

LIVING MARXISM

The petrol
pollution scam
page 20

US\$5 DM7 FF25 IR£2

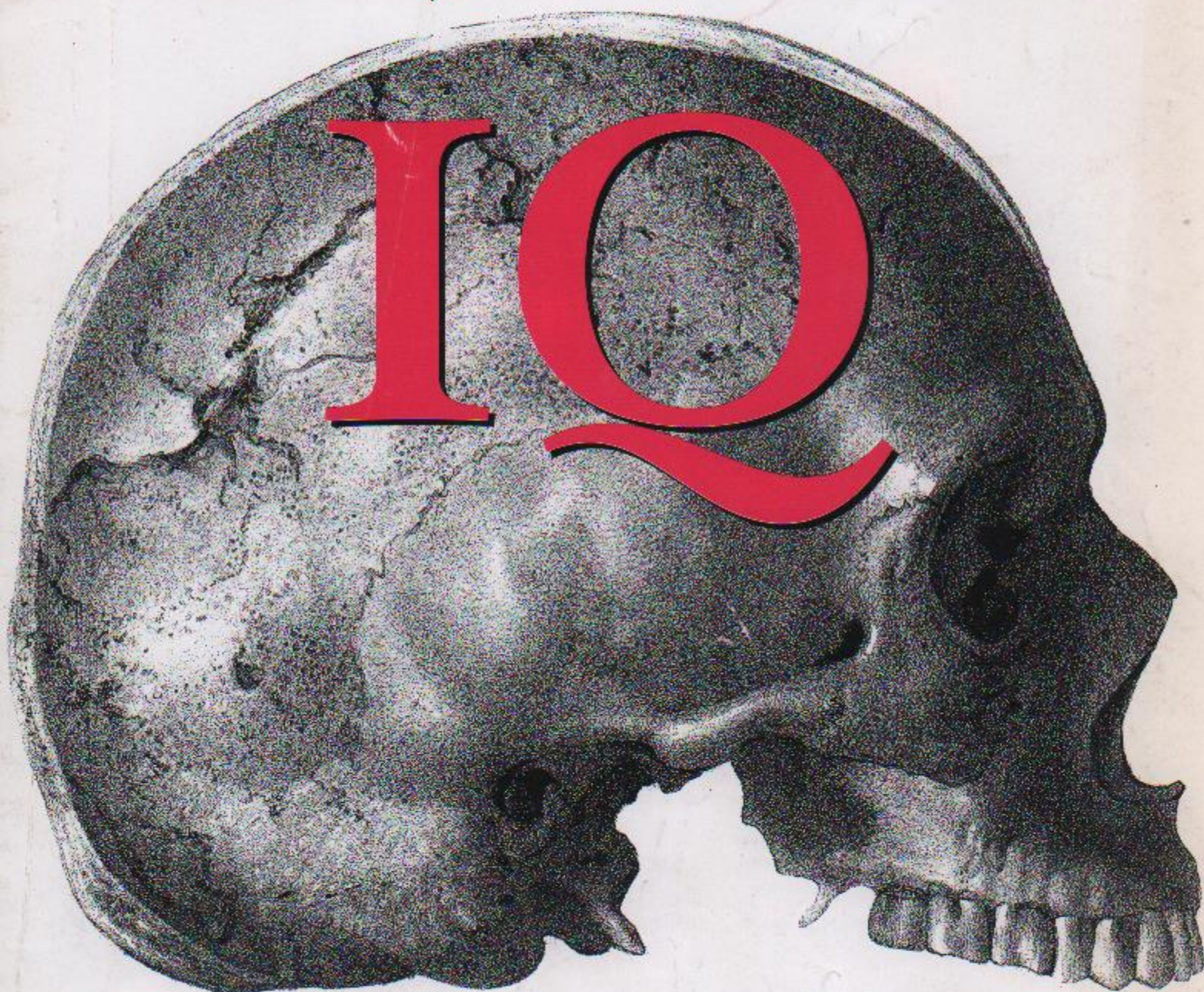
UK £2

December 1994

No74



Race, class and

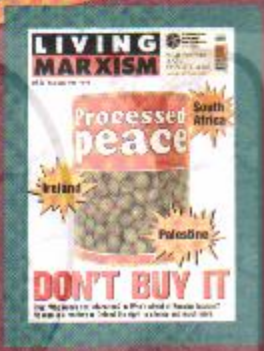


The truth in black and white

War crimes trials • Indian plague panic • The police, the pope and much more

Subscribe

A subscription to *Living Marxism* is now better value than ever; at £19.50 for a year you save almost 20 per cent on the cover price. Write to *Living Marxism* Subscriptions (74), BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX; phone (0171) 278 7699; fax (0171) 278 9844; e-mail lm@camintl.org.



Binders

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

Back issues

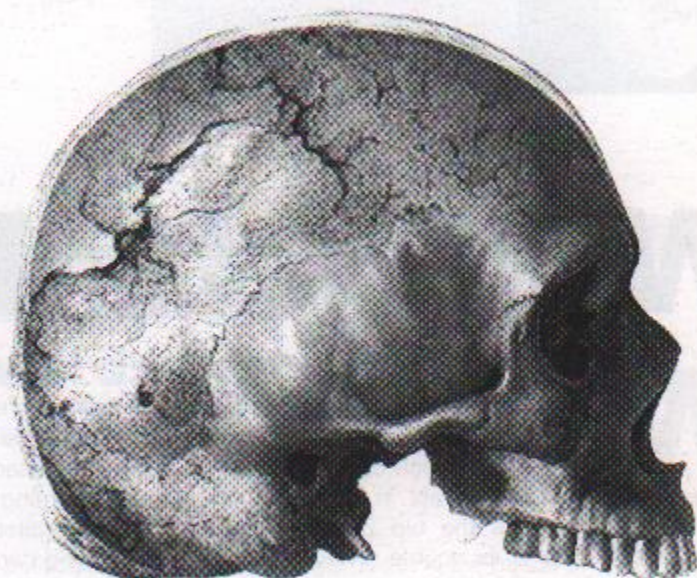
All issues £2.50 including p&p

- 67** Britain drools over D-Day: pornography for patriots; Who's afraid of porn? The family: what's all the fuss about?; The trouble with anti-racism
- 68** D-Day, VE-Day, VJ-Day: anniversary fatigue; South Africa's election fraud; America pulls the strings in Bosnia; Unemployment fall-out; Kurt Cobain
- 69** Kill the Criminal Justice Bill; Moonwalking; Who killed Rwanda? Where's Blair's Labour Party?; Defending Damien Hirst
- 70** No more Hiroshimas; Bernadette McAliskey interview; Real unemployment; Why isn't Africa 'on-line'?; In defence of Diego Maradona; Jeff Koons
- 71** Heart of darkness: the myth of human evil; Who's afraid of population growth?; Silcott showtrial—the sequel; Whaling about Japan; Cricket cheats
- 72** The closed university; No More Hiroshimas: campaign report from Japan; Ireland: ceasefire but no peace; A fear of science?; Authentic pop
- 73** A plague of moral panics; Is teenage sex a health risk?; The 'underclass' debate; Haiti: redefining democracy; Economy: what feelgood factor?; Shohei Imamura

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

CONTENTS

- 4 **Editorial**
- 6 Letters
- 8 **Taboos:** The Indian plague panic
Sandy Deegan
- 11 Ann Bradley
- 12 What they said in '94
- 14 The case against war crimes trials
Joan Phillips
- 16 Is there a skills shortage?
Phil Murphy
- 20 **Futures:** Petrol pollution scam
John Gillott
- 23 The asthma myth
Michael Fitzpatrick
- 24 Race, class and IQ
James Heartfield
- 30 Welcome to LA law
Andrew Calcutt
- 32 Kohl's Germany,
Germany's Europe
Alan Harding
- 34 Refighting the Pacific war
Daniel Nassim
- 37 Toby Banks
- 38 **Living:** The pope; Gangsta camp;
Africa on film
- 43 **The Marxist Review of Books**



Race, class and IQ

An unintelligent argument

Are whites innately more intelligent than blacks?
Are wealthy people born brighter than the poor?

The Bell Curve, a new book by American social scientists Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, has caused a transatlantic storm by claiming that inequality is an inescapable consequence of natural differences in inherited intelligence.

James Heartfield explains why focusing on IQ is little more than an excuse for inequality under capitalism. Page 24

Editor: **Mick Hume**

International: **Daniel Nassim** ● News: **Andrew Calcutt** ● Living: **Kenan Malik**

Books: **James Heartfield** ● Design: **Richard Stead** ● Production: **Michael Kramer,**

Peter Ray, Alec Campbell, Sally Gray ● Managing Editor: **Phil Murphy**

Irish mailing address: **Living Marxism, PO Box 4351, Dublin 1**

US mailing address: **Junius Publications Ltd, PO Box 769, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156**

Subscription rates: Britain and Northern Ireland £19.50 ● Europe (airmail) £27 ● Outside Europe (airmail) £37 ● Overseas (surface mail) £23 ● (Institutions add £7.50)

● Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX; Fax (0171) 278 9844 ● Distributed in the UK by Comag Magazine Marketing, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 7QE; Phone: West Drayton (0895) 444 055; Fax (0895) 445 255; Telex 881 3787 ● Distributed in the USA by Ingram Periodicals Inc, 1228 Hail Quaker Boulevard, Post Office Box 7000, La Vergne, TN 37086-7000; Phone (615) 793 5522 and Bernhard DeBoer Inc, 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110; Phone (201) 667 9300 ● Typeset by Junius Publications (TUI) © copyright Revolutionary Communist Party ● Printed by Russell Press (TU), Nottingham ● ISSN 0955-2448 December 1994.

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome, but can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed

**LIVING
MARXISM**

Monthly review of the
Revolutionary Communist Party
Editorial: (0171) 278 9908
Subscriptions: (0171) 278 7699
e-mail: lm@camintl.org



Mick Hume

Who gets the pay-off?

When the Conservative Party is competing with the royal family to see which can sink deepest in sleaze and lowest in public esteem, you know that the old political establishment is up to its double chins in trouble. It is now open season on the Tories. After 15 years of one-party rule, the media is full of excited talk about a 'sea change' in political life, with the decline and fall of the corrupt *ancien regime* apparently paving the way for the regeneration of the British system of government in the age of Tony Blair.

It is fun to watch the Tories suffer. But why should we assume that their troubles will necessarily lead to something better? If things are allowed to continue on their present course, the governmental crisis seems more likely to make the mood of cynicism and pessimism in the country even worse, while allowing the ruling elite to carry on running society, regardless of who gets to sit in Downing Street.

The seemingly endless sequence of sleaze revelations has exposed the Major government's inability to command respect even among its own core supporters. The fact that MPs have taken corporate freebies and backhanders for asking questions cannot in itself explain the prominence given to recent scandal stories; after all, handouts have always been considered perks of the job for politicians and journalists alike. What has changed is that the government has lost any legitimacy in the public mind, so that everything the Tories do now immediately invites suspicion and criticism from all quarters.

The collapse of Michael Heseltine's unpopular plans to privatise the Post Office demonstrated the extent of the Conservative Party's troubles. After privatisation was scrapped, many commentators observed that the drifting Major government no longer had any major policies to implement. They were right, but the problem goes deeper than that. The truly remarkable

thing was that a nonsensical proposal to sell off the Post Office could ever seriously have been proposed as the 'flagship' policy of a governing party in the 1990s. In a month when faltering industrial growth figures and falling car sales confirmed the ongoing reality of the capitalist slump, the only economic initiative which the party of the market seemed able to come up with was to auction off Postman Pat and asset-strip his black-and-white cat. It was an irrational policy which could have lost the government rural votes, and in the end most top Tories were probably quietly relieved to see it shelved.

But what other legislative plans are they left with? None—except the general predisposition to crank up their law-and-order crusade. Now that the Criminal Justice Bill has finally passed into law, we should expect Home Secretary Michael Howard to come forward with Son of CJB; but surely even he cannot criminalise enough groups of people to fill an entire session of parliament.

Locked into a downwards spiral, the once-cocky Conservatives are facing the possibility of defeat more starkly than at any time for 20 years. Yet what is this 'sea change' in political life really likely to change? It is not as if the problems end with the Tory Party. The Conservative collapse is only the most dramatic illustration of the extent to which the entire political culture of this country is in a state of degeneration and decay, a process infecting every mainstream party and the parliamentary institutions they rely upon.

What passes for politics on all sides of the House of Commons today is a concoction of the banal, the trivial and the tasteless. The terrain on which debate takes place has been continually narrowed until only a barren strip remains. Once politicians argued over grand visions of how to produce a richer and fairer society; now they squabble over whether or not to take a penny off income tax or put VAT on

gas bills. The character of politicians themselves has changed accordingly, with the traditional distinctive Tory and Labour MPs being replaced by faceless placemen who are so interchangeably bland that the media can seriously suggest Tony Blair is good-looking by comparison.

The sleaze scandal itself reflects the trend towards petty tabloid-style politics. Jonathan Aitken is a millionaire banker and John Major's chief secretary at the Treasury, in the front line of the Tory cabinet's campaign to slash billions off spending on our health, welfare, wages and jobs. You would think that there was no shortage of sticks with which his opponents could hammer him. Yet in today's politics of trivial pursuit, the only financial matter over which Aitken has been seriously attacked is a hotel bill at the Paris Ritz—and even that issue was soon displaced from the front pages by further revolting insights into David Mellor's love life.

Meanwhile on issues of substance, on the big economic and social questions that affect our lives, there is little difference among the major political parties—and even less debate. For instance, in the midst of the sleaze row surrounding Aitken and other Tory ministers, two important documents were published: the report on the future of the welfare state issued by the Commission for Social Justice (set up by the Labour Party), and the government's white paper on changing unemployment benefit into a job-seeker's allowance. The similarities in the assumptions underpinning both—about the need to dismantle the old welfare state and the emphasis upon individual responsibility—were remarkable. Yet few remarked on either, all eyes being fixed upon cod faxes and hotel receipts. So it came to pass that a Labour Party body proposed measures, such as making parents pay for their children's university education, which Margaret Thatcher would not have dared whisper a decade ago—yet hardly anybody batted an eyelid.

We live our lives today under a political system in which non-personalities conduct non-debates about non-alternatives. The question of which parties actually form a government becomes less and less important, as their policies and personalities merge into one indistinct mass of mediocrity—a tendency towards convergence which was also well illustrated in the recent German and American elections. Meanwhile, over in the real world, the market economy which all sides now support continues to grind down our living standards and working conditions without attracting critical comment.

Against that background, why should we believe (except as an act of blind faith), that the Tory Party's problems are likely to lead to any change for the better in the way Britain is governed? Instead, the most important impact of the governmental crisis is on the political mood in the country. And here, it is making matters worse.

The sleaze exposures and endless ministerial cock-ups have further intensified the powerful sense of popular cynicism about not just the Tory Party, but politics in general. Most people feel entirely detached from a political process in which party managers and spin-doctors mix with lobbyists and PR men, none of them ever coming close to the realities of everyday life. As a result, politicians are now held in deep contempt by the public—an international pattern stretching from Whitehall through Washington to Milan and far beyond.

All of which might seem like no bad thing and not before time. The problem is, however, that as yet there is nothing to put in the place of the discredited old school of politics. In a situation where there appears to be no credible alternative on offer, disaffection with the status quo will not lead to any political uprising. Instead, the effect is the opposite, strengthening public cynicism and pessimism about the prospects of anything changing. Most people now wish

The sleaze scandal reflects the trend towards petty tabloid-style politics

a plague on all things political and withdraw into their private lives, while those who do expend energy on public affairs retreat into campaigning around parochial 'community' issues. The net effect is to allow the political elite to stumble on from one crisis to another, without facing serious pressure from any opposition movement.

Worse still, what new responses there have been so far to the governmental crisis look distinctly dangerous. The malaise of the Tory-run system of government has been widely interpreted as a problem with popular democracy itself. As a consequence, many of the solutions proposed, from the argument that there should be fewer MPs to the demands for more controls on the press, have distinctly authoritarian, anti-democratic undertones—and that can only confirm the control of the ruling elite over society.

Look at how the political elite itself is seeking to rebuild public confidence in its system by investing authority in the hands of individuals and institutions that are 'untainted'—which today is usually assumed to mean unelected. So Major appointed Lord Scott to inquire into the government's role in the Iraqgate scandal, and has now set up Lord Nolan to adjudicate on the sleaze allegations. These wise old men might seem more legitimate than the parliamentary crooks in the eyes of the public. But in fact their emergence as prominent figures in the political system represents an attack on democracy. It is the investment of

more power in the hands of unelected, and so unaccountable, state officials. As such it means one more step away from genuine democratic control, and one more barrier to protect the pillars of capitalist power from popular pressure.

The sleaze scandals have provided a glimpse of how real influence is exercised in our 'free' country, behind the curtains of the parliamentary puppet show. They have shown that power lies with those few who have wealth enough to buy it. That ought to be a signal of the need to extend democracy, by creating a system where control is in the hands of the working people who make up the majority in society. Instead, without a political alternative pointing in that direction, the 'sea change' can end up as a move towards an even more unrepresentative, elitist system.

Some commentators now go so far as to argue that, however dreadful Charles and Diana might be, we should not consider getting rid of the monarchy, because the alternative would be a corrupt politician as head of state. That the rotten House of Windsor can now seriously be upheld as a more legitimate symbol of democracy than the House of Commons should be warning enough of the authoritarian direction—which the backlash against government corruption is taking. When it comes to open government, give me an elected crook over an inbred hereditary monarch or a judge appointed by his ex-schoolfriends in the cabinet any day of the week.

If you would like more information about *Living Marxism* readers' groups in your area, write to Helen Simons, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, phone (0171) 278 9908 fax (0171) 278 9844 e-mail lm@camintl.org

Female genital mutilation

My attention has recently been drawn to a piece in your publication entitled 'A civilising mission?' (October) which provokes me to a few remarks which you will undoubtedly publish since you invite readers' views and criticisms.

If Sandy Deegan is a man, the ignorant out-pourings do not really surprise me. Men do not care about whether women can actually experience sexual pleasure or not, and they usually do not care if women are in pain or not. If Deegan is a woman, she should be ashamed of her arrogance and lack of compassion.

If parents took their girl child to a quack and asked the person to cut off parts of or the whole of one arm, this would certainly be considered as grievous bodily harm and a crime. When parents take their girl child to a quack and ask this person to cut off parts of or the whole of the clitoris, labia minor and mutilate the sexual organs, your author labels this as traditional practices to be respected and applauds doctors in well-equipped hospitals for the modern medical care taken of the tortured girl.

It is mind-boggling that crimes against women's human rights and their physical integrity are used for propaganda purposes. Let me assure you that feminists everywhere think that it is indeed their business to speak out against a barbaric method of oppressing women. I also recommend you to note that the well-known Egyptian doctor and writer Nawaal El-Sadaawi was one of the first and loudest to denounce female genital mutilation. She was followed by many other women from countries where this crime is committed. Our duty as women is to openly and tirelessly show solidarity with our sisters who need our support. But what would Sandy Deegan know about that?

Maria Jonas General Secretary, Socialist International Women, London

Sandy Deegan's article on—or was it a defence of?—female genital mutilation (FGM) marked an all-time low. With disturbing insouciance, Deegan mentions that those who campaign against FGM 'attack the practice as brutal', that 'on the face of it, it is hard to disagree'; female mutilation 'no doubt seems alien and cruel to Western sensibilities', even though we should remember that it is 'a traditional practice...which has been going on for centuries'. With chilling callousness, she mocks anti-FGM campaigners for being 'unfamiliar with the values of the societies where female circumcision is practised' (after all, it's their culture, ain't it?).

This is a grotesque parody of the universalism and internationalism of genuine communism, and makes even the Victorian missionaries

look progressive by comparison. If someone attempted to remove Deegan's clitoris and then stitch the labia and the remaining sides of her vulva together, she would be the first to scream blue murder. However it is OK for a Somali girl to be forcibly mutilated. Deegan's feeble allusion to relatively wealthy women who choose to have silicon implants in their breasts only compounds her errors.

FGM in any form is barbaric and must be unreservedly condemned by communists, wherever and whenever it occurs—as should any form of exploitation, oppression or barbarism. If 'Western feminists', 'prominent Western liberals', 'international do-gooders' or anybody-else-you-care-to-mention also feel compelled to denounce FGM, then good for them.

Eddie Ford *Hither Green, London*

No surrender in Ireland?

Mike Belbin (letters, November) attacks Mark Ryan ('A ceasefire but no peace', October) for concluding that Sinn Fein has given in to constitutionalism, countering that 'nothing has been surrendered yet'. A few years ago Sinn Fein viewed the SDLP as a party of collaborators. What has changed is Sinn Fein's perception, not the SDLP. Similarly the Free State was seen as a neo-colony ruled by puppets. Now one of those puppets (Albert Reynolds) is treated by Sinn Fein as the legitimate leader of Irish nationalism and the SDLP as 'fellow nationalists'. If that's not bad enough, the Sinn Fein leadership present this pan-nationalist front as a great step forward.

The reality is that Sinn Fein have thrown in their lot with puppets and collaborators, and the price paid for this new pan-nationalist alliance is the abandonment of any serious challenge to partition. Fair enough that Sinn Fein should decide the political direction they want to pursue, but for Belbin to suggest that anti-imperialists should refrain from criticism and actively assist Sinn Fein in accommodating to partition, is indeed tragic.

As someone who has spent all my adult life opposing British rule in Ireland, it gives me no pleasure to have to agree with Ryan's conclusion that we have witnessed a setback for the struggle in Ireland. To pretend otherwise only sows confusion, and delays still further the building of a new anti-imperialist movement in Ireland capable of defeating British rule once and for all.

Kevin Kelly *Archway, London*

Haiti: no cheers for Clinton

James Bradley must be living in cloud cuckoo-land if he thinks that 'the advantage of the American establishment' has also been the

advantage of people in the third world' (letters, November). The people of Haiti might have 'got back their elected government', but if this is guaranteed by American politicians and the US military then it is a hollow 'victory'. The USA continues to have power over Haiti and other third world countries, which continue to be at the receiving end of decisions made in the West on their behalf.

It might start out as a mission to dole out sweets and bread, but the guns and bombs are not far behind. When the barbarism breaks out (caused by the West, blamed on the 'natives'), all Bradley will be able to do is wring his hands and say, 'Oh, but I didn't want that sort of intervention'. Too late—by that time the idea that the West can and should 'do something' will be even more entrenched than it is today.

Even if no bullet is fired or bomb dropped, American intervention can never be anything other than anti-democratic—regardless of whether Washington backs Aristide or Papa Doc. Firstly, the real scope for the US government to interfere in the internal affairs of another country is increased. Secondly, the idea that a superpower should sort out the mess becomes more acceptable. This can only reinforce the racist assumption that third world nations are incapable of running their own affairs.

The nature of the USA and other Western superpowers has not changed. What has changed is that people like Bradley might once have criticised them, rather than giving voice to the dangerously naive view that somehow the cynically motivated actions of superpowers can be progressive, if only by default.

Alka Sehgal *Walthamstow, London*

Labouring for justice

I am a supporter and member of the Labour Party. In my view they are the party best placed to make a change for the better from within the system. I have no means at my disposal by which to radically alter the system and I see that the best way to make the system itself fairer, to regulate the nastiness which is inherently created by the market, to allow all people the opportunity to work, is to have a government that is interested in more than the minority. Labour can be that government.

I cannot conceivably reduce myself to standing on the sidelines waiting for the capitalist system to fail while no immediately viable alternative is offered. I cannot watch injustices pass by and applaud them as they bring that collapse one step closer. The first thing I seek from any system is justice. It is something with which many people do not concern themselves, and yet where injustice does occur it wounds the very fabric of our society.

If you seek a revolution, what of the injustices that occur tomorrow? The new order that would be created may well be fairer, but it will not be completely fair. Let us deal first with a short-term goal of basic justice and rights for all.

Ashok Katwala

a.katwala@glass.jecsystems.com

Forgive us our sins

I am a Christian Conservative voter with an open mind (they are not mutually exclusive states). In my view, Mr Mick Hume's article ('An age of evil?', September) makes the fundamental error of Marxism, in arguing that evil is not a product of humans but of a social system.

Mr Hume writes 'society itself is created... by people', while also writing 'what's evil is a system', thereby defeating his own argument. Another glaring contradiction appears in Mr Hume's treatment of the Thatcherite concept of encouraging individuality (a concept guaranteed to stimulate wholesome self-worth). He declares 'in the end there is only society'; then later, 'all human behaviour is the product of human initiative and the interaction between people', which is surely a matter determined by one's individuality.

Mr Hume is refusing to admit the existence of evil because he cannot bear the thought that 'there can be no new solutions to our problems and no real hope for the future'. But it is not true that 'if we believe in human evil, we are doomed'. To say so is cruel, and to believe so must be wretched, since the evidence is all round us. Our only hope lies in admitting our innate evil and seeking forgiveness.

Sarah Watts *Queens' College, Cambridge*

Easy criticism?

I read with interest the replies to my letter (October). Both Claran Guilfoyle and Frances Ashton seek to portray me as some sort of political millenarian, not content till someone fleshes out my apocalyptic fantasies. Sadly, the reality is much more mundane. In fact my main grievance is not so much against *Living Marxism's* deconstruction of capitalist society as with their simplistic and sectarian attacks against their counterparts on the left.

Frances Ashton states that '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'. If that is what *Living Marxism* stands for, then I entirely agree. But is it? More often than not, it appears to me that those who do genuinely try to 'confront the problems of the present' are the first to be vilified by *Living Marxism*. Month after month we are presented with the same simplistic argument: those who go on ANL demonstrations and the like are fundamentally misguided in that by focusing on the minority of active fascists they overlook the broader issues of racism within capitalist society. In fact, this argument, with minor alterations, appears with respect to a number of issues within *Living Marxism*—green issues, feminism, so-called political correctness and so on.

This is what fucks me off about your approach: you criticise but offer no alternatives. Like some Marxist version of the Harry Enfield character, you stand outside the debate muttering 'you don't want to be doing that', but have nothing constructive to put in its place. Proffering a critique is not the ultimate political stance against capitalism. It is the easy part. What is more difficult is getting together with people and actually trying to change things.

Dave Clarke *Brighton*

Animal writes

Cathy Dunlea (letters, November) concludes 'it's not all right to exploit any animal—human, fish, cow, rat, spider', and enjoins us to 'realise our superior hunting ability does not make us gods'.

Superior hunting ability? I don't know if Dunlea has been out hunting with a pride of lions, but I suspect they might make a killing before she does—she might even be the killing if she's not careful.

Hunting doesn't come into it. The superiority of human beings originates in social interaction, which gives rise to the consciousness that is uniquely human. One manifestation of this uniquely human characteristic is the ability to read and write. Therefore, in writing a letter asserting that animals are equal, Dunlea has disproved her own argument. As far as I know, neither *Living Marxism* nor any other publication has ever printed a letter from 'fish, cow, rat or spider'. Or perhaps all the spider letters are being suppressed?

Derek Hutchinson *Cardiff*

Tarantino, train-spotter

I think Kryssia Roma tried to read too much into *Pulp Fiction* ('Pulp for the slacker generation', September). I thought it was a brilliant film and this impression was only reinforced by a recent television documentary on the writer and director.

Quentin Tarantino is something of a film buff. He's just an anorak away from being a train-spotter, and that's what makes his films so good. *Pulp Fiction* is a collage of the best bits from Tarantino's favourite movies. His particular talent is the skill with which he chooses the bits to use and the way he puts them together. When this is coupled with the situation in which he has placed his characters, the result is explosive, literally in some instances!

Pulp Fiction is fresh and retains most of what made *Reservoir Dogs* so good, but adds humour and sophistication, enhanced by an addictive soundtrack. I think it is fine to point out how art and popular culture reflect the predominant moods in society. But that is as far as it should go. What counts is whether an evening spent watching *Pulp Fiction* is an evening well spent. As far as I am concerned it is.

Ian Williams *Bristol*

Unpopular classics

Don Van Vliet (letters, November) has got it wrong. Classical music was originally designed as a demonstration of the power and wealth of the aristocracy. In the days of Bach, Beethoven *et al*, the only professional musicians were employed by aristocrats, who would put on concerts to show how many servants they had.

The only culturally valid form of music is the folk music which the proletariat composed and sang themselves, when they had a few hours to do so at the end of a hard day's work; not the elitist 'classical' stuff which depended on the exploitation of millions of oppressed peasants to provide the wealth for the rich to put on their grotesque musical spectacles.

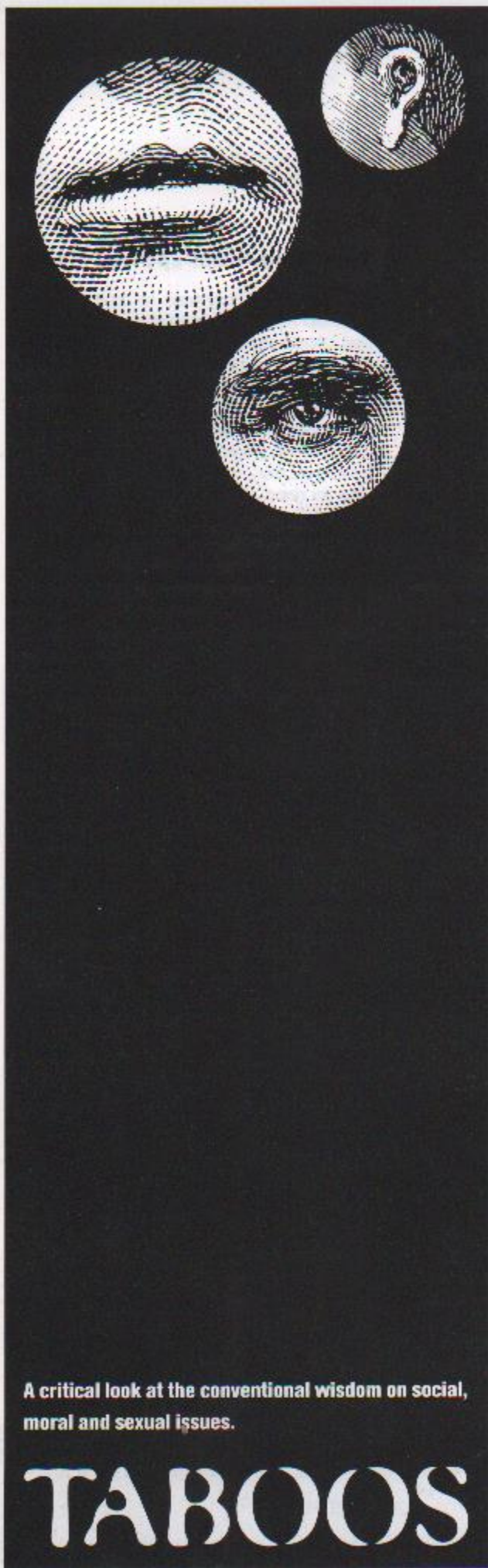
'Pop/rock' may be exploited by the Richard Bransons of this decade, but at least it is composed by groups of friends to show how enthusiastic they are about music, and as such is the folk music of this century.

Keith Ackermann *Tilbury, Essex*

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

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

Living Marxism, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX fax (0171) 278 9844 e-mail lm@camintl.org



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

TABOOS

Sandy Deegan on the truth behind the scare stories about this year's outbreak of pneumonic plague in India

Plague panic spread by media rats

India's first outbreak of plague in 28 years spread panic across the country in the autumn. Schools, cinemas and colleges were closed, people were advised against congregating in markets and other crowded places. A state of emergency was declared in several Indian states.

The plague did more than cause panic throughout India, it alarmed the rest of the world too. Suspected cases were reported in Britain and Sri Lanka. Flights from India to various countries were subjected to special health checks or banned outright. Air Canada suspended its services to and from New Delhi, and in New York a plane arriving from Bombay was held up for several hours because one passenger was air sick.

For several weeks the fight against the spread of the plague made headline news in the press and on TV. Governments and health officials were on hand around the world to offer advice to stricken India. Yet now, a couple of months later, the panic seems bizarre. In many ways it looks like the plague that never was.

It is clear that the horror story headlines were out of all proportion to the real health problem. Just 122 cases of pneumonic plague were reported in the latest Indian epidemic—the death toll was far less. Compared to the suffering caused in the third world by other diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis, the international panic at the outbreak of pneumonic plague seems somewhat overdone. TB and malaria pose far greater health problems, and are difficult to treat even with access to modern medicines and hospital facilities. Pneumonic plague can be cured with the same antibiotics that your doctor gives you to clear up a throat infection.

Between 1988 and 1991 the World Health Organisation recorded

14m new cases of malaria and 21m of TB. Health experts are now concerned that drug-resistant strains of both are emerging. Yet there is little media excitement about these mundane diseases. More people in India die *each day* of cholera than in a year of plague, yet these deaths go unremarked upon.

The fact that Western governments and commentators can live comfortably with millions of deaths from more prevalent diseases suggests that we should be careful about taking the humanitarian concern for plague victims at face value. What has excited comment from the West is not that people are dying of a curable disease, but that *India* is suffering from a disease that most of us thought had been consigned to the history books. The outbreak of plague, a disease that conjures up powerful images of filth and decay, has provided ideal confirmation of prevailing prejudices about the backwardness of India's customs and institutions.

The representation of the plague tells us a great deal about the way in which contemporary India is viewed by Western commentators. While epidemics are often seen as natural catastrophes demanding pity and sympathy, the Indian plague was presented as the inevitable consequence of the Indian way of life. Hence the media emphasis on the slow and incompetent response of the Indian government to the crisis, and the repeated stories of cowardly, irresponsible doctors who fled from the infected areas leaving patients to suffer. Traditional Hindu customs, such as the religious veneration and protection of the rat, have been highlighted as major contributors to the spread of infection.

One curious fact seems to have been forgotten by those writing about ▶



ILLUSTRATION: ORCHESTRA OF THE DEAD BY MICHAEL VOLZHEUT, 1988



the plague—that in India the disease has been largely eradicated in the post-independence period. The recent outbreak of plague is after all the first epidemic since 1966. In the days when the British Raj ruled the subcontinent, plague was a major killer—in some years killing more than a million Indians. In more modern times, Indian society has been relatively successful in containing the disease.

The recent outbreak of plague in India had less to do with traditional customs than the very modern habit of slashing public spending on welfare provision and healthcare. This year's epidemic came in the wake of savage cuts in social spending—a result of the economic austerity programmes imposed by prime minister PV Narasimha Rao under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The shortages and inflated prices of the basic penicillins required to treat plague victims are entirely a consequence of the market economy's inability to produce and distribute the medicines needed by the poorest sections of the population.

For most commentators plague has been seen as confirmation of India's primitive character. However, for others it has been seen to represent the problems of modernity. While some emphasised the contribution of poor sanitation and recent floods, others laid the blame on India's recent rapid economic growth, stressing that the outbreak took place in the industrialised textile and mining region of Surat. These commentators have blamed the spread of the disease on high population density in the urban areas, with the attendant problems of pollution and unsanitary living conditions, and have tried to ascribe the incompetent response of the Indian authorities to the 'breakdown of community' consequent upon the expansion of the new industrialised areas.

The emphasis on the role which population 'congestion' played in the spread of disease has served to underline some of the messages about Asian and African societies which were broadcast at the international conference on population, convened by the United Nations in Cairo in September. This assembly, the largest population conference ever, dominated international news shortly before the plague outbreak, and placed overpopulation firmly in the popular consciousness, priming the world for a panic.

Experts warned the international conference that the expanding population in third world countries would lead to increased overcrowding and increased migration. The message was clearly that those dissatisfied with their lot in the developing countries could try to come West, bringing

with them their families, their poverty and their diseases. Geoffrey Cowley, writing in *Newsweek* primed his readers for panic with the observation that 'it took the Black Death several years to travel the fourteenth-century trade routes from Asia across Europe. Today Bombay to London is a 10-hour flight, short enough for an infected person to make the journey before showing any signs of plague.'

Anxiety about the plague served as a code for the 'epidemic' of third world immigrants

The return of plague to a country with the fastest growing population on Earth has been presented as a warning of the dangers ahead for all of us, unless the 'international community' addresses the problem of there being too many people in the developing countries so as to put the lid on population growth and put a stop to migration.

Reading reports in the British press, you could have been forgiven for thinking that your chances of catching plague were as high in the wards of the London Hospital in Whitechapel, as they were in Surat. For the scaremongers in the government and the media, anxiety about the plague served as a valuable code for the 'epidemic' of third world immigrants that really concerns them.

Immigrants from Asia were identified as potential plague carriers in need of screening. Asians are becoming quite used to being identified as the source of health problems. In east London, recent outbreaks of tuberculosis have been blamed on the Bengali community. And Asians have been fingered as major culprits in encouraging the development of drug-resistant strains of the disease, which are thought to develop when treatments are not properly continued. It was significant that in reporting how easily plague can currently be treated with antibiotics, several medical writers took it upon themselves to speculate about what might happen if plague developed drug-resistant strains as a consequence of 'uneducated' people failing to treat it thoroughly.

True enough, far more cases of TB have developed among Bengalis than among the local white population of east London—but that does not mean that there is something indigenous to Bengalis which predisposes them to TB and turns them into 'infective agents' in the community. A more

fruitful explanation of the association between TB and Asians may lie in local authority housing policies which dump Asian families on the worst council estates where damp, mouldering conditions are perfect for culturing tuberculosis, or in the poverty of many east London Bengalis which traps them in these slums, or in their experience of racism which makes them less inclined to seek medical attention from health professionals, and to abandon treatment as soon as symptoms ease.

The high-profile reporting of planes being held up while Asian passengers were scrutinised creates the impression that little England is under siege from foreign agents of infection. Images of aircraft being sprayed with disinfectant, and peaky looking passengers being quick-marched to the quarantine wards gives shape to the notion that our clean and antiseptic isle is being corrupted by filthy foreigners, and that unless we tightly control our borders even our health can be compromised.

Medical experts were somewhat flabbergasted by the energy with which immigration officials mustered themselves to study travel documents of Indian nationals, ostensibly to check that they had not come straight from a plague region. As GP and journalist Trisha Greenhalgh pointed out in the *Independent*, it is incredibly difficult to catch pneumonic plague from another human being: 'the vast majority of cases arise when the flea bites first a sick rat and then a person.' And, as she concluded, 'the only rat pack in flagrant evidence in this country is the one gnawing its way through its pencils thinking up non-existent health scares'.

Even if an immigrant was infected, a bottle of tetracycline would soon do the trick. But then plague-spotting was never really the point of the exercise. When there is half an excuse to humiliate Asian visitors and to double check their entry papers, the immigration service is unlikely to let it pass.

All in all, the panic about the plague has helped to create conditions where anxieties about Western society can be projected on to the third world. 'They' are the problem. 'They' are the bearers of disease. 'They' threaten not only our traditional lifestyles, but our very lives. Even if you try to help them with modern technology it only creates more problems, because 'they' do not use it responsibly: transport brings them over here, drugs are misused so as to render them ineffective and encourage new strains of disease.

The plague panic was not so much a medical scare as a population panic. It could herald the start of a new epidemic.



'Pro-life' problems

The anti-abortion lobby has managed to create a national controversy about an entirely sensible and unremarkable government scheme to combat rubella and measles by the year 2000.

Prompted by fears of a predicted measles epidemic, the Department of Health launched an initiative to vaccinate children across the country. By using a vaccine which also immunises against rubella, health officials hoped to reduce the number of cases of that disease, too. The bid to eradicate rubella is largely motivated by a desire to reduce the risk it poses to pregnant women. Rubella is pretty harmless to most people but can cause severe mental and physical defects to babies born to mothers who suffered from the disease in pregnancy. Rubella infection is a cause of many abortions each year; yet it was the use of the rubella vaccine that caused objections from the anti-abortion, 'pro-life' lobby.

The problem for these people lies in the origins of the vaccine. It may save babies now, but it was developed from lung cells taken from a 14 week old male fetus which was aborted in 1966. The culture was used to grow a 'cell line' known as MRC5 from which several vaccines were developed in the 1970s. This is not fresh news. The origins of the vaccine have been common knowledge in medical circles and have not been kept secret from the public. The vaccine remained uncontroversial because nobody thought to make a big deal of it—until October, when the announcement of the vaccination programme coincided with a decision by the anti-abortion group, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), to draw attention to what it perceives to be illegitimate and repugnant uses of fetal tissue.

Having recently failed to persuade the authorities to ban research using ovarian tissue taken from female fetuses, the rubella vaccination programme provided another opportunity for SPUC to work up some public revulsion. SPUC briefed the Catholic press, who covered the story and inspired the headmaster of Ampleforth, a leading Catholic boys' school, to ban the combined vaccine. A Jesuit school in Lancashire also banned the vaccine and, as the carnival of reaction played ever more loudly, concern spread to the Muslim community. Fr Leo Chamberlain claimed that use of the combined vaccine could be construed as 'condoning' abortion, and that there was no need to vaccinate boys against rubella as they do not have pregnancies. This shows a rather limited grasp of epidemiology, but then Chamberlain is a priest and, as such, some might think he would do well to stand clear of medical matters.

SPUC's intervention succeeded in its intention of sparking a national debate on the ethics of research and therapy using fetal tissue. The measles vaccine debate was used to question the ethics of the medical use of material from aborted fetuses in general. The infamous 'slippery slope towards Nazi values' was mapped out by several writers, including Professor TEJ Healy from the Department of Anaesthesia at Manchester Royal Infirmary in the *Times*: 'If we now accept as ethical the use of aborted human tissue to develop vaccines for the benefit of other members of the human race, would we not be

returning in spirit to the Gestapo laboratories.' I find it rather worrying that somebody can progress so far as a clinician while failing to distinguish between research involving tissue from legally aborted fetuses and abhorrent practices on living people.

SPUC supporters will doubtless think they have scored a great victory. They will be delighted with the defensiveness of the government's Chief Medical Officer, Kenneth Calman, who has taken on board their concerns and has promised to write to all vaccine manufacturers to alert them to the allegedly 'moral' issues. He told religious leaders that the Department of Health would 'continuously explore the possible alternative vaccine technologies'.

Yet in some ways their victory is a Pyrrhic one. The focus of the anti-abortion lobby on such issues as the use of fetal tissue indicates the extent to which they have failed to stand their ground in the battle to restrict abortion provision. Even pro-life veteran David Alton has publicly admitted that now is not the time to launch an offensive on the Abortion Act. The overwhelming consensus that abortion should be an option for women, albeit a restricted one, has pushed the anti-abortion lobby into the more marginal areas of medical ethics. The pro-life lobby have known about the origins of the measles vaccine for decades, but only now have they felt they needed to place it at the centre of a campaign.

Their marginalisation has even been illustrated in the vaccine debate itself, where the natural allies of the pro-life lobby were rather more circumspect than the Chief Medical Officer. The Catholic church was noticeably less gung-ho, with the Catholic bishops of England and Wales giving the vaccine an ethical all-clear and reassuring parents that consenting to have their children vaccinated 'does not condone abortion nor amount to encouraging further abortions for this vaccine'. This was one occasion where the zealous fundamentalist campaigning by SPUC caused more trouble than it is worth to the bishops, who prefer to keep their heads down when faced with a clear conflict between religious ideals and everyday practicalities. While the bishops are clearly anti-abortion, they have no wish to cope with the anguish of Catholic mothers burdened with rubella-damaged babies.

The pragmatic attitude of most Catholics to the issue was even demonstrated by the headmaster of Ampleforth who set this particular ethical dilemma loose. Sir reportedly justified his decision to ban the vaccine at his school, not with a stirring defence of his faith, but by insisting that his was an empty gesture. 'We understood that general immunity to rubella in the population is very high', he told the press, 'and that gave us the freedom to go with our conscience on this. If I thought that pulling 420 boys out of the immunisation programme was going to cause widespread harm, then I'd be a fool and a blackguard'.

In other words, 'I can follow my conscience on this only because I know what I do is going to have no influence on others'—including the parents who pay the school fees. Some religious leader! Whatever happened to taking prophetic stands? ●

Rubella infection is a cause of many abortions

What they said in '94

Compiled by Andrew Calcutt

I'd describe the outlook for Western Europe in just three letters, Y-U-K.

David Roche *chief economic strategist for Morgan Stanley International*

What are we going back to save? You're going to end up dealing with the same folks as before—the five families that run the country, the military and the bourgeoisie. They're the same folks that are supposed to be the bad guys now.

Major Louis Kernisan *US adviser to the police in Haiti*

I will not allow any defiance.

FLO leader Yasser Arafat *rounds up Palestinian militants*

A freedom of information act for juries.
Michael Howard *on the ending of the right to silence in the Criminal Justice Act*

We did not get any benefit from the American army. They just killed our people and destroyed our houses.

Asho Mohamed *resident of Mogadishu*

These little guys, who might be making atomic weapons or who might be guilty of some human rights violations or whatever, are looking for someone to listen to their problems and help them communicate.

Jimmy Carter *transforms policing the third world into a counselling session*



I am persuaded that the best path for advancing freedom in China is for the United States to intensify its engagement with that nation.

Bill Clinton *rewards the butchers of Tiananmen Square with Most Favoured Nation trading status*

The massacre in Tiananmen Square is a black mark against Deng Xiaoping. It may be that Deng had, in truth, no realistic choice.

Financial Times

Stick a fork in him, he's done.

Former US secretary of state James Baker *on Fidel Castro*

Five per cent? No one can be that low.

Bill Clinton *on the poll ratings for Polish president Lech Wałesa*

I believe that I have created a lot of cognitive dissonance in the minds of people who are comfortable with stereotypes.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Al Gore is so boring his secret service codename is 'Al Gore'.

Al Gore

We do not think it is part of our business to kill anyone.

Former SAS chief General Sir Michael Rose *commander of UN troops in Bosnia*

We say that the economy of this country must be built on sound market principles.

Nelson Mandela *reassures the Johannesburg stock exchange*

Cancelling the rent and service charge debts which people in the townships built up during apartheid is fiscally unobtainable and has no basis in law.

Joe Slovo *Communist Party leader and housing minister, expounds some 'sound market principles' to the black masses*

We are a pretty ordinary little nation and yet we don't realise it.

Archbishop of Canterbury Dr George Carey

I'm just a pauper by America's standards.

Mark Thatcher *down to his last £5m*

We don't give precise dates.

Sir Alastair Morton *chairman of Eurotunnel*

Had I been invited, I would not have attended.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl *on the D-Day celebrations*

UN troops were a little more trigger-happy than they should have been during Operation Restore Hope.

Michael Harper, *UN envoy to Somalia, after 'peacekeepers' killed more than 4000 Somalis in 12 months*



A lot of these royal apartments are really the equivalent to council flats.

Queen's director of property Michael Peat



Do you seriously expect me to be the first Prince of Wales in history not to have a mistress?

Prince Charles

I don't even know how to use a parking meter, let alone a phone box.

Princess Diana

I thought that whatever I do some psychiatrist will come along and say 'My God, that chap should be in an institution'.

Prince Philip *on why he never tried abstract painting*

It is not about dying that I have a great worry. It is about not living any more.

President Francois Mitterrand *of France*

'Back to basics' isn't a crusade about personal morality and it was never presented as such.

John Major *embarrassed by Tory sex scandals*

It is sometimes necessary to say something that is untrue to the House of Commons.

William Waldegrave *minister for 'open government'*

I do not remember what the prime minister said on Europe.

Chancellor Kenneth Clarke

It is damaging to the public interest to have any decision-making process exposed.

Andrew Leithead *assistant Treasury solicitor to the Scott inquiry*

At least two-thirds of the Tory Party and one third of Labour MPs would have done what these chaps have done.

Tory minister on MPs being paid to ask parliamentary questions

Getting our supporters out was like drawing teeth.

Unsuccessful Tory Euro-candidate **Edwina Currie**

The number of workers returning is...an indication of the desperate desire of most signalling staff to return to work.

Railtrack production director **John Ellis** on the day that a further 33 RMT members joined 368 already back at work, while 4000 took part in another one-day strike

Recognising the potential of the current situation and in order to enhance the democratic process and underlying our definitive commitment to its success, the leadership of the IRA have decided that as of midnight, 31 August, there will be a complete cessation of military operations.

IRA Army Council

It's like the World Cup. We didn't win anything, but we still took to the streets.

Visitor to Milltown cemetery, Belfast, on the night of the ceasefire celebrations



Many more people now agree Labour is the party of law and order.

Labour leader **Tony Blair**

As I watched Blair's speech on TV, I found myself in complete agreement with everything.

Sun columnist **Richard Littlejohn**

...a blatant attempt to incriminate a suspect by positive and deceptive conduct of the grossest kind...a skilful and sustained enterprise to manipulate the accused.

Mr Justice Ognall on the police entrapment of murder suspect Colin Stagg

Just another colour to work with **Quentin Tarantino** on screen violence



Ideas which stress the growing importance of international cooperation and new theories of economic sovereignty across a wide range of areas—macroeconomics, trade, the environment, the growth of post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory and the symbiotic relationships between growth theory and investment in people and infrastructure, a new understanding of how labour markets really work, and the rich and controversial debate over the meaning and importance of competitiveness at the level of individuals, the firm or the nation, and the role of government in fashioning modern industrial policies which focus maintaining competitiveness.

Shadow chancellor **Gordon Brown's** concise summary of New Labour's economic thinking

If you are going to link this murder to a film, you might as well link it to the *Railway Children*.

DI Ray Simpson investigating officer into the killing of James Bulger

I lied but I didn't cheat.

England cricket captain **Mike Atherton** on the ball-tampering row

If you are saying to me do I believe that it is best, it is easiest, that kids are brought up in a normal stable family, the answer is yes, I do believe that.

Tony Blair's attack on single mothers

Instability is bad for children. We need stability and we should look at marriage for preference, because married relationships are more stable.

Social security minister **Alistair Burt** echoes *Tony Blair*

Tony Blair has pushed moderation to extremes. **Robert Maclennan** incoming president of the *Liberal Democrats*

I think the agency has had a very good year. **Ros Hepplewhite** just before she resigned as head of the *Child Support Agency*

If I say you are not going to get an answer out of me, you know you're not going to get an answer out of me.

CND member **Margaret Beckett** gives a straight no-comment on the use of nuclear weapons by a Labour government

Yes, God is still Bulgarian. But the referee was French.

Bulgarian striker **Hristo Stoichkov** after his team lost to Italy

I am not in the business of allotting sins. *Archbishop of Canterbury* **George Carey**

It's a sign of the decline of civilisation when women become more intelligent than men.

Professor **Norman Stone**



The worst crime is faking it. **Kurt Cobain's** suicide note

It is all about technique. The great mistake of this century is to put inspiration and creativity first.

Vivienne Westwood

If you bed people of below stairs classes they will go to the papers.

Jane Clark long suffering wife of former Tory minister **Alan Clark**

If you had come over on another banana boat, you might have landed in Britain instead of Washington.

Tory MP **Winston Churchill** makes polite conversation with black US General **Colin Powell**

In 1969 I published a small book on *Humility*. It was a pioneering work which has not, to my knowledge, been superseded.

Lord Longford blows a humble trumpet in *The Tablet*

Not such a nice place.

Manchester, according to **HM the Queen**

" " **Princess Diana** on the phone

As the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia prepares for its first war crimes trial in the Hague, Joan Phillips accuses the United Nations of staging a political showtrial using the methods of a kangaroo court

The case against war crimes trials

Dusko Cvjetkovic went on trial in October, charged with genocide. The 26-year old Serb appeared in an Austrian court, accused of committing arson and murder in the village of Kucice in Bosnia. The genocide indictment is based on the charge that Cvjetkovic killed one or more people because of their ethnicity or religion. He denies the charges.

The trial opened in Salzburg, where Cvjetkovic has lived as a refugee since April 1993. Before the day was over it was obvious that the prosecution had no case. The testimony of the chief prosecution witness, a Bosnian Muslim, diverged considerably from his own affidavit. Evidence offered by other witnesses included third-hand hearsay. The affidavits of some witnesses identified people other than Cvjetkovic as the murderers. Police records of statements made by Cvjetkovic and the chief prosecution witness were inaccurate and contained translation errors.

Asked during a break in the case whether he had a leg to stand on, the prosecutor, Hubert Maringele, replied, 'not at this stage'. The judge apparently agreed. But instead of throwing the case out of court, he adjourned the trial until 5 December to allow the prosecution to find a leg. Perhaps witnesses will now come forward, unaffected by the media coverage of the trial, to testify that Cvjetkovic is indeed a genocidal killer.

The Cvjetkovic case should ring alarm bells about impending war crimes prosecutions to be held under the authority of the United Nations in the Hague. In its first public hearing on 8 November, the prosecutor's office of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia requested permission to ask the German authorities to hand over Dusan Tadic,

a suspected Serbian war criminal held in Germany. If Germany allows the case to go to the international court, the trial is expected to start in spring 1995. Tadic is alleged to have beaten, tortured, raped and killed Croats and Muslims in the Prijedor region of northern Bosnia.

Many questions can be asked about what the UN is doing staging war crimes trials. For a start, what criteria are used to define a war crime? If genocide means killing one person or more because of their race or religion, then any number of American cops or Loyalist gunmen in Northern Ireland could be so charged. This sensationalisation of ordinary acts of war has become routine. For example, the UN Commission of Experts talks about a 'mass grave' of three or more people. Three might sometimes be a crowd, but since when has it been a 'mass'?

Prejudice

This type of tabloid sensationalism is nothing new to the discussion of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. For three and a half years, lurid tales of ethnic cleansing, death camps, systematic rape, Mengele-style experiments on human beings and genocide have been the staple of media coverage of the war.

And it is not just journalists who have sensationalised the war and been selective in attributing guilt. Stories about atrocities committed by Serbs have been given the stamp of authenticity by international bodies such as the UN and the EU, human rights groups such as Amnesty International, and women's organisations like Marie Stopes. In their resolutions, fact-finding missions (which usually manage to find no facts), official reports, advertisements and leaflets, these bodies have added



to the popular perception that acts of extreme bestiality unseen for half a century have been carried out in Bosnia and Croatia, and that the Serbs have been responsible for most of them.

In an extraordinarily presumptuous statement in its final report to the Security Council, the Commission of Experts declared that the Serbs had committed war crimes in northern Bosnia and would probably be found guilty of genocide in court: 'It is unquestionable that the events in Opstina [county] Prijedor since 30 April 1992 qualify as crimes against humanity. Furthermore, it is likely to be confirmed in court under due process of law that these events constitute genocide.' The implications this will have for Dusan Tadic, who is charged with committing war crimes in Prijedor, are not hard to guess.

A consensus already exists that genocidal crimes against humanity have been committed in the Balkans, and that one side in the conflict is more guilty than the others. In this lynch-mob atmosphere, the idea of the accused in war crimes trials being presumed innocent until proved guilty, or of all persons being equal before the law, goes out of the window. When such a strong impression has been created of the entire Serbian people as a race of bestial, genocidal killers, any individual Serb who ends up in the dock will not stand much of a chance—even if the prosecution does not have a leg to stand on.

All the signs are that the sort of legless evidence presented in Salzburg will be the stuff of cases at the Hague. No forensic evidence is likely to be presented; prosecutions will rely on



**Soldiers
or criminals?
A Serbian dugout
in Krajina**

personal testimonies, flimsy evidence given the magnitude of the alleged crimes. In a civil war in which all sides have suffered grievously, the danger of people testifying in order to exact revenge is considerable. The chances of hearsay evidence, which has been a recurring feature of media reporting of alleged atrocities in Bosnia, being used to damn the accused are high.

This danger is illustrated by the tens of thousands of pages of evidence about alleged crimes submitted to the UN by governments, international bodies, human rights organisations, journalists and individuals. Many of these submissions have come from unreliable sources, such as the various war crimes commissions established by the three parties to the conflict. Some have come from prejudiced sources, such as human rights bodies which have taken sides in the conflict. Others have come from media reports which themselves are based on hearsay evidence.

On top of all this, the war crimes tribunal is in danger of elevating secrecy into a principle, with its secret database of testimonies, anonymous submissions, protected witnesses and *in camera* proceedings. Secrecy is antithetical to the pursuit of justice. Anybody who wants to know the truth should be demanding that nothing is secret and everything is out in the open.

The UN seems to be making up the law as it goes along and trying to cover its tracks with legal mumbo jumbo. For example, in order to justify the war crimes process, it has decided to classify the war in Yugoslavia as an international rather than an internal conflict. The UN insists that the

'character and complexity' of the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia justify the international designation, and therefore the application of the law applicable in international armed conflicts.

This is arrant nonsense, designed to disguise an unprecedented interference in the affairs of small states. By waving a magic wand and turning a civil war into an international conflict, the major powers on the UN Security Council have given themselves the authority to sit in judgement on the rest of the world. The spectacle of the great and the good lecturing lesser peoples about how to behave is a throwback to the days of Empire.

Bias

Which brings us to the most important questions of all—what is a war crime, and who decides? Atrocities are committed in all wars, but they are not always classed as war crimes. In practice, whether an atrocity is defined as a war crime depends on who is doing the killing and who is doing the judging.

Many ugly things have happened in Croatia and Bosnia. Atrocities have been committed by all combatants. But why should they be singled out as war crimes? The war crimes lobby argues that the atrocities in Bosnia are comparable to those of the Nazis. There is no evidence to support this view. The crimes for which people will stand trial in the Hague are not peculiar to the war in Yugoslavia. They are the staple of most wars in the twentieth century—which begs the question why a Serbian soldier can be prosecuted as a war criminal for committing

atrocities, while a British soldier who executes an Argentinian prisoner and cuts off his ears as trophies is regarded as a hero?

This double standard should make us suspicious of the motives of those staging the war crimes trials. Is it not strange that we had to wait until the Cold War was over (and all those atrocities committed by the British and the Americans and their allies in Korea, Kenya, Malaya, Vietnam, Cambodia, El Salvador and a hundred other places were forgotten) before somebody was put on trial for war crimes? The concept of war crimes appears to be an ideological construction of New World Order politics, used to legitimise the international pecking order by branding some as criminals and casting others in the role of judges.

All the evidence suggests that the war crimes trials are politically motivated. They reinforce a moral division in the world between those few nations qualified to sit in judgement, and the other races fit only to stand in the dock. If this moral and racial divide has not already become obvious in the case of the Serbs, it will certainly become clearer if and when the proposal to put Rwandans in the dock for war crimes is carried out. And even if no case ever comes to court, the war crimes process will have served its purpose for those who set it in motion. The Western powers which have appointed themselves to sit in judgement on supposedly less civilised peoples will be sitting pretty, their authority to dictate to the rest of the world strengthened by the legal trappings of an international tribunal. ●

The focus on a 'skills shortage' today is designed to hold the workforce responsible for the deficiencies of the market economy

Skill cra

Phil Murphy investigates

The talk of Britain enjoying a strong recovery has moved even further into the land of make-believe with the argument that the economy is 'overheating'. Government spokesmen and economists point to two statistics as 'proof' of overheating: capacity constraints on manufacturers and shortages of skilled labour.

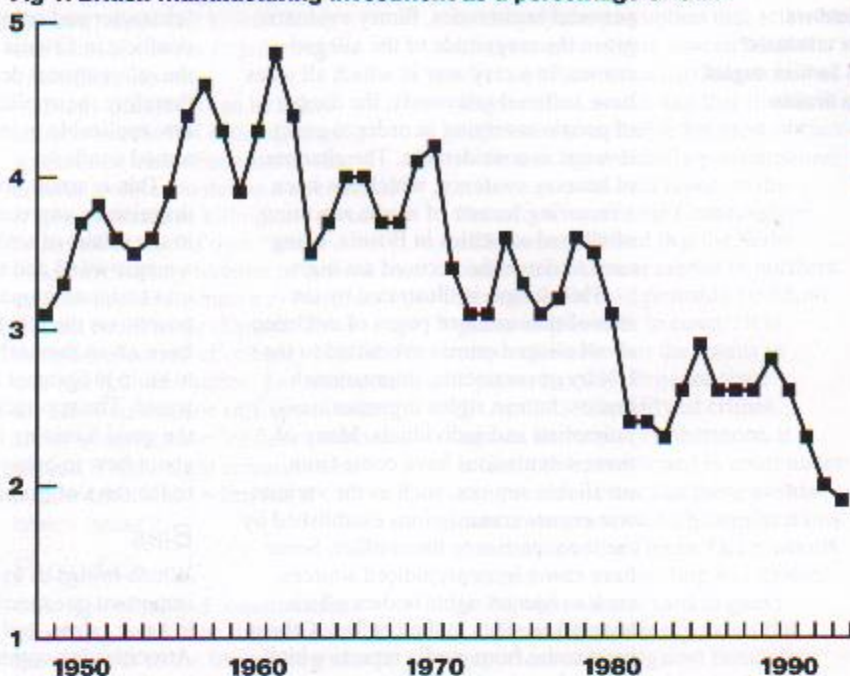
Autumn surveys of manufacturing industry conducted by both the British Chambers of Commerce and the Confederation of British Industry reveal that a higher proportion of firms are working at full capacity than at any time since the peak of the 1980s boom. But you can draw one of at least two very different conclusions from this. Either the economy is so dynamic and expansive that it is bursting at the seams—or productive capacity has stagnated to the point where a slight upward blip creates problems. The recent abysmal figures for investment in manufacturing point firmly to the latter explanation.

In 1992 and 1993 net investment was *negative*—that is, the amount of old capital stock destroyed exceeded the level of new productive investment. In fact, in comparison to the size of the economy, manufacturing investment is at a postwar low (see fig 1). So today's capacity constraints are a sign of economic weakness, not strength.

What about the claims of skill shortages? This notion has much wider resonance. It is at the heart of the mainstream economic thesis of the 1990s, which puts such a premium on what is called 'human capital'. The argument goes like this:

'We live in a global economy. New technology has speeded up

Fig 1. British manufacturing investment as a percentage of GDP



SOURCE: CSO BLUE BOOKS

communication and transport around the world beyond recognition. Hi-tech and deregulated capital markets mean that trillions of dollars can be zapped across continents at the touch of a button. As a result, investment capital can flow around the world to wherever is best and most profitable. This means that today a country stands or falls not on its capital stock, but on the extent to which the strengths and skills of its people can attract international capital flows.'

This development is said to herald a new economic revolution in which labour takes over from capital as the key factor. Every policy report, whether it is from the World Bank or the Labour

Party's Commission on Social Justice, now concludes with the need for more training and education of this 'human capital'.

Despite the positive, empowering nineties-style language, the underlying message of the skills shortage discussion is that the poor state of 'human capital' is to blame for the mess the economy is in today. In other words, the workforce is responsible for the capitalist slump. We are paid too much, we are not flexible enough, we are too cosseted by welfare payments, we are not educated enough, we lack the appropriate skills.

The consequences of this argument for our living standards and working conditions are potentially devastating.

ZV

Which makes it vital that we take the argument apart and expose the real motives of its proponents. So let's look in a little detail at the notion that there is a shortage of skilled labour today.

Throughout this year the cry has been raised across British industry that a skills shortage is impeding the recovery. The Building Employers Confederation reported a shortage of carpenters and bricklayers. In a survey of large engineering companies, 60 per cent claimed that they have difficulties finding appropriate staff. Another survey by chartered accountants said three out of four of their clients forecast a skills shortage. Several surveys of smaller companies have reported around two-thirds saying they were having difficulty recruiting skilled staff, with many expecting the problem to get worse.

Simple intuition should suggest something odd here. With around five million jobless people wanting work, and even the rigged official unemployment count still exceeding two and a half million, how can there be a skills shortage? Surely there must be enough people out there able to take up all but the most specialised jobs (and you don't see many adverts for British astronauts, diamond-cutters or competent government ministers)? It becomes even more bizarre when you see employers on *News at Ten* claiming their problem is a skills 'imbalance', and that they cannot even recruit enough *unskilled* workers.

It is a time-honoured tradition for employers to blame their workforce for the system's economic failings. It is rather like the way sportsmen blame their equipment when they fail. The batsman bowled out looks at

his bat in disgust, the tennis player who has hit the ball out smashes his racket on the ground, the golfer who slices the ball throws away the club. In the case of capitalist production, the boss holds his employees responsible.

In the past he might have blamed the workers for being in trade unions or for wanting too much money. But with the union movement finished as a fighting force and with workers forced to accept minimal if any pay rises, the focus has shifted on to the worker's individual capacity to do what is expected of him.

The capacity to work in the way the

boss wants is subsumed under the concept 'skill'. In the study of workplace organisation, the term 'skill' is ubiquitous, but it is also defined and used very inconsistently (see C Darrah, 'Skill requirements at work: rhetoric v reality', *Work and Occupations*, February 1994). Ask an employer to define skill and more often than not you will get an answer like: 'skilled men are men who do skilled work', or 'skilled work is work done by skilled men'. In the 1980s, one study questioned the conventional wisdom about a skills shortage, and ►





by surveying employers assessed that 'the shortages actually faced by employers were not those of applicants lacking or unable to acquire the necessary cognitive or manual ability, but rather a shortage of potential employees perceived as possessing the required behavioural characteristic' — that is, quiescent, reliable, and keen to follow management's directive (J Oliver and J Turton, 'Is there a shortage of skilled labour?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol20, No2, 1982).

Hard-to-fill vacancies like catering, cash till operators and retail sales staff are hardly the most highly skilled jobs imaginable

The term 'skill' does not really define some precise technical attribute of a worker. Instead it has become a useful scapegoat, not simply for the employer's failings, but for the failings of a market economy which cannot sustain consistent productive investment and growth. For both government and employers, the discussion of skill shortages is a way of relocating economic problems on to the supposed deficiencies of human capital. And because 'human capital' is only a fancy term for us, the people who do the work, there is always the implicit (sometimes explicit) assumption that we are at least partly responsible.

Whatever you say

If we are in work, we are probably part of the skills gap, and not quite up to what our employers wanted. If we are out of a job, then it is probably either because we have not got a skill—the skills shortage—or we have not got the right skill—the skills imbalance. (This explanation for mass unemployment requires that you ignore the fact that for many years the number of job vacancies has been no more than a small percentage of the total jobsless.) Either way the solution comes back to the old favourite: we need more training. As this year's *OECD Jobs Study* argued, training might enable the workforce to cope better with technological change and increased competition, implying that today's global mass unemployment is due less to a lack of investment in jobs by profit-hungry capitalists than to a lack

of skills on the part of the potential workforce.

Those who insist that the problem really is a skills shortage can produce statistics to substantiate their belief. How do they come up with these statistics? They ask employers to account for their problems, to say what is stopping them from recruiting people and expanding. Specifically, the Confederation of British Industry asks its members if skilled labour shortage is a constraint on recruitment (see fig 2). This is like asking sick people to account for their illness, and taking the answers as an expert diagnosis. Many of us have pet theories to explain why we feel sick, but that doesn't make them right. Yet the employers have the nerve to poll their own views on a skills shortage and present them as statistical 'proof' that their quack diagnoses are valid. The medical equivalent is that if people with lung cancer were canvassed as to the cause, and enough of them said it was the result of too much fresh air, this would be taken as a scientific explanation.

Never mind the facts

The government's own skills survey doesn't even ask for employers' subjective impressions of what is wrong. It just asks if they have any 'hard-to-fill' vacancies, uses this as a gauge of recruitment difficulties, and draws its own preconceived conclusions about the relative significance of skill shortages. But it is not difficult to see that the existence of hard-to-fill vacancies can reflect all sorts of factors: unattractive jobs, poor pay, unsatisfactory terms and conditions of work, setting unreasonably high recruitment standards. This explanation is reinforced when you consider some of the more stubborn areas of hard-to-fill vacancies reported recently: catering, retail sales staff, cash-till operators—hardly the most highly skilled jobs imaginable. More relevant is that these are occupations renowned for involving long hours, low pay or both. The government's own figures show that the fastest growing types of hard-to-fill jobs are in low-skill, low-paid services like catering and cleaning.

In fact beneath the headline hype about the problem of skill deficiencies even the government's own dubious surveys show only a small rise in concern about the lack of skills. However, the Department of Employment is determined not to let its own rigged statistics kill off a promising scapegoat for economic failure. Reported skill shortages may still be at a low level 'but this is no cause for complacency. In the past they have increased in recoveries and have held back growth' (*Labour Market and Skill Trends*, Employment Department, 1993).

The department reminds us that in the recovery following the 1981 recession, skill shortages 'did not peak until the 1988 boom'. So even if there is not much of a skills shortage now, there might be soon.

Yet, even if we look at 1988, the year when they say the last skills shortage peaked, there is a lot of evidence to puncture the myth of the skills shortage. We now have the advantage of several more detailed studies of vacancies carried out at the time. They all found that the skills being demanded by employers matched very closely the skills possessed by the unemployed. (This includes two surveys commissioned by the government, which it is not too keen to cite: P Meadows et al, *The London Labour Market*, 1988 and IFF Research, *Vacancies and Recruitment Study*, 1988.)

Another detailed study of vacancies in Chesterfield in the summer of 1988 came to the same conclusion (C Marsh, 'The road to recovery?', *Work, Employment and Society*, March 1990). At precisely the time when the government and employers were complaining most loudly about skilled labour shortages, the survey found little evidence of a skills gap and even less of unfilled vacancies holding back company objectives. On the contrary it found that twice as many people recruited had apprenticeships as needed them for their jobs. In everyday language this might be called a surplus of skills.

Rubbish jobs

Far from revealing any skills gap, the study remarked that 'the striking feature of the jobs on offer was how unattractive they were. Unskilled jobs in personal services predominated'. Forty per cent of the jobs on offer demanded compulsory unsocial working hours, and most paid below the Council of Europe's 'decency threshold'. At the time, the 1988 survey team were surprised to find that people in Chesterfield took these low-quality jobs as better than having no job at all. However, six years further down the road of lower pay and worse working conditions, it would not be surprising if a 1994 survey found recruitment difficulties had more to do with the unemployed not being prepared to stomach such rubbish jobs, than with any skills problem.

If the statistical or quantitative measure of a skills gap is so dubious, how has the skills shortage discussion become so influential? The skills fetish is so pervasive because it fits in with the dominant way that global capitalism is seeking to counter its problems today. *Enhanced labour market flexibility* has become the key phrase at every national and international

economic gathering. Attention is focused on how to squeeze more out of each worker, and on how to reduce the cost of the unemployed, by curbing the welfare state. (This dual strategy is usefully united by arguing that welfare spending is a disincentive to work and a barrier to labour market flexibility.) Nobody talks about increasing the exploitation of the working classes these days; they talk of labour market reform, investing in human capital, the skills deficiency and the need for

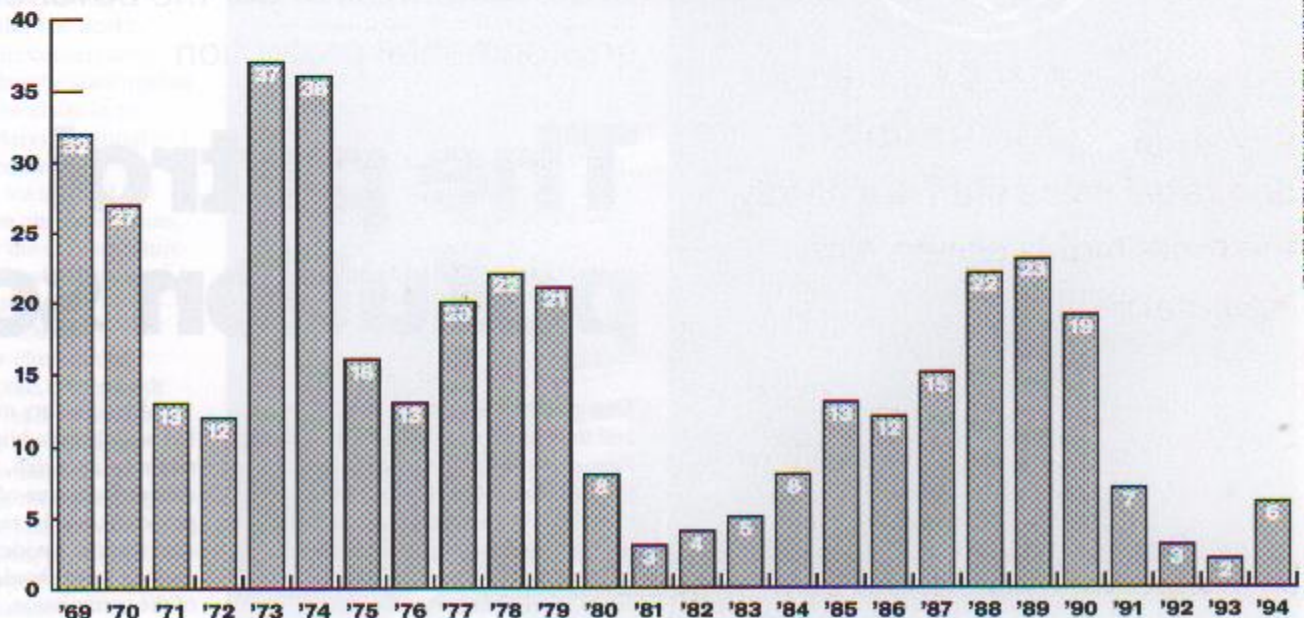
market economy cannot sustain a good education system.

The tradition of blaming the lack of education for economic weakness has been given new impetus today. The long-term decline of capitalist profitability in this country means that, despite the willingness of the Japanese and South Koreans to set up the odd screwdriver plant over here, there is no prospect of an investment-led recovery in Britain's economic fortunes. Nor does anybody have

Companies (the TECs and LECs). Support for training also unites all 'sides of industry': the Institute of Directors, the CBI and the TUC all urge more resources for training.

More recently, the call for training and education has been internationalised. It features prominently in reports and strategy documents from the G7, the IMF, the OECD and the European Commission. All this will keep it close to the top of the policy agenda alongside greater

Fig 2. Skill shortages: percentage of businesses reporting skill shortages to CBI



SOURCE: CBI INDUSTRIAL TRENDS SURVEY

more training and education. But the consequences for the workforce are much the same.

While the need for more labour market flexibility is often couched in reassuring, friendly language about coping with new technology, a greater emphasis on quality, an increase in 'higher level' jobs and 'knowledge-based' occupations, what it usually comes down to is work intensification, multi-tasking, and the enlargement of your job for no extra money. A frequent argument is that skill-deficient workers are not keeping pace with technological change. But what are the big technological advances accounting for retailing, hotels and catering being near the top of the list of difficult recruitment areas?

Regardless of the lack of facts and survey findings to support it, the preoccupation with a skills shortage is likely to grow. In Britain, especially, the issue of skills shortage and poor training has a long pedigree as a scapegoat for economic decline. This gets things back to front. Britain's low standing in most league tables of educational standards is a symptom of the weakness of Britain's social infrastructure. But this is a consequence of the decay of British capitalism, not its cause. A weak

any faith in the kind of state-led macroeconomic policies which failed in the past. As a consequence, supporters of the market economy have nowhere to go but to jump on the skills/training/education bandwagon. Lacking any way of regenerating the productive capacity of industry, they are reduced to playing around with the wages and conditions of the workforce. That is why, for British politicians over the past 20 years, 'training' has become the socio-economic equivalent of fresh air and clean water. Everyone is for it.

All in favour

Tony Blair's favourite mantra of 'training and education' is echoed not only by the Liberal Democrats, but by the Tories, too.

Real government spending on training schemes has tripled since 1979 to about £3 billion. Far from disguising this area of state intervention, the government has regularly relaunched its training programme under the fanfare of a new quango—the Manpower Services Commission became the Training Commission, then the Training Agency; at the end of the 1980s responsibility was devolved to the Training and Enterprise Commissions and the Local Enterprise

labour flexibility and intensification. Everywhere skills shortages are assumed to be a big part of the economic problem, and training is the friendly face of more 'active' labour market policies.

The argument that poor educational standards and the resulting skills deficiency are the cause of economic malaise has been hard enough to sustain in the case of Britain. It is even more difficult to substantiate in the international context. For example, if better education is the answer to economic stagnation and unemployment, how can you explain the coexistence of the excellent French education system—the Baccalaureat—with the slump in France and the highest unemployment rate of the G7 countries? We can already anticipate their answer. Education and training won't be enough on their own. Firmer measures will also be needed to effect the necessary revolution in human capital capacities. How about benefit cuts, workfare schemes, pay cuts and job-intensification just to get started? When it comes to making the workforce more 'flexible', the Commission on Social Justice's Gordon Borrie and the Tory government's Peter Lilley have much less to separate them than they probably imagine.



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

FUTURES

The royal commission report *Transport and the Environment* has won widespread praise for exposing the dangers of pollution and the 'car culture'.

John Gillott is more worried by its plans to impose austerity and restrict our freedom of movement, all under the cover of environmental protection

The petrol pollution scam

The central focus of *Transport and the Environment*, the Eighteenth Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, is the need to reduce reliance on road transport. Its most provocative, and widely publicised recommendation is to double fuel prices over the next 10 years.

The report has certainly struck a chord. The effusive response of the *New Scientist* editorial was typical of much of the reaction. 'More and faster public transport, buses that run on time, freight travelling by canal instead of along crowded roads, fewer cars, reduced air pollution, a big drop in the number of children killed by speeding motorists, more tranquil streets where people can chat at their front doors....It sounds like paradise. And it might even be possible in our lifetime.' ('Escape from the killer car?', 5 November 1995)

The report successfully taps into a range of contemporary concerns, and links them to the need to cut road transport. Anti-road building protesters complain that if something isn't done, we will have no countryside left. The report endorses the concern that the growth of roads and traffic is not 'environmentally sustainable'. Environmentalists argue that the smog which affected London in 1991 was merely a foretaste of what is to come. The report agrees. The commons environment select committee is worried that out-of-town shopping centres are killing local communities. The report shares these worries, adding that travel to such places is an environmental problem in itself.

Although Tory minister John Gummer has said that doubling petrol prices might be a bit rich, there is a good chance that some of the report's proposals will be rapidly implemented. And there is a widespread belief that most of them should be. The chairman of the commission, Sir John Houghton, is also an adviser to the prime minister on environmental matters. He clearly has the ear of a government which has retreated from Margaret Thatcher's love of the 'car-economy'. So, onward to the Green paradise then?

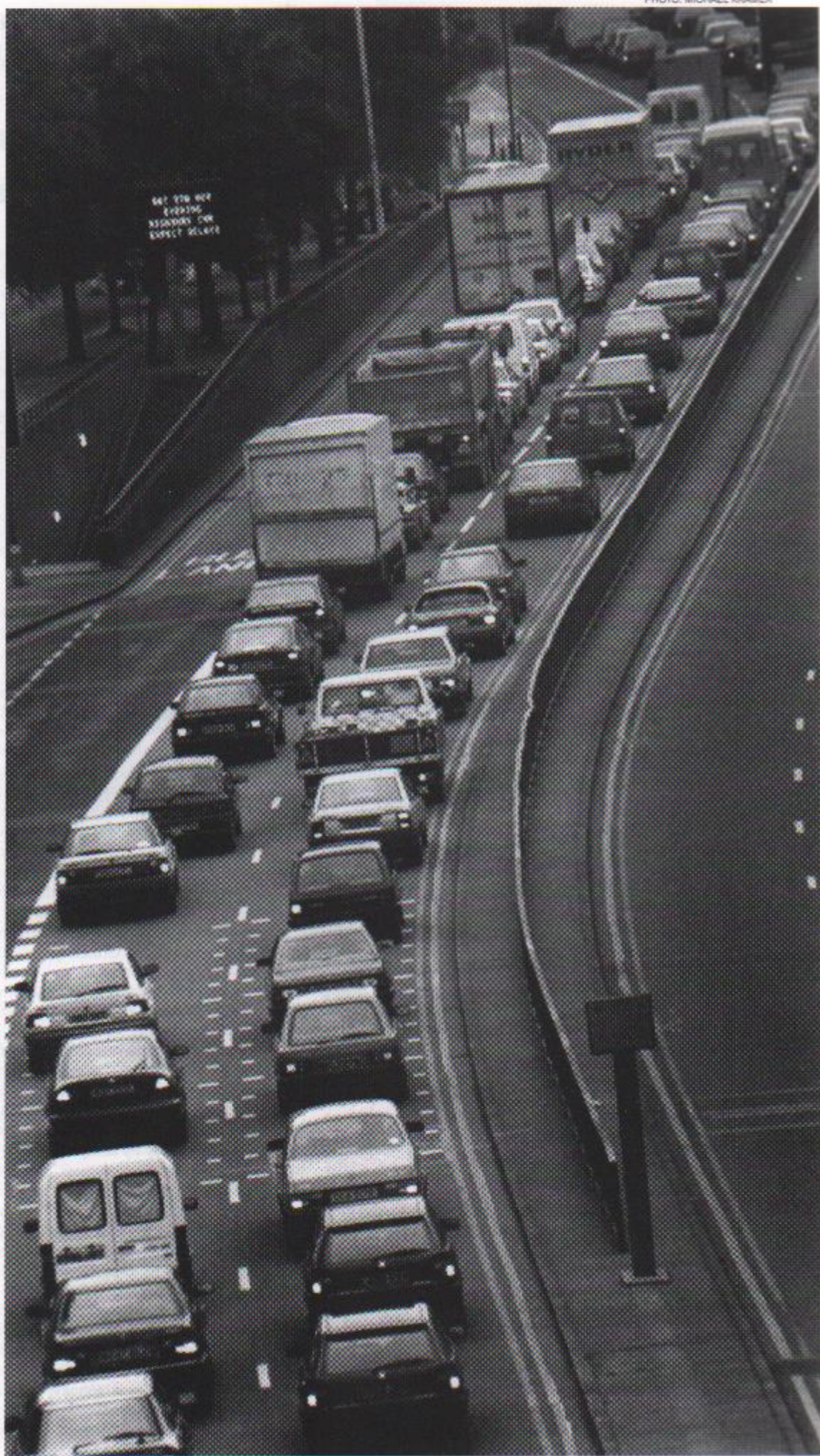
If this is the future, count me out. The underlying philosophy of the report is deeply conservative, even narrow-minded. And the not-so-hidden agenda is to impose more financial burdens on ordinary people. What is more, it is not science, reasoning and facts that are the driving force behind the report. The science shows that things are not nearly so bad as the report's conclusions would have us believe. What is being proposed is in fact an environmentally correct package of austerity measures. The report concludes with a quote from the conservative Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). According to the report, Burke wrote that society is 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'. For the authors of the report, this captures well the message they want to convey. Current policies, they claim, break this partnership by breaching natural limits, set by finite fuel resources and the limited ability of the atmosphere

to absorb and disperse pollutants. We need to be restrained, because 'the present generation's cavalier and constantly increasing use of non-renewable resources like oil may well foreclose the options for future generations'. And today's transport system 'is not sustainable because it imposes environmental costs which are so great as to compromise the choices, and the freedom, of future generations'.

Burke actually said that the *state* was 'a partnership'. The misquote is forgivable to the extent that Burke equated the state with society as any conservative would. For Burke, this equation served the conservative purpose of safeguarding the state against popular revolution. The claim in the report that society is defying natural limits also serves a conservative purpose: our options, we are told, our consumption, even our movements, have to be limited for the sake of future generations. This was spelled out in the response to the report from Brian Mawhinney, the transport secretary. Unpalatable choices that could affect jobs, income, and growth had to be faced if the report was to be implemented: 'People are going to have to determine how much they are prepared to change their lifestyles between road and rail, and between economic considerations, personal choice considerations and environmental considerations.'

Yet the report itself provides plenty of evidence to undermine these conclusions. Take pollution. If car-use continued to grow at its present rate, by the year 2020 we would not be suffocating in a cloud of pollutants. On the contrary, catalytic converters, now fitted to all new cars, and the improvements to this technology already in the pipeline, will ensure that atmospheric levels of carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, and particulates are all reduced by a significant amount, despite there being more cars on the road, all on average travelling further. And this is without considering the possibility of further improvements in technology in the intervening period.

The only exception to this is carbon dioxide. It is quite difficult to remove carbon dioxide from emissions, and more carbon dioxide from cars will add to increasing amounts emitted from other sources. Carbon dioxide is not directly harmful to humanity, except at concentrations well above what there will ever be in the atmosphere. It is, however, one of the gases responsible for the famous 'greenhouse effect', and increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are thought likely to cause a warming of the Earth. ►



This is a controversial issue, beset by uncertainty about likely changes and their impact on eco-systems. What the report does not consider, and this is typical of most Green literature, is the measures which humanity could take to adapt itself to a changing natural environment. Nor is there any reason to suppose that changes to the global climate must be changes for the worst. They might have a neutral, or even a beneficial, effect on such things as food production. The assumption is that change will always be change for the worse, so that stopping change through conservation is the solution.

The emphasis on the problems posed by rising consumption of natural resources, such as oil, is the most nonsensical part of the report. While supplies are finite, we are still finding reserves at a faster rate than we are using them up. In any case, the logic of living on finite resources is that they will run out no matter how slowly you use them. The trick is to find an alternative before supplies run out. Since we have plenty of reserves left, and since there are plenty of ideas bubbling around for alternative fuels for transport, there need not be a problem here. The best policy for ourselves and future generations must be to experiment with new methods of propulsion rather than inventing problems of resource depletion.

In an ideal world, everybody would have access to a car, petrol would not double in price, the road system would meet our needs without concreting over all of the countryside, and there would be excellent and cheap public transport. The probable result would be that cars were used a little less, but we would all have the freedom to get where we want, when we want, which no system of public transport alone can provide. Some of the suggestions in the report bear a superficial resemblance to this picture, especially the stated desire to improve public transport. However, closer reading shows that the intention is quite different.

Casting a cynical eye over how the report's proposals are likely to be translated into policies by the current government, the pressure group Transport 2000 has outlined the 'Treasury dream ticket': higher fuel prices, cuts in road spending, and no extra spending on alternatives. This dream might well turn into reality, since the driving force behind government and industry use of Green ideas is indeed the desire to make money and justify cuts. A small example is that some employers now charge their workers for the privilege of parking at work—all in the name of environmental protection, you understand.

However, the thinking in the royal commission report itself is no better;



even without government distortion, the report's proposals add up to nothing more than an austerity package. Contrary to much of the press coverage, the proposals of the commission are underwritten by the proposition that *all* motorised travel, not just travel by road, needs to be constrained. On a Radio Four discussion of the

In an ideal world everybody would have access to a car

report, a Green came on to insist that there should be 'no "gadding about"'. People should live near work and food should be grown locally'. The presenters made light of the idea of living on the fifth floor of Broadcasting House, but the views of the parochial Green are not so far from those of Houghton's committee: transport policy, they say, must give 'priority to minimising the need for transport' (p242).

The policies the report recommends are not framed so as to increase transport by rail at the expense of transport by road. Rather, the stated aim is to minimise motorised transport and travel, especially by road, but by other means as well. Constant promotion of walking and cycling is part of the package. Jacking up prices for petrol is the meat.

I say 'stated aim', because it is hard to believe that cutting travel is being seriously proposed. People will continue to use motorised travel at an increasing rate; so the net result of implementing these proposals will be more money in the pockets of the government and the transport companies. Critically, while calling for investment in public transport, the report makes no recommendation as to how much we should be charged for travelling on trains, buses or trams instead of using cars. Rail and other transport operators must be licking their lips at the market opportunity offered by a doubling of petrol prices: they could raise prices and still appear cheap by comparison.

By presenting its case in environmental rather than narrow economic terms, the royal commission has provided the authorities with the arguments to guilt-trip people into paying more for petrol and public transport. Rising petrol taxes and road tolls, alongside increasing fares for rundown public transport, can all be packaged as measures designed not to save the government money, but to save the planet for our children.

The extent of the scam being proposed is quite breathtaking.

The royal commission report rationalises the idea of doubling fuel prices by promoting a 'polluter pays' approach. In fact the fuel taxes we pay to the Treasury already amount to several times the road-building budget. But the committee has added in what it estimates to be other costs associated with road use, such as the cost to the health service of road accidents and ill-health said to result from exhaust fumes. Not surprisingly, the final sum is more than the revenue from fuel tax. It then proposes doubling the price of fuel through huge tax increases—which would take the revenue raised from us soaring well above the figure the committee says is required.

The commission is at pains to insist that its concerns are those of the environmentalist, not the accountant. Even at the end of a chapter about the 'Economic aspects of transport', we are told that 'the primary reason for the increase in fuel duty for road transport is to provide an efficient method of achieving environmental targets which are an essential part of a sustainable transport policy'. But then, what was all the costing about? Especially since, as the commission well knows, research shows that increased fuel prices hardly reduces car use—they just raise more money for HM government. It is hard not to conclude that the aim, as well as the result, is austerity for you and me, and revenue for the state.

Criticism of Transport and the Environment should not be confined to quibbles about its costings. The entire 'travel less' premise of the report needs to be challenged. The invention and extension of mass transport systems has been instrumental in the creation of our sophisticated modern society. The railways, the car and the airplane have each in their turn helped to give us greater freedom, broader horizons and better lives.

The notion that we should somehow stop travelling and go back to living and working in the local community is not just naive and narrow-minded, but discriminatory. After all, those who can afford to live in idyllic village communities would have no problem maintaining contact with the outside world; those exiled to live on the 'communities' of desolate housing estates, with expensive corner shops, would be even more stranded by rising petrol costs and fares for inadequate public transport.

I am sure that many supporters of the commission's report will not be too sad about that. Out of sight, out of mind is the middle class prejudice which seems to lurk behind many of the environmentally flavoured proposals to reduce travel and keep the poor in their place.

Michael Fitzpatrick asks why, despite the lack of evidence, people are prepared to accept that exhaust fumes cause asthma

Suffocating cities

The idea that the growing volume of car exhaust fumes in our cities is to blame for the rising prevalence of respiratory diseases like asthma, especially among children, has now acquired the status of established fact. This notion has been fostered by numerous television features, newspaper reports, official investigations and pamphlets from environmental quangos and pressure groups. It is supported by anecdotes about the great London smog of 13 December 1991 and the wave of wheezers who descended on casualty departments throughout the south of England on 24-25 June of this year.

In fact the strength of the conviction that exhaust fumes cause asthma is in inverse proportion to the scientific evidence.

The most obvious defect of the asthma-pollution thesis is that, as a recent editorial in the *British Medical Journal* succinctly puts it, 'the increase has occurred during a time when general atmospheric pollution has fallen' ('Asthma in children: epidemiology', *BMJ*, 18 June 1994). Though there may be more cars now, the decline of coal-burning heavy industry and domestic coal fires means that city air is incomparably cleaner than it was 30 years ago.

Further circumstantial evidence also undermines the asthma-pollution thesis. An increasing prevalence of asthma has been reported in many different countries—including Fiji and northern Chile, where pollution is not a problem. There is a much higher level of asthma in West Germany than in East Germany, despite the much higher levels of pollution in the part of the country formerly in the Eastern bloc. Levels of asthma are no greater in Los Angeles, notorious for its traffic-related smogs and high ozone levels, than in other US cities.

How then can the growing number of wheezing children be explained? The *BMJ* editorial is candid: 'the reasons for this increase are not known.' However, a further editorial emphasises the probable role of 'inhaled allergens, such as those present in house dust, cat fur, and grass pollen'. The authors speculate about the possible role of respiratory irritants—like cigarette smoke or exhaust fumes—in modifying the body's response to such allergens. Yet they note that this possibility has 'not been formally examined'.

An investigation of the growing prevalence of asthma in Australia, reported in the same issue of the *BMJ*, concluded that cigarette-smoking and air pollution, both of which were declining in the population under study, 'were probably not relevant' ('Changing prevalence of asthma in Australian children'). The investigators concluded that a higher level of house dust mite allergen was the most likely explanation for the rise in asthma cases.



A comparative study of asthma in the two parts of the new Germany concluded that 'Western' housing styles, with decreased ventilation, higher humidity, and probably higher numbers of pets may be more important for the prevalence of asthma and atopy than "classical" outdoor pollutants such as SO₂ and particulate matter' (*Thorax*, No48 1993).

In relation to the June epidemic of asthma cases in the south of England, a number of possibilities have been raised (see *BMJ*, 9 July 1994 and *BMJ*, 22 October 1994). There was at the time a relatively high level of ozone, partly caused by traffic pollution. The epidemic also coincided with widespread thunder-and-lightning storms, a high pollen count and high levels of fungal spores. Yet, while the experts take the view that 'the aetiology of the epidemic was probably multifactorial', in the court of public opinion the motor car and its dirty fumes have already been convicted and now face punitive sanctions.

Why is it that, despite the lack of evidence, people are so ready to believe that car exhaust fumes are causing childhood asthma? It seems that thousands of children coughing, wheezing

and short of breath symbolise their parents' sense of suffocation in modern city life. People believe that pollution is getting worse in the same way that they are convinced that they are in constant danger from criminals, drug addicts, child abusers and sexual partners bearing potentially deadly diseases—despite the evidence that all these risks are grossly exaggerated. The oppressive level of road traffic throughout the south of England makes the car a potent symbol of a wider malaise; the wheezy child is both the victim of the car and a metaphor for a broncho-constricted society.

While respiratory distress expresses social distress, scapegoating the car and its fumes both mystifies the problem and obscures its cause. If the increase in asthma is caused, as seems most likely, by allergy, particularly to the house dust mite, then research into effective measures of prevention and cure is the way forward. If the suffocation of our cities by motor traffic is a symptom of a deeper social malaise, then perhaps that too requires more detailed investigation and appropriate therapeutic intervention. ●

Are whites innately more intelligent than blacks? Are wealthy people born brighter than the poor? *The Bell Curve*, a new book by American social scientists Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, has caused a transatlantic storm by claiming that inequality is an inescapable consequence of natural differences in inherited intelligence.

James Heartfield explains why focusing on IQ is little more than an excuse for inequality under capitalism

An unintelligent argument

The publication of *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* has sparked a major intellectual controversy. Its authors claim that cognitive ability, as measured in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests is an inherited trait which substantially accounts for inequalities in wealth, income and education. Controversially, they estimate that, on average, white Americans are a full 15 points more intelligent than blacks.

The claim that some races are naturally superior to others has been taboo ever since Nazi racial policies led to the Holocaust. When Murray and Herrnstein broke that taboo, critics in liberal newspapers like the *New York Times* and Britain's *Guardian* reacted with outrage, and even right-wing commentators like William Safire and the leader writer of the *Spectator* balked at *The Bell Curve*.

Herrnstein, who had already courted notoriety with previous work on intelligence, has avoided criticism this time round by dying before publication. His co-author, Charles Murray, is no stranger to controversy either. His previous book *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-80*, along with countless articles and lectures, warned of a dangerous underclass of demoralised and welfare-dependent poor developing in America's inner cities. *Losing Ground's* controversial argument that it was the failure of moral responsibility on the part of the poor, evident in the breakdown of the family, and not social policies that accounted for poverty has been gaining ground. Not just conservative policy-makers, but many former liberals in the Clinton administration and in Tony Blair's Labour Party have adapted their arguments to Murray's case against welfare spending. But *The Bell Curve's*

assertion of the natural superiority of the white and rich is just too much for the Clinton and Blair camps to swallow.

At the heart of the controversy over *The Bell Curve* is a correlation between tested IQ, income and race. According to Murray and Herrnstein, 'wages earned by people in high-IQ occupations have pulled away from the wages in low-IQ occupations, and differences in education cannot





explain most of this change' (p91). As a comment on diverging incomes this is not a controversial finding. It is now widely accepted that throughout the last 15 years in the USA (and in Britain) those on high incomes have seen their wages rise still higher, while those on low incomes have lost out even more.

A variety of authors, from former Nixon adviser Kevin Phillips

to labour secretary Robert Reich, have demonstrated that the free market policies of the Reagan/Bush years only led to greater social division. (see *The Politics of Rich and Poor* and *The Work of Nations* respectively). Until the presidential election of 1992, American conservatives argued that a rising economic tide 'lifts all ships'. But Democratic candidate Bill Clinton's accusation that 'trickle-down

economics aren't working' put paid to 12 years of Republican administration.

The problem that conservatives face is how to explain the failure of the free market to bring prosperity. The virtue of *The Bell Curve* for them is in the use of IQ to explain social division. If income inequalities are due to natural differences then no blame attaches to the capitalist economy. The rich are rich because ►



it is in their genetic make-up to succeed, as it is the lot of the poor to fail. No blame attaches to the market as IQ serves as an apology for economic failure.

The apologetic character of IQ is even more marked in the case of race. It is bad enough for the free market that there are winners and losers, but all the evidence points to the fact that the winners are predominantly white and the biggest losers are black. A wealth

It should come as no surprise that people lower down the social ladder should get worse scores in IQ tests

of recent material demonstrates that black Americans have lost out to such an extent as to make a mockery of free enterprise. Andrew Hacker's excellent study found that on average black families earned just \$580 dollars for every \$1000 earned by white families in 1990, and, most damningly, that the difference between their earnings and those of whites had got worse, not better, between 1970 and 1990 (*Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, pp94-98).

Fixing the figures

According to *The Bell Curve* the failure of American blacks to close the income gap is not due to discrimination, but to their lower average intelligence as measured in IQ tests. Murray and Herrnstein cite findings that black Americans are on average 15 points below the average IQ. The clear implication is that the innate stupidity of blacks is responsible for their social inferiority, not discrimination in the labour market.

Murray and Herrnstein go further. They look at black performance in education, employment and income, as Andrew Hacker did, but adjust the figures to take into account lower IQ. So Murray and Herrnstein estimate that black students of the average IQ have a 68 per cent chance of getting a degree, higher than the 50 per cent chance of whites. And they estimate that blacks of average IQ have a 26 per cent chance of getting into a 'high IQ occupation', while equally intelligent whites have only a 10 per cent chance. And finally they estimate that blacks of average IQ will earn \$25 000 a year, just \$545 short of the earnings of a similarly intelligent white. (pp320-3)

These results are spectacular. By adjusting the figures to take into account lower tested IQ, *The Bell Curve* not only eliminates the difference in income, but suggests that in employment and education, blacks are privileged. As Murray and Herrnstein argue, 'the evidence presented here should give everyone who writes and talks about ethnic inequalities reason to avoid flamboyant rhetoric about ethnic oppression' (p340). By introducing IQ into the equation, America's capitalist economy is exonerated of racial discrimination: blacks fail because they are less intelligent. In fact, these estimates support Murray's argument that the real discrimination is in favour of blacks, through affirmative action.

The consequence of explaining social and racial inequalities in terms of natural differences is a fortuitous defence against the accusation that the free market has failed. But what if the explanation is right? Can differences in intelligence be explained by natural differences, and do these differences explain social inequality?

Nature and nurture

Murray and Herrnstein cannot claim to have identified any definite link between tested IQ and any natural feature, but that does not stop them suggesting that one will turn up. Writing of ethnic differences in IQ, they say that these 'may well include some (as yet unknown) genetic component' (p312, their parenthesis) and 'the evidence may eventually become unequivocal that genes are part of the story' (p315).

The whole edifice of their 845-page long book is built upon a statistical correlation between tested IQ, social status and race. But statistical correlations prove nothing. At best they can indicate a connection, but the theory that the connection is a natural inheritance remains unproven—despite the fact that people have been looking for it for hundreds of years. It is a theory that awaits either the identification of the genetic material that carries differential intelligences, or another theory that gives a better account of the material.

The best known alternative to the theory of genetic inheritance as an explanation of both IQ and social difference is the one that Murray and Herrnstein call Socio-Economic Status. According to this argument, IQ and social difference alike reflect nurture, not nature. In other words, your intelligence is dictated not by your genes, but by how you are raised. Poor families raise their children with lower social expectations and less intellectual stimulus leading to lower IQ.

In fact, Murray and Herrnstein allow nurture some role but insist that

nature is the principle determinant. However, the debate between nurture and nature is no real debate at all. Both begin at the level of individual achievement and extrapolate outwards to explain social inequalities. At this level of explanation it is impossible to conclude the argument. As a rule the two camps compromise by striking a balance between environmental and natural causes of intelligence.

Marginal position

The true explanation, however, lies not at the level of individual intelligence, but at the level of society as a whole. Differences in income, occupation and education are generated as a consequence of the process of production. It is the relationship of individuals to the process of creating and controlling wealth in society which dictates their incomes and their status.

Throughout the free market eighties, income inequality widened as a consequence of the differential impact of economic boom and recession on different classes and groups. It is the peculiarly marginal position of American blacks to production that ensured that they would pay the heaviest price for the re-emergence of recession. Blacks have been in a weak position in American society since they were first brought across the Atlantic as slaves. It is not the hangover of slavery, though, that explains inequality today. Rather, those inequalities are systematically reproduced by the inability of a declining capitalist economy to fully integrate black labour in society. Of all the ethnic groups in America, only blacks are defined by their marginalisation from the production process.

Cultural bias?

But if it is the weakness of capitalist production that accounts for social and racial inequalities, what are we to make of differences in tested IQ? Liberal good taste demands that we make as little of it as possible. Yet the taboo surrounding IQ only makes the inequality-is-natural argument seem radical. In fact it should come as no surprise that people lower down the social ladder should get worse scores in IQ tests. Whatever the finer points of intelligence tests, it is just true to say that those with greater social power will tend to score higher.

Critics of IQ tests prefer to say that the tests carry a cultural bias. They point out that IQ test questions have often presumed knowledge of things, like regattas, that are the narrow preserve of the well-heeled. One Nazi test asked examinees to formulate a sentence containing the words 'war...soldier...nation'. On the other hand, devotees of testing

have bent over backwards to insist that it is aptitude, not knowledge that is being tested. The idea that aptitude can be isolated from knowledge is fairly dubious; but let's assume that Murray and Herrnstein are right to say IQ tests reflect intelligence.

Intelligence is shaped by an individual's relation to the production process and their experience of interacting in society, not by any natural inheritance. So people who

for whites with low incomes and low IQ scores. In that case, social position, too, would be fixed. However, intelligence is much more malleable than Murray and Herrnstein admit.

Firstly, IQ scores overall rise with the passing of time. The convention of making the average IQ at any one time equal to 100 masks the fact that the average tested IQ has risen by 15 points since the Second World War (p308). But rising IQs should come as no

The adoption study should be no surprise. People whose circumstances change radically often become radically different themselves. Nobody wonders at the cockney accents of immigrant Asian East Enders, or their interest in reggae-based Jungle music. All sorts of influences and experiences, at home or work, through the media and among friends can work to make you a very different person.

Finally, *The Bell Curve* cites the case of the American Head Start programme of intensive nursery education for children from poor backgrounds. Here Murray and Herrnstein think the evidence backs up the case for a genetically based IQ. They point out that while Head Start can increase recorded IQs by as much as 10 points at the beginning of the programme, the gain tends to fade out over time. As they see it, natural intelligence wins out over special assistance. However, what the fade out of the initial gain in IQ really shows is how the experience of the real world imposes limits on the effectiveness of policy intervention in the classroom. Special encouragement can bear results at first, but before long children cotton on to the fact that a bit of extra schooling does not mean that they are going to escape from the ghetto. Rundown schools, and brothers and sisters out of work all confirm the realistic expectations of children and parents about future opportunities. A small amount of pre-school encouragement is soon knocked out of any promising students by the grim reality of the American public school system.

The malleability of IQ belies the argument that intelligence is genetic. Indeed, the idea that intelligence is a natural property is peculiarly unintelligent.

Dumb inheritance

If intelligence were a natural propensity, like muscle strength, it could be estimated simply, by a single measurement. But the complexity of the IQ test bears witness to the fact that it is not a one-dimensional capacity. Actually, if our intelligence were inherited, we would all be stupid, inheriting the exact same ideas as our forebears, as a spider inherits the ability to weave a web and nothing else. Instead intelligence is by its very nature not fixed or determined, but open-ended and expanding.

The whole purpose of the education system is to make people cleverer than they were. Often people who get a chance to pick up their education late in life are amazed by the change in their outlook. People pushed by their parents to pursue the college education unavailable to that earlier generation, cringe with embarrassment when ►

come from rural backgrounds to work in cities often find their horizons stretched to a degree unimaginable to their parents. Those, like blacks in America who are marginal to society are prevented from participating in the decision-making that stimulates what Herrnstein and Murray call 'cognitive ability'. Relegated to ghetto life, underemployment and few chances of social mobility, there are just fewer opportunities to get your wits stretched.

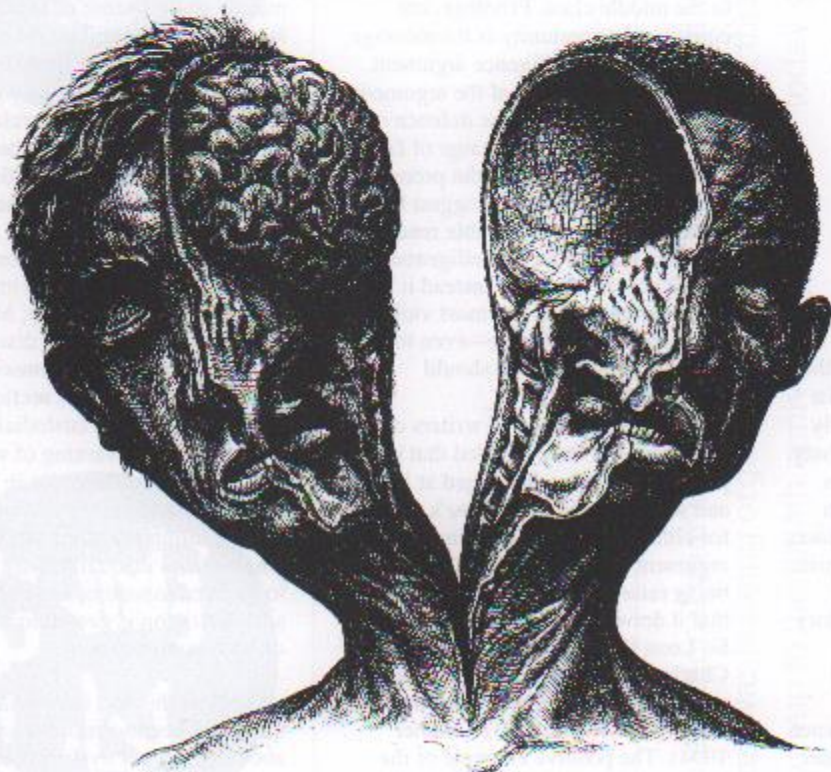
Rising IQ

Against the evidence of a racial basis to intelligence, the US military discovered after the Second World War that whites from the rural south scored lower than blacks from the industrial north: the impoverished south proved to be an even worse environment for the development of intelligence than the city ghettos of the north. In general, the bias is in society, not in the wording of the tests.

If, as *The Bell Curve* argues, intelligence were fixed, that would be bad news for blacks, as well as

surprise. Each generation is better educated and more worldly wise than the last. When the British recruits of the First World War were sent to die under machine gun fire at the Somme or Passchendaele, it was for most of them the first time they had been outside of their counties, let alone their countries. Today's recruits would stand out if they had not been abroad on package holidays or to a football match. Travel and mass media make our knowledge of the world a lot more comprehensive than our grandparents'.

Secondly, individual IQs are, against all the genetic arguments, remarkably susceptible to intervention. Murray and Herrnstein cite a French study where children adopted into middle class homes had their IQs rise by an estimated 20 points (p412). The authors of *The Bell Curve* think that social engineering of this kind on any generalised scale would be unthinkable. But that only shows that they assume the class structure to be immutable, and invoke a genetically determined IQ to justify that assumption.





introducing an unsophisticated mum or dad to friends. College life, the migration from home, the new social contacts and independence can make even the most parochial, provincial boy into something like an urban sophisticate.

Intelligence is the very opposite of a natural capacity, only developing through social interaction. At one extreme, children who grow up in the wild develop no native intelligence at

Upfront racism with a eugenic framework is pretty alien to today's intelligentsia

all. At the other extreme, even the most original thinkers cannot leap over the intellectual attainments of their own time. New ideas build incrementally on the gains of the past, allowing only a little room for the isolated genius. As Isaac Newton said, 'I have seen so far because I stood on the shoulders of giants'. Today all the best scientific breakthroughs are expected in the well-developed fields of biochemistry and superconductors.

Privilege

So much is it the case that intelligence is the property of communities rather than individuals, that it can be separated entirely from the mind that first gave rise to it. Ideas are regularly sold, stolen and copied. Fortunately we do not have to reinvent the wheel every time we get in a car, because once invented it is the property of all humanity. The realised intelligence of the great thinkers of our age lies all around us in industry and the arts, available for all to participate in—where the market does not stand in the way, that is.

The argument that intelligence is a personal capacity, genetically determined, and measured in IQ tests degrades the intelligence which it claims to celebrate. Intelligence, which is really an endless chain of conversations that links up the whole planet, is reduced to a badge of privilege and exclusion. Though, of course, those who are secure about their social status, have little need of such symbols of superiority. As a rule it is only the insecure and unpropertied middle classes that join the high IQ society Mensa.

Murray and Herrnstein's case for a naturally determined intelligence is for the most part a justification of the

status quo. To that end they warn against attempts to buck the genetic market with positive discrimination and any excessive resourcing of working class education. But that does not mean they really want to see a *laissez-faire* education policy. Instead, like those middle class mothers who badger the local education authority for piano lessons for their offspring, the authors of *The Bell Curve* want additional spending on 'gifted children'—as if the education system were not already a substantial subsidy to the middle class. Privilege, not equality of opportunity is the message of the genetic intelligence argument.

The consequences of the argument of *The Bell Curve* are the defence of the market against the charge of failing blacks and the poor, and the promotion of privilege. This might suggest that the book would get a favourable reaction from the middle class intelligentsia whose corner it argues. Instead it is the highbrow press that has most violently attacked *The Bell Curve*—even to the extent of arguing that it should be banned.

Perhaps the educated writers on *New Republic* have decided that social privilege must be challenged at its roots and so reject *The Bell Curve's* apologia for elitism? Not so. The principle argument against *The Bell Curve* being raised in the broadsheets is that it draws attention to inequality. So Leon Wieseltier protests that Charles Murray is 'utterly unable to account for the rise of a black middle class' (*New Republic*, 31 October 1994). The positive example of the black middle class has long been a favourite of liberals, embarrassed by the overwhelming evidence of discrimination. But all the recent evidence is that the black middle classes, always a tiny percentage of the black population are struggling to keep their heads above water.

Old fashioned

In the same issue of *New Republic* Alan Wolfe wonders what the difference is 'between thinking that the black male next to me is dumb and thinking that there's a 25 per cent chance he's dumb'—a parody of *The Bell Curve's* probability approach. But like Wieseltier, Wolfe's argument is less concerned with the reality of racial division, than with the possibility of adding insult to injury.

The Bell Curve reads as though it ought to appeal to the incipient elitism of the middle classes. But the problem with it is that its elitist arguments are framed in the language of the past. Upfront racism with a eugenic framework is pretty alien to today's intelligentsia. Murray and Herrnstein's mistake is to resurrect the traditional racism of 60 years ago.

Today the poverty of the black inner cities is not a source of pride for the elite, in the way that the domination of the European empires over the world was in the past, but a symbol of social decay. Black failure only underscores the limitations of the policy reforms that the middle classes supported over the years.

The 'custodial state'

Contemporary elitist thinking rarely draws explicit attention to colour, as *The Bell Curve* does. Instead, the middle classes sense of superiority is articulated around moral issues, like family structure, illegitimacy and crime. In the past, Charles Murray's investigations of the underclass suited those prejudices well. But breaking the taboo about race has not endeared him to the intelligentsia—they think racism is common.

The Bell Curve's arguments might go a bit too far for today's intelligentsia but, in a chapter on policy, Murray and Herrnstein present a disturbingly accurate picture of the consequence of modern elitism. The section headed 'The coming of the custodial state' purports to be a warning of what will happen if differences in IQ are not accommodated in policy. In fact, it is a chilling portrayal of a society where social inequalities are taken to be fixed in nature, and public administration is geared to defend those divisions:

'Politicians and intellectuals alike will become more open about the role of dysfunctional behaviour in the underclass, accepting that addiction, violence, unavailability for work, child abuse and family disorganisation will keep most members of the underclass from fending for themselves.' (p523)

As a consequence of this 'it will be agreed that the underclass cannot be trusted to use cash wisely' and benefits will be in the form of 'services'; 'childcare in the inner city will become primarily the responsibility of the state', as children are taken from their families; 'the homeless will vanish...required to reside in shelters'; 'technology will provide new options for segregating and containing criminals, as the electronic bracelets now being used to enforce house arrest (or perhaps "neighbourhood arrest") become more flexible'; and 'the underclass will become even more concentrated spatially than it is today' because such 'services' as public housing and detention centres will be kept out of the suburbs. (pp523-4)

Welcome to the 'custodial state', policy preference of the 'cognitive elite'.



NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

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



An international year of action against war is being organised in the run-up to the fiftieth anniversary. In Britain, the Campaign Against Militarism is staging 12 months of protests, debates and other initiatives under the banner **NO MORE HIROSHIMAS.**

If you want to take a stand against the threat of militarism and war today, get in touch. For more information, send now for your **NO MORE HIROSHIMAS** action pack, which includes the campaign's manifesto, stickers, details of initiatives in progress and ideas for campaigning. The pack is available for a donation of £2.50.

Phone Kate Margam on (0171) 278 9908 or write to No More Hiroshimas, Campaign Against Militarism, BM CAM, London WC1N 3XX, fax (0171) 278 9844 or e-mail hiro@camintl.org

The British police system is being remodelled on American lines, reports Andrew Calcutt

This year's model police officer is wearing a soft cap instead of a helmet, and a blouson jacket instead of the traditional blue serge tunic. Greater Manchester Police unveiled the new uniform in September, along with American-style nightsticks and the announcement that 180 officers will wear their revolvers openly.

'The American look is coming to a police station near you', commented John Stalker, *Sun* columnist and former deputy chief constable of Manchester (13 September 1994). The British policeman's new kit makes him look more like TJ Hooker cruising the freeways of the West Coast than George Dixon walking his beat in the old East End. But there's more to this than fickle fashion.

The 'American look' is indicative of a new style of policing: a two-tier system modelled on the policing of US cities. Her Majesty's constabulary is being turned into a paramilitarised force whose primary role is ensuring social control, while private security guards and local authority-controlled 'community forces' are encouraged to expand into other, subsidiary areas of policing.

The transition to a 'mixed economy' of law enforcement is being mapped out by a Home Office committee chaired by senior civil servant Ingrid Posen, which is due to report in January 1995. The remit of the Posen committee is 'to examine the services provided by the police, to make recommendations about the most effective way of delivering core police services, and to assess the scope for relinquishing ancillary tasks'.

Posen identified 95 police tasks and categorised them as 'inner core', 'outer core' and 'ancillary'. 'Inner core' includes riot control, surveillance, criminal investigation and arrest. 'Outer core' duties are defined as 'services which should be managed by the police, but the method of delivery can be flexible, involving officers, civilians, specials or contracting out'. 'Ancillary' tasks are those most likely to be hived off first to 'alternative providers', including forensic work, licensing, administration of alarm systems and stray dogs.

The Home Office review is not the only ongoing inquiry into the role of the police. The Police Foundation and the Policy Studies Institute are co-sponsors of a prestigious review body chaired by Sir John Cassels.

The Cassels committee recently published a discussion document which recommends the formation of 'ancillary' policing units.

Rod Morgan, committee member and professor of criminology at Bristol University, explained that 'this two-tier policing would involve ancillary "police" officers undertaking many of the local community policing tasks currently the exclusive responsibility of sworn

constables' (*Police Review*, 5 August 1994). As well as 'ancillary patrols' manned by 'existing constabularies', Morgan envisaged 'the creation of accredited community patrol forces'.

In August 1994 Wandsworth council preempted the Cassels inquiry by extending the role of its existing uniformed parks police to include the patrolling of housing estates, paid for by residents. Wandsworth's record as a flagship Tory council is well known, and it seems likely that the south London borough has been charged by the government with piloting a policy of 'community patrols' which could soon be endorsed on a national scale.

Advocates of American-style, two-tier policing claim it will be an efficient provider of 'community safety'. Home secretary Michael Howard insists that the findings of the Posen committee will 'enable the police to withdraw from peripheral tasks in order to concentrate on tasks that really matter to the public'. Professor Morgan believes that community patrol forces '[by] their uniformed presence could serve to reassure the public and deter the sort of local incivilities which disturb many people'.

The real consequences of two-tier policing are starkly demonstrated in an American city like Los Angeles, where all-white suburbs are cordoned off by private security forces whose main function is to keep the 'underclass' penned into urban bantustans such as Compton and Watts, and shopping malls are under constant video surveillance by guards charged with keeping out 'undesirables'. Meanwhile the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) oversees the government of the city on apartheid lines. The LAPD operates as a hi-tech public order police force, equipped with the latest weapons, helicopters and surveillance gear, and authorised to maintain permanent roadblocks at the entrances to the city's ghettos.

In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis described the realisation of two-tier policing in Los Angeles:

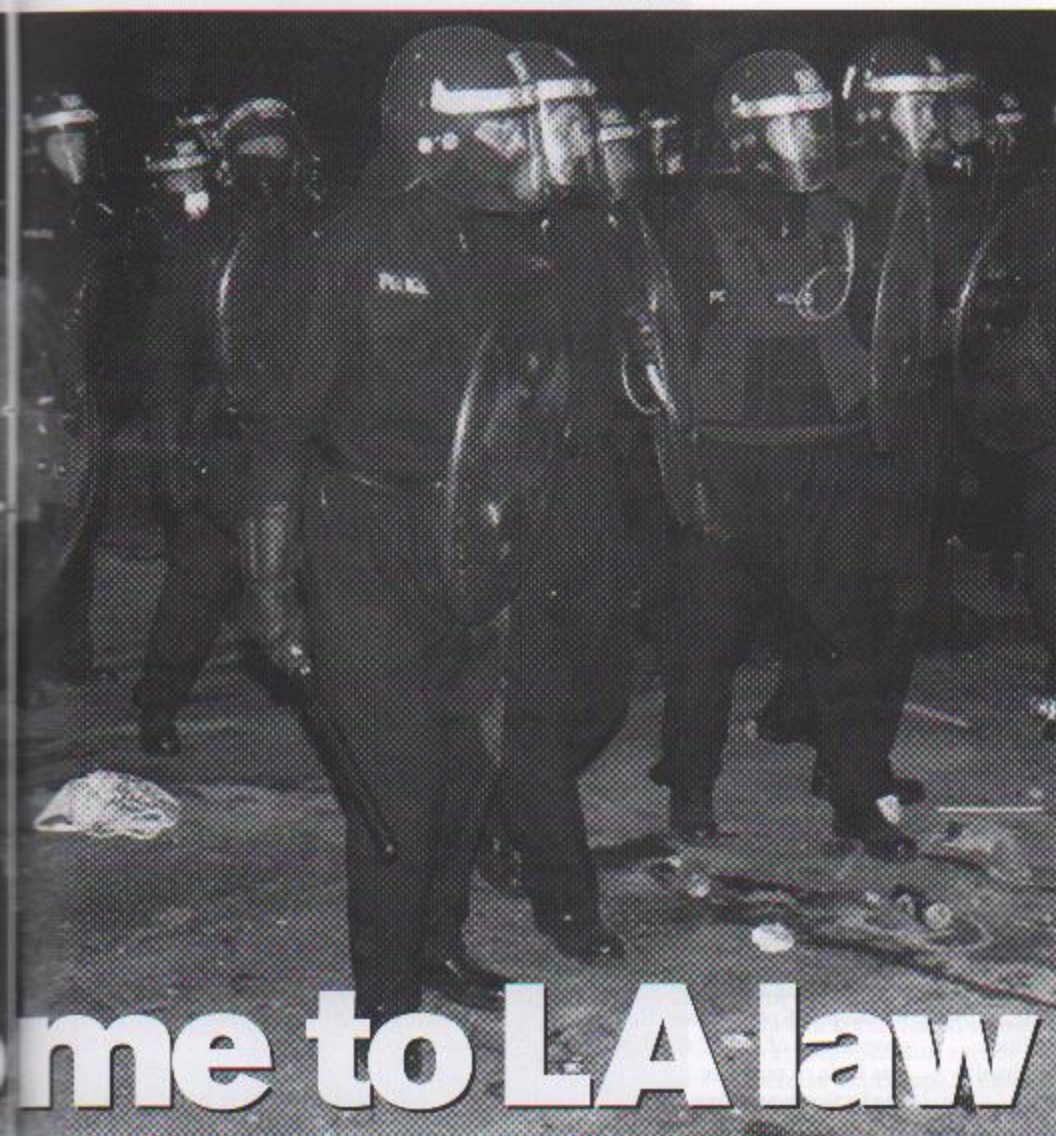
'Virtually every affluent neighbourhood... contracts its own private policing; hence the thousands of lawns displaying the little "armed response" warnings....The private sector, exploiting an army of non-union, low-wage employees, has increasingly captured the labour-intensive roles (guard duty, residential patrol, apprehension of retail crime, maintenance of security passages and checkpoints, monitoring of electronic surveillance, and so on), while public law enforcement has retrenched behind the supervision of security macro-systems (maintenance of major crime data bases, aerial surveillance, jail systems, paramilitary responses to terrorism and street insurgency, and so on).' ('The LAPD as space police', *City of Quartz* pp250-52)



Los Angeles is the modern exemplar of class-based law enforcement. The well-off pay to screen petty crime—and those deemed criminal 'types'—out of their neighbourhoods. The poor are left to fend for themselves, except when the state police intervene to enforce public order, usually under the cover of a 'war on drugs'. This they do with guns blazing: 21 people were shot dead by the LAPD in 1993. It all adds up to a repressive system of social control, administered by police chiefs who run their districts like godfathers.

Other American cities are catching up on Los Angeles-style policing. 'In the United States today there are approximately 1.4m individuals engaged in the private security industry', declared Robert Johnson, president of the Boston-based First Security Services Corporation, at the recent International Police Exhibition and Conference in London. 'For the past 20 years or better, there has been a *de facto* delegation of what were traditionally public police functions to the private sector.'

British policing has already embarked on the same course. Some estimates indicate 250,000 people employed in the private security industry, compared to 126,000 sworn constables. Policing agencies are proliferating. The Police Federation claims that up to 1,000 private street patrols are already in operation. Private guards patrol streets and estates in areas covered by more than



a quarter of the 43 constabularies in England and Wales.

Instead of street patrols, the residents' association of Hampstead Garden Suburb has invested £250 000 in a closed-circuit TV surveillance system (with a control room built into a former public lavatory). Local Labour councillor Alan Williams compared the scheme to the electronic monitoring of areas like Beverley Hills in Los Angeles, where 'loiterers' who show up on screen are given the bum's rush by private security guards.

Private security firms have been hired by local authorities such as Dundee in Scotland and Islington in north London. Municipal policing is mushrooming. Some local authorities are extending the jurisdiction of existing units, as when Wandsworth parks police moved on to the housing estates. Others are setting up new constabularies (Greenwich parks police), or 'community forces'. Sedgefield in Co Durham, where Labour leader Tony Blair is the MP, was the first of these.

Her Majesty's constables are also angling for a piece of the new market in selling police services. West Yorkshire and South Wales police have proposed the establishment of police-run commercial security companies. In *Criminal Justice Matters* (September 1994), criminologist Les Johnston reported that such companies

might set up as trusts, allowing parent-constabularies to bid for contract work, with all revenue being ploughed back into the local force.

In line with the trend towards two-tier policing, Britain's police chiefs have already drawn up their own list of priority and ancillary tasks. For instance, it has been revealed that, in at least eight constabularies, most household burglaries are no longer considered a priority. 'The police have stopped responding automatically to 999 calls', reported David Leppard for the *Sunday Times* (26 June 1994). David Blakey, secretary of the chief constables' crime strategy committee, told the paper that prioritisation of this kind 'is the way forward'. It is already the case, then, that a burglary in a gated community in Belgravia will be regarded as a serious crime, while the same offence in Hackney or Manchester's Longsight may be treated as NFA—no further action.

American-style prioritisation doesn't only involve the privatisation of 'ancillary' police services. The flipside is that the Force concentrates on developing a more coordinated and comprehensive system of controlling public space. In Britain, this already involves the deployment of a range of equipment in the hi-tech, paramilitary tradition of the LAPD: helicopter surveillance complete with Nitesun searchlights, extended batons (nightsticks), riot

gear, guns worn openly, 'pepper' (ie, chemical) sprays, and new investment in the latest information systems technology.

Two-tier, Los Angeles-style policing is fully in line with government policy. It follows on from the Sheehy inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards, the white paper on police reform, and the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act. By increasing chief constables' control over budgets and police priorities, and reducing the proportion of elected councillors serving on police authorities, the new Police and Magistrates' Courts Act provides for local police chiefs to lord it over their fiefdoms in the manner of LA's William Parker or Daryl Gates. All recent discussion of policing points to American-style law enforcement as the shape of things coming to Britain.

The problem is, however, that, as the riots of 1992 showed, the LAPD is hardly the most popular institution in the USA. Senior British officers have voiced concerns that, if 'softer' community-based tasks are hived off to other agencies, the 'public police' will be left with only those functions which bring them into conflict with the public.

On Radio Four's *Today* programme, Sir John Smith, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, argued that sworn constables should continue to deliver 'community policing', because this is the only way to make the use of force acceptable to the public (18 October 1994). 'If we lose sight of the community policing aspects', echoed Timothy Brain, assistant chief constable of the West Midlands, 'we lose the vital concept of policing by consent. We would be going down the road followed by some Continental and US police forces; hardcore reactive policing—which produced the consequences we saw in the Los Angeles riots'.

Smith and Brain are concerned that the trend towards American-style policing will blow the whistle on the PR image they have spent years trying to perfect. This image obscures the fact that the 'public police' are the frontline state agency of the ruling elite, dedicated to maintaining order on its behalf. A good PR image is doubly important to a force which has been seriously embarrassed by a succession of scandals.

The fears of the police chiefs are probably unfounded—at least for now. In the current atmosphere of social insecurity and the attendant panics about crime, the low public opinion of the police is outweighed by a demand for order. In this climate of fear, cynicism towards the existing police is likely to result in support for the idea of additional policing agencies. There is a public demand for a uniformed presence on the streets, and, according to John Stalker, 'they are ceasing to care whether or not it is the real police'.

In the vain hope that two-tier policing will afford some sort of protection from the insecurities of the day, many people are prepared to see the spread of private or local authority street patrols as well as more sworn constables. The reality is that two-tier, American-style policing can only result in a repressive system of class-based social control, as seen in the private estates and public housing projects of Los Angeles. ●

The shape

By the time Germany went to the polls on Sunday 16 October, chancellor Helmut Kohl had spoken to over a million people at rallies across the country. Everybody agrees that Kohl himself won the election for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). At the same time, nobody believes that this is the result of his spell-binding oratory or dynamic policies. Kohl is an inarticulate rambler and his government has often been muddled and confused. Nor can Kohl's success be put down to his personality. He is pragmatic, cunning and ruthless—good qualities for a politician—but as a man he hardly inspires respect among Germans.

The secret of Kohl's success is that he embodies both the emergence of Germany as the premier power in Europe, and the reactionary consensus that is enveloping politics not only in Germany, but throughout the Western world.

During the election campaign the main opposition party, the Social Democrats (SPD), tried to counter the influence of Kohl by putting up a triumvirate of party men. While nobody but Kohl figured on CDU street hoardings and TV commercials, the SPD always showed leader Rudolf Scharping alongside finance spokesman Oskar Lafontaine and Gerhard Schröder, head of the government in Lower Saxony. The aim of this SPD tactic was not only to match Kohl's bulk. The SPD spin doctors surmised correctly that since they had no political alternative to the path down which Kohl was taking Germany, they too had to come across as steady and reliable. They embraced the same political agenda and gave credibility to Kohl's considerable presence as a politician.

The odds were against the opposition as soon as the powerful German economy recovered from its

1993 recession. Although Kohl and the CDU are not popular, receiving barely 40 per cent of votes in the election, Kohl embodies a sense of stability and of Germany's new and important position in the world. The CDU election commercials emphasised Kohl's position as an international statesman mixing with Francois Mitterrand, Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton. John Major did not appear in these commercials, a fair summary of how important the German establishment thinks Britain is.

Despite Kohl's exhausting programme of public speaking there was little or no sense in Germany that an election was going on. When Kohl spoke in Frankfurt on the last Thursday before the election, he was applauded by 300 of the CDU faithful who after years of stalwart service were rewarded with a seat at a party rally. He was heckled by 100 protesters while another 300 Frankfurters stood around. Half of these clapped; the other half looked stonily at the platform and after a few minutes of Kohl's hour-long speech turned to make their way home.

Shift to the centre

It would be easy to dismiss the German election as just plain boring, and Kohl's Frankfurt speech certainly was, but this would miss the point. The real message of the election was that it had nothing to do with politics because all the major parties agreed on all the major issues.

The liveliest discussion in the SPD was whether they should stick to their call for *autobahn* speed limits to save petrol. In the end they decided not to antagonise the average BMW-owning voter and dropped the proposal. In Germany and throughout Europe this is the trivial stuff of politics today. The elevation of personalities—even when they haven't got one—proceeds apace, while major areas of concern are dropped from the political

agenda. Even the narrow areas of debate which remain are subject to a convergence of views among the mainstream parties. German commentators call this process 'a shift to the right', but that is an inadequate description if it is understood to include the growth of fringe right-wing politics. Groups like the Republican Party are more marginal than ever.

What is called 'the shift to the right' is really the development of a consensual model of politics in which there are no major differences between the main political parties—and, moreover, where this uncontroversial consensus is celebrated as the essential nature of democracy. On all sides, the political landscape is taken as both fixed and narrow. Anyone who bucks this trend is by definition an extremist and anti-democratic.

During the election campaign a journalist asked SPD spokesman Scharping whether there were any differences in foreign policy between his party and Kohl's. Scharping replied that there were virtually none, and suggested people should be happy that Germany had reached a consensus on its international role.

On all of the great issues of modern politics, from welfare cuts to censorship laws, the same convergence is now evident. After a little heart-searching the SPD supported the government's stringent tightening of restrictions on asylum-seekers. The opposition has endorsed the CDU strategy of privatisation and come round to endorsing the Maastricht treaty. This is especially important since at the heart of Kohl's chancellorship is the desire to confirm German reunification through German leadership of an integrated Europe. And voters could be forgiven for not being able to work out the difference between the CDU's 'solidarity supplement' to finance the costs of German unity, and the SPD's 'supplementary tax'.

The German general election revealed the pattern of European politics today. Alan Harding reports from Frankfurt

of things to come

Many commentators have argued that the narrow Bundestag majority of 10 that Kohl won in the election will upset the consensual appellation and be a recipe for instability. British observers in particular gleefully suggested that Kohl's result will inhibit Germany's progress in determining the shape of Europe, and that John Major will now be able to fight back on more equal terms. This is wishful thinking. The recent humiliating demotion of British EU commissioner Leon Brittan is an accurate reflection of the balance of power in Europe. Kohl will not feel at all constrained from pushing his full agenda for a German-led Europe at the December conference in Essen. No opposition to hold him back exists in Germany.

Austerity and control

Even at the electoral and constitutional level the small majority does not present much of a problem. Germany does not have by-elections, so if a representative dies a replacement comes automatically from the same party. The majority of 10 is quite secure; but more to the point, the across-the-board agreement on all matters of substance means that there is already a 'grand coalition' in all but name.

Nothing makes this clearer than the recent passage of Germany's draconian equivalent to the Criminal Justice Bill. Under the terms of this legislation, the intelligence services are to be integrated into police work and the police themselves given the right to cavedrop on organised crime. The SPD initially resisted the growth of state authority but, under pressure to join the law-and-order crusade, swung round to support the measures.

Everywhere, the tendency in German politics is towards stasis, conformity and a policy of the lowest common denominator. The players in the political game all agree to play by the same rules, which include

extending state control over society and imposing as much austerity as necessary to consolidate the German economy. This is as true of the smaller parliamentary parties, the Greens and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which might have been expected to constitute an alternative opposition.

The Greens had some success in the elections, getting back into the Bundestag with 7.9 per cent of the vote. However, their vote no longer rests on a reputation for radicalism, but on the decline of the moderate Free Democratic Party (FDP). The middle-aged professionals who traditionally voted for this liberal party in order to moderate either the SPD or CDU now see this role being played with an environmental twist by an older and wiser Green Party. Joschka Fischer, the leader of the Greens, responsible for cutting social provision in the state of Hesse, has signalled that the Greens, like the FDP before them, could even play a role as coalition partner to Kohl's CDU.

The PDS, the rump of the old Communist Party, is the prime example of the absence of an opposition in German politics. Having been built up by the media into a radical alternative party, the PDS won enough votes, especially in eastern Germany, to gain entry to parliament and win a place on the national political map. Yet the existence of the PDS is only a reflection of the depth of disenchantment with life under the market among working class people in the old East Germany. Nobody could seriously believe that there is any genuine popular enthusiasm for a collection of former Stalinist bureaucrats who have given themselves a retreat. Instead, like everything else in German public affairs today, the emergence of the PDS is simply a consequence of the way that the political agenda has been recast in the sizeable shadow of chancellor Kohl.



Do mention

Fifty years on, the battles of the Second World War in Asia are being fought once again. Only this time the battlefields are not the bloody beaches of Pacific islands, nor the charred remains of Japanese cities. The battle for the legacy of the war is being fought out in museums and newspaper columns.

The media in the USA and Britain often presents the arguments about the Pacific war much as it did 50 years ago. Both Allies are fighting to show that right was on their side—and in particular to justify the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The Japanese are, in this view, so fanatical that they are still reluctant to admit that they were the villains of the war.

Inside Japan the picture is very different. Contrary to the arguments advanced by Western pundits, the Japanese authorities are not reluctant to admit to their role in the war. In fact, Japanese politicians now seem to use every opportunity to atone for their country's misdeeds half a century ago.

Probing these apparently historical discussions reveals a lot about contemporary concerns in the USA, Britain and Japan. What might appear to be obscure disputes about museum exhibits or history textbooks reveal far more about international affairs and nationalist politics today than they do about the conflicts of the past.

Surrendering, not fighting

In the USA the hottest controversy surrounding the Pacific war has centred on an exhibition to be held at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC in the run-up to the fiftieth anniversary of the war's end next year. When plans for the exhibition first became known, US army veterans' groups launched a virulent campaign against it on the grounds that its neutral depiction of the destruction caused at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was anti-American (see 'The battle of the bombs', *Living Marxism*, October 1994). Since then, the organisers have conceded on all the main points. The final exhibition will minimise the impact of the bomb on the Japanese and will no longer include a section on the postwar nuclear arms race.

In the process of the dispute the exhibition has been transformed into a justification for the slaughter carried out by the Allies. The museum's

curators had originally estimated that the USA would have suffered 31 000 casualties in the first 30 days of an invasion of Japan, if it had opted not to use the Bomb. The new exhibition puts the figure at between 260 000 and one million US casualties. Once again the hoary old myth that the slaughter of 200 000 Japanese civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a humanitarian gesture to save lives has come to the fore.

In both Britain and the USA the fight is on to win the war the second time around. The imagery of the Pacific war is slightly different on each side of the Atlantic. For the USA, the war was about the 'unprovoked' Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor followed by the marines heroically slugging it out with fanatical Japanese troops in bloody battles across Pacific islands like Leyte, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and Saipan. The British view is different. Given that British troops in Asia did more surrendering than fighting, the dominant image of the war in Britain is that of the *Bridge on the River Kwai*; an image of British prisoners of war being tortured and humiliated by their cruel Japanese captors.

The arguments being put forward in Britain and the USA do have a common theme. In both cases the assumption is that Japan is still a problem and a potential threat. The implication is that Japan's war record and lack of a sense of guilt about its past means that it cannot be trusted in the present.

Sometimes the anti-Japanese message comes as a crude warning of another attack on the West. Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honour*, a recent bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic, features a second Japanese surprise attack on the US naval fleet in the Pacific, a Pearl Harbor for the nineties. It is the most recent commercial success in a whole genre of pulp fiction which portrays the Japanese as inherently fanatical, sneaky and cruel.

In the more staid world of non-fiction the conventional view is that Japan is still a problem because it is unwilling to face up to its terrible deeds in the war. This idea is coherently expressed in an influential new book by Ian Buruma, an Anglo-Dutch writer and journalist, called *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War In Germany and Japan*. Buruma argues that Japan suffers from amnesia when it comes to its atrocities in the Second World War.

Buruma's thesis has been echoed in

liberal and conservative publications alike. The *Economist* says that Japan 'has for decades been "in denial" about its history of aggression' (14 May 1994). Kevin Rafferty, the *Guardian's* Tokyo correspondent, tells us that 'Japanese leaders have done more than most to deny and lie in the face of the evidence' (29 September 1994). The *Daily Telegraph* believes that the Japanese government should 'publicly acknowledge such massacres as the Rape of Nanjing' and goes on to argue that 'there is no excuse for concealing the truth from the younger generation' (1 September 1994).

Monkeys, rats, termites

One wonders what the *Daily Telegraph* leader writer would make of a Japanese journalist who claimed that his people 'do not have and ought not to be given a grudge against the past. This is an extraordinary country, one which has rough passages perhaps, but whose creativity and achievements are a beacon to others and ought to be taught to each generation'. In fact, the quote is from John Keegan, a regular *Daily Telegraph* writer, putting forward his view of British history (5 May 1994). Keegan, like Ian Buruma and his followers, seems to be suffering from 'historical amnesia' himself. The 'rough passages' of British history include a record of colonial plunder and brutality of far longer duration and covering a much larger area than that of the Japanese.

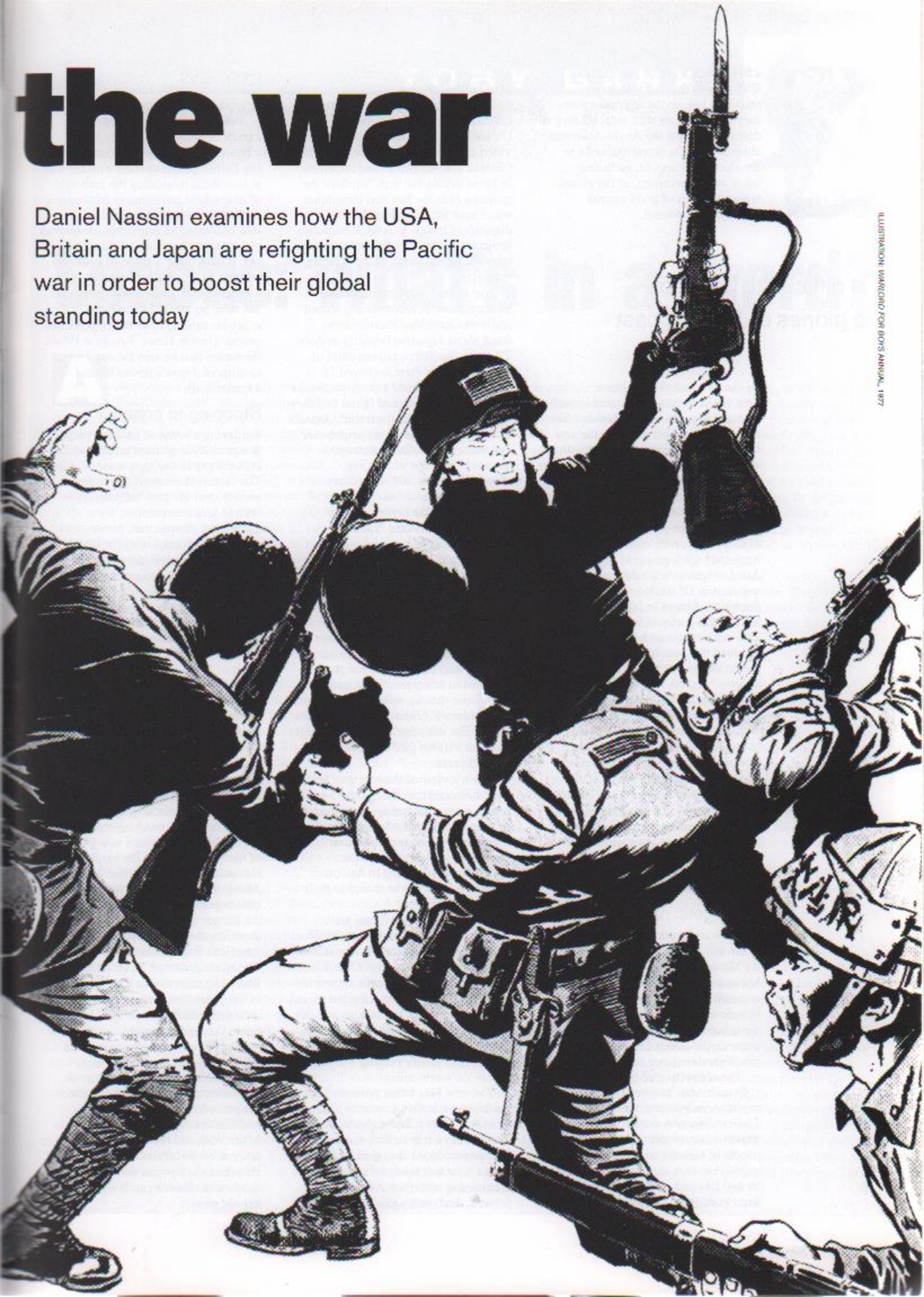
Indeed one of the most striking examples of amnesia in relation to the Second World War is Hiroshima itself. For British and American commentators the destruction of Hiroshima is an embarrassing episode they would rather forget. And when they are forced to talk about it, they conveniently forget that it was preceded and justified by a hysterical racist crusade in which the Japanese were portrayed as monkeys, rats and termites.

The staggering double standard in Western discussions of Japanese history is not just of academic interest. Behind it lies the notion of Anglo-American moral superiority in the present. The idea being presented is that the Japanese, in contrast to Britain or America, are tainted by their past experiences. The true character of the Japanese is held to be violent and underhand compared to the civilised and open Anglo-Saxon nations.

The conclusion drawn is that Japan's tainted past makes it unworthy to play ▶

the war

Daniel Nassim examines how the USA, Britain and Japan are refighting the Pacific war in order to boost their global standing today





a full role as a global power today. Britain and the USA may have problems but, so the argument goes, they have right on their side. History is deemed to invest the Anglo-American alliance with the moral authority to do whatever it sees fit, including using atomic weapons, as the global representatives of good against evil, past and present.

It is difficult to boast of the glories of Japan's past

As the defeated power, Japan cannot discuss the Pacific war in such an explicitly self-serving fashion. Yet from a different perspective, the new Japanese discussion of the war is also an attempt to use history to help occupy the moral high ground in international affairs today.

In recent years, Japanese politicians have pursued a 'diplomacy of contrition', with ministers frequently apologising to Japan's Asian neighbours for the country's war record. Of course, there are still prominent figures in Japanese politics who would prefer to forget the past. Two cabinet ministers have already resigned this year after making public statements to that effect. Shigeto Nagano, the justice minister, resigned in May after claiming that the Japanese massacre of Chinese civilians at Nanjing in 1937 was 'a total fabrication'. In August the director general of the environment agency, Shin Sakurai, resigned after suggesting that Japan did not launch a war of aggression in the 1930s and that some Asian countries benefited from the Japanese occupation. But the striking thing today is that these old-timers are going against the rising trend in Japan.

Apologetic nationalism

The new conception of Japan's role in the war is clearly exhibited in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum—the official Japanese museum commemorating the bombing. In June of this year a new wing of the museum opened. The difference between the new section and the established museum is quite staggering.

The old section of museum embodies what was until recently the mainstream Japanese view of the war. The exhibits concentrate on the terrible impact of the atomic bomb on the people of Hiroshima. These include models of what victims of the bomb looked like and artifacts of clothing from casualties. The aim of the

exhibition is to portray the Japanese as victims of the war.

The new museum takes a more critical line on Japanese history. On entering the museum, the first video on display talks of the plight of Chinese and Korean forced labourers in Japan during the war. Nor does the museum hide the fact that Hiroshima was a base for the assembly and dispatch of troops to Asia. It broaches subjects that have traditionally been taboo in Japan—such as the Nanjing massacre.

Nor is the Hiroshima museum an aberration. In recent years, school textbooks have also become more frank about Japanese brutality in Asia. TR Reid, the Tokyo bureau chief of the *Washington Post*, surveyed 12 of the most widely used history textbooks in Japanese schools and found that they 'now include information about Japan's brutality toward its Asian neighbours' and that every textbook surveyed discussed the rape of Nanjing. He observed that 'the outline of World War Two in Asia is close to what American students learn' (*International Herald Tribune*, 31 August 1994).

This more contrite view of Japanese history has the official backing of the Japanese government. On 31 August the prime minister, Tomiichi Murayama, launched a 'Peace, Friendship and Exchange Initiative'. In his speech the prime minister said that 'it is all the more essential in this time of peace and abundance that we reflect on the errors of our history' (*Japan*, 20 September 1994). The initiative will have a budget of about ¥100bn (£650m) over the next 10 years.

Japan's view of the war may seem more balanced than that of the Western governments, yet it disguises an equally sinister agenda. Unable to promote a straightforward sense of moral superiority and national pride, the Japanese are trying to find other ways to turn their war record to their advantage.

Both the West and Japan are plundering the past to promote their interests in the present. For the victors in the war, Britain and the USA, the discussion of past Japanese aggression is essentially about checking the spread of Japanese power and influence today. For Japan, the loser, the discussion of the war is an attempt to use its past misdeeds to justify playing a broader role in the world today.

The new idea being promoted by the Japanese is that, precisely because of its war record, Japan should play a more active role in East Asia. Compensation for the crimes of the past is a pretext for developing a new relationship with East Asia in the present. And once again Japan is to

play the dominant role in the relationship—only this time as a 'pacifist' superpower.

But the Japanese discussion cannot be understood solely in relation to foreign policy. Just as the US-British preoccupation with the war is also about rebuilding the authority of discredited government institutions, so the 'diplomacy of contrition' is also becoming an important component of Japanese domestic politics. The aim is to develop a sense of national purpose by promoting Japan as a humanitarian power. As Murayama has said, he would like to build a 'tender nation rather than a powerful nation' (*Japan Times*, 7 August 1994). He means that he sees the need to disguise Japan's power behind a tender mask.

Stooping to conquer

Achieving a sense of national purpose is especially important today because Japan is experiencing a sense of drift. The factors that cohered Japanese society over the past half century—such as anti-communism, the experience of economic boom and a solid alliance with the USA—no longer operate in the old way. Japan is desperately seeking a new way to define its identity.

Many Japanese conservatives would undoubtedly like to define Japan's past as a heroic one in the way that Britain does. But it is difficult to boast of the glories of Japan's past when it was humiliated in the Second World War. The Japanese are making the best of a bad job by turning their war record to their advantage.

The new Japanese state is now defined as the ultimate humanitarian power. Japan's experience of war, both as aggressor at Nanjing and victim at Hiroshima, is held to qualify it to play a prominent peacemaking role around the world today. Japan's new perception of itself is clear from the exhibits at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Alongside the historical material are contemporary exhibits warning of the danger of nuclear war today and depicting modern weapons like American F-16 advanced jet fighters. The message is that Japan's past gives it an obligation to crusade for peace in the dangerous present, including by sending its 'peace people' (armed forces) around the world.

The discussion of the war in the USA, Britain or Japan is of more than academic or historical interest. It is being used to support dangerous notions which, in different ways, reaffirm the right of the great powers of the West and the East to intervene in and run world affairs. The bombing of Hiroshima is a potent warning of the dangers of allowing such notions to hold sway.



Spastic: what's in a word?

A shopkeeper in Greenwich has renamed his business 'Shoot The Aged'. Not altogether surprisingly, he has come in for a fair amount of stick. I can't help admiring him for having the bottle to offend people for a laugh, though. It is a small blow against the not-in-front-of-the-children culture which is smothering even the most timid expression of anything 'controversial'.

Judging by the way this sort of thing is discussed, you'd think the ability to hold an opinion (eg, that old people should not be shot) while at the same time entertaining the ludicrous possibility of arguing the opposite—in other words, having a sense of humour—was a threat to civilisation, rather than the sign of it. This attitude, which suggests that we should be fed only nice clean healthy thoughts, for our own good, is behind the recent events at the Spastics Society.

The Spastics Society has to contend with a certain amount of stigma, not least the unfavourable publicity resulting from its sacking of spastics in its employ, the abuse of its black employees by a senior manager, and the use of its printing press for the production of 'specialist' porn magazines which are not available at your local Spastic Shop.

The main stigma, however, is the negative connotations of spasticity itself. Now the society has decided to rename itself 'Scope' in an attempt to challenge the public attitude to spastics. In doing so, it is following a familiar pattern, in which established organisations stuck with un-PC titles including awkward words like 'deaf' and 'blind' have attempted to use less 'offensive' phrases. So 'the blind' become 'people with visual impairment', emphasising that they are people first, and not defined by their medical condition. The problem is that this makes no difference to the lives of people who are blind, whose lives are to a very great extent affected by it, and who will be treated accordingly. To put it another way, you can call a deaf person what you like—'hard of hearing', 'Mutt and Jeff' or a deaf old bastard—he won't be able to hear you anyway.

To go back to the Spastics Society, several generations of middle class people have never grown out of their prep school habit of labelling anything or anyone they consider useless as 'spastic' or 'spaz'. There is nothing admirable about this, but the word does have a vivid reality, whether you like it or not. Attempts to replace 'spastic' with other words inevitably suffer the same fate as all euphemisms—the new terms acquire the same old negative connotations, with an extra one, embarrassment, for good measure. A euphemism reminds you that something unmentionable is being referred to, with the implication that the something is not just unpleasant, but shameful as well. It is about as pointless as the sewage industry hiring an advertising agency to think up a nice word for shit.

A poster has been produced which is supposed to help improve attitudes to children with Down's syndrome, or 'mongols', in playground parlance. It encourages children to be nice to them. It encourages parents to be nice to the parents of Down's children. It says that this should be done in a natural, unembarrassed way, but the fact that this is mentioned at all makes it obvious that there is nothing spontaneous about such behaviour: it is an act of politeness and sympathy, perhaps even charity and pity.

There is nothing wrong with being nice to people, or trying to ease the embarrassment of the parents of these children, but there's no point in trying to tell people that nothing is wrong. Everybody knows that Down's syndrome and cerebral palsy are undesirable, and it is quite appalling that attempts should be made to redefine them as just 'different'. The poster has a section for the Down's syndrome children themselves, with a list of positive things for them to read out like a mantra: 'I am beautiful', 'I am popular', and so on. In the middle, there is a large drawing of a child's face, which resembles a currant bun. It cannot, even in the loosest sense, be described as beautiful. It is highly unlikely that any Down's syndrome child will be convinced by this kind of Prozac logic, let alone other children.

It reminds me of the time *Blue Peter* 'adopted' a spastic, to raise awareness. Joey became the *Blue Peter* spastic, like Shep, the *Blue Peter* dog. Immediately, 'Joey' replaced 'special needs' as the most popular form of abuse in the playground. As I write, the first 'Scope' jokes are probably already doing the rounds.

One person who has always known what is good for us is Mary Whitehouse. In her heyday she was a figure of fun, a national laughing stock. She bombarded the Director General of the BBC with letters about broadcasts that she considered, in her immortal catchphrase, 'unsuitable for family viewing'. She once wrote to Jeremy Isaacs (then editor of *Panorama*), about his decision to repeat Richard Dimbleby's famous report from Belsen. This 'filth', she complained, was 'bound to offend'. She recently defended her stance, arguing that the programme was an 'intrusion' into our homes, and 'very off-putting'. The Holocaust: off-putting or not? There's a talking point for the pub.

Mrs Whitehouse has just retired, but she had the last laugh. I turned on the rerun of *The World At War*: 'This programme contains scenes of violence and suffering,' warned the announcer.

As I write, Poppy Day is upon us again. I used to react to it like a bull to a red rag, what with the way an exception was made to the usual 'don't-discuss-the-real-world-please, we're-British' rule, so newsreaders and schoolchildren could wear them, as if poppies were non-political. Now with World Aids day looming, I find myself even more annoyed by the other self-righteous lot, and their bloody red ribbons, particularly the new permanent metal versions.

Everyone would think it odd to go around wearing a ribbon for 'flu, which most people are far more at risk of dying from, yet we put up with this pious rubbish from the Aids establishment without a murmur. Thankfully the 'message' remains vague for most of the population. I overheard a man on the bus trying to describe somebody, and groping for the right image. 'He had one of them ribbons on—you know, the ones famous people wear', he said eventually, and everyone knew exactly what he meant.

Hope springs eternal



PHOTO: KARSH, OTTAWA

Pope John Paul's new blockbuster will find its way into several million Christmas stockings this month. Michael Fitzpatrick looks into the pontiff's fire and brimstone

Be not afraid', the message of the risen Christ to his disciples, was the theme chosen by Pope John Paul II for his inaugural address to the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square in Rome in October 1978. This injunction has guided his energetic pontificate through a period when global spiritual and moral confusion has reflected wider political and economic turmoil. And now, when there is much speculation about the pope's failing health, it frames *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the pontiff's reflections on major issues of doctrine and ethics published in the form of a dialogue with Italian journalist Vittorio Messori.

Whatever the physical state of the pontiff, the approaching third millennium of Christianity finds the leader of the world's 900m Catholics in strikingly confident form. Not only can Catholicism claim to have seen off communism (an achievement in which this Polish Pope is generally accorded a degree of personal credit), but the older and more established traditions of Enlightenment rationalism and secularism are also in an advanced state of decay. Indeed John Paul here characterises Marxism as merely one (albeit a 'cheap version') of many oppressive systems thrown up by modern civilisation, distinguished by 'the systematic elimination of all that is Christian'. He warns that 'today a similar plan is revealing itself in all its danger and, at the same time, in all its faultiness'. After three centuries of retreat, it appears that Catholicism is to go on the offensive.

After 16 years, the broad lines of Vatican strategy under John Paul are clear. These are to combine a hardline conservatism on the theological and moral fronts with a flexible radicalism on social and political issues. The Pope's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (the 'splendour of truth') imposed an intransigent orthodoxy on Catholic moral teaching. This is maintained in the new catechism published earlier this year which upholds strict bans on divorce, contraception, even artificial insemination within marriage. In June John Paul wrote to all bishops categorically rejecting the ordination of women priests. At the same time, the Pope has emphasised the church's concerns about poverty and oppression, particularly in third world countries. John Paul has criticised Western policies of trade and investment and the associated problems of third world debt, he has denounced abuses

of human rights and refused to endorse the Western onslaught on Iraq in 1992.

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the Pope provides a series of homilies on the broad theme of 'Back to basics'. But, where John Major had in mind a return to the values of late nineteenth-century Britain, John Paul favours Europe in the late Middle Ages, if not Biblical Palestine.

The Pope notes that 'the rationalism of the Enlightenment strikes at the heart of Christian...theological reflection on salvation and of redemption'. He insists that 'in order to restore Christianity to its full vitality, it is essential to return it to the evangelical foundations from which it was torn by the impact of the philosophy of Descartes from the mid-seventeenth century to the French Revolution and beyond. In particular John Paul emphasises that salvation—and 'Christianity is a religion of salvation'—means to liberate from evil.

In a clear echo of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's polemics against the liberation theologians a decade ago, the Pope puts liberation from 'radical, ultimate evil', before saving people from social evils (injustice, coercion, exploitation) or disease or natural disasters. In case there is any doubt about the consequences of man's rejection of God, it is 'eternal damnation', otherwise known as hell.

If you were brought up in the one true church before the liberalising impact of the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s and you think this is beginning to sound familiar, you're right. John Paul wants to bring back the good old hell-fire sermons:

'Let's remember that not so long ago, in sermons during retreats or missions, the *Last Things*—death, judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory—were always a standard part of the programme of meditation, and preachers knew how to speak to them in an effective and evocative way. How many people were drawn to conversion and confession by these sermons and reflections on the Last Things!'

James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* provides probably the most famous account of such an 'evocative' sermon and its rather contradictory effects. But John Paul believes that secularism has bred insensitivity to eschatology and he wants to revive these morbid preoccupations. He even clings to the 'purifying fire' of purgatory.

Crossing the Threshold of Hope is a curious mixture of metaphysical reflection and autobiographical anecdote, combining biblical exegesis with testimony to the 'authentic values of popular piety' as evidenced by the revival of pilgrimages to various Marian shrines. It is certainly strange that a man of such conspicuous learning should attach such significance to the prophecies at Fatima and to the fact that his own attempted assassination took place in 1981 on the anniversary of the first appearance of the Virgin to three peasant girls in Portugal in 1917. Mercifully he does not pontificate on the significance of the movements of statues at Ballinspittle and elsewhere in rural Ireland in recent years.

Quoting St Paul's injunction 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel', John Paul looks forward to the 'new evangelisation' proceeding into the next millennium. After a brief survey of the heroic missionary record (no apologies here in the manner of those guilt-ridden commemorations of the conquest of the Americas), the Pope provides a candid assessment of Catholic attitudes towards other religions and other denominations within Christianity. Dismissing calls made 'unilaterally or tendentiously' for 'pluralism' and 'tolerance', John Paul indicates the expansionary spirit that currently prevails in the Vatican. The success of the World Youth Day in Denver in 1993 (a recurrent theme here), the convergence between evangelical Protestants and Catholics in North America, and the role of the church in defending third world interests against Western interference at the recent Cairo conference on population all indicate the potential for the influence of Catholicism to grow.

Yet it is difficult to turn the wheel of history back 300 years. Once the burden of guilt and the clouds of mystification are lifted, it is not easy to replace them, even from one generation to the next. The relentlessly destabilising influence of the capitalist system counteracts any attempt to restore the moral codes or hierarchical structures of feudal Catholicism. The church has benefited from the collapse of Stalinism, but it is quite incapable of containing the destructive and disintegrative forces that are likely to be unleashed by the decay of the capitalist system. So, be not afraid, Marxism lives. ●

His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Jonathan Cape, £9.99 pbk.

Bad Black Males have much in common with the 'batty boys' they love to hate writes Andrew Calcutt

Gangsta camp



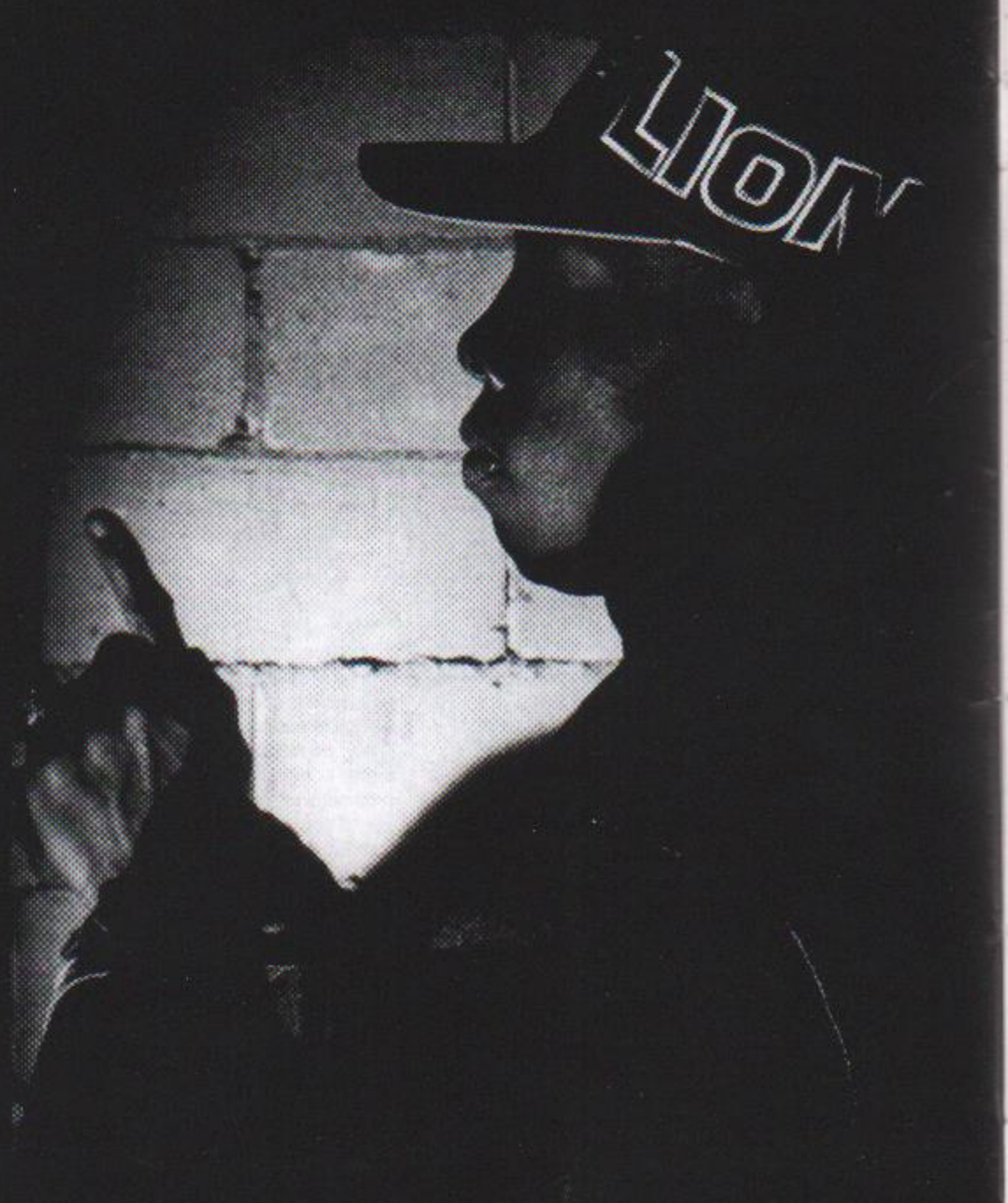
Thirty years ago, Susan Sontag wrote that 'if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented camp, someone else would' (*Notes on Camp*, 1964). She could not have foreseen that camp would be re-invented by someone else—a someone who is none other than the Bad Black Male, sworn-enemy of the original authors of camp.

Look at the overblown he-man figures adorning the covers of gangsta rap records and black music magazines such as *Skank* and *The Source*. Compare them with the male models who advertise wank-[phone]lines, or the exaggerated images of masculinity created by Tom of Finland and other gay artists. Reverse out the colouring (black to white and vice versa), and you will find that the two sets of images are almost identical. What we are looking at here is an advanced case of gangsta camp.

I am not suggesting that gangsta rappers are necessarily gay, nor that all gays are closet gangstas. Some of them may be, but that's not the point. Rather, the exaggerated, highly mannered images of rap and ragga have a lot in common with the kitsch-machismo currently associated with gay pin-ups and nightclub performers. Gay camp wants to suck cock while gangsta camp prefers pussy. But in their fantasies of what a real man should be, both Camps exaggerate the same features beyond the point of absurdity.

Both camps perform an ironic double-tax on their own inflated fantasies. With his close-cropped hair, expansive moustache and muscle-filled t-shirt, the archetypal gay man of the eighties was a parody as well as an amplification of masculinity; as if to say 'I'm a real man. Not.'

Likewise, the adoption of the 'jungle' label is a declaration that this latest form of black music is driven by strong, sexual urges; but it is also an ironic feint at the notion that blacks are high on instinct and low on IQ. The street style known as 'Raggamuffin' parodied the tradition of hand-me-down clothes, and patched together a dance-stance which was feisty and self-mocking at the same time. In their respective versions of camp, Bad Black Males are expressing the same sort of tongue-in-cheek sensibility as the 'batty boys' they love to hate.



The common element in the black and gay styles lies in the experience of marginality common to both groups. Even in today's 'multicultural society', gay men are still treated as criminals on account of their sexuality; likewise black males are defined as criminals, just because they are black. Disbarred from the mainstream, exiled to the margins, camp has come about as the means to describe the experience of being shut away from the rest of the world.

**Soul brothers?
Freddie Mercury
(top left) and
Shabba Ranks**

Camp is an expression of exclusion, translated into exclusivity. The camp sensibility allows those who have been separated from society to find comfort in the recognition of their fellow outcasts. Mutual recognition enables the outsiders to redefine themselves as the in-crowd. But the inherent self-mockery of camp suggests that this is a forlorn attempt to make the best of a bad situation. Turning alienation into an art form is the defining element common to both camps.

The Ideology of Imperialism



The New Ideology of Imperialism

Frank Füredi

'a refreshing counterpoint to silly Western nostrums that various malefactors in the Third World constitute the new enemy.'

Francis Fukuyama, *Foreign Affairs*

Published by Pluto Press, £8.95pbk

Available from Junius Publications, BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX.
Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd; add 75p for postage and packing

WAR & PEACE IN IRELAND

Britain and the IRA in the New World Order

by
Mark Ryan

'...a valuable and illuminating contribution to the present debate.'

Tim Pat Coogan

Why has the IRA given up after 25 years of war with Britain? *War & Peace in Ireland* investigates the origins of the 'peace process' in the politics of the New World Order and the immense changes in Ireland, North and South.

Analysing the demise of the political traditions that have dominated Irish society since the 1920s, and the diminishing status of the Union in Britain, author Mark Ryan indicates the destabilising consequences of these historic developments.

Published by Pluto Press, £8.95pbk
Available from Junius Publications, BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd; add 75p for postage and packing

LIVING MARXISM Originals

THE STATE AND REVOLUTION

VI Lenin

The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution



Lenin's *State and Revolution* is the Marxist revolutionary's critique of capitalist state power, written as the author led the overthrow of the Russian state in 1917.

A new introduction by James Heartfield explains why Lenin's exposure of the military power and bureaucracy behind the parliamentary facade is all too appropriate for today.

Published by Junius Publications. £5.95pbk

Available from Junius Publications, BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd; add 75p for postage and packing

Hollywood's latest film about Africa depicts the world as black and white in more ways than one, says Toby Marshall

The pedigree of *A Good Man in Africa* suggests that it should be different from the usual Hollywood images of African life. Not only does it have an all-star cast (Sean Connery, Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, Louis Gosset) and a multi-million pound budget, but the main figures behind the film are knowledgeable about Africa and sympathetic to its people.

The director is veteran Australian Bruce Beresford. He has lived and worked in Nigeria and has directed a number of documentaries on African society. The screenplay was written by William Boyd, who adapted it from his original novel, and who lived most of his early life in Ghana and Nigeria. Aside from *A Good Man in Africa*, many of his other novels—notably *An Ice Cream War* and *Brazzaville Beach*—are fictionalised accounts of African life. Boyd and Beresford collaborated on a 1990 film, *Mr Johnston*, which dealt with colonialism in Nigeria.

Africa is a continent in which both Beresford and Boyd have staked considerable personal and artistic commitment. Yet the film leaves you with a sense of being told only half a story.

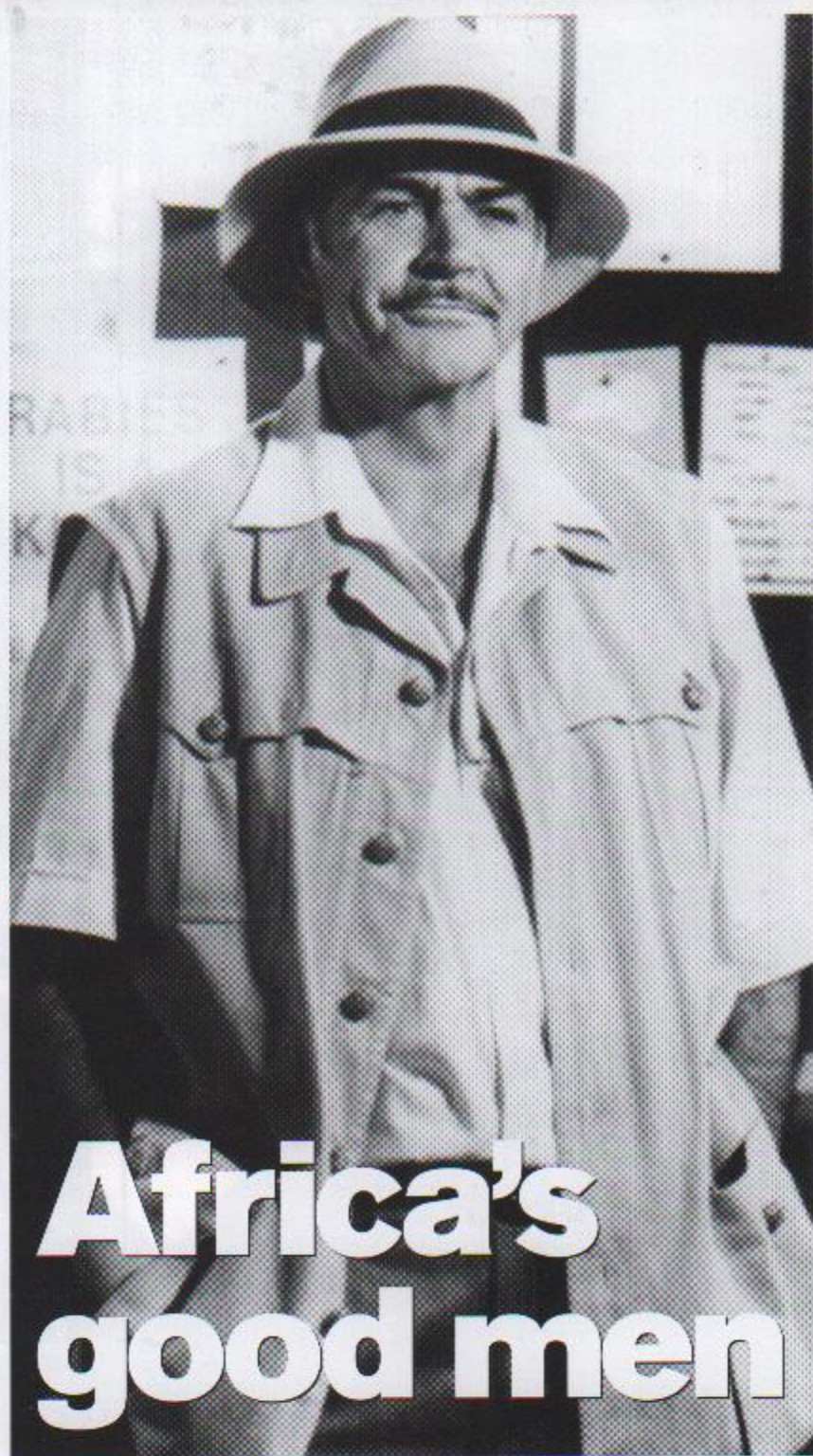
A Good Man in Africa is set in the fictional West African state of Kinjanja. At heart it is a story of corruption and redemption.

Both book and film centre around the shambolic character Morgan Leafy (Colin Freels), the British Deputy High Commissioner. The story begins with Leafy's attempts to influence a leading local opposition politician Sam Adekunle (Louis Gosset Jr) on behalf of the British government, by offering him an all-expenses paid stay at a London hotel (it is not clear whether the hotel was owned by Mohammed al-Fayed).

But Leafy bumbles his mission when he is caught sleeping with Adekunle's wife Celia (Joanne Whalley-Kilmer). As a result, he is blackmailed and dragged into Adekunle's own web of bribery and corruption. Redemption comes in the form of the 'good man' Dr Murray (Sean Connery), whose assent Adekunle needs to proceed with a dodgy property deal, but who it seems cannot be bought at any price.

In making *A Good Man in Africa*, Beresford has done little that is filmic and added little to the book. The one striking difference is in the denouement.

Sean Connery plays the white man in Bruce Beresford's new film



Africa's good men

The ambivalence of the novel is stripped away. The film has here a clarity and a certainty that the novel lacks.

In both novel and film the key moment arrives when the 'good man' refuses to be bribed. Murray's honesty and integrity inspire Leafy to challenge Adekunle's corrupt methods. In the novel, however, Boyd leaves it to our imagination as to how far Leafy has been redeemed.

In the film there is no such ambiguity. The transformation of Leafy is complete. The film closes with Murray's death as the army puts down a riot. 'Why do good men always die?', asks Leafy as Murray lies dying in his arms. Spurred on by the

memory of Murray, Leafy vows to challenge the 'evil' Adekunle and to root out corruption in Kinjanja. The white man, the film seems to be saying, will have to act as the salvation for the black man.

Of course, in most films that grow out of novels, Hollywood strips away the original's subtleties and turns ambiguities into moral certainties. But there seems more to it than this in *A Good Man in Africa*. The transformation from book to film also seems to reveal a transformation in our perceptions of Africa. The more subtle understanding of Africa has been left behind and everything is now presented, quite literally, in black and white.

MARXIST

REVIEW OF BOOKS

As the theory that race is a social construct gets a hearing, Suke Wolton looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the argument

White power

The Invention of the White Race, Vol 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control,

Theodore W Allen, Verso, 1994, £39.95 hbk, £14.95 pbk

Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America, Eric Foner, Clarendon Press, 1994, £4.50 pbk

The Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy, Verso, 1992, £34.95 hbk, £11.95 pbk

Racist Culture, David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell, 1993, £13.99 pbk

Constructions of Race, Place and Nation, Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose (Eds), UCL Press, 1993, £35 hbk, £12.95 pbk

Inside Babylon, Winston James and Clive Harris (Eds), Verso, 1993, £34.95 hbk, £11.95 pbk

Towards the Abolition of Whiteness, David R Roediger, Verso, 1994, £11.95 pbk

Racism and theories of racial superiority have been central to conservative thinking. At the turn of the century racial ideologies were at their height, as European colonies spread from Africa to the Far East. Race was understood to be a system of natural classification for all humanity that put white Europeans and Americans at the top and arranged the rest of the races in descending order. Racial ideology presented Western domination as natural superiority, providing the mainstay of ruling class thought.

With decolonisation and black migration to Europe, sociologists and anthropologists have been more cautious about emphasising white supremacy. Instead they concentrated on relations between the races, upon the failure of blacks and Asians to assimilate into white society and upon the failure of third world countries to develop along Western lines.

But today the emphasis in racial theory is shifting again. On one hand, conservative pseudo-science is claiming once more to have discovered natural, inherited differences between people of different races. On the other, students of 'post-colonial discourse' now depict race as something that is socially constructed rather than being a natural division. As Theodore Allen promises in the first volume of his *Invention of the White Race*: 'I will substantiate a definition of racial slavery as a sociogenic rather than a phylogenic phenomenon.' (p23) For Allen the idea that whites are naturally better than blacks is out of the question: only what happens in society can explain racial differences.

Furthermore these writers have overturned the usual procedure of taking the white race as the ideal and explaining how other races fall short of that ideal. Instead they say that we should examine whiteness itself and try to understand how white supremacy is socially constructed. In the books reviewed here, it is the white rather than the non-white races that are seen as dysfunctional. For some, like Paul Gilroy, Winston James and Clive Harris, the black experience is a positive rather than a negative model of social organisation.

The understanding of race as a social institution is a substantial gain over the old apologetic theories of natural superiority. The investigation of the ideology and institutions that consolidate white supremacy in David Roediger's *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* and Allen's *Invention of the White Race* are excellently researched and argued. Racial division is not excused as something naturally given in our genetic make-up, but attacked as an artificial constraint that serves to mask real inequalities.

However, while it is a real advance to look at race in social terms, the way that these writers develop the theory raises as many problems as it solves. The weakness of most of these authors is that they understand society itself in rather narrow terms, concentrating exclusively on cultural and institutional divisions. Any investigation of how society throws up racial differences is cut short at the most obvious expressions of white supremacy, like the old trades' union closed shop and personal prejudice. Despite their emphasis on the ►

'social' origins of race, the one thing that these writers do not examine is the way in which racial divisions are produced and reproduced by the way in which *society* is organised. Instead, they tend to concentrate on the ideological and institutional demarcations between racial groups. As a consequence the relation between the social divisions created by the capitalist system and racism is obscured, as racism is reduced to the beliefs and actions of individuals and groups.

To locate the roots of racial thinking in the forms of capitalist organisation is to imply the possibility of overcoming racism by transforming society. By contrast the fashionable theory of race as a construction sees racism as principally a prejudice, or at most a kind of closed shop against immigrants. The conclusion that this theory leads to is that blacks need to create a counter-culture as a site of resistance. Promoting the goal of many different cultures, while denying the superiority of any one, the modern theory of race as a social construct ends up excusing the racial divide in a more comprehensive and contemporary way than the ideology of white supremacy ever could today.

When the idea of race originally arose, it was not even defined in terms of colour, but of good breeding. That original racial sentiment was the elitist outlook of a ruling class that expected to bequeath its refined manners to the next generation as surely as its property and power.

The notion of race changed more than a century ago, when the idea of democracy was expanded and the vote extended to give a wider section of the population some sense of a stake in the system. Race now became a broader device to give a working definition of who was in and who was out. Citizenship was accorded only to certain racial groups. This is clear in the mid-nineteenth century developments in the USA, outlined in Eric Foner's *Slavery and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America*.

The British working class was granted the vote at the same time as 'inferior' races from the colonial world were subjugated more forcibly

Prior to the 1840's black people, at least in the North, were granted the vote if they could fulfil the property qualification. The civil war of the 1860s, retrospectively justified in terms of the liberation of the slaves, established Northern industrial hegemony over the US economy. It created the conditions for the further industrial development of America, and so expanded the working class enormously. The loyalty of this new working class was, as Foner tells it, bought by giving the white workers the votes and denigrating the blacks. Blacks were denied the vote until the 1870s—despite having had it in the 1840s in Pennsylvania and New York states. In Britain the expansion of the suffrage coincided with the development of the empire as an object of pride. The British working class was granted the vote at the same time as 'inferior' races from the colonial world were subjugated more forcibly.

In the history of the consolidation of the racial divide there is a great deal of evidence of the manipulation of race by the authorities. The racial divide was politicised

in a way that galvanised indigenous working class support for the status quo. But concentrating on the ideological expressions of race leads these proponents of the theory of race as a social construction to see it simply as a conscious strategy on the part of the powers that be.

In fact racism cannot simply be an invention or Machiavellian plot. The consequences of racism may be entirely to the benefit of the ruling class—but the basis of the racial divide is the weakness not the strength of its system. Inequalities within the working class are not invented by ideologues, they are real, arising out of the uneven development of capitalism. Irish immigrants to Britain and black slaves taken to America really were inferior in social status. The ideology of race gave a forceful expression and bogus legitimacy to those inequalities, but did not create them. If racial ideology did not reflect a real division it would have no more purchase than the dislike for Jehovah's Witnesses. It is because race prejudice is not a conspiracy, but reflects real inequalities of income, mobility and employment, that it is so deeply entrenched. Where prejudices are confirmed by the experience of inequality they become more than prejudices.

If racial ideology did not reflect a real division it would have no more purchase than the dislike for Jehovah's Witnesses

Writing about India, Allen says 'racial oppression [was] introduced as a deliberate ruling class policy where it was not originally intended' (*The Invention of the White Race*, p23). But the British Raj was not capable of 'inventing' Pakistani nationalism or Sikh separatism. It was the weakness of the colonial economy that led them to endorse segregation in a crude attempt at containment. The fashion, therefore, for the idea of 'constructed' identities, preoccupied with the success of the tactic, ignores the weakness of the strategy. It is a theory that only sees the last move in the consolidation of division, the institutionalisation of sectarianism, without understanding that these divisions were already implicit in the uneven development of the Indian economy under British rule.

The foundations of racism within the structures of society are not, however, the real subject matter of the 'social constructionists'. Today's theorists who claim that race is an invented identity are more interested in showing how it is justified and articulated, than how it arises out of the limitations of capitalist society. The differences between these authors is who they think did the inventing. Allen thinks the ruling class did it for the purposes of social control. David Roediger thinks the ruling class did it to make the white workers loyal. Winston James, Clive Harris, Peter Jackson, Jan Penrose and Paul Gilroy, by contrast, put the stress on the way that black people invent their own identities.

To these latter, more radical proponents of the theory of the social construction of race the idea that the ruling class can simply impose 'divide-and-rule' identities is demeaning to black people, presenting them only as victims. Instead they presume that people must create their own identifiable groups. For example, Winston James and Clive Harris argue that: 'Like all nations,

nationalities and ethnic groups, Afro-Caribbean people in Britain have erected boundaries in relation to those with whom they identify.' (*Inside Babylon*, p266)

This more extreme version of the theory only draws out the consequences of seeing racial division solely in terms of cultural exclusiveness. Considered apart from the social force of capitalist domination, the defensive strategy of black separatism is put on a par with white racial identity.

It is true that young blacks use rap slang to hide their rage in a form inaccessible to white teachers. But the black people living in Stonebridge Park, Moss Side or Broadwater Farm did not 'erect boundaries'; they were driven into ghettos and policed into seeing 'differences' by the presence of riot vans and early morning 'visits'. To suppose that black people in Britain are responsible for their own isolation and segregation is to turn reality upside down.

James, Harris, Jackson, Penrose, Gilroy, Roediger, Allen and Goldberg all claim to be on the side of the oppressed. But endorsing difference is a difficult operation if it is not to sound like apartheid. Their resolution of this problem is to bolster the case for difference with a phoney celebration of the identities of the oppressed.

David Roediger implies that blackness is better because in contrast: 'It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false.' (*Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, p13, although Roediger never specifies what exactly makes black culture *more* than oppressed and false.)

Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose have decided static identities, like whiteness, are the problem ones. Whereas others identities are 'dynamic and plural' (*Construction of Race, Place and Nation*, p207). As Paul Gilroy sees it, the experience of the black diaspora has created an open identity that is valuable precisely because it is not exclusive. Gilroy celebrates:

'the value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture *en route* to better theories of racism and of black political culture than those so far offered by cultural absolutists of various phenotypical hues.' (*The Black Atlantic*, p223)

Of course migrations can be a great force for optimism and change. But the conditions of insecurity and brutalisation of the black migrations across the Atlantic are no cause for celebration.

The 'invented race' school, however, appears to have forgotten about the reality of social power. For David Theo Goldberg we need merely the power to speak: 'To control the conceptual scheme is thus to command one's world.' (*Racist Culture*, p9) Goldberg's thesis is to give up on all the promises of equality from the Enlightenment since their fulfilment has been denied. Instead of striving for equality in the real world, Goldberg looks for a conceptual freedom through the celebration of 'particular historical, social and cultural differences' (p5).

Jackson and Penrose also find solace in their academic studies when they say: 'From this perspective, social construction theory can be seen to offer a radical

form of analysis and exciting possibilities for envisioning societal transformation.' (p3) The way that they perceive change coming out of ideas is through a process of analysis followed by letting the ideas take over:

'As all of this suggests, the social construction perspective works by identifying the components and processes of category construction. The resultant knowledge can then be used to reconstruct categories in ways which allow their inherent power to be used in the pursuit of equality.' (p3)

The implication in this is that there will be equality in a 'category'. And presumably there will be pie in the sky when you die.

To demand nicer academic categories in the hope of ending racism really only succeeds in putting an attractive gloss on racial division. Just as racism is not simply invented, so we cannot sit around and invent a better identity. Dreaming up non-racist nationalities is not an option. Indeed it can only succeed in providing a more beguiling apology for racism than the white supremacists could hope to produce.

If the idea that race is social were developed to its real potential it would be a brilliant guide to challenging racism on the ground. But the fashionable theory of race as a social invention reduces society to the operation of prejudices and restraints between groups and individuals. To properly address racial division it has to be located not in society in the abstract, but in the forms of organisation and control prevalent in this society, capitalist society. It is only by challenging the divisions created by capitalist society that racism can be effectively challenged.

The black people living in Stonebridge Park, Moss Side or Broadwater Farm did not 'erect boundaries'; they were driven into ghettos and policed into seeing 'differences'

Roediger cites Dan Scully the Irish American head of the longshoremen's union, testifying before the Louisiana legislature during a strike in 1907. Scully's terminology would not endear him to today's politically correct anti-racists, but more clearly expresses an opposition to the racial divisions society has created than any of them:

"I guess before long you'll be calling us nigger-lovers, too. Maybe you want to know next how I would like it if my sister married a nigger?...I wasn't always a nigger-lover. I fought in every strike to keep black labour off the dock. I fought until in the white-supremacy strike your white-supremacy governor sent his white-supremacy militia and shot us white-supremacy strikers full of holes. You talk about us conspiring with niggers...but let me tell you and your gang, there was a time when I wouldn't even work beside a nigger.... You made me work with niggers, eat with niggers, sleep with niggers, drink out of the same water bucket with niggers, and finally got me to the point where if one of them blubbers something about more pay, I say, 'Come on nigger, let's go after the white bastards.'" (p26)

On Foot Through Africa, Ffiona Campbell, Orion, £16.99 hbk

Ffiona Campbell's walk from Cape Town to Tangier, chronicled in *On Foot Through Africa*, and for the BBC, avoids the two traditional ways of travelling to Africa—the 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' package tour with the nomadic Aussies suffering from sunstroke and the Oxbridge graduates taking a year out, and the 'craft and textile holiday' with bronzed hippies whose only conversation is about how dope should be legalised. Instead Campbell's journey is an eclectic mix of useful insights into the problems a Western walker might face crossing Africa on foot, a smattering of the beliefs of Africa's old colonial masters and the prejudices of a politically correct, eco-friendly upper class crusty.

Most of the immediate problems which Campbell faced are the direct result of wealthy Western travellers' arrogance. The normal behaviour of packs of overlanders travelling through Africa is to abuse the locals, speed through villages leaving mangled crops and dead chickens in their wake, get involved in fights and insult Africans by offering money for simple advice and hospitality. These short-term visitors are, however, only doing what aid agencies have turned into a way of life. Campbell describes how in Burkina Faso aid workers lived in fine houses with air conditioning and servants, living off the situation [drought] and playing along with Westerners views on what Africa needed. The result is hostility towards the whites who follow, even well-meaning travellers. Campbell and her travelling team mates spent a lot of time stumbling over these legacies.

But *On Foot Through Africa* reveals some insights into Campbell's own motivations and preconceptions, too. She expresses many of the contemporary Western prejudices about Africans who, she confirms for those who have not been to Africa or met any, are unsuited to Western ways. Campbell believes she has solved the riddle of why Africa is in its current predicament: 'That's the problem with Africans handling Western bureaucracy: they've had the system hammered into them but they don't know what it means.' If you missed the point, Campbell believes Africans belong in the past. It is in this vein that she applauds Raymond, her horribly self righteous ex-boyfriend, as he discusses local herbal remedies and demonstrates long and best-forgotten traditional fire-lighting methods to villagers in Zaire. 'He'd become a caretaker of these traditions and was returning them to their rightful owners', she coos.

For Westerners travelling around Africa today it is more or less compulsory to discover something dark and dangerous about Africans and humanity more broadly. If you are a liberal-minded Westerner you don't talk of untrustworthy blacks, although Campbell does tend to find superstitious Africans in most villages and corrupt officials in every town. As befits the politically correct traveller of the 1990s, Campbell discovers that African men (Campbell refers to them as 'dodgy brothers' and has a generally low opinion of them) are the heart of darkness of the African continent. In Zaire she suggests that drunken wife-beating is a national pastime. Before she gets to her final destination, African men have

intimidated and harassed her, and generally behaved in a manner closer to animals than human beings.

This caricature of African men is confirmed at the end of her journey when she reached Morocco. She imagines that nearly all the Moroccan males she meets are driven to masturbate as soon as they clap eyes on her. As she tells it, motor cyclists drive by wanking and Mercedes drivers stop to have a 'Moroccan piss' every time they catch sight of her. This unending criticism of the behaviour of African males gradually becomes a moral condemnation of Africa. In fact, Campbell toys with the idea of launching a campaign against sexual harassment in Morocco. The risk of not being allowed to complete her walk seems to have prevented her from doing so.

Although Ffiona Campbell has undertaken a mammoth journey of 16 088 kilometres over two years, *On Foot Through Africa* reads like a small step of self-discovery for one woman. Campbell believes there is nothing on Earth left to explore: 'What remains is an exploration of self.' Most writers on Africa claim to give us great insights into African society but end up telling the reader more about their own fears and preoccupations. At least Ffiona Campbell is honest enough to say that *On Foot Through Africa* is a study of herself rather than Africa.

Emmanuel Oliver

War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate, Sarah Dunant (Ed), Virago Press, £7.99 pbk

Offered up as a debate, this collection should be called *Political Correctness: A Defence*. 'What's all the fuss?', is the complaint of the lion's share of the contributors, 'political correctness is just a right-wing caricature, and where it does exist it's just common sense, like not being gratuitously offensive to minorities'. A handful of safe critics like Christopher Hitchens score some good points about intolerance in universities, but these criticisms only serve to isolate the more extreme expressions of the phenomenon, the better to save its core.

As it happens, political correctness does not need defending because today it is so much part of the mainstream that most people will say there really is no such thing. All the old right-wing prejudices about a woman's place being in the home and the glories of the British Empire are painfully transparent the more redundant they become. But the new PC prejudices are so commonplace that they do not seem to be prejudices at all. It is readily assumed that working class men are violent, and too macho to get used to their share of unemployment without counselling; that gay-bashing is rampant among the sexually insecure black males of Brixton; that civil servants are incapable of behaving humanely without race-awareness training. Once upon a time, the virtues of good breeding and chivalry emphasised the superiority of the genteel classes over the oiks. Today it is mastering the etiquette of the equal opportunities policy and the anti-harassment code that elevates the politically correct over the underclass. The contributors to the *War of the Words* cling on to the idea that they are the victims in the debate about PC. In reality they are the new elite.

James Heartfield

BAN NOTHING

*BAN NOTHING—question everything t-shirts
Black text on front and back with LIVING MARXISM logo
on extra large white shirt*

*£10 plus 80p postage and packing.
Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd,
and send to BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX*

FROM THE CREATOR OF TRUE ROMANCE
AND RESERVOIR DOGS



WINNER
BEST FILM
CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 1994

**"ONE OF THE
GREAT WILD RIDES
OF RECENT CINEMA"**

Vogue

**"PAINFULLY FUNNY AND
BREATHTAKINGLY
SMART - IN A WORD
UNMISSABLE"**

The Face

**"AN INDISPUTABLY
GREAT FILM!
FEROCIOUS FUN"**

Rolling Stone

**"A BRILLIANT AUDACIOUS,
AMBITIOUS MASTERPIECE"**

Jim McLellan - The Face



A FILM BY
QUENTIN TARANTINO

PULP FICTION

18

MIRAMAX INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS A BAND APART AND JERSEY FILMS PRODUCTION A FILM BY QUENTIN TARANTINO PULP FICTION MUSIC SUPERVISOR KARYN RACHTMAN
COSTUME DESIGNER BETSY HEIMANN PRODUCTION DESIGNER DAVID WASCO EDITOR SALLY MENKE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ANDRZEJ SEKULA
CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BOB WEINSTEIN HARVEY WEINSTEIN RICHARD N. GLADSTEIN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DANNY DEVITO MICHAEL SHAMBERG STACEY SHER
STORIES BY QUENTIN TARANTINO & ROGER AVARY PRODUCED BY LAWRENCE BENDER WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY QUENTIN TARANTINO

Distributed by BUENA VISTA INTERNATIONAL (UK) Ltd.



SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON MCA CASSETTES AND CD



MIRAMAX

READ THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY OUT NOW FROM FABER AND FABER UK