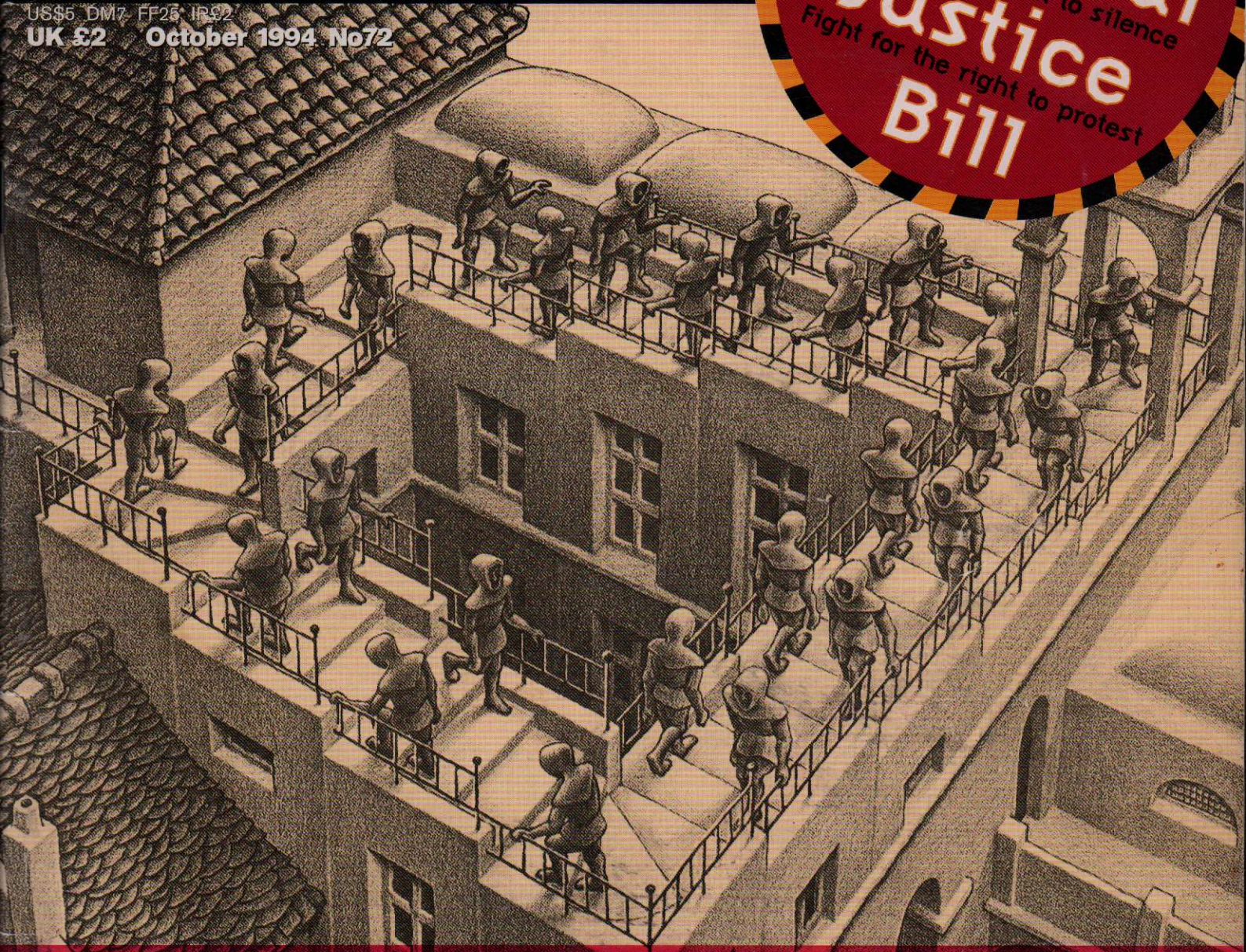


LIVING MARXISM

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Fight for the right to silence
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Fight for the right to protest
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A culture of conformity is stifling college life

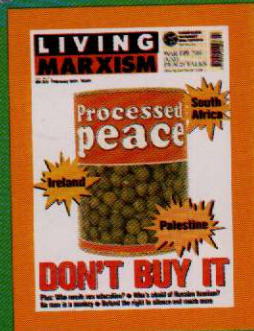
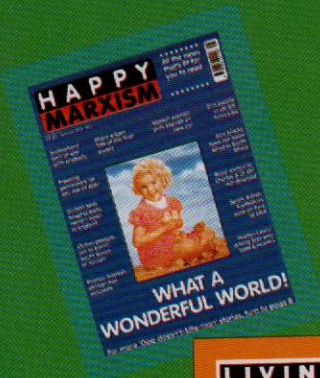
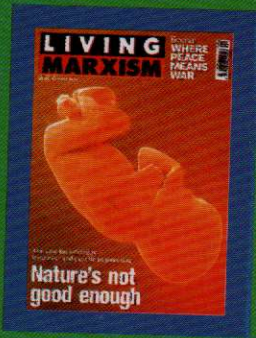
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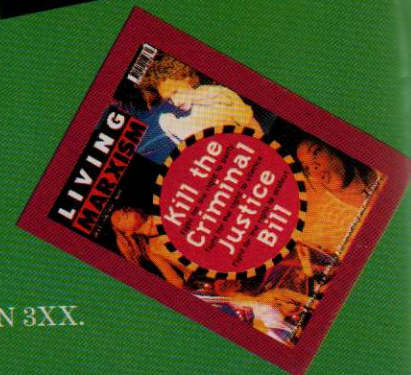
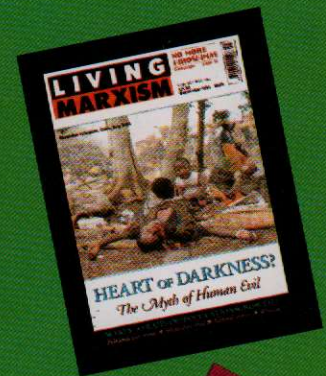
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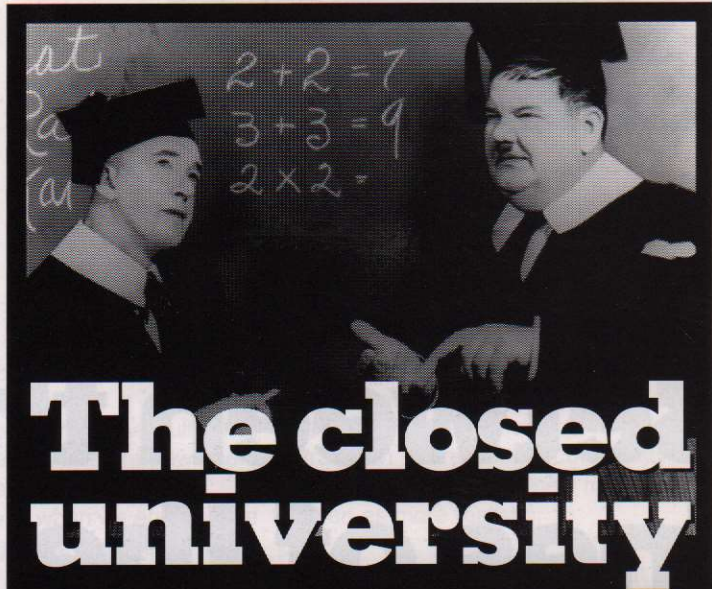
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The closed university

At the start of the university year, *Living Marxism* looks at how a culture of conformity is stifling college life. From the know-nothing education students are being offered to the codes of conduct that tell them how to behave, universities are becoming more conformist, more censorious and more conservative. This is the opposite of what college life should be like—experimental, open-minded and intellectually stimulating.

The brain drain

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The lowering of standards in higher education and the narrowing of minds are being disguised as an exercise in empowering students. Claire Foster exposes the decline of higher education.

Treating us like children

p30

The proliferation of politically correct codes of conduct is creating a nanny campus where students are treated like helpless infants. Ellie Dashwood speaks out against the new controls.

The problem with 'No platform'

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Juliet Connor questions the assumptions behind the demand 'No platform for fascists', and puts the case against censorship. In response to the culture of conformity and controls, it is more important than ever to uphold the idea of free speech on campus.

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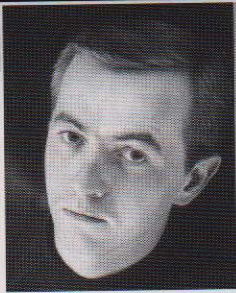
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Mick Hume

Between the lines of the bill

The Criminal Justice Bill, which the government hopes finally to push through parliament in October, is a symbol of the rotten state of public life in this country.

Once passed, the bill will abolish the right to silence. It will give the police extensive new powers to do everything from stopping and searching people to taking body samples for a DNA data bank. It will criminalise raves and protests. And it will enforce new measures against everybody from squatters and cannabis-smokers to pornographers and ticket touts.

The Criminal Justice Bill is the act of a government which is dead on its feet but desperate to demonstrate that it is still in charge by imposing its control on society through the police and the courts.

Many critics of the bill have tried to persuade the Tories that they are being irrational or extreme in pursuing such an unwieldy authoritarian bill. But ask yourself, what else could this government do to reassert its authority? What else have John Major and Home Secretary Michael Howard got to offer us, except another law-and-order crusade?

The government cannot offer any positive vision of the future. It is in a dead end and can see no way out. All of its efforts to talk up the economy in the media have failed to convince people who live in the real world, where British capitalism continues to languish in slump, and economic insecurity affects almost every household. The tone of economic discussion in high places is more and more downbeat; one of the six 'wise men' advising the chancellor

recently suggested the government should wise up to the fact that another downturn is on the way.

As for the Tories' political programme, that has long since been exhausted. Their successful privatisations and strike-busting campaigns of the 1980s seem as far away as D-Day, as the latest rows over selling off the Post Office and the mishandling of the railworkers' dispute help to sink the government to new lows in the opinion polls. And the prospect is that things will get worse, with the Conservative Party locked into a spiral of divisions, scandals and cock-ups that puts the possibility of electoral meltdown on the agenda.

The Criminal Justice Bill is part of the government's response to this crisis. It represents an attempt to shift responsibility for society's problems away from the authorities and on to ordinary people, by painting a lurid picture of a nation besieged by a variety of young drug-crazed, raving criminals.

Most importantly, the bill is designed to demonstrate that the government can get back in the saddle and re-establish some authority by cracking down on those who do not fit into Major's vision of a Britain based on warm beer and village cricket. Devoid of ideas but desperate to impose a measure of control, the government is pushing the police and legal apparatus further into the front line of politics. As the politicians' grip on things grows weaker, so the power of the state machine over society gets stronger.

Despite its draconian character, the Criminal Justice Bill passed through the

House of Commons in July without opposition, as new Labour leader Tony Blair ordered his MPs to sit on their hands and abstain. If the bill itself says a lot about the government, the compliant response to it is equally revealing about the state of the opposition parties.

The Labour Party is now the living dead of British politics. Its media managers might have puffed up a lively, forward-going image for the Blair leadership, and the party has profited from the Tory crisis in the polls, but inside, Blair's Labour Party is empty. It has dumped the old baggage of traditional Labourism but replaced it with nothing at all.

Empty vessels tend to echo—in Labour's case, the sound is an imitation of the noises emanating from the Conservative Party.

Labour's expectations of what is possible are now about as low as the Tories', the debate between them reduced to a matter of whether pennies should go on or off income tax and VAT. Like their Conservative counterparts, Labour spokesmen can now be spotted pointing the finger of blame for Britain's problems at individuals trapped at the bottom of society. Witness Blair's recent attacks upon the 'dependency culture' among the poor and the unemployed, and his criticisms of single mothers—themes first made prominent by right-wing social theorists.

Blair has also made a project of presenting Labour as the party of the police, in the forefront of demands for more powers and protection for Britain's paramilitary force. From this point of view, there was no way that the Labour Party could vote against the Criminal Justice Bill. Blair's acquiescence in the passage of this unjust law ought to make it clear to all that, even if the Tory crisis dumps Major out of office, the election of a Labour prime minister in the 1990s would make no difference at all to the authoritarian, anti-people drift of political life.

Unlike the Christian youth revivalist Blair, thousands of young people are bitterly opposed to the Criminal Justice Bill as an

attack on their freedoms. The bill has intensified their sense of alienation from mainstream politics, becoming a focus for their rejection of the entire parliamentary circus.

'We don't trust politicians, we'll do it for ourselves' is a sentiment you can hear a lot among anti-CJB campaigners. In terms of creating a new opposition, the way that idea is spreading is far more important than any soundbite which Blair's spin-doctors might dream up. It gives a glimpse of the potential to break out of the impasse we are in today, by getting people to come together, take matters into their own hands, and stand up for what they want. But that potential can only be realised if 'doing it for ourselves' really means just that, if we are truly independent of the old, dead politics.

The trouble at present is that even some of the most dynamic anti-CJB campaigners are still influenced by the pessimistic mood coming down from the top of the political system. You can see it particularly on two fronts: the question of whether we need more legal controls in society, and the issue of what kind of change it is realistic to demand today.

Those who have marched against the Criminal Justice Bill are all rightly outraged by parliament's attempt to impose more bans and restrictions on their right to party and to protest. Yet it is a safe bet today that many of them also support demands to impose some alternative controls on human behaviour. For instance, some prominent campaigners against the bill have indicated that they have no problem with those parts of the bill which seek to crack down on something like pornography; others have said that they want to see the bill's nominal measures against racial and sexual harassment toughened up in new laws.

However reasonable the motives behind this approach might seem, it represents a dangerous concession to the culture of control which the authorities are now seeking to institutionalise.

What does it mean when we endorse the notion of imposing more legal controls or censorship? For a start, it suggests a lack of confidence in our ability to 'do it for ourselves'. It implicitly accepts that there is a need for some enlightened authority to police what people can do, watch, read or say. In other words, that instead of 'doing it for ourselves' we need a judge or a policeman or some quango to decide what's best for us. Such a concession by anti-CJB campaigns can only play into the government's hands, by giving some street credibility to the demand for more law and order.

If we want to challenge the culture of control it is important that, in taking a stand against the Criminal Justice Bill, we also oppose every other attempt to impose new bans, regulations and restrictions on society. And while we are at it, let's forget all about the idea now being mooted that campaigners against the bill should cooperate with the police in implementing the new controls on raves. That is a recipe for handing control of our affairs over to the same force that has harassed ravers, protesters and travellers across the country.

The pessimism of the old political class also influences people by lowering expectations of what is possible. Trapped by the constraints of a stagnant market economy, the major parties have abandoned any belief in their ability to change society for the better. That is the meaning of their preoccupation with a narrow little debate about taxation rates. Many who have now turned their backs on the old politics are nevertheless still influenced by the

outlook of low expectations. Today's protest movements rarely demand broad social change. Instead dissidents tend to concentrate on more local, community issues, such as opposition to new roads, which are seen as more realistic.

But is it realistic to imagine that the things which really shape our lives could be changed at local or community level? We are up against national and even international forces. The economic system which condemns millions to poverty or insecurity is not a village market. The state which polices our lives more and more closely is not a parish council. Even road-building programmes are products of the development of a modern society, not a local whim.

If the anger and energy displayed by those opposed to the Criminal Justice Bill is to be made to count, we need to go a lot further in making the idea of 'doing it for ourselves' mean something. That must mean, in the first place, severing all connections with the culture of control and the mood of low expectations that has been bred by the deadlegs at Westminster. It means rejecting every excuse they use for imposing more bans and restrictions on people's freedom. It means refusing to be bound by the limits of a system that puts private profit before public need.

'Doing it for ourselves' means believing in our ability to get together and take control of our own lives. And the hard truth is that delaying a road or setting up an autonomous record label is not going to challenge the deep-seated social ills like unemployment, exploitation, racism and repression which blight our lives today. So let's get serious about changing the way things are, and make the campaign to kill the Criminal Justice Bill a step towards breathing some life into British society.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, contact Helen Simons at *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
Phone (071) 278 9908 Fax: (071) 278 9844 e-mail: lm@camintl.org

Mad, crazy and 'out there'

Mick Hume's editorial ('No More Hiroshimas', August) is one-sided. The underlying assumption seems to be that a second Hiroshima will be inflicted on the world by Western powers and that the 'alleged threat of nuclear proliferation in the third world' is an illusion. Yes, the West is certainly not the impartial, blameless policeman it paints itself as. But to dismiss North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Libya, etc, as not being engaged in a nuclear weapons programme flies in the face of the facts.

There are now more fingers on the nuclear button than at any time in the past. With the rise of nationalism in the ex-Soviet bloc member states, the threat of warring neighbours is readily apparent. And with weapons-grade plutonium being smuggled out of Russia by a newly established mafia, then to be sold to terrorists, what do you think is going to be the likely scenario? The likelihood is that any future nuclear assault will be used by an unaccountable third world dictatorship to crush one of its neighbours (Iran/Iraq; North Korea/South Korea; Pakistan/India; Russia/Ukraine).

There are mad, crazy buggers 'out there' just as there are mad, crazy buggers 'over here'. The battle cry of 'No More Hiroshimas' is a noble one, but to read it as 'No More Hiroshimas perpetrated by the West' is to see only half the picture.

Nigel Wackett London E5

Who's copping out?

While reading David R Clarke's letter (September) requesting discussions on possible alternatives to capitalism, it struck me that when I was into 'possible alternatives' a few years ago I read *2000 AD* to satisfy my inquisitiveness.

The issue is not capitalism versus some other system. At this point in time we do not have the option of living under anything other than capitalism. The immediate issue is whether we let the problems of capitalism grind us down (and in the process lower our horizons to match), or whether we engage in a political struggle to uncover the ways in which the present system survives.

Ciaran Guilfoyle Nottingham

David R Clarke accuses Frank Richards of 'copping out', because in his article ('There is an alternative', August) he failed to provide 'some discussion of possible alternatives, even if purely hypothetical'. I disagree. In my experience those who prefer to hypothesise about the future are the ones copping out of confronting the problems of the present. In this respect, futurology and nostalgia are essentially the same: they both provide an escape route from the difficulties of the here and now.

Clarke also says that Richards is unduly negative. Again I disagree. At the moment, developing a critique of modern capitalist society is the most positive contribution anyone can make to developing an alternative. Alternatives that mean anything cannot be dreamed up. They evolve in the course of a struggle to deal with the problems of the present. For example, it is only by fighting attacks on jobs today that we can begin to put forward how society might be organised more rationally in the future according to people's needs rather than the drive for profit.

Frances Ashton Leicester

What kind of democracy?

It is a revelation to see a *Living Marxism* reviewer endorse Desmond Fennell's reasons for 'the crisis of Irish national identity' ('Paths to peace', August). The abandonment of Fennell's 'satisfactory national self-definition of the first half of the twentieth century' is mourned by Mick Kennedy, who neglects to mention that the state of Eire was, during that period, a popular theocracy in the vanguard of the assault against Enlightenment and democratic values.

Several of your contributors speak of 'democracy' in the context of the justice of the campaign waged by the Provos. Maybe you should define your terms first. Do you mean majoritarian democracy of the sort that brought the mullahs to power in Iran, and implied by Bernadette McAliskey in her endorsement of the legitimacy of the Irish constitution of 1937? Or do you mean 'the fight against all forms of legal, social and political restraints which seek to curb human action', as you assert elsewhere?

At the moment *Living Marxism* is advocating action on the basis of two mutually exclusive political positions. Maybe it is time you considered your own role in the demoralisation of the left and the consequent 'spirit of low expectations'.

Alan Tait Huddersfield

Poverty and population

Amanda Macintosh ('Family planning or population control?', July) scores a few justifiable points about familiar attitudes to population, but for the most part I found her article profoundly depressing. The new left will get nowhere if it clings to old beliefs about our future and fails to face up to the ecological verities affecting the planet. I could not detect any understanding that when those concerned about human population suggest that action is absolutely necessary, we nevertheless recognise that it will not be sufficient.

We do not believe that the world's problems can be explained by looking at numbers, but

we do assert that rational attempts at planning for the future are impossible without population control. The true naivety comes from those who argue, as Ms Macintosh appears to do: look after the people and the population will look after itself. This argument, as expounded by Mao and others in the fifties, might have worked then had it really been put into operation. Alas, all we had was the application of simple public health measures in developing countries, which led to a fall in death rates. Welcome as this was, birth control never caught up, largely because grinding poverty continued as their governments proved unable or unwilling to withstand the effects of rapacious economic expansion in the rich north. The result is that world population has pointlessly doubled and the huge gap between north and south in resource consumption continues to expand.

The rapid population growth of poor nations is one of the factors which hampers any developments which might lead to a reduction in their birth rate. The vicious circle of poverty and high fertility has to be cut in two places. Nor is this just preaching from the rich north—many of these same countries have had population policies for decades, although ineffectively applied.

Because of a concentration on soaring numbers in the poor south, attention is diverted from our own situation. Europe and North America are already grossly overpopulated and one of our most important contributions to restoring some kind of sustainable balance in the world is to reduce our numbers slowly and consistently to about one half. This will not be difficult to achieve given public recognition of the population issues. Nor will it mean abandoning socialist principles of mutual help and support. Quite the contrary, population control is for people. Without it we can never ensure a decent and fairer future for our descendant here and across the world.

Aubrey Manning Ormiston, East Lothian

Censored for being Serbian

This year the Edinburgh festival was literally the cutting edge of the arts establishment. Two Serbian films (*Why Have You Left Me?* and *Nicola Karaja: A Hunt for Tito*) were withdrawn from the festival by its organisers. The public followed complaints by Bosnian Muslims whose films remained as part of the programme. In addition, two Serbian-produced plays (*Zenit* and *Miss Julie*) were removed from their original venues and transferred to small theatre often playing after midnight. The Serbian theatre company was advised not to discuss the reallocation.

The censored films are anti-war. Strindberg's *Miss Julie* is hardly likely to stir up national fervour. Festival director Penny Thornton recognised that 'the Serbian films are anti-war and

express little or no political sentiments', but added: 'it is regarded that the screening may be seen to be supportive of the Serbian position.'

When is an anti-war film 'regarded' as pro-war? When it is made by Serbs. These productions were censored because they were made by Serbs, and for no other reason. Imagine the outrage if *Malcolm X* had been taken off because the director was black! Yet the liberal arts establishment feels no compunction about treating Serbian film-makers and performers in this cavalier fashion. There's only one word to describe such behaviour: racism.

The Edinburgh episode is part of a wider censorship which assumes the public is too stupid to think for themselves, and that we need to be told what we can and cannot watch. This particular example is also part of a wider promotion of lies that has distorted all coverage of the war in former Yugoslavia. It serves to perpetuate the demonising of the Serbs, and reinforces the uncritical portrayal of Western intervention.

Tiffany Jenkins Brighton

In defence of dope

Andrew Calcutt ('Dealing with dope', August) spoils his otherwise excellent analysis of the cannabis legalisation debate by his final short-sighted, anti-drug comments.

Joining the media conspiracy to misinform does little to explain why humans have used psychedelic substances for millennia, and will continue to do so even in a communist society. Of course drugs will not liberate us on a political level, but in the case of cannabis hemp our quality of life could be greatly improved by maximising its full potential.

Hemp fibre is more durable than cotton, makes the highest grade paper, and can be used to construct and fully furnish an entire house. It yields four times as much cellulose per acre than trees and in considerably less time. Converted to alcohol it could make us virtually self-sufficient in our energy needs. Pollution, deforestation, resource-depletion and the greenhouse effect would be things of the past.

Calcutt omits to explain why this amazing yet innocuous plant has become a pariah to rival Saddam Hussein. Firstly, it is a political weapon to control rebellious social groups and disobedient regimes through the 'war on drugs'. Secondly, and this is the original

reason for prohibition, cannabis is a major threat to the biggest industries of the first world. Pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, textiles, construction, paper, tobacco—these industries could convert, but the third world would cash in and the world economy would be destabilised.

We must demand the decriminalisation of cannabis. We should call for intensive, unbiased research into the properties of all psychedelic substances, and for the results to be made public in full.

Mary Jane Tokar Sheffield

On a guilt-trip

One thing I find bloody irritating about your organ is your oh-so-cleverness in adopting some pretty damned reactionary positions and then attempting to give them this really-smart-revolutionary-Marxist-analysis.

I'm referring to a couple of things in particular: Ann Bradley's defence of stick-insect 'supermodels' ('Fat's not a feminist issue', June), and her assertion that 'fat is damned ugly'—would Ann say the same about the deformed or disfigured?; secondly, your pathetic piece by Ed Murray in defence of whaling by the Japanese ('Whale meet again', September).

I for one am a committed anti-racist but totally oppose the slaughter of these beautiful sea mammals for greed. Just because you oppose something wrong by a non-white country does not mean you are a racist, and to patronise Japanese people like that article did smacks of English white middle class guilt-tripping.

I see you have stopped patronising the republican Irish working class of late. Is it that you have genuinely changed politically, or did they eventually bore you, and instead you've decided to display your anti-racism by guilt-tripping about the 'Yellow peril' (capitalist Japan)?

Siobhan NiBraidigh Leeds

Laissez-faire nonsense

Sara Hinchliffe's article ('Battered rights', September) was the most stupid, out-of-touch, *laissez-faire* and naive nonsense I have ever read, displaying total ignorance of the realities of domestic violence.

I suggest Sara Hinchliffe do some statistical research, eg, find out the percentage of women murdered by partners out of the total women

murdered. Of course most men are not violent, but some are and it is vitally important that domestic violence is seen in law as being socially unacceptable, which, thankfully—at last—it is.

I have lived with a man who was prone to fits of violence, and the support I got from the police saved my sanity as well as my physical well-being. It was like being rescued from a nightmare.

The new policy adopted by the police towards domestic violence is a sign of real progress. They are helping women in need, not 'interfering' in people's lives. They are now able to come to people's aid when called, and this is essential if the law is to be enforced. Now it is seen—in law—to be socially unacceptable to inflict physical violence upon another person, whether they live with them or they are a stranger in the street.

I called the police to help me when the situation got out of control and I was living in fear, and the response was immediate, sensitive and supportive. Sara Hinchliffe should understand that 'what battered women do need', before they can do anything about their situation, is protection, and always urgently—hence the need for the intervention (not interference) of the law.

Kate London

Sara Hinchliffe disapproves of the huge increase in state intervention to prevent deaths and injuries to women caused by domestic violence ('Battered rights', September).

Fiona Foster disapproves of the huge decrease in state intervention to prevent deaths and injuries to men caused by industrial accidents ('Dying for a job', September).

Is this what you mean by the fragmentation of the left?

Mark Slater Nottingham

Brazil exchange

Please publish my address so that those who appreciate Marxist theory can correspond and exchange views. My address is:

SCLN, Q.311, Bloco B, Apto. 207
Ed. Jardim, 70757-520
Brasilia/DF
Brazil

Thank you for your consideration.

Renato Leonardi Brasilia

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor

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A critical look at the conventional
wisdom on social, moral and sexual issues.

TABOOS

What gives Western feminists and international agencies the right to demand a ban on female circumcision in the third world? asks Sandy Deegan

A civilising mission?

Female genital mutilation, sometimes known as female circumcision, a practice common in some African and Arab countries, is suddenly in the spotlight and under fire in the West.

The first international conference on female genital mutilation, Change Without Denigration, organised by the London Black Women's Health Action Project this summer, was just one recent event where the issue has been under scrutiny. It was on the agenda at the United Nations population conference in Cairo in September, and was a focus of debate at an international conference of obstetricians and gynaecologists attended by 10 000 health professionals in the same month. Concern about the practice has been reflected in various articles in the women's pages of national papers and those women's magazines that aspire to a social conscience.

Opposition to female genital mutilation (FGM) has united organisations as diverse as the National Union of Students and the Roman Catholic church. Students at Sheffield University this year elected black American author Alice Walker to replace Nelson Mandela as the honorary president of the union, in recognition of her opposition to the practice. Meanwhile, at a recent Vatican synod on African women, delegates called for the practice to be strongly condemned by the church. FGM, it seems, is an issue on which bishops and students see eye to eye, and against which black minority groups and the Murdoch press can unite in condemnation.

It is not difficult to see why so many people can be outraged by FGM. Those who campaign against it attack the practice as brutal, a violation of

human rights and the dignity of women. On the face of it, it is hard to disagree, especially when confronted with lurid descriptions of what FGM involves.

FGM covers a number of different practices. Sunna circumcision, the least invasive procedure, involves cutting away part of the prepuce, or hood of the clitoris, and sometimes the tip itself. Excision is more drastic and involves the removal of the entire clitoris as well as the labia minora (inner vaginal lips) and the cutting back of the labia majora (outer vaginal lips). The most severe form of FGM is infibulation, where following the excision, the labia minora and major and the remaining sides of the vulva are stitched or stuck together until they heal leaving just a tiny hole for the flow of menstrual blood.

Opponents of the practice emphasise that while the procedure is sometimes carried out in modern hospitals, many societies still resort to primitive methods, cutting women with knives, scissors, razor blades and sometimes glass. Anaesthetics and antiseptics are seldom available, and deaths from shock, septicaemia and infections are common. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that each year more than two million girls endure FGM at puberty, and that worldwide there are between 85m and 115m women who have been subjected to FGM.

All of this no doubt seems alien and cruel to Western sensibilities. But, it's worth asking, what's new? Why should a traditional practice such as FGM, which has been going on for centuries, suddenly become such a burning issue today?

When the United Nations first raised the issue of FGM back in 1958,



This Maasai girl's facial paint indicates that she is 'in healing' from a circumcision the World Health Organisation says should never have happened

it invited the WHO to undertake a study of the practice. But the WHO rejected the request on the grounds that 'the ritual operations in question are based on social and cultural backgrounds, the study of which is outside the competence of the World Health Organisation'. Yet today, the WHO has no such compunction about judging the 'social and cultural' practices of third world societies. Its latest information pack states that the international community cannot 'remain passive in the name of some bland version of multiculturalism'.

What has changed? After all, nobody is arguing that FGM is on the increase. If anything, it seems very likely that as traditional communities have become fragmented, fewer women are circumcised today than in the 1950s when nobody wanted to know about FGM. It is also certain that a greater majority of those whose families still continue the tradition have access to modern medical care, so making FGM somewhat less of a risk to women's health than it was in the past.

There is nothing intrinsic to the practice of FGM which can explain why it has become a major international issue almost overnight. The current furore about the practice seems to make sense only if it is set in the wider context of relations between the West and the third world today. In particular, it fits neatly into the renewed campaign of demonisation aimed against Africa and its peoples (see F Füredi, 'At the heart of Rwanda's darkness', *Living Marxism*, September 1994). FGM has been taken up by bodies like the UN because it provides one more stick with which to beat the third world for its barbarism, and so allow the West to bask in a sense of its own moral superiority. The fact that feminists and other prominent Western liberals are prepared to give that stick a politically correct point makes it an even better weapon for the Western authorities in the nineties.

To get a sense of what's really behind the anti-FGM campaign, you only have to look at the way the issue has been taken up by the media. Accounts of FGM are peppered with ►

allegations about African and Asian doctors who can be paid to do the operations on the sly in private Harley Street clinics—the implication being that respectable white, British doctors would never perform unnecessary procedures for cash. There are stories of Asian families who drag their daughters ‘back home’ for the operation when they reach puberty. In the USA, at a time when the Clinton administration is sending back Cuban and Haitian refugees, a Nigerian woman, Lydia Oluloro, has become a *cause célèbre* by winning the suspension of her deportation on the grounds that her two American-born daughters would be forced to undergo FGM in Nigeria. Apparently the horrors of US-trained death squads in Haiti or starvation thanks to a US embargo in Cuba pale into insignificance compared to the evil practices of black Africa.

By reinforcing notions of a clash between third world barbarism and civilised Western values, the FGM issue is providing another excuse for outside intervention in the affairs of African and Asian peoples. In America, the National Organisation of Women has argued that congress must ‘strongly oppose the granting of “most favoured nation status” to any country where FC/FGM is practised, and whose government is not actively engaged in opposing, outlawing and eliminating FC/FGM’. No doubt the Washington feminist lobby applauded the recent decision by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to make combating FGM a condition of its loan to Burkina Faso. But while it might make Hillary Clinton’s friends feel good about doing their bit for women around the world, the implications of the anti-FGM campaign are nothing for people in the third world to cheer about.

All aid to Somalia, a country where female circumcision is widely practised, would be in question if the link between FGM and financial support were systematically pursued. As Rakiya Omaar, Somali co-director of Africa Rights has said, ‘Somalis cannot comprehend the focus on this issue when their entire country has fallen apart’. You can understand their lack of comprehension (especially when the collapse of their country had been facilitated by the bloody military intervention of the USA and UN—the same bodies now chastising Somalis about FGM). The idea that women in the third world, whose first priority is often one of basic survival, should be obsessed with the same concerns as Western liberals in Washington and London is bizarre. Even the WHO is forced to concede that women in the third world are ‘frequently faced with issues of their own and their families’ survival and may not see FGM as an immediate priority’.



The concern with FGM in the third world has a domestic spin-off for the authorities here, too, as a means of criminalising and cracking down on immigrant communities. The UK-based Minority Rights Group International, which has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council,

Should doctors, social workers and policemen be inspecting immigrant children’s genitals?

argues that there is a need for ‘clear and unambiguous legislation’ to incorporate FGM into the ‘framework of protecting children from abuse’. FGM is already illegal in Britain under the Prohibition Act of 1985 which provides that anyone found practising or aiding the procedure can be imprisoned for up to five years. The police have stated their commitment to bring prosecutions under the act, and worked with the anti-FGM campaign Forward to nail a Harley Street doctor exposed for FGM by the *Sunday Times*.

Forward has also declared its intention to work with local authorities in ‘child-protection intervention’ in immigrant families. *Community Care* magazine, in an article highlighting how local authority social services departments are already targeting the practice, recently reassured us that Lambeth Social Services Department is to employ a team of social workers with the specific brief of determining which young African, Asian and Middle Eastern girls are at risk of FGM, so as to place them on the Child Protection Register. Somali health workers have objected to being besieged by social workers asking, ‘Do you know anyone who has taken their child to Somalia for the operation?’.

The prospect of an army of doctors and social workers, backed up by the police, trawling through minority communities demanding to inspect their children for signs of genital mutilation, or interrogating parents over intimate family details and travel plans, looks like an exercise in degrading entire communities. Yet under the cover of a campaign against FGM, it can be presented as an exercise in saving some girls from degradation. That is why the current obsession with FGM is such a convenient way for the authorities to justify intruding into the lives of immigrant communities here, and the affairs of third world peoples abroad.

Even those who would generally defend the right of Africans to live free from Western dictates will balk at any notion of upholding their right to circumcise females.

It is worth remembering, however, that many African women have demanded the right to continue their traditional practices. As one woman argued, in the face of feminist outrage, at a recent women’s conference in London, ‘You have the right to ask a doctor to put silicon bags in your breasts, why should I not have the right to ask for him to alter my body in the way that I find acceptable?’. This reaction is only incomprehensible to people who are unfamiliar with the values of the societies where female circumcision is practised. Circumcision cannot be ended without challenging the meaning of youth, adulthood, cleanliness, health and illness in the societies concerned. Those who advocate from afar that the UN or IMF should impose a ban under threat of punitive action are simply indifferent to the destructive consequences of their campaign.

The current campaign against female circumcision carries on the paternalistic tradition of Western intervention in this field. Back in the thirties, British missionaries mobilised the colonial state in East Africa to curb the practice. In Kenya, the Kikuyu people resisted this intrusion into their cultural affairs—indeed the nationalist movement had its origins in the resistance to the attempts of missionaries to ban female circumcision.

The central question raised by Kikuyu nationalists 60 years ago retains its relevance for the discussion of FGM today: who has the right to determine what cultural practices are acceptable or not in African societies? The attempt to determine it from the West might now be couched in the empowering language of feminism rather than the sermons of missionaries, but that does not alter the fact that it is using coercion to impose an outside agenda on the people of the third world.

It is one thing for African women to demand the ending of female circumcision. Only they are entitled to decide on this matter. It is quite another thing when Western feminists and international do-gooders decide to make moral judgements about societies they do not comprehend and for which they demonstrate nothing but contempt. Such campaigns invariably turn into another excuse for condemning Africa, and legitimising more forceful foreign interventions in the lives of the people of the South. If we are serious about helping to achieve emancipation for women in the third world, opposing all such interventions is a good start.



Sexless liaisons

As trendy sexualities go, 'lesbian chic' has had it—the 'sexless liaison' is the latest form of relationship to come under scrutiny from women's magazines and broadsheet feature-writers.

I was convinced that the first article I read about sexless liaisons was a spoof—a send up of the 'how to cope with your relationship' pieces that make up the staple content of women's magazines. But no, it's for real and is not to be confused with celibate relationships.

A celibate relationship is generally understood to refer to one where the partners do not have sex. Pedants debate whether this means they abstain from penetrative sex or from any form of sexual stimulation. But it is fairly clear that they are a couple of people who are self-consciously not doing what most people would be doing in a similar situation.

I confess I've had a problem with people defining themselves by what they don't do in bed ever since I met a woman, while I was researching an article on bisexuality, who described herself as 'bisexual, but a celibate lesbian' because she had never had sex with a woman. This seemed to make as much sense as me claiming that I am a 'celibate necrophiliac' because I have never had sex with a corpse. I suggested other people might consider her as heterosexual, but she insisted that even though she had never acted on her lesbian instincts they were nevertheless there and she was potentially a lesbian.

The implications of defining people by their potential actions rather than current deeds are staggering. Our capacity to imagine actions and yet restrain ourselves from them is one of the things that differentiates mature human beings from small children. The fact that I frequently *imagine* smacking someone in the face is an indication of my restraint rather than my violent potential. Whatever has happened in my mind, the truth of the situation and the experience of those around me is that an assault has not happened.

Of course there are those who insist that thinking is the same as doing. Earlier this year *Living Marxism* reported the bizarre discussions in North America that followed the claim by anti-porn campaigner, Catharine MacKinnon, that writing about rape is the same as rape, but most people (particularly rape victims) appreciate the difference.

'Sexless liaisons' take the biscuit as far as defining by potential goes. They are different to 'celibate relationships' in the sense that there is no Relationship with a capital R at all, only something that used to be called friendship. Take Anne Garvey's description of a typical sexless relationship as discussed in the *Guardian*. Describing the 'affair' of 57-year old, father of three, Gerard, she writes: 'It had been going on for five years. Every lunchtime they would take their coffee to a discreet corner of the canteen and share their lives, what had happened at home, problems with colleagues, beliefs, hopes, dreams.'

Not even a hint of sex or even of developing the friendship beyond what it was. If that sounds to you like two work colleagues having a good old gossip, you're not alone. Yet the article describes it under the header of 'coffee without kisses, lunch without lust...a sexless liaison'.

Descriptions of sexless relationships fit into two not very new or interesting patterns: either good old-fashioned flirting (as in 'For me it was a wonderful warm, reassuring friendship...I just sat there being admired safely on one side of the [table] being amusing, knowing that I was an object of fascination'), or good old-fashioned friendship (as for Gerard). And both forms of behaviour are extremely common in any workplace for the simple reason that people who work together often have more common experiences and common friends and acquaintances than those who live together. But to describe relationships between flirtatious friends or workplace colleagues as sexless liaisons makes no more sense than to describe a job interview, or an appointment with the hairdresser as a sexless liaison.

It's not difficult to understand why the authors of these articles or the 'relationship experts' who are quoted in them, have run off down this particular track. These days, the concept of a sexual relationship has become so loose as to cover virtually any form of social intercourse. If not-having-sex-with-someone-with-whom-you-share-a-flat can be described as a celibate relationship, why shouldn't not-having-sex-with-someone-with-whom-you-share-lunch be described as a sexless liaison. And come to think of it, I did recently read just such a piece about the peculiarly flirtatious character of transactions between hairdressers and their clients!

The all-embracing, ever-expanding definition of what constitutes a love affair is a symptom of our increasingly relativistic times where there is a reluctance to define activities, relationships and attitudes in a precise and meaningful manner. This reluctance stretches from politics (where terms like racism, sexism and oppression are used so generally as to have been rendered completely meaningless), into our private lives, where we are now told that a relationship with a coffee-break companion is as significant as the relationship with the person with whom you choose to share your life, or your bed at least.

In the days of sixties promiscuity, attempts to dismiss 'meaningful relations' were based on the positive impulse to expand one's experience of sex; by contrast, today's attempt to present everything as a 'meaningful relationship' comes with an obligatory health warning. Relate counsellors tell us that a sexless liaison can be as dangerous as the traditional, fully penetrative affair. Your partner, we are told, may feel jealous and insecure if you share even a conversation with another man/woman—so don't. What lonely lives we are expected to lead, and what petty, obsessive relationships we are expected to share. ●

I am a 'celibate necrophiliac'

● In August 1995 it will be 50 years since the USA, with British support, dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing around 200 000 people.

● August 1994 marked the launch of an international year of action against war, leading up to that anniversary.



In August, the Campaign Against Militarism (CAM) sent two delegates, Daniel Nassim and Joan Phillips, to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to attend the World Conference Against A&H Bombs organised by Gensuikyo (Japan Council Against A&H Bombs).

As they arrived in Japan for the forty-ninth anniversary of the atomic bombing of those cities, two new battles were being fought over the use of nuclear weapons. The first is about how the bombings should be seen today. The second is about whether the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should be renewed next year.

In the following pages, they report on the contacts established between the No More Hiroshimas campaign in Britain and anti-war activists in Japan, and say where CAM stands in the new nuclear battles of the nineties.



Hiroshima is built on corpses, tens of thousands of them. You'd never guess. The new Hiroshima is a gleaming metropolis of more than a million people. But after the atomic bomb exploded on a hot summer morning on 6 August 1945, the city was a charred plain as far as the eye could see.

Hiroshima's residents had passed a fitful night, with air-raid sirens sounding frequently from dusk. On the morning of the 6 August, the alarms finally stopped, the all-clear signals sounded and the morning began like any other, with people hurrying to work. By the time the B-29 bomber carrying its deadly load appeared over the city it was too late for warnings. At 8.15am the bomb exploded 500 metres above the Nakajima district of the city. Nearly all people and buildings within a 2km radius of the epicentre of the explosion were killed or destroyed. By the end of the year, about 140 000 were dead or missing, almost half of the city's 350 000 residents.

Many died without trace, turned into shadows by the heat of the blast. On a stone step in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum you can see the shadow of a human being, evaporated as he waited on the steps of a bank. Others were all too visible, but unidentifiable. Large numbers of blackened beings had to be cremated on the spot.

NO MORE

● In Britain, the Campaign Against Militarism has launched a **NO MORE HIROSHIMAS** campaign of anti-war protests, talks, exhibitions, youth initiatives and other events.

● If you want to take a stand against the threat of militarism and war today, get in touch. For more information, ring Kate Margam on (071) 278 9908, or write to **NO MORE HIROSHIMAS**, Campaign Against Militarism, BM CAM, London WC1N 3XX, or e-mail on hiro@camintl.org



Panorama of damage at Hiroshima, half a mile from ground zero

Thousands of corpses could be seen floating in all Hiroshima's rivers the day after the explosion. One man whose job was to collect corpses remembered how they clung to the river bank. 'I noticed blood on my body and went to the water to clean it off. I kicked the dead bodies out of the way. But they kept floating to the river bank. I kicked them again. I had lost my humanity.'

We heard many more stories like these from the Hibakusha, the survivors of the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There are about 340 000 Hibakusha still suffering the effects of the bombs—but still living to tell the tale of what happened on those awful days almost half a century ago. It wasn't always like that. After the bombings, a silence descended on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When British Commonwealth forces occupied Hiroshima after the surrender of Japan, they imposed a Press Code and strict censorship of all material related to the A-bomb. The silence lasted for almost seven years until the occupation ended, broken only by the brave attempts of Japanese to tell the world the truth about what happened.

Fifty years on there is a need to tell the world all over again about what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki so that we don't allow it to happen again as the drive to war accelerates at the end of the century. In preparation for our No More

Hiroshimas year of action, we went as delegates to the 1994 World Conference Against A&H Bombs, held in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August.

Along with hundreds of Japanese delegates, representatives from 19 countries, including the USA, Russia, India, France, Tahiti, Australia, Kazakhstan, Vietnam and the Philippines, attended a series of international meetings in Hiroshima from 2 to 4 August. A two-page statement from CAM was translated and distributed to all delegates, and we had many opportunities to participate in the debates. Our points about the racial dimensions of the bombings and of the current nuclear proliferation debate struck a chord with Japanese and third world delegates in particular.

The much bigger world conference ran from 4 to 6 August with rallies involving thousands of participants. We were invited to address the main Hiroshima rally of 10 000 people. On 6 August, we attended the memorial ceremony in the Peace Park with more than 40 000 people. In Nagasaki, we participated in an international roundtable meeting and a rally of 4000 people on 9 August.

The discussions at the conference covered global power relations, the NPT, North Korea, the Hibakusha, nuclear-testing, Western intervention in the third world and much more. Many

sessions were devoted to discussing initiatives for the year ahead. The conference adopted the Hiroshima Declaration, opposing the extension of the NPT and calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, demanding the dissolution of all military alliances and expressing solidarity with movements fighting for liberation from war and want.

During our stay we made contact with many Japanese Hibakusha, students, youth, workers, trade unionists, women's groups, artists and others. We interviewed Hibakusha and gathered material about the bombings and their aftermath from hospitals and museums. In Hiroshima, we discussed our plans for the year ahead with young people from Aichi prefecture in central Japan who were attending the international conference, and later cemented relations during a visit to the city of Nagoya.

Our visit was extremely valuable in establishing personal relations with a wide range of Japanese anti-war activists, from 17-year old school students to 77-year old survivors of the bombings, from the women's movement in Tokyo to public sector workers in Osaka. In the year ahead we intend to strengthen those ties by organising events involving an exchange of ideas, information and individuals between Britain and Japan. ●

HIROSHIMAS

PHOTO: IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

Battle of the bombs



Months before the fiftieth anniversary of the USA's nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the question of how to commemorate the occasion has become a subject of controversy in America. The focus of the controversy is an exhibition about the bombings at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington.

Scheduled to open next May, the exhibition is built around a display of the Enola Gay, the B-29 bomber that dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima.

At issue is how this act should be seen. For 50 years the US authorities have defended the bombing as a humanitarian act that saved lives. Wartime president Harry S Truman declared that the bombings saved the lives of 'a half million boys on our side'. The Smithsonian exhibition never sought to question this interpretation of the bombings. But even showing the horror of what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki went too far for some US patriots.

From the moment the organisers revealed the contents of the exhibition earlier this year, they have been besieged by protests. US veteran groups accused the Smithsonian of anti-American prejudice and pro-Japanese bias. A group of 24 congressmen complained that the exhibition portrays the Japanese as victims of the war and ignores the atrocities they committed. The 24 also criticised the organisers for failing to highlight why the bombings were justified: 'Attention to the fact that the atomic bombs prevented an invasion of Japan and an estimated one million casualties is limited to one small wall label at the end of an exhibit.' (*Japan Times*, 12 August 1994)

Smithsonian officials say they are 'seriously considering' changes to satisfy the concerns of the veterans. They have already made substantial changes, after three separate reviews of the exhibition delivered damning verdicts: 'If I didn't know better', said one historian, 'I would leave the exhibition with the strong feeling that Americans are bloodthirsty, racist killers.'

Museum director, Martin Harwit, insists that the exhibition has not been organised, 'with a view to criticising or apologising or displaying undue compassion for those on the ground that day, as some may fear' (*Japan Times*, 11 August 1994). He has assured members of congress that the exhibition will strike a balance between illustrating the bomb's destructive power and explaining why it was necessary to use it. In other words, there will be no questioning of the central myth that has justified the bombings for 49 years: that they were necessary to save lives.

So what's all the fuss about? The row cannot be understood simply as a dispute about history, but only as an expression of very contemporary concerns. The battle over how the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki should be remembered has less to do with what happened in history and more to do with what is happening in the world today.



The A-Bomb Dome in Hiroshima was one of the few buildings near the epicentre of the explosion to survive the A-bombing of the city.

Washington's rulers cannot allow the moral standing of the world's superpower to be called into question by a discussion of what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is because the USA's claim to global leadership today, not to mention its possession of a massive nuclear arsenal, rests upon the notion of its moral superiority. Anything that raises doubts about America's moral authority, such as a debate about the legitimacy of the atomic bombings, cannot be tolerated by the authorities.

It is telling that the main concern expressed by the US Air Force Association is that the exhibition will treat 'Japan and the United States as if their participation in the war were morally equivalent' (*USA Today*, 26 August 1994). The US authorities cannot accept that there was any moral equivalence between America and Japan in the Second World War because that would call into question the idea that Washington was fighting a just war and had right on its side.

This is why the Japanese are always presented as the aggressors and why the bombing of Pearl Harbor, rather than the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is presented as the decisive act in the Pacific War. This is also why the Japanese are said to have fought a uniquely cruel war. Once the enemy has been demonised in this way, anything the Allies did can be

justified. The *Wall Street Journal* spelled this out in a recent editorial:

'Bombing civilians is not an ennobling way to fight even the most just of wars, but the aggression of Tojo and Hitler, which also victimised civilians, unleashed an anger in the Allied nations that submerged all thoughts of mercy.' (18 August 1994)

In other words, a morally superior America was confronted by an enemy so evil that all forms of warfare were justified in the fight to destroy it.

Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* challenges the idea that any moral sheen is attached to Japan for being the world's only A-bombing victim: 'The firebombing of Tokyo left more women and children dead than the nuclear fires of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.' (18 August 1994) It is true that the firebombing of Tokyo was a barbarous act that led to large numbers of civilian fatalities. But the implication that the atomic bomb was just any old bomb, and the use of it was no different from the routine bombings of Japanese cities, cannot be sustained.

The use of the atomic bomb was an exceptional act of barbarism, not because of the numbers killed or because of the way that they were killed, but because of the rationale behind it. There was no military justification for the

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was a purely political act. Two cities were annihilated for no reason other than that the USA wanted to show the world that it was *the* power on Earth. It was a warning to the world of what could be expected if anybody dared to challenge the might of America.

The Americans were able to get away with cold-blooded murder in Hiroshima and Nagasaki because of the racist crusade that preceded the bombings. The image of American soldiers as 'bloodthirsty, racist killers', which one historian scorned in his criticism of the Smithsonian, provides an insight into how the USA was able to justify the bombings at the time.

Throughout the war, US propaganda depicted the Japanese as apes, insects, reptiles and other lower forms of life. The racist demonisation of the enemy as 'yellow vermin' explains why so many Americans were prepared to accept the bombings even as they recoiled from the horror of nuclear devastation. The day after the destruction of Hiroshima, a cartoon in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* portrayed a grotesque, ape-like brute staring up in dumb wonder as an atomic bomb exploded overhead (7 August 1945). Only a political culture saturated in racism could have celebrated the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians by a nuclear bomb as 'the greatest thing in history', as Truman boasted.

Today the last thing America's rulers want is a discussion that threatens to expose the racism at the heart of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. But that is precisely what needs to be exposed, along with the lie that has justified the bombings for half a century. The argument that the bombings were necessary to force a Japanese surrender and prevent an American invasion was decisively rejected as far back as 1946 in the authoritative United States Strategic Bombing Survey. From a detailed study of the state of the Japanese war effort in the summer of 1945, and exhaustive interviews with high Japanese officials, the survey concluded that Japan would have surrendered 'certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945...even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated' (*Japan's Struggle to End the War*, Washington DC, 1946).

It is important to intervene in the debate about the bombings, and to expose the racism that prepared the ground for them, not just to settle scores about the past, but to prevent another Hiroshima from happening in the future. Even academic observers recognise that this debate about the bombings is not about the past. It is an argument about the role of American power in the future. America's leaders cannot tolerate any constraints on the exercise of US power today. This is why they will never apologise for the bombings. To do so would call into question the moral superiority upon which America's authority as a world power depends, as well as its right to use nuclear force in the future.



The sting in the suitcase



Would you buy plutonium from a man in underpants? A *Newsnight* special report in August showed German special agents knocking on the door of a man they said was a former Russian soldier selling nuclear contraband. When he answered the door in his underpants you could tell it wasn't for real.

In fact, not many of the recent scare stories about men selling plutonium and uranium from suitcases have been for real. The panic about nuclear smuggling took off in a big way following four seizures of alleged nuclear materials in as many months in Germany. All four seizures turned out to have involved sting operations by German secret police. Nevertheless, the series of stings had the German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel warning of 'a new atomic danger posed by travelling salesmen with nuclear suitcases'.

We are told that there has been a massive increase in nuclear smuggling in recent years. In 1990, there were four cases. In 1993, there were 241. But when you read the small print you discover that most of this illicit trade has consisted of scams by petty crooks who have spotted the invention of a new crime and are trying to cash in on it. Some 118 of the 1993 cases were scams involving sellers offering materials they did not possess.

Only 21 cases led to the seizure of radioactive material. And this material was not the stuff of nuclear weapons. It seems that most suitcases are full, not of plutonium or uranium, but of radioactive rubbish. A favourite seems to be soil from Chernobyl carrying just enough radioactivity to register on a geiger counter. The fact is that until the spring of this year, neither of the isotopes required to make nuclear weapons—highly enriched uranium-235 and plutonium-239—had been found in anybody's suitcase. And when German police seized 325 grammes of plutonium-239 in a sting operation at Munich airport in August, it transpired that it was not even up to weapons grade standard.

The truth is that an enterprising scam artist could probably find more radioactive material in the dustbin of a British hospital than in any

number of Slavic suitcases arriving at a German airport. So far most of the smuggled 'plutonium' that has been found in the West has been in the form of tiny flakes embedded in ceramics from Russian smoke detectors, not to mention samples of scandium and red mercury, both radioactive substances with no known military uses, masquerading as fissile material.

Just as there is no evidence that there has been any nuclear smuggling going on, nor is there any proof that such materials are coming from Russia. We are told that a new nuclear mafia and poverty-stricken Slavs are cashing in on the lack of security at Russia's nuclear establishments. But there is no evidence to substantiate any of this. The media has made much of the fact that some tiny nuclear samples have been sold with certificates of authentication from Russian military sites, but, given that it's easier to forge a certificate than steal some plutonium, it seems likely that this is just another scam. Some sources have even suggested that some of the stuff seized in sting operations in Germany is not even manufactured in Russia, but only in the USA and Western Europe.

Even more striking is the fact that there is no evidence of anybody wanting to buy any of the stuff—except German intelligence agents, and now chequebook journalists. There have even been cases of one lot of undercover agents selling the stuff and another lot buying it. This is hardly surprising given that the black market in this trade consists almost exclusively of undercover policemen. We are told that nasty governments in Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea and Pakistan, and terrorist gangs from pretty much the same places are the buyers. But are we seriously expected to believe that these governments are building bombs by buying 500g a week of inferior plutonium from people they do not even know? And why would terrorists choose to buy something so expensive and difficult to use, when there are plenty of cheaper and easier-to-handle lethal substances on the market?

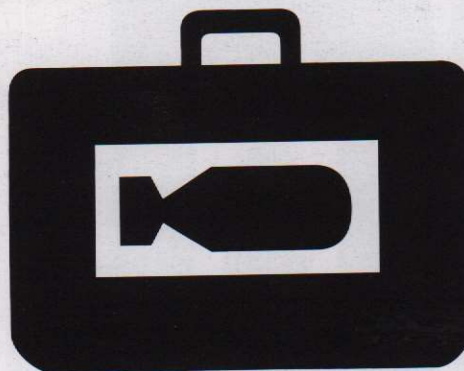
It would appear that the nuclear suitcases story is one big sting operation. So what's it all ▶

NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

◀ about? Some suspect that it may have something to do with the fact that there is an election in Germany in October. The nuclear security scare provides a good issue on which chancellor Helmut Kohl can establish his domestic authority. But there is more to it than this. The issue serves the government's international as well as domestic ambitions. This is Germany's claim to be part of the nuclear club, a power that can be trusted to sit at the top table with the nuclear powers, and to admonish those in the third world who cannot be trusted with the Bomb.

The recent panic also fits the pattern of post-Cold War international diplomacy. Over the past few years, terrorists, nuclear scientists and third world maniacs have all been put in the frame by Western policy-makers looking for a replacement for the old communist threat. In 1994, all these demons have come together in the spectre of the travelling salesman with a nuclear suitcase. The anti-proliferation crusade is fast becoming an organising principle of Western foreign policy. President Bill Clinton recently said that it was a 'top priority of US foreign policy'.

The question is why anybody has given any credence to a scare which is so artlessly fabricated? The answer has nothing to do with the facts of the matter, and everything to do with the politics of the proliferation debate. At the heart of this debate is a racist double standard which suggests that the existing nuclear powers



At the heart of this debate
is a racist double standard

can be trusted with the Bomb while everybody else who hasn't got the Bomb is a potential threat to world peace. This is why a liberal newspaper like the *Guardian* can acknowledge in one paragraph that nothing is being smuggled except nuclear rubbish, and in another paragraph indulge fears about 'Europe teeming with Iraqis, Libyans, Iranians, Pakistanis and others with

unlimited budgets to buy instant nuclear status the easy way' (20-21 August 1994).

The core message of the nuclear proliferation discussion is that you can't trust the third world. While we in the West are civilised, rational and trustworthy, they are uncivilised, irrational and untrustworthy. This is the reasoning behind the campaign to extend the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995. This campaign is not about abolishing nuclear weapons. It is about maintaining the legal monopoly on the Bomb enjoyed by a handful of powers, and criminalising any state which is suspected of wanting to develop the Bomb as a nuclear pariah.

This view of the threat to world peace turns reality on its head. In the make-believe world of Western diplomacy, the threat is always presented as coming from mad Iraqis, Libyans, Algerians and other third world types. The hypothetical threat is always over there in the third world, and never over here where the real power to destroy the world many times over actually resides. In reality, rather than the fantasy world created by Western policy-makers, the men with their fingers on the nuclear trigger are all in the West. These are the only people ever to have used a nuclear bomb, the only people who are still making nuclear bombs, and the only people who are threatening other people with nuclear annihilation. Yet these are the people who are portrayed as the force for world peace. It's a funny old world.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARISM



In September the Campaign Against Militarism launched its Worldwrite initiative as part of the No More Hiroshimas year of action. Worldwrite is our call to all those who are against war to communicate their views, via letter, to people in Japan for whom the issue of war will be high on the agenda in the year ahead. We will forward your letters to school children, students, trade unionists, A-bomb survivors and anti-war activists in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Our aim is to send 200 000 letters to Japan by the fiftieth anniversary of the bombings next August.

Worldwrite is about challenging the culture of racism that brands foreigners as our enemies and in doing so prepares the ground for war. By making contact with people in Japan we can bridge the racial divide that still presents the Japanese as a race apart. The runaway success of Michael Crichton's 'let's-nuke-them-again' bestseller, *Rising Sun*, shows that the Japanese are still considered to be 'different' from us. The more direct links we can establish between us, the easier it will be to confront the poisonous effect of such prejudices.

If you want to help Worldwrite, please contact Tony Graham who can supply you with our special headed paper, and start sending them back by the sackful! Campaign Against Militarism, BM CAM, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: (071) 278 9908. Fax: (071) 278 9844. E-mail: hiro@camintl.org

NO MORE NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL

abolish the Non-Proliferation Treaty

NO MORE MILITARY THREATS

fight imperialist intervention

NO MORE ARMS BAZAARS

end global militarisation

NO MORE REARMAMENT

not a penny more for war

Why is nobody demanding aid for Cuba?

Paula Cerni finds the limits of Western humanitarianism off the Florida coast

Thousands have taken to the seas to escape the grinding poverty of Fidel Castro's Cuba. Subject to a US trade embargo since 1963 under the Trading With the Enemy Act, this Caribbean island lost its lifeline when its trade with the old Eastern bloc ceased. Now the USA has stepped up the economic war against Cuba with more sanctions under the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act and a ban in August on the remittances sent by emigrants to their families back home—a ban that will cost Cuba an estimated \$500m a year, its only source of foreign currency apart from tourism. And the tourists are becoming fewer as conditions inside the country deteriorate further.

Shortages are driving the country back to the Middle Ages. Without oil, Havana's streets carry only horse-drawn carts; the electricity supply is routinely shut down; and agricultural productivity is collapsing. Rationing means Cubans have not seen meat for months, subsisting instead on a diet of rice and soya beans without even oil for cooking. Healthcare has collapsed and the sick are suffering.

Cuba is dying on its feet but nobody is demanding aid for the island. It seems that the sympathy that extends to the suffering masses everywhere else in the world does not extend to Cuba. From Somalia to Rwanda and Bosnia to other far-flung countries, America has trumpeted its commitment to humanitarian intervention to save the sick and starving. Yet this commitment seems to be singularly lacking when it comes to Cuba.

In fact, US policy appears to be the opposite of humanitarian. After risking their lives crossing the seas on makeshift rafts, Cuban refugees have been detained in concentration camps in Miami, intercepted and imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, the American outpost on Cuba, or even deported to camps under American military jurisdiction in Panama.

All this suggests that American foreign policy is not motivated by an altruistic concern for the well-being of people in the third world, but rather by more base, selfish considerations. In Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and elsewhere, US intervention has been about boosting America's standing and authority at home and abroad. Similarly, the Clinton administration's policy towards Cuba is guided by *realpolitik* rather than sentiment.

No doubt there are several factors informing Washington's attitude towards Cuba, from a desire to carry on fighting the Cold War to a wish to look tough by taking on an easy target. Whatever the reason, we can safely say that

Bill Clinton's Cuban policy is certainly not shaped by humanitarianism. Perhaps the key factor influencing the government's Cuban policy is the heightened domestic sensitivity to the immigration issue.

The spectre of large-scale Cuban immigration into the USA is the focus of an official panic about the 'browning of America' that puts cultural homogeneity over humanitarianism. Just as there is a reaction against the idea of Puerto Rico becoming an American state, because the inclusion of more Hispanic people would further dilute the old WASP identity, so there is a backlash against the arrival of more Cubans.

There was always resentment against immigrants from Cuba. But this was tempered by the idea of Cubans as victims of communism and opponents of Castro who deserved to be given a break. Cuban exiles were guaranteed asylum after a year's residence under the 1966 Cuban Refugee Act. Today, however, Cubans are cast in the role of Spanish-speaking foreigners who want your welfare. Seen only as economic refugees fleeing poverty, Cubans lose their heroic status and fit instead into American fears about low-class immigrants undermining the American way of life. Cubans are now denied the residence that would once have guaranteed them a fast-track to citizenship.

Immigration used to be a symbol of the American dream, but today the authorities are gripped by a nightmare of burgeoning masses of Latinos. The huddled masses yearning to be free have become, in the American imagination, a symbol of decay and an economic burden. Florida, for instance, is suing the federal government for a billion dollars in education, health and other costs caused by illegal immigration.

Declaring a state of emergency in August, Florida's Democratic governor Lawton Chiles protested at 'thousands massing on the shores of Cuba'. President Clinton immediately stepped up the coastguard patrols operating on the Florida straits and defence secretary William Perry warned that 'there is a tidal wave of people out there'.

America's siege mentality has turned the old Cold War rhetoric inside out, as the US authorities demand that their Cuban counterparts get tough on refugees. In July, the Cuban coastguard sank a tugboat loaded with refugees, drowning 32 people. But when fleeing Cubans killed a Cuban navy lieutenant and hijacked a navy vessel, a US state department spokesman condemned 'the repeated use of sometimes lethal violence'. US officials would never have condemned East Berliners escaping over the wall for using 'violence', but that is because they were not branded as criminals in the way that Cubans have been.

In Florida the influx of Cuban refugees, especially after the Mariel boatlift of 125 000 Cubans in 1980, has been seen as a threat to law and order. Cubans have become a by-word for crime and corruption in every film and TV programme from *Miami Vice* to *Scarface* and Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Immigration is held to have turned the Sunshine State into a paradise for muggers and drug dealers.

The US fear of immigration has nothing to do with the characteristics of immigrants themselves and everything to do with America's own anxieties. The US government has lost the belief that it can, as in the past, make a heroic entrepreneur out of every newcomer, fearing instead an influx of Al Pacino-style Scarfaces. The clampdown on immigrants only shows that nobody any longer believes in the civilising influence of the American dream.

The limits of American humanitarianism are all too visible in the Straits of Florida as US coastguards round up refugees clinging to their makeshift rafts. The USA's blockade of the Cuban economy is the true measure of US overseas aid, whose largesse has always been subordinate to the self-interest of those in power on Capitol Hill. In the concentration camps of Florida, where Cuban refugees await repatriation to Guantanamo, ethnic cleansing has become the goal of America's 'humanitarian' foreign policy.



Cubans under the heel



A ceasefire, but no peace

The IRA has surrendered unconditionally but the British government has not won an unqualified victory, reports Mark Ryan

Hopes that the IRA ceasefire announced on 1 September will bring peace to Northern Ireland after 25 years of war are destined to be shortlived. There will be no peace, even if the Loyalist paramilitaries call a halt to their campaign, because the cause of the conflict—the British occupation—remains. The British Army and its paramilitary allies hold 98 per cent of the weapons in Northern Ireland. Until the British declare a ceasefire and withdraw from Ireland, there is no chance of peace. Unfortunately a British withdrawal is not in prospect.

All the talk of ceasefire and peace process has led to a rewriting of history. From recent commentaries it would appear that Northern Ireland was a peaceful place until the IRA appeared on the scene. The truth is different. The nationalist people of Northern Ireland experienced violent repression and sectarian discrimination for nearly 50 years before the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969. From the moment Northern Ireland came into existence in 1921, it has been in a permanent state of military mobilisation against almost half of its own population. It was the oppressive character of the Northern state which led to the emergence of the Provisional IRA in the early seventies, not the other way around.

If the plight of Catholics was bad before 1969, it is even worse now. Catholics are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants, and the overall level of joblessness has

rocketed. As a result of sectarian attacks, security policies, housing and road developments, Catholic and Protestant communities are more segregated today than at any time in history.

Catholics today face a bigger and tougher military force than they did in 1968. In the late sixties the civil rights movement campaigned against the B-Specials, a Protestant militia of fewer than 4000 poorly trained and equipped volunteer farmers. In the course of the war, the Specials became the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR); after numerous cases of UDR involvement in Loyalist terror groups, the name was changed again, to the Royal Irish Regiment. It is now twice the size of the old Specials, and a fully integrated regiment of the British Army, with access to all the hi-tech paraphernalia of modern counter-insurgency. Meanwhile, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has more than trebled in size and has become a paramilitary force.

Under siege

By the end of 1969 there were 8000 British soldiers in Northern Ireland; today there are around 12 000. Troops and police patrol Catholic areas incessantly, enforcing British rule from a network of barracks, control centres and listening towers. In the Border areas, Army bases have been fortified to the extent that villages resemble open prisons. To show that they were planning to stay, British troops at Newtownhamilton in South Armagh passed the week leading up

to the IRA ceasefire in reformatting their base. With its watchtowers, observation posts and concrete barricades, the Border itself is coming to resemble the now demolished Berlin Wall.

The message from the British armed forces is clear: the IRA may have given up its military campaign, but Britain's military machine remains in place. The immediate result of the ceasefire is that, for the first time in 25 years, the British Army is in full control of Northern Ireland. In nationalist areas where they once feared to tread, soldiers stroll unchallenged, still treating all Catholics as the enemy. The ceasefire has led to an increase in cases of physical and verbal abuse of nationalists by troops and police. These are the familiar actions of a victorious army.

Those committed to the cause of Irish freedom have to face the grim reality that 25 years of resistance has ended in defeat. The worst possible reaction now is to pretend that the ceasefire represents a step forward on the road to a united Ireland. Yet, this is what Sinn Fein is doing.

The problem is not the ceasefire as such. Given the unfavourable balance of forces facing the republican movement in recent years, it is fair enough to conclude that it would be foolhardy to continue the military campaign. Under such circumstances, nobody could criticise the IRA for calling a halt, regrouping its forces and explaining to its supporters the need for a defensive posture.

But Sinn Fein's 'peace process' has obscured the issues and created



(Above)
On parade for the last time? The IRA are taking the blame for Britain's war in Ireland

confusion among nationalists. From the beginning, the 'peace process' pursued by Sinn Fein was a myth. It sought to persuade nationalists that the movement was now strong enough to achieve through diplomacy what it had failed to achieve by force. While the IRA laid down its arms without the slightest concession from the British, Sinn Fein urged its supporters to take to the streets in celebration. But what is there to celebrate?

Respecting the Union

Sinn Fein argues that the IRA ceasefire is a step forward in the 'peace process'. This argument undermines everything the movement has struggled for, destroys the morale of the nationalist people, and retrospectively vindicates British propaganda. If an IRA ceasefire can bring peace, then the implication is that IRA violence is the cause of the conflict. Not only is the republican movement accepting the burden of guilt for the bloodshed now, it is putting in question the legitimacy of 25 years of resistance. Worst of all, it confirms British propaganda that the violence was caused by 'mindless terrorism', and that British troops are in Ireland to keep the peace. The constant appeals from Sinn Fein leaders for the British government to be 'bold and imaginative' in response to the ceasefire only confirms the common prejudice that Britain is a force for peace in Ireland.

In his attempt to justify the ceasefire, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams argued that Irish nationalism was now strong enough to pursue the goal of a united Ireland without recourse to violence. But, far from being stronger, Irish nationalism is effectively dead. The Dublin government led by Albert Reynolds,

leader of the Fianna Fail 'republican' party, has effectively abandoned its constitutional claim to sovereignty over the whole island. John Hume, the leading Northern Catholic nationalist politician, talks incessantly about the need to respect the Unionist heritage. When every leading mainstream nationalist has renounced the key features of Irish nationalism, Adams discovers life in this corpse.

The opportunism of the Sinn Fein leadership may reap some rewards for Adams and his colleagues. Leading republicans have already been welcomed into the mainstream of Irish politics. Within a week of the ceasefire, Adams was treated to a handshake with Reynolds on the steps of Leinster House in Dublin.

Adams has been accepted as a legitimate politician, because like Reynolds and Hume, he too has made the decisive break from old-style Irish nationalism. Sinn Fein's desire for an 'inclusive dialogue' among all the Irish parties and the British government with a view to achieving a political settlement signals its repudiation of two centuries of republican tradition.

Sinn Fein has abandoned its historic aspiration to represent the Irish people as a whole in their quest for freedom, in favour of becoming just another party at the negotiating table. Even in the darkest moments of past defeats, republicans always asserted their commitment to the goal proclaimed by Theobald Wolfe Tone, leader of the 1798 revolt of the United Irishmen—that of overcoming 'the divisions of the past, and to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman'. Now, instead of striving to overcome sectarian divisions by overthrowing the force that sustains them—Britain—republican leaders have accepted both the divisions and British rule. Now they ask only to be included as representatives of a section of Northern Catholics in negotiations within the framework of the United Kingdom.

No British solution

Although the Irish republican movement has been defeated, the British government has little cause for celebration. Throughout the 'peace process', the British government has been reacting to events rather than initiating them.

The conditions for the settlement in Northern Ireland emerged as a consequence of the end of the Cold War and the new international balance of forces resulting from the defeat of national liberation movements around the world. The global demise of popular nationalist movements left Irish republicans isolated and more disposed to come to terms with the British government.

Ironically, the IRA's surrender has also exposed Britain's diminished status in the New World Order. The high-profile involvement of the US government in the diplomatic game is particularly demeaning for Britain. Successive British governments have repudiated American interference in the Irish question. Now Bill Clinton is using a domestic British issue as a vehicle for diplomatic advancement.

The comparisons made between the Irish 'peace process' and those in South Africa and Israel inevitably place Britain on a par with these third-rate powers. Like these countries, Britain seems too weak to be able to sort out its domestic opponents without assistance from other, more powerful states.

Fuelling sectarianism

Even more galling for Britain is the way the Downing Street declaration elevated Albert Reynolds as John Major's equal and raised the issue of an Irish share in British sovereignty. The shuttle diplomacy of Dublin foreign minister Dick Spring, who visited Washington and Bonn to brief the American and German governments, was another humiliation.

Major may have got a result in Northern Ireland, but it is one for which Britain has already had to pay a high diplomatic price. It is too early to say whether a higher price will be exacted in the future. A period of calm could follow the ceasefire, but the unravelling of the old arrangements could destabilise the framework of British rule in Northern Ireland, as well as society in the South and relations between Ireland and Britain.

Peace in Ireland is a more distant prospect now than it was 25 years ago. Even the repressive stability which prevailed from 1921 to 1969 is unlikely to return. The military is now so bound up with the economy and social fabric of the Northern state that demilitarisation will be limited. Any peace dividend would have a disastrous effect on Protestant employment, fuelling Loyalist fears of betrayal. Talk of shared sovereignty over the North between Britain and the Irish Republic, while not resolving the conflict, will perpetuate sectarian tensions.

It is difficult to accept that the world's oldest liberation struggle has ended in defeat. But we should remember that it was not for want of heroism on the part of ordinary nationalists that the struggle foundered. It was politics which failed them. As a new Ireland emerges, the challenge we face now is to make politics adequate to the aspirations of the next generation.

Mark Ryan's *War and Peace in Ireland: Britain and the IRA in the New World Order* is published by Pluto Press.

Should fascists be allowed a platform for their views in the media or other public forums? As the issue hots up again in the colleges, Juliet Connor questions some assumptions behind the no platform argument

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The problem with 'No platform'

The demand 'No platform for fascists' has become an issue across Europe. Last year, 40 intellectuals, led by the Italian writer Umberto Eco, signed the 'Appeal for vigilance', vowing to boycott any media outlet which allowed the far right a hearing. In Britain, groups like Media Workers Against the Nazis, a collection of journalists including John Pilger and *Guardian* columnist Paul Foot, have taken up the campaign to get fascists off the air and out of the press. When the *Independent* published a letter from the press officer of the British National Party back in April, the no platform debate moved up a gear.

Nobody particularly wants to see Derek Beackon or other unpleasant BNP figures in the newspapers all the time, but the same could be said for a whole number of other people. So what is really the issue for those who call for 'No platform for fascists'?

In his *Guardian* column criticising the *Independent* for printing the BNP letter, Paul Foot gave two reasons for supporting 'No platform'. First, he said, the notion of free speech cannot apply to the BNP because they have contempt for it themselves. Given half a chance, they would censor all of their political opponents. Second, and most significant, he argued that fascist ideas in the media have a direct link with racist attacks on the street. 'There is a very real sense', said Foot, 'in which every publication of fascist propaganda leads to another assault on a black person' (11 April 1994).

The British National Party is a small organisation of a couple of hundred people, a combination of social misfits and skinheads, concentrated in a handful of places around the country. In a recent court case in which BNP organisers were convicted of assaulting a black man outside an East End pub, it became clear that just about all of the

party's active London membership had fitted into the same public bar. So isolated and desperate for friends has the BNP been that 'Fuhrer' John Tyndall spent two years writing to an obscure right-wing group in Donegal before he realised that they were a sado-masochistic cult largely made up of transvestites.

Nobody, and especially not someone of Foot's experience, could seriously argue that an outfit like the BNP is responsible for racism in Britain today. So what is the 'No platform' lobby really saying when it maintains that 'every publication of fascist propaganda leads to another assault on a black person'?

The implication of the no platform argument is that the problem is not the BNP itself, but the audience for fascist ideas. It assumes that racist attacks occur because the people who commit them have been influenced by 'fascist propaganda' in the media. The demand for 'No platform' is underpinned by the view that people will inevitably copy what they see on the television or read about in the newspapers. Strip away the rhetoric about fighting racism and the no platform argument reveals a contempt for ordinary people, considered so stupid and gullible that they can be stirred to racist violence by a word from a Beackon or a Tyndall.

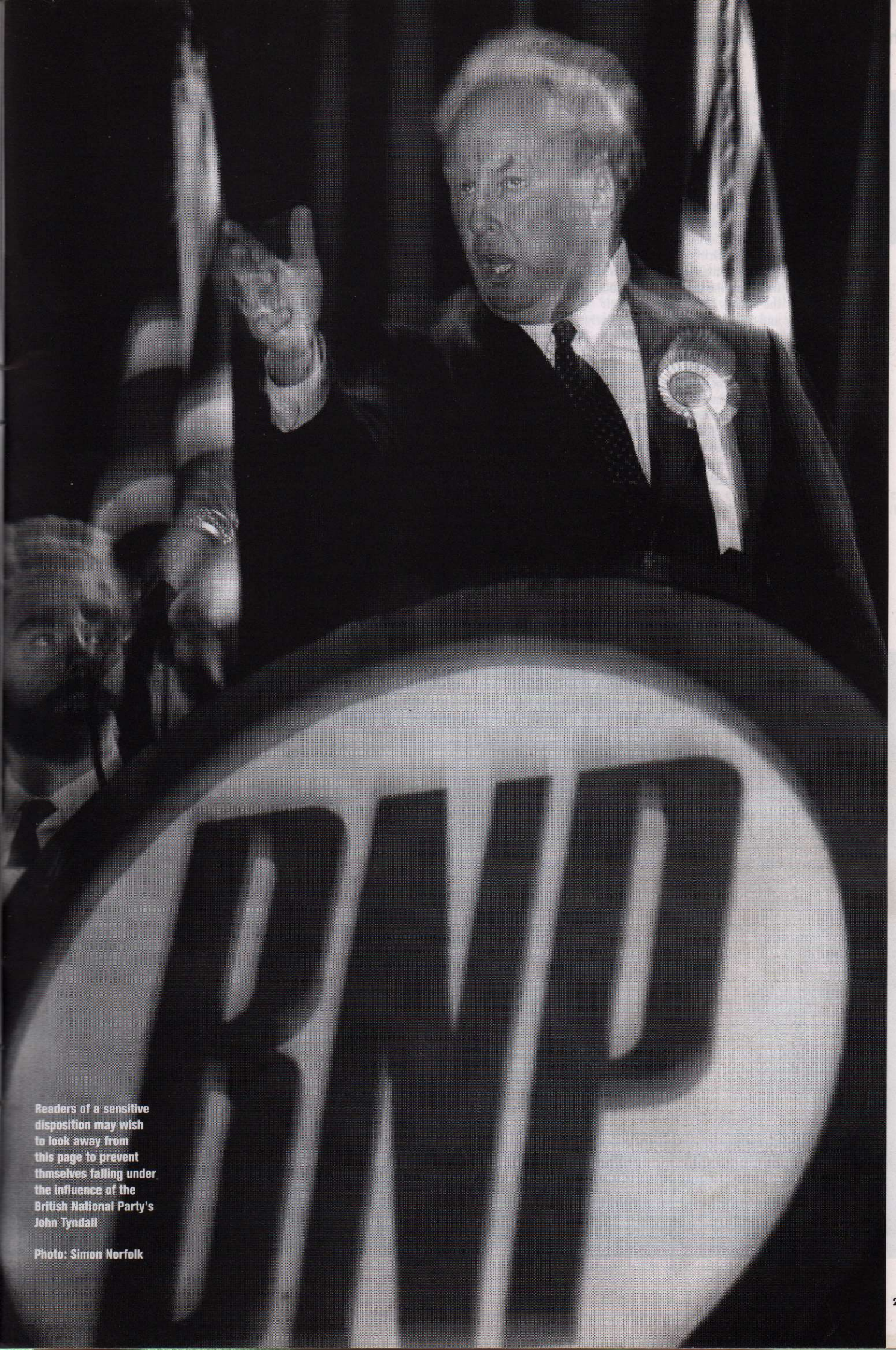
A similarly dim view of what people are like crops up in other fashionable debates, such as the discussion of video nasties. The idea that violent films cause violent behaviour in people is now taken entirely for granted. The assumption that racist attacks are caused by what we see in the media takes the argument a step further, with a more radical twist.

Just imagine the world if this were true. One Sunday supplement story on John Tyndall or radio interview with a fascist and white Britons would take

to the streets to attack black people on sight. Indeed society would be a perpetual Mad Max nightmare of murder, rape and violence if people spent the day acting out what they saw on video the night before. If the BBC screened *Reservoir Dogs* the country would be awash with blood. And if our political views could be determined simply by what we were exposed to on the media, surely we would all be into the yogic flying promoted by the Natural Law Party in its party political broadcast during the June Euro-elections.

Nobody becomes a racist or commits a racist attack on the strength of reading media coverage of fascists. Any argument which adopts this approach encourages dangerous confusions about the causes of racism. The problem of racism is presented as a product of ordinary people's ignorant prejudice, manipulated by fascists with the help of the media. The fact that racism is an outlook institutionalised in society from the top downwards, and enforced through systematic discrimination, is lost as attention focuses on the need to stop the stupid masses being incited by a glimpse of fascist propaganda.

An approach which begins by suggesting that popular ignorance and prejudice is the cause of racism is bound to end up calling for censorship. If ideas in the media have such an effect on us, then the solution is to hide those ideas from view. If we're too stupid to watch the BNP on the television without being seduced by its ideas, then what we need is an enlightened few to keep them off our TV screens and out of our breakfast newspapers. Since prominent anti-racists are somehow immune to the influence of 'fascist propaganda' which causes others to commit violence, they have seen fit to appoint



Readers of a sensitive disposition may wish to look away from this page to prevent themselves falling under the influence of the British National Party's John Tyndall

Photo: Simon Norfolk



themselves guardians of the nation's conscience. Bans and censorship are their tools.

It seems bizarre to argue for 'No platform' for an organisation that already has no influence on political discussion. The BNP has no platform in any real sense. There are of course plenty of racists with an important public platform, but they are certainly not in the British National Party. They are in the mainstream political parties that have the biggest platform of all: the houses of parliament. Their anti-immigrant ideas are regularly relayed to audiences of millions. They write the laws and control the justice system and 150 000 police officers. Through these institutions, a culture of racism has been created which ensures that anything foreign is viewed with suspicion. Institutionalised racism provides the bedrock of everyday prejudice in society—and the cue for racist violence.

'Spanish bastards'

By contrast, the BNP has one bookshop in Welling, a paper that nobody reads, and a very occasional soundbite on local radio. Yet somehow we are supposed to be worried that these sad figures have a platform from which to air their dangerous views. In the

'No platform' discussion, the powerful racists with a truly influential platform barely merit a mention. Meanwhile, one BNP letter in the *Independent* is considered to be a threat to us all.

Of course, racism in the media can have an effect. Concerted campaigns to pinpoint immigrants as a threat have resulted in increased race attacks. But this has nothing to do with the fringe BNP, or with the stupidity of the public. Anti-foreign stories in the media can have an impact because they feed off a racist culture which has been institutionalised in British society from the top down, a culture which has made racism respectable. When a BNP member blames 'blacks' for taking 'our' jobs and houses, he is widely dismissed as a bigoted idiot. But when a Tory minister like Peter Lilley makes a speech about immigrants scrounging off the welfare state, he is taken seriously because he has every institution in society to back him up. His brand of respectable racism is taken as something close to common sense.

When Spanish fishermen recently attacked English trawlers for using oversized nets in their waters there was a national outcry. 'The Spanish are a bunch of bastards', fumed one Cornish fishermen. He said what others

were thinking—you can't trust a dago. Treating foreigners with suspicion is part of the British way of life. The idea underpinning most political discussion is that Britain is best and the rest of the world, especially the third world, is inferior by comparison. The Germans won't buy our beef, the Spanish attack our fishermen and the Africans come over here scrounging off the dole. This kind of poisoned, anti-foreign culture guarantees a resonance for racist ideas. None of this has anything to do with fascists having a platform. Nobody, by any stretch of the imagination, could argue that the BNP is responsible for the prejudices of Cornish fishermen. Those views are simply a reflection of mainstream British culture.

Mainstream racists

The fascination with 'No platform for fascists' means that mainstream racist ideas go unchallenged. While prominent anti-racists campaign to get the BNP off the news, the government has free reign of the airwaves. In contrast to the BNP, those who really control society and whose ideas have dominance, appear respectable and trustworthy. If, as Umberto Eco maintains, fascists represent that which is intolerable,

Bans and bigotry



Peter Tatchell of the gay pressure group *Outrage*, adding his voice to the demands that a conference of Muslims at Wembley be banned

Photo: Michael Kramer

then all the other politicians must, by implication, be acceptable. If the BNP really is the face of racism in Britain, then the Tory Party, which is only too pleased to denounce the BNP, can look like a champion of decency and fair play. So the most powerful racist party is made to look reasonable in comparison to the weakest and least influential.

Public decency

Those who support the no platform view may think that they are fighting racism, but censorship can never solve the problem. It assumes that sweeping things under the carpet is a solution. But it never is. If we are to tackle racism, the very least we need to do is to get these ideas out into the open. Closing your eyes and hoping that the problem will go away is no solution at all. Calling for censorship isn't just useless, however, it makes matters worse.

Paul Foot's preoccupation with a fascist future where all our views will be censored foolishly ignores current reality. It's not some fantasy about a BNP-run future that we should worry about, but the real climate of censorship that already exists today. The authorities are finding it increasingly easy to impose tighter

controls on what we can see, hear or read, from films to computer information.

Many might think that it's all right to call for censorship of racists so long as the government is not invited to do the banning. Anti-fascists argue that it's up to ordinary people to demand 'No platform' for fascists in colleges, in the press and in their workplaces. But it makes no difference who does it. Whether the appeal for censorship is addressed to the government, media barons or trade unions, calling for a ban on the BNP can only reinforce an already censorious climate.

Indeed, in many ways it is worse when anti-racists or feminists demand restrictions and bans than when Tories lead the call for censorship. The fact that these radical voices are willing to endorse a demand for more controls gives a special legitimacy to the notion that bans and censorship can be for the public good. The demand for 'No platform' makes a form of censorship appear fashionably anti-fascist. That can only make it easier for the authorities to use the same pro-censorship arguments to tighten their control over ideas in society.

The editorial in a summer issue of *Socialist Worker* complained of the lack

of media coverage of the Anti-Nazi League carnival in Brockwell Park. But it ended by calling for 'No platform': 'We need to keep the Nazis on the run and raise the pressure on the press to deny these murderers a platform.' (4 June 1994) An article which opens by criticising the media for not covering the activities of one political movement ends up by calling for the exclusion of another party. The supporters of 'No platform' demand that newspaper editors deny the BNP a hearing—and then look shocked when those same editors use their allotted position as protectors of public decency to deny a platform to those other 'extremists', the ANL.

The final irony of the anti-fascists' campaign is that if anyone has given the BNP a platform, it is them. Their obsession with the BNP has elevated this little collection of scumbags into a recognised party that can even attract some protest votes. Those who insist that keeping the BNP out of the media is a major concern today have given the fascists more publicity than they could ever have gained by themselves. And while anti-racists continue their obsession with banning the far right, racism remains unchallenged.

● The British National Party is not the only organisation to face calls for bans and censorship by anti-racist campaigns. Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Islamic fundamentalist group alternatively known as the Islamic Liberation Party (ILP), is the latest preoccupation of the no platform lobby.

When Hizb ut-Tahrir held a 12000-strong conference at Wembley Arena in August, there were calls from many quarters for the Home Secretary to ban the event. Brent council, within whose boundaries Wembley falls, expressed concern that if allowed to continue, the conference could promote anti-Semitic ideas. Brent was not the only body calling for the banning of Hizb ut-Tahrir activities. The National Union of Students (NUS) is leading a campaign in universities and colleges around the country to clamp down on the group.

Early this year, Hizb ut-Tahrir's spokesman, Farid Kassim, was billed to speak at University College London on the Middle East peace process. UCL authorities cancelled the meeting saying that they feared a breach of the peace. In April, it became the anti-racist policy of the NUS to 'commit NUS resources to combating Hizb ut-Tahrir activity on campuses'. The new policy described UCL's decision to cancel Farid Kassim's meeting as a 'principled stand against anti-Semitism'. The justification for this policy is that the group is guilty of 'preaching anti-Semitism, race hatred and violence against Jews and other disbelievers'. At the

annual NUS conference where the policy was passed, Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideas were condemned as 'offensive' and anti-democratic. Banning the group's activities on British campuses was said to be an effective way to fight racism.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an anti-Zionist group. Its literature states opposition to the state of Israel and supports its abolition. Like many other religious groups on campus, Hizb ut-Tahrir denounces homosexuality as unnatural. There are aspects of Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideas that many would find repugnant. But is this a good reason to call for censorship against the group?

Even if they were anti-Semites, stopping members of Hizb ut-Tahrir from speaking to students will do nothing to fight racism. The campaign to censor Hizb ut-Tahrir may seem like a radical, anti-racist initiative. But it isn't. Not only will it do nothing to challenge anti-Semitic ideas, worse still it will fuel an already pervasive prejudice against Muslims.

From Arnold Schwarzenegger movies to news coverage of events in Algeria, Muslims, and especially Islamic fundamentalists, are presented as fanatics who are intolerant of others and out to impose their extreme beliefs on everybody else. The composite image of book-burning, woman-hating, bomb-wielding Mad Mullahs that has been built up over the past decade indicates the extent to which Muslims have been demonised.

In this context, any move to ban Islamic groups on the grounds that their ideas are

offensive inevitably fuels an already existing prejudice. In Britain in 1994, any anti-Islamic campaign can only help to consolidate a racist backlash against Muslims. When student unions call for censorship of Hizb ut-Tahrir they are playing into the hands of those politicians who have been promoting anti-Muslim ideas for years.

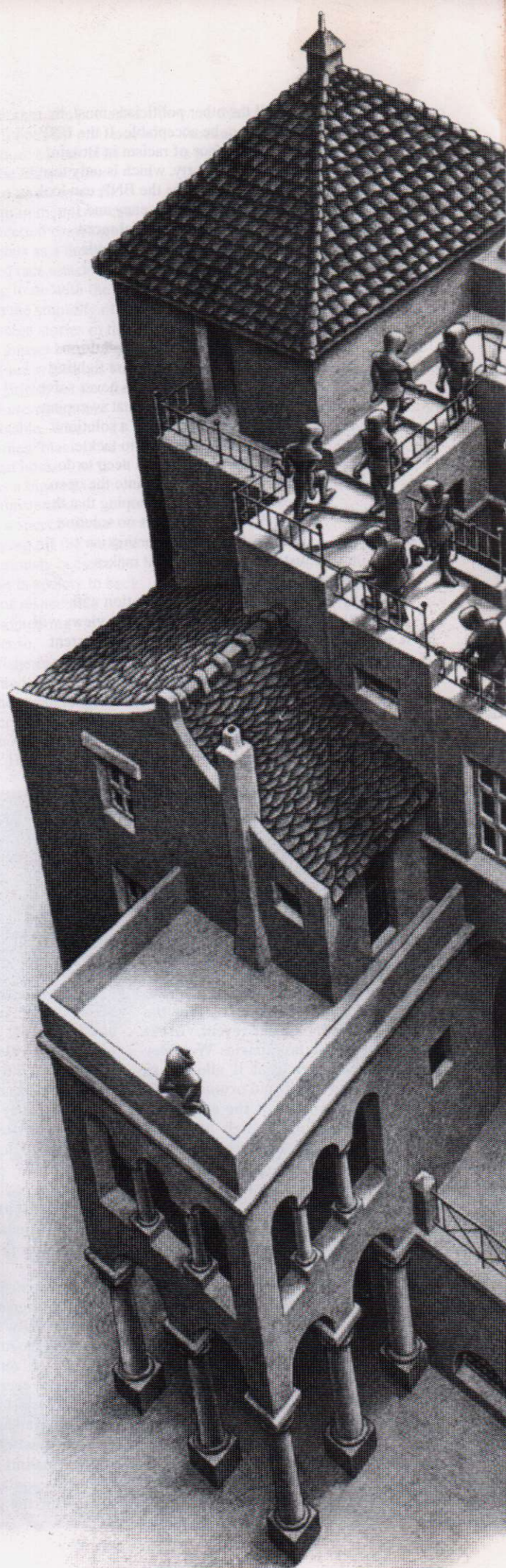
Any campaign for censorship is bound to play into the hands of the authorities because it gives them the moral authority to ban anybody else they deem to be offensive too. But a campaign which advocates censorship in the name of anti-racism is even worse. Not only does it fuel anti-Muslim sentiment, but it also gives anti-racist credentials to the censors. Called on to ban and censor, the authorities who are responsible for the promotion of racist ideas can appear as champions of anti-racism.

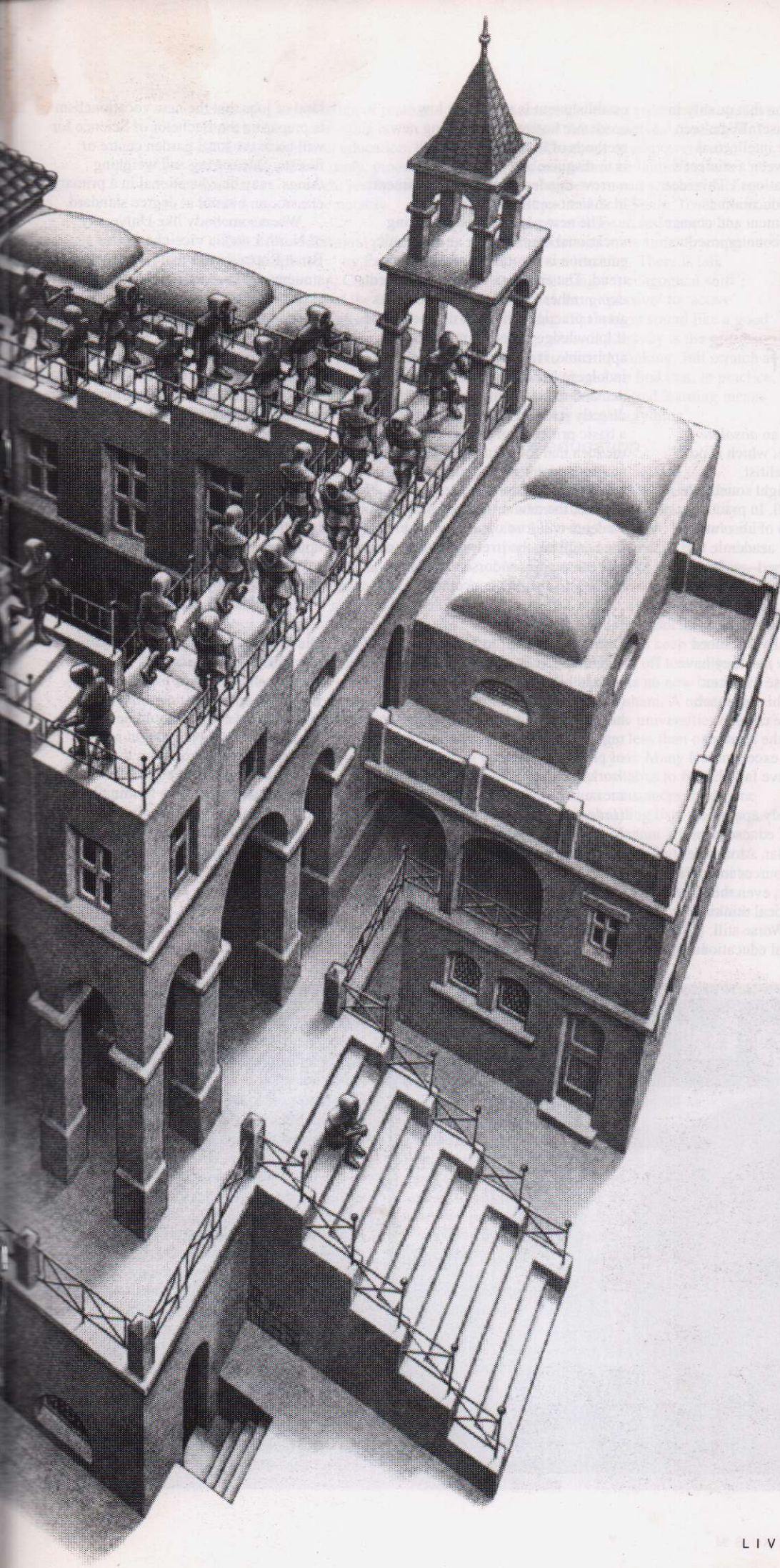
The campaign to stop Hizb ut-Tahrir is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Racist ideas about Muslims are dressed up in the language of fighting anti-Semitism and defending gay rights. The movement for censorship ends up as an anti-racist, racist campaign. The respectable racists in government and authority must be laughing all the way to statute books. Who needs Tory backwoodsmen to rant about the threat to the British way of life from fundamentalist zealots when student unions are spreading the same prejudices in the spirit of political correctness.

Rachel Elliot

Is your college course boring?
Claire Foster examines the decline of higher
education—and the way in which the lowering
of standards and the narrowing of minds
are being disguised as an exercise
in empowering students

The brain drain





What's wrong with the higher education system? Why is a university education so often an uninspiring experience today?

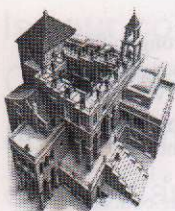
One big problem is a lack of resources. The higher education system in Britain was designed for 50 per cent fewer students than there are now. The number of lecturers has been kept more or less static while student numbers have boomed; as a result, staffing ratios have increased from 8.5:1 at the start of the 1980s to 20:1 today. Overstretched, demoralised lecturers have little time for personal tuition and are unlikely to be able to inspire academic excellence in overcrowded lecture theatres.

In addition, changes in government funding now mean that there are two classes of academic. There are those few whose research projects attract funding; their £50 000 grant makes them far too valuable a resource to allow near the students. And there are those who teach, with no time to pursue their own studies, who resort to churning out old lectures from year to year, with no new ideas and little enthusiasm.

Everyone senses that something is wrong—that standards are slipping and university life is in decline. There is talk of *academic drift* and the need to retain *quality*. There are schemes for quality control, quality audit, quality assessment, quality management. Yet the government-backed schemes to link funding to quality are making academic life even more banal. The 'quality' of a course is now likely to be defined through narrow accountancy-style performance indicators, such as its ability to process a number of students to reach a set mark with the fewest possible resources. Nineties 'qualitybabble' reduces quality education to jumping through hoops at the behest of government auditors. In terms of the real quality of education that students receive, the result of substituting accountancy standards for academic ones can only be to make matters worse.

Educationalists seeking to escape from this trap are trying to develop alternative definitions of quality education. These are often couched in egalitarian language, emphasising the need to empower students and counter elitism. In practice, however, they represent an accommodation to the conservative mood of our times. The end result is often to turn academics into apologists for the erosion of educational standards in the colleges.

For instance, a recent issue of *The Lecturer*, the newspaper of the lecturers' union Natfhe, seemed to ►



welcome the suggestion that quality in education could now usefully be seen as value added, as 'the intellectual distance travelled between a student's entry and exit qualifications'. This idea of *relative* quality in education as 'a measure of development and change' in the student is often counterposed to

establishment is to present low academic horizons as exciting new methods of learning. The result is to disguise a new mood of narrow-mindedness as an experiment in student-centred education.

The new vogue for emphasising vocational courses over an academic education is a good example of this trend. The emphasis now is on students *doing* rather than *studying*. If courses aren't practical, they are deemed futile. If knowledge is not immediately applicable, it is dismissed as an indulgent luxury. This misguided demand to teach only that which is directly relevant to getting a job rejects a basic principle of higher education: the idea that the gaining of knowledge and broadening of the mind are worthwhile ends in themselves. Instead, the new orthodoxy means students will lose opportunities to study the beautiful, the irrelevant, the arcane, and can readily endorse a philistine attitude to abstract concepts.

Picking flowers

One adult returner to Middlesex University, reflecting on his BSc degree in field biology and habitat studies (sic), gleefully commented that he had 'expected it to be all lectures and regurgitation of facts and understanding of principles. Instead it was all field work; picking flowers, identifying, measuring and weighing things' (*Independent*, 23 September 1993). Many students worried about their employment prospects have adopted a similarly pragmatic attitude, endorsing the view that the only useful knowledge is that which will lead to a job. But, judging by that Middlesex graduate's experience, the

kind of jobs that the new vocationalism is preparing the Bachelor of Science for will be in the local garden centre or florists. 'Measuring and weighing things' may be educational in a primary classroom, but not at degree standard.

When somebody like University of North London vice-chancellor Brian Roper argues that few of today's students will succeed without practical skills, it strikes a chord with many worried about unemployment. But equating knowledge with skill-acquisition risks reducing degree courses to the level of YTS schemes. Typical of the current discussion, Roper presents the degradation of knowledge as modern, forward-looking education:

'Employers are looking for communications abilities and experience of teamwork. Many subjects lend themselves to a problem-solving approach. Multi-disciplinary courses may be much closer to the real world than the old subject disciplines.' (*Independent*, 31 March 1994)

But higher education is not supposed to be like what Roper calls 'the real world'—the world of hardnosed managers and mass unemployment. A university course should be a time for study, reflection, thought and experimentation, free from the pressures of the marketplace. University will become terminally dull if we allow seminars instead to become workshops in how to communicate and do group work. And while today's favoured 'multi-disciplinary courses' might sound high-powered, they are replacing in-depth specialisation with superficial pick-and-mix modules. A bit of

Broadening the mind is a worthwhile end in itself

the traditional idea of an *absolute* standard of excellence, which is now widely denounced as elitist.

Relative quality might sound like a fairer standard for all. In practice, however, the rejection of absolute quality allows shoddy academic standards to be disguised—as long as the student feels they have made progress during their course. It matters not how far they have gone, or even whether they have really advanced at all—as long as they *feel* they have progressed, their course has been a success. Of course this approach is convenient for those colleges which—if judged on the absolute standard of academic excellence—would be shown to have failed their students.

These sort of shoddy apologies for the degradation of education are becoming more popular. Alongside the constraints on resources imposed by government policy, even the *quest* for new ideas and critical thinking is being abandoned. Worse still, the trend within the liberal educational

Standing up for standards



PHOTO: DRAGON NEWS & PICTURE AGENCY

● Sitting in his office tucked away in the Maintenance Department of the University College of Swansea, Colwyn Williamson doesn't look like an 'incubus'. But during a three-year dispute with the University of Wales, the college management described him as an evil spirit because he complained that his students were receiving a 'cheap and nasty education'.

In 1990, Williamson, a philosophy lecturer, and three other members of his department complained to the University of Wales, the academic authority for all Welsh colleges, that the standards of education on an MA degree were unacceptably low. Instead of conducting the inquiry that they had initially promised, the college management threatened the lecturers with dismissal and took disciplinary action against them. They were charged with 'vilifying and denigrating' senior members of the university.

Williamson and his colleagues were concerned that the educational standards of the Philosophy of Healthcare MA were poor enough to make it practically worthless.

chemistry, a smattering of maths, a history of art unit—this is GCSE-style general education, not undergraduate study, producing graduates who might just be jacks of all trades but are notably master of none.

This new educational philosophy, labelled 'skillology' by Professor Geoffrey Alderman, Chairman of the Academic Council of the University of London, turns education into a product to be acquired rather than a process of development. Even postgraduate work is now being defined more narrowly. In the past the basis for being awarded a PhD was the production of a substantial piece of 'original' research. Today, when doctorates are taught like other courses, research *skills* can be enough to gain a PhD, and there are moves to scrap the thesis altogether. Meanwhile the title professor is being renegotiated to reward skills rather than scholarship. Academics used to become professors by virtue of their research record. Now many gain professorships because they are notable managers, or members of the university directorate; many haven't even got first degrees.

Confusing skills and knowledge is a dangerous trend. After all, most skills can be acquired through experience with a little guidance, and do not require intensive tuition or analysis of your understanding; as one new educationalist points out, you acquire the skill of driving a car by doing it for yourself, not by taking notes while the instructor drives and writing an essay on gear-changing. In which case, if education is just another skill to be acquired, who needs all of these teachers and tutorials and assessments? It is in this spirit that learning is

increasingly being redefined as students 'doing it for themselves', packaged in the language of empowerment.

Universities are launching *open learning* centres and schemes such as Supported Self-Study. Teacherless students will spend less time in the classroom and more time directing their own learning. There is talk of facilitating a 'pedagogical shift', a switch from 'passive' to 'active' learning. That might sound like a good thing, after all passivity is the greatest threat to critical thinking. But scratch at the surface and we find that, in practice, active, student-centred learning means 'not being taught anything'.

DIY education

At the heart of the notion of 'active learning' is the idea that students should take responsibility for their own education. However it is presented, it really means that students become more passive and learn less. Being sent off with a book list to teach yourself is at best a poor DIY education of the sort normally associated with homeless people who keep warm in libraries; being sent off to a college library that contains no new books is even more of a sham. A new study shows that the new universities (former polytechnics) buy less than one book per student per year. Many lecturers slim down the syllabus to fit these constrained circumstances. Everyone knows course reading lists are fairy stories; students cannot afford to buy the books and cannot find them in the library. Often photocopied handouts of short excerpts have to suffice as the basis for your 'higher' education.

Some argue that this need not matter, since conventional

book-reading is old-fashioned and technology provides the key to education in the future. But in the current climate, even the much heralded computerisation of learning is a mixed blessing. For a start it can accelerate the trend to reduce staff interaction with students. The new libraries of the twenty-first century may sound an exciting addition to the learning experience—but they cannot act as a replacement for interactive teaching. John Moores University in Liverpool recently installed a £6m multi-media learning resource centre 'that could spell the end of the traditional lecture and seminar'. Yet this new resource-based learning (RBL) is no more than designer 'learning by rote'. Lectures are written on compact disk, using the lecturer's voice, video graphics and conventional notes. There is no opportunity to challenge and no collective sense of unravelling intellectual problems. Instead knowledge becomes something static to be copied down. These developments are presented as giving students active control over their learning (because you can switch the lecturer's voice on and off?). But what could be more passive than the isolated taking of notes from a computer?

Without interactive teaching, students lose the experience of questioning and critical thinking. Susan Purdie, a lecturer at the University of Plymouth, points out the limitations imposed by a lack of time with students on overcrowded, under-resourced courses:

'There is almost no chance of giving them any space to run, to discover, to come up with something the teacher ►

According to Williamson, 'the college had handed out 50 University of Wales MA degrees without teaching the students anything like enough, without anything that could reasonably be called a proper education and without anything that could reasonably be called a proper examination'. He believed the admissions procedure was very slack, the amount of time spent in the classroom with students was very low and the amount of written work required was negligible. The most striking example was one final year thesis which had obviously been copied from someone else's work. The problem was not so much that the student was guilty of plagiarism, but that the examining board had been alerted to the fact, but passed the student regardless.

Since universities now receive funding according to how many students they have, the aim of the management is to attract as many students as possible and educate them for as little as possible. On the new conveyor belt of education, students are 'unit costs' which need to be processed

cheaply while still ensuring that the examination results are high enough to attract more students. To this end, lecturers are under increasing pressure to teach to a lower standard and set easier examinations. Williamson is only too aware of the effects:

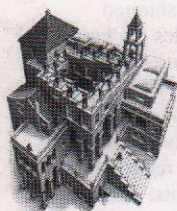
'What we have is overcrowded classrooms, classes where we don't even know the names of all the students, where a very great number of students never get any individual attention and where students are expected to survive for themselves when they are already endangered by a reduced grant.'

These circumstances led to a number of Swansea students graduating with a Master of Arts which qualified them to be master of very little. But the university authorities did not seem worried by this; in fact they were prepared to go to great lengths to make sure that the education production line was not interrupted. They even used what Williamson describes as 'dirty tricks' to discredit and intimidate him and his colleagues:

'The college had spent some £200 000 campaigning against us. They'd paid a team of barristers to handle the internal proceedings against us and they had hired a public relations firm in Cardiff to handle the media against us....They paid off one of our number with £68 000 for promising never to criticise the institution again.'

The student union faced similar heavy-handedness from college managers. It was charged £2000 for the costs of removing posters showing support for Williamson and the others. The student union described it as a fine for backing the lecturers. Williamson himself was accused by the Swansea principal of advising members of the student union how to break into the registry.

The government's new methods of funding mean that there is more pressure today to run universities like businesses. Colwyn Williamson's case illustrates just how far college authorities will go to ensure that their production line runs without a hitch. If guaranteeing government funding means ►



has not thought of....To get through the job now, you must have decided what the student is going to learn. I can teach some students some facts which I already know...I cannot teach 60 students to work out something which perhaps I do not know. For that, I need to be able to talk with them.' (Quoted in *The Lecturer*, December 1992).

If students know as much as lecturers—who needs staff?

Lecturers who express doubts about the changes are accused of over-teaching. The new educational philosophy suggests that traditional forms of education work against students' interests and only reflect the teacher's ideas about learning. By contrast, the nineties tutor should be there simply to discuss and agree targets, and advise on study methods. Notice what is absent—*teaching*. And, of course, in this new role, tutors can conveniently run two groups in the time formerly allocated to one.

Nobody fails

It is easy for lecturers themselves to collude in the anti-academic trajectory. Daunted by the demands of preparing and marking work for huge classes, more lecturers are using the active learning model to promote peer group assessment—that is, getting students to mark each other's essays. Students might like this idea, but it is a cop-out for all concerned. If your work is to

be judged by someone who knows as much or less than you do, the experience of being intellectually challenged becomes limited to the mutual ignorance of the assessors. Worse still, the NUS charter demands that students should be able to negotiate their own targets for achievement. In which case, of course, I deserve an 'A' every time. The whole philosophy of peer and self-assessment removes the pressure from studying. Yet thinking and developing new ideas, learning facts and new concepts—these are hard work and need some objective and ruthless criticism. Do you know enough to help someone improve their work from a 2.2 to a first? After all, students are unlikely to be the best judges of standards and coherence; the ability to make such judgements is what they have come to university to learn.

Notions of self-assessment feed into the prevailing academic enthusiasm for accepting that every opinion is valid. If students are as able as lecturers, then their opinions have to be 'respected' no matter how crass. Lecturers who tell students they are wrong are accused of over-teaching. Academics who dare to suggest a female student is incorrect may well be accused of oppressive intellectual bullying. So when a student who has not read the text exhibits their ignorance, presumably the rubbish they come out with should be judged as worthy as somebody else's insightful contribution. Ignorance and knowledge are placed on a par.

In this atmosphere it is not surprising to find some educationalists calling for the end of degree classifications—if you can't be wrong,

how can you fail? If every opinion has equal merit, how can one person gain a first class degree and another a third? It is the final closing of the circle—higher education in the nineties removes aspirations to excellence and rewards ignorance.

The meaning of critical thinking is now reduced to challenging the idea that teacher knows best. But for real critical thinking to thrive, we need to accept that some are better educated than others, that students have a lot to learn, that the stuffy old professor knows more about classical civilisation or quantum mechanics than the students do. Being an active learner means more time spent with others developing ideas, not less. There is no such thing as over-teaching—students need to be taught more. All of which must mean more lecturers, smaller classes, and more resources all round.

Empowering management

Anyone who tries to redefine knowledge, or to disguise second-rate teaching standards with talk of empowering students, should be unmasked as a college management stooge. For if students know as much as lecturers, who needs staff?—which is fine in colleges eager to cut jobs. And if knowledge for knowledge's sake is elitist, down with academic knowledge—a handy slogan for the mass of colleges where academic endeavour and books are scarce and where flower-collecting is called higher education. Is your college course boring? Then liven it up by exposing the educational jargon that is denying us the right to know everything and question anything.

◀ admitting more students to be taught by fewer lecturers, then so be it. If it means giving students an increasingly poor standard of education, so be it. As Williamson points out, 'it stops being the primary business of an educational institution to educate people'. His college management was even prepared to sack staff members in order to keep their shoddy standards a secret. Unfortunately for them, the attempted cover-up failed.

After two investigations which reached different conclusions, the university called in the University Visitor, namely the Queen, to make recommendations on what to do with the four lecturers. Sir Michael Davis, the former high court judge appointed to pass judgement on behalf of the Queen, published his report in June 1993. He found that the suspended lecturers should be reinstated and the right to criticise upheld. In January of this year, the four were given Campaign for Free Information awards by Michael Grade. The college principal was ordered to circulate an apology to all

members of the academic staff at Swansea and all members of philosophy departments across Britain. He has since taken early retirement.

Meanwhile, Colwyn Williamson has set up the Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards (CAFAS) to 'monitor and campaign against the decline in standards in further and higher education, and to protect individuals against victimisation'. The campaign's latest case is in defence of a Sunderland University marketing lecturer who, in front of his students, literally stuck two fingers up to the local council. The Labour council got wind of his gesture and complained to the university. In a blatant act of political censorship, the university convicted the lecturer of 'harming relations' with the city council and threatened reprisals.

CAFAS is drawing up a code of practice for lecturers and principals to follow. When I asked Williamson how effective this would be, he acknowledged that 'all universities have sex and race codes, but they make no

difference whatsoever'. So why call for it? 'Actually', he admitted, 'I'm an ardent supporter of the law' and quoted the 1988 Education Reform Act. All Williamson wants is for universities to abide by the rules. But this seems unlikely to get us very far in standing up for academic freedom and educational standards. Tackling the problem of conveyor-belt education means getting the discussion out of the sphere of rules and on to the terrain of resources. Calling for more rules and regulations will surely only mean that there are more to break and more chances for principals to interfere in the work of academics. For academic freedom to mean something, lecturers must be able to criticise anything or anybody without the interference of any rules or codes of practice.

Winning the case against Swansea college is to be congratulated, but it will take more than a new rule book and the intervention of the Queen to achieve the academic standards that people like Colwyn Williamson strive for.

Juliet Connor

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If you thought going to university was about standing on your own two feet, you haven't reckoned on the new codes of conduct, writes Ellie Dashwood

Treating us like

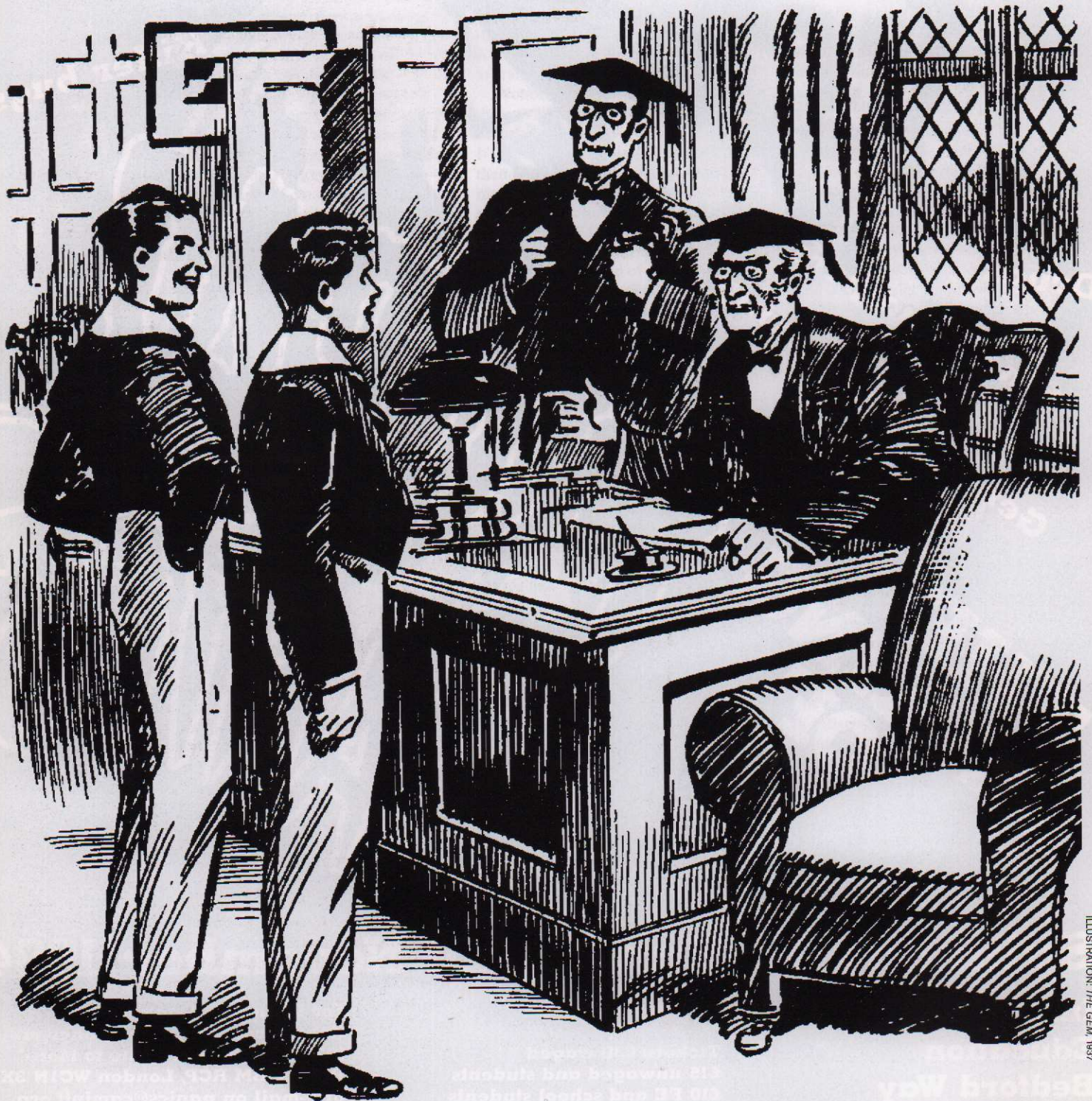


ILLUSTRATION: THE GEM, 1897

children

You are 18 and away from home for the first time. You can say what you like and do what you like with whoever you like. But not if you are going to university.

It is not just that the grant is so small that you are still dependent on your parents, though that does account for ever more students studying in their home towns instead of moving away. The real constraint on university life is the college busybodies, from the principal to the student union women's officer, all telling you what to do. Evidence of the climate of conformity being promoted in today's colleges is the proliferation of codes of conduct.

Codes of conduct are guidelines for behaviour, which put down in black and white how students should behave. Over the past two years, discussion of the inadequacy of existing codes and the need for new ones has taken off in a big way.

Few sex-pests

Old regulations are being tightened up. Higher education 'experts' suggest that there is a breakdown in standards of behaviour at universities, and are demanding tougher codes. A task force commissioned by Kings College to look at its disciplinary procedures found that they do not give the university enough authority. The task force suggested that the police should be called in to deal with every breach of university regulations apart from 'academic offences' like cheating in exams.

Meanwhile, new codes are being created with a more politically correct line for the nineties. New codes about how to deal with 'harassment' of a racial or sexual nature are being developed at a prolific rate. They act as both a warning to students—'don't call people derogatory names'—and as advice on what to do if you are 'harassed'. According to Nottingham Trent University's harassment code, you should tell a 'named person'—who could be anybody from a lecturer

to a cleaner as long as they are a responsible adult—if anything of this sort happens to you.

There are also new codes to regulate the activities of dangerous elements on campus. These target religious groups in particular. Increasingly, fundamentalist Muslims and Christians are being presented as a threat to the student population and action is being taken to curb their activities.

Go to any university campus and it is difficult to find anything which could explain the new regulations. A breakdown in discipline is not in evidence. Students are no more likely to be racist or sexist than they were in the past. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that they are more likely to be 'harassed'. Few students encounter fascists or sex-pests on a regular basis.

One explanation for the new vogue for codes of conduct could be that universities want to make sure that students know their place. Codes of conduct were drawn up in the first place to do just that. Normally called codes of discipline, these regulations lay down wide-ranging and explicit guidelines for behaviour, and spell out the right of the university authorities to discipline students who breach these guidelines.

Damage and disruption?

Sheffield University's code says that students can be disciplined by the university principal if they are found to have carried out 'malicious damage' to university property or if they 'fail to comply with the policies and directions relating to the effective running of the university'. This code was invoked most recently to threaten students with suspension after they had been involved in an occupation of one of the university buildings. They took this action in protest against cuts in student grants, but as far as the university principal was concerned they were 'bringing the university into disrepute'.

At the LSE, the college authorities adopted an even more bullish ▶

No politics please, we're students

● Walking around campus last term, I was struck by the number of posters congratulating us on having saved 'our union'. The government's proposals to reform student unions had just been defeated and the National Union of Students (NUS) was jubilant. It seemed that its letter-writing and MP-lobbying campaign had been the first of its kind ever to succeed. The unions were to escape drastic restrictions on the services they could provide, as well as in the funding that went with them. We were given a collective pat on the back and the assurance of even cheaper beer in the future.

For some reason I couldn't help being suspicious. Why would the government have been persuaded to back down after receiving a few scribbled pleas from the Train Spotters Society? A closer look at the situation reveals that the NUS campaign did not lead to the defeat of the government's plans at all. Instead, the government ended up frightening NUS into undertaking its own reform process—which will have just as dire consequences for students as anything the government planned to introduce.

John Patten's original attack on student unions at the 1992 Conservative Party conference was an upfront attempt to stop students from doing even the little they are allowed to do today. His two main proposals were for the abolition of closed shop membership and the scrapping of 'non-core' services. In Patten's opinion, student unions provide a lot of services which are available to all students, but irrelevant to most. The answer is for the unions to provide fewer services which the students have to pay for themselves:

'Most students who go on to college or university do so because they want a good education and a qualification that they can use later on in life. It is only a few who get involved in the National Union of Students in supporting dubious causes of no interest to the great majority of students. In a free country, that is their privilege. But why should the taxpayer have to pay for it?' (Quoted in the *Times*, 8 October 1992)

In other words, by limiting public funding to the union services necessary for the 'good' education nice students want (welfare, sport, catering, etc), all the 'dubious' causes (clubs, societies, political campaigns, collective action) can be swept away.

What is noticeable about the areas targeted by the government as 'non-core' is that their abolition would do very little to bring public spending down. The talk about money-saving was simply a front for a clampdown on anything political. The NUS campaign ignored this ▶

The closed university



approach. They warned students that they would be disciplined if they put up stalls advertising meetings, social events and so on outside the university entrance. A letter sent to the student union quoted the university code of conduct, commanding that:

'No student shall:

- Disrupt teaching, study, research or administrative work;
- Damage or deface any property of the school.'

Apparently putting up a stall and sticking a poster on a wall to advertise a disco do just that.

the meetings could not take place. According to the regulations:

'The college will take all reasonable steps to ensure that freedom of speech in the college is protected, but meetings may be subject to conditions or maybe cancelled if there is a real likelihood of injury to persons or damage to property.'

Freedom of speech is granted—but only if the university likes what you say.

Students have always had to put up with this kind of patronising attitude from ageing chancellors, and have

'abuse', and to help those 'at risk' from some danger or other. Rather than having disciplinary connotations, the new codes seem altogether more caring.

The new codes of conduct to protect women students from the unwanted attentions of predatory lecturers are a case in point. In the USA, Harvard University was the first college to regulate 'amorous conduct in an instructional context', when it issued a new code in 1984. The idea has now reached British universities and is supported by the Association of University Teachers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe). According to Natfhe, 'if a romantic or sexual relationship develops between a member of staff and a student, the chances are greater that an abuse of power will occur'. Furthermore, 'voluntary consent by the student is questionable given the unequal nature of the relationship'.

The implications here are worth considering. The assumption is that a female student cannot possibly consent to have sex with a lecturer. Even if she says that she wants to, then her free will is discounted. That she might actually prefer to get off with a lecturer, rather than a spotty 18-year old student, is unimaginable to the promoters of 'amorous conduct' codes.

Students have been getting off with their lecturers for years—what has changed is the idea that a grown

Freedom of speech is granted—but only if the university likes what you say

And it's not just what you do that can land you in trouble. It is also what you say. At Queen Mary's and Westfield College in east London, the code of conduct was used to prevent students from holding meetings about racism (ironically enough, the censors cited the section covering 'Freedom of speech'). The authorities said that since the subject was a sensitive one

often been willing to flout the rules. Occupations and protests were never stopped by the old codes of conduct.

The new codes sound a bit different. They are written as if they are designed to protect students, to make sure nothing untoward or unpleasant happens to them. They seem to express a desire to defend the 'disadvantaged' among the student population from

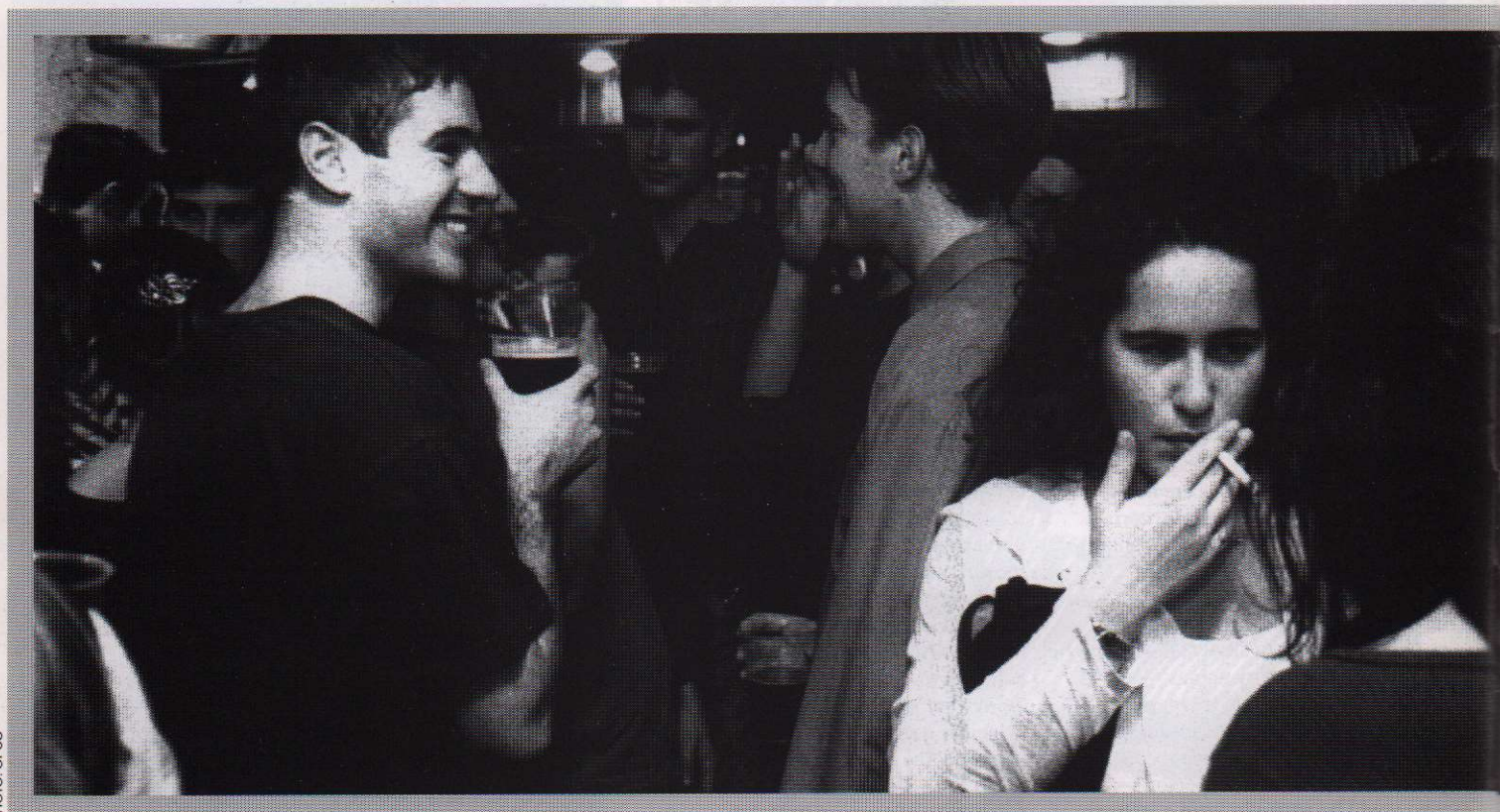


PHOTO: OPIUS

woman cannot handle it. Adult female students at university are reduced once again to children. They might have reached the age of consent for sex in law, they might have left home, they might live independently, but as far as Natfhe is concerned the college authorities are still *in loco parentis*.

College lecherers

Remarkably, this approach is presented as pro-women and promoted as part of an equal opportunities policy. But what could be more anti-women than the old-fashioned idea that women can't handle themselves when it comes to sexual relationships. The notion that women have minds of their own, and might actually choose to have sex with their tutor, is not even considered. Instead, the student and teaching unions appear to be playing the role of prudish chaperons, protecting innocent and weak-willed females from the advances of lustful lecturers.

Vicki Merchant, the University of Central Lancashire's sexual harassment officer and a supporter of the code, believes that the university authorities should decide how sexual relations are conducted. Rejecting the teaching unions' offer of self-regulation, she says, 'trade union officers are usually male and that is why they are so defensive about it. The policy should be drawn up by universities who have a legal obligation to prevent sexual harassment'. Posed in anti-sexist terms, rules of conduct seem to be more acceptable than the traditional warnings

about bringing the college into disrepute, but they are just as patronising.

Not only are students' bodies under threat from sex-craved lecturers, but apparently their minds are in danger too. According to the National Union of Students, dangerous 'extremists' are taking over university campuses and are out to pollute young minds. The NUS, acting the part of the concerned parent, is warning students not to talk to strangers, especially if they sing hymns and carry a Bible.

It seems that 'fundamentalist' Christians have devised brain-washing techniques like mad Simon in *Brookside*. So innocent students need to be protected from the Bible-bashers by more worldly wise student union officials. The NUS has taken on a commitment to 'monitor' Christian cults on campus. The London Church of Christ—a particular bogey for student unions—has been banned from using premises at Manchester, Aston, Bristol and several London colleges.

Thought police

In effect, student unions have set themselves up as the new thought police. In the union leaders' low opinion of their members, the average student is easy prey for the Svengali-like cults. Unable to think straight all by himself, Joe-student needs somebody to do it for him. So it is much better if the student union decides that students do not want to know.

Being treated as an incompetent is bad enough. But the consequence of the drive for greater regulation of student life is more serious still. The result is inevitably a more censorious climate on campus. Students are advised that anyone with an opinion which is out of the ordinary should be treated with suspicion. Those who fail to conform to the mainstream view of things are labelled extremists. Anyone who speaks their mind is seen as a problem. The parameters for discussion become narrower and narrower, and in the end only 'respectable' opinion is allowed. Anything else is silenced as 'offensive'.

Conformity rules

The end result is the opposite of what university life should be like. It is supposed to be about encouraging open-mindedness. Instead, an atmosphere is created where anything controversial is ruled out of order. Students are advised, in the finest traditions of conservatism, to stick to the tried and tested. Conformity rules.

It is time to start speaking out against control. A stifling climate is being created in our universities. From the vice-chancellor to the union official, almost everyone seems to want to ban meetings of which they do not approve or institute codes of conduct to tell us how to behave. Students should not be treated like children; they are old enough to look after themselves and old enough to make up their own minds.

◀ (Continued from page 31) attempt to restrict political debate and activity, and instead focused on the financial aspects of the government's proposals.

For NUS, reform is a problem because it means big cuts in the union's funding. Financed principally by the government, NUS has no intention of falling out with the Tories over anything so trivial as the fight for student interests. This was made clear with its transformation into a charity. In exchange for becoming a charity and being absolved from paying tax, NUS promised not to be involved in any political campaigning whatsoever.

At a time when students are facing cuts in living standards and education standards, political activity is the only way we can fight our corner. But from its application for charitable status to its compliance with *ultra vires* laws, which prevent the union from engaging in any political campaign that is not 'directly related to a student issue', the NUS has gone along with the government's desire to restrict political debate and activity on campus.

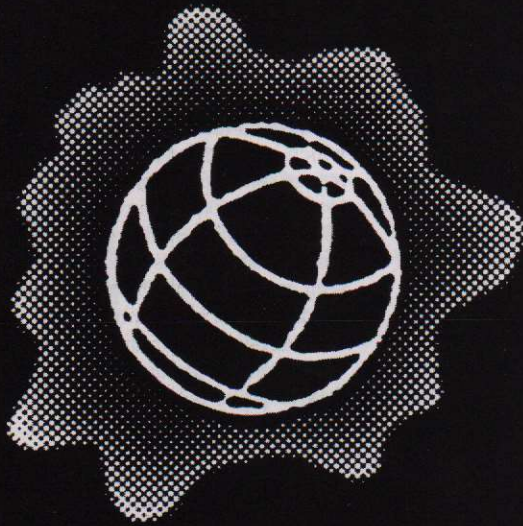
The effects of choosing funding for entertainments over the freedom of students to fight the government on issues like education cuts have already become clear at colleges around the country. In order to prove their neutrality, student unions have been restricting the activities of groups or individuals who might damage the clean-cut image that NUS is keen to present. Examples include the exclusion last year of a University of North London student from the union bar for 'aggressive' behaviour, the banning of

a Muslim group for being 'violent' and 'homophobic', and the censorship of a left-wing poster at the University of Sussex on the grounds that the image of a 1960s street riot constituted an 'incitement to violence'.

It is arguable that NUS has been far more effective in implementing Patten's anti-politics crusade than the government could ever be. Whenever the government tries to stifle political activity it tends to arouse suspicion (witness the reaction to the Criminal Justice Bill). But by repackaging similar repressive measures in the politically correct language of 'protection' for students from dangerous influences, student unions have been able to get away with policing every aspect of college life.

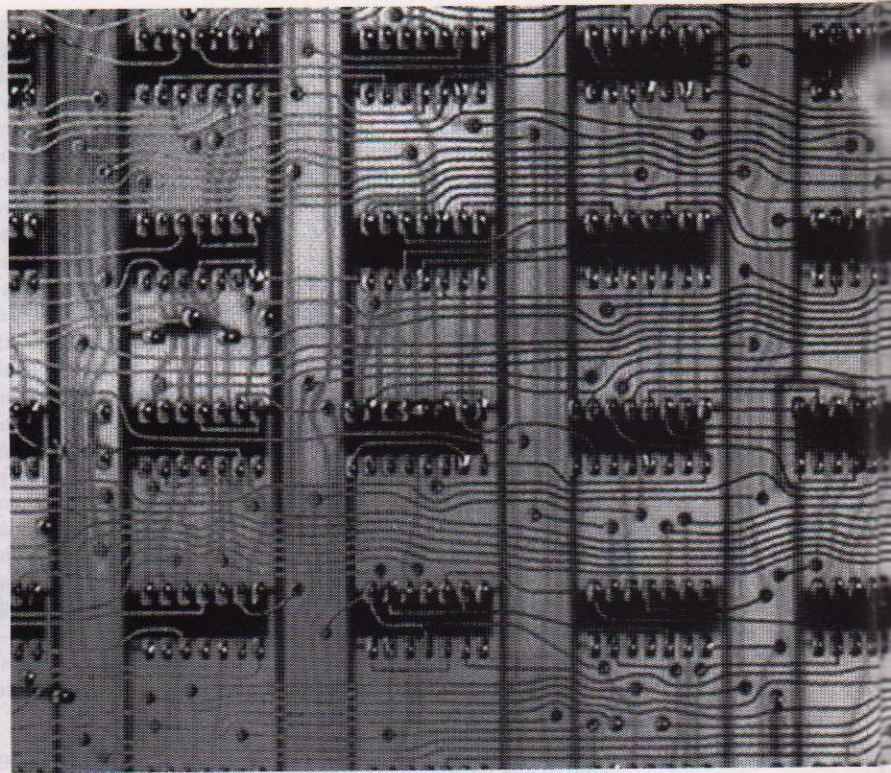
The end result of the debate about student union reform is a compromise which benefits everyone but students themselves. The government is happy because NUS is more willing than ever to act as a policeman on campus, banning students from reading, watching and debating anything controversial. NUS is happy because it has secured its funding in return for clamping down on troublesome political groups and individuals. Students, on the other hand, are not only being denied resources for a decent education, but the chance to fight for them too. And that's not to mention the boredom factor. Who says students don't want politics? I went to university to get an education, and that requires a critical, questioning culture on campus, as well as the resources which we're being denied.

Jennie Bristow



A challenge to prejudice and mysticism
on matters scientific, technological and
environmental.

FUTURES



Science and

John Gillott locates today's anti-science trends in the broader context of social pessimism and fear

Despondency seems to dominate the scientific community. 'Today', writes Nobel laureate Leon Lederman, 'science in America is in a mood of uncertainty and discouragement'. In his capacity as president-elect of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Lederman commissioned a survey of how leading American scientists viewed the future of their work. He expected a pessimistic response, but the depth of despair revealed in the survey (published in 1991 under the provocative title *Science: The End of the Frontier?*) shocked him:

'The responses paint a picture of an academic research community beset by flagging morale, diminishing expectations, and constricting horizons. From one institution to the next, across demographic categories, across disciplines of research, the nation's scientists are sending a warning. Academic research in the United States is in serious trouble.'

Lederman's pessimistic assessment is echoed by many scientists in Britain. Their immediate concern is lack of cash and the incoherence of government science policy. But scientists are also deeply worried about the wider mood

in society, which many have dubbed 'anti-science'.

Signs of this mood are all around. This year's debate in Britain, about the possibility of using eggs from fetuses in assisted conception, brought to the surface some of the fears people have about science. The feeling of many commentators was that science has gone too far, that scientists wanted to 'play God'. A *Guardian* journalist worried that 'test-tube technology, combined with an explosion in genetic understanding, has given doctors powers normally associated with nature or God....There are fears that technology has spun out of control'. Dame Jill Knight, chair of the Conservative backbench health committee, clearly felt she was tapping a vein of popular disapproval when she moved an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill aimed at banning the use of fetal eggs in assisted conception: 'There are times when the House must assert its authority and make it clear that scientists sometimes go too far.' Her amendment was passed, and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority duly recommended even tighter restrictions on what could be used in assisted conception when it delivered its report in July.



the 'feelbad' factor

Fears about the role of science in the sphere of conception are closely linked to fears about genetic engineering. Of all the areas of science, this is the most controversial. Knight believes that 'the implications of this genetic engineering are so alarming that we have to stop and think it through'. In his book, *Earth in the Balance*, US vice-president Al Gore condemns geneticists for playing at God, 'unaccompanied by god-like wisdom'. A warning against genetic engineering was carried by the blockbuster movie *Jurassic Park*. An editorial in *Science* reported that 'according to both the writer and producer, the movie intentionally has anti-science undertones. Press accounts say that producer Steven Spielberg believes science is "intrusive" and "dangerous"'.

Of course, not everyone expresses this kind of suspicion of science. However, the dominant mood dictates that in debates on issues like assisted conception and genetic engineering, most attention is given to the critics, and little is heard of the many benefits offered by research. This is as dispiriting for scientists as the open hostility they face from certain quarters.

What most troubles scientists is the influence of anti-science ideas among

the authorities. After all, governments give out much of the funding for science and set science policy. In his book *Science and Anti-Science*, American science historian Gerald Holton notes with some concern how Washington has become more suspicious of science in recent years. A good barometer of the shift is George E Brown, chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. During the Cold War, Brown was a staunch supporter of science. He is singing a different tune today. In his essay 'The objectivity crisis', Brown goes so far as to say that 'the promise of science may be at the root of our problems'.

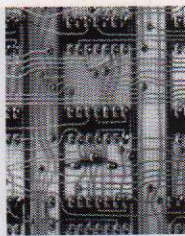
According to Holton, anti-science trends arise because of ignorance about science and its methods. Lewis Wolpert, biologist and chair of the British Committee on the Public Understanding of Science, believes that the problem is that science is counter-intuitive and that therefore people find it difficult, even threatening. As Wolpert put it when we debated anti-science trends at the Towards 2000 conference in July, science is not a 'feelgood' subject.

There are several problems with this conception of the contemporary mood. Things are more complicated than the anti-science label implies. There are

indeed strong suspicions of science today, but in the strict sense of the term society is not 'anti-science'. Society could not function without science and technology. Governments have to strive to promote technology, if only to ensure that their economies are not at a competitive disadvantage. Some areas of science, such as theoretical physics, might be in trouble, but other areas, such as biology, are expanding rapidly.

Not only are things more complicated, they can appear paradoxical. Al Gore might have condemned scientists in his book, but he is also the 'technology czar' in the Clinton administration, in charge of promoting information technology. The British government is condemned by many scientists for under-valuing science, yet is forever proclaiming its commitment to scientific advance. Steven Spielberg may feel science is 'dangerous', but children marvelled at the technology used to make *Jurassic Park* and are fascinated by the idea of using science to bring dinosaurs back to life. And while there may be public suspicion of science, science books and television programmes, especially those related to human nature and cosmology, are more popular than ever before. ►

The resolution of the paradox lies in the realisation that the contemporary mood is not so much anti-science as conservative and fearful. Society now has low expectations of what can be achieved in any sphere of human activity. It is fearful of experimentation, risk-taking and change in general. This climate is reflected in doubts about science.



destructive. Underlying this rejection of progress is a lack of faith in human judgement and human abilities.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, written between the wars, is more a novel for our times. Huxley paints a picture of where he sees science leading us: into soulless living in a technologically efficient society

Human life has improved immeasurably in the past 400 years

People today are more inclined to deify nature and condemn human attempts to control it—the most popular books on science are the ones that put across this message. There is no sense today that scientific advance could be a part of a wider social advance. There is no sense of the possibility of *progress*, defined by a nineteenth-century French dictionary as the idea that 'humanity is perfectible and it moves incessantly from less good to better, from ignorance to science, from barbarism to civilisation'.

From this point of view, we can see that there are not two Al Gores—the author of the doom-laden *Earth in the Balance*, and the man enthusing about Information Superhighways—but rather, there is one Al Gore who embodies the double-sided attitude of today's elites towards science. For those who run society, science and technology remain practical necessities; but they reject any association between science and human advancement.

When Gore condemns geneticists for 'playing God', his point is that scientists should not try to impose their will on nature. Similarly, the message of *Jurassic Park* is not so much anti-science as anti-progress. It is a hi-tech morality play carrying the message that any attempt to meddle with nature will end in tears. This is the point the character Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum in the film version) makes whenever anything goes wrong. When Malcolm speaks about the park where the dinosaurs are kept, he is passing comment on any ambition to control nature for human benefit: 'You decide you'll control nature, and from that moment you're in deep trouble, because you can't do it.... You can make a boat, but you can't make an ocean. You can make an airplane, but you can't make the air. Your powers are much less than your dreams of reason would have you believe.'

Humanity cannot make the oceans, but it can use the oceans and other elements of nature to expand human powers. This is what real 'dreams of reason' are made of, and neither Spielberg nor anybody else has made a convincing case against them. But then, the anti-progress mood today is not based on reason. It is based on fear.

The very idea of progress is now seen as at best misguided, at worst

devoid of anything human. "Progress is lovely, isn't it?", exclaims one character, contemplating a holiday in a hotel with 60 escalator-squash courts. What makes it a novel for our times is the notion that interfering with nature is the root of the problem. The scientists are condemned by Huxley because they want to take us 'out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature' into what they consider to be 'the much more interesting world of human invention'. For Huxley, this is the first step to totalitarianism.

The idea that interfering with nature is necessarily destructive is a strong theme today. In *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment and the Crisis of Development*, Bruce Rich, a director of the New York-based Environmental Defence Fund, blames human interference in nature, and the political project of modernity beginning with Descartes in the seventeenth century, for the environmental problems we now face. 'The twentieth century', he writes, 'has shown the full potential for destruction of human populations and of nature itself when institutions and societies view and treat other human groups and whole ecosystems as means or instruments to achieving a "greater" end'.

Rich misses the target—it is a capitalist system out of control, not the ghost of Descartes, which gives us destruction and war. And in his rush to condemn, Rich fails to mention that the quality of human life has improved immeasurably in the Western world over the past 400 years. On a simple measure such as life expectancy, we are in a different world to our ancestors—thanks to the advance of society and of science.

Public attitudes towards scientific advance cannot be understood simply by studying science itself. Instead, the anti-science trends of today are caused by the anti-experimental mood which dominates society—and they in turn

serve to reinforce this mood. Scientific advance is of necessity linked to a wider project of humanity imposing its will upon nature. The experimental, forward-looking character of science inevitably clashes with a culture dominated by low expectations and a low opinion of the human potential.

The problem with trying to explain anti-science trends narrowly as a product of popular ignorance and fear of science is that it fails to explain why anti-science trends can be stronger at some times—such as today—than at others. Once anti-science trends are located in a wider context, however, it becomes possible to understand them as a product of specific historical circumstances.

For instance, one specific dimension of contemporary culture that strengthens anti-science trends is environmental politics and the sanctification of nature that goes with it. The strong consensus behind the idea that human intervention in nature is a destructive thing is a product of the past 30 years. In her survey of the history of the ecology movement from 1880 to the present, Anna Bramwell charts the changing perceptions of nature and attempts to transcend nature. Up until 1960, she notes, 'nature' was seen as the source of inequality, while attempts to transcend nature through science were seen as bringing equality. From 1965 to the present, she argues, the situation has been reversed. 'Nature' now signifies equality, and attempts to transcend nature are seen as a source of inequality. This contemporary view of a mythical 'balance of nature' is a part of the popular rejection of progress based on scientific advance. 'Nature knows best, best not meddle' is a sentiment many would agree with in our conservative times.

Locating anti-science trends in the context of our conservative, fearful times leads to an important practical conclusion. It suggests that the challenge is not to raise public and governmental awareness of the importance of science, but to challenge the culture of conservatism and low expectations which dominates society. When society has a sense of what humanity can achieve, it will look to the future with a greater sense of optimism, and anti-science trends will disappear. Leon Lederman's own conclusions on the state of science and society today are to the point: 'a common denominator here is a loss of faith in the future.' This is the problem we need to address.

John Gillott is the co-author with *Manjit Kumar* of the forthcoming book, *Science and the Retreat from Reason*, to be published by Merlin at the end of the year.



Video nasties

If you want to make money, make 'reality video'. The shops are full of them: real-life rescues, real-life disasters—anything captured on news footage or home video. The kind of ghouls who jump into their cars as soon as they hear of a motorway pile-up now take along a camcorder and mobile phone, and are ready to do business with newsdesks and production companies within minutes of arrival.

Titles such as *Real Life Casualty* have caused a certain amount of disquiet, with their blatantly gruesome appeal to our more base instincts, so their producers usually attempt to justify themselves with a higher motive than titillation: they are warnings, or tales of courage, or accounts of daring rescues. But in the case of *Trouble on the Terraces*, this approach has not been enough to satisfy our moral guardians, who have called for its withdrawal, and given it plenty of valuable publicity in the process.

Trouble on the Terraces is a fairly straightforward run through the golden age of football hooliganism, interspersed with the views of various exponents of the art and academic 'experts'. The producer says that people can listen to the different views expressed and make up their own minds. Given that there have been hundreds of TV debates and books about hooliganism, there seems little need of a video full of choice clips; so it is a safe bet that most purchasers will have made their minds up beforehand, and will fast forward to the action.

Nothing surprising about that really. And I can't see why enjoying watching a football ruck is any worse than watching videos of car crashes or war films or rugby matches, or reading SAS magazines. With the exception of the Heysel disaster, I can only recall a handful of people dying from football hooliganism. The obsession with it is because of the type of people who do it, rather than the damage they do.

This is particularly striking when one considers a bestselling series of videos that is prominently displayed in every branch of WH Smith, and which has provoked no controversy at all. It features the antics of a gang of real-life adventurers who kill dozens of innocent people every year, the British traffic police, and it includes *Police Stop!* and *Police Stop 2*, along with *American Police Stop* and various similar titles. Indeed, far from prompting an outcry, it is noticeable how TV programmes like *Crime Monthly* have rushed to jump on the bandwagon, and now include exciting items on car and helicopter technology and the latest riot equipment, none of which has any significant 'crime prevention' application.

'See how easily accidents can happen then avoid the risk', says the cover of *Police Stop*, very slightly more prominently than the copyright details at the bottom. Above this it screams: 'Thrills and spills come thick and fast as the boys in blue hit the road and take to the air. Take part in a high-speed chase...join the force for 50 minutes of non-stop action.' Or take *Police Stop 2*: 'Amazing, alarming, unbelievable...the pace is fast and furious but the lessons are always worth learning.'

And what lessons are these? That you stand a higher chance of being knocked down by a police car than a joyrider or fleeing armed robber, presumably. In a journalistic capacity, I once spent a night in a patrol car in the home counties, covering two famous market towns and a large area of motorway. There were three incidents. First, a speeding motorist was spotted and followed, until it was discovered that the driver was a senior police officer on his way home. Later, an

abandoned car was found that had crashed into a fence (at a speed of about 20 mph, judging by the damage). Although obviously the work of teenagers, within five minutes two patrol cars, a dog-handling team and an armed response unit were on the scene. The dogs lost the scent after about 100 yards, so they decided to wake up a local villain who lived nearby instead, in case he had decided to crash a stolen car in his own road. The machine gun crew, it turned out, were on a 'routine patrol' in the middle of the night in the countryside. Finally, there was a 'fast and furious, action-packed' chase, with three cars in pursuit of a dangerous gang of kids who had left a service station without paying for petrol.

Given the undoubted educational value of such stuff, perhaps enterprising video production companies might like to consider some more police titles. *He's Late for His Tea!* could collect the best clips of pedestrians knocked down by high-performance patrol cars. *Have-a-go Heroes* could compile scenes of security guards and police making high street arrests, with the action escalating as bystanders join in to help the underdog in true British style, and take their revenge on the boys in blue. Interviews could include the senior West Yorkshire officer who visited the pit village of South Elmsall twice—and got a hiding both times. And using genuine film from surveillance cameras, we can see how 30 shoppers at the Croydon Whitgift Centre 'clapped and cheered a robber as he fought off and escaped from a store security guard' (*Croydon Advertiser*, 26 August 1994). The purpose of this video would naturally be to act as a warning, and to show how such things could be avoided—but it would be left for individuals to make up their own minds about what they see. Education is always more effective if it is combined with entertainment, I feel.

Further to last month's report on the sorry state of the Labour Party in my area, I can now report that no-longer-'loony' Lambeth council has been putting my enormous council tax payments to good use. Following Labour-run Tower Hamlets' example (they washed all their Union flags when they won back their seat from the BNP), Lambeth has gone one better and—for the Queen Mum's birthday!—brought back the national flag, which has flown just once in 25 years, during a brief period of Tory rule in 1982. In the meantime the town hall had flown the red flag, the ANC flag, and a giant condom. To its credit, the Labour group (no longer in overall control) made no fuss, and Tory leader Hugh Jones spoke for everyone when he said: 'It symbolises the end of an era—an era of nonsense and incompetence.'

And entering into this new sensible spirit of Union Jack-waving, Lambeth MP Kate Hoey (Vauxhall, Labour) is to join Enoch Powell in addressing the opening of a Westminster branch of that fine old labour movement institution, the Derry Apprentice Boys. Kate believes that the Labour Party should accept members from Northern Ireland so as to integrate the province further into the United Kingdom. 'Labour should move away from its blinkered Green nationalist line', says Kate. 'We have been trying to out-nationalist the nationalists.'

With timing like that, who can doubt Labour is on its way? ●



Arnie and the

Emmanuel Oliver on the racist twist in *True Lies* that the reviewers overlooked



T *True Lies*, the latest blockbuster from James Cameron, has not caught the public imagination in the same way as *Terminator II: Judgement Day* in 1992. Perhaps critics found its special effects not so special after the extraordinary *T2*. After reading the reviews, I was in no great rush to see *True Lies*. When I finally did see it, I got a rude shock. It was not what I had been led to expect.

There are three stories in *True Lies*. Two I was ready for. The first is the story of Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger) the superspy. James Cameron, who has never been known for understatement, has tried to produce the definitive superspy movie. However, it is just possible that Schwarzenegger has been over-cast, as his Harry Tasker tries to inject some nineties irony into a sixties icon—James Bond. Can anyone, even a true Schwarzenegger fan, really accept Arnie in anything more complex than the original unspooking *Terminator*?

The second *True Lies* story is about Harry Tasker the spy whose marriage is in trouble. This sounded a definite turn off. The attempt to give Arnie's Bond a meaningful relationship, or rather a non-meaningful marriage to Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis) which he can turn into a success, sounded awkward—and it was! Superspy, masquerading as dull salary man, turns into new man, forms husband-and-wife team and saves the world from evil. Even this idea is



Islamic Bomb

unoriginal. Bond did once get married, but it was shortlived. The producers had Mrs Bond killed off before she could get in the way of a lucrative spying career spanning three decades. The half-witted idea of a married superspy was consigned to the cutting room floor—until *True Lies*. As it stands, Harry's attempts at emotional sophistication make Homer Simpson seem debonair. But I expected that; Arnie is not an actor.

What the previews did not prepare me for is the third story: what happens when nuclear weapons fall into the 'wrong hands'. In *True Lies* the wrong hands are Arab hands, ably assisted by Juno (Tia Carrere), an oriental of indeterminate origin. The Arabs get hold of nuclear weapons and threaten 10 American cities with annihilation unless their demands are met. Juno's presence in the film is hard to explain, beyond the fact that as someone from Asia she is a reminder of the US obsession with North Korea's alleged nuclear arsenal.

True Lies revives one of the great traditions of James Bond—the racial villain—but gives it a modern post-Cold War twist. Gone are the ubiquitous Russians. In *True Lies* the villains are the stereotypical, mini-nuclear arsenal-touting Arabs we hear so much about these days. Crimson Jihad, the international Arab terrorist gang led by Aziz (Art Malik), is an unpleasant gallery of clichés to rival even the mythology surrounding Carlos the Jackal. The Arabs are all unshaven and have large

Schwarzenegger with love interest Jamie Lee Curtis (top left), Americanising James Bond (left) and laying down the law to Johnny foreigner (Art Malik, above)

black rings under their eyes; some are extremely fat, bearded and sweaty, most are shifty and all of them are, of course, fanatical.

It is not surprising that the prejudices of American policy-makers should end up in a Hollywood blockbuster. Hollywood has a long tradition of taking popular demons and constructing films around them. The past 50 years have provided a bountiful supply of aspiring world dominators. In the old days, film-makers invariably opted for communists and Germans. More recently, Hollywood has been a bit unsure about who should take the place of the steely German villain or the ever-advancing reds of Cold War spy/adventure films. For a while it looked as though the South Africans had been chosen as the incarnation of evil in the post-Cold War world. Joss Ackland played a particularly unpleasant South African villain in *Lethal Weapon II*. But white South Africans were really Cold War villains who are now viewed as potential victims of black domination.

The current Western fad for finding dangerous threats to Western tranquillity in the third world ensured that some dark monster was in line for the role of international post-Cold War villain. Who better to fill the void for Hollywood film-makers than fanatical Arabs with nuclear weapons?

I suppose it's not that surprising that the only coherent aspect of *True Lies* was largely ignored by the press (the over-the-top racism received only

the most cursory comment here and there). After all, when *True Lies* came out in Britain during the month of August, journalists from the quality papers were exercising their own fevered imaginations about Arabs buying plutonium and uranium from Slavs with suitcases of the stuff.

What seemed to get the chattering classes going was the prospect of getting on the plane and having to sit next to a chap with a dark complexion who may well have a supply of plutonium in his hand luggage—just the sort of pre-holiday downer to ruin a couple of weeks in Provence. One feature writer seemed to be thinking of the screenplay for *True Lies II* as he wrote about Europe swarming with Iranians, Iraqis, Libyans and Arabs of all sorts buying and selling nuclear destruction out of suitcases. With this sort of hysteria in the media, it's not surprising that the collection of racist stereotypes in *True Lies* should have aroused so little interest.

The consensus that nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union are falling into the hands of unstable third world leaders is a myth. Even those most excited about the prospect have to concede that most of the nuclear material uncovered by German intelligence agents of late is radioactive flakes from Russian smoke detectors or radioactive soil from Chernobyl. Lack of fact should never stand in the way of a good film-maker, but the same cannot be said for good journalism. ●



Quentin Tarantino has become the Merchant Ivory of low-life criminality, says Krysia Roma

Pulp for the slacker generation

Hollywood's reputation has always been that it eats its own rebels. Even Martin Scorsese seems to have been tamed by *The Age of Innocence*, in which his usual gutsy portrayal of contemporary street life has been replaced by a glorified American version of Merchant Ivory. Period drama is where it's at, and everyone is at it. From Hollywood to Pinewood, film studios are busy hauling out the classics and dressing everyone up in crinoline and starch.

So, what is on offer for those of us who are past the stage of having to watch all that stuff for A-level texts? Quentin Tarantino, Hollywood's latest *enfant terrible*, whose first film, *Reservoir Dogs*, was a masterpiece of low-life criminality, might seem to be an obvious choice. But even Tarantino seems to have caught the period piece bug.

Of course, Tarantino has not (yet) succumbed to filming a George Eliot or Edith Wharton novel. But his new film, *Pulp Fiction*, is as retro and nostalgic as any Merchant Ivory production. What Tarantino offers us is the period drama of pulp magazines which was born between the wars—the noir world of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, where men had stubble and broads were blonde. He has absorbed all the tough-guy movies, all the old classics from TV, the blaxploitation films of the seventies and created a period piece for the slacker generation.

(Above) John Travolta trades on his past in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (with Samuel L. Jackson)

The film follows two hit men, Jules and Vincent, one black (Samuel L. Jackson) and one white (John Travolta), on their way to take out some guys. This is what Tarantino himself has said of the premise on which the film is based:

'It's like the opening five minutes of every other Joel Silver movie. A bunch of guys show up and pow! pow! pow! kill somebody and then the credits start and then you see Arnold Schwarzenegger. So let's extend that whole little opening, let's hang out with them for the rest of the day and the shenanigans that follow. That's where the film came from.'

Tarantino shares Hollywood's obsession with low-life criminality which began with the romanticisation of Jesse James and Bonnie and Clyde. What makes him different from other directors is that he takes the secondary, background characters and makes them into the heroes. We know Jules and Vincent are low-life because they wear cheap dark suits with thin black ties. They are tough, unsophisticated and very Tarantino—the opening dialogue, which reads like a reprise of the opening to *Reservoir Dogs*, is about how much mayonnaise Europeans put on their burgers.

This unlikely duo (they're not Danny Glover and Mel Gibson) work for the Superfly/Shaft-style big bad boss, Marsellus (Ving Rhames). If it wasn't for

the fact that *all* blacks are criminals as far as America is concerned, it might even have been funny. Tarantino tries desperately to be cool and PC by mixing up all his black and white characters together, seemingly to subvert racial typecasting. But he ends up giving the nod to every stereotype you've ever seen in a Hollywood gangster movie. It's cool to show black criminals in films because Tarantino can say he saw them in those old blaxploitation movies. His women are either *femme fatales* like Uma Thurman or fluffy like Rosanna Arquette. Arquette plays a dealer's wife who does not want her house messed up by someone having an overdose—because that's how women behave in movies.

The whole movie is a film buff's paradise with all the cute references. Marsellus' wife Mia (Uma Thurman) takes Vincent to the glamorous diner where you're served by Marilyn Monroe lookalikes and can order a bloody Douglas Sirk steak.

Vincent is Travolta as we knew him from *Saturday Night Fever*. There is a scene in which Vincent is forced to enter a dancing competition with Mia and he turns out to have holes in his socks. I thought Travolta had some pride in him, but maybe he doesn't see that he is being sent up for the entertainment of a new generation.

Bruce Willis (who apparently pleaded with Tarantino to play his role) is Butch, the boxer who didn't take his fall and has to flee from Marsellus. It's a more contrived version of his *Die Hard* character. He crashes cars, rescues Marsellus from being tortured by an S&M sheriff—and still survives. Harvey Keitel, Tim Roth, Amanda Plummer—all are in there somewhere and all play exactly the role you would expect them to.

Tarantino is no Scorsese. He loves his pulp fiction but he has no feel for real life. That is why he does not concern himself with that terrible thing, 'the outside world'. Of course there is nothing wrong with that if the film happened to be good entertainment—as *Reservoir Dogs* showed. In *Pulp Fiction*, however, Tarantino simply serves up the same old clichés, though he does dress them up in black suits and thin ties for the benefit of the art house audience. None of the characters manages to break out of the clever comic book references. 'How strange it is that one has to go to an art house these days to hear decent low-life dialogue', Julie Burchill recently moaned. All that shows is that low-life dialogue has become trendy and formulaic.

Tarantino claims to hate theme park diners. But *Pulp Fiction* reminds you of nothing so much as Planet Hollywood, but without the benefit of Arnie. ●

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Frank Furedi



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Get real, Neil Davenport tells bands that want to be authentic

What's soul got to do with it?

Bands which were once committed to the idea of creating contemporary music now seem to prefer to see themselves as part of a 'classic tradition'. Music from the past, like mod-pop or soul, is seen as 'real music' compared to the 'inhuman' noises of techno or rap. The artists who aspire to be 'authentic' see themselves as taking a noble stand against the artificial pap thrown at us by corporate moguls and the dim masses who buy such records. But isn't it about time that we binned rock 'n' roll 'classicism' in favour of the index of possibilities that electronic music offers?

'Authenticity is the essence of Creation', said Alan McGee the boss of Creation Records recently. He is not kidding. Having given up on techno, McGee is content to release records that reflect Creation Record's iconography of cool: Small Faces, Big Star, mid-period Stones, Tim Buckley and the Byrds. This is one of the reasons why bands on Creation, like Ride and Primal Scream, have given up on today's music.

Ride, for instance, have traded in their ability to make towering, wall-of-noise epics for an uninspiring stroll through sixties mod-pop. This is not a case of reinventing the past like Blur, but of lifting the song-techniques and aesthetics from the period wholesale. Someone ought to point out to Ride that loon pants and frilly shirts should only be seen on the cover of *Sergeant Pepper*, not on nineties pop stars.

Primal Scream have also given up on the future. Three years ago they released the ground-breaking *Screamadelica*, a fabulous journey into dub soundscape and rock/House collisions. This year's appalling *Give Out But Don't Give Up* gives an indifferent two fingers to clubland in favour of pub-rock buffoonery. The album's numerous stabs at soul balladry are self-conscious attempts at being 'genuine' and 'authentic' at the expense of 'artificial' innovation. But what's so special about soul?

It is often believed that soul is one of the most emotive and genuine forms of music because it developed through the bitter experience of black oppression in America. White artists who want to be 'authentic' usually try to plug into the romantic notion of soul

Never mind the ballads, Bobby (Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie)

being a 'pure' form of music. In the case of Mick Hucknall and Michael Bolton, soul usually means bellowing to dramatic effect. Yet a singer's capacity for emotional excess is not a harbinger of good music. There are plenty of singers who cannot hit the right notes, but can evoke warmth and ennui that eludes the technically perfect.

For the authentic wannabes, however, an ability to wail in a histrionic manner is a demonstration that you are the 'real thing'. This kind of ham-fisted squawk finds favour in the slacker blues of Babes in Toyland, Come and PJ Harvey's album, *Rid of Me*. But the worst offenders of authentic squawk are surely nouveau grunge groups like 4 Non-Blondes and the Spin Doctors. For starters both bands are self-congratulatory: Hey, none of that PR, marketing bullshit for us, we're not bimbos! Their idea of being 'real', however, consists of nothing more than looking ugly and badly dressed.

The fact that both bands have succeeded through heavy rotation on MTV is no surprise. MTV is the satellite channel that likes to demonstrate, with its *Unplugged* series, that it too can be authentic. *Unplugged* is a series of

concerts that feature some crusty old-timer, say Neil Young, stripped bare of any modern equipment in favour of the lone acoustic guitar. The idea of *Unplugged* is supposedly to uncover the authentic essence of songs that can never be captured by studio trickery. Ironically it uses state of the art technology to promote a very old-fashioned view of music: that the use of hi-tech hardware is inferior to the feel and impact of well-crafted songs on primitive instruments.

Bands which retreat into authenticity often believe that they are being radical by rebelling against the coldness of modernity and the tackiness of mass society (in other words working class people who buy 2-Unlimited singles). Yet the styles of music that the wannabes emulate, such as sixties pop, were not originally conceived of as authentic or permanent. Pop music is at its best when it is as contemporary and disposable as a daily newspaper. It is also more exciting when it can harness new ideas to the best of today's sound technology. Give me any day artificial star sailors like Orbital and Autechre rather than another round of authentic soul and trad-rock. ●

THE

MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Stuart Derbyshire examines the latest debate about what shapes human consciousness

Mind over matter

The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul, Francis Crick, Simon & Schuster, £16.99 hbk

Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind, Gerald Edelman, Penguin, £7.99 pbk

The Rediscovery of the Mind, John Searle, MIT Press, £19.95 hbk, £9.95 pbk

Consciousness Explained, Daniel Dennett, Penguin, £20 hbk, £7.99 pbk

How the Self Controls its Brain, John C Eccles, Springer Verlag, £23 hbk

Imagine for a moment that you have been asked to invent or design a robot that can roam around a room, avoid obstacles, pick up specified objects on the way, all without any direct human input beyond the original design and manufacture. This is the 'visual problem', the problem of how we see, that Francis Crick sets out to examine with his *Astonishing Hypothesis*. Crick focuses on vision because he says that the different aspects of consciousness are likely to employ a basic common mechanism such that explaining visual consciousness will aid in the total explanation of human consciousness.

Like most of the scientists under review here, Crick is trying to develop a materialist alternative to the dualism of mind and body. The crudest form of dualism is the proposal of a homunculus—a little man sitting in the brain analysing the inputs, like those in the Numskulls comic-strip from the *Beezer*. The homunculus is easily dispensed with. If there are little Numskulls sitting in our brains watching the retinal input, listening to auditory input and so forth, what is in their heads?

John Eccles' account of human consciousness utilises a more sophisticated dualism than the Numskulls. Instead of a little man, something greater than man is postulated to coordinate the mechanical activities of the brain and interpret its messages: the soul. And there can be no easy logical explanation of such a spiritual force as the soul.

The way to cut through this supernatural nonsense is to examine the relation between the experience of the human being in society and the shaping of human consciousness. Yet this relation is ignored by Crick and the other rationally minded authors reviewed here. As a consequence they unwittingly jettison all that is associated with being conscious, things such as beauty, culture, free

will and so on. Much to the annoyance of Crick and the delight of Eccles, mysticism can then fill in the vacuum left behind. A one-sided explanation of humanity in terms of biology ignores the social relations which make up our experienced self or consciousness. This is the Achilles' heel which Eccles attacks to defend dualism. 'Since materialists' solutions fail to account for our experienced uniqueness', he writes, 'I am constrained to attribute the uniqueness of the self or soul to a supernatural spiritual creation' (p180).

Crick's fanfare as he unfolds his materialist theory of consciousness is a poor attempt at disguising this inherent weakness:

'The Astonishing Hypothesis is that "You", your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.' (p3)

Crick settles on the way vision works as the model of consciousness because vision happens to be one function which is well localised in the central nervous system (to the occipital cortex at the back of the brain) and is well described by neurologists, medics and mathematicians.

More than 15 years ago David Marr described how a brain could extract visual information based on the mathematical properties of light and dark falling on the retina. Simply put, Marr explained how, via the use of a cell with a centre which is excited by light and a surround that is inhibited by light, any system can detect edges of light and dark. The specific mechanisms, however, are not important, the key point is that Marr ►

solved the 'visual problem' outlined above without recourse to an external intelligent agent. Marr proposed in computational terms how the brain could 'see' without the need for a homunculus.

Crick's thesis is that by unravelling, 'Marr-like', all the neuronal properties of the brain, we will come to a theory of consciousness. He is wrong. The issue here is self-consciousness, not just knowledge, but knowledge of knowledge or knowing that you know. However detailed our understanding of neurology becomes, it will still not constitute an understanding of subjectivity or human consciousness. In the case of the seeing robot, the problem remains that the robot 'sees' but does not know that it sees. How can something that is operating on a computational basis become a something that knows of itself? This is the crux of the problem that has tied philosophers, neurologists, cognitive scientists and Nobel Prize-winners alike in knots.

Having asserted that you are nothing more than a collection of nerve cells, the next assertion is that the complexity of those nerve cells gives rise to consciousness. Crick claims that 'it is probable, however, that consciousness correlates to some extent with the degree of complexity of any nervous system' (p21). Self-awareness and the special properties of consciousness seem less inexplicable when seen in the light of the extraordinary complexity of the brain. This view is echoed by Gerald Edelman: 'But here is an astonishing fact—there are about one million billion connections in the cortical sheet. If you were to count them, one connection (or synapse) per second, you would finish counting some 32m years after you began.' (*Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, p17)

**I get concerned when
neurologists talk of brain areas
as experiencing human attributes such
as pleasure or consciousness**

But complexity is specific to the observer and the times; our imaginary robot has by now become a pretty complex piece of electronic gadgetry, but it still is not conscious. In fact, very many things are complex from your household washing machine to the movement of international finance, but they are not conscious either. It would seem, as John Searle rightly argues, that consciousness does not arise from complexity as such, which is lucky because the actual neurology of the brain simply does not hold out the astonishing complexity Crick and Edelman imply. The 10 billion neurons with 10 trillion connections between them may imply a bewildering level of incomprehension, but, by dividing the second number with the first we can arrive at the number of connections made by each single neuron, which is just 1000. This surprisingly low number demonstrates that the brain is organised as a collection of small local circuits which implies areas of specialised activity.

If consciousness cannot be explained in terms of the complexity of neuronal organisation alone, perhaps it lies within the complex integration of the local circuits carrying out the computations? Crick's book is dedicated to the visual circuits, his accounts of the various visual areas (V1, V2...V5) give a fascinating insight into the organisation of the occipital cortex and a keen

illustration of the active, constructive, as opposed to passive, nature of vision. But Crick reduces consciousness to a banality when he tries to explain it in terms of visual illusions. After a long discussion, which can be summarised by saying 'sometimes looks can be deceptive', it becomes of intense importance to prove that the brain can still make up a visual scene in the absence of full information:

'The visual psychologist VS Ramachandran [has shown] a subject a picture of a yellow annulus (ie, a thick ring, or doughnut). The subject had to keep his eyes still and view the world with only one eye. Ramachandran positioned the yellow ring in the subject's visual field so that its outer rim was *outside* the subject's blind spot, while its inner rim was *inside* it. The subject reported that what he saw was not a yellow ring, but a complete homogeneous yellow *disk*.' (p55)

Hence the blind spot that we all carry due to the optical nerve occluding part of our retina goes largely unnoticed because of the brain's capacity to 'fill in'. This may be an important discovery which illustrates the active nature of vision, but the step from this process to consciousness is more than one of degree. Perhaps recognising this, Crick begins to draw in other brain mechanisms to flesh out his hypothesis, like memory circuits and the attention. A picture is built up of several cognitive or computational boxes feeding in towards some centre where consciousness will be. Thus, for Crick, 'Free will is located in or near the anterior cingulate sulcus' (p268), for John Searle 'the basis of consciousness is in...perhaps, the reticular formation' (p67). Edelman may shy away from specifying any particular area as being responsible for consciousness, but he does link the development of the hippocampus as a long-term memory store to the general complexity of the brain and presents his theory of consciousness as an emergent property arising from the development of long-term and short-term memories (p132).

Edelman may be right in suggesting that long and short-term memory are necessary for the development of consciousness, but when he calls areas of the brain 'hedonic' (pleasure-seeking) he confuses the biological substrate with the thing itself. I get concerned when neurologists talk of brain areas as experiencing human attributes such as pleasure or consciousness. The Anterior cingulate cortex is not conscious of anything, any more than hippocampal loops are happy; only social beings are conscious and, sometimes, they can be happy. Failure to recognise this empties human consciousness of its process and presents it as an 'explosion' of complexity; a mishmash of computations. This failure encourages mystical interpretation.

Daniel Dennett highlights the dualistic implications of proposing a neurological centre for consciousness, as the French philosopher René Descartes did with the pineal gland more than three centuries ago. The ancient belief that there is a spiritual mind in addition to the physical mind is rightly seen as unscientific and detrimental to scientific progress, but 'while materialism of one sort or another is now a received opinion approaching unanimity, even the most sophisticated materialists today often forget that once Descartes' ghostly *res cogitans*

is discarded, there is no longer a role for a centralised gateway, or indeed for any functional centre to the brain' (p106).

Dennett does well to rid us of the need for a centre of consciousness and gives a convincing explanation of the discontinuity (blind spots) of everyday experience which requires the whole brain to be active in producing 'multiple drafts' of a final experience. However, when we finally get to Dennett's explanation of consciousness it is sorely disappointing:

'I haven't replaced a metaphorical theory, the Cartesian Theatre, with a non-metaphorical ("literal, scientific") theory. All I have done, really, is to replace one family of metaphors and images with another, trading in the Theatre, the Witness, the Central Meaner, the Figment, for Software, Virtual Machines, Multiple Drafts, a Pandemonium of Homunculi. It's just a war of metaphors.' (p455)

Dennett should have applied his valuable insight regarding the neurological centre for consciousness to his own theory. After all, Dennett has merely taken the pineal gland, the hippocampus, anterior cingulate cortex, or whatever chunk of brain takes the researchers' fancy, and, like Edelman, replaced it with the brain, or maybe the organism. This reduces to saying 'the organism is conscious' which is true, but not particularly explanatory. The continued assertion of consciousness rather than any real explanation is used by Eccles to demonstrate the common sense necessity of a supernatural explanation of humanity.

Eccles is highly critical of materialism arguing that there is nothing in physics (or materialism in general) that singles out brain processes as being in any way special. They are special only because they can be associated in a certain way with things outside classical physics, namely possible conscious experience. This is a perfectly acceptable point, which is largely ignored by Crick and the other materialists. Eccles is arguing that once biology reaches some critical point or mass it becomes more than just biology. In other words, you are not just 'the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells' you are something more. This point is probably ignored because Eccles' conclusion is unacceptable to materialism, for Eccles the 'something more' is provided by God and anything else is ridiculed as 'neuronal fantasia' (p28).

Ultimately, Eccles is making a virtue of the poor understanding of how our experienced self relates to our brain and is using this as a vehicle to 'reinstatate the spiritual self as the controller of the brain' (px). Like the materialists, Eccles' complete theory of 'how the self controls its brain' ends up degrading humanity, but this time in favour of divine intervention not biology. Rather than a biological milieu, Eccles proposes an *a priori* world of thoughts, feelings, memories, intentions and emotions 'which we must regard as a miracle beyond Darwinian evolution' (p139).

Far from being liberating as Eccles suggests, this formula reduces humanity to nothing but zombie intermediaries for an already fully formed other world. This total annihilation of rationality means that Eccles' is easily

dismissed in entirety, his earlier more rational ideas sadly ignored.

A newborn child is not *a priori* endowed with knowledge, never mind knowledge of knowledge and subjectivity. It has to learn. A baby is naive about everything. This is not to deny biology, because of course everything that the baby learns, including its own sense of self, is only possible because of the evolutionary development of our biology. Furthermore, it is true that, through development, this sense of self will mould neurology (possibly according to Edelman's 'Theory of neuronal group selection'). Everything that we do and think has some sort of neuronal representation. 'You', however, are much more than this.

**Only the pressure of having
to work with others, making ideas
commonly understandable, forces the
subordination of our instinctual biology
to our conscious will**

A child may build up an extensive memory of motor responses based on instinct, but like the imaginary robot at the beginning, could still not know anything. In fact, if left entirely alone, a human being would operate in an unconscious, computational manner. Only the pressure of having to work with others, making ideas commonly understandable, forces the subordination of our instinctual biology to our conscious will. The child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is language. By naming things it is possible to reflect and thus to become self-aware. The development of verbal thought changes the nature of development itself, it ceases to be a biological process and becomes a sociohistorical one. Verbal thought is determined by a historical-cultural process with specific properties and laws that cannot be found in our nature or biology. Human nature or consciousness is moulded by what we create.

It would be wrong to suggest that the authors reviewed here have made no attempt to come to grips with the social, but it is never seen as central to the development of the individual. It is always peripheral, 'background' for Searle, 'memes' or bits 'n' pieces of culture for Dennett, a product of 'our original need for value' for Edelman. Society is seen as something that our biology utilises rather than as something constitutive.

Edelman may be right 'that before language evolved, the brain already had the necessary bases for meanings in its capacities to produce and act on concepts' (p126). But the key change came as man began to interact, produce tools and work together. This social development would have provided the necessary force for the development of language and consciousness. Maybe early on in our history, natural selection would have worked to weed out those who did not have language capacity or the proper hand to mould tools or whatever, but we can now be sure that we have left natural selection behind. With our biology intact for many thousands of years, human consciousness has gradually progressed and decisively separated us off from the rest of the animal kingdom. We are free from the computations of instinct to forge our own destiny.

Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures, Edward W Said, Vintage, £4.99 pbk

Edward Said, the American professor of literature, classical pianist and prominent Palestinian critic of the Middle East peace process, gave the Reith lectures in 1993 which are reprinted here in full. Said's previous work has won him a reputation for his critique of Western notions of orientalism, reviewed by Kenan Malik in these pages in June 1993 ('The myth of "the Other"'). As Malik explained, Said's criticisms veer towards a rejection of objectivity as a Western notion of rationality.

Happily, in his Reith lectures, as has often been the case in more recent pronouncements, Said's rejection of 'Western' values has been offset by his unwillingness to endorse the wholly relativist conclusions that many have drawn—often from his own work. So Said is at pains to argue that 'tub-thumping about the glories of "our" culture or "our" history is not worthy of the intellectual's energy' (p69). At the same time, Said is far from naive about those former radicals of the third world who, like Samir al-Kalil, write scathing critiques of Islam for Western consumption, writing that 'to try to say something in the mainstream Western media that is critical of US policy or Israel is extremely difficult; conversely to say things that are hostile to the Arabs as a people and culture, or Islam as a religion is laughably easy' (pp87-8).
Eve Anderson

Reading Audiences: Young People and the Media, David Buckingham (ed), Manchester University Press, £35 hbk, £12.99 pbk

How does an Asian family in Southall regard Peter Brook's version of the *Mahabharata*, compared with the Indian version? (They thought Brook took liberties with the play's religious meaning.) How does a family of social work clients respond to the film *Annie*? (They talked while it was on). These and other equally remarkable findings are contained in this new survey of how audiences interpret media, a project undertaken in the patronising spirit of Desmond Morris' investigation of the *Human Animal*.

Each contributor, with the commendable exception of Martin Barker, prefaces their findings with an apology for daring to speak on behalf of those interviewed and observed—but that does not stop them putting their own prejudices in the mouths of their subjects. When not waxing lyrical about working class life or culture, a media expert like Chris Richards turns to his own daughters, aged four and eight, for empirical observation. Apparently their Barbie dolls, so undesirable to adults are actually part of their negotiation of unequal power in the social world. Such are the dilemmas facing modern parents.

Reading Audiences rejects the approach that says that children are directly influenced by what they see, argued most recently by child psychologist Elizabeth Newson. Instead the contributors emphasise the act of interpretation on the part of audiences. But this difference with those who demand censorship of harmful videos and other media is not so great. Instead of wanting to ban

harmful material, most of these writers want to see young people educated to exercise discrimination in their viewing habits. Like the arguments of the censorship lobby, *Reading Audiences* is a case for expert supervision of what ordinary people watch.

Alka Singh

The Times Guide to the Peoples of Europe, Felipe Fernandez Armesto (ed), Times Books, £15.99 hbk

We have all met that bloke down the pub who can tell you the pros and cons of any nationality you might care to mention. 'Well your Danes...now they've always had this inferiority complex...goes back centuries.' And so on. Most of us, I dare say, have even found ourselves—in moments of national sporting disaster—asking along with the commentator precisely what Norway or Iceland have ever contributed to world civilisation. How can people who are only good at keeping warm be beating us?

Well the time has come for the bloke down the pub. In the non-political nineties everything is to be understood in terms of 'culture'. The idea of the *Times Guide to the Peoples of Europe* is that to 'make sense of Europeans, or do business with them' we need to understand their culture. Where in the past you might have found out about cheap hotels and good restaurants, or, God forbid, learned the language before visiting a new country, now you learn about its culture. Saloon bar prejudice of old about Johnny Foreigner is now *de rigueur* for the European traveller. Unlike everyday prejudice however, this new trend declares a concern for overcoming such misunderstandings. The more we learn about each other, the less friction there will be goes the reasoning.

This is nonsense. As soon as we fix qualities and characteristics to peoples we know can only be as diverse as ourselves, we entrench the barriers that exist between nationalities. Remarkably, in the politically correct *Times Guide*, everyone is overjoyed with their place of birth. Thus 'Icelanders are intensely proud of their history' (p20). At a time when the identification of European peoples with their states is in reality highly problematic, national pride is thankfully in short supply. This is to say nothing of the fact that human beings are rarely so blind as to celebrate their locality merely because of an accident of birth. In the past, an Icelander might have wanted to travel further afield—perhaps to somewhere warmer and more hospitable. Now they are presumably too 'proud' to travel.

Like the bloke down the pub, the *Times Guide* claims to be an expert. Like him, too, it makes half of it up. Thus hitherto unknown to mankind, we discover Hutsuls, Boikos and Lemkos in the Carpathians, for example. Unlike the bloke down the pub, however, there is no sense of humour. With talk of hot-blooded Latins and methodical Germans, we knew it was at least half tongue in cheek. Now it's all down in print—and in the ever-sopompous language of 'proud' peoples whom we must 'respect', I fear national stereotyping has finally made it. Worse still, it's gone PC.

Adam Eastman

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