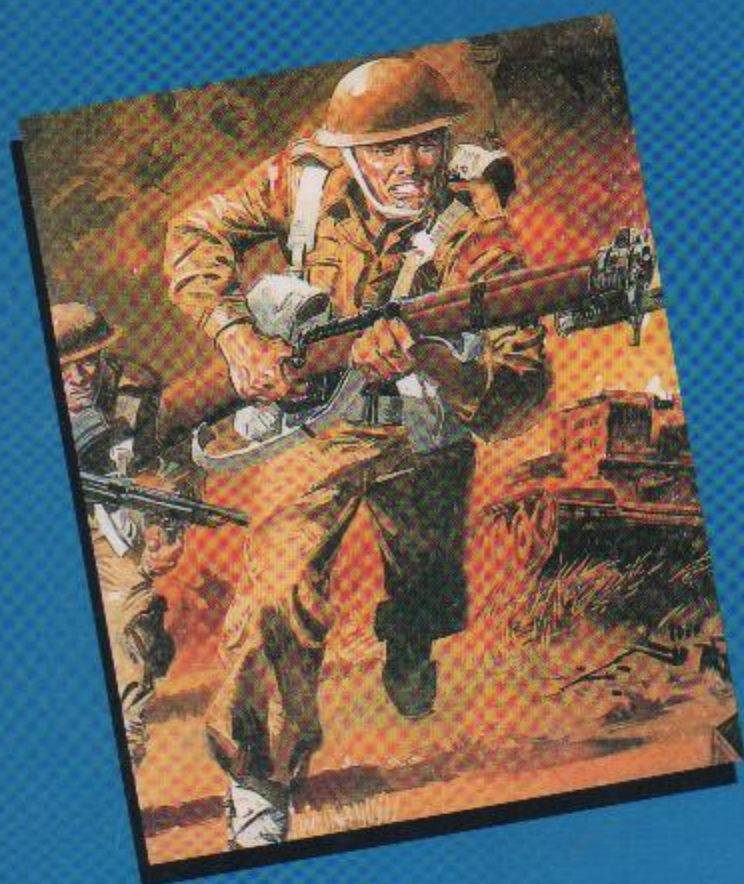


LIVING MARXISM

US \$5 DM/ FF25
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The trouble
with
anti-racism
page 8



BRITAIN DROOLS
OVER D-DAY

PORNOGRAPHY FOR PATRIOTS

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Family affairs

It's the United Nations Year of the Family, and the media is full of panicky debates about 'problem parenting'. This month's *Living Marxism* investigates what all the fuss is about.

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Ann Bradley looks at why the authorities are so obsessed with defending the family unit—and policing the way we live.

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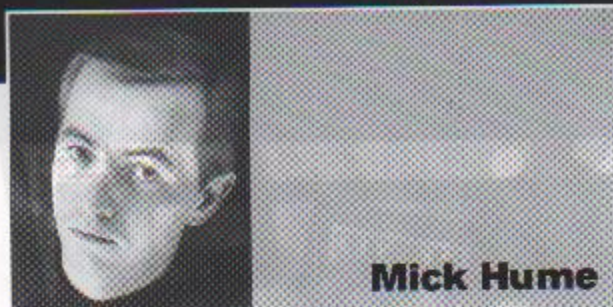
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**LIVING
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Mick Hume

Pornography for patriots

Union Jack flags flying in the streets. Young men with beer guts marching about in combat gear. A coarse celebration of Britain's greatness, and a glorification of violence against foreigners. Who needs the BNP when we've got the official D-Day commemoration?

In the run-up to the May local elections, anti-racists have been obsessed with chasing the fringe British National Party around the backstreets of east London. Meanwhile, nobody is protesting about the nationalist, anti-foreign jamboree that has taken centre stage in British affairs, focused around the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of the D-Day invasion in June.

D-Day now seems to be an item of everyday news, with the press and the TV competing to give us blow-by-blow accounts of the plans for political and military events to mark the anniversary. And the underlying theme of all the D-Day stories is that, half a century on, the Brits are still winning against all-comers.

'We' have already routed the Germans by making clear that they are not welcome at the ceremonies, and hammered the French hoteliers who tried to turf British veterans out of their D-Day beds to make room for oily foreign VIPs. Now we wait with bated breath to see if Princess Di agrees to come out of retirement for the occasion and storm up the Normandy beaches in a British designer suit.

Some might say that all this fuss about D-Day is harmless enough, and that it is all right to remember the dead. But what exactly is it that we are being asked to celebrate in June?

In the first place, the version of history on which the D-Day commemoration is based is a fantasy. The image of Britain as a freedom-loving nation which saved the world from fascism does not quite fit the facts of the time: the British establishment's sympathy for the Nazis, the way

that 'Quit India' and other anti-colonial movements were condemning Britain as an imperial tyrant at the time of D-Day, and so on. (These are historical issues which we will return to in *Living Marxism* as the various wartime anniversaries come around.)

But more importantly, the D-Day circus is not really about remembering the past at all. It is a vehicle which the British authorities are using to convey a political message for the present.

The D-Day events are not designed to commemorate what happened on the beaches 50 years ago. They are about celebrating the continued superiority of British decency and democracy over the alien creeds of oppression and evil. They are designed to stir nationalist passions and so rally support for the British authorities in fighting today's battles, at home and abroad. This carnival of militarism is motivated by entirely contemporary concerns; why else would it be that the further the Second World War fades into history, the louder the commemorations become?

A celebration of Britishness like the D-Day commemorations can never simply be a dignified remembrance of the dead. It always involves setting up a counter-position between *us* and *them*. An official tribute to those who died for Britain automatically raises the question 'who killed them?' (and always avoids the issue of what the British war machine did to its enemies). Any national commemoration of the Second World War straight away draws a line between us, the noble victors, and them, the vanquished tyrants. In this way, history becomes a powerful resource for nationalist politics.

In mobilising the nation around D-Day, the British government is effectively declaring war without firing a shot. It is using yesterday's dead as foot soldiers in a militaristic campaign for today. By re-running the Second World War on our TV

screens, the authorities hope to recreate a bulldog public spirit that can carry the beleaguered Major government to victory over its current foes, both real and imagined.

Kraut-bashing has long been a strong undercurrent of British politics. Now hostility to all things German is being brought further out into the open, in the guise of a history lesson. A chauvinist climate has been created in which any incident that touches upon the war is turned into grist for the nationalist mill.

So, for example, it was inevitable that the English Football Association would cancel April's international against Germany, scheduled to take place in Berlin on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday. This had nothing to do with any real significance attached to the date in Germany; as the bemused German authorities pointed out, international football matches had been played on that anniversary before without incident. The English withdrawal was entirely a response to the political mood in Britain, which demands that no opportunity be missed to remind the world that Hitler lived, that the Germans are still Nazis really, and that Britain is the nation of fair play.

The Second World War burlesque show now being played out before the nation is pornography for patriots. The decline in Britain's global status leaves them with little to get excited about in the real world. But they can still get a thrill out of the images of past glories, by wanking over the war. All of the drooling over D-Day is designed to remind us that, despite its pathetic leaders, Britain is not impotent, and to show that John Bull can still get it up with the rest of the great powers.

When a controversy broke out recently over whether Winston Churchill, the conqueror of Nazism, was himself a racist (he was, of course, along with the entire British establishment), Frank Johnson,

assistant editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, issued a telling warning against messing with the mythology of the Second World War. 'We need historians who question myths as well as perpetuate them', he said. 'But above all, in the age of Major, Clarke and Heseltine, we need the myths.'

The wartime myths feed the inflated sense of Britishness that is the very stuff of political life in this country. The centrality of nationalism to British attitudes has been well demonstrated around the recent European debate, in rows over everything from British beef to voting rights. In March, when John Major attacked the rest of Europe and Michael Portillo boasted about the Tories 'batting for Britain', they showed that cabinet ministers need no lessons from little fascist groupings about how to bash foreigners for political purposes. In April, when the Archbishop of Canterbury was crucified by newspapers and MPs for daring to suggest that Britain today is a 'pretty ordinary little country', it confirmed that blind faith in the doctrine of 'British is best' remains a prerequisite for being accepted by respectable society.

One consequence of this chauvinist British consensus is the creation of a poisoned political atmosphere, dominated by the narrow-mindedness of what we have called the *Daily Mail* mentality. As Pat Roberts argues elsewhere (see page 8), the strength of nationalist prejudice is the bedrock on which everyday racism flourishes in our society. The deep-seated notion that Britain is somehow a cut above the rest contains the implicit assumption that other peoples and nations are inferior. That message, conveyed in a million subtle and coded ways, lends powerful legitimacy to the politics of race.

That is why there is no place for the BNP in mainstream British politics. As long as the authorities can have D-Days, they don't need the overt racism of the far right. The Second World War provides the government with a respectable 'us and them'

In mobilising the nation around D-Day, the British government is declaring war without firing a shot

ideology that is always readily at hand, and can be used to strengthen a reactionary political bloc on all manner of issues. If a nationalist bandwagon can be set in motion around something like D-Day, it gives a boost to conservative prejudice about everything from race to family values and law and order.

Yet where are the protests against the Tories' efforts to set such a bandwagon in motion? Instead, it is the low-life BNP that has been grabbing all the attention among anti-racists. But the BNP has played no part in forging the anti-foreign outlook that dominates political debate in Britain. It can claim no credit for institutionalising racial bigotry in our society. So why has it become the focal point for anti-racism today? It is difficult to escape the conclusion that anti-racists have chosen to talk up the threat from the insignificant BNP, because they are impotent when it comes to challenging the strength of mainstream British nationalism.

Campaigns concentrated against the BNP are not the same thing as fighting racism. Worse, they can even reinforce the problem. The common approach among anti-racists is to brand the BNP as 'Nazis', in order to emphasise that group's alien character and mobilise as much opinion as possible against it. But, as the D-Day commemoration shows,

a popular crusade against 'Nazis' is exactly what British nationalism is all about today. Far from challenging racism, this is the central plank on which modern British chauvinism rests.

In these circumstances, it is little wonder that every mainstream political party has responded enthusiastically to calls to condemn the BNP. There is now an unprecedented all-party consensus on this issue. The 'evil' of the BNP has become a mantra that politicians get together and chant at every opportunity. The pin-striped racists on the parliamentary front benches join with anti-racists to damn the 'Nazis'.

Being anti-BNP has now become a badge of respectability in British politics. It doesn't seem to matter what scandal you are involved in, or how incompetent or obnoxious your own party might be. So long as you condemn the BNP, you can shore up your credentials as a civilised champion of British democracy. This is a sideshow which those who are serious about fighting racism should have nothing to do with. The problem we have to tackle is not a scumbag British National Party that might win a couple of council seats; it is the respectable British nationalist parties that are running the country.

Let's get our priorities right, and declare war on D-Day.

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

Naive about genetics?

Reading this month's issue ('Nature's not good enough', April), I wondered if a change of name to *Living Liberalism* might be in order. I refer to the passionate defence of all research into genetics and embryology.

You quoted with total contempt a raving Tory who was worried that such research could be 'misused for commercial gain'. But surely any research carried out in a bourgeois capitalist society will inevitably be used in a way that suits bourgeois capitalist objectives.

I am sure *Living Marxism* would agree that knowledge is good for its own sake. However the fact surely is that so much money is being put into genetic and embryological research, not for love of knowledge, but because such research is a real money-spinner.

Those in the first world with sufficiently high disposable income, who can't have their own sprogs, will pay good money to produce a child they can claim to be their own. Infertility, however, is an individual problem, not a collective one. There is no worldwide collective problem of 'not enough babies'. Surely Marxists should enthuse more about research being carried out to solve collective problems like early death from diarrhoea in the third world or cancer in the first, or my favourite as it threatens me, Alzheimer's, and worry less about the peculiar needs of some of the infertile.

The raving Tories you mention are right in thinking the information gleaned from genetic research could be used in capitalist Britain to marginalise the 'genetically inadequate', excluding them from employment, even health-care. It is not difficult to envisage a right-wing capitalist Britain that instead of being suspicious of abortion, makes it, by the withdrawal of benefits, more or less compulsory for those of us who don't quite come up to scratch. Me and mine, for example.

Come the revolution, you will be right to support all avenues of research into everything. But until then, a little less optimistic naivety please.

Deborah Lavin Kilburn, London

PS I shall not be cancelling my subscription. Even *Living Marxism* cannot be perfect, but please try harder.

Ann Bradley asks 'why is there so much fuss about the new reproductive technologies?' ('Sterile concerns', April). A very appropriate question, but a bloody cheek coming from one of the writers responsible for the 'Nature's not good enough' section which occupies nearly a quarter of a magazine supposedly dedicated to revolutionary politics.

If this represents the first manifestation of the new policy of telling us what *Living Marxism* is for, not just against, we're off. Our introduction

to the post-revolutionary state: not the ending of the forcible maintenance of property relations, but babies for all whatever the state of our fallopian tubes. During the difficult transition to communism we'll be neglecting the food supplies to ensure those hi-tech eggs get fertilised on demand.

All through this wasted paper, as in several other instances in the last few months, you exploit the word 'Progress' for its emotive quality, and you come across like Stalinist apparatchiks chanting praise of the Five Year Plan through loudspeakers. What you mean is research and development. Doesn't sound very relevant or interesting then, does it? It isn't.

Underneath all this 'Excelsior!' stuff is the assumption that technology is inherently progressive; therefore all technology is good technology. What kind of analysis is that? Under capitalism the worst-case scenario must happen, in case someone else does it first and the body that funds your research loses the opportunity for entrepreneurial exploitation. So the research you call for will lead to ever more inescapable authoritarianism and selectively enhanced and limited designer-workers.

Even worse, can you tell us how the world is going to be a better place without Downs Syndrome people, yet with the far less worthy middle class not only rampant, but able to design itself? Could you find some other bee for your barnet, Ann? Do you like football at all?

Susan and Paul Farmer Truro, Cornwall

The excellent articles on fertility treatment and research somewhat misrepresent the current situation, suggesting that treatment has a success rate of between zero and 30 per cent. In fact IVF gives a success rate approaching 100 per cent for many causes of infertility, but this requires between six and nine courses of treatment. In Newcastle, women receive only two courses, following a wait of five years. After that they have to pay.

Low average success rates, quoted in the articles, appear from adding in all causes, including male infertility for which IVF is diagnostic only, or only taking one or two courses. The current debate not only attacks research, it also allows health authorities to limit funding, which is the main restriction on treatment today.

David Hall Newcastle-upon-Tyne

War and peace in Ireland

Claims by the British government that it is a peace-broker with 'no selfish, strategic or economic interest' in remaining in Ireland require clarification. Thousands have perished under British rule in Ireland. Today, the government is prepared to pump £7.4 billion per

annum into propping up its regime. Or is it? No wonder Sinn Fein seeks clarification.

The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 and now the Downing Street declaration stem from tactical deliberations by successive British governments on how best to undermine the republican movement. The British establishment knows only too well that a united and independent Ireland would represent a crippling blow to its authority, calling into question its ability to rule.

Partition constitutes a barrier to progress. The right to self-determination can only be exercised by the removal of that barrier. The disestablishment of partition in the context of self-determination would release the Irish people from artificial division imposed upon them by British governments and their Border.

Unfortunately the state 'will not suffer itself to be dismembered...rather than lose anything which it considers of importance, it will pull the roof of the world down upon its head'. So said William Morris in 1886. The observation is relevant today because it encapsulates why Britain stays.

The liberation of Ireland from British social control would not only unfreeze Irish history, it would represent a major step forward for everyone in Britain interested in change. The issue of self-determination for Ireland is central to the debate for change in Britain.

The Irish people have the right to determine their own future. It is also their right to decide the means necessary to release that future from the grip of the oppressor. However, the current Sinn Fein position in seeking to embrace constitutional politics and 'reach an accommodation' is causing confusion among supporters of Irish freedom.

The Anglo-Irish 'peace framework' presages 'talks about talks'. That framework has resulted from a process set in motion by Sinn Fein itself. Elements in Sinn Fein appear to be enticed by the prospect of embourgeoisement. But republicans in the Six Counties are *de facto* revolutionaries because they seek to overthrow the state, therefore 'isolation' in relation to the established political order is inevitable.

If that order presides over a system which is corrupt or simply incapable of providing for people's needs then alternative strategies are thought of, alternative solutions are sought. No problem is insoluble. There is a solution to 'the Irish problem'. It is self-determination for the Irish people, troops out now.

MJ Hallihane Sheffield

Quack counsellors

I read with interest Beth Adams' article ('The counselling con', March). Having been put through this Orwellian nightmare myself, I have come to the conclusion that she is right. Counselling is in short a 'quack' profession.

The counsellor may genuinely believe that he/she is helping people out, but in reality the opposite is the case. Subconsciously (or consciously) the counsellor will always promote his or her own interests or prejudices ahead of the interests of the client. In effect, the counsellor is the modern-day equivalent of the priest/priestess, wizard or witch-doctor, and is a barrier to human development and personal freedom.

Robert Wyatt *Norwood, London*

Strenuous shoving

I fail to see how any attentive reader of my book *Speaking of Sex* could conclude, as Peter Ray contrives to do in his review (February), that I advocate merely terminological reforms to sexual law and social attitudes. In saying that victimless crimes should be eliminated, and that public nuisance offences (whether sexual or not) should only be the concern of the law when someone who has actually been pestered or annoyed is willing to give evidence to that effect in court, I am advocating sweeping changes to current public morality attitudes which Ray quite wrongly sees me as 'keen to defend'.

And as to 'discreetly pushing at the open door of reform' in the 1960s, I experienced it as a decade of strenuous shoving against heavy odds. I wonder where your reviewer was at the time?

Antony Grey *London*

Reasonable offence

I agree with Lady Howe—oh my god—that reason is preferable to offensiveness (letters, April). Unfortunately we live in an age of unreason, and those who use reason risk offending 'common sense'. Those who harbour progressive tendencies risk offending Lady Howe, etc. I am afraid that reasonableness and offensiveness are these days one and the same thing.

Stuart Sharp *Brixton, London*

Affairs of state

Public scandal is not the disastrous thing for the capitalist West which Pat Roberts seems to think ('Scandalous affairs of state', April). Scandal of the 'wrong' kind is routinely spiked

by news editors and published by *Private Eye*. Scandal of the 'right' kind sells newspapers, diverts our attention from more serious social ills, discredits politicians like Clinton and Major who are too ineffectual to run capitalist governments, and reaffirms our faith in the integrity of bourgeois democracy when 'justice is seen to be done' by the removal of scapegoats.

In Italy scandal's exposure serves the cause of severing the rich north from the poor south, yoked together for so long by a corrupt coalition. Elsewhere, most major countries are one-party or duopolistic states. In the absence of anything like genuinely adversarial democracy, leaking and the orchestration of scandal are required in the making of palace revolutions to put in place more scoundily based leaderships and policies. Orice considered disloyal and dysfunctional, leaking and scandal-mongering are now an integral part of politics, much as they were when undesirable Roman emperors had to be replaced.

Pat Roberts characterises the 'scandal epidemic' as a spontaneous expression of frustrated democratic grievance from below. Since what most of us know about these scandals is what the capitalist press has chosen to tell us, this is to assume that the *Mail*, the *Sun* and the *Telegraph* have somehow been transformed into our champions, articulating the moral outrage of us all. That's what they want us to think, and in Pat Roberts' case they have succeeded.

B Miller *Bristol*

Grasses, keep off

Are you a law-abiding member of the community? Worried about the neighbours—the loud music, the kids joyriding and smoking dope, strangers calling at their house at night? Put-off from taking action by the prospect of your involvement in protracted court proceedings? No problem. Just dial this number and we'll send round a member of staff to witness the trouble and act as your proxy in court.

This might sound like an Orwellian joke but in Motherwell near Glasgow, the district council, which already has TV surveillance cameras on its housing schemes, is introducing a round-the-clock hit squad of 'professional witnesses' to anti-social behaviour. So as well as the police and housing officers, a team of grasses from the housing department will be on permanent stand-by.

Public surveillance cameras were pioneered in the Midlands and the west of Scotland, and this looks like another pilot-run. I want a number to ring to report the activities of these professional grasses and to complain about the anti-social behaviour of Motherwell council.

Deirdre McFerran *Glasgow*

Infantile phase

A possible reason for John Parker's confused apology for the behaviour of some Leeds United fans during a silent tribute to Matt Busby could lie in his belief that 'supporting a team is about collective self-belief bordering on self-deception' ('LUFC PC?', April).

As a lover, player and supporter of football for over 30 years let me assure him that this is merely an infantile stage that one has to pass through before becoming a true football supporter!

Danny Lees *Pontefract*

PS Message for Mark Hughes (alias Mick Hume) We love you Villa, we do We love you Villa, we do...

(That's enough Villa—ed)

The Bill

In a recent issue of *Living Marxism* the inescapable impression is given that I had been interviewed by Andrew Calcutt. I am reported as being 'proud of the new moral tone of *The Bill*'. I was not interviewed by Mr Calcutt nor anyone from *Living Marxism*, and did not utter these words; neither can they be accurately translated from the interview with the *Daily Mail* I gave in 1992. If Commander Marnoch's comments were attributed to an interview with the *Guardian*, then it should have been made equally clear my verbatim remarks were also from an interview elsewhere. Moreover, if I am to be quoted, it should not be in a form truncated to the point of distortion, which was the case in Andrew Calcutt's piece.

Would you please publish this letter by way of correction.

Michael Chapman, Executive Producer, *The Bill*

● See 'A caution from *The Bill*', page 40

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

Everybody from MPs to police chiefs declares their support for anti-racism today.

Yet racism in society remains as strong as ever.

What's the connection?

Pat Roberts solves the puzzle

The trouble with anti-rac

Anti-racism has acquired the status of respectability in Britain in 1994. It is no longer just liberal clergy who swear on the Bible of anti-racism; Conservative ministers and police commissioners are often just as keen to be seen condemning racism. To be anti-racist is now considered an important part of being polite and well-behaved.

For years, racism has been a dirty secret which nobody in British politics wanted to mention in public. Today, the mainstream parties are suddenly competing with each other to come across as the most committed anti-racists. When the Commission for Racial Equality issued a statement against playing the race card in the run-up to May's local elections, candidates of all the major parties rushed to sign it. A parliamentary exchange in March, a few days before the TUC held its big anti-racist march in east London, was typical of the changed mood.

Hartley Booth, a Tory backbench MP, introduced a private member's bill which would make racial harassment a specific offence. The government initially declined to endorse his proposal, but assured Booth that it shared his concern to stamp out racial violence. Next, Labour MP Ken Livingstone attacked the government

for refusing to support Booth's bill, but claimed that the idea of a law against racist violence was actually a Labour Party proposal. The Liberal Democrats' spokesman then stood up to attack Livingstone for stealing *his* party's proposal for a law against racial violence—and, for good measure, laid into the TUC for refusing to let Liberal leader Paddy Ashdown speak at the east London demonstration. The spectacle of everybody from the Labour left to the Tory right jockeying for position on the anti-racist bandwagon suggested that this issue has acquired the kind of all-party status normally reserved for supporting the NHS and the armed forces.

Given the strength of respectable opinion in support of anti-racism, it seems paradoxical that racism continues to influence so many aspects of life in British society. While MPs make anti-racist speeches, the immigration and asylum laws they have passed continue to brand black people as second class citizens (see page 11). While police chiefs issue anti-racist codes of conduct, their forces carry on harassing black youth. And all the while, the everyday reality of racial discrimination, petty abuse and violence goes on across British society.

It is as if the worlds of anti-racism and racism simply do not meet. There

appears to be no connection between the growth of the culture of anti-racism and the reality of routine racism. What is the solution to this puzzle? Look a little closer at the real relationship between the anti and the racist, and an answer suggests itself. It seems as if the target of what is called anti-racism today is not racism as such, but merely certain aspects of its manifestation.

Falklands factor

If we are to make progress in the battle for equality and freedom, it is important that we make a distinction between *fighting racism* on the one hand, and respectable, mainstream *anti-racism* on the other. They are two very different things.

Fighting racism is a critically important cause. Racism not only discriminates against and denigrates its targets—it corrodes our collective humanity.

Racism is also an important resource for perpetuating the domination of the elites over the rest of society. In the past, racial politics were about the ruling classes declaring their natural, innate superiority over the rest. However, in the age of mass politics, racism is rarely presented in public in such an overt aristocratic fashion. Instead we see racism presented in a more popular form. Rather than

ism

Foreigner-bashing minister Peter Lilley is more of a racist threat than the BNP thug ever could be

emphasising the difference between the superior elites and the inferior masses, modern racial politics seek to unite the nation against the inferior foreigner. In this flag-waving fashion, racism can be deployed to mobilise the many in support of the interests of the few who run society.

So, for example, every time the government is in trouble, one cabinet minister or another makes a speech about standing up for Britain against Europe. By making 'no surrender' speeches about Britain's voting rights in Europe, and calling the Labour leader 'Monsieur Oui', John Major was preparing to run the campaign for the May local elections on a nationalist ticket, until the issue of enlarging the European Union blew up in his face. He may still fall back on the nationalist card as his best chance of survival. Conservative government ministers have not forgotten the Falklands factor. They remember how a little war against an external enemy can unleash a wave of chauvinism and help an unpopular government win an election.

Nationalist attitudes and a chauvinist outlook are central to the British political culture. Indeed their centrality to the outlook of the British elite helps explain the 'Euro-scepticism' of many Conservatives, who are troubled that their ability to appeal to patriotism may

be undermined by advancing European integration. The cult of Britishness is carefully nurtured at every level of public life. It is difficult to watch any international sporting event without encountering hostility towards the foreigner, who is usually a cheat and a cad. When Torvill and Dean failed to win a gold medal at the Winter Olympics, the British media immediately pointed the finger at the dishonest foreign judges who were too blinded by envy to see that the British pair were so obviously the best.

D-Day

The cult of Britishness and the casual tendency to denigrate everything that is foreign help to define a political culture which encroaches on every aspect of public life. It contributes to the creation of a climate in which a 'British is best' attitude is taken for granted. British politicians do not normally have to wave the flag or beat the national drum as wildly as other governments. Nationalist assumptions are so deeply ingrained in British life that a coded comment about 'our' proud history or 'their' strange customs is usually enough to press the patriotic button in the public mind. In these circumstances, nobody needs to make overtly racist statements about 'wogs'. The unquestioned assumption of British superiority automatically endows

everybody else with the mark of inferiority. This is what structures and shapes perceptions and popular reactions to other people.

The football hooligan draped in the Union Jack and John Major 'fighting Britain's corner' in European summits are only variations of the same political theme. But there is an important difference. It is the chauvinism of the establishment which endows run-of-the-mill racism with respectability. And every new official celebration of Britain's greatness, such as the forthcoming commemoration of D-Day, helps to reinforce the common sense of racism in Britain. The racists on the streets are taking their lead from the top.

Racism is fundamental to the British way of life. It is a central component of the British identity. The establishment lives its life according to its assumptions of superiority and inferiority. Its dominant position in society is underwritten by its ability to win popular acceptance for this outlook.

The central flaw of today's anti-racism is its failure to understand the fundamental cause of racism. Respectable anti-racism separates racial prejudice from the nationalist cult of Britishness which underpins it. Indeed, prominent anti-racists often couch their arguments in the language of national ►



conceit. Anti-racism criticises the British for violating their principles of fair play when they discriminate against immigrants. It often suggests that racism is not British. Worst of all, it fails to grasp the link between British political culture and racism.

Not all racists wear black shirts

Anti-racists will denounce BNP thugs, football hooligans and aggressive white racist youth. In the mind of the anti-racist, the identikit racist is an unemployed skinhead from east London. The anti-racist imagination does not appear to entertain the possibility that the real culprits are ruling politicians who seek to mobilise national passions against foreigners. Yet it is their actions and the influence of their nationalist ideas which create a climate where racism will always thrive. According to the twisted logic of mainstream anti-racism, it seems that an unemployed racist thug is more of a problem than a chauvinist cabinet minister at the centre of political power, with access to the mass media, quite capable of communicating his message to us all.

Anti-Nazi racists

Anti-racism directs its fire *not at the causes of racism but at some of its consequences*. Opposing the most obvious manifestations of racism, such as racial violence or the activities of the BNP, constitutes the staple of anti-racist politics. Such a narrow approach is not only misguided, it is counterproductive. By restricting the scope of the problem to its most unpopular aspects, it leaves the culture of respectable racism untouched. Worse still, focusing on racism as something extreme and un-British that is found only on the far-right fringe of politics can even help to legitimise the routine forms of racism which are embedded at the centre of British society.

Anti-racists seem capable of recognising racists only when they wear a black shirt or sport a swastika armband. Hence their fascination with Nazis. However, not all racists wear black shirts. In fact, in Britain, the vast majority of racists would define themselves as anti-Nazis. This is because the anti-German outlook centred on the Second World War forms one of the central strands of modern British nationalism. Being anti-Nazi in Britain today has nothing to do with fighting against racism.

The entire national identity is constructed against the Krauts and their un-British ways.

Far from posing a challenge to racism, the anti-Nazi legacy continues to be used by the British establishment to reinforce its authority. The government which 'stands up for Britain' against its European competitors is also busy organising the coming D-Day celebrations. In both cases Britishness is defined positively at the expense of others—mainly the Germans. The objective of all of these chauvinist campaigns is to strengthen the legitimacy of the politics of 'British is best'.

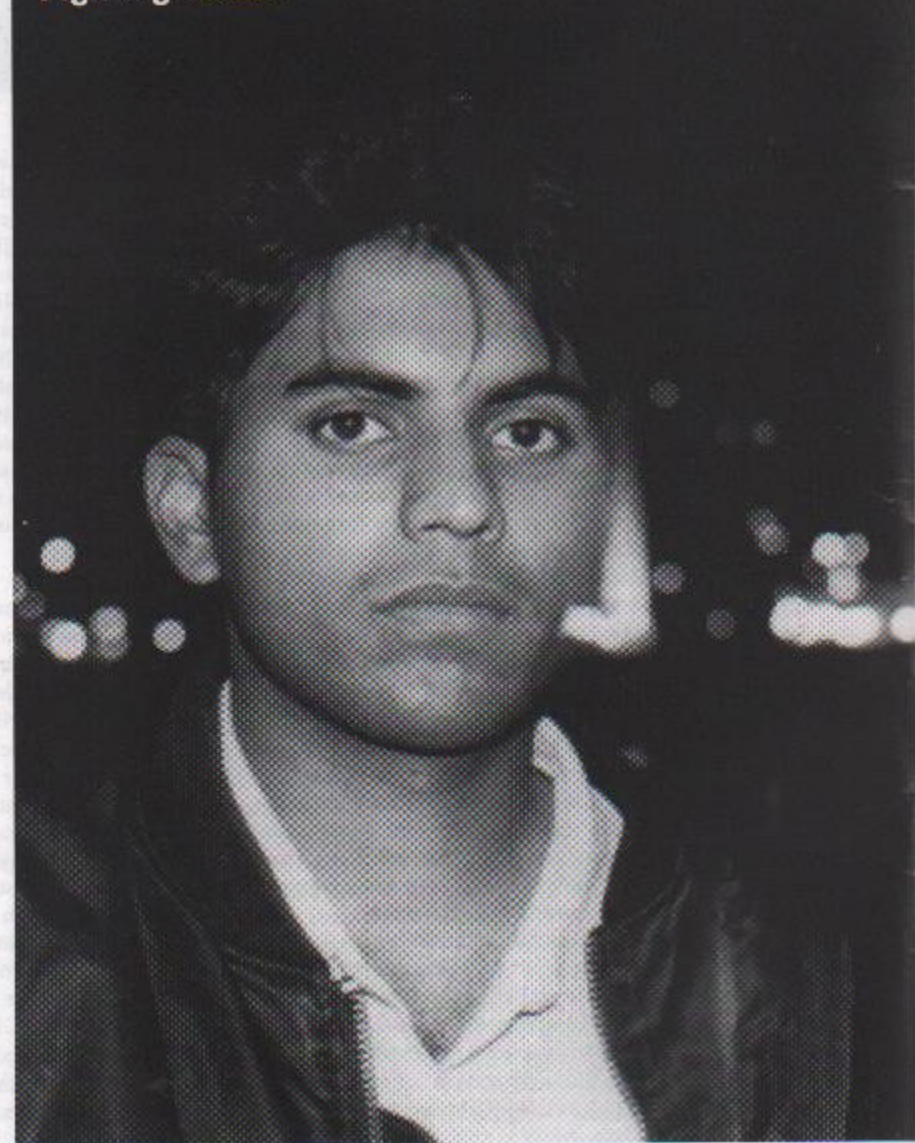
One of the reasons why anti-racism has become so respectable is because it does not threaten vested interests. Its anti-Nazi emphasis even appeals to the prevailing norms of Britishness. Having a march 'against the Nazis' a few weeks before the D-Day jamboree complements the initiatives of the ruling elite.

Just how complementary this relationship has become was seen

in the reaction to the BNP's electoral success in the Isle of Dogs last year. When politicians of all shades unite to condemn the BNP and its voters, there is an implicit affirmation that the rest of the British people stand together as decent and civilised. All that anti-racism demands is that we should be polite to each other. By focusing on the extreme manifestations of racism, the essential quality of British decency is retrieved.

The convergence of old-fashioned British decency and anti-racism does not make the struggle against racism any easier. Indeed anti-racism confuses those who want to fight against oppression in all of its forms. Campaigns against the BNP are not only ineffective, they serve to reinforce the impression in the public mind that racism is an extreme violation of the essential British tradition of tolerance. They divert attention from the mechanics of mainstream racism. Moreover, since these campaigns involve no questioning of the principles of British nationalism,

Fighting racism



the establishment can carry on fuelling chauvinist sentiments while anti-racists chase around after a few fascists. And as long as Britain's leaders are allowed to carry on waving the flag, the culture of racism will continue to retain its force.

It ought now to be possible to see why the growth of respectable anti-racism has not coincided with any decline of racism. Both can grow side-by-side, because the fundamental roots of the problem of racism remain outside of the discussion. Forget about blackshirts and swastikas. The problem is British chauvinism, organised under the Union Jack.

Those who 'stand up for Britain' are pushing society to unite against foreigners and people from different cultures. As long as their chauvinist sentiments retain the ability to mobilise popular support, something like a Falklands War can erupt from one moment to the next. And as we know from past experience, such nationalist sentiments can be used against people from within and outside Britain. ●

Hunger for freedom

Few people seemed to notice but, in March and April, over 200 asylum-seekers were on hunger-strike against being imprisoned without trial in Britain.

Kirsten Cale reports

While every mainstream political party was trying to establish its anti-racist credentials in the run-up to the May local elections, none of them wanted to know about the asylum-seekers on hunger-strike in jails and detention centres around Britain. Politicians keen to boast about their opposition to the British National Party in east London were strangely quiet about the desperate and dramatic protest against Britain's racist asylum laws taking place in their own constituencies.

British law assumes that immigrants and asylum-seekers are criminals, scroungers and liars. Asylum-seekers are routinely fingerprinted, interrogated and imprisoned on suspicion of being 'bogus' refugees. This institutionalised discrimination is the bedrock of British racism, branding people from the third world as second class before they even set foot in the country. Yet the asylum laws, and the protests against them, are not an issue for today's respectable anti-racists. ►

In the local elections on 5 May, Mukith Miah is standing for East London Workers Against Racism in St Dunstan's ward in Tower Hamlets to highlight the issues that others want to ignore. He told Mark Butler why

'It's up to us'

'I have lived in Tower Hamlets with my family since 1975. We have always experienced racism. I've been stabbed by racists, and my brothers have been beaten up and framed by the police. But not only has my family experienced racism—we have always fought back against it.

My mother Sara Bibi was one of the first to do something about racial harassment. She got involved in East London Workers Against Racism (ELWAR) in the early eighties. ELWAR supported the family through the difficulties we had when my father was attacked by a gang of racists, who broke one of his legs, in 1986. And ELWAR helped my brother Malik to organise the successful Stepney Four campaign, when he was accused of the attempted murder of a white man, stabbed after a 'Rights for whites' demonstration in 1990.

I have witnessed constant harassment of Bengali youth by the police. It is difficult for young Asian and black people to go anywhere in east London without us being stopped, having our cars searched, and then being told to 'produce' our documents at the police station. This is backed up by the recent Police Complaints Authority report which shows a 400 per cent increase in complaints against the police for racist behaviour last year.

I am standing in the council elections to draw attention to police racism and to let young

Asians and blacks know that they need not face this harassment alone.

Ordinary people experience bad housing from the council, Bengali people and white people are both in the same boat. The problem is that there's not enough decent housing for all. When the council says there's an influx of Bengali people, it is because they want us to blame each other when they themselves are the real problem.

I am standing in the council elections to prevent the council from being able to scapegoat black people for the lack of housing and resources.

Having been brought up in the area, and having experienced racism at first hand, I know that the real problems are the police and the council. These issues affect people's lives much more than the BNP, but they are not being challenged by the main parties. Instead, those parties encourage division.

Although my family has been through a lot, we are not unusual. In east London, many black families have similar stories to tell. But over the years I have learned that nothing comes without a struggle, and nobody can do it for us.

When it comes to fighting racism, we can't trust the police or the council—it's up to us. ●
If you want to help ELWAR's campaign, phone Kirk Williams on (071) 278 9908.

The first thing you notice as you enter Campsfield House, a new immigrant detention centre outside Oxford, is a notice proclaiming the immigration service's commitment to equal opportunities. This irony is not lost on the inmates inside.

Samuel Robertson is from Liberia, but the authorities refuse to believe it. He is officially designated 'nationality doubtful'. Immigration officials tried to trip him up in an interrogation: 'They asked, what colour are the taxis, name the presidents since 1945, what do the banknotes look like?'

Every asylum-seeker is assumed to be guilty of lying, until they can prove otherwise. Samuel has been told he won't be released. 'I didn't get all the questions right because some were so stupid', he said, 'they asked what the Liberian army is called. I said "the Liberian army"—what else would it be? But they said that proved I wasn't telling the truth'.

Luxury breakfasts

The new Asylum Act has intensified the pressure on refugees and immigrants. More than 9000 asylum-seekers and immigrants are held in Britain's detention centres and prisons each year. Under the Asylum Act, more people are being held, for longer periods, with less chance of being allowed to stay.

The proportion of refused asylum-seekers leaped from 14 per cent in the first half of 1993—before the Asylum Act came into force—to 72 per cent in the second half of the year, under the Asylum Act. Those granted 'exceptional leave to remain' plummeted from 76 per cent to 22 per cent after the act was introduced.

The prisons are full of unconvicted asylum-seekers. Jacques Mutoko is being held in Canterbury prison. He's committed no crime, but he's locked up with a racist 'who always gives us shit'. He still can't understand how he bought an expensive plane ticket from Zaire to jail. Canterbury prison is famous for its soggy chips, 'but I want dignity, not better food in prison'.

In March and April, more than 200 imprisoned asylum-seekers joined the hunger-strike. Prison officials tried to break the protests with inducements and threats. On 17 March, hunger-strikers at Campsfield House were served breakfast trays of yoghurt, cornflakes with milk and sugar, orange juice, toast and jam—far more tempting than the usual fare. The inmates dumped their trays in the corridors.

Later, officers entered the hunger-strikers' rooms and read out a document which said that the immigration service would take no responsibility for those who continued to protest, and that hunger-striking would lead to pain, bad hearts and

death. Alphonse Amrah, a Ghanaian prisoner, later grimaced: 'Tell me something I don't already know.'

Hunger-strikers have been kept isolated from other prisoners, with the heating turned off, and subjected to violence and threats. 'The prison staff are frightened and try to break our morale', explained a prisoner at Harmondsworth detention centre, near Heathrow. 'The Group 4 guards are the roughest.' The prison officers told people that they would be instantly deported if they refused food, and falsely promised hunger-strikers immediate release if they abandoned their protest.

Weak with hunger

Harminder Singh, incarcerated in Campsfield House, says that his wife was present when officers promised his release. But when he took food, they denied all knowledge of the conversation. 'The immigration officers are liars: they say they'll personally attend to our cases if we give up, but it's just a trick.' Instead, protesting prisoners have been sent to psychiatric hospitals, or moved on to prisons such as Winson Green in Birmingham and High Down in Sussex. And some have been deported.

'Everyone feels very weak, especially after a few days', said Samuel Robertson. 'It's extremely difficult to get out of bed.' Harminder Singh was still vomiting days after he'd come off hunger-strike at Campsfield House.

I took the 81 bus from Heathrow to Harmondsworth detention centre. Like hundreds of others, Hassan Chadi made the trip in a Group 4 security van after he turned himself over to customs officials at the airport in March. He's still a prisoner.

British democracy

I met Hassan in Harmondsworth's drab cold visitors room in April, with rain knocking against the window. He was a slight man, wearing a shell-suit. He had been on hunger-strike for 16 days. His eyes were cloudy and he couldn't talk for too long, but he maintained a lively contempt for his jailers. 'This morning, a nurse told us to drink more water or we'd damage our kidneys', he said. 'Maybe she thought we didn't know that starvation is bad for our health.'

He had found out quick enough that Britain is no haven for the disenfranchised or dispossessed, and he was angry and bitter about it. 'I came here because I thought Britain was a democracy. Now I'm in greater fear for my life than I ever was in Algeria.' (Some names and places have been changed to protect the identities of hunger-strikers.)

Colour blind Britain?

Government ministers insist that the Asylum Act is a non-discriminatory, 'colour blind' law. After all, it doesn't mention black people once. But ask the question 'who does the Asylum Act keep out?' and its racist logic becomes clear.

How many wealthy Australians attempt to claim asylum at Heathrow, and how many middle class Norwegians try to smuggle themselves through Dover in crates? None, as the nationalities of the inmates of Campsfield House (below) show.

The Asylum Act discriminates directly against people from the third world (and some from the new third world of Eastern Europe)—because they are the only people seeking asylum in Britain.

Countries of origin of asylum-seekers imprisoned in Campsfield House on 15 March 1994:

Algeria	3
Angola	4
Bangladesh	6
Cameroon	1
China	2
Colombia	3
Cyprus	1
Ethiopia	7
Ghana	28
India	27
Ivory Coast	4
Jamaica	1
Kenya	8
Liberia	4
Malawi	1
Niger	1
Nigeria	28
Pakistan	2
Peru	1
Philippines	2
Poland	1
Romania	5
Sierra Leone	3
Somalia	3
Sri Lanka	8
Sudan	1
Togo	1
Turkey	6
Uganda	4
Zaire	8
'Nationality doubtful'	5
Total	179

South Africa's black townships recently rang to the cry of 'Viva SADF!', as supporters of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress applauded the decision to impose a state of emergency in Natal, ostensibly to prevent Inkatha disrupting April's elections. Who would have thought that the South African Defence Force would be cheered by the same communities that it was gunning down during the township uprising of the late eighties? And who would have thought that we would see Mandela applaud the introduction of a state of emergency—the same instrument that the apartheid regime used to suppress Mandela's supporters when he was still a prisoner on Robben Island?

As it prepares for government, the ANC has been transformed from an opponent to a supporter of state repression in South Africa. The process of bringing the ANC out of the prisons and townships and into the corridors of power is the key to solving a central problem facing the South African state: how to present the hated security forces of the apartheid regime as the democratic defenders of the new South Africa.

A recent funeral in the East Rand township of Vosloorus illustrated the widespread hatred of the security forces. Thabiso Mofokeng of the ANC and Samuel Mabotja of Umkhonto we Sizwe (the ANC's military wing) had been shot by members of a paramilitary Internal Stability Unit (ISU), a division of the South African Police. At the burial there were bitter calls for the murderous ISUs to be driven out of the townships. But while the ANC leadership singled out the Internal Stability Unit for attack, it continued to demand that another branch of the old apartheid security state, the SADF, occupy the townships.

The ANC is not alone in trying to give some new legitimacy to the South African security forces. The British authorities are playing their full part. 'To build up a new level of trust between the police and the communities is an enormous task', says British ambassador to South Africa Sir Anthony Reeve, 'one in which we are very anxious to help and are helping'.

A British woman chief inspector is organising the training of ANC and Inkatha marshals at marches. 'She is explaining how in Britain we organise marches of that kind to ensure they don't result in violence.' A Home Office counter-terrorism expert, Assistant Commissioner Keith Biddle, is leading a European Union group of senior police officers, including 40 from Britain, to oversee local policing of the elections.

The Civil Service College at Sunningdale, Berkshire is a venue for the South African Police Policy Training Programme. Among those teaching the South African security forces how to pass themselves off as democrats have been: Barbara Mills of the Crown Prosecutions Service, Sir John Smith, President of the Association of Chief Police Officers, Commander John Grieve of the Metropolitan Police, Ian Burns of the Home Office and Chris Boothman from the Commission for Racial Equality. The course includes visits to courts, the Home Office and Scotland Yard.

Visitors to Sunningdale also include key members of the transitional executive council like Cyril Ramaphosa (Secretary General of the

Dixon of Soweto



John Pearson on how Britain is helping to brush up the image of the old apartheid state security forces

ANC) and Siphwe Nyanda (Chief of Staff, Umkhonto we Sizwe). Other students of British policing have been Jesse Duarte (special assistant to Nelson Mandela) and top members of the South African Police including Brigadier Sharma Maharaj, one of the most senior non-whites in the force.

Britain's interest in the policing of the new South Africa is not based upon concern with freedom for the black majority. Britain is still easily the largest foreign investor in South Africa, with investments of around £6 billion. For years Britain supported the apartheid regime when it seemed the best way to guarantee big profits. But more recently Western thinking has been that a moderate black-led government would provide a more stable economy. The more effective the state can be in co-opting and containing disaffection and unrest, the better will be the return on British investments. That is why the Western powers pressed the apartheid regime to start the process of reform, and why Britain is now so keen to help the security forces acquire some measure of public legitimacy.

A newly legitimised regime in South Africa has other benefits for Britain. Britain re-established military contacts with South Africa in January 1994 after more than 25 years, with the visit of a Royal Navy warship and support vessel to the Cape. Britain has high hopes of military sales to South Africa—especially of naval vessels. Keen not to lose out as the country opens up, the British authorities are developing a close working relationship with the new South African leadership.

So how will policing change for black South Africans under the new government and British guidance? The state of emergency in Natal looks

like a sign of things to come; old-fashioned state repression of the masses, repackaged as a co-operative effort to defend democracy.

The South African Police initially promised to change the colour of the ISU uniforms from camouflage to a more tasteful blue. A more fruitful deal was struck by FW De Klerk and Mandela to replace the ISUs with troops of the South African Defence Force in the East Rand townships. When the plan was made public the ANC announced that it was organising a series of rallies to welcome the troops and to help create a spirit of co-operation between the security forces and the community.

In the meantime the National Peacekeeping Force has been formed as part of an integrative initiative between the ANC and the SADF, to create a 10 000-strong paramilitary force to replace the ISUs. Peacekeeping force members will be equipped with Perspex shields, visored helmets, batons and tear gas; and each will be issued with 9mm pistols, R4 rifles and body armour. The peacekeeping Dixon of Soweto will clearly be ready for war.

A stunning illustration of the ANC's spirit of reconciliation came in March on Sharpeville Day, the thirty-fourth anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre when at least 69 blacks were gunned down by the security forces. 'The majority of the police force', emphasised Nelson Mandela, 'is composed of honest and devoted men and women, black and white, we need them, they need us'. The thousands that have been killed since Sharpeville, both under apartheid and during the 'peace process', suggest that black South Africans need the security forces like a hole in the head.

Additional information from Jenny Graham

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Who's afraid of porn?

asks Juliet Connor

A friend recently told me about a social worker, a woman, who went into a prisoner's cell to interview him about his application for parole, only to find the walls covered with pornographic centrefolds. She demanded that the prisoner take the pictures down because she found them offensive. When he refused, she cancelled the interview and his chance of parole.

What is bizarre about this episode is that the social worker should feel so threatened by the photographs that she could not bear to remain in the same room as them—especially considering that it was she who had the upper hand. The prisoner's move to defend one of the few comforts of prison life was interpreted as an unbearable act of aggression towards the woman. The notion that by having these pictures on his cell wall, the prisoner could intimidate a person in such a position of power over him is ludicrous.

I would like to think that the incident was nothing more than an example of one woman's silliness, but her attitudes towards pornography are widely held today. The assumption that pornography poses a threat to women is rarely challenged. Controversies about pornography regularly appear in the news. And when one does appear, you can guarantee that it will get heated.

The latest controversy surrounds computer pornography. There is a real scare developing about children being corrupted by computer-generated pornographic images. Apparently, for around £20, school kids can lay their hands on CD-ROM copies of games like *Voyeur*, *Playboy Massage* or even *Strip Teacher*, in which the teacher

says, 'tell me the name of the thirteenth president of the United States and I'll show you my tits'. These kinds of games and images, it is argued, are putting dangerous ideas into children's heads. It has even been widely reported that one 11-year old was so inspired by computer pornography that he attempted to rape a six-year old girl.

It is not just the old conservative moralists who are getting upset about computer porn; feminist opinion has been just as vociferous in denouncing it as filth. The debate around CD-ROM pornography reveals the growing consensus that pornography is objectionable and should be banned.

One group, Feminists Against Censorship (FAC), does maintain that banning can only do more harm than good. Censorship, for them, is a dangerous infringement of the right to free speech. For its sins, FAC has met the wrath of the anti-porn feminists whose sole concern is the apparent correlation between pornography and rape. The two sides of the debate seem poles apart, but they do share one common assumption. Whether they are for or against censorship, just about all feminists agree that pornography is a problem that needs to be tackled. They only disagree on how to tackle it.

Questioning the anti-porn consensus today would appear to be a difficult task. The ideas that pornography causes rape and that it is degrading to women seem to have common sense on their side. However, once held up to serious scrutiny, the anti-porn arguments are very weak.

Most feminists agree that the social inequality of women is expressed through sex. Men dominate women

Each month, this *Living Marxism* feature takes a critical look at today's conventional wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues

TABOOS

ILLUSTRATION
ROBERT CRUMB FROM
MY TROUBLE WITH WOMEN

DROOL

SLAVER



in every aspect of their lives; nowhere more so than in their sexual relations. According to veteran anti-pornographer, Andrea Dworkin, sexual domination has become material reality:

'The woman's body is what is materially subordinated. Sex is the material means through which the subordination of women is accomplished....As such, pornography creates inequality, not as artefact but as a system of social reality.' ('Against the male flood: censorship, pornography and inequality', in C Itzen, *Pornography*, p528)

For Dworkin, then, pornography is not just the reflection of woman's unequal position in society, it is the actual cause. In her upside-down view of the world, reality is merely a reflection of images, rather than the other way around.

The proof of pornography's harm is said to lie in the accounts of rapists ►

who have said that they regularly used pornography for sexual arousal. But this is no proof at all. If Dworkin's analysis were true, then the thousands of men who pick up a copy of *Razzle* or *Fiesta* every month ought to be out on the streets raping women. Unless Andrea Dworkin lives in a world radically different from my own, this is not happening.

It is not particularly surprising that men who rape women often get a kick out of pornography, just as people who commit violent crime probably enjoyed *Reservoir Dogs*, but what kind of evidence is that? When Peter Sutcliffe said he mutilated women because God had told him to, everyone thought he was just a loony. Nobody concluded that Christianity is driving men to go out and murder women and there certainly weren't any calls to ban the Bible.

The reality is that neither rape nor the subordination of women is caused by men's exposure to pornography. The cause of women's position in society is far more fundamental to the way that we all live. In today's society, where women are still second class citizens, it is not particularly surprising that they can become the victims of brutality.

Rape is the consequence of women's inferior social status. And if pornography does not cause rape, it certainly does not cause the subordination of women. What guarantees women's inferior position in society are low pay, financial dependence upon men and fewer job opportunities. And all of these problems centre upon women's position in the family.

When men apply for jobs, they are more likely to succeed than women. It isn't because bosses have watched *Deep Throat* too many times that they assume women are unreliable employees. It is because women are expected to make family life their priority. Unfortunately, they often have to. If a child falls sick, the woman does the nursing; if an elderly relative is bed-ridden, the woman does the caring. Even if a woman does not have a family of her own, society still views her in the same way, as a potential wife and mother. None of this has anything to do with the prevalence of pornography, but a lot to do with the influence of respectable family values.

The most popular argument against pornography is that it is demeaning to women. But why should we find women in sexually submissive positions so demeaning? Why should we find it any more degrading than the images of women that we see on the television every day? It is just as feasible to argue that most of the female characters in TV programmes are either bitches, boring wives or virgin maids



and that this is demeaning to women.

In the real world, meanwhile, real women are really being degraded all of the time. Why is a woman struggling on to a bus with two small children and a pushchair considered perfectly normal, while a model in a porn movie is seen as an insult to womanhood?

The message is clear: sex is dirty and degrading—men want it, women do not

Pornography is seemingly different because it involves sex and sex is a taboo subject. Sex is presented as something that men do to women; something that men want all of the time and women put up with. Ironically enough, it was the idea that women should lie back and think of England that feminists in the 1970s fought against. They argued that sex is something that women want just as much as men do. Today, it seems that it is considered best to keep your legs crossed and avoid it altogether.

According to today's politically correct outlook, promiscuity indicates a lack of self-respect and pornography is degrading to all women. And so the anti-porn feminists join hands with Mary Whitehouse. The message is clear: sex is dirty and degrading. Men want it, women do not. If this is the kind of sentiment coming from those who claim to be standing up for women, then we might just as well be back in Sunday school.

The new prudery is widely accepted today, even to the point where the *Sun* is considering cutting page three. Labour MP Clare Short, after failing to get her 1986 bill against topless newspaper pin-ups through parliament, is delighted to hear the news. At last, she says, 'the tide of public opinion has switched and it has been widely seen as grotty and demeaning' (*Guardian*, 25 February 1994). If anything is grotty and demeaning it is the restrictive censorship that treats nudity and sex as obscene.

The idea that women are under siege from a barrage of lusty men, turned on by pornographic magazines and on the lookout for a victim to rape, can only encourage the perception of women as pathetic victims. Calling for bans on the basis that we need to be protected from over-sexed men and degrading images suggests that we just cannot look after

ourselves. Women have little enough power in society without feminists celebrating powerlessness and behaving like a lot of shrinking violets. Before too long, they will be arguing that we all need chaperons.

Being against censorship is not simply a case of challenging the prudish outlook of the anti-porn camp. Censorship is not only ineffective in improving the position of women in society; it is a hindrance to the cause of liberation.

The experience of recent events in Canada bears testimony to the dangers of calling for the banning of pornography. The Canadian government has been tightening up on existing obscenity laws so that it is now possible to prosecute those in possession of publications or videos considered 'demeaning' to women. In the *R v Butler* case, the supreme court found Donald Butler, adult video store owner, guilty of peddling obscenity. The obscenity laws have since been strengthened to include anything which is considered demeaning or dehumanising, especially to women.

Predictably, the Canadian

authorities have come up with their own definition of what is demeaning. What started out as legislation apparently designed to protect women has quickly become the mechanism by which the government can ban undesirable ideas. For the authorities, however, undesirable ideas mean gay and lesbian literature, an exhibition on youth sexuality and even feminist anti-porn books written by Andrea Dworkin herself.

The bitter irony is that it was the anti-porn feminists who argued for the legislation in the first place. However, even in the face of such resounding proof of the dangers of censorship, Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, who helped campaign for the new law, remain undeterred. They are currently arguing for similar legislation to be introduced in the USA.

Even the universities in Britain are not immune from the fashionable demands to censor pornography and other material branded offensive; in fact, they can often be worse. At Leeds University, the students' union has just voted to oust the *Sun* from the campus because page three is offensive. To most, the event would seem more ridiculous than dangerous. However, from the experience of Canada, it should be clear how, once a censorious climate has been established, the authorities can impose their own definition of what is offensive. Allowing them to decide what is acceptable and what is not can only mean giving up more of our freedom.

Nobody has to like pornography. But who says we need to get rid of it? I'd rather see the back of Mills & Boon novels.



Sex book bans

Nick Fisher's bemusement at the government's decision to ban his sex education book, *Your Pocket Guide to Sex*, was quite genuine. He had absolutely no idea that his contribution to the collection of young people's books about sex, written for the Health Education Authority (HEA) was going to cause such a storm in the cabinet. After all, there's nothing very special about his guide.

It is written in 'unorthodox language' that junior health minister Brian Mawhinney might find 'smutty'; but then so is every other recent book aimed at a youth market. Some of its perspectives on sex play might be rather questionable, viz the much quoted quote that 'if you've never licked chocolate mousse off your girlfriend's nipples, you don't know what "sexy" means'. But even the tabloids were forced to admit that the book takes a fashionably responsible line on stressing the importance of relationships and the dangers of unprotected sex.

Having perused a copy of the book thought to be so smutty by the cabinet that Virginia Bottomley primly refused to show a copy to Labour's health team, I can confirm that it is quite unexceptional.

The government's demand for the book to be withdrawn and pulped, and the acquiescence of the HEA who had commissioned it, was even more surprising because the book had gone through all the usual 'official channels' of approval. It had already been vetted, and given the thumbs up, by the suits at the HEA and the Department of Health.

So why the hysteria? One explanation is that the publication date fell at a bad time, coming shortly after a number of other sex education scandals. Following the backbench uproar about a Family Planning Association manual which suggests ways that teachers can answer questions about masturbation, media hysteria about a discussion of 'Mars bars parties' and oral sex in a Leeds classroom, and internecine strife between the departments of health and education about how teachers should deal with enquiries about sex from under-16s, the publication of Fisher's sex guide was bound to make headlines.

Furthermore the government was in a unique position to act (and be seen to act) because it funds the publishers, the HEA, to the tune of more than £30m a year. Banning this book was a perfect sop to the backwoods back benchers. It was a clear cut, easy strike that could be justified because of the official links between the HEA and the Department of Health. It is far easier for Major's people to be seen to be decisive about pulping a booklet they are paying for than it is to forbid teachers giving contraceptive advice to the under-16s, a current cause of backbench aggravation between those who think that giving advice encourages under-age sex and those who believe that preventing advice would encourage under-age pregnancies.

But another reason why ministers have fallen like jackals on the

sex guide has more to do with current negotiations about the future of the HEA, than about the prudence or puritanism of members of parliament.

Even before this recent furor, the work of the HEA was under scrutiny following a structural review, the consequences of which have not yet been made public. The government's attitude to the quango is ambivalent. On the one hand, the HEA is a perfect vehicle for government concerns. The *Daily Mail* describes it as 'a key cog in the government's health machinery', churning out advice on how we should live our lives according to the new rules on nutrition, alcohol abuse and sexual health, and administers initiatives like National No Smoking Day. It is seen as a mouthpiece for the Department of Health but not of it, and as such the quango provides a way of making government edicts more palatable.

Virginia Bottomley primly refused to show a copy to Labour's health team

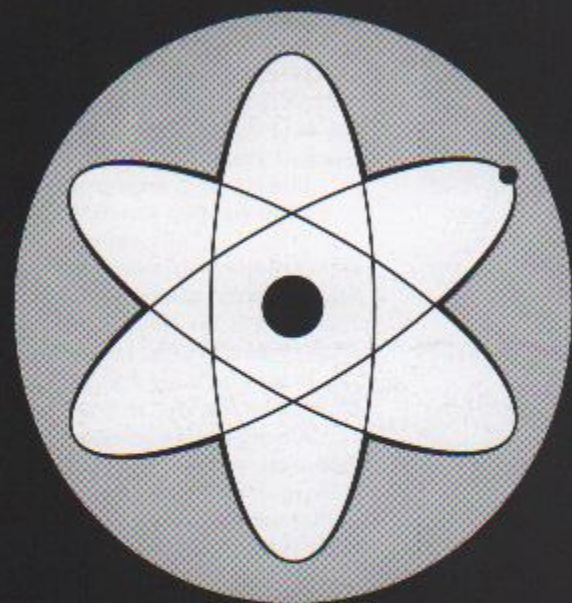
Lectures from Mrs Bottomley about smoking or drinking or sex are received with hostility (what right does she have to tell us what to eat or who to sleep with?), while 'information' from the HEA is welcomed because it is seen as politically neutral. Norman Fowler knew what he was doing when he set up the HEA in 1987 specifically to be a campaigning organisation, particularly on safe sex issues. It is unlikely that popular publications such as women's magazines would wish to be seen producing trendy sex-supplements with the Department of Health; no street cred there, but the HEA

is a different matter. Same message, different image.

The problem for the government is that while the HEA plays an effective role in trying to indoctrinate the nation with government approved notions of decent living, it does not come cheap. Ministers and back benchers alike balk at supporting the health quango with its staff of 200. Some simply do not understand the HEA's usefulness at all, and bridle at its PC indulgences. Others fail to see that for the HEA to play its most effective role—mediating between Department of Health and public—it is sometimes useful for it to be a little risqué.

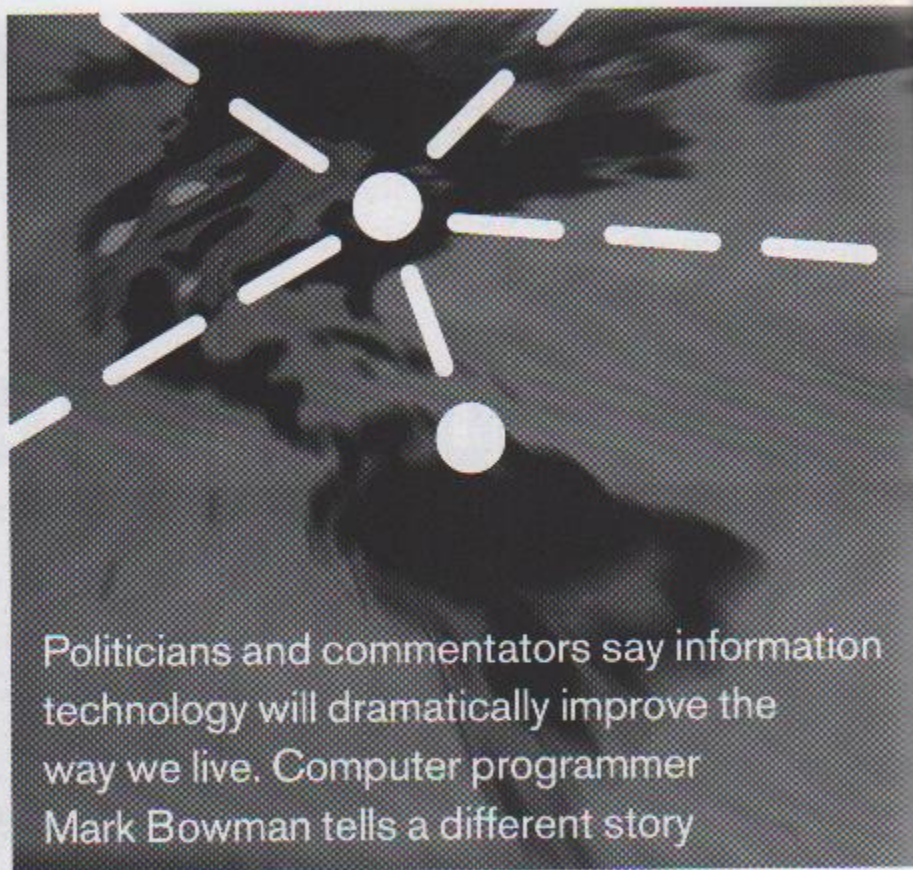
The action against Nick Fisher's book is a shot across the HEA's bows, a warning not to overstep the mark. The message is that they are supposed to be putting a trendy gloss on the government's safe sex policy, not smothering it with Mars bars. It may even help provide the government with a justification for slimming down the whole operation. Current government thinking seems to be that it could get the same degree of useful output for less.

But whatever form this particular quango adopts in the future, it is highly unlikely that the government will want to get rid of it altogether. The HEA plays far too useful a role in motivating the government's restrictive health and sex policies to the masses, in a language that Mrs Virginia Bluestocking could never get her tongue around.



Each month, this *Living Marxism* feature seeks to challenge prejudice and mysticism on matters scientific, technological and environmental

PROGRESS



Politicians and commentators say information technology will dramatically improve the way we live. Computer programmer Mark Bowman tells a different story

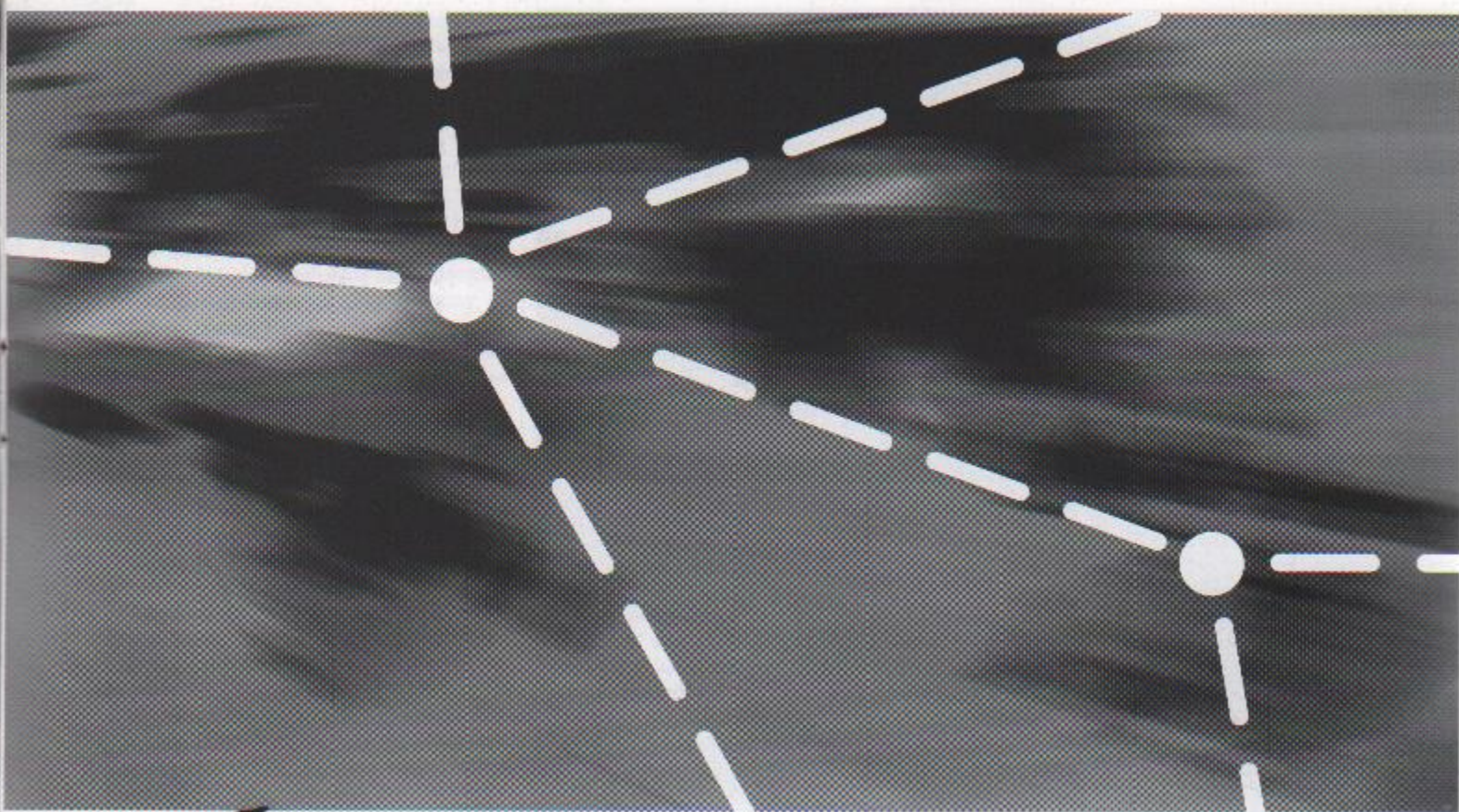
The disin

'This is the information age', says Bill Gates, billionaire boss of the computing company Microsoft. Business magazines, books, and the popular media echo Gates' claim that new information technologies are in the process of powerfully transforming economies and the way people live. The background to this claim is the building in every major country of information highways—networks of fibre optic cable which offer cheap, very high-speed communication over long distances—and the availability of cheap, powerful, personal computers. Soon the phone line entering your home or office could carry information equivalent to all the telephone calls being made in Europe at any instant today, and tomorrow's personal computers will be more powerful than today's super-computers costing \$20m.

'Make no mistake, these changes are going to make up one of the most powerful revolutions in the entire history of humankind', argues US vice-president Al Gore, who is in charge of the information superhighway in America. Capitalists dream that if information becomes capital, then capital will have no limits to its growth, since information is limitless. *Fortune*

magazine believes that growing up around us is an 'economy whose fundamental sources of wealth are knowledge and communication rather than natural resources and physical labour' ('Welcome to the revolution', 13 December 1993). US labour secretary Robert Reich agrees, but argues that this development has consequences which traditional capitalists might not like. In the workplaces of the future, says Reich, information workers will call the shots: 'the claims of both routine labour and financial capital increasingly are subordinated to the claims of those who solve, identify, and broker new problems.' (*The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for Twenty-First Century Capitalism*)

The idea that new technologies will shift power into the hands of individuals is a theme echoed by many commentators. According to Charles Handy of the *Financial Times*, 'we are seeing Karl Marx's great dream come true in a way which he could never have envisaged. In 10 years' time, in most successful businesses, the workers will truly "own the means of production" because these means will be in their own heads and at their fingertips'



formation age

(29 December 1993). It is often claimed that people will no longer have to leave home to work—they will simply receive and despatch work down the data highway. 'The opportunities for each of us as individuals are far greater than at any time in human history', insists futurologist John Naisbitt, who uses the new technology to work from his home 10 000 feet up in the Colorado mountains. Another futurologist, Alvin Toffler, believes that we will all soon live in 'electronic cottages' which will help restore the nuclear family.

For the pundits of the information revolution, the only dark cloud threatening this rosy future is the danger of a division in society between the information 'haves' and 'have nots'. They fear the creation of a new underclass, marginalised by their ignorance of the new ways. In fact, the problems go much deeper than that. The whole notion of an information revolution is wrong. Information technology does have great potential—but as a tool, not as an all-determining autonomous force. Whether that potential is realised is dependent on the dynamics within society. In the undynamic conditions of late twentieth-century capitalism, the

likelihood is that the true potential of information technology will be stifled. And unfortunately, whether computer literate or not, workers will no more own the means of production than they did in Marx's own day.

Since the phrase 'revolution' is bandied about so much in this area, let's start with the views of the twentieth century's leading revolutionary, VI Lenin. He was a great fan of all technologies, and once declared that socialism equalled Soviet power plus electrification. He also argued that it wouldn't have been possible to make the Russian Revolution without the telephone. For Lenin, however, the telephone and electric power were tools to be used by society, not a power in their own right. He was under no illusion that Alexander Graham Bell caused the overthrow of the Tsar.

Information technologies do have great potential as tools. Already, systems are used to predict the weather, search for mineral deposits and communicate instantly from one end of the globe to another. Technology is being developed that would enable you to have access to any music, film or book in the world, all at the press of a button. In the future you could tune into a lecture at Harvard or

consult with an expert on a rare medical condition in rural China, while in the background, the latest English defeat in the West Indies will be showing; the difference being that you may have tuned into the Caribbean television coverage to avoid the whingeing commentary. Way into the future, nanotechnology promises programmable minuscule robots which could fashion products directly from raw materials to your individual specifications.

To come back down to earth today, an inkling of the possibilities can be seen from the Internet system. Internet is a global network through which millions of people meet and exchange information. It comprises approximately 12 000 computer networks across the world and is used by around 15m people. It allows people to exchange news, research and ideas, and connect up with other users. You need to be technically proficient to use the network, but it is worth learning: there are groups discussing every type of interest from politics to science to music. Used on a larger scale this sort of technology could help stimulate debate and learning in every sphere of knowledge. ►

However, there are a host of barriers to the realisation of these possibilities. An immediate practical problem is the clash of formats and regulative procedures between the telecommunications and media industries. These mis-matches are a product of market competition, and such is the anarchy of the market that a solution might not be forthcoming. Our governments may solve these problems in time, although if the Channel tunnel fiasco is anything to go by, we may be in for a long wait. A more fundamental problem, however, is that the development and use of the new technologies is moulded to suit the needs of the elites that run our societies.



the great and the good to make sure we aren't watching computer porn.

This kind of mis-match between potential and reality in part accounts for the fact that, outside of computer buffs and the business and media worlds, there is little popular enthusiasm for the new technology. By contrast, during

For those who work at home it is not work but the home that is disappearing

Information does not write its own rules. It is bound by the laws of capitalist society. Information maybe limitless, but so for all intents and purposes is seawater—and we now have water shortages in some parts of the world despite well-known desalination procedures. Desalination is not considered profitable enough, so some people have to make do without adequate water. Similarly, the use and production of information is constrained by the profit criterion. Like machinery, information is produced by a workforce, and also like machinery, information becomes capital when it is employed to produce profit. Those who own information, like those who own machines, have power over others. And they guard this power. Copyright is used to protect 'intellectual property', and governments seek to advance the cause of their own national information industries at the expense of their rivals.

The emphasis of science policy, whether in America or Britain or Germany, is on national commercial success. If there is no obvious profit in the foreseeable future, then a particular area of science is in trouble. The study of planet Earth, of how all the oceans, atmosphere, biosphere and humanity fit together, is one of the more significant ventures that is threatened by the drive for short-term results and national advantage.

The study of planet Earth could be a major application of the new information technologies. But rather than overseeing long-term projects like this, governments on both sides of the Atlantic have concentrated on going with the flow. In the case of the information industries, that means facilitating the media-led development of the new technology by allowing telecommunications companies to buy up media sources, and vice versa. Potentially we could be mapping out the future of the world; instead we are being offered Arnold Schwarzenegger videos down the phone line, plus committees of

the industrial revolution, a far more dynamic period in the history of capitalism, there was great popular interest and enthusiasm for new developments. Leading figures of the industrial revolution such as Brunel were revered figures. Today's prophets of the information revolution are shallow characters, and their followers irredeemably nerdy.

Today's information highways are being developed in the context of global economic slump and deindustrialisation. This sets the framework for the development and use of new technologies. In these circumstances, the changes which are being brought about through the use of information technology amount to making the best of a bad job as far as companies are concerned. And that in turn means that, for the vast majority of working people, most of the changes are for the worse.

In the 1980s, information technologies were used first and foremost to cheapen machinery and speed up production. Corporate capitalism was able to reduce product development time through computer-aided design and production. In addition, employers were able to save cash by using computerised ordering and stock-keeping to reduce the amount of capital tied up in stock.

In the 1990s, the prime use of information technology is to reduce the importance of individual knowledge. The emphasis is on cost-cutting through cutting thousands of jobs and imposing flexible working practices such as multi-skilling and team-working. Fashionable new computer programmes known as groupware have been specifically designed to reorganise work around projects into which individuals can be slotted, and ejected.

Far from freeing people from the constraints of work and giving

individuals more power, the cumulative effect of these changes has been the opposite. Contrary to the hi-tech image of the information industry, much of the work is relatively unskilled. Speaking as a computer programmer, Robert Reich's vision of empowered workers is a fantasy to me—I certainly don't feel I have any power over those with capital for whom I work. Whether you are a designer, programmer, engineer or keyboard operator you are always replaceable, and nowadays there are plenty to replace you. Unemployment is not confined to ex-car workers in Detroit or former Yorkshire miners.

The reality of home-working is much closer to Karl Marx's description of the oppressive conditions of the cottage industries of the nineteenth century than it is to Toffler's comfortable vision of 'electronic cottages'. The idea that home-working will allow people to spend more time with their families is a joke: today it is leading to something closer to 24-hour working. The advent of more widely affordable faxes and mobile phones has had the effect of placing us on permanent call. For those who work at home, it is not work, but rather the home that is disappearing.

I am one of the estimated 1.2m people working from home in Britain today. My own experience of teleworking as a computer programmer is that you have to keep clocking up the hours until the work is done, sometimes working through the night. For those with families, the pressures are worse. A recent report by two Sussex University academics detailed the family tensions caused by long hours and home-working in a fairly cramped environment. 'It feels like a 24-hour working day', said one woman trying to juggle her job with housework and childcare. The children expected to spend time with their mother because she was home. 'Unless you are physically out of the house you haven't left work', said another.

The spread of information technologies in the society in which we live is only reinforcing the old inequalities of power and wealth in a new form. Futurologist John Naisbitt can live in peace up a mountain, yet still enjoy a lecture from Harvard and talk to the world, because he has the resources and the time to do so. Billionaire Bill Gates of Microsoft can live wherever he wants and travel First Class down the information highways at his leisure. The great mass of information workers, on the other hand, have neither the resources nor the time to make use of the opportunities the new technology has thrown up. Roll on a real revolution....

The elections in April were hailed as the end of an era for Italian politics, and a new start for a political process which had become discredited and scorned by the Italian people. This view seems to be borne out by the results. The Christian Democrats (DC), who had ruled Italy without interruption since 1945, ceased to exist as a party. A DC rump called the Popular Party commanded only 10 per cent of the vote. The Socialists, the heirs apparent to the DC but also their allies in the tangled web of corruption, suffered the ignominy of receiving just two per cent.

The star of the elections was the man who epitomises the idea that there is something new in Italian politics; Silvio Berlusconi, media mogul and owner of AC Milan. Berlusconi projected himself as the saviour of Italy, a slick, successful new broom who would sweep away all that was old and rotten. Nothing could be further from the truth. Berlusconi is as steeped in the old ways as the corrupt politicians he has replaced.

Like many of the disgraced political class, Berlusconi is a member of the P2 masonic lodge, an institution which reaches from the mafia to the Vatican and takes in the top echelons of finance and contract allocation along the way. Berlusconi is also a bosom friend of Bettino Craxi, former Socialist prime minister. It was the exposure of Craxi's crooked operations in Milan which opened the floodgates to corruption investigations throughout Italy. Berlusconi's fortune was built upon that Craxi connection. The threat of anti-trust legislation has been a major source of worry to Berlusconi. His entry into politics had more to do with preserving his debt-ridden business empire than with any mission to save Italy.

Forza Italia, the organisation that Berlusconi founded only months ago to front his ambitions, has as much substance as one of his afternoon TV gameshows. The candidates may be unknown names from the media or from Berlusconi's business orbit, but the people who pulled the organisation together were the old Socialist apparatchiks who have been in the business for a generation. Since the election, the political in-fighting which characterised the old Italian system has simply been raised to a more farcical level.

The DC used to win 30-35 per cent of the poll, then use patronage and backhanders to construct a coalition government with a hatful of smaller parties and, in later years, with the Socialists. Berlusconi won only 24 per cent of the vote, and depends on two antagonistic partners. The Northern League has built its base on the rich north's contempt for the south, while the National Alliance (the new name for the neo-fascist MSI) only exists because it has inherited the DC's networks in the south. This is not the stuff of stable government, nor an enthusiastic endorsement of Forza Italia.

People voted for Forza Italia because they hated the old parties, not because they were attracted by Berlusconi. The arbitrary nature of Forza's support was exposed by an opinion poll back in February. The pollsters slipped in a fictitious party called 'Avanti Italia' supposedly led by Diego Maradona. It received the equivalent of four million votes. The football link serves to remind that 'Forza Italia' is itself an adaptation



Alan Harding on the Italian farce that may turn to tragedy

Send in the clowns

of the rallying cry 'Forza gli Azzurri' (the Italian national team). It makes sense for any politician to connect, however tenuously, with the only national institution that any Italian has any time for.

Alongside all the talk of a new leaf, Berlusconi's election success raised one preoccupation with the past. Everyone has been poring over Italy's fascist past and the spectre of Mussolini. It is difficult to take any of this seriously. Mussolini was a bully and a failure, but he headed a real social movement that expressed the fears of Italy's petit bourgeoisie and became the truncheon with which the Italian elite disciplined the militant working class. Berlusconi's vacuous manifesto—'You can be rich like me'—is not likely to match Mussolini's programme of national regeneration and attract thousands of committed party cadre.

What makes Berlusconi representative of Italian class politics in the nineties is not his charisma (he has little) nor popular enthusiasm for him (there isn't much). Berlusconi is the product of political disengagement and disenchantment. At the time of the last opinion polls, two weeks before the election, 50 per cent hadn't a clue who they would vote for. Berlusconi's success is a symbol of a society which is sickened by its political representatives

but has nothing except empty style with which to replace them.

Berlusconi's cult of the successful businessman rising above party politics is openly elitist and anti-democratic. But the reaction from Italian liberals (and their colleagues throughout Europe) has been just as elitist. They put down their failure to Berlusconi's semi-clad 13-year old dancing girls. It never occurs to them that the recycled politicians of the left might have little or nothing to say to millions of young Italians.

The left says the right won by buying off the stupid working class with Berlusconi's baubles and entrancing them with his media machine. Radical playwright Dario Fo railed at the 'imbecile people'. The idea that idiot workers were hooked on a diet of media sex and sleaze was belied when a new non-Berlusconi newspaper hit the streets of Milan during the election campaign. It sold out within three hours to people hungry for something different. Unfortunately when they read the new paper it was just the old centre left whining at Berlusconi's vulgarity.

Italian politics today is a farce, but the scene is still set for a tragedy. Berlusconi is neither charismatic nor the master manipulator. He is, however, all that's on offer, and that makes the plot serious.



These days it seems as if discussions of every issue from child benefit to video nasties, 'family breakdown' and 'problem parenting'. How come the establishment is so obsessed

Ann Bradley looks into why the family matters to the authorities—and how they are finding new ways to police the way we live

Why fa

'The facts are that one in three marriages ends in divorce; there are thought to be something like 150 000 children each year who become victims of divorce. Those people who cohabit before marriage have a higher rate of divorce. Thirty per cent of babies are born out of wedlock. Single-parent families represent some one in five British households. The number has risen from 840 000 in 1979 to 1.3m today. One-parent families have almost doubled as a proportion of families with dependent children from 10 per cent in 1976 to 19 per cent in 1991. The cost of it—if we are worried about that—is £6.6 billion a year....

'Bearing in mind this catalogue of facts, it is not an exaggeration to say that there is a real danger of a breakdown in the fabric of society. If we were to be here in five years' time what would be the statistics on this? There would be more divorces, more children born out of wedlock and more single-parent families. We are going down, at a very fast pace, an extremely slippery slope and no one knows what the end of it will bring.' (Baroness Young, *House of Lords Official Report*, Vol552 No45 col639)

Baroness Young's contribution to a recent House of Lords debate on the family (left) summed up the tone of the entire event. For four hours peers competed to be the most concerned about family breakdown. The only points of contention emerged over the cause. Those on the Labour benches found different ways of articulating the folk wisdom that 'when poverty comes in through the door, love goes out the window', while Tory peers chuntered on about declining moral standards.

The lords are not alone in worrying about family breakdown. It is impossible to open a newspaper these days without coming across concerns about problem parenting. These concerns can now be raised in relation to just about any issue.

The influential Royal Society of Arts, for example, recently contributed to the discussion about the rising number of single-parent families by suggesting that parents should contract to stay together until their youngest child has grown up, and that child benefit should be linked to attendance at parentcraft classes.

The recent court judgement that a childminder should be able to smack a child became a vehicle for a general discussion on appropriate means of parental discipline, implying that modern parents no longer have the ability to make decisions about how to control their own children. Similarly, the presentation of a report on the alleged effect of video nasties on young viewers provokes a discussion of how parents should supervise their children's entertainment.

Care on hand

The establishment's concern about the family is understandable. Society as we know it could not exist without strong, stable families. Society is organised on the understanding that family units exist and are able to take responsibility for numerous practical functions. It is extremely difficult to survive as a lone individual, as anyone who has suffered a bad dose of flu or a broken leg while living alone will appreciate. The authorities organise social welfare provision on the assumption that recourse to it is the exception rather than the rule.



PHOTOS: THE WELLSOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

...s can be turned into a debate about
...ssed with defending the family unit?

Family matters

If you are ill, it is assumed that your family will rally round and care for you except in circumstances where your condition makes it absolutely necessary and appropriate for you to be cared for in a specialist medical environment. It is assumed that young people will take some responsibility for their elderly parents, enabling them to remain 'independent' for as long as possible—independent, that is, of state welfare. It is assumed that when the school day finishes in mid-afternoon there will be a parent available to care for the child, and where parents are unable to take charge of their off-spring it is assumed that they will have made a private alternative arrangement—usually involving grandparents. At every turn, the family is expected to take private responsibility for our welfare, rather than expecting public assistance from the authorities.

Changing attitudes towards the family can generate practical problems. If employment (and unemployment) patterns encourage geographic mobility, then it is not possible for the elderly to depend on their children in quite the same way. A single parent will find it extremely difficult to balance having

sole responsibility for a child with the job that is necessary to maintain a decent standard of living. These are problems to which the authorities cannot afford simply to be indifferent.

Family ties

The concerns that members of the establishment express about changes in the structure of the family have a rational element to them. The ideal family, from the point of view of modern capitalism, is one where two people enter a commitment for life and establish a division of labour through which they can earn an income sufficient to support them and their progeny, while also carrying out necessary domestic functions. This unit should be willing and able to take responsibility for any other relatives as and when required. It is accepted that not everyone will be able to live in this way all the time, but it is supposed to be the functional norm.

The main fears that haunt the likes of Baroness Young concern how to manage society if the domestic arrangements that suit capitalism no longer suit the individuals who live within it. If the family breaks down

so does the whole informal structure of care on which capitalism depends. This is always an issue for modern capitalism, but particularly so at a time when, as now, the state is concerned to cut public spending. The emphasis on care in the community (see p32) places an even greater burden on the family.

The family's function for the authorities is not limited to providing a framework for care and welfare. Family life is also an important means of stabilising individuals and giving them a stake in society. People's commitment to other family members, and in particular to the future of their children, helps to generate a conservative influence which is openly welcomed by those who run society.

Recent publications by the right-wing think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, have stressed the importance of family stability to social stability. The director of the Institute's Health and Welfare Unit blames the growth of the welfare state for social ills from child abuse to crime. He argues that people become irresponsible when personal responsibility is taken away from ▶



them, and can be made responsible again by giving them responsibility for their family's welfare. This view is widely accepted. It may not sit easily with equal opportunities policies, but personnel administrators know that when they are looking to appoint workers who will be

Sexual health campaigns preach the importance of fidelity far more effectively than moral lectures

responsible, reliable and put in the overtime, it makes sense to select from a constituency of home-owners with families. A man with the weight of a mortgage on his shoulders, who knows he is responsible for a wife and children, is less likely to step out of line.

Modern parents

A third area of establishment concern about the family is more ideological. As the *Daily Express* pointed out recently when publishing the results of a survey on parental attitudes, 'family values are supposedly the glue that holds our society together'. Because of this, it is considered important that we respect family values even if we don't manage to live our lives according to them. We are supposed to acknowledge that divorce is, in general, a 'bad thing', even if we are ourselves divorced. We may not live in traditional, two-parent loving families but we are supposed to aspire to it. The British way of life is supposed to encompass the domestic vision. The image of home and hearth—pot of tea on the table, father reading the paper, mother with her arms in the sink, children doing homework, dog asleep on the floor, is Britishness itself. It is no wonder that the establishment looks at the decline of the family and sees the decline of Britain reflected in it.

The *Express* was horrified to find out that, according to an ICM poll, most modern parents were not even prepared to pay lip-service to 'traditional values'. Commenting on results which showed only a minority of parents thought religion was important or thought banning sex scenes on TV would influence moral standards, educationalist Professor David Marsland remarked on the 'chasms within the nation's consciousness'. 'In its moral thinking and behaviour', he added, 'this nation is divided, confused and potentially headed for the quicksands of moral decline'.

The trouble is, it is far easier for members of the establishment to panic and rhetoricise about the perceived problems with family life than it is to do anything about them. John Major's government has responded to the concern about the welfare of the family by officially including family matters in Virginia Bottomley's health ministerial portfolio, but it is difficult to see how she will address what is seen as the problem. Even though the family is crucial to the operation of capitalist society, it is understood to be our own private world, in which we live our lives free from interference. An Englishman's home is supposed to be his castle, after all. Ironically, any government measure which compromises the autonomy of family life serves to undermine traditional family values still further.

Compulsory Sunday roast?

In any case, it is hard to see what practical measures could be taken to deal with the problems that Baroness Young perceives. Even those who believe that the liberalisation of the divorce laws over the past 30 years has led to an increase in broken marriages would find it hard to argue that couples would remain together if divorce were once again made more difficult. The advisers to No10 are reputedly enthusiastic about the direction taken by the Royal Society of Arts recommendations, but nobody has been able to suggest exactly what it would mean in practice for people to contract to stay together until their children had grown up. How would such a contract be enforced?

As columnist Libby Purves recently remarked at a conference on the future of the family, 'what next, a law to make Sunday roast compulsory?'. It sounds ludicrous and it is ludicrous, because our associations within the family are supposed to be our own private concern.

Condoms and aerobics

Every time the government tries to address family problems directly it runs into difficulties: people think their family matters are their own business. Anything that smacks of interference in the family generates hostility, especially at a time when so many other areas of our lives are fraught with rules and regulations. However, if the same ideas for intervention in family life can be repackaged in a family-friendly form, they can become acceptable.

Health education campaigns are a particularly successful vehicle for promoting the family at the moment. Sexual health campaigns focusing on Aids and condoms preach the importance of fidelity and sexual conservatism far more effectively than

moral lectures about the wrongfulness of casual sex. Healthy eating campaigns stress a woman's responsibility to protect the family from heart disease by providing a high-fibre, low-fat diet. Not exactly a law making Sunday lunch compulsory, but an indirect means to get across the message.

Parentcraft classes

The proposal that child benefit payments should be linked to attendance at parentcraft classes caused some furious comment. Yet the introduction of parentcraft classes into schools is welcomed. It was the coercive element of the proposals, and the linking of classes to welfare benefits, that caused the problems. But there is no public objection to the principle that the state now needs to teach young people to do what former generations have learned for themselves.

These more subtle means of trying to restore the family to its rightful role are being combined with an increasing amount of interference in family life from outside professionals. Teachers and doctors are bombarded with advice and instruction about their responsibilities in identifying 'parenting problems' and cases of child abuse.

Family stewards

Awareness of the supposed problem of non-accidental injury is so high that earlier this year teachers alerted authorities about a case of abuse after identifying severe bruising on a child's legs. The 'bruises' subsequently washed off in the bath—they were stains from the child's new wellies. But why would the teacher have thought 'abuse' when she saw a dirty mark on a child's leg? This is where the public discussion about problem families has its most insidious effects. If there is an assumption that everyone is battering their kids, you begin to see bruises everywhere.

The constant discussion about child abuse is both an expression of the authorities' concern about problem parents and a means of dealing with it. By spelling out in lurid detail what is an unacceptable way for parents to behave, they are clearly establishing how a normal family should live. And by drawing in teachers, doctors and social workers to police family behaviour, they hope to weave a web of 'family stewards' to halt the decline.

The government does not need an explicit family policy, nor a minister for the family, to attempt to shore up the traditional family arrangements. It is already deploying all manner of social agencies in an attempt to corral people into obeying the rules of 'respectable' family life.



Anti-social work

Sara Hinchliffe looks into the furore surrounding the failure of the social services to prevent child deaths—and rejects the idea that social workers need more powers

Nottinghamshire social workers have come under the spotlight recently, as three high-profile child deaths have drawn the gory attention of the national press. Three-year old Leanne White was beaten to death by her stepfather in 1992. When he was convicted of murder and Leanne's mother of manslaughter in February this year, it came to light that Nottinghamshire Social Services had listed Leanne as 'at risk' but had not prevented her death.

Leanne White's neighbours, grandmother and uncle had contacted social services on seven occasions beginning in June 1992 to report the fact that Leanne was being beaten by her stepfather. Their pleas were ignored. Leanne died on 14 November from 107 injuries. To make matters worse, according to the local paper, social workers sent Leanne's mother on a £1000 sailing holiday to France while she was on bail.

Other similar cases have hit the headlines. Last year the parents of nine-year old Nahkira Harris were convicted of her manslaughter. They had withdrawn their daughter from insulin treatment for her diabetes and she had died in a diabetic coma. The social worker in charge of the case was unqualified; she had spent five hours trying to find Nahkira after she had been discharged from hospital by her parents, and had then closed the case.

Then in early March 1994, three-year old Julian Bramley was killed in a fire at his home in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. He and two other children were being looked after by two 13-year old babysitters while their mother was enjoying a night out. DSS officials had put Julian on the Child Protection Register following complaints that the children were being left 'home alone'.

Nottinghamshire social workers appear to be taking a lot of stick. Leanne White's grandmother is suing the council for negligence on the grounds that the police should have been involved in the case from the beginning and that social workers should have physically examined Leanne. The Tory group on the council is demanding that the social workers in charge of Leanne's case be sacked (three of them were promoted). The common theme of all the criticisms and complaints, however, is that social workers are not doing their job properly. Nobody is questioning the right of social workers to intervene in family life; indeed everyone—from local councils to the trade unions and the government—is demanding more intervention.

In response to the criticisms of its social services, Nottinghamshire County Council is claiming that its 250 child abuse social workers are not enough to deal with the epidemic of child deaths. A wholesale review of child protection services has been launched, and the area is to be restructured to fulfil the demand from all sides for more highly trained and better-supervised social workers. A new management structure, with more than seven new well-paid child protection managers costing an extra £192 000, is being implemented.

Nottinghamshire is not alone. Child abuse became a national issue once again in late March, when the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) ►

◀ launched an awareness campaign to remind the public about child deaths from abuse and neglect. Childline reports that its freephone lines, open to abused children to call for help, are getting busier and busier each year.

In line with the increased exposure of the issue, the law on child abuse is being changed to enable the authorities to intervene more easily in family life. Measures are being enacted which will make it easier for local authorities to remove children suspected of being abused from their families. Earlier this year, following the case of a Newham child who had been wrongly taken into care for a year, the Court of Appeal ruled that such children had no right of redress. In other words, social services have a blank cheque to remove children from their families without fear of prosecution.

Local authorities and social services already have wide-ranging powers to intervene to stop child abuse. A whole array of child protection legislation, culminating in the Children Act which obliges local authorities to act immediately to remove children in cases where physical abuse is suspected, has been implemented in recent years. In the past year, child abuse referrals and requests for help have leapt by 6000 to over 48 000. In Nottinghamshire alone, 1500 child abuse cases are dealt with by an army of social workers annually. Local papers around the country carry the local DSS phone number to encourage friends and neighbours to report their suspicions of local abusers.

Social workers now interfere in people's lives on a wider basis than ever before. Yet there is hardly a murmur of public opposition. It is time to take a step back and ask some more critical questions about all this social work intervention. Let's look for a moment at what social workers actually do.

In a study of child protection practices in Western Australia (where social work practice is similar to Britain) published in April, David Thorpe of Lancaster University argues that social workers spend most of their time policing the parenting habits of disadvantaged people who need practical support rather than surveillance.

In practice this means social workers target families which they judge will find it difficult to make the right decisions about their lives, such as single parents, unemployed people, working class families and blacks. Children of single parents are often found on the 'at risk' register simply because they don't have a father. Julian Bramley



A friend of mine's children routinely threaten to phone Childline if they want to give their mum a hard time

was on the register because his single mother went out for an occasional drink, leaving her children in the charge of not one but two babysitters. This may sound like responsible behaviour to the rest of us. But not to Nottinghamshire social workers, who considered Julian at risk for not having a mother who never went out.

'At risk' families are unlikely to share social workers' PC views (the social worker in the Harris case kindly dropped the family a note to let them know she was going on a racial awareness course). Parents may well be checked to see whether they are passing on what are considered the right values to their children. According to Thorpe's study, 'the child protection system is being used to impose standardised norms of parenting...rather than try to protect children from injury or harm'. Families which don't match up to the right standards will be subjected to more social worker visits and interviews. Thorpe's research supports the idea that social workers are looking for more than abused children:

'Because social workers have nothing to go on when trying to distinguish the risks in one family from those in another, they fall back on moral judgments. Decisions are being taken on the basis of untested assumptions about what parents should be, rather than evidence of harm to children. Issues like the physical state of the house, how tidy the children look at school, the lifestyle of the parents and minority child-rearing traditions, such as expecting older children to help look after younger siblings, were decisive in the workers' assessment of risk.' (*Guardian*, 30 March 1994)

Social workers say they are there to help people who just can't cope with the pressures of daily life. This all sounds very helpful. So why does the joke about the difference between a Rottweiler and a social worker (answer: it's easier to get your kids back from a Rottweiler) have a ring of truth for ordinary families?

In fact, social workers are there to test parents' ability to bring up their children. Under the Children Act, state bodies are required to 'put children first'. This means that parents are judged according to how well they meet the standards set by social workers. Most parents suffer the attentions of social workers prying into how they bring up their kids. Mothers of newborn babies have to put up with months of surveillance from health visitors.

Many mothers cannot even agree with each other on child-rearing issues; should you feed your baby whenever it cries, when should it go on to solids, at what age is it safe to let your child play outside? It has long been accepted that parents are the best judge of what's right for their

own children. But no longer. Today, if your ideas don't match what the social workers think—for instance, if you think it's OK to smack your children—then you are likely to be judged to need their help. And according to Thorpe's research, if you get a visit from child protection, you had better look sorry and be grateful for their concern. Where parents were welcoming and contrite, the case was more likely to be dropped than when they were hostile and suspicious of the investigating agency, regardless of any evidence of harm to the child.

It is insulting to imply that parents need social workers to tell them that it's a good idea to feed their children and send them to school. Parents don't need social workers to tell them that it's a bad idea to beat the kids up, or that they shouldn't have sex with their children.

When we take a step back, is today's social worker really so different from the patronising middle class Victorian matrons satirised by Dickens in novels like *Bleak House*? These privileged women saw visiting the poor as part of their Christian duty and tried to get impoverished families to read the Bible, say their prayers and behave themselves. Today's social workers may well be the modern equivalent: urban missionaries, there to ensure that we comply with their view of what our lives should be like.

Interference and surveillance by social workers now has an impact on many aspects of people's lives. Neighbours who bear each other a grudge are just as likely to report their enemies for child abuse as for working while signing on the dole. A friend of mine's children routinely threaten to phone Childline if they want to give their mum a hard time. A few weeks ago I noticed a poster stuck to the lamp posts on a local street, like the ones people put up when they have lost their cat. It had been put up by parents who had been visited by child protection officers and police after a neighbour had reported their children screaming. The poster thanked the neighbour for dobbing them in and advised them to learn the difference between squeals of pleasure and squeals of pain. Their kids will probably be on the 'at risk' register until they leave home.

The last thing families need is more social workers with more powers. We don't need a new army of social workers taking every nosy neighbour's phone call seriously, or thousands more children on the Child Protection Register because their parents don't match some middle class model lifestyle, or health visitors with the power to strip-search children for bruises. (In one case earlier this year, parents were interrogated by social workers and police, after

a teacher spotted 'bruising' on their daughter's legs. It turned out to be ink marks, from where the girl's mum had written her name inside her wellies.) Families should be left alone to work out the best way to bring up their kids for themselves. In fact, given that their sole role is to lay down petty laws about how people should live, we would be better off if there were no social workers to interfere at all.

The acceptance of social workers' intervention doesn't just have consequences for individual families—although those are bad enough. It has consequences for the rest of society too. Are we so lacking in confidence that we are prepared to hand over decisions about children's welfare to an army of PC snoopers paid by the state? Don't we trust ourselves to make decisions? It is so much easier for the government to bring in the sort of Big Brother legislation it is so keen on, if it can claim to be doing so because of public concern about child abuse.

I have heard it argued that all the problems with social workers are worth putting up with if they save children from being abused. But all the evidence suggests that social workers cannot stop child abuse in the first place. The only solution offered by social workers is to remove children from their families. But putting kids in homes doesn't solve the problem; a constant stream of prosecutions of children's home workers and foster parents shows that kids can just as easily be abused while under the state's protection. And David Thorpe's research indicates that 'fewer than a quarter of the children entering state care had been physically, sexually or emotionally abused' (*Guardian*, 30 March 1994).

The evidence also suggests that child abuse has been built up into a moral panic, with increased intervention by social workers justified by inflated claims of abuse epidemics. The NSPCC's recent campaign launched a new panic about child abuse by highlighting the fact that around 180 children will die from neglect or abuse this year. Yet these figures have remained more or less constant for the past 20 years. In other words, all the changes in the law, all the social workers, and all the NSPCC campaigns have had no effect on the problem of child abuse, which is much the same now as it was in the past. Yet the NSPCC used these figures to launch a new panic about child abuse. It argued that people need to be made more aware of what child abuse is, perhaps so that we don't mistakenly abuse our children while giving them their tea.

We need much less of this patronising attitude—and fewer social workers with fewer powers to police people's lives would be a good start.

Additional information from Joanne Hayes

In recent times, the balance between private life and public life has shifted in favour of the home and the family. Public activity is in abeyance, says James Heartfield

The privatisation of everyday life

Membership of the major political parties has slumped. Labour Party membership has been falling for more than a decade. But the Tories too have been in trouble since the late eighties. Nor is the decline of mass party politics restricted to Britain; in the United States, the Democratic Party won the 1992 election despite discovering that it had no membership list. In Italy, the major political party of the postwar years, the Christian Democratic Party, collapsed once its leaders had been implicated in corruption scandals. And political parties are not the only public organisations to lose popular support.

In Britain, trade union membership fell from 13 300 000 in 1979 to 9 600 000 in 1991, or from 53 to 37.7 per cent of the workforce in 12 years. Membership of mainstream Christian churches fell by more than a million from eight million in 1975 to 6 720 000 in 1992. Britain already has the lowest church participation in Europe at just 15 per cent in 1990 (compared to 81 per cent in Ireland).

Armchair politicians

The National Federation of Women's Institutes, The Mothers Union and the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds have all seen their memberships fall by nearly half since 1971. The Red Cross Society, the British Legion, the RSPCA, the Guides and the Boy Scouts (though not the Cubs and the Brownies) have all suffered major falls in membership over the past 20 years. In fact, almost all major public institutions from the National Farmers Union to the Green Party have been affected by the decline in popular participation.

In recent elections in America and Russia participation hit all-time lows. Even the Italian election, in which Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Forza Italia was supposed to have injected fresh life into politics, was marked by a decline in voting overall.

Britain might seem to go against this trend, since the numbers voting increased marginally in the

1992 general election to 33 275 000, a 76.3 per cent turnout of those eligible to vote. However, this rise in the turnout in Britain does not contradict the wider trend: the turn away from active to more passive participation in public life. Increased voting should be seen alongside decreased membership, canvassing and campaigning.

More passive kinds of public involvement have been holding their own or increasing, especially those that you can do from your own front room. Marginally more people write to local councillors or newspaper editors than once did. Many more people give to charity—the incomes of charitable organisations have increased from £320m in 1981 to £793m, adjusted for inflation, in 1993. Of course, giving to charity is the sort of public conscience that you can exercise in private, giving by telephone while watching a televised appeal.

Complaints to official ombudsmen increased sharply between 1976 and 1992, more than doubling in the case of the ombudsman for health and increasing nearly 10 times in the case of the ombudsman for local authorities. Similarly the workload of Citizens Advice Bureaux, law centres, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality has roughly doubled in the past 10 years. These semi-official bodies have taken up the strain of dissatisfaction on an individualised basis, where the avenues for more collective protest have narrowed or disappeared altogether.

As people's aspirations have become more individualised, so their use of their free time has become even more centred upon the home and family life. In their leisure time most people now prefer to stay indoors than go out. Average television viewing reached an all-time high in 1992, the last recorded figures, of 27 hours per week, while attendance at football matches continued its long-term fall and cinema visits levelled out at an average per person of two in 1992 after a long decline.

One telling sign of the increasing relevance of home life—alongside the slight reduction in the amounts spent per household on drinking and eating out—is the importance of late night Friday television. Star turns like *The Word*, *Roseanne*, Jo Brand and 'Mr Friday Night', Jack Dee, have all joined in the competition for the Friday night, TV slot. Years ago, when *Ready, Steady, Go* was on a Friday night, they said 'the weekend starts here'. Now *The Word* is your weekend, along with a game of *Fantasy Football*.

'Out' is dangerous

But it's not just a case of staying in with the box instead of going out. Even television viewing itself has become more fragmented and privatised than it once was. As ownership of televisions has increased, so more and more families watch TV separately. To cater for the proliferation of television watching, cable and satellite services have been set up, providing a variety of specialist television viewing. Add the attraction of computer games and personal CD-players, and it is not unusual to find several members of a family pursuing different private pastimes in the home at the same time.

The attractions of home and hearth weigh even heavier given the generalised anxiety about going out. In the past year recorded violent crimes against the person dropped after years of steady increase. Fear of crime, by contrast has risen precipitately in recent years. The overwhelming sense that 'out' is a dangerous place to be is a major attraction to staying in.

Fear of violent crime and other unwanted social encounters puts real strains upon public space. In the United States 'gated communities' like CityWalk in Los Angeles are on the increase, especially in the suburbs. These artificially public spaces are in fact privately owned, with security guards on hand to expel unwanted 'troublemakers': the poor. In Britain there are few gated communities, though privately policed shopping

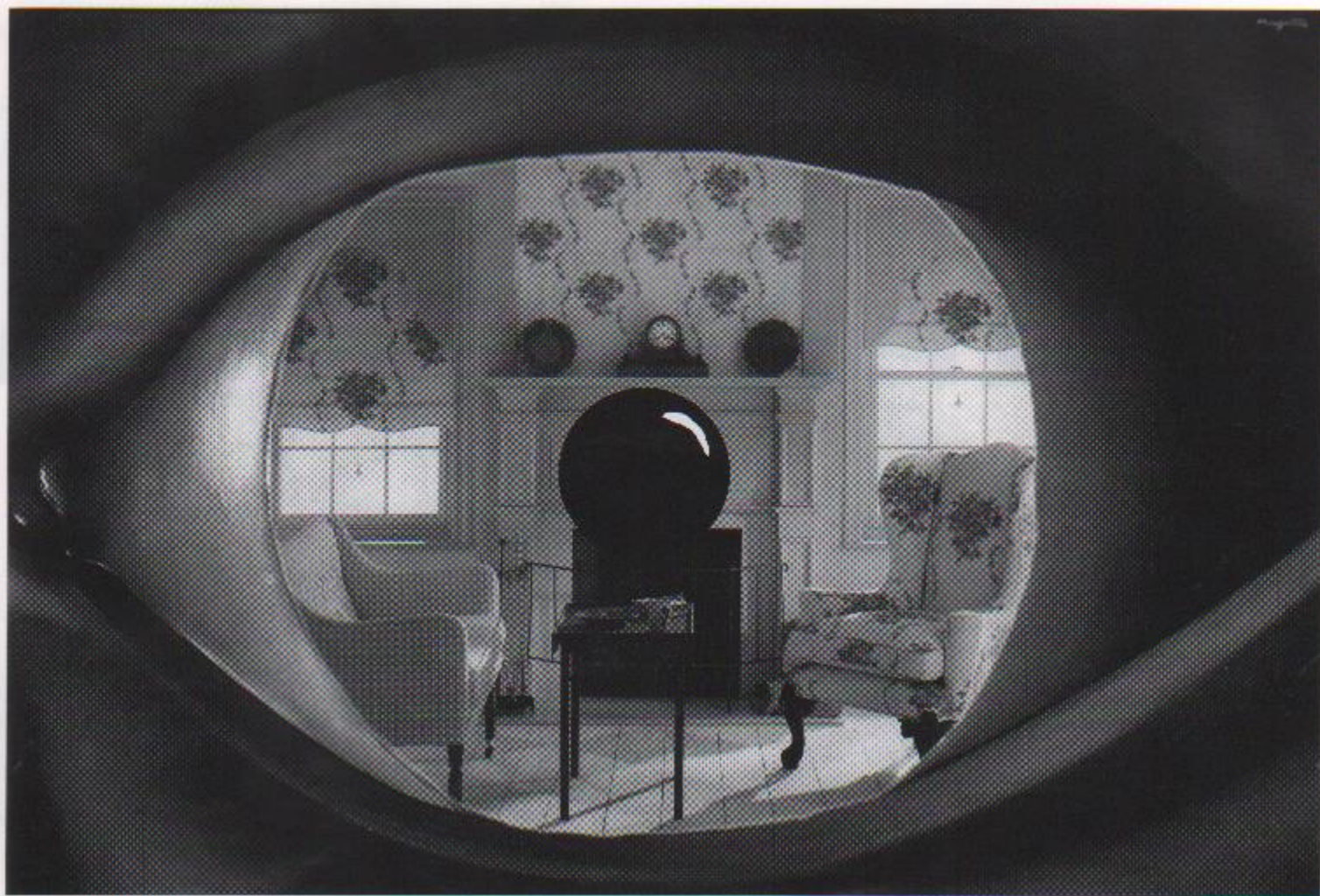


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN AFTER MARGRITTE

malls are more common and there are similar trends of suburbanisation. (Cornwall, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire and other southern counties have seen the biggest increase in population between 1981 and 1991, while the numbers in urban centres like London, Liverpool and Belfast are either stagnant, or falling).

In Canary Wharf in London's Docklands private security guards turn motorists away from the yuppie development site that was subsidised with £8m of public money. 'The point is to deter people who have no business being there', according to Canary Wharf Ltd spokeswoman Georgie Gibbs.

For the wealthy, gated communities are an option but for most people home will have to do. The underlying sentiment is similar nonetheless. Public space is a dangerous place. As much as possible people prefer to live their lives in the safety of their own families.

The privatisation of everyday life often appears to be a matter of the technology at hand: television replaces the cinema, telephone calls replace visits, market research and opinion polls make mass politics redundant. But above all the disaggregation of collective life is a political trend. There is nothing inherent in the new means of

communication, whether satellite or Internet, that means that people have to turn inwards to the family for comfort. That is all down to the political climate which makes the public world seem dissatisfying and dangerous.

The massive extension of public life that began at the turn of the century was premised upon the entry of the masses into politics. Mass football and cinema attendance, the first holiday resorts and other arenas of public leisure were created as a growing urban workforce won time and money for itself.

Crinkly Bottom

Mass organisations like the unions—along with their representative arm the Labour Party—were formed as the working class tried to organise itself and more middle class reformers tried to reorient it towards constitutional politics. Mass parties were also created as a counterweight to the newly assertive urban workforce. The modern Conservative Party and other middle class organisations were created to keep the working class out of power.

But few people today would put any great hopes in the politicians or political parties. Today's disillusionment with mass politics does not just affect the parties of the

left. Without popular pressure, all mass politics, and with it mass cultural life, has lost its urgency. The privatisation of everyday life is the outcome of the exclusion of the mass from politics. The less the public sphere seems to be an arena in which ordinary people's aspirations can be met, the more home and family offer themselves as the consolation prize.

And alongside the disappointment with the public world there is fear. Without clear guidelines for public interaction—like which team you should support, or which party or cause—'out' is a frightening place. Increasingly, points of social contact are seen to be a source of danger rather than satisfaction. Instead of seeing each other as potential friends or allies, other people look more like a threat. If you go out you can be robbed or attacked, duped or raped.

The real danger, though, is not going out, but staying in. The diminution of the public world threatens to exclude people from any role in making the decisions that affect their lives. Worse still, you might get to like it in Crinkly Bottom.

(Most statistics taken from *Social Trends 24*, 1994 edition, Central Statistical Office.)

A year ago, the introduction of the community care reforms was supposed to bring a big improvement in the lives of the elderly and the infirm. Instead, reports Debra Warner, the changes have helped to ruin the lives of many women in the family

'At least babies grow

In *Eastenders* Pauline Fowler recently agreed to take in her Auntie Nelly, discharged from hospital and too weak to live alone, because, after all, 'she is family'. As state facilities are run down, many people are left feeling that they ought to look after their own. But while we can laugh at the trials of Pauline and her interfering aunt, the reality for most people caring for sick relatives is no joke.

Sue's ailing mother came to live with her three years ago after a series of falls left her too weak to cope on her own. Sue works in the evenings and her day is spent cleaning up after her husband and two teenage sons, and caring for her mother, now bedridden and incontinent. Before going out to work she cooks the evening meal and feeds her mother, and when she gets in she often has to change her mother's sheets before going to bed. She rarely gets a full night's sleep. 'I thought it was bad enough when the boys were babies, but at least you know that babies are going to grow up. Mum will probably get more dependent on me as she gets older. Sometimes I'm so tired I feel like telling her to get out of the bed and let me climb in and get some sleep.'

Informal carers

The lives of women like Sue were held up as an example in a February debate in the House of Lords, held to mark the International Year of the Family. Amid the many warnings about family breakdown, Lord Bishop of Oxford reminded his peers that 'not all is gloom. There are 6m informal carers in Britain—people responsible for the disabled and the elderly—of whom 43 per cent are in paid employment'. This, according to their lordships, is evidence that the family is alive and well.

But caring for a sick relative at home while doing a full-time job

is a far cry from most people's ideal of family life. Mary, whose husband suffers from multiple sclerosis, works full time as a secretary but caring for John is becoming increasingly demanding as his condition deteriorates. She finds herself doing two full-time jobs. 'I can't afford to give up work—how would we pay the mortgage? We owed a lot of money when John had to stop work and what I earn isn't enough as it is.'

Left to cope

In the morning, Mary washes and dresses her husband before lifting him out of bed into his wheelchair. At the end of the day, she lifts him back into bed. In between, she goes to work, does the housework and nurses John during his frequent 'bad patches'. 'After all the years we've paid National Insurance, I feel bitter that we've just been left to cope. I'm not a nurse and sometimes I worry whether I'm doing the right thing for him.'

The community care reforms which came into force in April last year introduced 'needs assessment', meaning in effect that many services are now means-tested. Free home care provided by social services dropped by a third on the introduction of the reforms, according to a survey by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, and in many areas the charges made for services have increased substantially. As a result, elderly people have become more dependent on grown-up children to care for them.

These days a weekend trip to visit elderly parents is less of a social call than a second job. For Theresa Dunne, the weekend trips to her in-laws mean doing the housework and shopping which the elderly couple are too frail to do themselves. 'I'm very fond of them, really. But they can be very demanding—they forget that I've got my own home to run as well.' While

Tory peers extol the virtues of the close-knit family, moving away from relatives is not an option for families like the Dunnes. Instead, for Theresa and millions of women like her, the demands of caring for the elderly are added to the responsibilities of the household chores and bringing up her children.

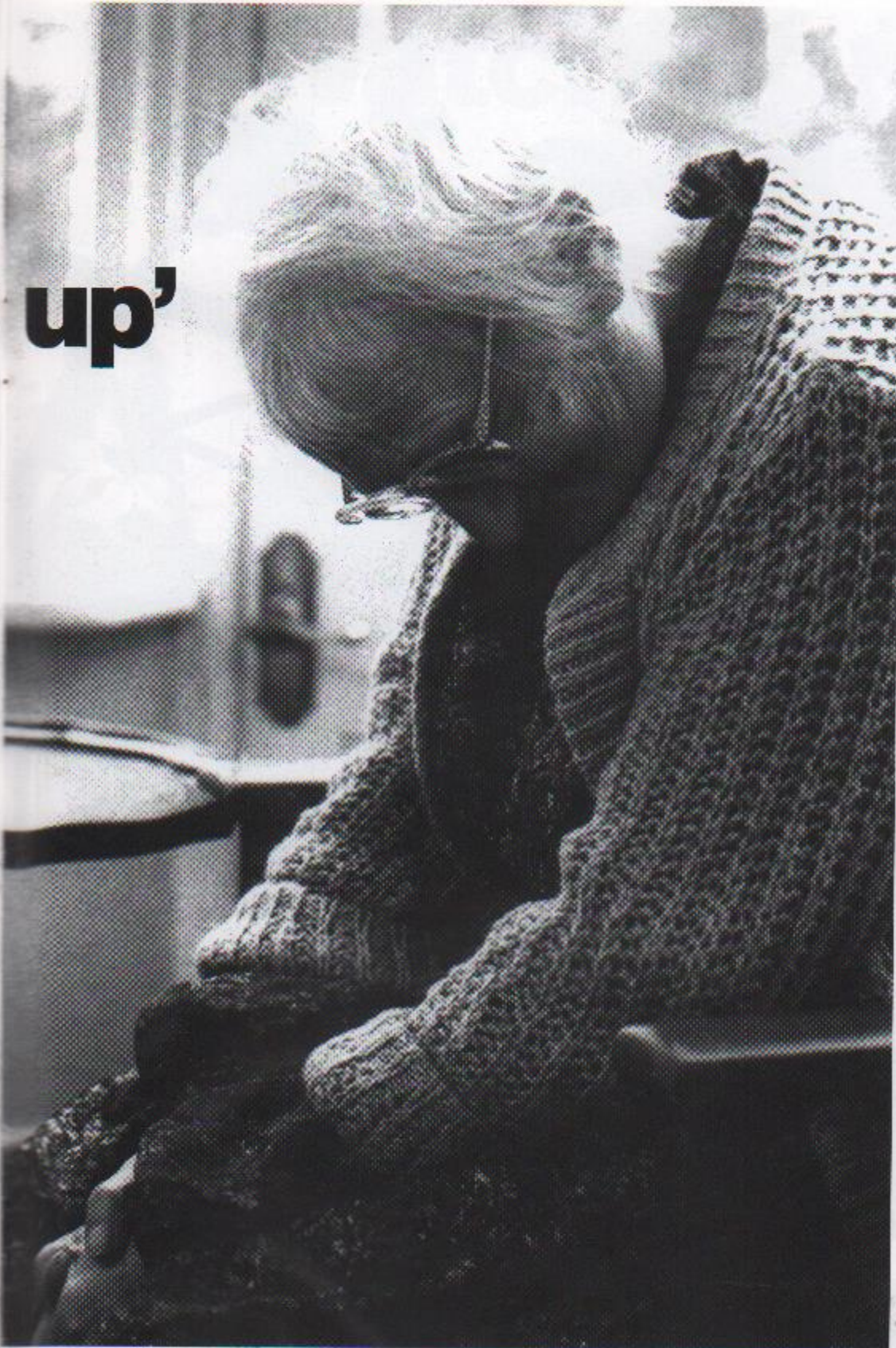
The idea of community care originated in the late sixties as an alternative to the shabby, impersonal geriatric wards that old people faced if they didn't have the means to buy private nursing care. Back then, the idea was to build comfortable sheltered accommodation in the community where the infirm could have access to care without losing their dignity and independence. The 1989 white paper 'Caring for people' took this idea up in outlining the government's proposals: 'The changes are intended to enable people to live as normal a life as possible in their own homes or in a homely environment in the local community.' That idea might have sounded fair enough; the reality has been very different.

Cost of care

At the same time as the community care proposals were introduced, local authorities were also charged with reducing costs. As a result many residential homes have now been closed or tendered out to the private sector. Places in these homes are means-tested, so the elderly or their families are often expected to contribute towards the cost of care. A February 1994 report by the health ombudsman noted that relatives have been put under duress to pay up to £120 per week for nursing homes.

An NOP survey shows 'a huge gulf between what the public expects—cradle-to-the-grave healthcare—and what the state will deliver. Remarkably few people (18 per cent) expect they will have to pay towards their healthcare

up'



in old age. In reality, three out of five contribute to their residential care costs.' (*Guardian*, 29 March 1994). Many families on moderate incomes find such costs prohibitive, leaving them with little choice but to take in elderly relatives and care for them at home.

For Sue, the pressures of caring for her mother are almost too great. 'There's no time off. When I'm out at

work I worry about her—my husband's a long-distance driver, so he's often not around to keep an eye on her. A few months ago she had a fall and had to go into hospital for two weeks. I felt so guilty because I hadn't been there to prevent it, but the relief of letting someone else look after her was huge. It's awful, but sometimes I wish she'd fall again, just to give me a break.'

The mixture of guilt and

desperation expressed by Sue is not unusual. *Community Care* magazine observed last year that 'the pressure of caring for someone who is confused can be enormous and push the most caring people into thoughts of cruelty that make them feel guilty afterwards' (3 June 1993). According to the Carers National Association, nearly half of carers say they have reached breaking point at some stage.

When community care was originally discussed, it was assumed that it would be provided by the welfare state. Today, it is taken for granted that the care should be provided by the family. What was once proposed as a step forward for carers and their relatives has been twisted so that the burden of care falls on the shoulders of women like Sue. Caring is a full-time job. While professional carers like nurses can go home at the end of the day, for people caring in the home, the job is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without pay or holidays.

A new dependant

The vast majority of carers in this country are women, many of whom have spent much of their adult lives bringing up and caring for children. Just at the stage when they can look forward to their children leaving home, giving them a bit of time for themselves, they find they are burdened with a new dependant, and one who is not going to grow up.

The community care reforms were promoted as improving the quality of life for people in need of care. But the relentless physical labour and emotional strain of caring etched on the faces of Sue, Mary and Theresa shows that the quality of their lives has been immeasurably reduced. Lord Bishop of Oxford may celebrate their lives as a sign of a caring society. But the reality of community care is that society cares less, leaving these women with little to celebrate. ●



Electronic EARS

Alongside truancy watch, the Department for Education (DfE) has also announced that 'experimental electronic registration facilities will be established'.

One such scheme for tagging schoolchildren is the schools attendance monitoring system produced by Dorset-based Breakthrough Computer Systems. Pupils carry an ID card containing information such as name, address, and parents' employment, marital and national status. Registration is by 'swiping' the card in and out of lessons. The cost of such equipment prohibits its introduction into every school. Nevertheless it epitomises the culture of surveillance promoted by the Tory government.

Falmer secondary school in Brighton has been chosen to pilot another system, called EARS (electronic attendance registration

Watching the defectives

Under its new truancy watch scheme, the government wants to enlist the community in a campaign against 'problem pupils' and their parents. Since when, ask Andrew Calcutt and Jennie Bristow, was missing school a crime against society?

I am very concerned about the link between truancy, poor academic performance and crime.' In February 1994 education secretary John Patten called a press conference to introduce 'a £14m boost to truancy watch and other schemes designed to help the wider community fight truancy'.

The Patten package comprises 86 schemes across England. Most are modelled on the 1993 Staffordshire pilot project which involved Stoke-on-Trent shopkeepers reporting suspected truants to police and education officers. Similarly the education and welfare service in Barnsley will 'liaise with local police'. In Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, 'patrols will be mounted by education welfare officers and police beat officers'. As part of a joint police-council operation, Coventry schools will be encouraged

to develop a 'pass' system for pupils permitted to go off-site.

In the London Borough of Haringey, truancy watch involves 'a partnership between the police, local businesses and all council services'. Linked to 'police and the business community', the Cleveland scheme will 'explore' video surveillance. In South Tyneside, education officers will 'shadow' community police. In Sandwell, Birmingham, environmental health officers will work alongside police and education officials. Big stores in Oxford city centre are collaborating with private security companies and local police to catch wandering schoolchildren.

All truancy watch schemes employ a 'multi-agency approach', with teachers, shop assistants, security staff and council officials working together, usually under the leadership

of the police, who will coordinate the various agencies involved.

As well as tracking absentee pupils, truancy watch will monitor their parents. 'Raising parental awareness' is a feature of most schemes. 'Parents face truancy blitz', warned the *London Evening Standard* (1 February 1994). 'Parents will have to provide detailed notes on why their children have missed school, under tough new government rules.' Junior education minister Eric Forth spelled out the standards which the government expects. Parents, he said, 'must play their part in getting their children to school on time and in a condition to learn....Parents should also impress upon their children the need to observe schools' code of conduct and reinforce this through discipline in the home'.

Under other government measures, parents who fail to discipline their children will themselves run the risk of being disciplined by the authorities. Last year's revision of the Education Act (1944) increased the scope for prosecuting the parents of truants. At the national Crime and the Family conference convened by the Family Studies Policy Centre in February 1994, Home Secretary Michael Howard announced an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which will mean parents being bound over to the sum of £1000 'to ensure that a child under 16 complies with a community sentence imposed upon him'.

The Home Secretary is certainly living up to his job-title. Except in wartime, no British minister has ever accrued so much power over the home life of the general population. With a chain of command that stretches from the Home Office and Department for Education, through the police and local authorities to teachers, the government is seeking all sorts of ways to lay down the law on how parents should bring up their children. Truancy watch is just part of the campaign of intrusion.

Prompted by the announcement of nationwide truancy watch, obliging journalists gave the impression that the country's shopping malls are plagued

system). EARS makes it easier for the local education authority to access information such as who is absent from school, who the worst truants are, who their friends are, and what sort of work their parents do.

Up to now, parents of absentee children could expect a phone call 90 minutes or so after their absence has been noted. With EARS, welfare officers and police can be notified straight away and sent round to do some investigative work.

Instead of manual registration and the chore of totalling up attendance figures for an ever-increasing number of pupils, teachers are provided with portable keypads linked to a central computer. A declared aim of the exercise is to 'simplify the routine administration tasks which teachers have to undertake'.

Teachers currently snowed under by the demands of the national curriculum and staff shortages are unlikely to be convinced that the authorities' motive is to ease their workload. The real motivation for schemes such as EARS is very different.

It is no coincidence that Falmer school is the guinea-pig for EARS. Situated in one of the most depressed areas of Brighton, the school has a bad reputation. In the local league table of truancy rates, it came second from bottom. The school is reputed to be a breeding ground for bullies and criminals. Local opinion holds that headmaster John Williams was brought in under specific instructions to clean up Falmer's image.

Everybody agrees that Falmer is a 'problem school'. But EARS and the publicity surrounding its introduction are helping ►



by a fast-growing epidemic of truants, all of whom are assumed to be involved in illicit activities ranging from petty larceny to infanticide. 'They share a Coke, a cigarette and some chips', observed the *Sun*, 'they shoplift, they steal from cars, they snatch purses...the two 10-year old boys who murdered toddler James Bulger in Liverpool

'Did anyone ever know a boy who begged his father to buy him a desk?'

were playing truant'.

If there was a causal connection between bunking off school and battering toddlers to death, every street in Britain would have its own James Bulger. This is not the case. While Bulger's death was highly exceptional, truancy is a routine fact of school life. This has been the case for generations.

Edwardian board schools were known as 'bored schools', whose pupils used all sorts of ruses to escape the tedium of lessons. In fishing ports it was traditional for adolescent boys to go 'pleasuring'—helping out on the family boat for weeks at a time. At the other end of the social scale, in Frank Richards' Billy Bunter stories, 'the fat owl of the Remove' was always trying to 'cut' Mr Quelch's Latin lessons in order to cash a postal order and gorge himself on tuck. In those far-off days opinion-formers and educationalists came close to regarding truancy as welcome proof of youthful high spirits:

'According to public opinion in Boydom, to sit for hours at a desk indoors is a wretched waste of time and daylight. Did anyone ever know a boy—a normal healthy boy, who begged his father to buy him a desk?...Certainly not. A boy is not a desk animal. He is not a sitting-down animal....He is a *boy*—God bless him—full to the brim of fun and fight and hunger and daring and mischief and noise and observation and excitement. If he is not, he is abnormal.' (H Casson,

Teacher's World, December 1918, quoted in G Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, p45).

Has there been a steep rise in the incidence of truancy? There has certainly been a huge expansion in the official definition of a 'truant'. The term is now used to include any pupil who goes AWOL for a single school lesson.

Recent press reporting of truancy has been as inflated as the new definition. The *Sunday Telegraph* featured the Amy Johnson comprehensive in Hull: 'up to one third of pupils in the final year were absent as their leaving date drew near'. But pupils have always been unofficially advised to stay away from school after taking their last external exam. The *Sun* cited Kensington and Chelsea as the borough with the worst truancy rate: in 1992, approximately 46 per cent of pupils skipped school for one or more half days. By the same reckoning, more than half of pupils were so conscientious that they didn't skive off even for a morning. Given that so many lessons are under-resourced and so few jobs are available to school-leavers, what's truly remarkable is that the vast majority of students motivate themselves to turn up to school on such a regular basis.

Perceived irrelevance

In 1992 the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned a large-scale survey from the University of North London truancy unit. The results do not tally with the reports of marauding gangs of truanting young criminals. Cutting particular lessons while staying in the school building is the most frequent form of truanting. Many truants cited dislike of particular teachers or specific lessons, largely on grounds of 'perceived irrelevance'. Nor is truanting necessarily the precursor to a lifetime of wilful ignorance and anti-social savagery. Most truants liked or at least tolerated school. Even more significantly, nearly 60 per cent of those branded as truants planned to continue their education after year 11 (aged 15-16), either at school or college.

A senior truancy researcher is dismissive of truancy watch: 'It will pick up a few kids, but as soon as they know a shopping centre has a truancy watch they won't go there. Everyone's against it. The only people for it are the ones who are going to get some money.'

Truancy watch has been developed and promoted by the DfE in line with the government's general emphasis on law and order, discipline and parental responsibility. In the political climate of the nineties, the spotlight is turned on to the 'crime' of truancy, and away from the real problems facing the schools—such as staff cuts, under-resourced classrooms, poor quality education and the chronic lack of jobs for school-leavers. The £14m cost of the new truancy schemes is chickenfeed compared to the billions required to renovate school buildings and resource the curriculum properly. Raising the spectre of truancy is a cheap stunt by a beleaguered government which is desperate to improve its reputation in the sphere of education.

Crusade

Introducing truancy watch, Patten declared 'the common thread running through these excellent initiatives is a recognition that ordinary people have their part to play'. A DfE circular noted that 'each scheme is unique but all seek to promote community involvement in tackling the problem of truancy'. Not content with inventing a new crime, the education secretary wants to enlist 'ordinary people' in a crusade against it.

The DfE's moral mission against truancy goes much further than telling your next door neighbours that their kids have been wagging it. Squealing to the authorities is the ethos of truancy watch. 'The wider community' is being called upon to act as the eyes and ears of the police. It is another step towards a repressive society in which the respectable classes are invited to form networks of proxy police, spying on their neighbours in case they or their children have a lie-in on Monday morning.

◀ to redefine the nature of the problem. The impression is formed that the problem with Falmer is its errant pupils and their irresponsible parents. Once this has been established, not a word need be said about deteriorating buildings, clapped-out equipment, over-full classes or under-staffing.

The propaganda offensive doesn't stop there. Having established that the problems of society are created by parents who don't know how to bring up their children, the authorities are in a position to redefine the purpose of schooling, from an emphasis on learning to a preoccupation with discipline.

In an interview with Radio Sussex and Surrey, Falmer's headmaster did not mention education once. School, he said,

is about 'producing good attendance patterns. Indeed, producing good habits in children of all sorts'. Pupils may have less opportunity to learn history or science, but the DfE is determined to ensure that they at least get into the 'good habit' of knocking down to authority.

The Schools Campaign Against Militarism (SCAM) in Brighton recently launched a campaign against electronic tagging in schools. To find out more, phone Jennie Bristow on (071) 278 9908, or write to SCAM, c/o The Angle Gallery, 4 Dakota Buildings, James Street, St Paul's Square, Birmingham B3 1SD.



You're fired please/thank you

America still leads the world in counselling services, with Artists Anonymous now offering help to those who find the burden of creativity too much to bear. In Britain we pride ourselves on our scepticism, and yet the authorities are happy to introduce their own versions under the guise of common sense and common decency. So, while the Home Secretary expounds upon his vision of surveillance cameras in every housing estate (and, by the way, didn't the Tories used to warn us *ad nauseam* about 1984?), Robert Key, minister for roads and traffic has decided that road signs appear too authoritarian, as they order us to 'keep left', etc. He plans to improve things by adding the word 'please'. This brings to mind the Home Office's plans to issue police with a 'friendly looking' truncheon, of which no more has been heard.

Judges are now attending race awareness seminars, so they can pass sentence on black people without giving offence with phrases such as 'you people' or 'the way we do things in this country'. So that's all right then. Wandsworth prison is seeking to improve its 'negative' image by introducing an 'anger room' where prisoners can shout and scream without bothering anybody. So no change there, to borrow a phrase.

And let nobody say that Barclays Bank doesn't care about its workforce. After sacking 400 staff on the spot (including a man who had been granted a mortgage by them the week before), Barclays personnel director John Cotton said: 'We are doing our best to ensure that we deal with the staff in as sympathetic and sensitive a manner as possible. Those affected by redundancy will have two opportunities to appeal and we have a 24-hour helpline for staff to talk to independent counsellors about their situation.'

I like the bit about those 'affected by redundancy', which, like Aids or RSI, is clearly something nasty that's going around at the moment, and has nothing at all to do with Barclays. And who exactly are these people expected to appeal to? And how long before this 24-hour counselling is available on-screen at cashpoints? Perhaps a small slip can be dispensed with a cheerful think-positive message for those 'without sufficient funds', along the lines of those fortune-telling machines at the seaside. I see an opening there for someone keen to make a splash in the world of personnel management.

The Torvill and Dean controversy rumbles on. An angst ridden *vox pop* of various top people revealed how deeply the tragedy was felt. Belinda Edwards of *Harpers and Queen* thought it was 'grossly unfair': 'I found it very confusing because the crowd was elated and I thought they'd won; I felt lost and abandoned when I realised they hadn't. I had to have a bath to recover, I couldn't even watch the medal ceremony.'

Personally, I was surprised how many people were genuinely shocked and upset by the whole business—particularly women who normally show no interest in sport of any kind. Ice skating is often thought of as a women's sport because it is arty and graceful, but that doesn't explain the massive TV audience. Most viewers had no real interest in skating, and probably had no idea whether the Russians were

better or not—what interested them was the scoring process. That's why the edited highlights on TV showed a few minutes of skating and then long lingering shots of the competitors watching the scores come up. In this respect skating is no different from the Eurovision Song Contest, when people place bets and switch on for the scoring at the end.

When a Brit is in with a chance, the country will go small-bore rifle mad, clay pigeon crazy, even, God help us, rugby barmy. The excitement about Torvill and Dean was simply an explosion of bottled-up emotion from thousands of women who have had nobody to cheer since Super Sue Barker hung up her racket and T&D went professional. Unlike English men, they do not have the experience of decades of sporting humiliation in football and cricket, and the shock was too much for them. I hope Belinda has found a suitable counsellor.

Whenever our athletes get beaten in the old days, there was always dark talk of steroids and beta-blockers, and how those East European women had to shave more than their legs. Now that the British squad is regularly hit by drug scandals we've decided to change our complaint. I quote from the *Sunday Times* a disapproving description of 'Ma's female army'—the Chinese women runners who have been trashing world records since they burst on to the scene last summer. Ma Junren is referred to as 'a brute of an ex-soldier' and this is what he gets up to.

'A normal day at Ma's Chengong camp begins with an early morning run after which athletes shower and eat a specially prepared breakfast. At 9am they study for three hours, learning English and mathematics. Lunch is at midday and from 1pm to 3pm they sleep. Afterwards training resumes with another run. Ma sets the pace by driving ahead of them in an old motorcycle and sidecar. Dinner is at 6pm, after which recreation is allowed, including physiotherapy and acupuncture. At 9pm the athletes go to bed.'

Sounds familiar? Substitute bullying for acupuncture, and you've got a fair description of an English public school circa *Chariots of Fire*. I suggest the Boarding School Survivors counsellors get out there sharpish.

And talking of short memories, I notice that in the hysteria about the England v Germany football match and the invitation to German veterans to join in the VE Day celebrations, little has been said about the time real Nazis marched in London, with the full support of the British establishment. In April 1936 Nazi officers, Grenadier Guards and prime minister Neville Chamberlain gave the fascist salute as the coffin of German ambassador Baron von Hoesch was taken from the Mall to Victoria station. The following year a delegation of Hitler Youth was invited to my old school on an exchange visit. I hardly need add that everything was done in the very best of taste.

The smash-hit French film of *Germinal* swaps Zola's anger and realism for sentiment and national nostalgia, argues Alan Harding

At a cost of more than 160m francs, *Germinal* (directed by Claude Berri and starring Renaud, Gerard Depardieu and Miou-Miou) is the most costly French production ever mounted. The investment has paid off, not only with a warm critical reception, but with a staggering five million plus paying at the box office in France.

Watching the film of Emile Zola's book about nineteenth-century French miners, I couldn't endorse the enthusiasm. Depardieu as the miner Maheu turns in a respectable performance of working class honesty and of the world being a little too complicated for a simple man to comprehend. Miou-Miou invests his wife Maheude with the requisite inner strength to hold the family together in adversity—the Mother Courage of the mines. And Renaud brings an intensity to the protagonist Etienne Lantier without quite ever suggesting the moodiness and sense of being close to the edge of self-destruction which was so important for Zola.

The net result is a worthy film rather than a good one. The secret of its success lies not in the film itself, but in what Berri's work means for a French audience to whom yesterday looks better than today.

Berri's most famous films, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources*, evoke a rural France which has gone, if it ever existed. Despite all the attention Berri paid to the hardship and toil of peasant life in Provence, these films were essentially a sentimental journey into the past. In *Uranus*, Berri rewrites the history of the wartime Resistance and the Nazi collaborators in France, to emphasise the theme of national reconciliation. In *Germinal* he is again looking to history and in the most nostalgic way of all—not to settle accounts with the past, but to create myths that can help deal with an uncertain present.

Here is Berri's stated reason for making *Germinal*:

'I was born on the Faubourg-Saint Denis, in a working class neighbourhood of Paris. [My father] went through the Popular Front. He must have dreamed of a "better world", before becoming disillusioned. After the war, he voted Communist...

'I have lived a life which is different from my father's. In material terms, I have gone over to "the other side" but I believe that my heart still beats in time with his.

I made *Germinal* for my father. When I think about *Germinal*, I am on my father's side, at the side of the miners as they scream for hunger. I believe that, in another life, I could have been, I would have liked to be, Etienne Lantier.'

Berri's use of *Germinal* as a vehicle for sentimental nostalgia is far removed from the message of Zola's novel. *Germinal* the book is the story of a defeated miners' strike in the grinding poverty of the Lille coalfield in the dying years of the Second Empire. It is also the story of the history of working class organisation and dawning consciousness. It is a story of bitter class hatred, of solidarity and human weakness.

While formally sticking to the story, Berri has made a film about reconciliation rather than conflict. It has hit a nerve with millions of French people because, at a time when they feel they are living in a divided and directionless society, the film creates a golden age when Frenchmen and women knew who they were and lived by simple values. The world of the striking miners is a France which, because it is gone and no longer a threat to anybody, can be mourned over and regretted. The nearest example I can think of in Britain is the way that those who condemned the militant resistance of the 1984-85 miners' strike have wept over the banners and the brass bands as pits have closed during the past 18 months.

Germinal is the story of a country and a generation which is being ground into the dust by bulldozers, and reduced to ashes. It's a period which is ending, but which still exists', says actor Renaud, in the most perceptive comment on what *Germinal* represents in contemporary French society. Because the film invokes the past in order to salve the confusion of the present, it is a conservative project. The language of class conflict and fighting to win is subordinated to talk of the miners' dignity in defeat: 'The miner has something inside him which comes from getting energy to power the earth and he still has it, even after the mines are closed. It's his pride.' (Depardieu)

As a result, *Germinal* the film is alien both to the political and aesthetic spirit of the author. Zola suffered trial and exile for 'J'Accuse', his famous open letter to the president of the republic in defence of the army officer Dreyfus, victim of an anti-Semitic witch-hunt. 'J'Accuse' embodies the division in French society which Berri obscures. Moreover, while

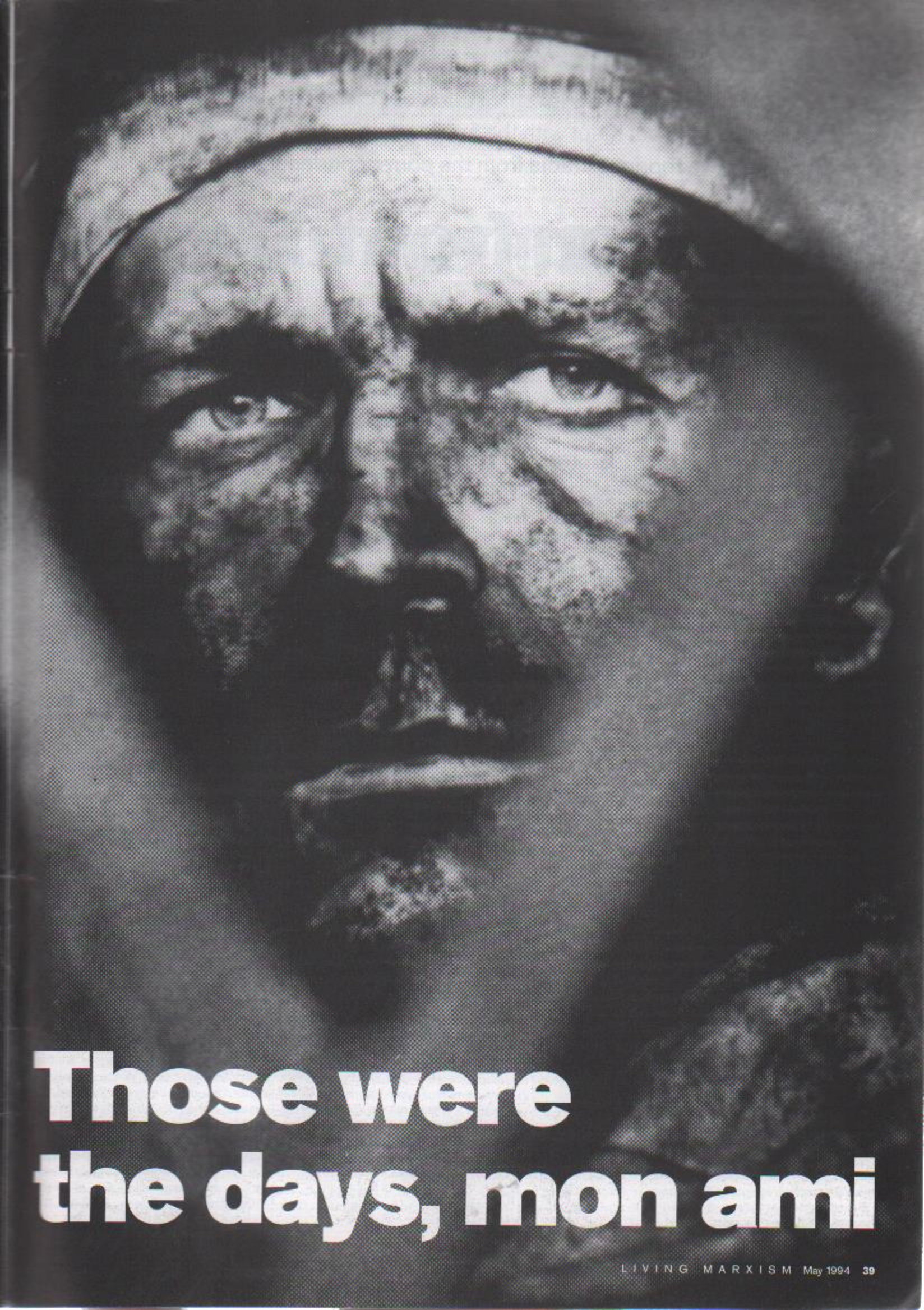
Zola places the miners' struggle in the context of its relations with Karl Marx's emerging International Working Men's Association, for Berri this is all but absent, leaving the struggle as a spontaneous and arbitrary French affair.

More damning is that the film's rosy-hued nostalgia departs completely from Zola's naturalism. Zola believed the novel to be a scientific act of observation. In *Germinal* he gives us the brutalisation of sexual relations, deformity, ill-health and the pallor of a life below earth sustained by potatoes. It is relentless and it is not pretty. In Berri's film a June feast day spent in the pub is not sawdust and spittle, but more like the French equivalent of Merchant Ivory doing EM Forster. In Berri, lovers run through corn fields with white teeth flashing. In Zola, grimy and hungry people hump in the corn and everywhere else.

In emphasising the dignity of defeat and the preservation of a vanished world, Berri (although he ends his film with them) has lost the sense of the combative and forward-looking words with which Zola concludes his novel.

'Men were springing up, a black avenging host was slowly germinating in the furrows, thrusting upwards for the harvests of future ages. And very soon their germination would crack the earth asunder.'

Germinal opens in London on 6 May



**Those were
the days, mon ami**

The March 1994 issue of *Living Marxism* carried an article entitled 'Kill The Bill' by Andrew Calcutt. It did not meet with the approval of Thames Television Ltd, makers of *The Bill*. Here we reprint extracts from the correspondence which ensued

A caution from *The Bill*

To: Mick Hume

editor of *Living Marxism*

From: John FitzGerald

legal adviser, *The Bill*

Mr Michael Chapman, the executive producer of Thames Television's programme *The Bill*, has asked me to bring to your attention the article headed 'Kill The Bill' by Andrew Calcutt.

Mr Chapman informs me that he has not given an interview to your magazine and has never spoken to the journalist Andrew Calcutt. The passage in the article states: 'producer Michael Chapman is proud of the new moral tone of *The Bill*: "viewers can watch the police, as represented by *The Bill*, and have the same warm feelings as they had to the police in the era of *Dixon of Dock Green*".' In fact, he has never compared *The Bill* in such terms to the BBC's television series *Dixon of Dock Green*.

In these circumstances I must ask for your undertaking to publish an agreed correction in the next issue of the magazine. To resolve the matter would you kindly let me have a copy of the text of your statement so that it can be approved by Mr Chapman. Meanwhile all rights are reserved.

To: John FitzGerald

From: Andrew Calcutt

The article in question did not purport to be an interview with Michael Chapman or any other representative of *The Bill*. It was an opinion piece which incorporated material from a wide range of published sources.

The quote attributed to Michael Chapman was taken from an article by Brian James, published in the *Daily Mail* on 13 May 1992*. In view of this, it seems there is no need for *Living Marxism* to publish a correction.

If Michael Chapman would like to take issue with my assessment of *The Bill*, he is welcome to express his opinion in the letters page of *Living Marxism*.

*In the *Daily Mail* of 13 May 1992, Michael Chapman is quoted as follows:

'There is no point trying to be a PR exercise. We don't moralise, but if a

police character is seen as less than scrupulous, then others are seen to be aware of that, and respond.

'Viewers can watch the police, as represented by *The Bill*, and have the same warm feelings as they had to the police in the era of *Dixon of Dock Green*. A different sort of policeman, of course. But these are different times.

'Alienation between public and police springs from forgetting that police are citizens in uniform. Reminding them is perhaps what we do best.'

To: Mick Hume

From: John FitzGerald

I do not agree with the view expressed by Mr Calcutt in the second paragraph of his letter. However, in order to deal with this complaint in an amicable manner, Mr Chapman agrees to your suggestion and submits the enclosed letter to be published, without editorial comment, in the next issue of *Living Marxism*.

I would be grateful, in due course, to receive a copy of the magazine containing Mr Chapman's letter.

Dear Sir

In a recent issue of *Living Marxism* the inescapable impression is given that I had been interviewed by Andrew Calcutt. I am reported as being 'proud of the new moral tone of *The Bill*'. I was not interviewed by Mr Calcutt nor anyone from *Living Marxism*, and did not utter these words; neither can they be accurately translated from the interview with the *Daily Mail* I gave in 1992. If Commander Marnoch's comments were attributed to an interview with the *Guardian*, then it should have been made equally clear my verbatim remarks were also from an interview elsewhere. Moreover, if I am to be quoted, it should not be in a form truncated to the point of distortion, which was the case in Andrew Calcutt's piece.

Would you please publish this letter by way of correction.

Yours faithfully
Michael Chapman

To: John FitzGerald

From: Andrew Calcutt

Mick Hume has agreed to print Michael Chapman's letter in the May issue of *Living Marxism*. In the interests of accuracy, however, I would ask you to take note of the following points.

In an opinion piece such as 'Kill The Bill' it is accepted journalistic practice to quote from statements which have already been published and have therefore entered the public domain, without necessarily crediting all of the original sources.

Having first categorically denied comparing the public perception of *The Bill* with that of *Dixon of Dock Green*, Michael Chapman now seems to concede that he did do so, and his criticism has changed tack. He now takes exception to my suggestion that he is 'proud of the new moral tone of *The Bill*'. Does he mean that he is ashamed of *The Bill*, or that the programme has no moral tone?

In his letter, Mr Chapman insists he 'did not utter these words; neither can they be accurately translated from the interview with the *Daily Mail* I gave in 1992'. But 'these words' are not presented as a quote from Michael Chapman; they are my reading of the tone of the programme and my interpretation of his published statements about it. Mr Chapman surely does not mean to curtail my interpretation simply because it fails to tally with his own.

On two occasions Michael Chapman has wrongly accused me of poor journalism. Accusations such as these are an inevitable aspect of critical debate, and I am not unduly worried by them. A matter of more concern, however, is the picture of policing which emerges three times a week from the studios of *The Bill*.

I suggest Mr Chapman should forget the technical quibbles, and address himself to the real question: is *The Bill* an accurate portrayal of policing? In 'Kill The Bill' I likened it to a 'police PR video'. If Mr Chapman believes otherwise, he should come forward and defend his programme.

I am pleased to tell you that the May issue of *Living Marxism* carrying Mr Chapman's letter is available from good newsagents, price £2, or direct from Junius Publications, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX (£2.80 inc p&p).



Wogan's wages of sin

Why should you be good? All moral philosophies, all theories of state and most theologies take their cue from this question. Now Wogan has the answer. His new show *Do the Right Thing* adopts a democratic and dialectical approach to personal ethics. The show takes the form of a short drama in which the protagonists' moral decisions are debated by a studio audience. The drama has two possible endings and the audience at home gets to vote on which one gets shown. The studio is set up like Raphael's 'School of Athens', with the audience lounging around on the steps of a little amphitheatre, one side of which is for the Yes votes, the other for the Nos. A little spice is added by a panel of pundits who are known sinners. We've had David Mellor, for instance, though not in his Chelsea strip.

There is an interesting moral tension between the studio audience and the audience at home. The studio audience feels itself involved in the debate and usually votes for rectitude. The viewers at home, on the other hand, are stuck in on a Saturday night with nothing to do but watch Wogan. They are not going to settle for someone following the path of Truth and finding inner peace. They invariably vote for self-destruction and disaster.

The show has been billed as a kind of primetime *Moral Maze* but this is unfair. The *Moral Maze* addresses itself to policy issues, such as should we allow vivisection or lower the age of homosexual consent. Wogan's moral teasers are more basic—is it alright to shag your step-daughter, for instance, was one. The *Moral Maze* flatters its listeners. The 'we' of its questions is axiomatic. It implies that 'we' the Radio Four listeners are included in the policy-making process. In fact, nobody gives two hoots what I think about the age of consent. Wogan's questions do at least have a kind of urgency.

The moral structure the programme promotes is a very primitive one: if you do wrong you will suffer the consequences, what goes around comes around. So one man who found a bag of money and kept it, ended up being wanted for murder. The trouble with this point of view is that it is patently not the case. We hardly ever suffer the consequences of our sins. On the contrary, we often do rather well out of them, a fact that is brought home all too clearly by the sight of the errant Mellor grinning chummily at the camera from his cushy spec on Wogan's podium.

Historically speaking, this disheartening fact led to the invention of theology, to the idea of post-dated punishment. You may not suffer now, but wait until you die, Smart Alec. This has a classical simplicity and I can't help thinking that *Do the Right Thing* would be much improved if it took it on board. It would be fun to see the floor open up and the actors being consumed in eternal flames, just every now and then. In Christian morality, condoning, contemplating or promoting evil is just as bad as perpetrating it, so if the audience voted incorrectly, they would have to go up in smoke too, which would improve my Saturday evenings immeasurably.

The collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of the modern nation state weakened this form of moral compulsion. The new

imperative was not the health of the soul, but the good of the state. You should behave well in order to help preserve the peace and prosperity of the nation. At its crudest, this argument comes out as 'what would it be like if we all did this?'. Again, I think Wogan might think about making use of this apocalyptic approach. We could have a little drama about a state which had collapsed as a result of the mass-debauching of step-children. Or one in which everyone was so busy grassing up their best friends that nobody had time to do anything else.

Modern bourgeois morality has—surprisingly—reinstated simple causality, though in an epic form, with the environment rather than the deity as the instrument of nemesis. The field of play of this new ethics is neither the bedroom nor the corridors of power, but the supermarket. Here you are faced with a million garish temptations. Make the wrong choice and you unleash destruction upon the world. As Rita Fairclough once memorably put it, 'if I lacquer my hair, ice caps'll melt and next thing you know, Back Rosamund Street is crawling with homeless polar bears'.

The odd thing about this morality is that, although it is practically hegemonic in middle class thinking, it has never translated itself into policy. Nobody has ever made trips to the bottle bank compulsory but who now would ever stick a bottle in the bin? The individual rather than the state is now the moral actor. Indeed politics itself has now become less concerned with policy and more concerned with the moral fitness of politicians. The morality of the arms trade is never questioned, only that of the arms trader.

The bourgeois individual sees itself as exemplary. The world would be a better place if only everyone bought Dolphin-friendly, boycotted Nestlé, recycled their plastic bags and generally behaved more like me. On one level, this puts a tremendous strain on the average Tesco shopper. A walk down the tinned goods aisle is more or less equivalent to the Dark Night of the Soul. On the other hand, it is tremendously self-aggrandising. The consumer has only to reach out for a packet of Radion and the ocean shudders to its unplumbed depths. Buy a jar of Nescafé and thousands die, as if the world were an intricate web of relationships with the Western consumer as the spider in the middle. The spider's least movement reverberates through the whole web.

It is fashionable to sneer at this world picture, to suggest that the bourgeoisie, excluded from real power, tries to make its shopping trips significant; to point out that though they will agonise forever over which brand of tuna to buy, they won't campaign for an integrated transport policy, or an end to the asset-stripping of the rest of the world by the high street banks. But you shouldn't really laugh because this time it's true. The Western consumer really is like a big fat all-devouring spider. When you buy Nescafé, people really do die. It would be really good to see a *Do the Right Thing* that reflected this. A shopper stops to fill up with petrol and buy a Snicker and the whole Western world is immediately overwhelmed by the defrauded growers of cocoa, dragging discounted superguns and remaindered nuclear personnel mines behind them. Now that is entertainment. ●

Reach out for a packet of Radion and the ocean shudders

James Heartfield on Prince Charles' architecture magazine

In the television drama *To Play the King*, a Machiavellian, right-wing prime minister, Francis Urquhart, is challenged by a well-meaning but ineffectual king with strangled vowels—a bit like Prince Charles, sponsor of the new architecture magazine *Perspectives*. The TV king protests at the subordination of everything decent about his kingdom to the untrammelled forces of free-market selfishness. In *Perspectives*, the real Prince sings a similar tune:

'I mind very much that the world we are creating for our children should be less ugly and less ecologically damaged than the world which my generation inherited.'

In fact it is just as well that the Tory ministers who talk so warmly of Charles' little venture haven't read *Perspectives* too closely, with its 'Power to the people', 'Fighting market forces' and 'Insensitive Western investors' headlines.

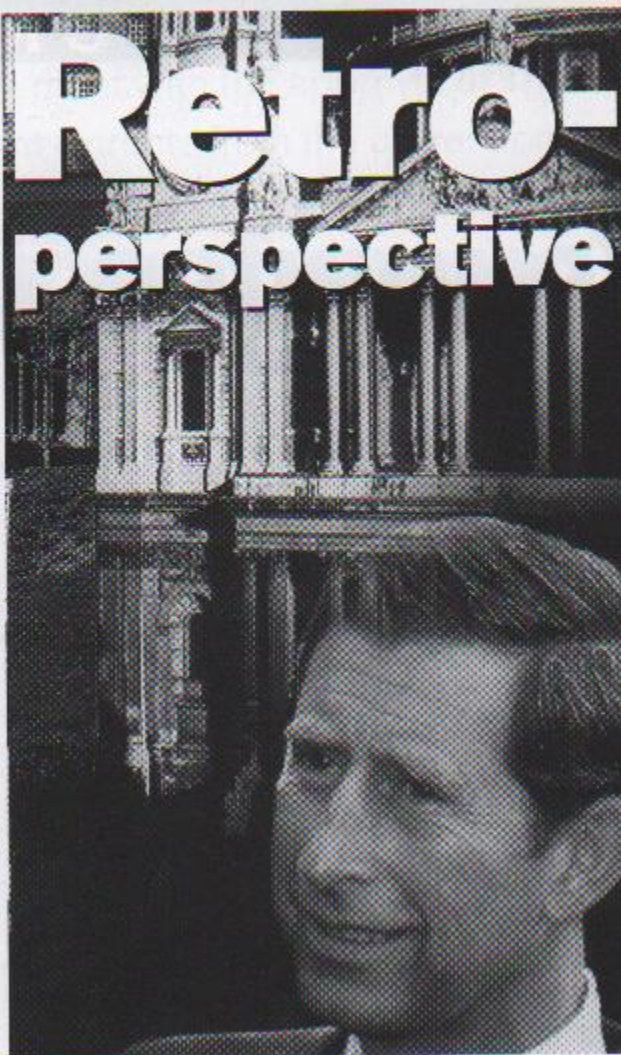
But unlike *To Play the King*, Charles won't be done over by the scheming prime minister for daring to speak out against the market. Not just because John Major is no Francis Urquhart, but because this is a safely cultural protest against market forces, not a political one that could cause the government any trouble.

It is a rural, or rather suburban idyll, in fact, a respite from everything common, in 'Bloomsbury, Bath, Bedford Park and Hampstead Garden Suburb'. (To get the proper metre of that list you have to imagine John Betjeman or John Gielgud reading it.) This is the England of warm beer, the sound of leather on willow and schoolmistresses cycling home at dusk, of John Major's fetishistic daydreams.

Charles looks forward to the day when 'we can again reflect in our buildings that critical spiritual dimension of our lives together whose social importance has shown down the ages'. 'Never more dramatically', he adds, 'than when this dimension was lost with the coming of the industrial revolution'. So that's where we lost our way. It's just as well British industry is being shut down then.

The hook on which Charles' rural idyll hangs is the campaign against the modernist architectural movement launched by Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. The modernists loved the new materials, like concrete and steel, and loathed the twidly decorations Victorians stuck on the fronts of their houses. Years ago, Le Corbusier designed 'Machines for living' in vast cityscapes, laid out in grand isometric perspective.

Le Corbusier's motivations were, if



'Nobody understands one': Prince Charles explains his vision of a suburban Britain

they only knew it, quite close to those of the *Perspectives* people. Like the Prince, Le Corbusier was concerned with the dehumanising effect of market forces—the dehumanisation of the worker in the capitalist production process. Seeing that the worker was alienated and so had no stake in the status quo, Le Corbusier wanted to forestall revolution by compensating him with a home that was as well suited to his domestic needs as the factory was to his working life.

Like Le Corbusier, *Perspectives* sees architecture as a constraint upon dehumanisation, but holds modernism to be part of the problem instead of the solution. Christopher Brooker writes 'the Modern Movement had been based—like communism—on a colossal fantasy, a dream which seemed so beguiling, but which in practice could not be realised'. In the 1970s, says Brooker, he was 'so horrified by what we were doing to London, and to the hundreds of thousands of people who had been herded by this mad vision into tower blocks and inhuman, desolate housing estates'. 'Come friendly bombers', wrote Betjeman in the blitz, 'rain upon Slough'.

Tom Wolfe made the argument best in *From Bauhaus to Our House*. There he ridiculed the 'worker housing' schemes of Walter Gropius and their American imitators: 'Here they were called public

housing projects. But somehow workers, intellectually undeveloped as they were managed to avoid... "the projects" [and] headed out instead to the suburbs.' 'The only people left trapped in worker housing in America today', Wolfe added, 'are those who don't work at all'.

The Prince of Wales adopted Wolfe's argument against modernism when he denounced, in the language of the eighteenth century, the 'monstrous carbuncle on the face of an old and dear friend', the proposed modernist extension to the National Gallery. A chill wind blew through the profession as architects complained that the prince's sway was losing them commissions.

Again following Tom Wolfe, the prince's campaign, manifested in the new magazine *Perspectives* and its sponsors, the prince's Institute of Architecture, lobbies for the suburbs against the city, and the small scale against the gargantuan. The fantasy is that if only the workers were back in their little brick terraces everything would be alright. 'Many of today's family problems can be traced back to the social disruption of mass planning in the 1960s', writes Alexandra Artley. 'Neighbourhood structures are built up slowly over generations and in the 1960s we destroyed them.'

Of course it is true that the newer planned estates were imposed with patrician arrogance from above. When the slum dwellers of King's Cross were decanted into the new estate in Somers Town their clothes and furniture were burned and their bodies fumigated in a public ceremony attended by the mayor and other subscribers to the new rebuilding fund. And while it is true that Somers Town today is a bit grim, the slums they cleared were nothing to write home about either. The Victorian equivalents of Alexandra Artley and Christopher Brooker were bemoaning the breakdown of the family way back then as well.

The truth of the matter is that housing is as good as the income the occupants can command and deprivation will never be abolished by town planning, only by an economy planned for everyone's benefit. The housing association flats built in the eighties under local control are already showing signs of the strain of overcrowding because tenants persuaded builders to overlook standards on size in order to keep within budget.

Meanwhile Prince Charles, like some senile delinquent, though hardly deprived, complains 'nobody understands one'. And *Perspectives* bearing the royal stamp, like Prince Michael of Kent's crystalware advertised on America's Larry King show ('I felt cheapened', said Larry), advertises the sort of wrought iron goods that you can buy in the *Mail* or the *Telegraph*, if not *Country Life*. It is the sort of anti-commercial commercialism you would expect from a publisher called Perfect Harmony Limited. ●

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

Adam Eastman explains why anxieties about Islamic fundamentalists say more about the West than the East

The wrath of Islam

Islam and the West, Bernard Lewis, Oxford University Press, £17.50 hbk

Islams and Modernities, Aziz Al-Azmeh, Verso, £35.95 hbk, £11.95 pbk

The Ottomans, Andrew Wheatcroft, Viking, £18.99 hbk

Some to Mecca Turn to Pray, Mervyn Hiskett, Clarendon Press, £12.95 pbk

The Revenge of God, Gilles Kepel, Polity, £39.50 hbk, £11.95 pbk

The 22 defendants—four of whom were convicted in March—currently being held in the United States for the bombing of the World Trade Centre last year would seem to have little in common. They are Palestinians, Jordanians, Sudanese, Iraqis and even two Americans, a Puerto Rican convert to Islam, and a black Muslim from Brooklyn. More mysterious still, nobody has been able to state even a motive of the sort that, as *Newsweek* put it, 'American juries usually understand' (28 February 1994).

In fact the only motive offered is their religion. Being Muslims, they are supposed to be driven by forces quite distinct from and mysterious to the rest of us. Apparently Islam dictates an implacable hostility to all things Western and, nurtured by centuries of resentment, these Muslims are out to even the score. The prosecution in the World Trade Centre trials admits that its case is at best an inference from circumstantial evidence. But no matter, the notion of a worldwide Islamic conspiracy has served as a substitute for hard facts.

The bombing has been seized upon by the American right, which has been predicting a 'global intifada' for the past few years. Republican Patrick Buchanan, for example, is already looking forward to a twenty-first century dominated by the struggle between Christianity and Islam.

In the intellectual world, preparations for this coming war with Islam are if anything more feverish. The number of books being published which warn of the rise of Islam is quite remarkable. Four of the books here under review, those by the noted 'Orientalists' Bernard Lewis and Gilles Kepel, and the less well-known Mervyn Hiskett and Andrew Wheatcroft, are contributions to this growing conservative literature.

Hiskett's book is undoubtedly the crudest. It's a sort of *Daily Telegraph* reader's guide to the weird and wonderful world of Islam presented in a style you imagine goes down well in the shires; big print, short paragraphs and even shorter sentences, many of which end with

'Oh yes!' type exclamation marks. For all that, *Some to Mecca Turn to Pray* is usefully clear in its arguments, free as it is from qualification and pretension. It is supposedly written, as all these books are, in the spirit of 'understanding'. This, however, is understanding as in 'know thine enemy', and can be read rather like an army briefing on the not-to-be-underestimated wiliness of a foe in battle. Having paid respect, Hiskett then declares his purpose, 'to explore the cultural clash between Islam and secularism' (p5).

The need to prove that it is possible to speak of entirely separate 'secular' and 'Islamic' worlds, and further that they inevitably 'clash', is asserted before Hiskett begins.

Hiskett presents religious loyalty as so powerful that it has resisted all attempts at modernisation. These Islamic forces, according to Hiskett, were only temporarily restrained in the liberal postwar era. Now we face 'the resurgence of ancient Islamic rivalries', which 'have now surfaced once again, having lost none of their former virulence' (p142). The spirit of the Crusades has stirred itself once more.

Hiskett wilfully ignores the fact that the so-called fundamentalism of recent years arises out of modern developments—principally the failure and humiliation of secular Arab nationalism—and bears only a superficial resemblance to previous Islamic movements. Similarly, as in the bulk of this literature, the hostility between East and West is projected back through history as if it were an eternal fact of nature. The threat of the Ottoman Empire to nineteenth-century Western Europe is rediscovered at the turn of the century in the horror of Arab slave traders and then again in the present: 'the public view of Islam in Britain circa 1900 was little different from that aroused by the Iranian ayatollahs and Arab terrorists of the present day' (p58). With varying degrees of intensity, it seems, we have been at war with Islam for centuries and will presumably continue to be so into the indefinite future. ▶

So why you may ask is he telling us all this? If East and West are so implacably opposed, what is there left to explain? The fact that Hiskett includes material on subjects such as the PLO, which is manifestly nothing to do with religion, indicates that his concern is not with Islam as such.

His first concern is to puncture the perception that the West bears a responsibility for events in the third world—specifically that Western domination has held the third world back. Hiskett worries that our domestic policy continues to be dogged by an unnecessary 'guilt' for past misconduct. Interpreting everything through the prism of 'Islam' allows him to explain away Western domination as simply a cultural incompatibility between East and West.

In this manner the Iranian revolution is reinterpreted as the reaction of a primitive people to modernisation. The Iranians preferred the Koran to Coca Cola and Elvis Presley. The fact that the Shah of Iran was a brutal American stooge dictator is simply written out of the text through the elevation of religion and culture. 'What now seems clear', says Hiskett hopefully, 'is that the terms "colonial-ism" and "imperialism" have long since been detached from their original reference to military occupation'. Instead, they are 'simply the inevitable and involuntary economic and cultural dominance that a technological lifestyle...assumes over a less developed lifestyle' (p147).

Rewriting the history of Western domination over the East does not only excuse past faults, it also makes the West look good by comparison. This is an argument used by Bernard Lewis in *Islam and the West*. His world is one where, 'Islam as an independent, different, and autonomous religious phenomenon persists and recurs from medieval to modern times' (p133). The West, on the other hand, is the permanent embodiment of secular reason. As Islam is doctrinally intolerant, so Christianity is doctrinally enlightened and progressive.

So what happened to hellfire and damnation, the Crusades and the Inquisition? The answer lies in Lewis', and coincidentally Gilles Kepler's, favourite quote from the Bible: 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.' According to Lewis' imaginative interpretation, this is why we have a secular tradition in the West—the Holy Bible ordained there to be a division of authority between ruler and deity. The separation of church and state becomes an historical given for all the 'Christian' world. In this argument, tolerance and individualism become as characteristic of the West as the subjugation of life to religious dogma is to the world of Islam.

Lewis has been writing books like *Islam and the West* for years. Now he feels that his moment has come and launches forth in this latest work with an attack on his principal rival in the field of Islamic studies, Edward Said, and his renowned work *Orientalism*.

For Said, the bulk of Western writing on the East through the ages has simply created a strange and threatening 'other' against which the West has defined itself. Said says that the West needs the Orient as the negative example against which the positive virtues of Christendom are contrasted. Often, the presentation of a singular and alien 'Orient' has simply been an apologia for West-

ern domination of the region that bears little relation to the real history of the Middle East. A better approach, Said argues, would be to celebrate cultural difference, instead of decrying it as a deviation from Western secularism.

Said's charge that Western scholarship has been concerned with excusing colonialism is all nonsense as far as Lewis is concerned. Lewis argues with some justification that if all Western writing on the Orient were an expression of power relations, as Said claims, then it would be impossible to establish the truth. But Lewis takes particular umbrage at one of Said's most positive propositions; that Muslims are no more bound to tradition than anyone else.

The implication is that the Islamic world continues to be dogged by the barrier of its own past—whereas in reality the greatest obstacles Muslims face are those thrown up by modern Western domination

Against this Lewis cites the Iran/Iraq war. The fact that the propaganda used by the two sides was posed in terms of ancient hatreds is cited as proof positive that Muslims are tied to the past. The implication is that the Islamic world continues to be dogged by the barrier of its own past—whereas in reality the greatest obstacles Muslims face are those thrown up by modern Western domination. And, at the same time, we are supposed to forget the fact that enlightened Britain is incapable of negotiating so much as an EC subsidy without raising the spectre of the Second World War.

Despite Lewis' genuine hostility to Edward Said, he has more in common with the Palestinian scholar than he might like to admit. It is striking how comfortable conservatives like Lewis feel with arguments about 'the other' and 'difference' pioneered by their more liberal opponents. He devotes a whole chapter to 'Other people's history'. He roundly reprimands the French, for justifying their imperial mission by denying any validity to the culture and history of their North African subjects.

In fact throughout *Islam and the West*, there is a strong emphasis on the specific traditions of the colonised world having been undervalued, just as Said argues. This underlies Lewis' plea that we recognise the particularity of Islam and other traditions that have hitherto been deemed inconsequential. Any ideas of similarity with our own society were illusory. Lewis even adopts Said's method in arbitrarily quoting from European literature through the ages to indicate that the Western mind has always viewed the Orient with suspicion and latent hostility. But rather than indicating his broadmindedness, Lewis' concessions to Said only suggest that Said's argument is not so progressive after all.

At first reading, conservatives like Lewis and radicals like Said seem to be on opposite sides of the fence. Said seeks to rescue Arab culture from the attacks of the Orientalists. Lewis denigrates Arab culture in defiance of its apologists. But underlying their different interpretations there is an underlying agreement that the cultures of East and West are overwhelmingly dissimilar. Both attack the idea that there might be common ground

between East and West—Said because he fears that any universalist doctrine will equalise them on the West's terms; Lewis because an assumption of common humanity indicates that the different fortunes of the two cultures might have real roots, in the modern relations of power between the West and the third world.

Andrew Wheatcroft's *The Ottomans* demonstrates the compatibility of these two apparently hostile approaches. Wheatcroft happily borrows arguments from both Lewis and Said, and pays compliments to both. He charts the images generated in the West of this old enemy. He notes particularly the notion of the 'Lustful Turk' and the 'Terrible Turk'. In effect, Wheatcroft reduces the conceptions of the colonial world generated in the West to banality. 'The image of the Turk...will never be free from its deep roots: in European fears of sex and violence looming from the East.' (p239)

'Every age has its ogres—the alien "other"', Wheatcroft concludes (p238). Wheatcroft's argument is that the demonisation of the Muslims is just human nature, anyone would do it. The flaw in this argument is that it makes the whole politics of racial and cultural superiority into something without a history. It is as if everyone has always hated everyone else, and that can explain everything from slavery through colonialism to today's hostility to Islam. The search for any particular dynamic towards domination is rendered obsolete.

Aziz Al-Azmeh's *Islams and Modernities* highlights the similarities between conservatives and radicals in the debate over the Orient. Al-Azmeh ridicules the popularity of cultural explanations of conflict, saying that the modern world is a 'voracious consumer of particularities' (p34). Al-Azmeh rightly condemns, as dishonest and reactionary, the emphasis, verging upon invention, placed on cultural differences and identity. The idea of incommensurable cultural identities, for example, he describes as a 'pathetic notion which is supposedly responsible for much of the nonsense one hears about the supposedly primordial antagonisms of Lebanon' (p132).

As for Islam itself, Al-Azmeh convincingly rubbishes both the idea of Islamic law as a code commanding the behaviour of its followers and the presentation of the Muslim community as a homogeneous whole. Instead he indicates the very modern origins of 'fundamentalism', with its intellectual themes of revivalism and cultural authenticity—more romanticism than the Koran.

In particular, as Gilles Kepel describes in his recent *The Revenge of God*, Islamic groups were encouraged as a means to marginalise the pro-Soviet and nationalist left in these societies

Al-Azmeh talks of 'petro Islam', suggesting that the Islamicist discourse 'started as a local Arab purveyance of the Truman doctrine' in the 1940s (p34). He points here to a great irony; that the impulse behind the promotion of Islam in the postwar years came from conservative Arab regimes backed by the Western powers, who saw religious conservatism as a possible bulwark against instability and rebellion. In particular, as Gilles Kepel describes in his recent *The Revenge of God*, Islamic groups

were encouraged as a means to marginalise the pro-Soviet and nationalist left in these societies.

Good as Al-Azmeh is at explaining how ideas of cultural difference can serve to explain away the West's political and social domination of the third world, he does not improve upon Maxine Rodinson's 1988 book *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (IB Tauris). Rodinson's achievement is to show how the European view of Islam changes over time, in accordance with its own needs, so refuting the myth of a timeless opposition between the West and its Oriental 'other'. Rodinson stressed the largely fraternal and understanding view of the Islamic world which was characteristic of eighteenth-century universalism in the West. A hypothetical threat from the Ottoman Empire mattered little.

Our views of the world are essentially shaped by the outlook of our own society, not by distant threats. In an intellectual climate where all men were seen to be born with equal abilities, East and West were part of a total picture of humanity. This is not to suggest that they did not hold imperfect and inaccurate views of the East, but it was of no significance, and was unlikely to be of consequence. It was the degradation of Asia and Africa following the colonial era that led to the view of the Islamic world as a distinct, separate and rather pitiful object.

Even in the early nineteenth century, with the beginnings of colonisation, the development of a threatening Islam as a distinct image was still absent. A world that had apparently crumbled under the impact of European superiority was not to be feared. Alarmism about Islam began with the opening of the age of imperialism in the late nineteenth century, when Western capitalism experienced the limits of its capacity to expand. Manifest expressions of this stagnation—the development of open rivalries between competing powers and the instability generated in the colonial world—began to stimulate fears that the 'immovable East' was being stirred to revenge and might take advantage of 'our' weakness.

Since the original positing of a distinct threat from the East at the turn of the century, the Western view of Islam has gone through a number of major twists and turns. Most notably in the aftermath of the Second World War, when an open sense of Western superiority was no longer sustainable. The East was said to be essentially similar to the West and capable of catching it up. Concern about a cultural challenge was submerged. Now, as the West is again racked with a morbid sense of decay and decline, the notion of a challenge has been revived. The impotence of Western society leads its intellectuals to fear a threat from an imaginary and potentially more attractive spectre, bent on the West's destruction.

Even our old buffer Mervyn Hiskett speaks with barely concealed envy of his mythical Islam's sense of tradition and solidarity as opposed to our own 'rotting grave of multiculturalist doubt' (p316). He demands that the primitives be integrated in Britain, but can barely muster the enthusiasm to honestly suggest that our 'rotting grave' is something anyone in their right mind would wish to be part of. In the meantime, staging show-trials of 'Islam' in the West might at least create the siege mentality necessary to suggest that we really have got something that 'the other' wants, and which is therefore worth defending.

Beyond a Boundary, CLR James,
Serpent's Tail, £13.99 pbk

This is the best book ever written on the subject of cricket. If you think that this is a matter of no importance that's your problem. It is so good because as CLR James remarks in his own preface: 'This book is neither cricket reminiscences nor autobiography. It poses the question: What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?' In *Boundary* James recalls an English writer's argument that the cricket ethic has shaped not only the cricketers, but West Indian social life as a whole, and remarks: 'It is an understatement.'

James dedicated this book to Learie Constantine and to WG Grace, the link between the cricket of a lost rural England and the modern game. Grace epitomised the singlemindedness, dedication and loyalty of the English gentleman. Constantine, a fellow Trinidadian of James, was a great fast bowler and a big clean hitter who played the leading role in the campaign to have a black man captain the West Indies team.

In the late 1950s that first black captain was the great Frank Worrell, the third and last dedicatee of this book. It is Worrell who initiates the age of West Indian cricket domination. I remember the awe with which as a 12-year old I watched Hall and Griffiths mow down the England batsman and Kanhai, Butcher and the incomparable Sobers take apart the England attack. Most of all Sobers, the all-rounder to whom Hadlee, Imran, Kapil and even Botham must concede pre-eminence.

Despite the continued success of the West Indies and another decade of Brian Lara to savour, those magical days are probably gone forever. The peculiar relation of West Indian society to cricket has changed. No longer is it the pre-eminent game for West Indian youth who look now to the USA and Michael Jordan. Exploitation and oppression continue, but they are no longer embodied in the innate sense of superiority of the colonial presence.

It is this experience which shaped the generation of James and those who followed him. James himself was educated in a school which followed in all its details an English public school. He learned to love not only cricket, but also Shakespeare. He also learned, as he put it, that 'the most profound loyalty can co-exist with a jealously critical attitude'. James himself was a great radical and a revolutionary, but the whole world of his upbringing was intensely loyal and knowledgeable about cricket while detesting the unjust society which had brought it.

What James is saying is that West Indians took up, transformed and threw back with a vengeance the game of their oppressors. If you think this is too heavy a load for cricket to bear think of the significance of Richards' fastest-ever test century on his home island of Antigua. Think of the blackwashes. Most poignant of all think of those days on a featherbed pitch at the Oval in 1976 when Michael Holding—all grace and athleticism—turned in the most sustained and greatest piece of fast bowling of all, until he uprooted the stumps of England's white South African captain, Tony Grieg, who had boasted that he would make the Windies grovel. In the event it was England who grovelled—and they're still grovelling.

Alan Harding

The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World, Howard Rheingold,
Secker & Warburg, £16.99 hbk

Howard Rheingold is a booster for the Internet. He argues that the burgeoning networks connecting millions of personal computer-users comprise a 'democratising' technology with 'the potential to bring enormous leverage to ordinary citizens'. Rheingold the radical is determined that the Net must not be taken over by media monopolies: 'the activist solution has been to use CMC (computer-mediated communication) to create alternative planetary information networks...it is still possible for people around the world to make sure this new sphere of vital human discourse remains open to the citizens of the planet before the political and economic big boys seize it, censor it, meter it, and sell it back to us.'

But Rheingold has a lot in common with the 'political and economic big boys'. He shares their concern to create a sense of community 'in the face of America's loss of a sense of social commons', and he believes that the Net could be the means to this end: 'the future of the Net is connected to the future of community.' But what kind of community? Judging by the heroes of *Virtual Community*, the virtues of Rheingold's electronic villagers bear a close resemblance to the models of good citizenry advocated by the likes of Bill and Hillary Clinton.

A 'small-town' atmosphere pervades Rheingold's Net-working. He takes part in an electronic conference on 'parenting', and when its members eventually meet face-to-face—rather than mouse-to-mouse—it sounds like an out-take from *The Waltons*: 'it was a normal American community picnic—people who value each other's company, getting together with their kids for softball and barbecue on a summer Sunday. It could have been any church group or PTA.' Somehow I don't think the homeboys from South Central LA were invited.

Elsewhere Rheingold presents a textbook formulation of the new moralists' argument for self-censorship: 'the only alternative to imposing potentially dangerous restrictions on freedom of expression is to develop norms, folklore, ways of acceptable behaviour that are widely modeled, taught and valued, that can give the citizens of cyberspace clear ideas of what they can and cannot do with the medium...if we intend to use it for community-building.' Such sophistry is dangerously insidious: it sounds anti-authority but corresponds exactly to the 'community' strategy of involving as many people as possible in policing each other according to standards of acceptable behaviour set by the state. This essentially authoritarian ethos is what 'community' has come to mean in the mid-nineties.

Technology is only as 'democratising' as the social context in which it is applied. The anti-democratic drift of today cannot but influence the way in which the Net is used and developed. For all his protestations of open access to all, Rheingold's 'virtual communities' only function as such because most of the population is excluded from them. I hope it won't be long before *Living Marxism* is available via an electronic bulletin board. But that doesn't mean the Net is a current of liberation in its own right.

Andrew Calcutt



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