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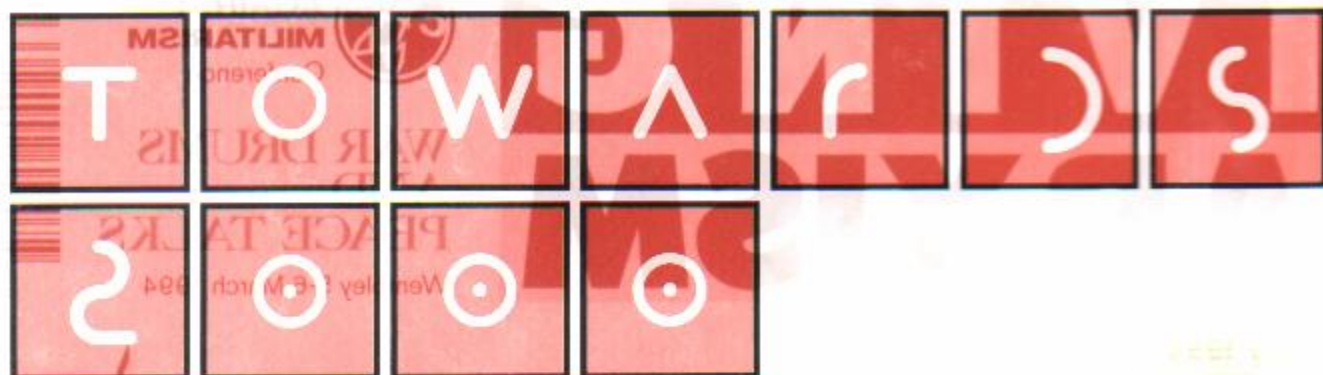
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No man is a monkey ● Defend the right to silence and much more



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CONTENTS

- 4 **Editorial**
- 6 Letters
- 8 **Taboos:** Sex education—who needs it? *Beth Adams*
- 11 The right to be offensive
- 12 **Russia: who's afraid of Zhirinovskiy?** *Joan Phillips*
- 15 Embryos: beyond the 'yuk factor' *Ann Bradley*
- 16 **Progress:** No man is a monkey *John Gillott*
- 20 **Processed peace: don't buy it** *Eddie Veale*
- 23 Ann Bradley
- 26 **Major's Irish gamble** *Mick Kennedy*
- 29 From Cold War to hot wars *Campaign Against Militarism*
- 32 Deflation: the price of failure *Tony Kennedy*
- 34 Abolishing the right to silence *John Fitzpatrick*
- 37 Toby Banks
- 38 **Living:** Spielberg's Jews; Stone's Vietnam; *Beavis and Butt-head*
- 41 Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV
- 43 **The Marxist Review of Books**

Two new features for February

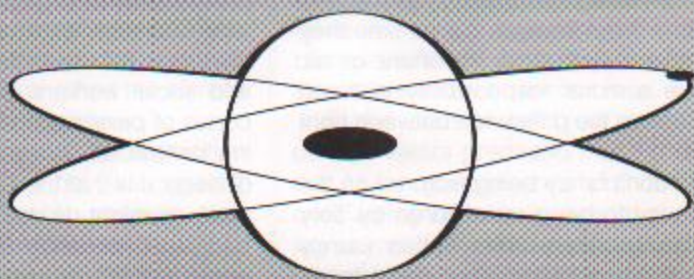


TABOOS

Today many issues are ruled unsuitable for critical discussion, and strong opinions are condemned as 'offensive' to one group or another. *Living Marxism* wants to break all of the taboos and open up the debate.

Each month, our new 'Taboos' feature will take a hard look at conventional wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues.

This month: **Sex education—who needs it?** page 8



PROGRESS

We are living in a kind of modern dark age, when anti-science sentiments and mysticism abound. *Living Marxism* is dedicated to a critical defence of progress and the human potential.

Each month, our new 'Progress' feature will challenge prejudice and mysticism on matters scientific, technological and environmental.

This month: **Sociobiology: no man is a monkey** page 16

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Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £19.50 ● Europe (airmail) £27 ● Outside Europe (airmail) £37 ● Overseas (surface mail) £23 ● (Institutions add £7.50) ● Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax (071) 278 9844 ● Distributed in the UK by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE; Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 065; Fax (0895) 445 255; Telex 861 3767 ● Distributed in the USA by Bernhard DeBoer Inc, 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA; Phone (201) 667 9300 ● Typeset by Junius Publications (TU) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party
Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham ● ISSN 0955-2448 February 1994. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed

**LIVING
MARXISM**

Monthly review of the
Revolutionary Communist Party
Editorial: (071) 278 9908
Subscriptions: (071) 278 7699



Mick Hume

The moral of the story

In February, we are all meant to receive a copy of the government's Parents' Charter through the post. It is packed full of handy hints about how to bring up and educate children.

Apparently, you should not give your children hard drugs, or allow them to go ram-raiding before their homework is done, but you should give them food and make sure they can walk by the time they start school. And most important of all, you have a moral responsibility to teach your offspring the difference between right and left.

If you don't fancy being lectured on the correct way to bring up children by Tory education secretary John Patten (surely a man whom only a mother could love), you can put down your Parents' Charter and turn on the television. One of the recent highlights on the BBC has been a series of programmes on the theme of... families and how to live in them/raise them/defend them.

The loveable Claire Rayner has been sent round to the homes of innocent people, to tell them how to solve their personal problems while wearing winged tampons. The BBC has also been promoting helplines that can give you professional guidance on every family problem from domestic violence and drink to sex and snoring. Whether the TV counsellors can tell you where to find the money to pay your post-budget bills, or where to put an elderly relative who is being cared for 'in the community' (ie, on the couch in your living room) is unclear.

We are faced with a bombardment of intervention in our lives by official and semi-official agencies, and it is getting worse by the week. They want to help us, to counsel us, to support us, to guide us, to give us good advice. In other words,

they want to control us, by laying down rules about what we should and should not do, watch, read or even think. This authoritarian ethos now runs right through society, from the cabinet to the classroom.

As we have said from the first in *Living Marxism*, John Major's 'Back to basics' campaign is best understood as the right-wing version of Political Correctness. Like the PC associated with feminists and social workers, it is about imposing codes of personal conduct and establishing behavioral conventions. The only real difference is that the Tories seek to restrict what we might do and say in the name of traditional decency and family values, while the PC professionals want to lay down their petty law in the name of mutual respect and non-sexism.

Since it became embarrassingly clear that the Tory Party, like the rest of society, is full of single parents and people who like sex, Major has been insisting that his 'Back to basics' campaign was never intended to be 'a crusade for personal morality'. This is patent nonsense.

There is no way to separate the notion of 'values' in the abstract from what individuals do, how we behave. Any policy to do with imposing moral values and standards is inevitably about governing individual conduct. Otherwise, Tory ministers who proclaim the 'Back to basics' doctrine would effectively be saying 'You can shag sheep if you like, so long as you believe in family values'.

All the talk about 'basic standards' and 'core values' is really a justification for more intervention in our lives. When politicians go on and on about the importance of differentiating between 'right and wrong', they are obviously judging our behaviour. The clear implication is that we

will have to be more closely controlled if we are judged to be guilty of misbehaving ourselves. And these days the kind of 'misbehaviour' that is deemed to warrant forcible intervention by parliament, the police and the courts can be anything from holding a rave in an empty field to arguing audibly in your own home.

The drive to moralise about and control our lives takes many different forms today. It can be seen clearly in the top-level government attacks upon single mothers and their right to welfare benefits or housing. It is obvious, too, in the police raids and legal crackdown that have accompanied high-profile panics about a few 'home alone' cases (at a time when, recent research suggests, lack of affordable childcare has made leaving children to look after themselves part of the British way of life).

But there are also many less obviously authoritarian attempts to regulate our lives: the safer sex campaigns, the Claire Rayner-style lectures on the do's and don'ts of personal relationships, the hysteria about whether or not women of the 'wrong' age should be allowed to have test-tube babies. All of these moralising trends, and many more, point in the same direction. Taken together, they reinforce the idea that we live in a jungle, and that what's needed are more rules and regulations to protect us from each other and from our own worst instincts.

The fashion for controlling and regulating everything, which we have called the new authoritarianism, is a symptom of an out-of-control society. Faced with a slump they cannot end and a political crisis they cannot resolve, the authorities' instinct is to crack down in a desperate bid to recreate some semblance of control. The PC professionals, meanwhile, believing their

privileged status to be threatened by social breakdown, provide a natural constituency for the new authoritarianism.

None of this would be too much of a problem if the boom in state intervention was understood as the authoritarian trend that it is and opposed accordingly. Unfortunately, it is not. Instead, the state's drive to enforce control coincides with a widespread yearning by ordinary people for some sort of stability.

The sense that things are out of control is acute among many who have had the rug pulled out from under their lives by the economic depression. The result is uncertainty, insecurity and the yearning for stability. This can make people open to endorsing aspects of the new authoritarianism, such as a disciplinarian campaign to police youth in the schools and on the streets.

Of course, the authorities' urge to control everything and the popular wish for stability never completely coincide. The speed with which Major's 'Back to basics' campaign ran into trouble showed how few people are prepared to swallow whole such sermonising claptrap from the government. The trouble is, however, that many who are unhappy about specific Tory initiatives, like the witch-hunt against single mothers, remain open to the wider moralistic message of the new authoritarianism. This is confirmed in the way that most critics of 'Back to basics' have focused their fire on the government's 'hypocrisy'.

By calling the Tories hypocrites, you accuse them of failing to live up to their own publicly espoused values. But you do not reject those conservative values as such, nor challenge the need for more

The problems which are messing up our lives today have nothing to do with some supposed decline in personal morality

control of personal behaviour. Indeed, it could be argued that, by implying that hypocritical MPs who break their marriage vows or sleep with other men are unfit for public life, you only strengthen the climate of moral conformity in society.

What we need now is an opposition which takes a stand, not just against messed-up government policies, but against the much wider tendency to depict all our problems as moral ones. There is one single theme which seems to underlie every discussion today. It is always individuals who are to be judged, rather than society. It is always standards of personal behaviour which must be changed, rather than forms of social organisation. This attitude turns reality on its head.

The problems which are truly messing up our lives today, from wage-cuts to war, have nothing to do with some supposed decline in personal morality. They are features of a society run by and for a capitalist minority. These problems will not even be addressed, never mind solved, so long as attention is focused on a moralising campaign about values, be they basic, family, or otherwise. Blaming a decline in people's moral standards for our

problems doesn't just let the authorities off the hook; by giving credence to the need for more regulation of individual behaviour, it can even help to strengthen the state's control over our lives.

At the start of last year, when many commentators predicted that the worst of the Major government's problems were over, *Living Marxism* insisted that continuing slump and political exhaustion would ensure that the Tories' stock fell even lower in 1993. The debacle surrounding the 'Back to basics' campaign suggests that optimistic forecasts for the Conservatives in 1994 will prove equally misplaced.

That political crisis, however, should not be allowed to distract attention from a development with more far-reaching implications; the advance of the new authoritarianism in society. As elected politicians fall deeper into disrepute, so the different arms of the state, from the police and the courts to unelected quangos and social services, assume greater authority and more powers to intervene in our affairs. Recognising and opposing this trend is far more important than worrying about who's screwing who behind the parliamentary bicycle sheds.

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

What perils of PC?

Your radical angle on PC ('The perils of political correctness', December) is based on an extremely narrow outlook. It is easy to attack those who 'moralise' for being interventionist and authoritarian, but contrary to what you and Hayek believe, intervention is not necessarily a bad thing. It depends who is intervening and for what reasons.

You bemoan the fact that the personal realm has become politicised, apparently, by people who wish to 'control' us. If this had not happened we would still have no awareness of sexual politics, and though advances in this field may have been limited, we have at least reached the stage where a variety of agencies are now forced to appear PC. The fact is that a laissez-faire approach in social policy, as well as in economic policy, gives way to the survival of the fittest. By mocking PC you echo the Tories.

'How did people survive' before they had counselling for domestic violence? In many cases they had extremely unhappy lives and repeated the cycle of violence in future generations. It is little consolation to tell these people that their misery is of less importance than changing the economic infrastructure. If they wait for the revolution they'll wait all their lives. Far from breeding apathy, PC can encourage people to revolutionise their personal lives. Political struggles can be fought on more than one level.

Social cohesion, as your article on language ('Spelling fascism', December) points out, is desirable, and this is inevitably dependent on some kind of prevailing moral framework. By leaving the right wing to take the initiative on matters of morality, you are playing a dangerous game.

Ashley Davies Sheffield

Don't mind your language

David R Clarke (letters, January) argues for opposition to the 'value-laden nature of language...not as an end in itself...but incorporated in a wider process of organised resistance'. He wants to struggle for PC language as part of a general struggle against what he calls 'the ruling bloc'.

It may seem only natural that progressive-minded people should be encouraged to do battle on all fronts. But this is to skate over the fact that any serious attempt at challenging the status quo can only come about as a result of identifying the issues which most clearly expose its inherently regressive nature.

In today's circumstances, proselytising for the use of PC language would only confuse the question of oppression and how to fight it.

For example, in their use of language, working class men would appear more backward than most Tory MPs. Should we therefore conclude that the man on the building site is most responsible for women's oppression? The wolf-whistle as the guarantor of women's inferior position in society? It makes more sense to identify and attack the real culprits, namely the capitalist system and the champions of the family which it sponsors.

When the authorities are attempting to re-establish their humanitarian credentials through the adoption of PC, Clarke appeals for the rest of us to learn the same language. Instead of equipping people with the means to confront the authoritarian strategy, his advice would have the effect of disarming and disorienting us.

Neil Abbott Stafford

Handicapped or oppressed?

I remain totally unconvinced about the desirability of disputing a 'social model' of disability (M Fitzpatrick 'Handicapped or oppressed?', December). What is the problem with the idea that the difficulties that arise from specific forms of impairment are not essentially rooted in a particularly biological condition, but are constructed out of the meaning given to those forms in a specific context?

But it is when Michael Fitzpatrick gets down to the old democracy-as-democracy-of-the-capable routine that the terrifying implications of his standpoint find their way to the surface.

The working class, so called racial groups, and women, to name but a few, have all experienced a systematic exclusion from the political process on the basis of that ever-shifting but apparently never-erasable line between 'those able to participate in democracy and those not'. An assumption of this right to draw the line on the basis of a 'common good' has historically underpinned every denial of rights. Is it not time to admit that this line can be no more than a visible manifestation of prejudice and misunderstanding?

Instead of an insistence on the limits of equality, why not wake up to the idea that equality could become a principle based on the discovery by an individual of their own potential for economic and political participation, independence, creativity, satisfaction, pleasure, etc? Not on a decision made over and above our heads by others as to the precise nature of our potential.

Hasn't Fitzpatrick missed the key to the concept of political oppression? That it involves the imposition of discrimination and subordination based on common assumptions of shared inferiority in relation to a collection of unique individuals.

Abi Masefield Stanhope, Co Durham

Missing the point, M Hamilton of Birmingham? (letters, January). Your first objection seems to be over Michael Fitzpatrick's use of the word handicap. This word is used to define a degree of disadvantage or deprivation of some faculty, in this case physical. I cannot see how you can deny that, for example, a person without the use of their legs is not complete. They have a physical disability; they are incomplete as a human being.

We all know that a physical disability need not impair a person's potential for developing thought, discussing and reasoning, which is, after all, more important than physical ability. However I suspect in desperation to confirm this point, many go too far and incorrectly conclude that a physical disability need not disadvantage a person at all.

A Farrell Edinburgh

Selective silence on rape

On 23 October 1993 the *New York Times* printed the following as part of a frontpage correction to a previous frontpage story: 'the article and the headlines should also have said that the interim report concluded that the existence of "a systematic rape policy" by the Serbs "remains to be proved".' More than 10 months after the EC gave widespread credibility to the idea of 'a systematic rape policy', the UN interim report can provide no substantiation. The *New York Times*, having splashed the interim report on its front page on 20 October as proof of a 'systematic policy', felt the need to print a correction. I wonder if the correction applies to other quotes from the NYT?

'The European Community recently issued a report in which investigators estimated that 20 000 Muslim women had been systematically raped by Serbian forces during the war.' (23 January 1993) 'The legal threat to Mr Karadzic charges him with responsibility for mass rapes, forced pregnancies, murder, torture and other atrocities.' (23 February 1993) 'Tens of thousands of innocents have been subjected to wholesale uprooting, systematic rape and grotesque forms of murder.' (12 March 1993)

Has the UN interim report had an impact? Not on the BBC, who still attributed 'systematic rape' to the Serbs in an item on *Breakfast News* (7 December 1993). But the *London Times*, on an inside page, ran a correction to a Reuters report that they had carried: 'in a report on 21 October we said that the UN had found evidence that Serb forces used rape as a weapon of war. In fact, the UN report was inconclusive.' (3 November 1993)

The final UN report may still describe a

'systematic policy of rape'. The interim report can be tucked away and forgotten by those who don't want to think. All along, the 'systematic rape' story was highly questionable, and it is good to see that *Living Marxism* questioned it.

Bill Webb North London

No word on the Kurds

Media concern has been gradually shifting from Kurds in northern Iraq to the Shia marsh Arabs in the south. Prince Charles expressed royal concern with his romantic evocation of life in the swamp. Then there were the well-publicised allegations of a chemical weapon attack for which the UN subsequently found no evidence. Claire Pointon (*Guardian*, 20 December 1993) notes that the Shia opposition has been demanding a safe haven-style operation in the south as exists in the north.

Yet life for the Kurds in the occupied territories in northern Iraq is less than blissful; a freezing, miserable existence by all accounts. Western military jets patrol the sky, but these have proved ineffective against bombing raids from allied Turkish aircraft. Three raids occurred between 30 November and 18 December 1993. The last attack left 200 'PKK terrorists' killed or wounded, according to Turkish authorities. Iraqi Kurds have disputed Turkey's accounts of such raids, claiming that they have been indiscriminate with many civilian casualties.

Such atrocities are not 'news'. After the 18 December raid, Sunday evening bulletins on BBC and ITN carried not one word. Monday's *Guardian*, *Times* and *Independent* had precisely nothing, while the *Telegraph* gave a two-sentence quote from Turkish sources.

Although it is well known that Turkey is waging a gruesome campaign of torture against its Kurdish population, we have to get details from a letter written by solicitor Louise Christian in the *Guardian* (18 December 1993). She points out that Western journalists do not go into Kurdish settlements resulting in under-reporting of atrocities. Worse, it appears that a Special Branch officer has been feeding smear stories to the *Sunday Telegraph* about PKK extortion rackets operating on immigrant businesses in Britain.

The end result is that allegations of mass graves of Kurds in Turkey are not investigated, but we are allowed tall tales of Kurdish Triads.

S Dale Manchester

Old-fashioned on Ireland

Living Marxism usually takes a refreshingly rational 'back to basics' approach towards the issues of the day, often opposed to the standard PC leftisms. But when it comes to Ireland, you only give us the same old tired knee-jerks.

Why should Eire and Ulster be considered to be one country? Because long ago in the pre-industrial world they were once united and independent? (Modernity and reason losing out to the romance of folk songs.) Or is it because they are linked by road, rather than by sea (and air and telecomms)? Belfast is roughly equidistant from Glasgow, Liverpool, and Dublin. Why should its links to Dublin be considered the most important, the most natural?

Is there any rational, scientific method to determine which groups of people can be defined as nations, or what territory a nation can claim as its own? This is a question for the heart, not the head, a question of 'blood' so irrational as to be reactionary. Nationalism cannot play a progressive role in the 1990s.

The people of Ulster are wasting their time and energy when all they fight for is the right to choose which capitalists exploit them, which state oppresses them. Is it really so important whether a worker is part of Dublin's economy rather than London's? Eire's politicians and millionaires are no better than ours.

Wanting the revolution to start here in Britain, you probably feel that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. This has a good non-nonsense ring to it, but is surely too banal to pass for objective, rational analysis.

Paul Williams Kennington, London

Who does police PR?

According to Ian Scott ('Can you trust a Condon?', October), the police force is conducting a public relations exercise in an effort to change its old racist image. What consultancy firm is responsible? They surely are miracle workers. The public perceptions of the new police force have undergone a sea-change.

Nowadays just about every so-called anti-racist organisation demands that the police fight racism.

I agree with Scott that his PR exercise angle is important, but by ignoring the collapse of the old anti-racist movement he fails to account for the radically new perception people have of the police. The most important factor is the demise of the old mediating forces between the oppressors and the oppressed. Importantly, organisations such as the Anti-Nazi League and Anti-Racist Alliance have campaigned for the police to be given more repressive measures to deal with extreme right wingers.

By not explaining these changes, Scott gives a superficial explanation for the police's new-found credibility. By looking at the role of the left and understanding the mistakes they have made, we can make progress in building our own anti-racist movement.

Alan Denehy London

Educating teachers

As a teacher in John Patten's constituency, I am appalled by his suggestion that education could be improved if schools were to adopt a 'Back to basics' approach. Patten tells us that we should be emphasising moral values and teaching children the difference between right and wrong.

I object to this because it is not motivated by a desire to develop standards and, consequently, will be damaging to pupils' education. If John Patten was serious about raising standards then he would invest money to reduce class sizes. Instead, he initiates a debate about moral values and in doing so deflects attention away from more important issues like depleting resources. Unfortunately, while many teachers also, instinctively, react against 'Back to basics', they accept responsibility for moral education. In my school, staff meetings and inset days focus on topics such as bullying and children's rights, rather than increasing class sizes (presently in the mid-thirties and rising).

It's time to shift the discussion onto those issues that can improve education and stop talking about the need to teach the difference between right and wrong.

Alex Oxford

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



Each month, this new *Living Marxism* feature will be taking a critical look at today's conventional wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues.

This month, Beth Adams asks...

Sex education: who needs it?

A new Family Planning Association (FPA) sex education handbook for primary school teachers has caused something of a furore, despite its extremely anodyne contents: lots of stuff about the naming of body parts, discussions about periods and warnings about safer sex. In December, launching a government circular on sex education in schools, education secretary John Patten criticised such trendy sex education. He emphasised instead the need for schools to teach morality as well as sexual mechanics, and to tell pupils that marriage is better than single parenthood.

The issue of sex education, and teachers' role in it, always provokes a hysterical reaction from right-wing moralists, largely because they find anything that puts 'children' and 'sex' in the same sentence to be a matter of embarrassment and concern. The issue has become one of those modern litmus tests which is taken to reveal someone's political persuasion. If you are for more sex education you are identified as a bit of a liberal; if you are against it, you are considered to be on the right.

Here, 'sex education' means something other than a biological discussion of reproductive functions. There are few people who object to the teaching of basic human physiology. Only the most lunatic of the lunatic fringe believe that children should grow up believing that babies are brought by the stork. The controversies arise when the issue expands beyond basic biology into a discussion of how and why sex happens.

Those at the conservative end of the spectrum tend to be suspicious of educationalists' attempts to discuss sex in a social or personal setting—what the FPA would call the negotiation of sexual relationships. They are particularly offended by discussion of different sexual practices and attitudes, unless they are clearly divided into 'normal' and 'abnormal': 'normal' being what your mum and dad

did to have you, and 'abnormal' being what perverts do (ie, just about anything else).

Conservatives are wary of sex education because they fear that talking about sex encourages children to put the theory into practice and experiment with sex at an earlier age. The moral crusaders have a rather romantic notion of childhood as an age of innocence which should be preserved for as long as possible, and see sexuality as a rather unpleasant aspect of adulthood that the young need to be protected against. Crucially, they also believe that if and when it is necessary to teach children about matters carnal, the family home is the place to do it. In the eyes of many conservatives, sex education in schools undermines parental control, rights and responsibilities.

On the other side of the debate, the liberal sex education lobby stresses that to deny children sex education is to keep them in a state of ignorance rather than innocence. They point out that parents often feel uncomfortable with the issue and are unable to discuss sex, and so teachers must fill the breach. They emphasise that children are constantly exposed to sexual images in everyday life and need to know how to make sense of these. Sex education, the liberal educationalists believe, is essential if young people are to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and abuse.

The modern liberal case for more 'contextualised' sex education might sound like an enlightened alternative to the not-in-front-of-the-children attitudes of the old-fashioned moral conservatives. Yet the gap between the two approaches is not as wide as it first seems. Even when it is delivered from a liberal perspective, it is possible to see sex education as a vehicle for steeping young people in extremely conservative sexual and moral codes.

TABOOS

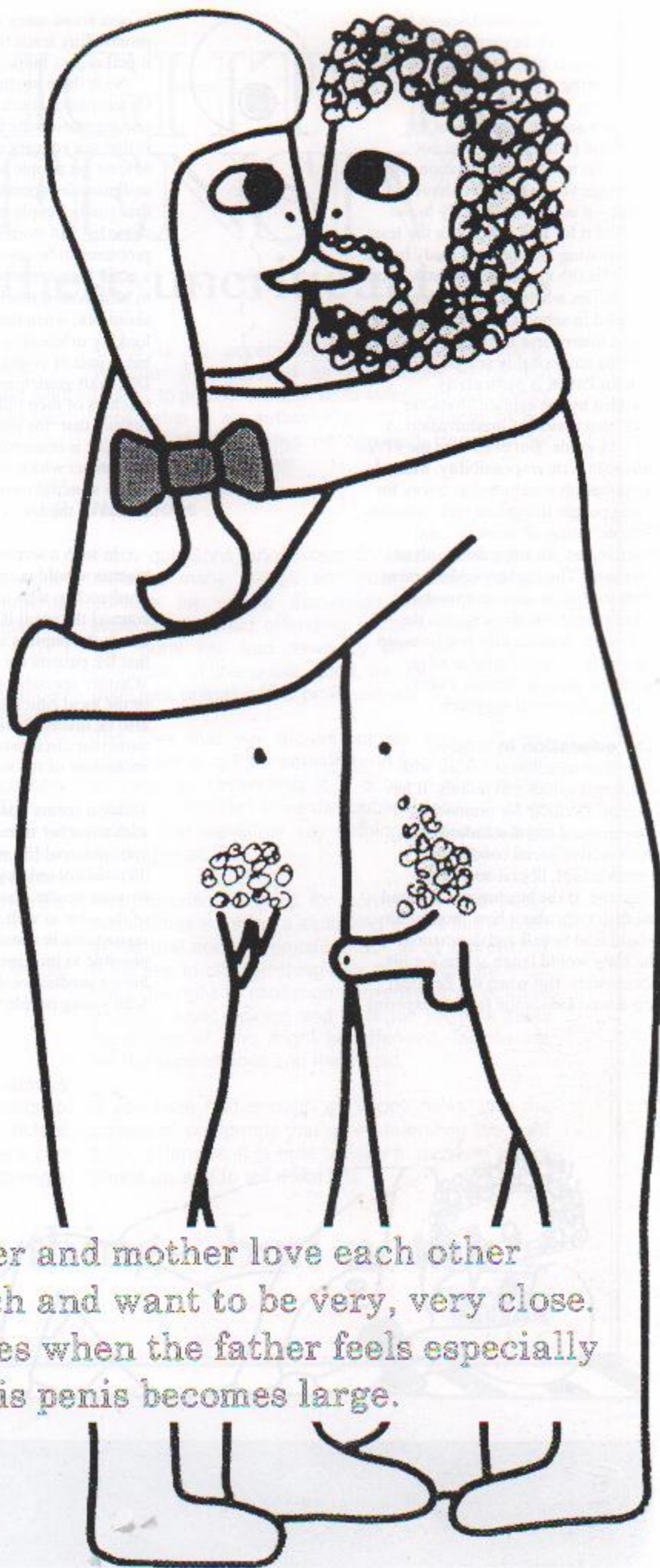
The main concern of the FPA and its supporters is that sex education should be taken out of a 'biological' and placed in a 'social' context. But what is this social context to be?

As he made clear in his December speech, Tory education secretary John Patten readily agrees that there is a need for young people to learn about sex in a social context—the context of a society based upon traditional family values. Indeed, the government has run ahead of the liberals in 'contextualising' discussions on matters of sex. Section 46 of the 1986 Education Act requires the local education authority, the governing body and the headteacher to ensure that sex education is 'given in such a manner as to encourage those pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the values of family life'.

The liberals would say that the social context in which they want to discuss sex education is a very different one, about empowering young people to cope with sexual relations in the modern world. Yet look a little closer and you can see that, while the language is very different, the moral message of both conservative and liberal sex education is pretty much the same.

For instance, where conservatives stress the need to defend the traditional family, liberal educationalists tend to talk about the importance of stable, responsible relationships. The need for young people to delay sexual experience, and the dangers of having sex before they are ready, is emphasised in the FPA literature just as much as in conservative tracts.

The curious thing about the liberal sex education guides is that, despite their stated aim of explaining sex as normal, natural activity, they are full of warnings about how dangerous it is supposed to be. There are warnings about the risks of unplanned pregnancy.▶



TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS:
FROM HOW A BABY IS MADE,
BY PER-HOJM KNUDSEN,
PICCOLO PICTURE BOOKS

The father and mother love each other very much and want to be very, very close. Sometimes when the father feels especially loving, his penis becomes large.

of sexually transmitted diseases in general and HIV in particular, about the dangers of child abuse and of simply being pressured into saying 'yes' when you want to say 'no'.

Patten and the Department for Education (DfE) really need not worry that trendy sex education will encourage young people to have sex earlier—it seems more likely to put them off it for life. It is not in the least bit surprising that a recent study by the World Health Organisation shows that in countries where sex education is provided in schools, the average age of first intercourse is higher. The children are probably scared to death.

John Patten is particularly offended by the explicit character of the discussion of masturbation in the FPA guide. But even here the FPA's emphasis is on responsibility. Mutual masturbation is depicted as a way for young people to explore their sexuality without 'going all the way', and described as 'an enjoyable form of safer sex'. The explicit endorsement of masturbation may be a modern development, but the way that the FPA guide draws a firm line between penetrative sex and what used to be called 'petting' echoes a very traditional parental approach.

Sex education in schools, even at its trendiest is loaded with traditional values and morals. It has become a vehicle for promoting conventional moral standards and conservative social conduct in a modernised, liberal-sounding language. If the headmaster lectured the fifth form about how promiscuity would lead to hell and damnation, the class would laugh at him for his eccentricity. But when the Personal and Social Education teacher explains

in concerned tones about how promiscuity leads to AIDS, 'well, it makes you think, doesn't it?'.
So is there anything to be said for institutional sex education? The one argument which seems irrefutable is that sex education in school does at least get people talking about sex, and provides access to information that young people might not otherwise come by. But even here there are problems to be considered. Is it really a good idea to encourage young people to turn to their teachers for information about sex, when the DfE is increasingly looking to teachers to police the behaviour of young people? The new DfE draft guidelines explicitly instruct teachers of their obligations when they believe that 'the pupil has embarked upon, or is contemplating, a course of conduct which is likely to place him or her at moral or physical risk or in breach of the law':

'In such a serious situation the teacher should normally inform the headteacher, who in turn should also counsel the pupil if appropriate and, where the pupil is under age, ensure that the parents are made aware. Whether specialist support services... or the local education authority should also be involved will depend upon the particular circumstances and the judgement of the staff.'

Today it seems that discussing sex with a teacher is an invitation to having your personal life investigated and then dictated not only by your parents, but by your headteacher and various arms of the state as well. With these restrictions in operation, is it really possible to imagine that a teacher could have a productive discussion on sex with young people where factual

information, beyond basic biology, can be conveyed?

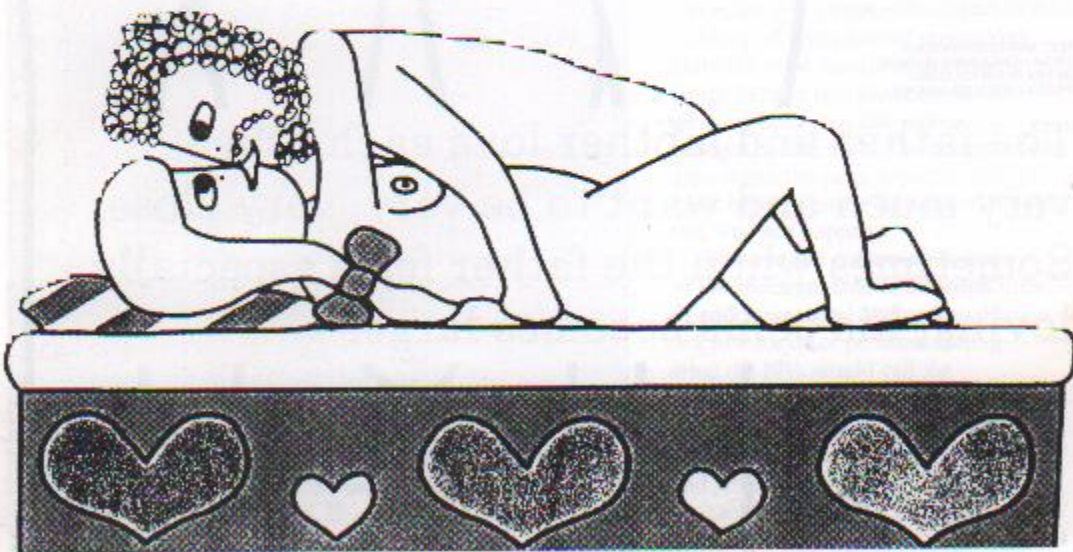
It is even arguable that the very category of 'sex education' contributes to the problems it is trying to resolve, by further fetishising what it seeks to demystify. Getting off with someone, knowing how to say 'yes' and 'no' to sexual activity, is a social skill that we learn through experience. It involves an interaction between two (or more) people in a specific set of circumstances. You can no sooner teach people how to 'negotiate' sexual relationships than you can teach them to have a conversation or tell a joke. To assume that young people need 'instruction' to make the most of their sexuality simply makes sex seem even more bizarre.

The liberal sex educators argue that the institutionalisation of sex education enables young people to understand and act on their feelings in a responsible manner. But you could argue that it 'disables' rather than 'enables'. It restricts people's capacity to experiment and to work out their own attitude towards sexual matters, and instead dictates a set of values, standards and behavioral codes acceptable to the authorities and to older generations.

Taking control of your life and working out your own way of behaving is a part of growing up. And an essential element of that process is breaking away from the prescriptions of parents and authority figures. One of the reasons why sex has traditionally been seen as a rite of passage from childhood into adulthood is because it is something that must be negotiated independently of parental, governmental or tutorial advice.

The demand for more sex education might sound very liberal and liberating. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The institutionalisation of discussion on sexuality in the classroom has become just one more device for introducing young people to a set of conservative moral values. The way in which sex is treated as a discrete area of education where specific instruction is needed, and one which teachers need specific instruction to conduct, enhances the conservative view that the whole area of sexuality is fraught with mystical 'problems' and 'meaning'.

A recent survey of more than 1500 teenagers showed that most turned to the pages of magazines like *Mizz* and *Just 17* to find answers to their sexual queries. Friends were the next most popular source of information. Hardly anyone said they would turn to their teacher. The FPA and associated organisations were horrified—but, when you think about it, maybe it's for the best.



THE RIGHT TO BE OFFENSIVE

A challenge to these uncritical times

We are living in a culture of conformity.

The media is becoming tamer than ever, faced with high-level demands for more 'happy news' and less critical coverage of the government.

The traditional puritans of the back-to-basics right and the new puritans of the politically correct left are both calling for more censorship.

And everywhere from the universities to the workplace, it seems that criticism and strong arguments are now condemned as unacceptably 'offensive' to one group or another.

These are dangerous trends. In the circumstances of today, we need to defend the right to be offensive at all costs.

Society is at an impasse, with the market economy in a state of slump and mainstream politics in a state of exhaustion. There is a pressing need for a critical examination of what exists and an open debate about the alternatives. Instead we are confronted with a censorious climate that narrows the terms of every discussion and stifles dissent.

In response, there are two principles that we should insist upon.

No censorship

Any demand for bans or restrictions will always make matters worse. Calling for censorship strengthens the ability of the authorities to dictate what we are allowed to see, hear or read. Bans can only add to the repressive atmosphere and strangle more life out of our conformist culture.

There is no acceptable pretext for censorship. Whether it is justified as a measure to combat racism, to protect children or to safeguard our privacy, censorship is an authoritarian infringement of our rights. It should always be opposed. Bans are for bigots and Big Brother.

No taboos

From questions about race to matters of sexual morality, many issues are now considered unsuitable for critical discussion. Instead we are expected to avoid offending anybody, and stick to the moral line laid down by the self-appointed guardians of the public good, be they government ministers, priests or PC professionals.

The idea that we should not be offensive may sound like a call for sensitivity. In fact it is another demand for censorship. It is a not-in-front-of-the-children attitude towards public debate, which insists that we either say nothing controversial or nothing at all.

Such uncritical regard for convention and public sensibilities is having a stultifying effect. It is a guarantee that society remains stuck in its current rut. If we are to change things for the better, we must have the right to challenge conventions, to outrage existing public opinion and to argue for new ideas regardless of who might be offended. Taboos are for the superstitious and the stupid.

If you have had enough of 'happy news' and the culture of conformity, join us in defending the right to be offensive. It is time to take a stand, to shake things up, and to tell it like it is.

Question everything—ban nothing

**LIVING
MARXISM**

The *Living Marxism* declaration on the right to be offensive came out of our Perils of Political Correctness conference in November. For more information or extra copies write to *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX or phone (071) 278 9908.

Who's afraid of Zhirinov

Reactions to the Russian election results revealed more about the West's fears for its own future than about political realities in Russia, suggests Joan Phillips

How many more Hitlers will be discovered before the 1990s are out? After the December elections, most Western commentators announced that the Russians had voted for fascism. The airwaves were filled with tired analogies between 1990s Russia and 1920s Germany, and between nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Adolf Hitler. Zhirinovskiy's party's success in the parliamentary elections led Western journalists to speculate about the prospects for a fascist dictatorship when Boris Yeltsin finally decides to put the presidency to the vote again.

'Victory of nationalist right shocks Russia', said the *Guardian's* frontpage headline (14 December 1993). Who did the *Guardian* headline writer think had voted for Zhirinovskiy? Martians? Let's face it, the *Guardian*, not Russia, was shocked by the result. The emergence of Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party as the dominant electoral force was a slap in the face for most Western analysts, who had confidently predicted victory for the radical market reformers of Russia's Choice.

Not only did Western experts get it wrong before the vote, however, they also misinterpreted the results. As far as most commentators were concerned, the spectre of fascism is haunting Russia. They might as well have said

that communism is on the march again, since the Russian Communist Party came third, only three percentage points behind the free marketeers of Russia's Choice.

The reality is that most Russians did not vote for anything, least of all fascism—they were voting against everything they have experienced during the past three years of market reform.

Protest vote

The vote reflected the desperation of those Russians for whom the arrival of capitalism has been a humiliation greater than anything they experienced under Stalinism. As many as 35m are now living below the poverty line. Most people are fighting for survival. Housewives stand in streets and subways selling sausage to feed their families. The elderly have been reduced to the indignity of the soup kitchen. Fear is everywhere—fear of unemployment, inflation, hunger, homelessness and worse to come.

After all this, what did the *Guardian* and the rest expect? Zhirinovskiy was the beneficiary of a groundswell of popular protest against the government's market reforms. This had little to do with any personal or political qualities possessed by the charmless Zhirinovskiy himself. He captured the protest vote because



PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

Zhirinovskiy?

he was the sole major contender untainted by a spell in power.

If anything, Zhirinovskiy's success has been exaggerated and the extent of popular alienation has been underestimated. Few commented on the fact that almost half the electorate (nearly 50m) didn't bother to vote. Zhirinovskiy may have got more votes than other parties, but capturing 23 per cent of the 53 per cent of the electorate which bothered to go to the polls hardly represents a landslide victory.

And whatever else it was, the vote for Zhirinovskiy was not a popular endorsement of fascism. The media made the mistake of thinking that by voting for the Liberal Democratic Party, Russians were giving positive assent to every word uttered by its leader. In fact, most people who voted for Zhirinovskiy probably could not name one policy of his party.

The point that Western observers miss is that Russians don't like any politicians at all. For the past few years, poll after poll has shown that they are fed up with politics, politicians and parties. Surveys have revealed that more than 50 per cent of people think that all the new parties have been founded by people who are simply 'greedy for power'. Almost 40 per cent say that party activities have 'no bearing on the life of ordinary people'. Some 12 per cent

think that party activists are 'misfits who had nothing better to do'. A stunning 78 per cent believe that there are no parties anywhere in Russia with which they can identify.

The problem evidenced by the Russian election is not the emergence of a fascist movement, but popular alienation at the arrival of a market system which is driving most Russians to despair.

It is ironic that Western commentators should claim democracy in Russia could be threatened if Zhirinovskiy goes on to win the presidency. Real democracy is non-existent *now*, never mind in the future, as the West's ally Yeltsin continues the process of consolidating his presidential dictatorship. While attention has focused on the authoritarian pretensions of the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, the dictatorial practices of the Russian president have been largely ignored.

In the months before the December election, Yeltsin assumed the powers of a despot, scrapping the constitution, disbanding parliament, sending tanks against his opponents, imposing a state of emergency, censoring newspapers and banning parties. Then he drew up a new constitution, giving him unprecedented powers to issue decrees and curb civil liberties. In December, while all eyes were on Zhirinovskiy's success at the polls,

few commented on the way Yeltsin rigged the referendum to get his constitution passed.

The shift towards executive authority at the expense of the legislature is given the seal of legal approval by the new constitution. It invests in the Russian president far greater powers than those possessed by the heads of state of France or America. The president is the head of state and the armed forces. He appoints the senior military commander, the head of the security forces and the prime minister. He is responsible for domestic and foreign policy.

Yeltsin's decrees

Zhirinovskiy's parliamentary victory will mean nothing because parliament has no power under the new constitution. Yeltsin can issue decrees which have the power of law but do not have to be approved by parliament. He can choose the prime minister, who doesn't have to be an elected member of parliament. He can appoint the government, whose ministers are not accountable to parliament, from a party which does not have a majority in parliament.

The president has the power to veto any law passed by a majority in parliament and to insist on a two-thirds majority for the law to be passed. If parliament passes a vote of no confidence in the government, the ►

president can keep the government in power for three months and can then dissolve parliament if it passes another no confidence vote.

The new constitution has been celebrated by some Western commentators as bringing to an end Soviet era abuses and granting new freedoms to the Russian people.

Zhirinovsky has no power because that is concentrated in the hands of one man, Boris Yeltsin

For example, it proclaims the right to freedom of the press. But this has not been much in evidence of late for opponents of the Yeltsin regime. After the president's attack on parliament, even friendly newspapers were banned in the general clampdown. And during the election campaign, the authorities temporarily banned several newspapers, ordering them to change their mastheads and editors.

Another new right enshrined in the constitution is that of freedom of movement. But apparently this does not apply to non-Russians (16 per cent of Russia's population). In the aftermath of his coup in October, Yeltsin launched a racist, anti-crime purge against 'persons of Caucasian nationality' in the capital. This led to the arrest, detention and expulsion from Moscow of thousands of people, some of them refugees from war zones in the Caucasus. In November, Yeltsin approved the introduction of a visa entry system to Russia for citizens of other former Soviet republics.

Yeltsin's constitution proclaims the right to freedom from medical or scientific experiments without consent. But there is no right to free medical treatment at a time when illness and disease are blighting Russia. The constitution grants the right to freedom from forced labour, just when the state has removed the guaranteed right to work from its citizens.

It is strange that Western commentators should have focused on the threat to democracy posed by Zhirinovsky. His party may have come out on top in December's poll, but the election has put it nowhere near the levers of power. Zhirinovsky has no power because that is concentrated in the hands of one man, Boris Yeltsin.

Step by step, Yeltsin has moved to strengthen his presidential powers and

consolidate his control over the state apparatus. Following the December election, he dissolved the security ministry and created a new internal security unit, taking personal control of telephone-tapping and other communications interception. It seems that, three years after the West feted Yeltsin as a hero, the methods of the high Stalinist era have returned to Russia, only without the Stalinists.

Shock therapy

The Western reaction to the Russian elections said a lot more about the fears that are gripping the advanced capitalist world than it told us about the realities of life in Russia.

When Western observers look at what is happening in Russia they see a reflection of the problems afflicting their own societies. For a start, they see the failure of the market system which has plunged the Western world into economic slump and brought spectacular misery to Russia through 'shock therapy' reforms. The post-election statement by the US administration, that Russians needed more therapy and less shock, was an admission that capitalism isn't working in the region where it was supposed to have triumphed in 1989. The problem was brought home to Bill Clinton before his trip to Moscow in January, when the White House could not find any sites for the president to visit that would dramatise the benefits of a free market economy.

No support

Events in Russia also present a magnified mirror image of the crisis of legitimacy experienced by Western political elites. The election results in Russia expressed in a more extreme form the same popular disenchantment with governing parties and institutions that is apparent everywhere from Japan and Australia to Italy and Germany. The mood of distemper that attached itself to Zhirinovsky in Russia has led voters in the West to lend support to anybody, green, red or brown, who is not associated with the established order. The very public revelation that those in power in Russia enjoy no popular support whatsoever was painful to behold for leaders in the West who sense that their own base of support is equally unimpressive.

The presentiment that what happens in Russia today could happen here tomorrow fills the Western elites with dread. It is this sense of their own precarious grip on power that compels the leaders of the West to put their weight behind Yeltsin. They have backed every dictatorial move made by the Russian president, while at home they are experimenting with

authoritarian measures themselves in order to maintain control. As the months have passed, it has become increasingly difficult for them to keep up the pretence that in backing Yeltsin they are backing democracy. But at least now that Zhirinovsky has been painted as the devil incarnate, they can present Yeltsin as the lesser evil.

Russian bogeyman

Indeed, some Western politicians and pundits see developments in Russia as a possible solution to their problems. Instinctively, most Western leaders are aware that the legitimacy crisis they are now experiencing is connected to the end of the Cold War and the loss of their old enemy. This is why arch-Tory Peregrine Worsthorne heaved a sigh of relief at Zhirinovsky's electoral breakthrough, because it meant the emergence of a new Russian bogeyman for the West to oppose. 'Modern liberal societies badly need a foreign enemy', explained Worsthorne. 'Without such a threat they will go to pieces.' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 2 January 1994)

Perhaps this helps to explain why the entire Western media and political establishment has gone to town against Zhirinovsky, a man who in other circumstances would be dismissed as a harmless buffoon. He clearly cannot be presented as posing the same calibre of threat as the old Soviet empire, but no doubt there are plenty of journalists who will do their best to talk up the danger he represents.

The West rearms

Thankful for small mercies, almost every Western leader seized the opportunity to emphasise the threat to world security and the need for strong defence forces. Helmut Kohl said in a radio interview that the rise of Russian nationalism showed the need for Germany to maintain an effective defence and promised that the armed forces 'will get what they need' (*Hundert 6*, 2 January 1994). Former US defence secretary Dick Cheney argued that defence cuts based on the assumption that the world had become a safer place would have to be reversed. British and French politicians issued practically the same statements, calling for a reversal of defence cuts based on the notion of a peace dividend.

Anybody watching TV pictures of Zhirinovsky lumbering around the dancefloor in an ill-fitting dinner suit after the elections would know that this man cannot be the real reason for the rush of enthusiasm for rearmament. Against the background of economic slump and post-Cold War political chaos, the Western powers are more scared of each other than of a thousand Zhirinovskys.

Beyond the 'yuk-factor'

Ann Bradley on the latest scare about the use of embryos and fetuses in medical science

There are lots of problems with infertility research and treatment. The main ones are that the research is still extremely primitive and the treatment is largely ineffective and desperately hard to get. A couple with a diagnosed infertility problem, suitable for IVF treatment, can wait as long as four years to receive treatment on the NHS, if their health authority is prepared to fund the treatment—many aren't. Most couples are forced to go private, paying around £1500 (plus the cost of drugs, which can add another £500) for a treatment which has just a one-in-three chance of success in the best institutions.

Clinical ignorance about infertility is such that a third of infertile couples cannot even find out why they have a problem. Nobody knows why some sperm are simply unable to penetrate eggs or why fertilised eggs repeatedly fail to implant in a woman's uterus. The questions far outstrip the answers.

Against this background of ignorance, it seems bizarre that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) should constantly complain that research and treatment involving human embryos and gametes is running far ahead of 'fundamental social and ethical issues'.

The HFEA is the body set up by the government to licence centres carrying out research and treatment involving human embryos, sperm and eggs. Last year it issued a consultation paper on the issue of embryo 'sex selection', which fanned the flames of media hysteria about designer babies. The HFEA said it would refuse to licence clinics which helped couples to choose the sex of their child simply for 'social reasons', rather than to avoid inherited sex-linked genetic disorders. As the 'sexing' of embryos is still a pioneering technique not yet generally available even to those with genetic disorders, this ban seemed somewhat unnecessary. You would have thought a more appropriate conclusion might have been to look for ways of extending the treatment's availability to couples who know that a male child is likely to suffer mental or physical handicap from a sex-linked genetic disorder such as Fragile-X syndrome, haemophilia or Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

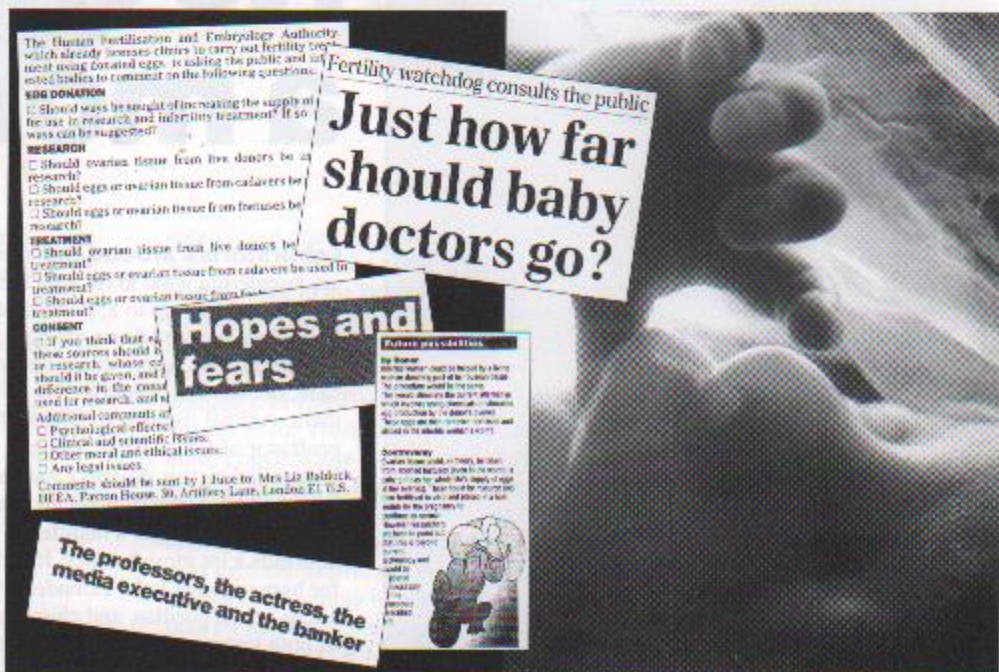
This year the HFEA has launched a discussion on the use of ovarian tissue taken from aborted fetuses. Fertility treatment involving this isn't clinically available either—nor is it likely to be for some time, if ever. One of the reasons why eggs from the ovaries of fetuses are not available to women requiring donated eggs is in itself a good justification for extended research. In the early weeks of development a lifetime supply of millions of eggs is laid down in a female fetus' ovaries. Even by the time it reaches six months gestation they have started to deteriorate, and the

number gradually diminishes until by puberty she will have only 300 000 or so immature eggs left. Nobody knows why this happens or how the eggs that remain are selected. If this was understood it might lead to a better understanding of ovarian function in adult women—if it's banned we might remain in the dark for much longer.

Instead of encouraging such research, however, the HFEA is concerned to criticise and regulate these procedures. It justifies its stance

No doubt there is a 'yuk-factor', but the belief that a medical procedure is rather revolting does not usually constitute a reason for banning it. Besides, it is irrational to the point of perversity, having accepted the legitimacy of abortion (as the overwhelming majority of society does), to insist that the resulting tissue should be sluiced or incinerated when it could be used to someone's benefit.

It is not surprising that there is public suspicion of infertility techniques when we are bombarded with warnings about an impending 'Brave New World' of designer babies and unethical research. In reality, far from being unrestrained and unregulated, the new reproduc-



by citing public concern. Insofar as there are public concerns about research using embryos and fetuses, they need to be challenged not pandered to.

It is understandable that there are concerns about infertility treatment and research. The very existence of such procedures cuts across what is seen as the 'natural' process of procreation. Infertility specialists are understood to be playing God, with the power to create life or destroy it.

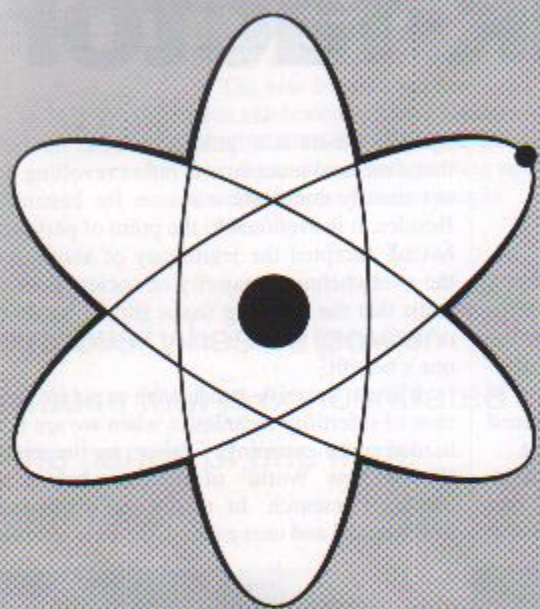
In fact infertility techniques are 'unnatural'—but then so is any medical procedure. All medical treatment is designed to intervene in and alter an unwelcome natural condition. And what is seen to be controversial today, is tomorrow considered routine. The first heart transplants provoked moral and ethical debates similar to those sparked by the discussions of fertility treatment today. Doctors were accused of playing God and moving towards the creation of modern Frankenstein's monsters.

Discussing the HFEA consultative document, newspapers referred to the widespread public 'yuk-factor' at the thought of using fetal tissue.

tive technologies have always been restricted by authorities which regard them with suspicion and ambivalence. On the one hand, they enable couples to fulfil what is seen as a legitimate desire for a family; but, on the other, by divorcing procreation from sex they pose a challenge to what is understood to be 'natural'—the traditional functions of fatherhood and motherhood.

The authorities want to keep 'artificial', assisted reproduction as close to unassisted, 'natural' reproduction as possible. Hence the vilification of a post-menopausal mother of test-tube twins and the condemnation of sex selection, or indeed of anything which takes the new reproductive technologies beyond simply allowing infertile couples to have an average chance of conceiving.

A government engaged in a 'Back to basics' campaign for traditional family values is clearly keen to regulate the new reproductive technologies. The authorities wish to constrain medical research within what they perceive as an acceptable moral framework—that of the traditional family. In doing so they hold back the potential of reproductive science to solve many people's problems.



PROGRESS

Each month, this new *Living Marxism* feature will seek to challenge prejudice and mysticism on matters scientific, technological and environmental.

This month, John Gillott takes issue with some fashionable theories of sociobiology

No man is a monkey

Laboratories around the world are wondering what to do with their apes. It can cost up to \$50 000 a year to hold an ape, and times are hard. If governments won't stump up the cash, the obvious solution is to kill them. Animal rights activist and professor of ethics Peter Singer is appalled by this prospect and has launched 'A declaration on great apes' to stop it. But Singer's manifesto demands a lot more besides. It calls for human rights to be extended to orang-utans, gorillas, and chimpanzees of both known species (*Pan troglodytes* and *P paniscus*).

Many scientists, including John Maddox, editor of *Nature*, praised Singer's motivation and ideas. The eminent Oxford biologist, Richard Dawkins, signed the declaration and provided its intellectual backbone. His argument was that in evolutionary terms we are very close to apes, as reflected in the fact that we share over 98 per cent of our genes with our closest ape cousins.

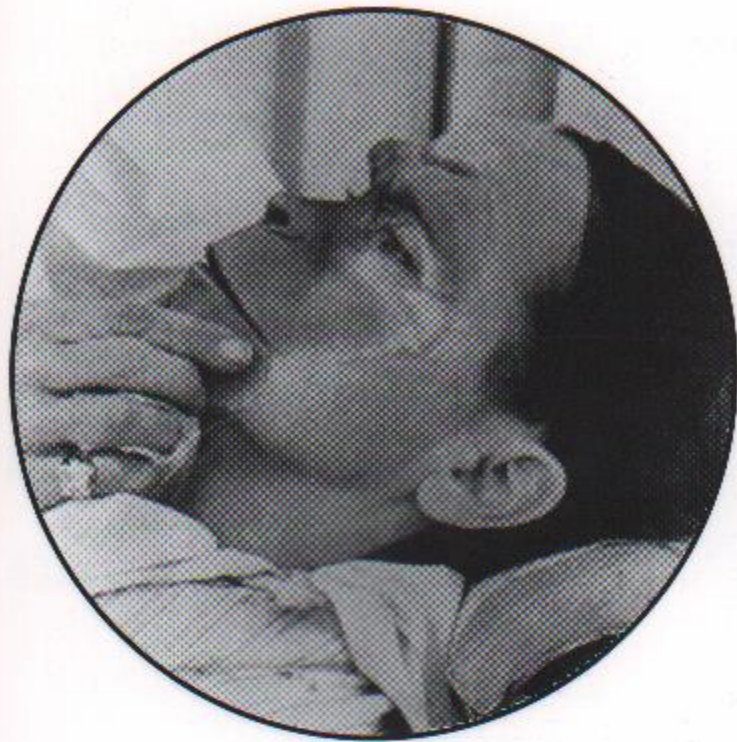
Like Singer, Dawkins believes that there is no reason to regard humanity as being superior to apes or other animals. His view is based on the assumption that humanity, like the rest of the animal world, is a biological species the behaviour of which is framed by its specific genetic make-up. The positive response to the declaration on great apes within the scientific community is due in large part to the widespread support there is today for this theory, which goes under the name of sociobiology.

Last year in London, a conference sponsored by the *Times Higher*

Education Supplement and the London School of Economics presented the latest scientific evidence in an attempt to show that all human activities, even our reasoning abilities, are biologically based. Human reason, brain scientists present argued, is no different in origin, and no better than the instinctive activity of animals. That humans possess language ability, argued Steven Pinker, is no sign of superiority. After all, bats have sonar.

The shift in the intellectual climate on this subject is striking. In 1975, EO Wilson of Harvard published *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. He called it a 'systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviour', and extended the analysis to humanity. Wilson speculated that biology 'may soon be in a position to investigate the very origin and meaning of human values'. There was uproar at this suggestion. He was accused of being little better than a fascist, and leading academics campaigned against him. Yet today views identical to Wilson's meet little or no opposition. When Jared Diamond, another supporter of the declaration on great apes, published *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* in 1992, it was awarded the prestigious Rhône-Poulenc science book prize. The book is, if anything, more sociobiological than anything Wilson wrote: humans are the 'Third Chimpanzee'.

Sociobiological theories point to significant conclusions. If the character of human life and behaviour really is determined by our biology, then there is little we can do to alter the world in which we live for the better. Like the



rest of the animal world, we are the prisoners of our genes. And if our genes are responsible for wars, xenophobia, inequality, and other undesirable features of human existence, as sociobiologists suggest, then what chance is there of dealing with such problems? The best we could hope for would be to suppress our natural instincts and face the inevitable alienation from our true selves. Society would be trapped forever in a Freudian dilemma: either war, racism and inequality—or neurosis.

The sociobiologists' point is that humanity has to accept these consequences, because they flow from hard science. But is sociobiology correct? Today there seems to be two choices: accept a sociobiological perspective, or fall back on the religious superstition that man is unique because of a personal relationship to God. But there is an alternative: the social-historical view.

The social-historical approach argues that man, far from being shaped by nature, has made himself in the course of his biological and social development. This view is fully consistent with natural science, and yet is far more convincing than sociobiology as an explanation of what makes us unique.

In terms of behaviour, humans are clearly unique in possessing the capacity to act purposively on the world according to a preconceived plan. Even the most advanced animal lacks this capacity. An understanding of advanced genetic theory is not needed to grasp this point, which Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

Making a monkey of Roddy McDowall for the film *Planet of the Apes*

emphasised many years ago. In *Capital*, Marx argued that the worst architect was superior to the best bee, because an architect made plans in his head before he built anything in reality (and so might improve on his bad designs!). In *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, Engels wrote that 'animals have never contrived to impress the stamp of their will upon the earth. It took man to do that. In short, the animal merely uses external nature, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; man by his changes makes nature serve his ends, masters it'.

The core of the social-historical perspective is that modern humanity has not been determined by nature. Instead, what we are is the result historically of human action *upon* and *against* nature, as a consequence of which we have changed ourselves. What makes modern man uniquely human cannot be explained by human biology. Instead, our biological evolution has been first influenced by, and then overcome by, the development of human society.

Charles Darwin was the first to propose a satisfactory mechanism of evolution. He argued that there is no plan or purpose in nature, no necessity for any creature, including man, to exist; and that there is no trend for simple creatures to give way to more complex ones. All that matters is how well individuals in a species are adapted to their environment. Change occurs because, while on the whole creatures faithfully reproduce, occasionally small mutations occur.

If the mutation is favourable in the given environmental context, it will tend to spread in a population, it will be 'selected' by the environment. These are the two key themes in Darwinism: chance mutation and natural selection.

Our ancestors went through such a pattern of evolution. In his fascinating *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human*, leading paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey argues that the huge tectonic movements that led to the creation of the Great Rift Valley in Africa changed the environment so significantly that a new behavioural pattern was selected in the primate population: bi-pedal movement to cover the more open terrain in search of food. A chance happening—changes in the African natural environment—led to the emergence around 7.5m years ago of hominids, essentially upright apes.

Another dramatic shift occurred around 2.5m years ago, which led to the *Homo* line of which we—*Homo Sapiens*—are the descendants. Again a change in the natural environment was the key according to Leakey. A rapid global cooling necessitated greater caloric intake. Nature threw up two solutions from the hominids: greater meat-eating, or greater intake of the largely vegetarian diet hominids had lived on until then. Our line was the meat-eaters. The other line died out, possibly killed by our ancestors.

However, from 2.5m years ago until around 50 000 years ago, something novel became significant, something not seen on earth before: a process of natural evolution that was in part culturally driven. Man began ►



to make himself. Leakey comments on the chief symptom of this; that the rate of natural evolution became very rapid. The evidence we have of what caused these changes is fully consistent with the theory Engels put forward, which emphasised the centrality of *labour* in the transition from ape to man.

Through his own labours, man changed his immediate environment in an increasingly deliberate fashion, and so affected the course of his own biological evolution within that environment. This led, among other things, to a rapid growth in brain size, as man began to create an existence that depended on an ability to perform complex tasks. Unlike other animals, even many of the biological features of humanity are due to its own labour, mediated by its impact on the environment—mediated, in other words, by the primitive society which early man created.

The human genetic material has changed very little over the last 50 000 years. Yet the character of human life and behaviour has been transformed many times over, beyond all recognition. Cultural development has taken over from biological evolution, as human society has flourished and expanded at an ever increasing rate.

When agriculture was established 10 000 years ago, mankind for the first time produced more than was necessary to meet its immediate subsistence needs. This surplus product led to an ever more rapid development of human productive activity, since the accumulated resources gave people the capacity to plan ahead and invent new

technologies. Science developed as man began to learn and speculate on the basis of his attempts to manipulate nature. A surplus product also led to class divisions, the formation of states, and wars over resources. Over the past 10 000 years humanity has developed at an increasingly rapid pace, and different societies have proliferated with different social conflicts.

Through this process of attempting to master nature, something wonderful emerged: civilisation itself. No longer a hunter-gatherer, man has begun over the past 10 000 years to take control of his own destiny. At the same time, Darwinian evolution has ended for us, because society now prevents natural selection taking its course.

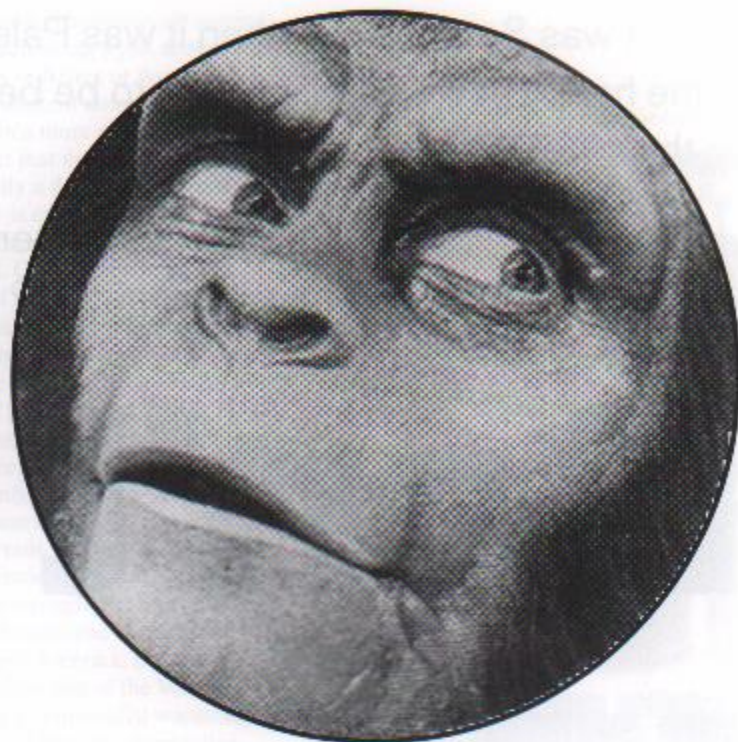
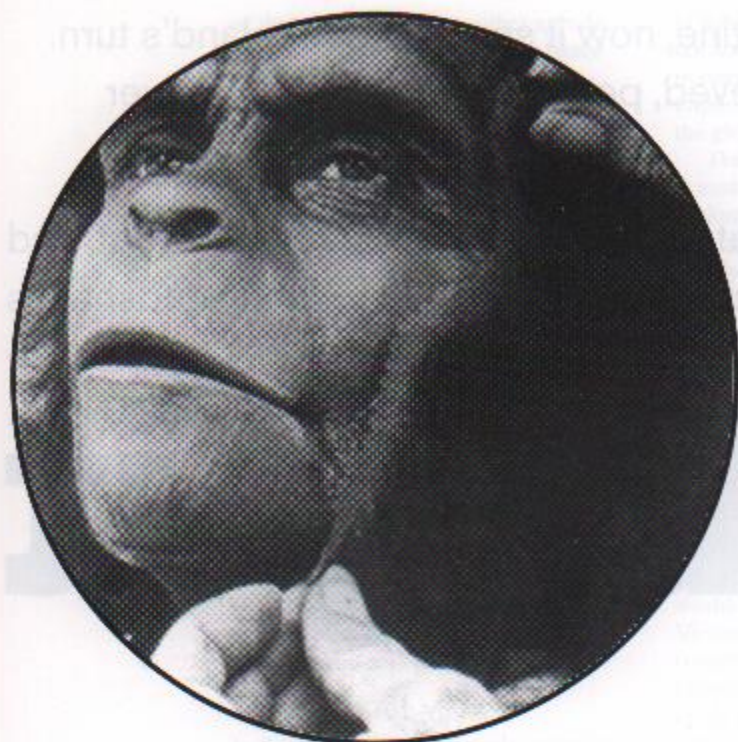
Marx said that the essence of modern man was not fixed by biology, but was the 'ensemble of social relations'. This does not mean that biology is irrelevant—if we didn't have complex brains then we couldn't be humans. It means that what a human being is and can achieve is framed by the development of society rather than by genetics.

Animals have only a limited ability to learn from experience. In his most recent book, *The Making of Memory*, neuroscientist Steven Rose gives an example of the limits that this places on animal behaviour. He found that he could train a chick to avoid pecking a coloured bead by coating it in a bitter-tasting substance. He tried a different approach, and got a different result: 'I tried to pair the bead-pecking with a different form of discomfort. I arranged the experiment so that every time the chick pecked a dry, tasteless

bead, it felt a mild electric shock to its feet.' This didn't stop the chicks pecking the bead. If anything they did it more. This was an experience they were unable to learn from. What is true of chicks is true of all animals to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the context and their complexity. There is a passivity in animals' relationship to their own experience which means that their behavioural patterns change very slowly, if at all.

Steven Rose reasoned that the inability of his chicks to learn from their new experience was due to the fact that 'in nature they are scarcely likely to have to learn the peck-pain-in-the-foot relationship'. And hence through evolution they wouldn't have developed the behavioural flexibility to deal with it. Genetically encoded behaviour is not rigidly deterministic, but it is limited in this kind of way.

People can train apes to recognise a collection of words, even follow very simple instructions, but try as they might they can't get apes to recognise syntax. Richard Leakey is among those who have been over-impressed by attempts to teach apes language. 'The evidence from primate language studies', he notes in *Origins Reconsidered*, 'suggests that we are not as special as we would like to believe...our language skills are firmly rooted in the cognitive abilities of ape brains'. Leakey is referring to the success of Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, at the Language Research Centre of George State University, in getting Kanzi, a male pygmy chimpanzee, to



recognise language to a level similar to that of a two-year old child.

Contrary to what Leakey and Savage-Rumbaugh claim, the striking things about these studies is that they show apes can only recognise a collection of words. Unlike humans, they cannot deal with meaning, and, crucially, they cannot use language to organise their activity in the way humans do. Language and purposive activity are a package, and apes lack both. Ape behaviour is more flexible than that of a chick, but it is still fundamentally limited by biology. They cannot respond to a new experience or human stimulation beyond a certain point.

Humans are not so constrained. Humans theorise and adopt new responses accordingly. After 10 pints we might keep on pecking like the chick, but even without a theory of what was causing the shock, most sober people would stop pecking until they worked one out. Unlike even the most flexible of animals, apes, we can interact with our experiences and experiment with new patterns of behaviour because we can theorise and act purposively. We can do this because we have acquired purposive behaviour in our collective history, and, crucially, because we can draw upon the cumulative, collective knowledge of society. Animals do not pass on their experiences to the next generation. Humans do. This has created a unique learning pattern.

There is nothing in human natural evolution that would have given us the flexibility to fly, write books, bungee-jump, or whatever.

Human social organisation has given us the capacity to do these things; to pass on knowledge from generation to generation in the written and spoken form; to move beyond natural evolution and overcome the limitations of our biological make-up.

In the words of a famous critic of sociobiology, Richard Lewontin, 'social organisation does not reflect the limitations of individual biological beings but is their *negation*'. The capacities possessed by individual humans are conditioned by the social context in which they develop and learn. As an individual is socialised he or she gains access to, and is shaped by, the knowledge and norms of human society. This means that individuals are unique neither because of a relationship to God, nor because of their genetic make-up, but because of unique experiences, unique socialisation. More significantly, it means there are no intrinsic limits within the individual to what he or she can do. There are only limits set by the character of society at any given time. And those can be overcome by social change.

Today, economic stagnation and a conservative social climate place severe limitations on individual freedom. The conservative social climate is also responsible for the rise of sociobiology.

Sociobiology thrives on today's culture of low expectations. It denigrates uniquely human abilities. It denies our capacity to change the world and ourselves through human activity. It emphasises the burden that our biological make-up places upon us.

All of this makes it a conservative ideology for our time.

Sociobiology has no basis in science. Rather than science 'proving' socio-biology to be true, society's pessimism about human capacities is influencing scientific thinking. No advance in natural science has occurred in almost 20 years since EO Wilson published his major work that would justify the shift in opinion towards sociobiology. Not a single example of human behaviour has been shown to result from our genes. And yet today, unlike 20 years ago, sociobiology pervades scientific thinking and is rarely challenged.

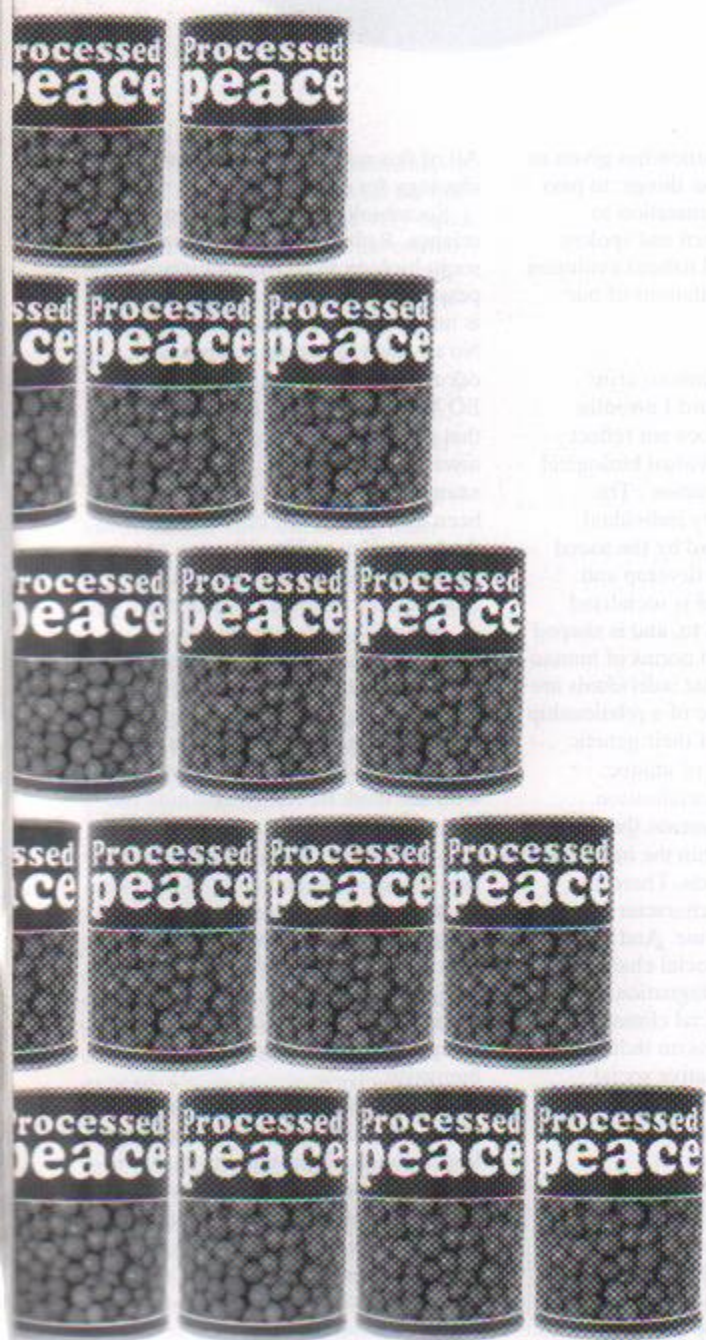
About 70 years ago the great Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, observed that a pre-lingual child was like an ape in its ability to recognise words. So Sue Savage-Rumbaugh has hardly made a breathtaking discovery with her work on Kanzi. But note the sequence: for Vygotsky, a young child was like an ape. The similarity showed how far the child had to go to become human, not that humans are like apes. Vygotsky's conclusions were more in accord with reality because he recognised the unique human potential. Rumbaugh's dubious conclusions are informed by her pessimism about humanity.

The rise of sociobiology is a sign of the anti-humanist times in which we live. Enough of this monkey business—a critical defence of humanism and the human potential is long overdue. Future articles in the Progress series will be taking up these themes. If you're reading this Kanzi, it's nothing personal. It's the soft-headed humans we are after. ●

First it was South Africa, then it was Palestine, now it seems to be Ireland's turn. If the happy news headlines are to be believed, peace is breaking out all over in the 1990s.

But what is the international 'peace process' really about, and who is it benefiting? Eddie Veale looks behind the handshakes

Don't buy it



The 'peace process' has become a staple of international affairs. There are peace processes at work in almost every major trouble spot around the world, from the conflicts inside the former Soviet Union to the civil wars of Africa. The protagonists in many of the most intractable wars of the past half-century appear to have been drawn into a process of negotiations and compromise that holds out the ultimate promise of peace and stability.

The peace process is one of those late twentieth-century terms that everybody uses, but nobody questions. Yet take away the smiling photocalls and the televised handshakes between leading players, and what does a modern peace process amount to? In particular, who initiates it? How do we know where it is heading? Why should we believe it will bring peace? And why does it always seem to begin somewhere in the vicinity of the White House, Washington DC, USA?

One strange feature of the current peace processes is that they all seem to fit into the same pattern. No matter whether the conflict in question is taking place in Cambodia, in the Caucasus, or in Angola, the sequence of events in the peace process seems always to be pretty much the same.

The peace process usually begins with an announcement in Washington that the rival sides in a war zone want peace, and that the 'international

community' wants to help them find it. There then follows a series of meetings; these rarely take place anywhere near the countries concerned in the war, but instead are supervised by Western diplomats in Washington or Geneva, Rome, Oslo, or London. At the end of these talks there will be a handshake—and maybe, if the peace process players are lucky, there will be a Nobel Peace Prize to celebrate, with free champagne from a Western embassy. All of this makes good pictures for the TV news. But it doesn't make much sense so far as resolving the real causes of the various conflicts around the world is concerned.

After all, how could it be possible that so many local wars, fought over different regional issues and passions, could be ended equitably by the same standardised process? What qualifies the American and other Western statesmen who oversee the process to know what kind of peace settlement the peoples of Nagorno-Karabakh or the Gaza Strip want or need? How could it be that African, Asian or Latin American wars, which have raged for years across hills, deserts and shattered cities, could all suddenly draw to an end at more or less the same time with a presidential declaration on the manicured White House lawn?

The closer you look at the current peace processes, the more you start to see that they can have little to do with meeting the different aspirations of the downtrodden and war-weary peoples

of the world. There is another agenda altogether being pursued in the peace processes. It is an agenda centrally dictated by the West, and the settlements that it seeks are the sort which will suit the needs of Western governments.

The ubiquitous peace process of the 1990s is not necessarily about peace at all. It is better understood as a different way of waging war against the peoples of the third world and the East.

Recent history shows that the start of a peace process does not mean the end of violence. From the former Yugoslavia to southern Africa, the killings have continued throughout all the negotiations and top-level meetings. While the leaders talk of peace in the rarefied atmosphere of the summit conference room, in the real world outside, ordinary people are still suffering the brutal consequences of militarism and war.

Turkey-shoot

In South Africa, for example, attention has focused on the negotiations between Nelson Mandela and President FW De Klerk and the progress towards a post-apartheid constitution. Little has been said about the impact of the peace process on the black masses, up to 15 000 of whom have been killed since Mandela's release from prison. Nor is South Africa an isolated example. In the occupied territories, the Israelis have kept up their turkey-shoot of Palestinians throughout the drawn-out diplomacy of the peace process. Northern Ireland, too, has continued burying its dead while the politicians congratulate each other on the peace process symbolised by the Downing Street declaration.

Around the world, the advance of the various peace processes has not been matched by any increase in peace. Indeed, as the Campaign Against Militarism briefing published in this issue of *Living Marxism* shows, the death tolls in at least 22 major wars have continued to rise (see page 29). Yet all of this is considered somehow separate from the peace process, to the point where you can have a continuing peace process in Angola while a thousand people a day are dying as a result of the war.

The progress of a peace process clearly has nothing to do with the intensity of any particular conflict in the East or the third world. It always seems to have something to do with the domestic and foreign interests of the USA and the other Western powers.

The true meaning of today's international peace process is the opposite of its public image. The peace process is not about reconciling local enemies. It is about pursuing the West's war against the whole of the third world

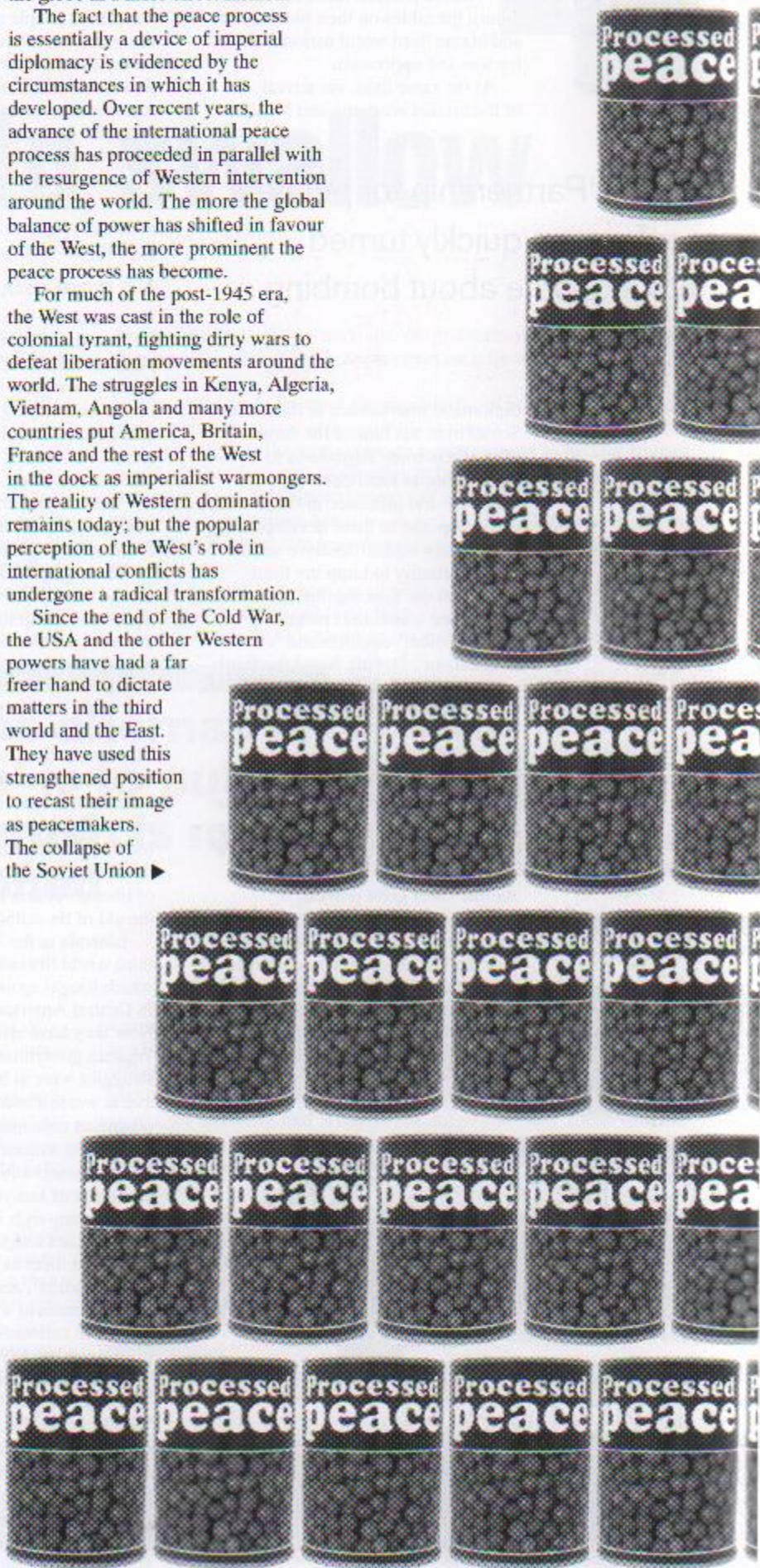
in a new form. The peace process is not about achieving a just settlement to conflicts in Africa or Asia. It is about imposing Western domination around the globe in a more direct fashion.

The fact that the peace process is essentially a device of imperial diplomacy is evidenced by the circumstances in which it has developed. Over recent years, the advance of the international peace process has proceeded in parallel with the resurgence of Western intervention around the world. The more the global balance of power has shifted in favour of the West, the more prominent the peace process has become.

For much of the post-1945 era, the West was cast in the role of colonial tyrant, fighting dirty wars to defeat liberation movements around the world. The struggles in Kenya, Algeria, Vietnam, Angola and many more countries put America, Britain, France and the rest of the West in the dock as imperialist warmongers. The reality of Western domination remains today; but the popular perception of the West's role in international conflicts has undergone a radical transformation.

Since the end of the Cold War, the USA and the other Western powers have had a far freer hand to dictate matters in the third world and the East. They have used this strengthened position to recast their image as peacemakers. The collapse of the Soviet Union ►

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER





helped to disorient anti-imperialists and to throw liberation movements everywhere on to the defensive. This has bolstered the position of the Western powers, allowing them to turn the tables on their old enemies and blame third world nationalists for war and oppression.

At the same time, the arrival of the market economy and Western

Nato's 'Partnership for peace' conference quickly turned into a debate about bombing the Serbs

diplomatic interference in the former Soviet bloc has fanned the flames of conflicts from Yugoslavia to Azerbaijan, as local elites fight for resources and influence in the new East.

In response to these developments, the Western authorities have seized the opportunity to lump the third world and the East together as uncivilised wastelands racked by age-old 'tribal' conflicts and 'ethnic nationalism'. Having found the third world and the East guilty of barbarism, the Western powers have then been able to set themselves up as the only civilised peacemakers on the planet, with a mission to save the warlike savages from themselves. The various peace processes have developed as an expression of this new-found faith in the peacemaking talents of the USA and the other great powers.

In practice, however, the peace process is a trick through which the West and its allies seek to dominate the rest of the world from behind a mask of humanitarianism. All of the drawn-out negotiations in Western capitals and all the White House diplomatic summits

disguise what is essentially a process of the West trying to impose its will by diktat.

Whatever the outcome of the peace process, we can be sure that it will not benefit the people at the sharp end of the war. The settlements imposed on the Palestinians and black South Africans, for example, represent the defeat of their struggles for genuine liberation. Elsewhere, such as in the former Yugoslavia, the consequence of the West's 'peace' diplomacy has been constantly to increase tensions and prolong the bloody civil war.

No more excuses

How have the Western powers got away with selling their processed peace to the world? The acceptance of the peace process is predicated on the discrediting of liberation movements. In order to make a credible case for their diplomatic interference being the path to peace, the Western powers have first to shift responsibility for all of the wars on to the shoulders of the third world.

You might think it would be hard for the most powerful, militaristic nations on Earth to blame some of the most powerless and poorly armed peoples for the global scourge of war. But, in the circumstances of the post-Cold War world, the Western powers have found it easy enough. The demoralisation of the old liberation movements is such that many of them have been prepared to accept partial responsibility for conflicts caused by Western imperialism. And within the West itself, prominent voices of liberal opinion have come to the aid of the authorities.

Liberals in the West once eulogised third world liberation movements which fought against US imperialism in Central America or South-east Asia. Now they have mostly accepted the Western government line, that such struggles were at best misguided and at worst murderous.

Guardian columnist Martin Woollacott summed up the new liberal/conservative consensus at the end of last year. Reviewing the Vietnam-style liberation struggles of the sixties and seventies, Woollacott dismissed them as 'wars that no longer seem justified', and held up today's peace process as a healthy antidote to the old nationalist poison (22 December 1993).

Pontificating from the comfort of London or Washington, pundits like Woollacott declare that the struggles of the third world to break the chains of colonial oppression no longer seem justified. For them, the messy carnage of today's Yugoslav conflict has become a prototype for all wars outside of the West's control.

They project the Yugoslav model backwards into the past, so that the wars for freedom fought by the peoples of Vietnam or Southern Africa become as insupportable as the siege of Sarajevo.

The discrediting of liberation struggles through the international peace process serves two purposes for the Western powers. First and foremost, it is a way of rehabilitating imperialism. It means that the Western powers no longer have to make excuses for their colonial pasts; indeed, they now feel able to assert that the third world was better off in the days of Empire than in the era of independence.

The ability to dictate terms to the third world and present themselves as the world's peacemakers is a precious new source of authority for deeply unpopular Western governments. At a time when they are all suffering crises of legitimacy and support at home, the rulers of the great powers will seize every opportunity to strut about on the world stage and to lecture the third world or the East about the need to behave in a more civilised manner. So Western leaders like John Major and Bill Clinton were quick to leave behind their domestic scandals and go off to preach about their 'Partnership for peace' with Eastern Europe at January's Nato conference. The fact that this discussion of 'peace' quickly turned into a debate about bombing the Serbs revealed the likely pay-off for those on the receiving end of Western peacemaking today.

New rules

The second purpose of the peace process for the Western powers is to establish new rules in international relations. In dictating terms for a settlement, the West's peace processes seek to police the behaviour of peoples and states in the third world. They lay down firm regulations about what is and is not acceptable in the New World Order. The message to leaders and movements in the third world is clear: if you bend the knee and give up the gun, you too could have a handshake in Washington; but if you try to assert your independence and stand up to the West, you may well have to shake hands with the US Air Force.

The apparent advance of peace talks around the world is really a new method of regulating the third world and the East. No such process can bring a just and lasting peace, since it does not address the problems of Western domination which gave rise to wars and militarism in the first place. If we want to see some progress towards peace and freedom, the first thing to be clear about is that we should have nothing to do with the processed peace that they are trying to sell us. ●





Bitter pill to swallow

With this government you have to be on the lookout for problems with even the most sensible-sounding suggestions. Even when a change looks like an improvement you can bet there's a catch somewhere. The new enthusiasm for deregulating post-coital contraception (the morning after pill) is a case in point.

The post-coital contraceptive pill is an invaluable fallback for anyone who indulges in recreational sex. It's a useful back-up if you miss a pill, forget your cap, tear your condom or just never quite got around to using some pre-coital or mid-coital method. Post-coital contraception is perfectly straightforward to use—just two doses of a special pill, 12 hours apart. The only problem is that the first dose has to be taken within 72 hours of sex. While that might sound like quite a long time in theory (especially if you thought you could only use the 'morning after pill' the morning after), in practice it's a very short time as currently the pill is only available from doctors, family planning clinics and some Accident and Emergency departments of hospitals. Given that most family planning clinics open for fewer than two hours a week and that unless you are very assertive it can take days to get an appointment with your GP, the current situation leaves many of us well and truly up the spout.

The Department of Health has been considering this issue quite carefully. Keen, as it is, to reduce the number of single mothers, but reluctant, as it is, to increase the rate of abortion, emergency contraception seems like a good option.

It seems pretty obvious that more of us would use post-coital contraception if we could get our hands on it more easily. So the big question is, how can it be made more easily available?

The obvious answer would seem to be to take it off prescription and allow us to get it from the local pharmacist. At least that is the answer that seems to be finding most favour with the Department of Health—those in the know seem to think it could be deregulated in the next 18 months.

Allowing the morning after pill to be sold rather than prescribed would certainly be a hundred times more convenient. And there seems to be no medical argument against it. The post-coital pill is safer than aspirin. You can't kill yourself by overdosing on the post-coital pill (although you might make yourself throw up), nor is it addictive. Even if you have medical problems that prevent you from taking the ordinary contraceptive pill, you can still safely use the post-coital pill. Ordinary pills are dangerous for some women because they involve taking low doses of hormones for a long period of time. Although the post-coital pill contains a higher dose of hormones it passes quickly through the system and so is thought to be safe even for women with a history of circulatory problems.

The only women who should never use post-coital pills are those who are pregnant already, since nobody is sure whether or not it can

damage the fetus. There may also be problems if you took it month after month—nobody really knows because it has never been tested for use in this way.

The proposal to improve the availability of post-coital contraception sounds like a great improvement—a means to enhance our control over our fertility. The key argument against seems to be that women would misuse it by taking it too often or later than the 72-hour deadline. But, apart from being patronising, this argument doesn't really hold water. You can misuse Lemsip—if you drank gallons you could do yourself all kinds of damage—but nobody calls for that to be available on prescription.

So if deregulating post-coital pills is such a good idea, why am I flagging it up as a possible problem?

It may currently be a hassle to get your hands on the morning after pill—but you get it free. At present we don't even pay for prescription charges on contraception. If post-coital contraceptive pills come off prescription we will have to pay a grossly inflated price, which will be justified as a deterrent to stop us from over-using it.

There is already a trend for the Department of Health to deregulate medicines from prescription-only to over-the-counter status. The result has been a big rise in prices. Caeston thrush treatment was the subject of one of the most widely publicised switches. A large tube of cream, for which you would have paid

a prescription charge of £4.25 (or nothing if you are on social security, an OAP or a student under 19) will now cost you £7.51. Of course, in theory you can still get it from your doctor, but given the choice between putting up with the symptoms until you can get an appointment (and spending half a day in the surgery waiting room with six ancient copies of *Hello*) most of us will probably be willing to put our hands in our pockets.

Deregulation has been a devious way of saving money on the NHS drugs bill under the guise of improving consumer choice. Nobody forces you to pay, you choose to. The fact that the alternative 'choice' is to put up with thrush is not mentioned.

The next step for some of these products will be to take them off prescription entirely. Then you will only be able to get them from the pharmacist, rather than on prescription, regardless of your circumstances.

I am all in favour of the post-coital pills being available through pharmacies—as long as the claims about safety are true. But I'm deeply suspicious of why the move is being made. It seems to me that if the government is really motivated by a desire to prevent unplanned pregnancy, it would allow pharmacists to distribute them for the price we pay now—that is, completely free. This seems to be the one option that isn't under discussion at all—perhaps because it won't save the authorities any money.

That the alternative 'choice' is to put up with thrush is not mentioned



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After the Major-Reynolds December declaration, there is much uncertainty about what comes next in the Irish War and Anglo-Irish relations. As a magazine which has given great prominence to the Irish issue over the years, *Living Marxism* wants to encourage the fullest discussion of current trends and future prospects.

Major's Irish gamble

Mick Kennedy opens the discussion by identifying some hidden dangers ahead for the British authorities



PHOTO: PHIL MURPHY

The Joint Declaration is a fraudulent document whose political intent is to deceive; to create illusions of agreement where none exists, and to hint at the existence of concessions where none are contemplated....

'There's nothing new in this declaration.'
Bernadette McAliskey,
Guardian, 31 December 1993

Under her maiden name of Devlin, Bernadette McAliskey first came to public attention as a student civil rights leader in the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969, when the people of Derry fought back against a police pogrom. She was elected MP for Mid-Ulster on a surge of popular enthusiasm for civil rights and came to Westminster at the age of 21. When she strode across the floor of the House of Commons in February 1972 to clout Reginald Maudling, the Home Secretary who presided over the massacre of 14 unarmed civil rights protesters in Derry's Bloody Sunday, the gesture resounded around the world.

In her spirited rejection of the declaration issued jointly by British prime minister John Major and Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds in Downing Street on 15 December, McAliskey reflects the views of many intransigent republicans. Such sentiments are nowhere stronger than in the border areas of Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Armagh where the IRA resumed its military campaign against the occupying British forces within hours of the Christmas truce ending.

McAliskey is right to say that the declaration is a fraudulent and cynical document. It offers peace while upholding partition and the framework of British domination that has condemned the whole of Ireland to decades of stagnation and repression, and more than 20 years of colonial war in the North. The primary aim of both the London and Dublin governments remains to isolate and defeat the Irish republican movement.

Novel features

McAliskey is wrong, however, to claim that the declaration contains 'nothing new'. Identifying the novel features of this Anglo-Irish initiative is the key to grasping both its contemporary significance and its potential consequences in Ireland and in Britain.

The novel feature of the Major-Reynolds declaration that has provoked most debate is its public offer of a place at the negotiating table to Sinn Fein, conditional upon the IRA declaring a 'cessation' of its military resistance. In the weeks since 15 December, the media devoted much attention to the nuances of statements by various republican leaders. Their manoeuvres in delaying a formal response and in seeking further clarification of the document so far reflect widespread recognition in the nationalist community that the declaration offers little hope of peace and progress after so many years of suffering.

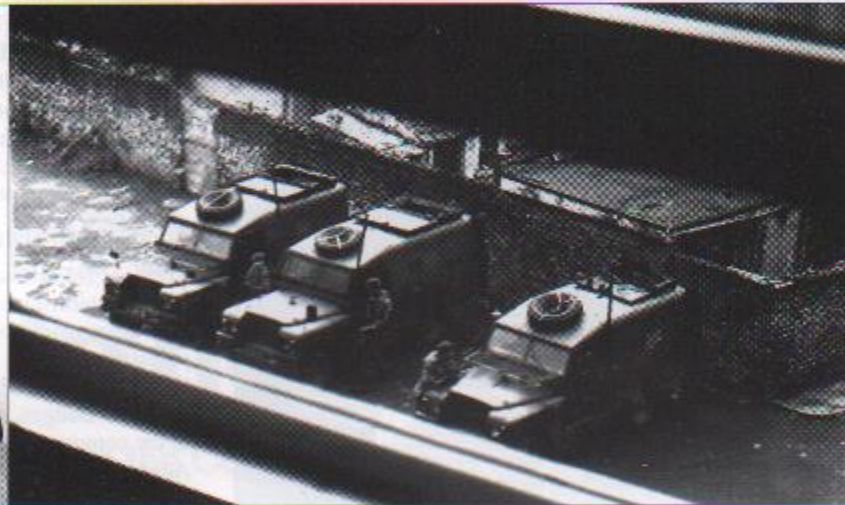
Yet the sense that there is little further to be gained by continuing the struggle in its current form is also

strong among nationalists in the Six Counties. The dynamic towards some sort of settlement in Ireland has been strongly influenced by international events—the collapse of the Soviet Union, the decline of radical national liberation movements everywhere, and, most significantly, the unfavourable deals imposed on the ANC in

qualifying clause indicates the historic anxiety of the British state in broaching the Irish national question. Yet no amount of equivocal phrasing and careful punctuation can disguise a significant shift of emphasis in the British government's presentation of its attitude to the Union and to Irish aspirations.

in the affairs of Northern Ireland. The fear among Unionists and their supporters today is that the routine use of such a term might act informally to undermine the unique link between Britain and Northern Ireland.

The declaration's affirmation that Britain has 'no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern



PHOTOS: JOE BOGANN

South Africa and the PLO in Palestine. The changing balance of forces between all Western governments and oppositional forces at home and abroad has helped to put Britain in a position of unprecedented strength with respect to its old enemies in Ireland.

So, despite its remarkable resilience and fortitude, the republican movement has been fought to a stalemate. The loss of direction of the military campaign both in Ireland and in Britain in recent years, and the rise in Loyalist terror, are expressions of this. The resulting drift of the Irish republican movement towards negotiating terms with Britain has been apparent in a series of policy statements over the past five years. The momentum towards a deal now appears unstoppable: the remaining questions concern timing and terms, and the extent to which the republican leadership becomes incorporated into enforcing the settlement.

There is another novel aspect of the Downing Street declaration which has received less attention than the quibbling over ceasefire terms, but which may in the long run prove more important:

'The British government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland if that is their wish.'

The document's characteristic heaping of qualifying clause upon

There can be no doubt that any concession towards Irish unity in one paragraph of the declaration is firmly contradicted by its support for partition in several others. Most politicians and media commentators have, like McAliskey, emphasised its explicit commitment to the 'Loyalist veto'. The assertion that the integrity of the Union will be maintained for as long as a majority of people in Northern Ireland desire it is the Ark of the Covenant of the Six County state. Though, as McAliskey shows, it was based from the outset on a flagrant violation of the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people, it has been crucial to the legitimacy of Northern Ireland since partition was imposed in 1920-21, and has been consistently reiterated in every British policy statement since. In the weeks since the Downing Street declaration, republicans have routinely regretted the inclusion of this formulation, while Unionists have found it reassuring.

'No selfish interest'

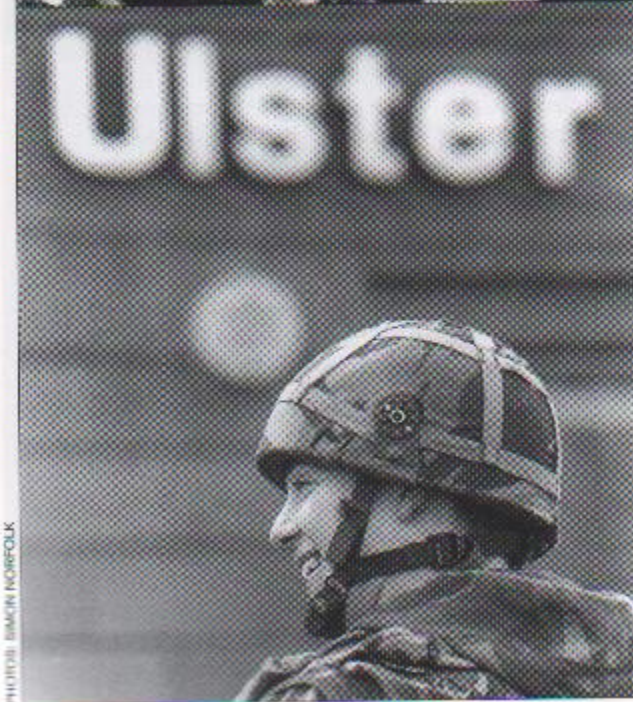
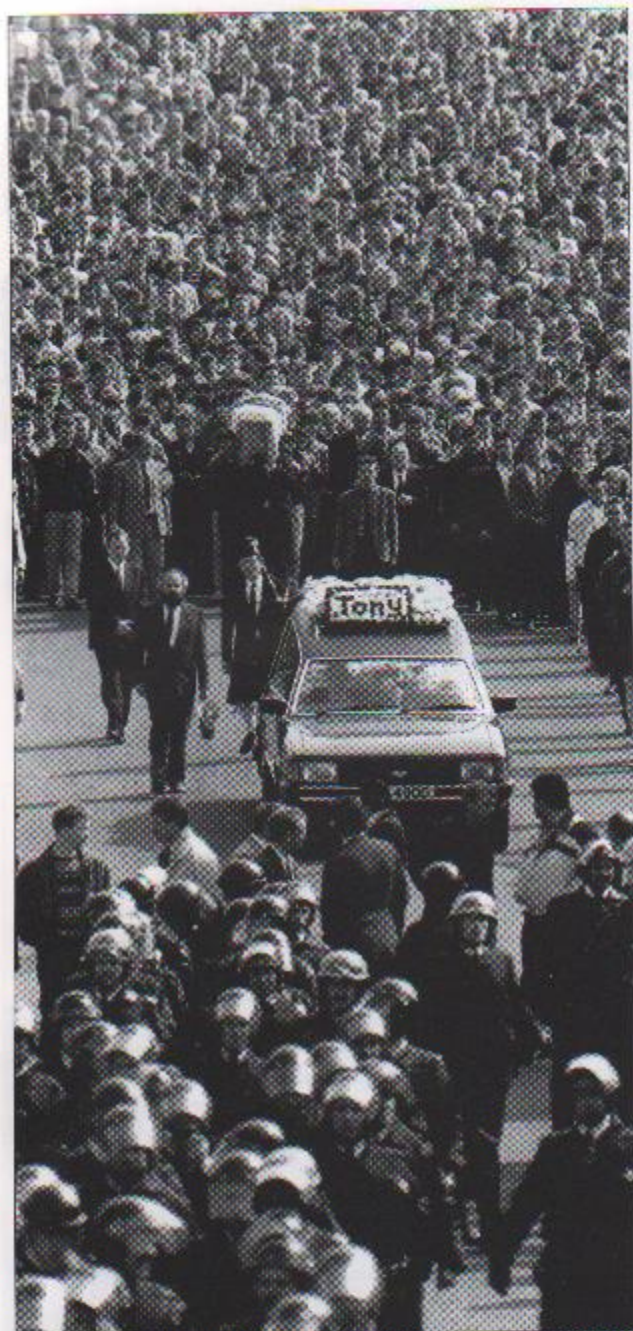
Yet, as more perceptive commentators have noted, the Downing Street declaration qualifies the 'Loyalist veto' with other, newer commitments. *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young has observed how the use of the phrase 'the totality of relationships between these islands' infuriated Margaret Thatcher when former Irish Taoiseach Charles Haughey first introduced it into a joint communique in 1980. This phrase—or its substance—is repeated like a mantra through the December declaration. Thatcher objected to it because it formally acknowledges the right of the Dublin government to a say

Ireland' emphasises the separateness of the Six Counties rather than their integrity with Britain. This formulation, which appeared earlier in speeches by Tory ministers Peter Brooke and Patrick Mayhew, was included in the declaration at the behest of the Dublin government. It registers a public shift by the British government from a traditionally pro-Unionist position to one of aloof disinterest.

Waning Union

According to Sir David Goodall, senior British official involved in the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement, the fudges and ambiguities of the December declaration seem loaded towards the Irish side: 'The tone of the declaration moves the British government a shade further towards accepting a united Ireland as an attainable rather than simply a conceivable goal.' (*The Tablet*, 25 December 1993) The demand from republican leaders that Britain should move still further and adopt the role of 'persuader' in coaxing the Unionists towards Irish unity reflects their perception of a growing distance within the Union. Hugo Young goes so far as to argue that, for John Major, the Union has become 'an option to be considered by individuals rather than a solemn constitutional verity'.

But so what? What would it matter if Britain loosened its links with Northern Ireland or indeed the wider United Kingdom? For many moderate Irish nationalists and for much liberal opinion in Britain, this is part of the appeal of the Anglo-Irish declaration. ►



For Hugo Young, the Union is a 'slowly waning feature of Britishness', which 'no longer seems to be seen as an integral part of the British national identity'. Many would be happy to let Ireland drift quietly away and settle for a more limited and harmonious, if less grandiose, Union. The fact that opposition to the Major initiative in Britain seems to be confined to a handful of Tory back benchers and disaffected ex-ministers like Norman Tebbit, Cecil Parkinson and Norman Lamont appears to confirm that, even within the Conservative and Unionist Party, loyalty to the United Kingdom is limited.

Wolverhampton next?

Yet there are serious dangers for the British establishment even in tinkering with the constitutional arrangements painstakingly built up over centuries. When the Tory MP for Wolverhampton, Nicholas Budgen, asked John Major in the commons on the day of the Anglo-Irish declaration whether the government still had 'a selfish, strategic or economic interest in Wolverhampton', he touched on a sensitive point.

The legitimacy of the state is bound up with its jurisdiction over defined geographical areas within which a subtle combination of culture, tradition, deference, economic interests and ultimately force ensure respect for its authority. Loyalty to the United Kingdom is only one feature of Britishness which is waning; the monarchy, the established church, parliament, traditional political parties—for many, these too are no longer regarded as an integral part of the British identity. A state that seems willing to concede control in Irish territories that have been included within its borders since the formation of the modern British state in the early nineteenth century may find its authority undermined in Wolverhampton, too, before long.

Cunning diplomacy

The *Sunday Times* sums up the view that Major is taking a mighty gamble: 'the prime minister has put his name to an agreement that encompasses the break-up of the United Kingdom as we know it.' (19 December 1993) Any step in that direction would be traumatic for Major's parliamentary position, for the Conservative Party and for Britain itself. But the *Sunday Times* is ultimately sanguine about Major's Irish deal: after outlining the nightmare scenario, its editor takes comfort in the fact that 'few agreements have been prepared with such care, even cunning', with both British and Irish governments using secret diplomacy.

It is to be hoped that the complacency of the *Sunday Times* and the rest of the British establishment receives its due reward. Unfortunately the legitimacy problems of the British state may take some time to emerge, and are unlikely to provide early respite to beleaguered Irish nationalists.

Internal division

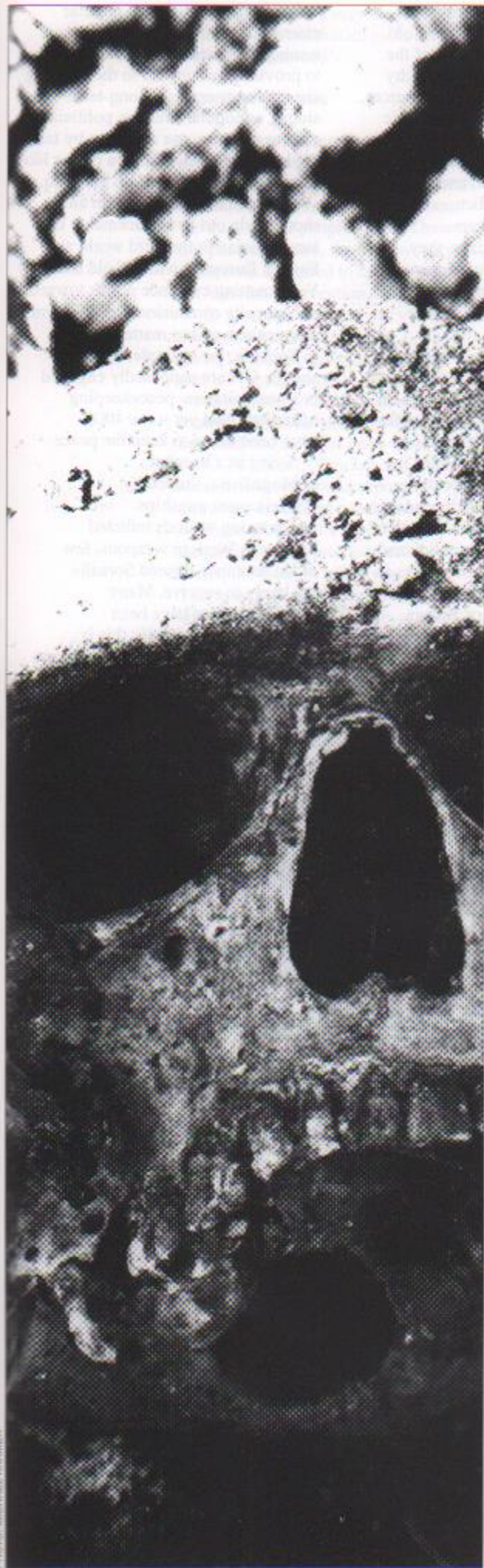
However, those who focus on the near-monolithic unity that presently characterises the approach of the British establishment and the Conservative Party towards Ireland are likely to underestimate the potential disruption that current trends may cause. As the pressures of slump and decline continue to take their toll, the inability of Britain's ruling elite to retain popular support or even grudging acquiescence at home is likely to become inescapable. In such circumstances, the fear of breaking up the United Kingdom over Ireland may yet become a focus of internal division and strife for the establishment—as it did earlier this century.

Nobel Prize

The potential for any Irish settlement to unravel is great. For nearly a quarter of a century the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, and indeed the totality of the relationships in these islands, have been reorganised around the realities of war. Even a deal that does not bring peace will destabilise existing arrangements. Even if the IRA dumps arms, the presence of tens of thousands of armed British soldiers, paramilitary police and Loyalist paramilitaries, means that violence is certain to continue, and may well intensify. Some form of internment, North and South, is likely to accompany any settlement, to hammer those who stand out against it. The potential for instability in the South, once the Dublin government has abandoned the last vestige of the legitimacy conferred by the nationalist tradition by giving up its constitutional claim on the whole territory of Ireland, is another underestimated consequence of the Major-Reynolds declaration.

When John Major saw John Hume trying to bring Gerry Adams towards him with his hands held up, he thought he saw an opportunity too good to miss. For a prime minister for whom everything appeared to go wrong, here was a chance to pull off a major publicity coup and perhaps even win a Nobel prize as the man who brought peace to Ireland. Few people in Northern Ireland expect that Major's gamble will have much of a pay-off for them; but few in Britain yet recognise that it could turn out to be a big loser at home too.

PHOTO: EMANUEL HOEFELK



CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARISM

Briefing

From Cold War to hot wars

When the Cold War ended we were told that the world was entering a new era of peace. What happened to it? Over the past four years, militarism and war seem to have become permanent features of the New World Order.

Phil Johnson prepared this briefing on the death toll in the major post-Cold War conflicts for the Campaign Against Militarism (CAM). It is one of a series of exposes planned in the run-up to CAM's big Wembley conference in March (see page 24 for details)

Today there are 22 major wars in progress around the world. More than 1.5m people had been killed in these conflicts up to the end of 1992, the last year for which it is possible to assess total casualties.

Although overall figures are unavailable for 1993, recorded deaths in high-profile conflicts indicate that the trend is still going up. More than 4000 Somalis were killed in the United Nations' Operation Restore Hope last year; in Angola, the UN estimates that 1000 people are dying each day as a consequence of the war there. Some of the biggest death tolls have been in countries like Sudan (37-40 000 dead), East Timor (15-16 000 dead) and Angola (more than 100 000 dead), of which we have heard relatively little.

By any standards, the four years after the end of the Cold War cannot be described as peaceful. Between 1989 and 1992, 58 countries experienced some kind of armed conflict. Just counting the biggest wars, the number of people killed since the Berlin Wall fell at the end of 1989 had reached 370 000 by the close of 1992.

Behind the stark figures for war dead are the hundreds of thousands of people who have died as an indirect result of war. In the Gulf War of 1990-91, for example, at least 100 000 Iraqis, and perhaps more than twice that number, were killed by the Western forces. One year on, in January 1992, 31 330 children under five and 67 636 over-fives had died of malnutrition and disease since the imposition of UN sanctions in August 1990. ►



Millions more have been turned into refugees by today's hot wars. For example, 63 600 have fled to Thailand from surrounding conflicts; 200 000 have been made homeless by the war in Georgia; the war in Tadjikistan has produced 400 000 refugees; more than 70 000 Zairean refugees have fled to other African states, while Zaire itself has become a temporary home to around 400 000 refugees from Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi; and more than 1.25m Mozambicans have fled to neighbouring countries. By the end of 1992, there were 19m refugees around the world, over half of them in Africa and the Middle East, and another 24m had been displaced and become refugees in their own lands.

UN 'peacekeeping'

The growth in conflict and war throughout the world has been paralleled by an extension of Western intervention, often through the United Nations.

In 1987, before the Cold War ended, the UN had just five peacekeeping operations. Today, it is running a record 16 such missions around the world. They range from the long-established 38-person observer group in India and Pakistan, to massive new operations of more than 25 000 personnel in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. The UN has established more missions in the past four years than it did in the previous 40.

Along with the threefold increase in the number of UN operations, there has been a huge expansion in personnel to around 90 000 today. Back in 1987, the figure was closer to 10 000.

Retribution is swift for those nation states which object to UN interference. In October 1993, for instance, Haitian demonstrators refused to allow 200 US and Canadian troops to land (the first detachment of a planned UN force of 600). Haiti's punishment for objecting to the presence of this army of occupation has been the imposition of UN sanctions and a naval blockade by the US, Canadian and British navies.

Made in the West

Usually, when commentators draw our attention to the growing piles of bodies around the world, it is in order to argue for more intervention by Western governments and international agencies. Yet the roots of today's explosion of global conflict lie in the West.

This is clear in the case of former Eastern bloc countries, which were supposed to enjoy the benefits of

the free market and Western-style democracy with the end of the Cold War. Instead, the introduction of the market has led to economic anarchy and a desperate scramble for resources, and the effect of Western diplomatic and military intervention in the ensuing chaos—as in the former Yugoslavia—has been to encourage fragmentation and conflict.

When the major powers intervene abroad nowadays, they do so in circumstances of increasing rivalry among themselves. The Western alliance, a stable feature of international politics for half a century, has been thrown into disarray by the end of the Cold War. As a consequence, all the peoples of the former Yugoslavia have become pawns in a Western power game. When Germany sought to assert its world power status by supporting Croatian and Slovenian independence, for example, the USA did a complete about turn on its previous policy and pushed for Bosnian independence, in an attempt to reassert its own global leadership. The people of Bosnia paid a heavy price for America's interference, as they too were plunged into a bloody civil war.

Cynicism and apathy are the most common responses to the established political parties and governmental institutions in Western countries

today. In the face of such popular disenchantment, Western leaders are turning their attention abroad. Unable to provide any answers to the growing chaos of economies in long-term slump, unpopular Western politicians seek to recoup some authority by taking the initiative elsewhere—in places like Yugoslavia, Somalia, Haiti and Iraq.

The idea that the West can and should help out as a peacemaker or humanitarian in the third world and Eastern Europe is widely held today. Yet mounting evidence points towards the opposite conclusion: that Western intervention makes matters worse. In Somalia, for example, the USA and the UN are supposedly engaged in a humanitarian, peacekeeping operation. And yet some 4000 have been killed to keep the peace.

Lying in a hospital in Mogadishu, shelled by US helicopter gunships and carrying wounds inflicted by hi-tech Western weapons, few of the seriously injured Somalis are likely to survive. Many of the casualties have been civilians, but apparently this is of little concern to the peacekeepers. Major David Stockwell, the chief UN spokesman in Somalia, justified the killing of more than 125 Somalis on 9 September 1993 by stating bluntly that, 'the women and children

Major conflicts in progress around the world

The 22 major wars in progress around the world had resulted in more than 1.5m deaths by the end of 1992. Between 39 000 and 50 000 of these deaths occurred in 1992 alone.

were combatants. Everyone on the ground was a combatant as far as we were concerned'.

Number games

Not only are Western states and organisations like the UN complicit in the deaths of hundreds of thousands around the world, they also lie about the numbers of people killed. These are not poor estimates, they are systematic distortions designed to bolster support for Western intervention.

In Somalia, this kind of cynical deception has meant that the figures given for people killed by the UN and US 'peacekeeping' forces are invariably underestimates. For example, Somalis said that 73 people had died and 200 had been wounded on 12 July in a UN rocket and cannon assault on a compound reportedly housing a command centre used by General Aideed's supporters. According to the International Red Cross, the number killed was 57. This is quite a discrepancy, but the UN claimed that there were, at most, only 15 deaths caused by the raid, and 15 wounded.

Aside from putting forward very low casualty figures of their own, UN and US government officials have tried other tricks. They have used vague terms like 'dozens' when discussing

Somali lives lost in confrontations with the UN; emphasised instead the number of UN deaths (83 by the end of 1993); asserted that General Aideed was responsible for 350 000 deaths due to famine, civil war and disease. But on 8 December 1993, US envoy to Somalia Robert Oakley acknowledged that Somali casualties—deaths and woundings combined—were between 6000 and 10 000.

The case of Bosnia has been quite different. Very few of the deaths in the civil war have been inflicted by Western troops. In this case, it has suited the Western authorities to endorse wild estimates of the numbers killed. The daily tales of death and destruction from Bosnia have created a climate of uncritical acceptance of the need for Western intervention. An unreal atmosphere prevails where any exaggeration—no matter how unrealistic—can be reported as fact.

On 30 June 1993, for instance, the London *Evening Standard* gave the figure for deaths in the Yugoslav wars as more than 140 000. Yet at the end of 1992, the respected Stockholm International Peace Research Institute put the figure at 10-20 000 for Bosnia, plus 6-10 000 for Croatia. The break-up of Yugoslavia has undoubtedly caused terrible human suffering. But are we really to believe that 110 000 deaths occurred in the first six months of last

year, almost four times the number that had been killed previously?

The *Sunday Times* ran an article on 30 May 1993 which suggested a figure of 250 000 dead. This implies around 220 000 deaths in the first few months of 1993. Why were these vast numbers not reported as they occurred? No evidence is ever offered to support numbers like 140 000 or 250 000. What's more, the *Sunday Times* article appeared a month before the *Evening Standard* piece. Are we to suppose that 110 000 fewer people had died by the end of June than had died one month earlier? Strangely, such inconsistencies have not merited much attention in the media. It would seem that fictional death tolls are deployed in the cause of encouraging further Western involvement.

The Campaign Against Militarism

Militarism is the most dangerous trend in world politics today. Yet the drive towards increasing Western intervention attracts little serious analysis, and the selective, distorted information which we are given is rarely submitted to scrutiny. Western leaders always lay claim to the moral high ground over events abroad: the motives and effects of their own interference in other countries have been subject to all too little criticism.

The USA and the UN have not hesitated, for example, to issue a warrant for the arrest of General Aideed, or to propose holding war crimes trials in the former Yugoslavia. The West, it would seem, has an unquestioned right to sit in judgement on the rest of the world. Yet a country like the USA can, without warning, commit an act of war such as the launch of 23 Tomahawk cruise missiles against Iraq, on 26 June 1993, and not be held to account.

The Campaign Against Militarism aims to change that. We were the first people to protest against the bombing of Baghdad in June, and have campaigned against the UN occupation of Somalia from the start. As well as demonstrating our opposition to Western militarism, CAM has set out to question the official version of events and to reject the received wisdom that the West can be a force for peace. The War Drums and Peace Talks conference at Wembley in March will be an important forum for raising more questions about the causes and the consequences of the wars that characterise the Western powers' New World Order.

(Additional research by Bill Hawk)

Country	Deaths by end of 1992	Deaths in 1992
Afghanistan	1 000 000 ¹	figures unavailable
Angola	more than 102 000	3000
Azerbaijan	2000	1200
Bosnia-Herzegovina	10 000-20 000	10 000-20 000
Burma (Myanmar)	13 300-16 400 ²	fewer than 2000
Burundi	35 000-45 000	several thousand
Colombia	11 000	3600
Croatia	6000-10 000	fewer than 100
Georgia (Abkhazia)	more than 3000	figures unavailable
India (Kashmir)	5000	2000
Indonesia (E Timor)	15 000-16 000	fewer than 100 (excluding civilians)
Israel (Palestine)	more than 12 000	fewer than 250
Liberia	150 000-200 000	4000-5000
Rwanda	5000	figures unavailable
Sierra Leone	20 000	figures unavailable
Somalia	3000-4000 ³	figures unavailable
South Africa	14 500	3500
Sri Lanka	24 000	4000 (excluding civilians)
Sudan	37 000-40 000 ⁴	more than 1000 (excluding civilians)
Tadzhikistan	20 000-25 000	more than 1000
Turkey (Kurdistan)	6200	3000
United Kingdom (N Ireland)	3000	87

¹Includes deaths caused indirectly by the effects of war

²Up to the end of 1988

³Conflict between Somali government and United Somali Congress, pre-UN intervention

⁴Up to the end of 1991

According to Conservative free market economics, the defeat of inflation is the key to resolving the problems of the capitalist economy. Advocates of the free market have long portrayed the choice in stark terms. Eradicate inflation and a benign world of sustained growth and rising living standards awaits. Go soft on inflation and expect a traumatic future of job insecurity amid violent economic swings from boom to bust.

Low inflation has been the most enduring objective over 15 years of Tory government. Yet there is an irony in the fact that it has been achieved under John Major's leadership. Margaret Thatcher left No10 in November 1990, with a reputation for vigorously pursuing low inflation. Yet she left with inflation near 10 per cent—the same as when she became prime minister in 1979. The bumbling style of the Major administration, meanwhile, seems unsuited to pursuing an objective in the single-minded way that advocates of low inflation insist is essential. Yet, inflation has fallen to levels not seen for a generation.

This raises awkward questions for those who identify low inflation with economic dynamism. It is clear that inflation would have plummeted in recent years irrespective of government policy. This suggests that government policy on inflation is not the decisive factor in determining economic prospects. Rather, the deflationary trends of recent years suggest that inflation and deflation are *symptoms* of a more fundamental process.

Market harmony

Monetary trends do not have a decisive effect on future developments; they are themselves determined by other economic factors. In the case of today, low inflation has been caused by slump.

The events of mid-September 1992, when the pound was effectively manhandled out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) by foreign exchange dealers, indicate the confusion that arises if you try to explain inflation and deflation in terms of government actions. During that crisis the trade weighted value of the pound fell by 11 points against other currencies on an index of 100—exceeding the decline over the previous seven years. This meant an increase in import prices, which might reasonably have been expected to show up in inflation. Successive interest rate cuts during 1993 should have added to this pressure. Yet the collapse of the pound had little impact; inflation continued to fall.

The recent deflation is symptomatic of stagnation in the realm of production. When free marketeers claim that what happens

Low inflation is not a cause of recovery, but a symptom of capitalist slump, argues Tony Kennedy

The price of failure

in the market determines what happens in the production process, they are turning reality on its head.

Capitalist economics says that consumption regulates production. According to this view, resources are allocated across different branches of production in line with shifts in consumer demand. Alterations in the pattern of demand affect the relative prices of different goods. Increased demand for one product will push up its price, and this is mirrored by a proportional fall in demand (and price) of one or more other products. Producers will respond to these price signals, so that investment decisions are made in accordance with the pattern of consumer demand.

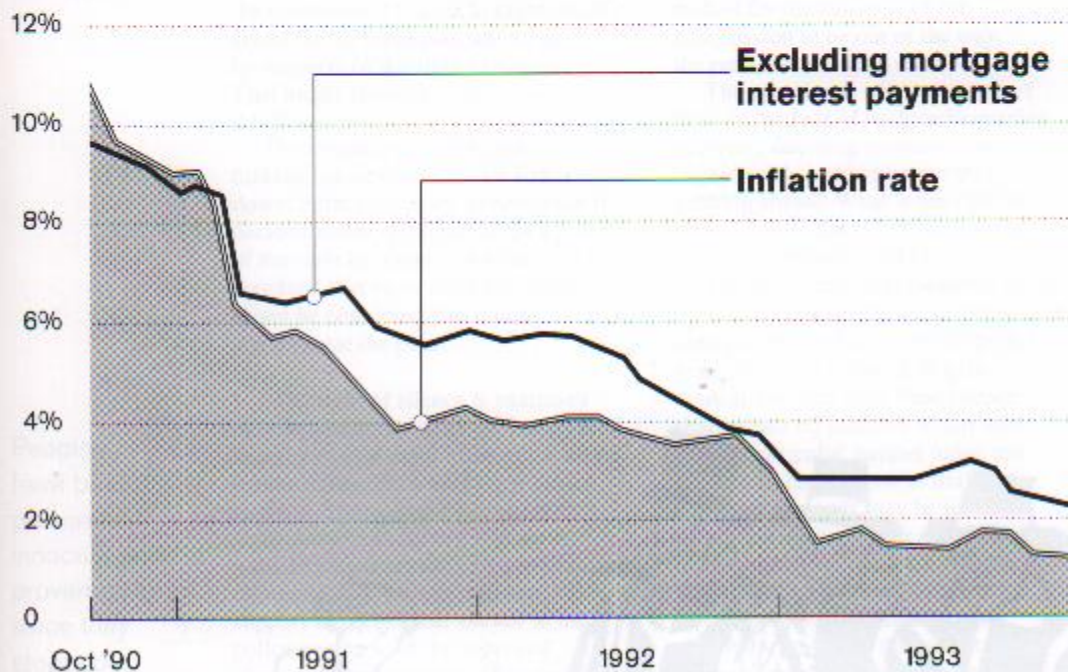
The belief that consumption regulates production leads to a harmonistic view of the relation between production and exchange in the market. The assumption of harmony forces economists to seek explanations for economic crises in the realm of exchange. For them, crises cannot be rooted in production, because problems in production appear as minor matters of technical coordination. Hence they search for explanations of crisis in the realm of exchange, especially among monetary phenomena—such as

changes in commodity prices, currency exchange rates, interest rates, etc.

Economists cite inflation as the key cause of crisis, because it prevents the efficient operation of the price mechanism. A price increase for a particular product could result from a specific increase in the relative demand for it or from general inflation. How, then, ask the economists, can producers distinguish one from the other? They will inevitably make mistakes. The wrong investments take place and the wrong products are produced in the wrong quantities. Goods go unsold and recession ensues. The solution? Eradicate inflation, and the price mechanism will operate properly.

To the free marketeers the aim of production is plain—consumption. However, this ignores the more specific objective of capitalist production, where control of the means of production is monopolised by a propertied minority. Under capitalism the interaction of production and consumption is mediated by the quest for profits. Our general demand for useful products is subordinated to the specific need of capital for profit. With capitalist production, a private

Annual percentage change in retail prices index



prerogative must be met before social needs. If profits prove insufficient, production is cut and consumption goes unsatisfied, and will continue to go unsatisfied until the quest for profits has been satisfied.

The relation between production and consumption is far from harmonious. Under capitalist production there is a contradiction between the needs of capital and the needs of society, and it is this which eventually leads to crisis and slump. Economic crises are experienced in the market, through such barriers to consumption as unsold goods or unemployment. But crises are rooted in the contradictory nature of the production process under capitalism.

Once capitalism is understood as a contradictory system of production, it points to a radically different view of phenomena in the realm of exchange, such as inflation.

The free market view that rising inflation undermined economic growth from the late 1960s gets things the wrong way around. Inflation was a symptom of economic initiatives which kept a fundamentally crisis-ridden system going. Inflation is associated with the expansion of

money and credit in the 1970s and 1980s. The rationale for such developments is easy to see. Printing more money looked easier than getting to grips with the deeper structural crisis in the process of producing wealth.

Inflation was the outcome of initiatives which manipulated the terms of commodity circulation. For instance, the process of financial deregulation that gathered pace in the 1980s, encouraged the expansion of retail credit. This stimulated production as capitalists could increase profits by selling more goods faster. Yet it was a limited solution that could only postpone the crisis; it meant consumers buying now with next year's income, goods that would otherwise have been produced next year.

Inflation resulted from the limited nature of this counter-crisis process. It took off as producers increasingly preferred the easy option of raising prices rather than output to protect profits. However, further increases in credit to meet the rising prices meant consumers drawing on income ever further off into the future. Rising incomes and booming property prices kept things going. But the banking system soon began to fret about the falling credit worthiness of its

clients and the increase in bad debts. The reversal at the start of the 1990s was sharp and dramatic.

The recession of the early 1990s is different from previous downturns because it marks the onset of a long-term depression. What growth there is will be anaemic and faltering. This is the true significance of the recent appearance of low inflation and deflation. Depression marks the end of attempts to buy some growth through the manipulation of credit. Such counter-measures were finally exhausted in the 1980s. Deflation is the market's way of saying prepare for hard times ahead.

Recent comments from advocates of the low inflation = dynamic growth outlook, in fact only confirm the image of a depressed 1990s.

The leading City economist Tim Congdon (one of the chancellor's 'seven wise men') relies on a historical correlation in which 'low inflation and interest rates coincide with rapid growth of output and employment' to present an upbeat review of the British economy (*Financial Times*, 4 January 1994). He assumes that Britain will achieve its long-run average growth rate (around 2.6 per cent since 1950) in the 1990s. The poor performance since 1990 therefore implies much more dynamic growth over the next three or four years to reach the required average. Furthermore, Congdon gleefully declares that all this can be achieved without igniting inflation.

Clipping coupons

Such methods of statistical extrapolation are a dubious basis for discussing economic prospects. More importantly, however, Congdon's article is a remarkable testimony to how low economic expectations have fallen in depressed Britain. It was the failures of postwar British capitalism that prompted calls to tackle inflation. Now, with inflation seemingly beaten, the prospect of equalling the poor postwar levels of growth is a cause for celebration.

James Buchan, writing in the *Spectator* (1 January 1994), comes closer to identifying the character of the low inflation 1990s. Buchan sees deflation heralding a new golden age—not for British industry, but for a resurgent rentier class enriched by its ownership of financial assets which, instead of being devalued by inflation, are continually revalued by deflation. He looks forward to a future of parasitic indolence where 'I stay at home, clipping coupons and defending my property against a highly active and dynamic burglar class'.

The proposal to abolish a suspect's right to silence marks a dangerous shift in the relationship between the individual and the state, says John Fitzpatrick

Their right to dictate



ILLUSTRATION: ADAPTED FROM TITLE PAGE OF WITCHES APPREHENDED, EXAMINED AND EXECUTED, 1613

On the day that the Birmingham Six were released from 16 years of false imprisonment in March 1991, Tory Home Secretary Kenneth Baker announced a Royal Commission on Criminal Justice. None of the Six had exercised their right to silence, indeed it was not silence, but confessions, beaten and terrorised out of the defendants, which were at the very core of this and the many other 'miscarriages'. Baker asked the commission to look at eight specific areas; one of them was the use made by suspects of the right to silence. That might almost be funny, were it not so grotesque.

The commission, although making big concessions, let Baker down. After two years' deliberation it decided not to recommend the abolition of the right to silence. Not only did it conclude that more innocent people might be convicted, but it just couldn't see the point:

'The right of silence is exercised only in a minority of cases. It may tend to be exercised more often in the more serious cases and where legal advice is given. There is no evidence which shows conclusively that silence is used disproportionately by professional criminals. Nor is there evidence to support the belief that silence in the police station leads to improved chances of an acquittal.' (*Report*, p53)

Never mind all that. In December 1993, less than six months after the commission delivered its report, Home Secretary Michael Howard introduced his Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which proposes, among other things, to abolish the right to silence.

People have been presumed innocent until proven guilty since they stopped ducking witches

The bill marks the culmination of a remarkable six-year campaign by the Conservative government to force through abolition in the face of high-level opposition from within the legal system.

In November 1988 the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order was issued abolishing the right to silence in Northern Ireland, ostensibly because of terrorism but, with application to all offences. The 'miscarriages' scandals enforced a slight pause, but having waited for the nuisance of the commission to be out of the way, the path is once again clear.

The question is of course—why? Why in the face of such embarrassing scandals, damning evidence and considerable opposition are they pushing ahead? What is the right to silence? Why does it matter so much to the government, and to us?

The most important elements of the right to silence are these: suspects have no legal duty either to answer police questions or, if charged, to give evidence at their trial; their silence shall attract no sanction of any sort, and, in particular, neither judge nor prosecutor can suggest at trial that a defendant's guilt may be inferred from their silence under questioning or in court. Abolishing the right to silence does not mean literally forcing suspects or defendants to answer questions. It means allowing the prosecution and judge to suggest to the jury that guilt may be inferred from the defendant's silence.

Prove it

Why should we be entitled to remain silent? Because only in this way can effect be given to the principles which are held to underlie the legal system. What are those principles? That we are presumed innocent until proven guilty—proven guilty that is by the prosecution, on whom the burden of proof lies. It is not up to us to prove our innocence, to prove that we have done nothing wrong. It is up to the prosecution to prove our guilt, and to prove it beyond reasonable

doubt. As soon as we are obliged to explain or justify our actions in any way, the burden of proof begins to shift to us, the presumption of innocence starts to dwindle. Our ability to remain silent is the very guarantee of the presumption of our innocence.

Why is there such a presumption in the first place? Why does the burden of proof lie on the prosecution and why is the standard so strict? Because the state has not been trusted. Because the power of the state, with its centralised coercive apparatus and its monopoly on the legal use of violence, has long been recognised to pose a mighty threat to the liberty of the individual. In that context, the assertion of the rights of the individual to procedural protections with respect to silence and proof has formed part of the assertion of our democratic rights.

Against the state

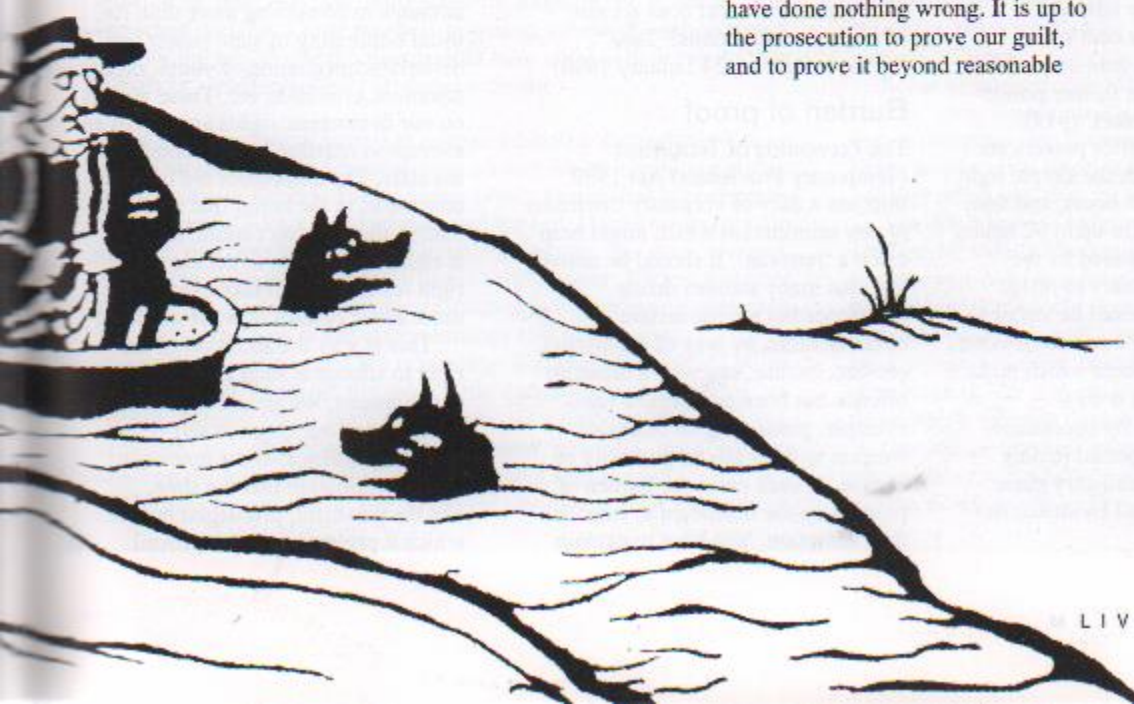
The right to silence is a matter which goes to the heart of the relationship between the individual and the state. It is not simply a matter of protection from abuse. The assertion of the right entails an assertion of self-respect and individual autonomy. It represents a claim about who we are, a claim about how we identify our own interests as separate from and in contradiction to those of the state.

Even Lord Gardiner, a former Lord Chancellor, could see something of that: 'The constitutional foundation underlying the privilege [against self-incrimination] is the respect a government must accord to the dignity and integrity of its citizens.' (*House of Lords Official Report*, 14 Feb 1973, cols 1567-68)

In attacking the right to silence the government is seeking to reduce our sense of our own autonomy, and to advance and legitimate the authority of the state. It is promoting our dependence upon the state and our distrust of our fellow citizens from whom it purports to protect us.

Police caution

Supporting his bill's abolition of the right to silence, Home Secretary Howard indicated how this proposal marks a shift in the relationship between the individual and the state, in favour of the latter. As well as condemning the right to silence as a charter for professional criminals, Howard criticised the existing police caution to suspects—the 'You-do-not-have-to-say-anything-unless-you-wish-but-what-you-say-may-be-given-in-evidence' line familiar from a thousand TV cop shows. This caution, said Howard, constitutes 'an invitation to remain silent, to refrain from providing an innocent explanation or from helping the police'. In other words, ►





it constitutes an unacceptable acknowledgement of our rights as individuals. And what matters today is the state's right to insist that we explain our every action to the authorities and fulfil our responsibility to 'help the police' on demand.

The ideological importance of promoting abolition can be judged

Whenever it threatens to get in the way the right to silence is removed anyway

from its practical insignificance. As the commission sensed, abolition wouldn't make that much difference. Why not? Because in practice the right to silence is a poor thing indeed. Whenever it seriously threatens to get in the way of the prosecution case, it is formally removed or diminished anyway.

Intimate samples

The reality of police power in the police station, and the absence of any effective safeguards for the suspect at that crucial stage, make a mockery of the right to silence. The right to consult a solicitor is supposed to be the major safeguard. Recent surveys reveal that only 30 per cent of all suspects receive legal advice before being interviewed, and 53 per cent of suspects whose cases go to Crown Court. (*Report*, p35). The study solicited by the royal commission on this topic from Professor Mike McConville and Dr Jacqueline Hodgson exposes just how worthless is the advice when it arrives. In 78 per cent of the cases in their study the legal adviser made no intervention at all in the interrogation (*Research Study No16*, p158). Barely a quarter of the advisers were solicitors; 16 per cent were articled clerks, 31 per cent unqualified clerks, and 21 per cent former police officers acting as 'runners' (p17).

In any event the police powers are awesome, starting with the simple right to hold suspects for 36 hours, and then with court approvals for up to 92 hours. These powers are bolstered by the reluctance of the judiciary to reject evidence because it would be unfair to admit it, or because it was a confession obtained in circumstances which make it unreliable, or where it was a confession obtained by oppression (evidence has been rejected in only two cases in that last category since the Police and Criminal Evidence Act was passed in 1984).

The police already have a whole range of profoundly intimidating and humiliating procedures which they might employ: fingerprints and photographs, strip-searches, intimate body searches, taking of non-intimate and intimate body samples (note adverse inferences may be drawn from a refusal to provide intimate samples such as blood, urine, semen, etc). The new bill will add new powers to search a person's mouth on arrest and new powers to take non-intimate samples from persons for DNA purposes, including by plucking hairs.

Exceptions abound

In this context the caution 'You do not have to say anything unless you wish to do so' will sound like a very thin proposition indeed, especially if delivered with a practised lack of conviction. Little wonder that the proportion of all suspects who answer no questions at all is 5 per cent (9 per cent in London). At most 10 per cent (16 per cent in London) refuse to answer some questions. (*Report*, p53)

While upholding, until now, the principle of the right to silence, parliament and the judiciary have increasingly chipped away at it. Statutory exceptions already abound: the refusal by a company director to answer the questions of a Department of Trade and Industry inspector may be a contempt of court (*Companies Act 1985*); refusal to answer the questions of a representative of the Serious Fraud Office may be a criminal offence (*Criminal Justice Act 1987*), as may failure to produce information or documents when asked by the Securities Investment Board (*Financial Services Act 1986*). The *Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986* effectively requires positive disclosure to the Customs and Excise in any case where there is a doubt as to the origin of the funds in question. (See R Fletcher and S Ingram, 'The right of silence; does it exist in major investigations?' *Law Society's Gazette*, 24 January 1990)

Burden of proof

The *Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989* imposes a duty of voluntary disclosure of any information which might help catch a 'terrorist'. It should be noted, too, that many statutes define an offence but set out certain circumstances, by way of exemption, proviso, excuse, etc, which mean no offence has been committed; for example, possessing an offensive weapon without lawful authority or excuse. In such cases the burden of proof is on the defendant to establish the exemption. You have to explain

yourself, or risk being found guilty by your silence.

The judiciary, who were slow to acknowledge the right in the first place, have grown bolder in asserting their ability to comment adversely on silence. In *R v Chandler* (1976) Lord Justice Lawton observed that 'it does not follow that a failure to answer an accusation or question when an answer could reasonably be expected may not provide some evidence in support of an accusation. Whether it does will depend upon the circumstances'. In *R v Ravin* (1987) Lord Justice Stocker went further: 'where suspicious circumstances appear to demand an explanation and no explanation is given, the lack of an explanation may warrant an inference of guilty knowledge in the defendant.'

Like the government, the judges now want more. In *R v Alladice* (1988) the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, held forth: 'The balance of fairness between prosecution and defence cannot be maintained unless proper comment is permitted on the defendant's silence in such circumstances. It is high time that such comment should be permitted.' 1988 was the year that Lord Lane knocked back the appeal of the Birmingham Six. The new Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, also supports abolition.

The state's rights

Abolition should be opposed because it may well make it even easier to convict innocent people. If it allows greater pressure to be applied to just one suspect, that is one too many. It should be opposed more broadly as part of a stand against the general government offensive on our liberties. That offensive is contained in this bill, in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill, in the coming assault on jury trial (backed by the royal commission) and in the general law and order drive of the 'Back to basics' programme.

The authoritarian crackdown amounts to something more than the usual buttressing of state power and divisive scapegoating of youth, ravers, squatters, criminals, etc. These attacks on our democratic rights are part of an attempt to redefine our relationship to the state. The authorities are trying to educate us in the belief that we don't matter, that we don't count, that it is right for the state to decide and right for the state to take ever more direct control of what we do.

This is why the abolition of the right to silence is such an important development. We should oppose it as a renewal of our claim to self-respect and independence, and a renewal of our determination that the state, and the powerful, privileged interests which it protects, will not prevail.



Get a lifestyle

'Get a life!', and its British counterpart, 'You sad bastard!', are fast becoming the most overused catchphrases of the day. The once cool epithet 'train-spotter' is now an everyday term of derision, used by young and old alike. So profound and swift has been the assimilation of these expressions that they have become the property of all. Just as ageing DJs began to 'do' Smashy and Nicey as soon as Harry Enfield unveiled them, now trainspotters are obliged to preface their remarks with self-deprecatory references to anoraks (which have themselves become a byword for all things 'sad').

The reason trainspotters address their comments in this fashion is that they have unwittingly become the subject of a 'trainspotter-spotting' cult that is far sadder than the real thing. On my last trip to Old Trafford, the highlight of a depressing return journey for most of my fellow Palace supporters was when someone shouted 'Crewel!'. In bygone days this might have alerted us to the arrival of rival fans. Now it is understood by all to mean: 'We are approaching Crewe station [the trainspotter's Mecca]—prepare to mock the trainspotters on the platform by performing theatrical impersonations of them masturbating excitedly.' Such casual antics are not the half of it, though. Today's trainspotters, in addition to withstanding the casual abuse that goes with the territory, must also contend with the army of journalists, independent film-makers and programme researchers that descend upon them wherever they gather.

Of course, it's all one big joke to these people, or so they will tell you. But it's one thing to take the piss if you are sitting on a train and you happen to pass some parka-clad loser peering at you through bottle-bottom bins, and another thing altogether actively to seek them out. What's the difference between watching trainspotters and watching trains? Why should trainspotter-spotters feel superior?

Laughing at wallies is a very reassuring pastime. There's nothing wrong with it in itself, and I certainly don't think trainspotters and other idiots should be respected or protected. The point about trainspotter-spotting is that it is the most extreme example of a much more important malaise. Large numbers of young, educated, well-adjusted, socially integrated middle class people have nothing better to do than talk about pathetic, socially inadequate people.

Most entertainment aimed at college-educated under-40s relies on a constant diet of trivia served up with a heavy-handed, winking-at-the-audience knowingness. Young media prince Danny Baker epitomises current trends. Kitsch is raked over and trashed. Hapless nobodies are paraded and mocked. Ironically correct guests are back-slapped. Again, I've got nothing against trivia or cruel humour. It's just that after a while the underlying contempt becomes first wearing and then repugnant. The tone is self-congratulatory and complacent.

The appeal is obvious. It's reassuring. Shouting 'Get a life!' at the TV takes your mind off the nasty little questions such as 'What am I doing with my life?'. For a while it creates a feeling of being clever, attractive and sophisticated. It's the most powerful drug yet for handling the insecurities that go with arrested adolescence.

Of course, getting a life is easier for some than for others.

Danny Baker has a life, and earns a lot of money in the process. Most of us—including many of the young sophisticates mentioned above—have to make do with a 'lifestyle': a kind of rag-bag of nights out, clothes, magazines and bits of furniture that are supposed to fulfil us and define who we are.

The term 'lifestyle' suggests choice. People use it when talking about things they have control over, or like to think they do. A decade ago the word was hardly used in everyday life. It conjured up a vision from the pages of men's magazines: high-powered executives driving around with beautiful women in expensive cars and holidaying with other important people in ski-lodges. It was a lifestyle built around a job—but it was a well-paid, glamorous job that he wanted to do. He lived to work.

Most people, of course, do not live to work; they work to live. In the past, they would clock off at five and do their best to forget about their job. Their real life of friends, family, leisure pursuits, was an escape from the boredom and aggravation of work. Nobody would have particularly associated the nuts and bolts of travelling to work, eating an evening meal, getting cash from the bank or going for a medical as part of a 'lifestyle'. Yet today, as work intrudes more and more into people's lives, with longer hours, harder work and worse transport, we are all expected to treat this as part of a lifestyle choice.

Some time ago, the BBC ran an educational series about class. A working class woman was asked the difference between her class and the middle class. 'They do things, and we have things done to us', she replied. For all her fatalism, you know what she means. Today we are still having things done to us, but we're encouraged to believe that it's us doing the choosing.

We are invited to: participate in rewriting our own job descriptions (to take on more work); go to the works gym with our managers; choose whether to get stuck on an unmanned bus or broken-down tube as 'customers' of London Transport; take out bank loans and insurance schemes to cover unforeseen costs; choose which takeaways to eat when we arrive home too late for the shops, and so on. All the time we are making 'lifestyle' choices at somebody else's convenience.

Some people are offered the opportunity to work from home, which sounds very important and high-powered, especially when a fax and a computer are thrown in. Unfortunately they find themselves living an executive lifestyle in other ways—on call at all times, with no corresponding pay-rise.

You don't have to have a white collar job, or any job at all, to have a 'lifestyle' today. You don't even have to be awake—just alive: lying unconscious outside a tube station is a 'lifestyle' if you are a young punk rather than an old tramp. You can drink the lager of your choice and light your fags with Lifestyle brand matches. You can make toast on a cheap Lifestyle brand toaster. If you are homeless, the DSS recommends fish and chips as 'a nutritious and healthy choice' for those whose lifestyle does not include a kitchen.

One major medical charity organisation, dealing with a chronic disease, now subtitled its magazine 'a lifestyle', to promote the positive aspects of the condition. Where will it end? ●

Laughing at wallies is a very reassuring pastime

In *Schindler's List*, Stephen Spielberg has produced a great film. But, writes Janice Bryan, he has also rewritten the story of the Holocaust

Spielberg's Jews

He who saves a single life saves the entire world.' So runs the Talmudic verse inscribed on a ring presented to Oscar Schindler as a token of appreciation by those Jews who came to be known as *Schindlerjuden*—Schindler's Jews. The *Schindlerjuden* were the 1300 Jewish workers in the Second World War whose lives were saved through the nous, humanity and bravery of one Nazi businessman. Stephen Spielberg has used that same inscription as the epigram to *Schindler's List*, his film which tells the true story of that small-time German businessman, and his successful attempt to protect the workers in his enamel-making factory in Krakow, Poland, from being consumed by the Holocaust.

Schindler's List is a far better film than one might expect from the man who brought us *ET* and *The Color Purple*—or from that opening epigram. It is thankfully free of the mawkish sentimentality which has infused much of Spielberg's earlier work. Superbly shot in black and white, *Schindler's List* has the same dry, detached style as *Schindler's Ark*, Thomas Keneally's Booker prize-winning novel, on which the film is based.

Born in the Sudetenland, in Czechoslovakia, Schindler (Liam Neeson) joins the Nazi Party as a teenager, not out of ideological conviction, but because it makes good business sense. When the war breaks out he moves to Krakow in German-occupied Poland, realising that greater business opportunities are open to him there. He ensconces himself in the recently confiscated apartment of a wealthy Jewish family and builds his business by persuading disenfranchised Jews that, since their money is otherwise worthless, they might as well give it to Schindler to invest in his factory.

An opportunist and a hustler, Schindler is a man who knows how to grease palms, how to play the black market and how to create contacts in high places. His friends include SS officials, Nazi Party apparatchiks and labour camp commandants. He is a man who cares little about politics but wants to use the war to make money and live the good life.

A businessman against the Nazis: Liam Neeson plays Oscar Schindler

Gradually, however, the awesome horror of the Final Solution begins to dawn upon him. Witnessing the systematic liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, and the casual atrocities of the labour camp into which the remaining Jews are moved, Schindler is repulsed by the system developing around him. Almost without thinking he begins to protect his own Jewish workers from the greater barbarism of the system, largely through bribing SS and camp officials. Saving the *Schindlerjuden* turns into an obsession, a personal mission to ensure that his 1300 workers survive the war.

Spielberg calmly and chillingly details the Kafkaesque shifts in daily life in Krakow as SS policy begins to take hold. From the initial shock of being forced to live in a completely walled-in ghetto to the brutal degradation of the labour camps, the film details the Jewish community's descent into a living hell. Spielberg depicts in almost documentary fashion everything from the black market scams to the casual, random murders of Jewish prisoners by SS officers and troops. The only time Spielberg resorts to cinematic gimmicks is when, for two brief scenes, he injects colour into the movie, a conceit that works very well.

The dispassionate tone of the film is a welcome change from the emotional and chauvinist nature of previous Hollywood accounts of the war and the Holocaust. Like Keneally, Spielberg tries to make sense of the Final Solution, rather than dismissing it as an unimaginable horror that somehow arose from evil or from man's basic inhumanity. Both book and film show that what began as a forced labour operation to provide workers for Germany's war effort took on a life of its own and ended up consuming the lives of six million Jews. Both Spielberg and Keneally depict Germans—even convinced Nazis—not as evil barbarians, but as ordinary human beings who, in the extraordinary context of the war, are pulled into committing acts of either immense heroism or terrible inhumanity.

Spielberg presents Schindler as a wonderfully rich and ambiguous character—a Nazi businessman whose

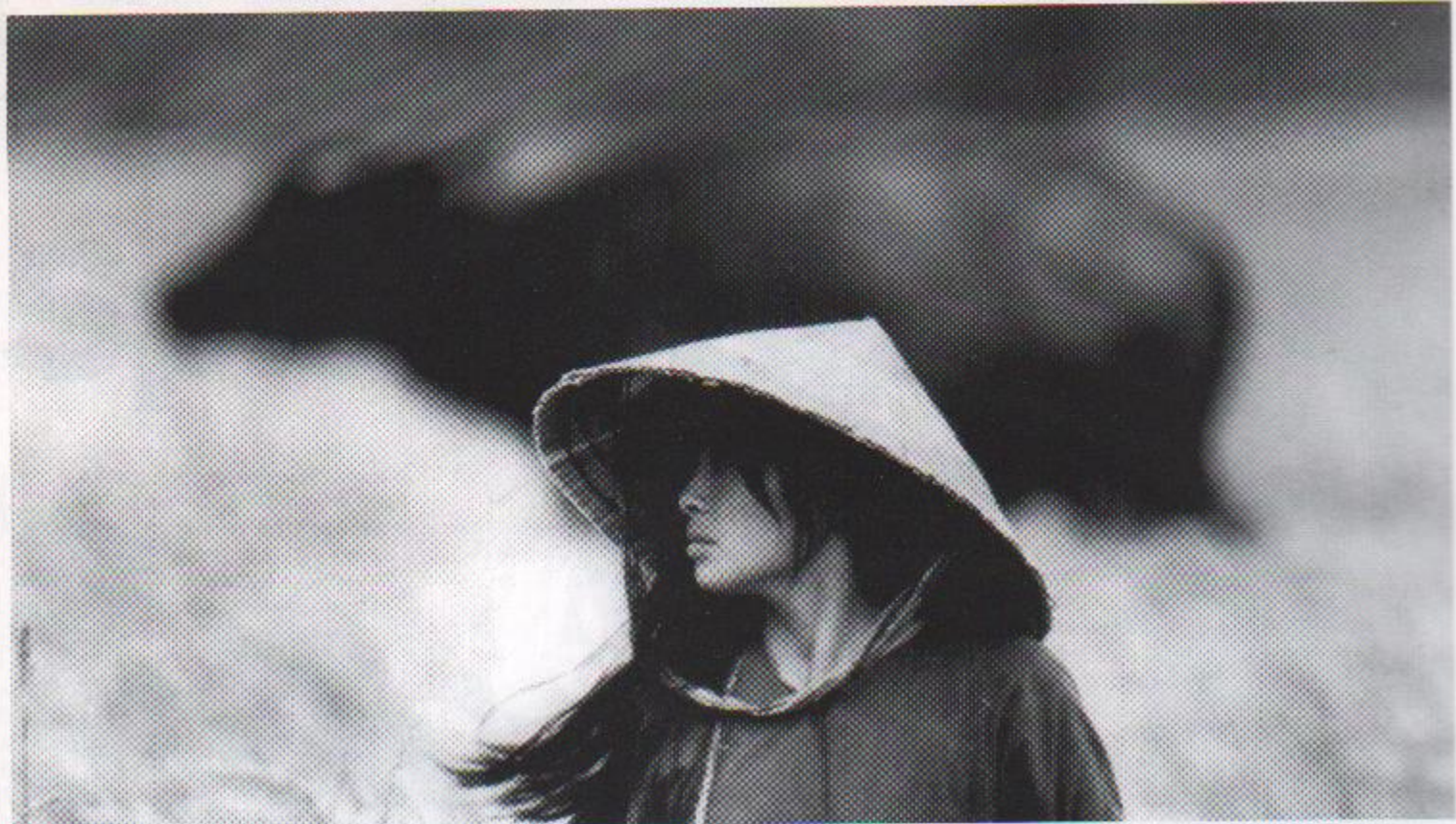
sheer humanity forces him to take inordinate personal risks to save the *Schindlerjuden*. Yet the film skates over the greatest ambiguity of all in the tale. Schindler might have spent his millions to protect his workers, but those millions came from his ability to use Jewish slave labour in his factory.

What eventually facilitated the Final Solution was also what drew Schindler to Krakow—the opportunity to make a fortune out of treating workers like chattels. The *Schindlerjuden* might have been beholden to their benefactor, but it was the needs of capitalist businessmen that led to their enslavement in the first place. For all the subtlety of both film and book, it is an issue that neither Spielberg nor Keneally seem willing to broach. As a chronicle of one man's transformation from an opportunist businessman interested only in making money to one hell bent on saving his factory camp workers from certain death in Auschwitz, *Schindler's List* is gripping and often moving. But in focusing simply on Schindler's story, Spielberg helps rewrite the history of the Holocaust. In the movie Jews are depicted as a hapless, subservient people incapable of saving themselves and desperately seeking a saviour. As one of the *Schindlerjuden* says about her benefactor after he has rescued a group of women from Auschwitz, 'he was our father, our mother, our only faith. He never let us down'. The idea of the great white saviour rescuing a helpless people from tyranny and oppression has an obvious broader resonance in today's political climate.

In the book Keneally at least gives a mention to the underground resistance movement in the ghetto which, often very heroically, fought the Nazi occupation. Spielberg fillets this out completely from the film. Indeed he seems to suggest that the only form of heroism worth contemplating is the pragmatism of Schindler. 'He who saves a single life saves the entire world.' It is another message which has considerable resonance today. ●

Schindler's List opens on 18 February. *Schindler's Ark*, by Thomas Keneally is published by Spectre Books, £5.99 pbk





Colonialism as bad karma

Gene McPherson on Oliver Stone's new vision of Vietnam

Heaven and Earth is the final part of Oliver Stone's trilogy about the Vietnam War. Where *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* dealt respectively with the American soldier's and the American public's view of the war, *Heaven and Earth* is a story told from the Vietnamese point of view.

The film is based on the autobiography of Le Ly Hayslip, who grew up in Ky La, a rice farming village in central Vietnam. When she was 12 years old, US helicopters landed there. Hayslip's two books, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and *Child of War, Woman of Peace*, on which Stone draws for his film, tell the subsequent story of her life.

Like many young people in her village Le Ly (played by newcomer Hiep Thi Le) joins the Vietcong resistance. She is arrested and tortured by the South Vietnamese army. Her mother trades her dowry to release her from prison. But now the Vietcong suspect her of having betrayed their cause and rape and torture her. She and her family are forced to flee to Saigon.

Le Ly ends up living with her sister, a prostitute, and selling cigarettes to GIs. She meets Steve (Tommy Lee Jones) a rugged American soldier who decides that an Oriental wife would do him good and whisks her off to the USA.

Newcomer Hiep Thi Le stars in *Heaven and Earth*

In America she experiences prejudice and hardship and, as her husband feels his own life reeling out of control, her marriage breaks up leaving her to face up to American life on her own.

Stone is the voice of liberal America in Hollywood. And like his previous two Vietnam films, *Heaven and Earth* is an attempt by liberal America to come to terms with the Vietnam War. But the tone of *Heaven and Earth* is very different from that of *Platoon* or *Born on the Fourth of July*.

In *Heaven and Earth*, Stone depicts the Vietnam War as the product not of imperialist aggression, but simply of the human capacity for evil. Stone does not dismiss American atrocities in Vietnam. But his film portrays them as the result of individuals who are out of control. Steve, for example, describes how he has massacred women and children, killed Vietnamese villagers working in the field. He also tells Le Ly of sitting the throat of a prostitute after fucking her. The violence of war, Stone seems to suggest, is akin to that of a depraved individual.

Stone emphasises the universal problem of violence by equating the actions of the US soldiers with those of the Vietcong. Le Ly herself compares her role in the Vietcong with Steve's conduct. 'We are the same', she tells him, 'we have made bad karma'. Le Ly also

sees the Vietnamese and the Americans equally as victims. 'Different skin', she says, 'same suffering'. In equating the actions of the invader and the victim, Stone demeans the Vietnamese people's nightmarish experience of the war and obscures America's responsibility for the conflict.

But if Stone emphasises the human capacity for evil, he equally suggests that human beings have the strength to overcome it. By the end of the film Le Ly is shown as a woman who has come to terms with American life. Returning to Vietnam to see her family, she has become a woman who has dealt with life and triumphed. By depicting a coming together of American and Vietnamese culture in Le Ly, Stone expresses the liberal guilt felt in relation to the war and suggests a means to atone for it.

In the end, *Heaven and Earth*, like most Vietnam films, is not about Vietnam at all, but about America. Stone wants to cast his country free of its past and imagine a new America. 'We are heading towards a new era in the twenty-first century', Stone has said of *Heaven and Earth*. 'People of all colours will be sharing a shrinking planet. It is necessary for us to get out of our skins and cross this spiritual and divisive gulf we have formed.' His rosy hopes for the future are as misplaced as his understanding of the past.



The Orang order

All right then, David Attenborough, if nature is so brilliant, why do albatrosses live so far away from their food? On *Life in the Freezer* (BBC 1), we learned that the albatross is superbly adapted to long-range flight, which is just as well, because its feeding grounds and its nesting grounds are 700 miles apart. Now I may be missing something here but if I was an albatross I would happily swap my wings—superb though they be—for a more convenient shopping opportunity.

And what about orang-utans? Superbly adapted to life on the canopy of the rainforest. Why? On *Wildlife on One* (BBC 1) a hefty male plummeted to his death while trying to settle down for a nap. Did he wonder as he fell whether being superbly adapted to life on the forest floor might not have been preferable?

The orang-utan is always presented as 'man's nearest relative'—the name means 'man of the forest'—and in this documentary Attenborough was a grown-up Johnny Morris, anthropomorphising the sex life of the orangs into *An Ape's Guide to Adultery*. Male orangs don't become fully male until they attain dominance over a group of females. In this jungle soap, Boris tried to seduce Yet away from Nur while the couple's son looked on. Only when he got someone under his incredibly long thumb did Boris finally get the distinctive cheek flanges. The male in Chester zoo has no rival. He has flanges like dust-bin lids. Two tiny, bored eyes stare out of his car park-sized face all day. He is superbly adapted to a life of accusing indolence. In Budapest zoo, the orangs eat at a table, from plates, using forks and spoons, leaning on their keeper's shoulder, sharing the intimate, unbreakable silence of different species.

To those who like to find hierarchies in nature, the orang is the 'missing link' between man and the lower apes. In fact in 1799 Charles White—the founding father of obstetrics—argued that the orang was superior to the indigenous human population of Sumatra. He went so far as to claim that orangs carried off 'negro boys and women with a view to making them subservient to their wants as slaves or objects of passion'. Which brings me neatly to the best thing on TV at the moment—Channel 4's Sunday morning rerun of *Planet of the Apes*.

The story is simple. Two NASA astronauts land on a planet where the human population has been enslaved by militaristic apes—a kind of PG Tips junta. The apes are played by actors with Elvis wigs. The main ape character is Galen, who wrinkles up his nose whenever he has a thought, not unlike Samantha in *Bewitched*. In order to pick up this tiny gesture, the camera has to come crashing in for a close-up, which it does with such velocity that the actor can't help but look straight into the lens, willing the cameraman to stop. It's a move you only see here and on *Top of the Pops*, where the camera sometimes gets horribly close to a backing singer or a drummer who then winks at you.

Pierre Boulle's original novel *Planet of the Apes* was mostly concerned with the question, 'what is a human?'. It was really a sci-fi version of Book Four of *Gulliver's Travels*, where Gulliver ends up in a place where the horses are rational and Utopian and the humanoids are disgustingly basic. Oddly enough, the horses are still there

in the *Planet of the Apes*. One of the main threads in Boulle's version is sexual. There is a woman of astonishing beauty who is mentally a brute. And there is an ape of engaging intelligence and sympathy who is nevertheless an ape. Which one do you go for? What is a human?

Of course, you can't make a primetime American TV series about naked people who cannot talk, so here the humans are not animals, but merely oppressed people. They have clothes and they speak English just like everyone else in the universe. These changes transform the premise of the story from a purely philosophical question into a directly political one. *Planet of the Apes* is about slavery. At the very end of Boulle's book, the astronauts discover that the 'Planet of the Apes' is in fact Earth in the distant future (they find the remains of the Statue of Liberty). In the TV series, this twist is blown by the second ad-break (presumably because the audience would have known this already from the movie). Again this moves the debate forward into a prickly new area—the question of repressed history.

The head apes know that humans were once the dominant species but they actively suppress this fact. They destroy the spaceship. They burn books and artefacts. The parallels with Columbian America and colonial Africa are obvious and powerful. The apes themselves have eschewed technology. And all they have in the way of culture are some funny hats and some sort of tooled leather poncho without which they would be naked. Their architecture and weaponry is of the Flintstone school. We learn later that this is because they believe technology was the downfall of humanity. They have taken a Pol Pot line on history and gone back into the forest.

Meanwhile the astronauts have taken the floppy disk from their flight recorder in the hope of finding a compatible computer somewhere on the planet. This is some hope. I take bits of my computer back to the shop where I bought it and they suck their teeth and shake their heads and say it can't be done. How they think they're going to do better in the lost caves is beyond me.

When the dark, pessimistic one expressed a doubt on this score, the cheery Aryan one said, well, they would just have to build a computer. That's when we knew the world had really changed since the seventies. They still felt in charge of the technology they used. They believed that if the computer went wrong you could fix it.

In every other age a major part of heroism was self-reliance. Gulliver could build a boat to escape. Crusoe built his stockade. In all heroism there is, perversely, a nostalgia for the ape. A true hero could cope in the forest or on the desert island. This belief was still prevalent in the seventies—partly because of the story of Apollo 13, when a hammer and some pluck saved the heroes from the wastes of space. Nobody thinks this any more. Heroes are no longer pitted against emptiness or nature, but against their own selves. In films like *Blade Runner* or *Hook*, a human is not something with courage or reason, but something with memories, and the adventure is no more than a kind of therapy. On the *Planet of the Apes*, the limits of modern humanity were exposed. I could have bought it if he had said he would build a rocket. But for one bloke in a forest to build a computer. He might as well have offered to build a horse. Some things really can't be done. ●

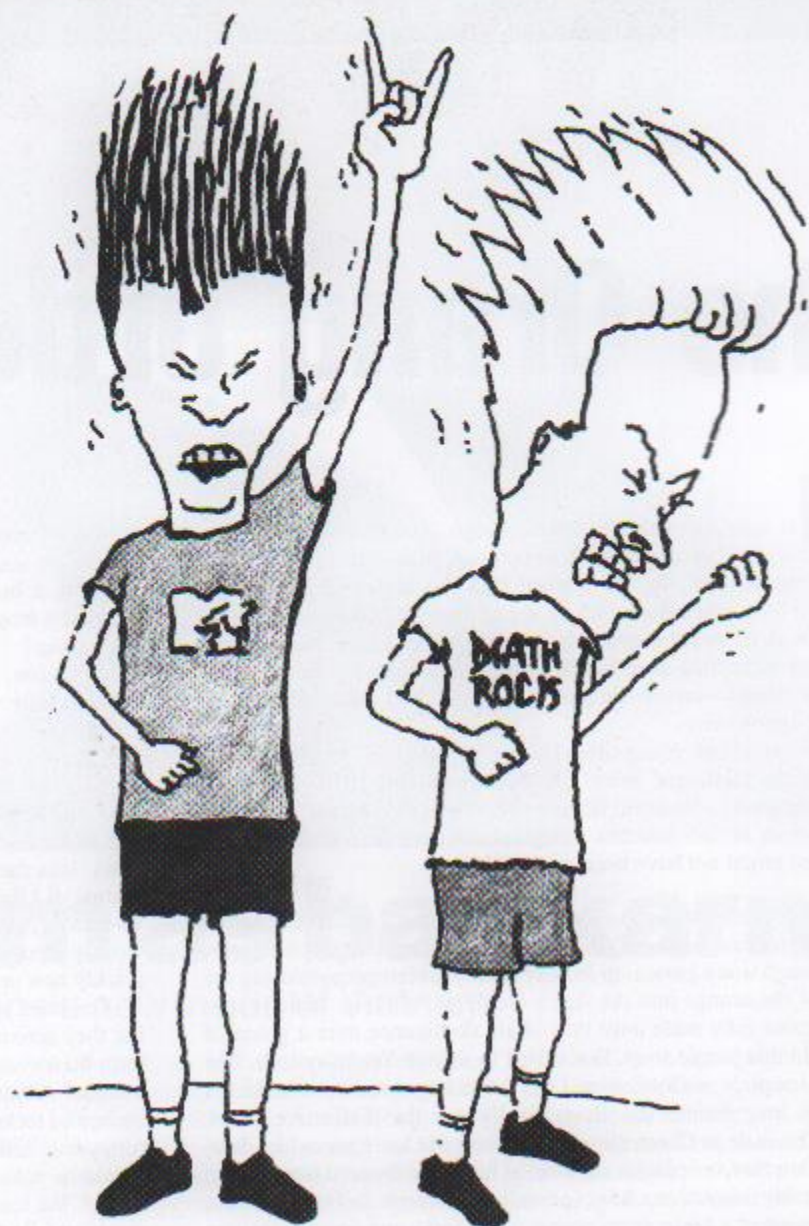
his spring Channel 4 had planned to bring to Britain *Beavis and Butt-Head*, America's most watched and talked about cartoon show. *Rolling Stone* magazine called the two teenage cartoon figures 'the voice of a new generation' and put them on the cover. *Time* magazine deemed it to be the 'bravest show ever run on national television'. Ideal, you might think for a British channel which is trying to boost its ratings by programming any number of trendy American shows.

But suddenly Channel 4 has gone very coy as to its plans for *Beavis and Butt-Head*. When I phoned Channel 4, a spokesman refused to say even whether the cartoon would be aired, let alone when. Why? Because *Beavis and Butt-Head* has become the centre of the moral panic in America about violence on TV, and Channel 4 is having second thoughts about sparking a similar controversy here.

Last autumn, a five-year old boy in Ohio burned down his house, killing two children who were inside. The boy's mother claimed that he had been copying the antics of *Beavis and Butt-Head*. In an instant, the two cartoon characters became the new symbols of everything wrong with American society. According to the pro-censorship lobby, *Beavis and Butt-Head* had to take the rap for virtually every anti-social act committed by children in the USA, from arson to cruelty to animals. MTV, which networked the show, pulled the programme from its early evening slot and rescheduled it for 11pm. And it now prefaces the programme with the following warning: 'Beavis and Butt-Head are not role models. They're not even human. They're cartoons. Some of the things they do would cause a person to get hurt, expelled, arrested, possibly deported. To put it another way: don't try this at home.'

So, what is all the fuss about? *Beavis and Butt-Head* are two gawky, stupid and very ugly teenagers. They are loathed by the rest of their classmates and bored by school. They take their pleasure in terrorising classmates and teachers alike. They torture animals and mutilate themselves. They push pencils in eyes, cut off fingers with chainsaws and put their hands into boiling fat. In this they are no different from many other cartoons, from *Tom and Jerry* to *Bugs Bunny*, where characters are crushed, blown up or shot, only to recover instantly without any real injury.

The programme is an exaggerated look at the things that teenage boys get up to when let off the leash. I have never played 'Frog Baseball', the name of the animated short where the two heroes made their appearance, but, like many British children, I am familiar with frog cricket.



Ian Scott on the cartoon characters that have panicked middle America

Loony toons?

The most refreshing part of the show is *Beavis and Butt-Head*'s regular review of the pop videos that appear elsewhere on MTV. Anyone who has ever been forced to watch MTV videos will immediately appreciate the *Beavis and Butt-Head* put-downs. 'This is like school', they comment after watching U2. A Vanilla Ice video was dismissed as 'one of those 501 commercials'. *Butt-Head* responded to Aerosmith's 'Rag Doll' video by sticking his hand down his trousers.

The main attraction of *Beavis and Butt-Head* is that they can do and say what other people think but would never actually do. They have no respect for

authority and little regard for their own or others' personal safety. And it is this nihilism that most gets up critics' noses.

But the idea that *Beavis and Butt-Head* is dangerous because children will simply imitate them is ridiculous. At school, if I was caught doing something wrong my standard line of defence was, 'It wasn't my idea'. To this my teachers would respond, 'if your friend told you to jump off the roof, you wouldn't, would you?'. The critics of *Beavis and Butt-Head* seem to be telling us that if cartoon characters told you to jump off the roof (or burn your house down) then you would. My advice to the critics is to find a high roof and jump off it. ●

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Adam Eastman reviews America's intellectual quest for a New World Order

The clash of civilisations

The Clash of Civilisations: The Debate, Foreign Affairs, \$7.95 pbk

The Real World Order: Zones of Peace/Zones of Disorder, Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky, Chatham House, £17.99 hbk, £11.99 pbk

Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World, Bruce Russett, Princeton University Press, £14.95 hbk

Democracy against Itself: The Future of the Democratic Impulse, Jean-François Revel, Free Press, \$24.95 hbk

The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age, Jonn Lukacs, Ticknor & Fields £21.95 hbk

The Wrath of Nations: Civilisation and the Fury of Nationalism, William Pfaff, Simon & Schuster, \$22 hbk

The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, Mark Juergensmeyer, University of California Press, £16.95 hbk, £10.95 pbk

Looking back from the perspective of 1994, '1989 and all that' seems a long way off. Then, somewhat to its surprise, capitalism found itself triumphant over the old Soviet enemy. Everybody was invited to join the celebrations, with Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' eulogy to the wonders of liberal democracy as the main party piece. Now, although they are still without any challengers, red or otherwise, the mood among the political and intellectual defenders of the capitalist system is decidedly downbeat. Their 'New World Order' is widely derided as a new world disorder, and history, ignoring Fukuyama's notice that it is at an end, has gone careering off into a chaos of local passions and conflicts.

Not surprisingly, a number of thinkers are trying to put matters right by recapturing the system's sense of order and maybe even triumph. This is the setting for the latest attempt to explain the shape of world affairs—'The clash of civilisations' thesis developed by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington.

Firstly, back to the beginning. The thesis advanced by Francis Fukuyama, that the end of Stalinism meant the vindication of liberal democratic capitalism as the only viable social system, became the centre of intellectual debate in the aftermath of Soviet collapse. Its reassurance that, aside from a few minor difficulties, the world was set to emulate the Western model was soothing, if not as gung ho as many might have liked. Life might have become rather boring as all the 'big questions' were now laid to rest, but at least we could sleep safely without fear of any threat from outside. On top of this, we had the idea of the 'Rebirth of History' associated with, for example, the British writer on East European affairs,

Misha Glenny. This, too, struck an optimistic note, now based more explicitly on the potential for a resurgence of political democracy in the Eastern bloc.

Then, without ever being intellectually challenged, the rosy views of the future seemed to be overtaken by more worrying developments. While the capitalist slump cast a shadow over the future of both West and East, it also became clear that the post-Cold War world was less rather than more stable than the old order. Even the success of the Gulf War in 1991 was quickly overshadowed by the onset of civil war in Yugoslavia, and the apparent inability of anybody to do anything about it.

The harmonious 'New World Order' hailed by George Bush lasted little longer than a soundbite. Order seemed the last thing in evidence as the rhetoric about the 'international community' solving the problems of Yugoslavia or Somalia only exposed the absence of unity and concerted action among the USA and its allies. Instead the USA found itself castigated by liberal opinion for failing to sort out other third world upstarts like the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, in the fashion that had bombed Saddam Hussein's Iraq back into the Stone Age.

The Western elite's great achievement of recent times has been the reversal of the postwar consensus that it had no business treating the third world like its own backyard. The recent acceptance that the West has the right, even duty, to determine the fate of the East and the third world has provided a considerable boost to the authority of Western society. Yet this key shift of opinion now passes almost without comment. Instead, as the Yugoslav crisis has dragged on, events in other parts of the world have ►

only compounded the sense of chaos surrounding the West's management of international affairs. The descent of the American 'Operation Restore Hope' in Somalia into what looks like a traditional colonial-style occupation, symbolises the hazardous nature of the world which the Western elites look down upon today.

Disturbed by the pessimism that surrounds international relations, various commentators have sought to restore a sense of certainty to the West's view of the world. *The Real World Order* by Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky deals with the widespread view that the failures in Somalia, Bosnia and elsewhere preclude the creation of any meaningful world order. Singer and Wildavsky's own idea is that a discernible pattern does exist, between 'zones of peace and zones of turmoil'. Their book is an attempt to settle scores with the liberal doubting Thomases. Singer and Wildavsky's desire for order is not simply an abstract academic concern. It helps provide the basis for the consolidation of Western authority over, and interference in, the 'zones of turmoil' in the third world. This comes out clearly in the discussion of nationalism.

In his new book *The Wrath of Nations: Civilisation and the Fury of Nationalism*, William Pfaff, an influential American columnist on foreign affairs, tries to give order to the subject by explaining nationalism as, 'a phenomenon of the European nineteenth century', a 'political consequence of the literary-intellectual movement called Romanticism, a Central European reaction to the universalising, and therefore disorientating ideas of the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment'. As nationalism is essentially rooted in the non-Western world, we, the civilised West, can act to contain and even eliminate its dangerous consequences. Pfaff now feels able to argue for an activist foreign policy where it would be, 'better if the international community would reimpose a form of paternalist neo-colonialism in most parts of Africa'.

Replying to Pfaff in *Foreign Affairs*, Conor Cruise O'Brien reveals the absence of a clear delineation in world politics which Pfaff is reacting against. O'Brien argues that nationalism is in fact a pretty universal primordial instinct. He sees no way in which such an entrenched force can be isolated and dealt with. 'There is no "new world order" within the capacity of the West that will have the effect of eliminating nationalist violence and related ethnic evils from every part of the world.' Pointing to Somalia, he asks of Pfaff's colonial enthusiasm, 'How would they fare if they were to take on all the nationalisms and sub-nationalisms of Africa?'

The differences in these debates are more apparent than real. Disagreement really only revolves around the degree of optimism about the West's capacity for resolving the chaos that is seen to be the modern third world. Crucially, all accept the moral superiority of the West over the rest. They disagree only over the extent to which this general sense of third world backwardness can be made more concrete—the extent to which the sort of clear division which divided the Cold War world between East and West can be redefined today as a division between our own and the non-Western worlds. Many think it can. But to do so, the difference must be explained as a cultural, even a civilisational divide. With

the absence of any political challenge to Western capitalism, different ways of life and culture are now talked up as the great schism of the nineties.

The zones of peace/zones of turmoil dichotomy already mentioned is one example of a cultural differentiation. The West is defined by its cultural stability, surrounded by a threatening world of chaos and disorder. Similarly, the conservative French thinker Jean-François Revel in his *Democracy against Itself: The Future of the Democratic Impulse*, replaces the old distinction between democracy and totalitarianism with a distinction between 'normal and abnormal' states. It matters little to Revel whether elections take place, or even that formal democracy is exercised, outside the normality of the West. For him, lawlessness and the absence of developed civil society mean that the 'abnormal' non-Western world is doomed to a permanent state of turmoil.

Samuel Huntington has made the most notable attempt, so far, clearly to divide the world along the lines of culture and civilisation. Originally published in *Foreign Affairs* and hyped as the big picture theory to replace Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis, it has been reprinted together with replies as *The Clash of Civilisations: The Debate*. Huntington has packaged the theme of cultural division in a far sexier way than the rather eccentric and crude formulations of Revel or Singer and Wildavsky. His is a world where the shape of the future will be defined by the interaction between discrete civilisations—Islamic, Slavic-Orthodox, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu and so on.

Huntington does not overtly denigrate non-Western civilisations. Indeed he can sound positively PC: 'The presumption...that other peoples who modernise must become "like us" is a bit of Western arrogance that in itself illustrates the clash of civilisations.' His bottom line, however, in reply to critics who have exposed the implausibility of squeezing every world event into his civilisational category, is that 'faith and family, blood and belief, are what people identify with and what they will fight and die for'.

The interest generated by Huntington's thesis is not due to any intellectual qualities. He himself virtually concedes that it is nonsense by entitling the reply to his critics, 'If not civilizations, what?'. In other words, 'Ok, it's gobbledegook, but what do you suggest? We need some way of understanding the world and our special position within it, and at least "civilisations" sounds good'. Huntington's aim, as the American professor of international relations, Albert Weeks, explained, is much the same as others seeking a 'real world order'. Huntington's concern for civilisations 'is symptomatic of the failure of globalism—specifically the idea of establishing a "new world order"—to take root and of the failure to make sense of contradictory trends and events. His aim is thus...to get a handle on the international kaleidoscope'. Endorsement for Huntington's ideas comes down to agreement with the prejudice that the primordial instincts so beloved of the likes of Conor Cruise O'Brien are in the ascendant. However, beyond this his proposition does have the virtue from a Western point of view of avoiding the problems that emerge within the West, by concentrating attention upon the West's differences with the rest.

Elevating attention to a conflict among civilisations refocuses scrutiny away from the uncomfortable subject of the internal state of Western society and the fracturing of the loyalties which are supposed to hold it together. With grandiose assumptions about civilisational ties, Huntington neatly sidesteps the very introspective questions that have provoked this flurry of articles. All he has done is change the subject. Fouad Ajami, an American professor of Middle Eastern Studies mocks our man of civilization. 'The West is unexamined in Huntington's essay. No fissures run through it. No multiculturalists are heard from. It is orderly within its

Four years of propaganda against Islamic extremists have failed to cohere a Western worldview

ramparts. What doubts Huntington has about the will within the walls, he has kept within himself. He has assumed that his call to unity will be answered, for outside flutter the banners of the Saracens and Confucians.'

If the refocusing of attention away from the shortcomings of Western society is to be convincing, it requires a more aggressive approach. Such aggression is difficult when the possible targets are so pitiful. The preoccupations of the likes of Huntington indicate that the hunt is on to find an enemy at least some way to being as convincing as communism was. Few questioned the meaning or value of the West when the Soviet Union was the spectre at the gates. Commentators are looking for new candidates for the old position. The new threat must be viable enough to create a sense of solidarity in the West, and also provide a comparison that favourably demonstrates the benefits of being Western.

All the talk about 'zones of turmoil' and 'abnormal states' is an attempt to do just that. The construction of such meaningless divisions aims to manufacture a threat from a morally degenerate third world. So, too, does the growing body of literature attempting to prove that democracies do not fight each other. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* is one example. According to this school of thought, the West is not only ordered and lawful, but intrinsically peaceful. The violent third world by contrast is threatening, and so needs containing. But how to translate such peculiar academic concerns into a tangible threat? In the real world there is precious little in the way of a threat from the East.

The quest for a new international threat hungrily follows any lead. *Newsweek's* suggestion is a global mafia. 'They're ruthless. Stateless. Hi-tech. And deadly', declared the front cover of the American news magazine on 13 December 1993. They even got a senator to call organised crime 'the new communism, the new monolithic threat'. Nice try, but unfortunately 'they're' also non-existent. More serious intellectual energies are going into the hyping of the threat of Islam. 'There are many

good people', William Pfaff wrote in the *New Yorker*, 'who think that the war between communism and the West is going to be replaced by a war between the West and the Muslims'.

One of the 'good people' Pfaff might have in mind is Mark Juergensmeyer. In his *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Juergensmeyer takes Huntington's civilisational paradigm a step further, singling out Islam as the villain of the piece. Since the American government went to great lengths to blame the bombing of the World Trade Centre on Islamic fundamentalists, the campaign has gathered momentum. But while Islam may be a rather more convincing enemy than *Newsweek's* mythical global mafia, comparison with the truly global dimensions of the Soviet threat only highlights its implausibility. Despite four years of propaganda against Islamic extremists, the campaign has failed miserably to cohere a Western worldview. Criticising Juergensmeyer's thesis as 'woefully inadequate', Fukuyama regrets that, 'one of the maddening characteristics of the new world order is that few generalisations remain valid outside of a specific region'. Or, as one of Huntington's fellow travellers notes, 'new and serious challenges face us abroad, but they may not be sharply defined enough to elicit a similar unifying response' (B Porter, 'Can American democracy survive?', *Commentary*, November 1993). Order remains as elusive as ever.

The academics' search for a new global threat to cohere the West at times seems absurd in its artificiality. But we should not lose sight of the importance of this discussion. The dynamic to draw new boundaries between 'them and us' is given by dissatisfaction with the crumbling of the American and Western way of life. Exaggerating the shortcomings of others and the threat they may pose acts to ease the pain of the vacuum which the end of the Cold War has left at the heart of Western political life.

The importance of building on the West's unique qualities is emphasised too by the renowned American historian John Lukacs. Concluding his latest work, *The End of the Modern Century and the End of the Modern Age*, he asks, 'will the American people have the inner strength to consolidate, and to sustain, the belief that their civilisation is different not from the so-called old world but from the so-called third world, and not merely its advanced model?...this is...the question'.

The drive to recreate a sense of cultural superiority also expresses a fact of world affairs in the nineties. Despite criticisms, it has proved considerably easier for Western governments to create a sense of their own worth and authority in the international arena than on the domestic scene. In many respects the future of the West is now bound up with the extent to which they can sustain their own solidarity and purpose on the international stage. This inevitably requires the creation of villains and victims and as much ideological coherence as can be mustered. All the talk of civilisation and order is really an attempt to package this project of restoring the authority of a failed Western system. Recreating a coherent sense of Western civilisation against threatening outsiders is much more than an eccentric moneyspinner for academics out to make a name for themselves.

Bad Sex, John Hoyland (ed), Serpent's Tail, £7.99 pbk

Melvyn Bragg has just won the first Bad Sex Prize. Awarded by Auberon Waugh's magazine the *Literary Review*, it is not the ultimate date rape penance but a prize for 'the most remarkable example of bad sexual description' in a recent novel. It seems a pity that Bragg's work doesn't appear in the new *Bad Sex* anthology. John Hoyland, editor of these 21 stories says 'there is a particular pleasure in reading them: the feeling that, no matter how many dodgy sexual experiences one may have had oneself, at least it hasn't always been that bad'.

So, here's a man who's never woken up, observed some putrid blob beside him and thought 'I don't remember eating that last night'. In fact here's a man who must have been very lucky indeed if the stories included are considered to be really that bad. Most involve characters called Mirabelle, Edmund ('whom nobody calls Ed'), Oliver and Sathbh. These sexpots engage in such horny pursuits as throwing cushions at each other—'the one my fiend of a husband bought in Bali'. All in all, *Bad Sex* turns out to be some sort of middle class nineties-style 'Reader's wives'. You won't find throbbing love truncheons in these pages, but exchange the G-plan for Ikea and the chocolate-flavoured nipple cream for Häagen-Dazs and there you have it: bad sex is when he has to ask 'Did you arrive?'.

The difference between good sex and bad sex is relative. When you're 15 sex isn't necessarily good if followed by conversation, but it is good if followed by a period. The stories that I enjoyed the most were the ones that had a down-to-earth approach to what are supposed to be out-of-this-world experiences: 'As he sank into her, Carolyn moaned and Hugh began to vomit uncontrollably. "It was the french fries", he kept saying, "you're the one who fed them to me".' ('Morning Always Comes', M Cohen). Or, 'she had visions of her nipple being rubbed clean away in a plasticine ball and rolling under a chair to gather hair'. And, 'she awoke to the smell of a pungent livid fart. A cloud of pure vegetable gas that hung like a shroud in the sleeping boudoir. It was poisonous. Is that me or is that him?—she asked herself, doubting she could produce something so alien to her' ('Grub', E Mildmay).

Helen West

The Private Lives of Albert Einstein, Roger Highfield and Paul Carter, Faber & Faber, £15.99 hbk

He was once asked to put on his own three-week show at the London Palladium. Women fainted in his presence. Young girls mobbed him in Geneva. Today this sort of adulation is reserved for pop and film stars. But in the aftermath of the First World War, Albert Einstein became the first superstar of science. As Highfield and Carter point out, 'a world exhausted by war was eager for distractions, and relativity became a public sensation. Warped space and the bending of light provided instantly beguiling slogans, however obscure their detail.... Yet it was also a triumph of human logic, a vindication of rationality after the war's senseless barbarism'.

Einstein had become the twentieth century's icon of

deep thought and wisdom—the holy man of science who had turned his back on the 'merely personal'. As he wrote: 'I have never belonged wholeheartedly to any country or state, to my circle of friends, or even to my family.... I lose something by it, to be sure, but I am compensated for it in being rendered independent of the customs, opinions and prejudices of others, and am not tempted to rest my peace of mind upon such shifting foundations.'

Highfield and Carter want to dismantle the Einstein myth, pursuing their case with the eagerness of young lawyers who have their first big name in the dock. Einstein emerges as an unsympathetic and emotionally shallow man whose famous modesty 'was at war with his arrogance'. Rather than a saint, Einstein was a mere mortal with all the attendant failings and contradictions. As CP Snow warned 'it is wrong to romanticise anyone, even Einstein'. Irrespective of the revelations here or those that may emerge in the future, Einstein's scientific contribution will remain untainted, a 'triumph of human logic' and a 'vindication of rationality' in a century when these have been in short supply. Personally I would settle for one Einstein over a thousand saints.

Manjit Kumar

Speaking of Sex: The Limits of Language, Antony Grey, Cassell, £30 hbk, £10.99 pbk

Anthony Grey made his name in the 1960's as the secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, discreetly pushing at the open door of reform that became the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. In *Speaking of Sex* he pursues the postwar compromise in sexual values into the nineties. Explicitly eschewing political correctness, Grey refreshingly insists on the individual's right to live a promiscuous lifestyle, rejects the ritual child abuse panics and objects to the 'Nanny state' interfering in people's private lives.

However his vision of a 'mutually accepting, tolerantly pluralist society' must extend to everyone, leading Grey to 'respect the views of those who believe that all sex outside marriage is wrong'. And not only their views, it seems their sensibilities must also be respected. The trouble is that this means upholding public morals.

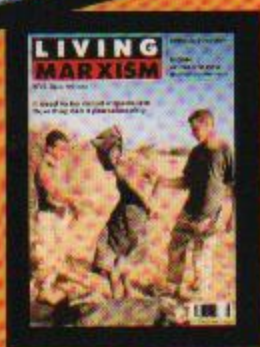
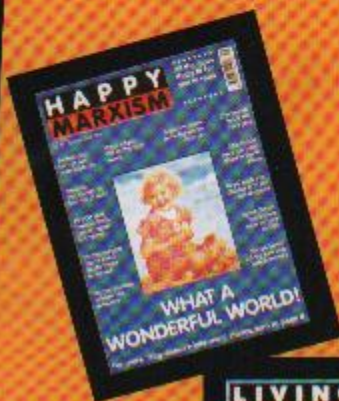
To overcome this problem Grey engages in precisely the kind of linguistic dodge that is characteristic of political correctness. Discussing the clauses of the 1967 act which criminalise homosexual behaviour in public, he argues that 'legal language must be updated to eliminate morally loaded terms such as gross indecency, and replaced with neutral terminology which factually describes the behaviour in question'. So, the sex crimes remain but their names should be less offensive to the law's victims. Indeed, he goes on to argue that the law against 'importuning' should be extended to include heterosexuals.

Grey would have us believe that language is the source of sexual unhappiness, but the truth is that it is the very public morality that Grey is so keen to defend, albeit with 'neutral terminology', that is the source of our hypocritical, hung-up culture.

Peter Ray

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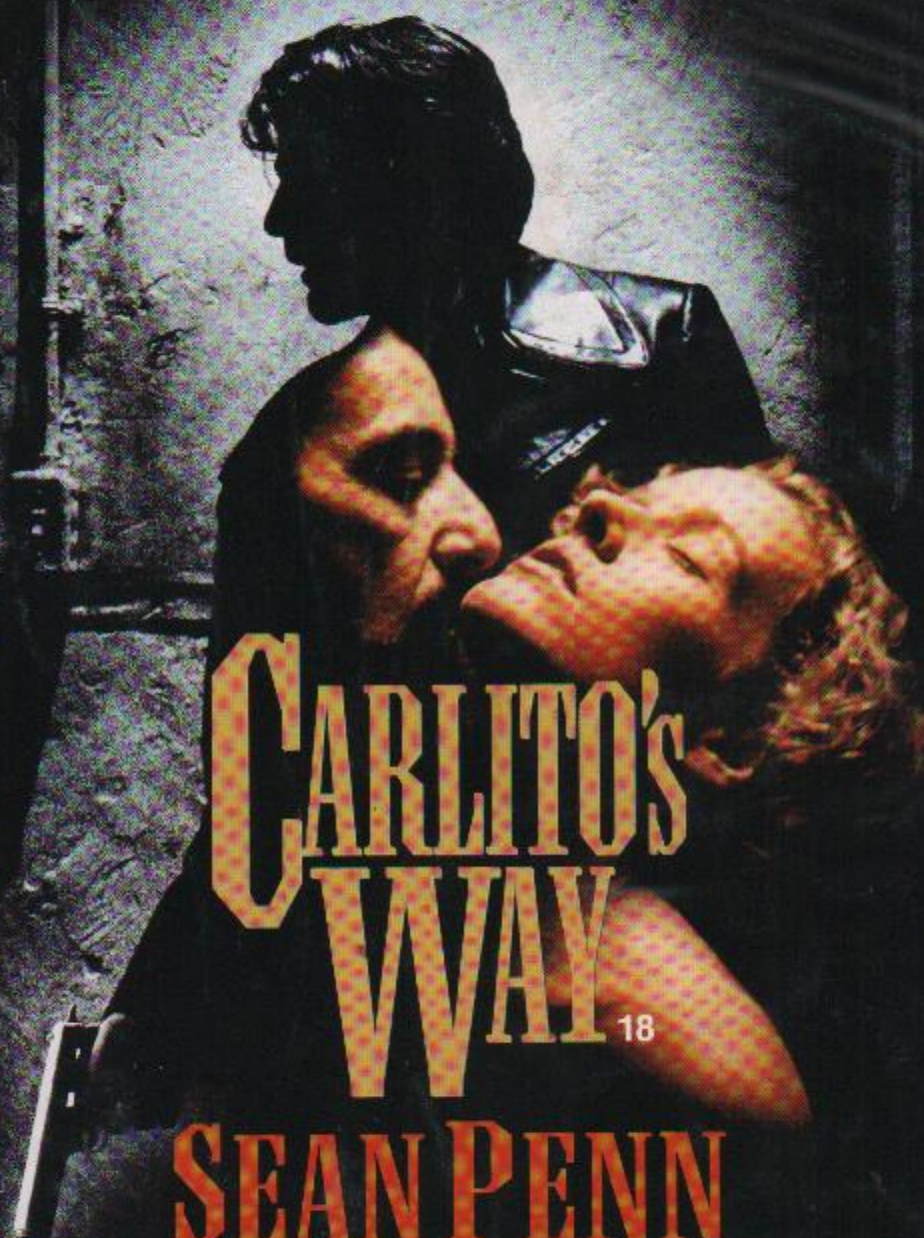
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November 1988-August 1993. £2.50 plus 40p p&p

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