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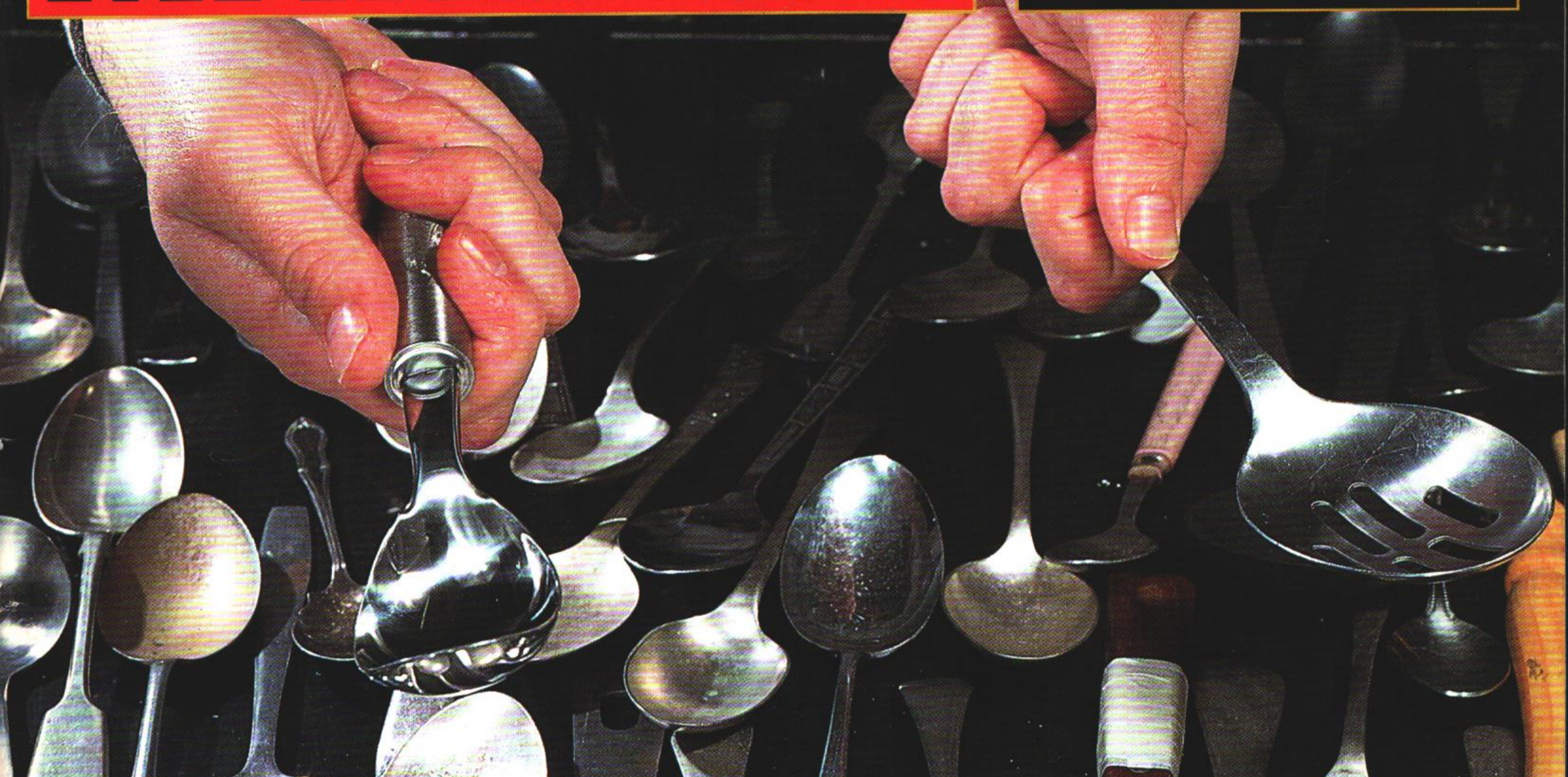
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THIS CHRISTMAS

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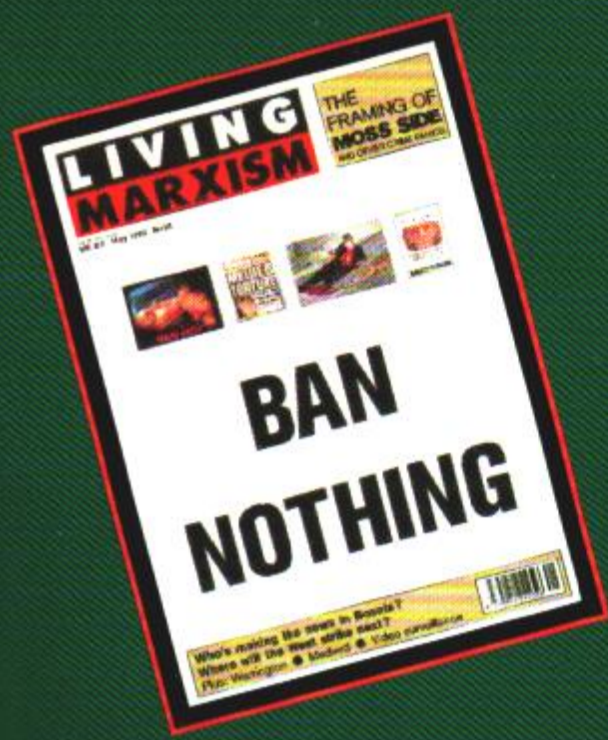


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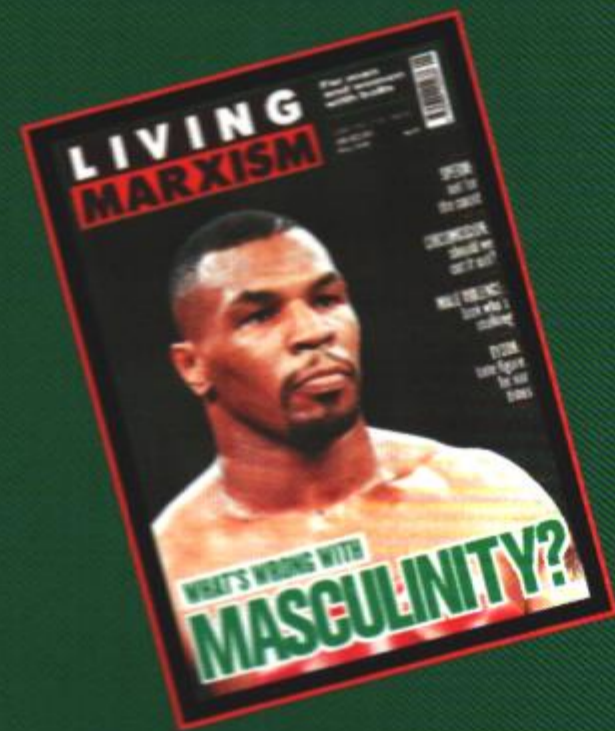
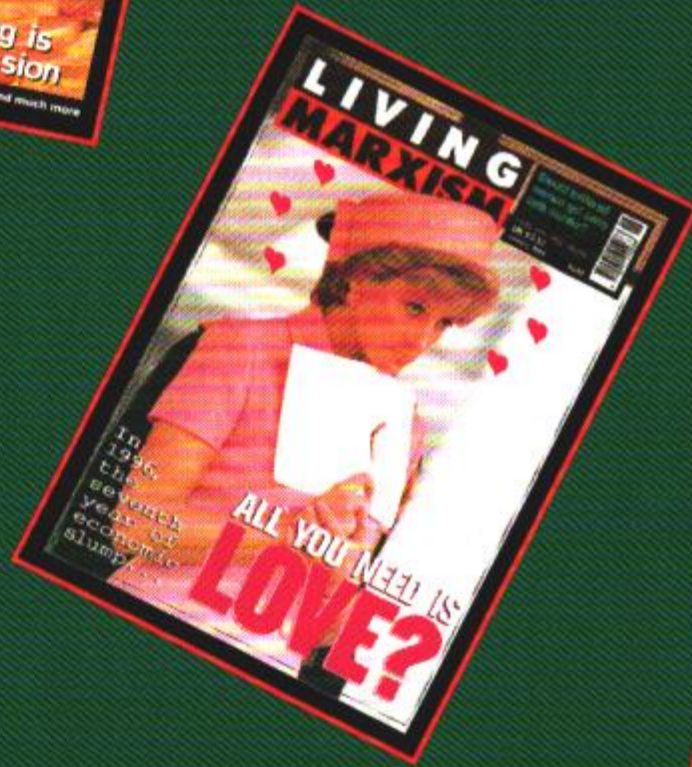
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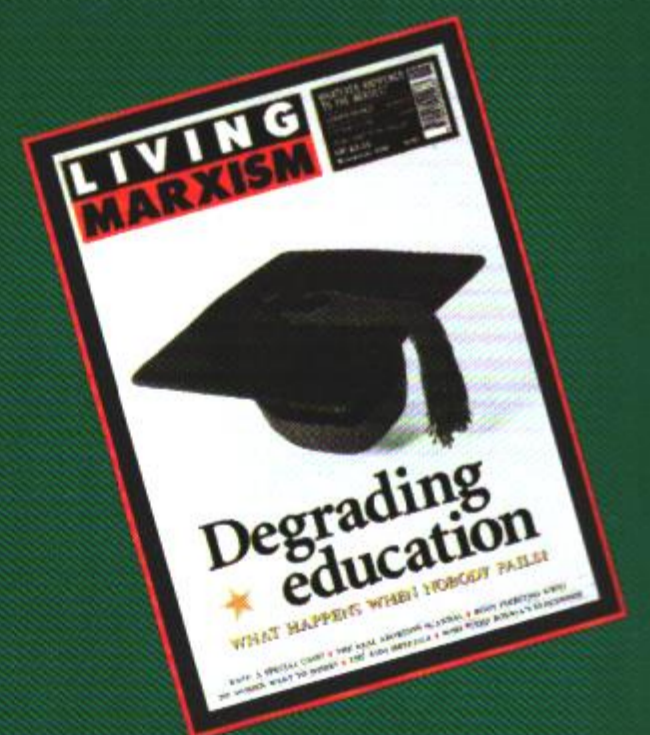
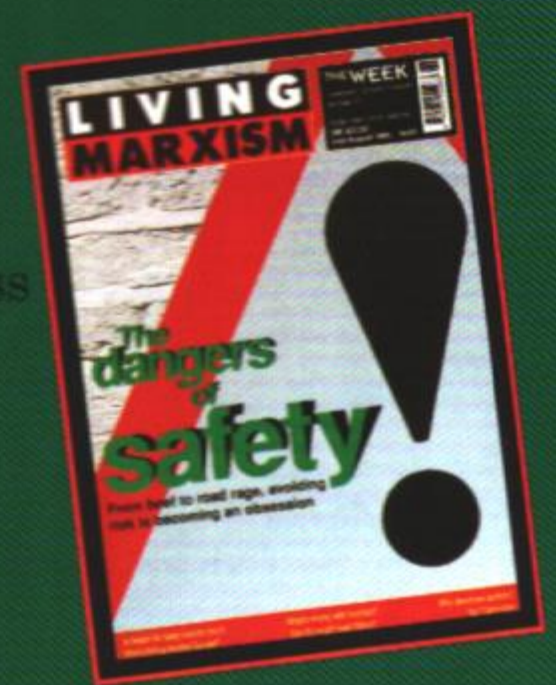
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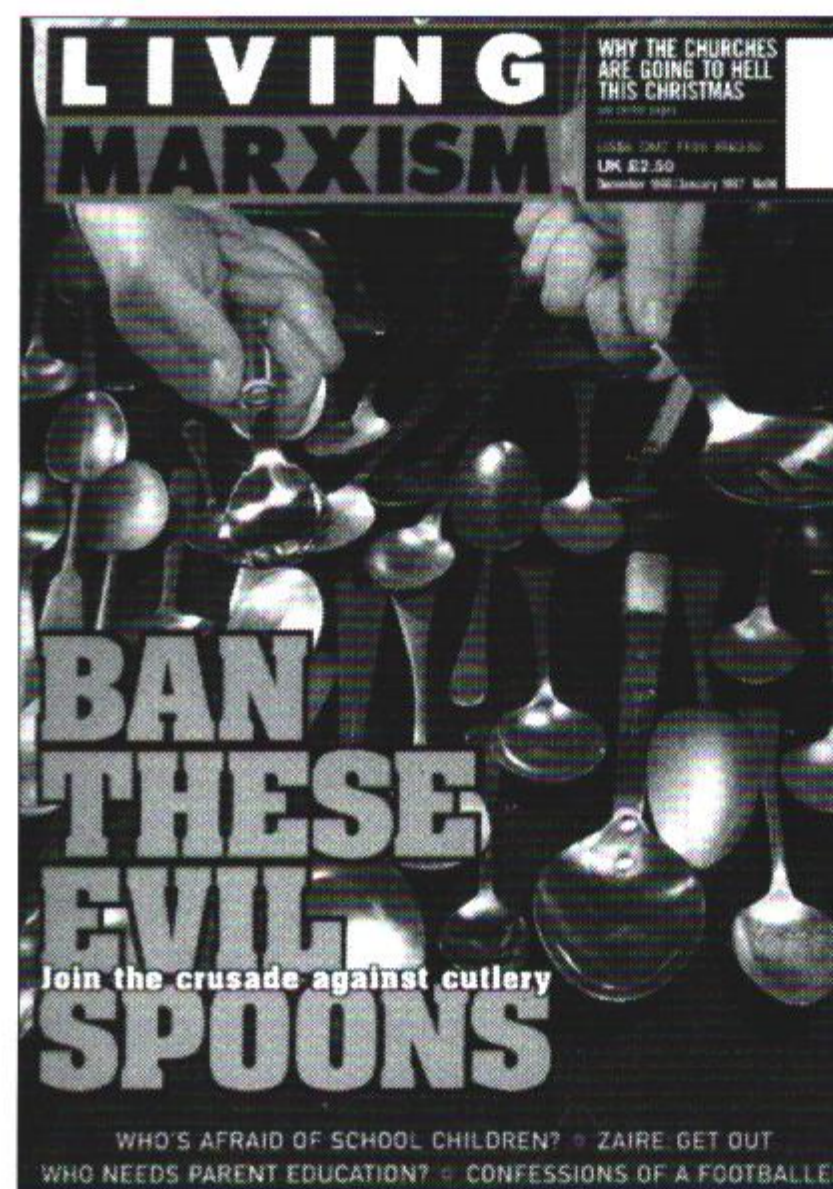
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This is a double issue. Back in February. Happy holidays!

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Mick Hume

Ban these evil spoons

The opposition parties have demanded that the government impose a ban on 'evil' combat knives. But why stop there? As the Tories themselves have quite reasonably pointed out, it is hard to frame a legal definition which would allow the police and the courts to differentiate between a combat knife and an ordinary carver. So surely we ought to ban them all. Take the bloody toys from the boys, and the bread knives from the housewives.

But wait. Now that the kitchen drawers have been opened for inspection, what other horrors might we find within? Those toasting forks could maim a small child as easily as a marshmallow. Dining forks that will pick up a potato are quite capable of puncturing an artery. And any one of that array of dessert and serving spoons could give somebody a nasty headache, not to mention their suitability for gouging out the odd eyeball.

Yet all of these potentially violent implements are openly displayed and offered for sale in knife, fork and spoon shops that can be found on every high street. The time has surely come for somebody to say enough is enough, and to launch a national crusade against dangerous instruments and those who peddle them. If we are serious about stamping out the 'culture of violence' in our society, we could make a good start by tackling the culture of cutlery in our homes.

Perhaps simply telling people not to sell or use knives and other dangerous implements is insufficient. If these instruments are truly 'evil', then the knives themselves

surely ought to be held responsible for their actions, and punished accordingly. On this issue, as with so many of today's moral problems, we have much to learn from the more fundamental attitudes of our forefathers.

In ancient Greece, for example, statues, carts and other inanimate objects were often put on trial for falling on people or running them over. More recently, in medieval Europe, pigs were regularly had up in court for child-murder, and many a porker was dressed in waistcoat and breeches before being strung up in the town square by professional hangmen. The evil objects of our age may be due for a taste of similar medicine.

We have recently seen some first steps back in this direction, with the demolition of evil buildings such as the Dunblane school gym and the West family's house of horror in Cromwell Street. The remains of the latter building were even crushed to dust, brick by brick, to ensure that none of its evil aura escaped—and presumably as a warning to any other terraced houses which might be tempted to stray down the path of violence.

That is the kind of initiative the powers that be need to encourage more, if they are to make society secure again by terrifying people into being frightened of their own shadows. Welcome to the new hi-tech dark age of irrationality, fear, superstition and stupidity. Lock up your knife drawers, cross yourself, and look for the bogeyman hiding under the bed. (Although he may well be elsewhere, swapping twisted images of children's cutlery on the Internet.)

Meanwhile, back in the real world...

The recent furore over what should be banned is clearly not really about handguns or combat knives. There is no automatic reason why any object should become the subject of a moral crusade, or why private tragedies such as Dunblane or the murder of Philip Lawrence should be made the dominant issues of public debate month after month. Something else is going on here.

The underlying issue at stake is the lack of authoritative leadership in society today, and the desperation of the politicians to attach themselves to any cause that can make them appear virtuous. Bereft of any political vision that could unite and direct the nation, both government and opposition parties are frantically searching for some source of moral authority.

First they tried to dress up in the garb of traditional religion, with Tony Blair and John Major competing to prove that theirs was the true party of God. (The irony was that, while Blair staged his cheap holier-than-thou act, his mentor Bill Clinton was attacking the Christian right for pulling a similar stunt in the US election.) This approach was never going to win society over, given that the old churches are now almost as badly discredited as the old political parties (see centre pages).

So Major, Blair, Paddy Ashdown and the rest quickly changed tack, and queued to sign up instead as followers of the new religion of the Western world: the worship of suffering and the cult of the victim. It was in this spirit that, as Frank Furedi examines elsewhere in this issue, the politicians grabbed hold of the coat-tails of the Dunblane parents and Mrs Frances Lawrence, in the hope of hitching a ride onto the moral high ground. In competing to see who could be the strongest and most sincere-sounding opponent of handguns and combat knives, the parties have hoped that some of the moral authority attached to these crusading victims might rub off on them.

The parties—and New Labour in particular—might seem to have done reasonably well out of the moral crusade so far, winning substantial public backing for their stance against guns and knives. But it is a pseudo-success, one that has created only an illusory consensus of support.

In effect the nation has agreed that we are all against shooting schoolchildren and stabbing headmasters. That hardly provides a positive basis for bringing society together. And once other, less clear-cut issues have been brought under the moral microscope, the discussion has only served to highlight the lack of common values in society today.

Take, for example, the draft statement of values recently produced for schools by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community, otherwise known as Nick Tate's Ten Commandments (after the government-appointed official overseeing the project). Because it wanted the statement of values to be endorsed by every section of society, the Forum confined itself to issuing a bland list of woolly generalities about being good citizens and respecting others. There was none of the ringing 'Thou Shalt Not..' certainty of the biblical Ten Commandments. Yet even then, the statement could not avoid exciting controversy and division; it quickly became embroiled in a row over why it had not explicitly endorsed the institution of marriage.

Of course, even in the past it was never the case that everybody agreed on a single set of values. In other times, however, there were those who had the moral authority to lay down the line on what society should consider right and wrong. That is what has changed today above all.

The original Ten Commandments were supposed to be the will of the one true God, brought down from the mountain by His chosen messenger, Moses. By contrast, Nick Tate's Ten Commandments were the result of months of deliberation and compromise by the 150 members of the Forum for Values, including members of all the major religious faiths, business people, teachers, journalists, academics and charity organisers. In the beginning, there was The Word; but in the end, there are thousands of them. When even the prime minister and his education secretary cannot agree on whether caning is right or wrong, the chances of anybody having the authority to impose a clear moral code on society are slim.

The crisis of moral authority at the top, and the attempt to resolve it through hyped-up crusades against easy targets, are symptoms of a ruling elite that has run out of steam and real purpose. If that was all, it would not much matter. But this authority crisis has damaging consequences throughout society.

Ours is an age in which the tendency is for nobody to uphold any particular principles or standards. It is a time when nobody seems to stand for anything certain beyond banning some guns and knives—a spinelessness symbolised by President Clinton's re-election pledge to 'put politics aside'. As a consequence, most people now seem unwilling to take responsibility for resolving wider social problems. Instead we are witnessing a constant round of buck-passing.

For instance, in the recent rows over school discipline, the government, parents and teachers have all accused each other of causing the problem. With nobody willing to take responsibility for sorting things out,

the blame for the crisis in the schools system has been passed down the line until it finally ends up pinned to those at the bottom—naughty schoolchildren. The search for scapegoats has produced some other bizarre results of late, notably when *Daily Express* columnist Mary Kenny blamed the demise of 'family values and moral ideals' on 'the influence of Dear Marj', the late newspaper agony aunt.

The refusal to assume responsibility in society today is reinforcing a sense of people as passive, vulnerable individuals, more or less impotent and incapable of taking control of affairs. We are left with a degraded sense of humanity as the victim of circumstances, threatened by mysterious forces of 'evil', and only moved by the experience of suffering and mourning. Any sense of an active human subject, potentially capable of making history and changing the way the world is organised, is lost in this diminished view of people as the passive victims and voyeurs of an out of control society.

This crisis of authority and responsibility presents a serious problem for those of us who are concerned to try to alter things for the better. Without a sense that it is possible for people to take control of their destiny, to stand up for themselves and their principles, there can be little prospect of change. That is why our magazine, and our *Manifesto for a World Fit for People* (see back cover), focus on contesting the messages broadcast by the moral crusaders and the cult of the victim, as the prerequisite for setting a new agenda for human liberation.

The moral of the story is that a society in the grip of modern superstitions and fears will never be free.

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@junius.co.uk

Unequal measure

Claire Fox ('Degrading education', November) forgets that whilst we may all be equal simply because we are human (and that is simplistic!), we are certainly not equal in capitalist society. She states that 'the modern examination system represented an important step forward for equality, precisely because it enshrined the notion that everybody could be compared equally'. In reality it was an equal assessment of unequal sets of circumstances.

There is much historical evidence to show that working class and middle class students are not alike in terms of good examination results—many more working class students have failed examinations or achieved lower grades. To measure their real achievements equally is a lot more complex than simply checking to see if they got the same answers to a set of questions.

Secondly, setting standards of excellence may make students strive harder to achieve them, but those likely to fail to meet the standard will be working class, and are already second class in capitalist society without the additional label of educational failure being thrust on them. Whilst I agree that standards should not be lowered to pacify the feelings of working class students, other more complex measures are required.

Finally, to describe putting 'people under pressure' as creative, sounds like a quote from a management handbook! Whilst we all need a certain amount of pressure to perform, it is medically proven that too much pressure can have the opposite effect and make people fail.

Jane Turner *Liverpool*

Vital statistics

I found Jennie Bristow's article ('Bingeing on anorexia', October) offensive. Bristow claims that '100 deaths out of 7.5m people aged 15-25 in Britain is not a significant trend'. What she fails to appreciate is that these '100 deaths' are just the tip of an iceberg. One per cent of 18-35 year olds are suffering from this tragic illness, and 10-12 per cent of women in the age group 18-35 suffer from bulimia, anorexia's sister eating disorder. Sadly, these figures translate into the fact that 'on a college campus of 40 000 students, as many as 2500 women probably have an eating disorder' (*D R Durham*, 1991).

Bristow stated that 'a handful of self-obsessed middle class girls' suffer from anorexia. The statistics quoted above illustrate that more than a 'handful' of girls suffer from eating disorders. There is a growing problem with men suffering

from anorexia, including *elderly* men. A study of eating attitudes in 183 malnourished men over the age of 70 found at least three suffering from an eating disorder (*The Edell Health Letter*, March 1989). This is no longer the 'Golden Girl' syndrome, where only the white, middle and upper classes can afford to suffer.

Bristow also suggests that society does not expect a lot from young people today. I feel that this is an unfair comment. The rise in unemployment, the difficulty of finding full time and permanent work, and the increasingly difficult task of being offered a place at university (let alone the monstrous task of being able to fund your education), all amount to one clear fact, that society expects more than ever of our younger generations.

Sarah Barker *Bristol*

While reading the article 'Model behaviour' (October), I got the feeling that Kate Simmonds is deluded into thinking that being a skinny model makes her special. Her article would have been more appropriately titled 'Don't hate me because I'm beautiful'. Well, tell Kate not to worry, she is not to blame for anorexia. A society that values the current trend in physical beauty more than the combination of physical, mental and spiritual health, is the real problem. (Companies, along with some models, that believe consumers are so easily duped by advertising that they will not buy clothes unless they are modelled by emaciated waifs, do not help the problem but they are not the root of it.)

I am not 'having a go' at Kate for making me 'feel inadequate and unattractive'. I am 'having a go' at her because she is shallow and conceited.

Pat Myass *McMinnville, Oregon, USA*

Animal rights and wrongs

The article by Jennifer Cunningham ('Planet of the apes?', June) may leave your readers a little unclear about my position regarding the rights of 'Great Apes'.

She writes, for example, of my views on 'primates', although she then refers to the *Declaration on Great Apes*. But the *Declaration on Great Apes* says nothing about 'primates' as a group, nor about monkeys or even about apes. It deals exclusively with 'great apes', that is, with a specific category, recognised by zoologists, which consists of chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans. It does not include other apes like gibbons; nor monkeys like baboons; still less primates, a category that includes prosimians such as lemurs.

Why are these distinctions important? On the one hand the crucial capacity that brings any

being into the sphere of ethical significance is the capacity for sentience, that is, for example, the ability to feel pain or to suffer. Once a being can suffer, it has interests that ought to be taken into account and given equal consideration with the similar interests of any other being. Anything less is simply speciesism, that is, our own species giving more importance to the interests of members of our species, just because they are members of our species. It should not be too hard to see that this is very similar, in both its logic and its morality, to the most blatant and undisguised form of racism, in which one racial group gives a privileged status to members of its own race.

From this point of view, there is nothing special about the category of beings we call 'primates'. Certainly they can feel pain, and can suffer, they have a complex family life and so on, but the same is true of many other animals, including wolves, pigs and even rats. There is no reason for giving more protection to, say, lemurs, than we give to pigs.

On the other hand, while we should give equal consideration to the interests of all beings who have interests, we need to ask what interests different beings may have. I would argue that what is relevant to a being's right to life, for example, is not the species to which the being belongs, but whether the being has to any degree an interest in continuing to live. Among the signs of such an interest might be precisely some of the things that Jennifer Cunningham claims distinguish humans from other animals, when she writes of 'our capacity for conscious thought, voluntary control of our behaviour and our ability to learn and advance'. But the problem for Dr Cunningham's view that these differences make a 'gulf' between humans and apes that is 'unbridgeable' is that there is ample evidence that chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans can do all of these things. I will not go into this evidence here because it is given in great detail by people more expert than me—for example, Jane Goodall—in the book edited by Paola Cavalieri and myself, *The Great Ape Project*. I could also mention that it is obvious that not all humans can do these things—but that leads to a different problem that Dr Cunningham appears not to notice. It might, of course, be rather awkward for her if she does, because then the problem she poses at the end of her article, 'animal rights or Aids', could equally well be put as a choice between fighting Aids or the rights of, for example, anencephalic humans, who will certainly never plan their actions or consciously control their lives.

Readers interested in more information about the Great Ape Project may wish to check

the home page for Gap International on <http://www.envirolink.org/orgs/gap/gaphome.html>
Peter Singer Monash University, Australia

So farewell then...

After many years as *Living Marxism* reader I have decided to cancel my subscription, and not without regret. Over the years, *Living Marxism* has included some excellent coverage of world events from a provocative, relevant and Marxian perspective.

Recently such contributions have declined markedly. *Living Marxism* has become predominantly concerned with lifestyle issues, commenting on the increasingly authoritarian society in which we live. The mushrooming of moral codes and prescriptions, from right and left, is undoubtedly a noteworthy recent development. However, in championing individual liberties against the state, without reference to the lack of challenge to dominant ideologies and the weakness of 'the left', *Living Marxism* loses the power of Marxist criticism and pleads in a hysterical manner for 'bourgeois liberty', as Marx would have termed it.

Civil society and 'politics' do reflect events in society. However, such debates are often very distant from the everyday experience of many people who must deal with attacks on public spending which result in real hardship. Both elements are important, but it appears to me that *Living Marxism* has rejected the latter to concentrate wholly on the former.

Marx's vision is not new. What we require is a viable Marxist politics to make it real. The 1980s saw Stalinism rejected, the 1990s have seen social democracy dumped. There is a golden opportunity for a rejuvenated Marxism. *Living Marxism's* lifestyle politics are not the answer.

Dave Richards

HIV and Aids

In his article about the objections by Peter Duesberg and Neville Hodgkinson to the orthodox dogma around HIV-Aids ('The HIV-Aids heretics', November), Stuart Derbyshire makes some claims which despite his apparent good intentions, are some examples of political correctness in the guise of science.

Continuum magazine published last month a scientific paper by Eleopolos *et al*, whose work has previously been seen in *Bio/technology*, the *Lancet* etc, demonstrating a thoroughly researched and profound argument that HIV has never been isolated. It has become ideologically fashionable to speak of HIV as a reality, while this has never been proved. Yet Derbyshire says of the disastrous theory that HIV causes Aids, 'there is proof....Further papers published since have established a causal role for HIV beyond reasonable doubt'. How can this possibly be so, when the 'virus' itself remains elusive?

Far from having 'lost the thread altogether', Hodgkinson has elucidated in his excellent book such a nexus of self-interested scientific self-deception that it is evident even someone of Derbyshire's experience balks at its meaning. For a year now a prize of £1000 has been offered to anyone finding in all the literature on HIV-Aids a single paper proving isolation of HIV. The money remains unclaimed. It is absurd in this context that Derbyshire suggests 'that HIV has a pathogenic role in the development of Aids can no longer be reasonably questioned'. *Cui bono?*

Further failure to question the relationship of 'HIV' to Aids would not only be unreasonable, but abusive of basic human rights. Some few people, such as Hodgkinson, Duesberg and Eleopolos have found the intellectual rigour to step outside the medico-industrial loop and ask the life-saving questions that are enabling thousands of people to regain their futures.

**Huw Christie MA (Oxon),
editor *Continuum*, London**

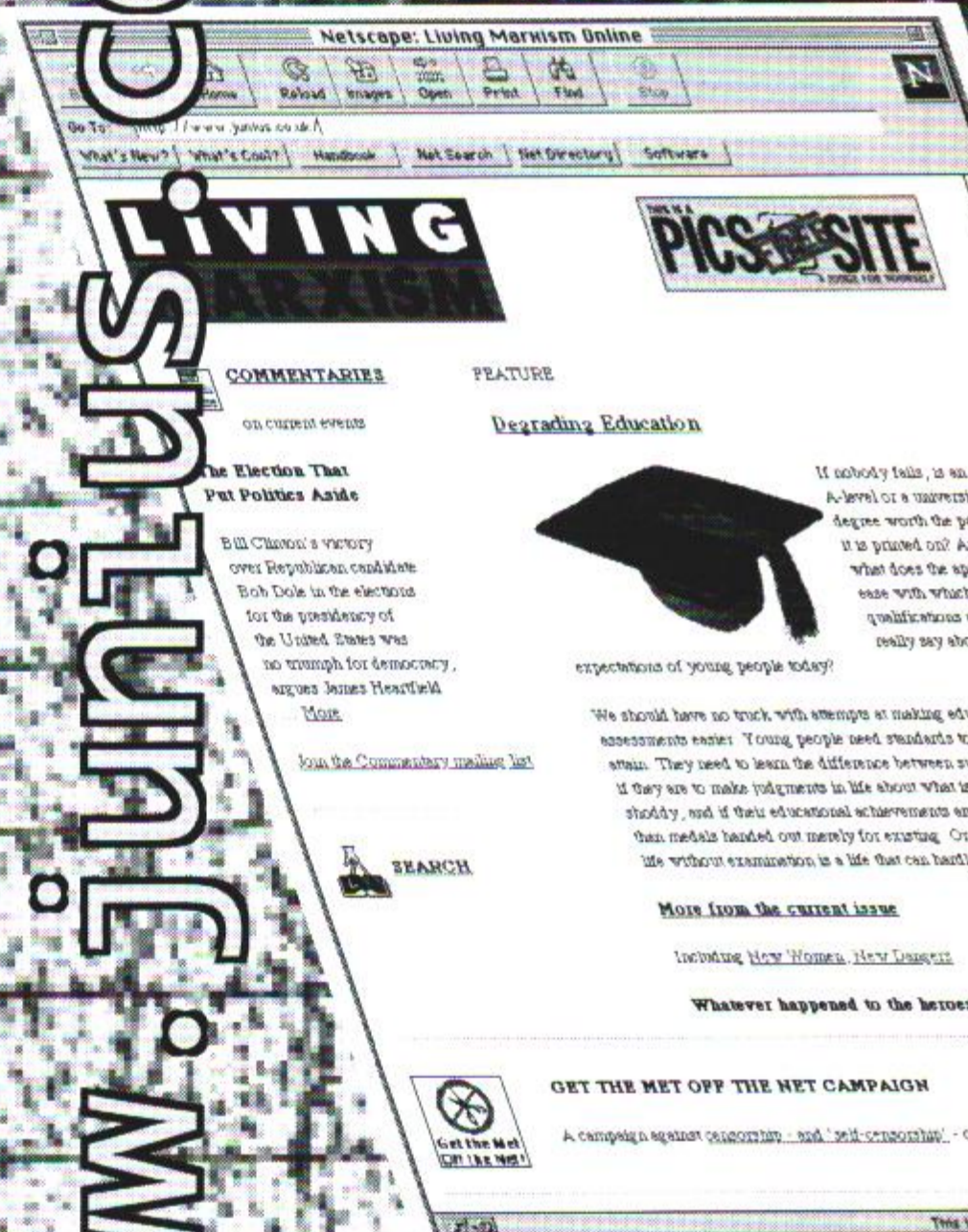
Green shit?

Austin Williams (letters, October) fails to comprehend that being more ecologically aware leads to better use of resources. That means *more*, not *less*. He may object to shitting in a bucket, but hasn't he heard of compost toilets? How does he feel about the fact that his shit probably ends up in the sea, making swimmers and surfers ill. What is he doing about this? It would be ideal if we could use any toilet in the knowledge that shit would be processed properly and then used as fertiliser, but that is not the case yet.

Katharine A Gilchrist, Canterbury

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Who needs parent education?

Domestic privacy could soon be a privilege you earn by proving to the authorities that you are fit to be a parent, warns Wendy Earle

'I blame the parents' seems to be the sermon of the month. Every problem from disruption in the classroom to violence on the street has recently been attributed to bad parents who fail to discipline their children. Then, when the National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse published its report *Childhood Matters* in October, the criticism turned against parents who treat their children too harshly. Sara Maitland's response, that people should 'stop minding their own business' and start interfering to prevent parents abusing their children, was typical of the way in which liberal thinkers tend to see the issue of parenting today (*Independent*, 24 October 1996).

The common view is that parents need to be better educated to raise their children. Bringing up children is no longer seen as something you stumble into and learn as you go along, but as something that requires professional training. Shadow home secretary Jack Straw has pledged that a Labour government will put parent education at the top of the agenda.

For many commentators of all political persuasions, the changes in patterns of family life—growing numbers of one-parent and step-families, births outside marriage, working mothers and unemployed

fathers—mean that parenting can no longer be taken for granted. The difficulties are said to be exacerbated by the disappearance of traditional support networks, the exposure of children to television, violent films, drugs etc, and the erosion of old certainties about right and wrong. The fact that the vast majority of children now have better food, more toys, sources of entertainment and stimulation, and more money spent on them than ever before is forgotten as attention focuses on the apparent problem of parents who do not know how to raise their children (see 'The problem of parenting', *Living Marxism*, June 1996).

The widespread assumption today is that many people lack basic parenting skills, and that this supposed failure of parenting is responsible for anti-social behaviour among young people. This view has been endorsed by several prestigious reports over the past few years—the Home Affairs Committee report *Juvenile Offenders* (1993), the Family Policy Studies Centre report, *Crime and the Family* (1993), the Children and Violence Commission report (1995), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report *Family and Parenthood* (1995) and, most recently, the *Childhood Matters* report (October 1996).

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

TABOOS

A cry to us all to stop and think again about how we treat children...



NSPCC
A cry for children

Anna Coote of the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), reflecting an increasingly common point of view, argues that 'Parenting is...a direct channel by which economic and environmental factors—poverty and disadvantage—influence young children's behaviour.' (A Coote (ed), *Families, Children and Crime*, 1994) It is striking that a socialist-feminist like Coote, who in the past believed that the causes of crime lay in social conditions such as poverty, unemployment and bad housing, now blames parenting as readily as any Tory ideologue. Poverty is now seen as a problem, not so much in its own terms, but merely as an influence on the all-important question of how parents behave.

The 'cycle of violence' has become a widely accepted explanation for anti-social behaviour. It implies that the way children are treated by their parents is the main determinant of criminal and violent tendencies when they grow up. The assumption is that today's neglected or abused children will become tomorrow's neglecters and abusers. In fact none of the reports cited above can prove this point. The evidence of research done over the past 50 years suggests that childhood experiences do not determine adult

Judging by their poster campaign, the NSPCC has a low opinion of parents

conduct. Few of those who suffer a bad childhood turn into psychopaths, and the vast majority of children who are abused do not grow up to be abusers. Only a tiny minority of children who have neglectful, violent or criminal parents grow up to be neglectful, violent or criminal themselves.

It is an indication of how desperate professionals and politicians are to find an easy target that parents have been made the scapegoats for social problems over which they actually have no control. Despite the fact that the 'cycle of violence' is untenable as a theory of criminality, the view is becoming widespread that all children are potentially at risk of experiences at the hands of their parents that could turn them into human timebombs.

By defining abuse so broadly as to include shouting at your child in the supermarket, the report *Childhood Matters* was able to claim that 'the number of children in harmful or potentially harmful situations is large'—perhaps as many as a million in the UK alone'. This was the premise behind the launch in May of the NSPCC's campaign 'A cry for children'. It targets parents' behaviour as the main risk children face with this melodramatic appeal:

•A cry for us all to stop and think again about how we treat children.

- A cry for us to understand how our behaviour can harm children.
- A cry to change our behaviour and change the future for children.'

In other words, parents must constantly scrutinise and analyse their conduct (and that of other adults) to ensure that they are not putting the children at risk.

Who is this supposed to benefit? Promoting the idea that parents' everyday behaviour could easily constitute abuse and trigger criminal or psychopathic behaviour in their children can only serve to undermine the possibility of a positive parent-child relationship.

Parents who become afraid of the potential negative consequences of what they do to their children will find themselves constantly jumping at their own shadows. The problem with worrying is that it can become a way of life—and a very uneasy one at that. If you let your children out of your sight they might have an unpleasant experience with a man in a dirty raincoat; if you smack or shout at your child he may become aggressive; if you do not discipline your child she may become irresponsible; if your child starts fighting with other children you will have to delve into his and your sub-conscious to find out why. This attitude can have a paralysing ►

effect on both parents and children, as they become trapped by the obsession with avoiding any behaviour that might have unforeseeable future consequences.

In case parents do not heed the dire warnings urged on them by organisations such as the NSPCC, there are demands for more intervention in parenting to make sure they fall into

Campion recommends that good parents should be licensed—like doctors and social workers

line. The campaign to institutionalise parent education is well under way.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) has launched the Parenting Forum and demanded that the government adopt a national policy for parenting education. Voluntary organisations such as Exploring Parenthood, Parent Network and Newpin have been running parenting classes for several years, which are now being promoted as models for the future. Parenting classes have been introduced to help young fathers in detention centres learn 'good' child-raising practices; some nursery and primary schools are starting to offer their parents classes in parenthood; and some schools are providing parent education for children as part of the Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum, particularly encouraging boys to attend, so young people can learn about the responsibilities of parenting before they start. The *Childhood Matters* report, endorsing the campaign for parent education, recommends a co-ordinated country-wide effort 'to establish effective, non-stigmatised parent education'.

People who call for parent education always adopt a sympathetic tone and plead that they want to help parents with a difficult and demanding job. At an NCB conference on parent education in April, one delegate suggested that 'parenting programmes are about helping parents to cope with the normal ups and downs experienced in parenting' (quoted in *Health Visitor*, June 1996). But parents and their children seem to have survived 'the normal ups and downs of parenting' until now—so why is parent education suddenly so necessary?

In fact it is not really the 'normal ups and downs' that these people are worried about. They want to identify the parents who shout at and smack their children on a regular basis, because they think

these are the parents who create teenagers who take drugs and break the law. A particular style of parenting, informed by psychological 'insights' and popular with middle class professionals, is being promoted as the only way to bring up well-adjusted children.

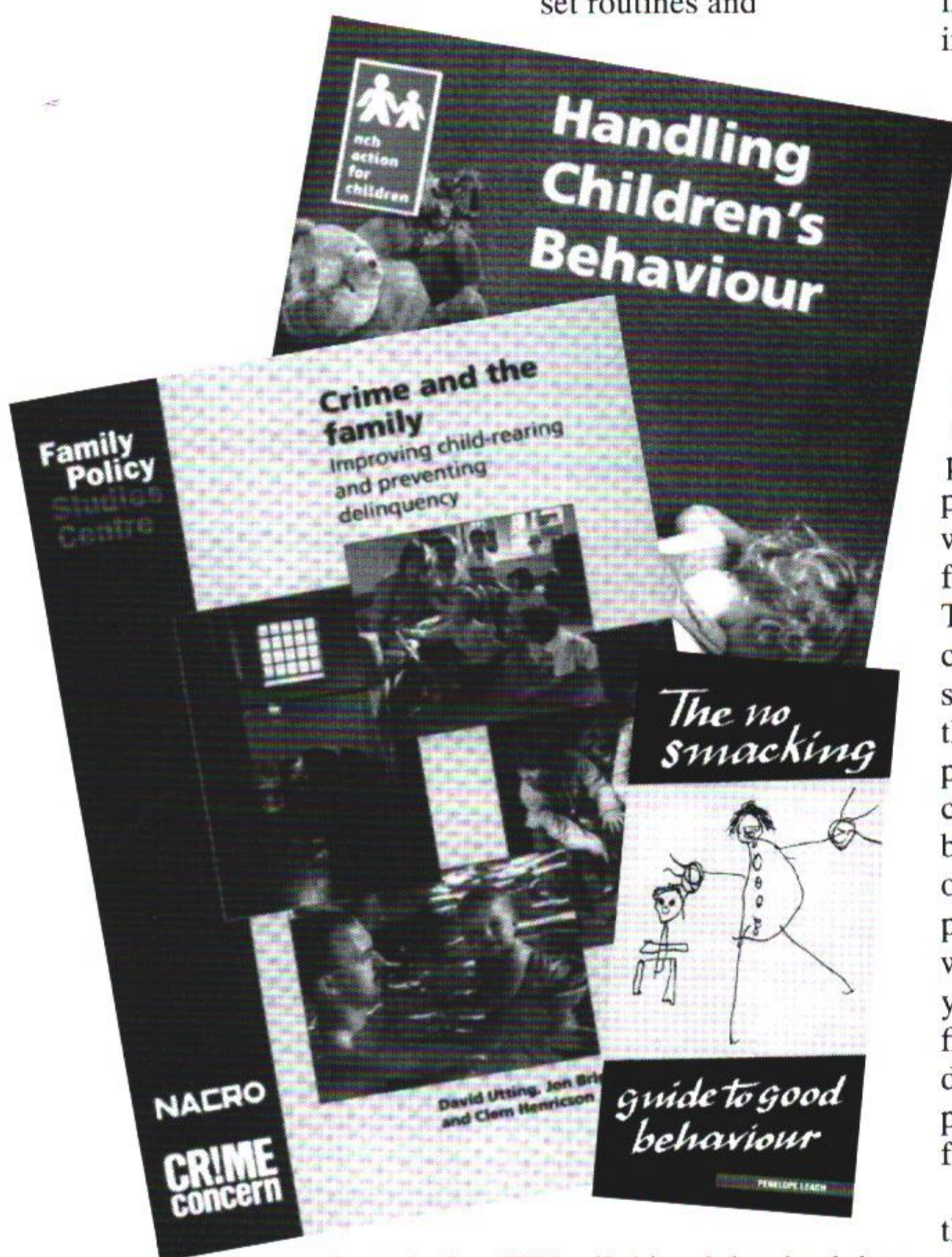
Advocates of parent education claim that it will help parents 'to understand their own social, emotional, psychological and physical needs and those of their children and enhance the relationship between them.' (Cynthia Pugh *et al*, *Confident Parents, Confident Children*, 1994). But telling parents that they need the help of professionals to bring up their children can only enhance feelings of inadequacy. The NSPCC pamphlet *Behave Yourself* prescribes 'ten steps to better parenting', a daunting list of dos and don'ts: don't smack, be positive, don't punish too much, don't reward too much, encourage your child, show respect, set routines and

Campion recommends that parenting should be analysed as if it were a job like being a social worker or teacher, and suggests that the parenting-as-a-job framework might also be a sounder basis for refusing people the option of, or continued involvement in, the parenting role. She argues that licensing parents (as the state currently licenses doctors and social workers, for example, after they have been trained) would ensure the protection of children against incompetent or abusive parenting. As she recognises, the licensing of parents may seem far-fetched now but it could gain currency given the growing interest in regulating parental conduct.

Campion elaborates the view that parenting must be professionalised in order to make parents accountable to the state. For its part, the state must take responsibility for ensuring that prospective parents know what the job involves: 'Parents fulfil a role in society in producing its future workers and as such they act as employees of the state and managers in relationship to the children.'

The state has always been concerned to maintain the family as an institution which helps it to retain social control, and ensures that the next generation is raised to conform to society's norms. However, it has primarily done this through the promotion of traditional family values while leaving the inner workings of family life more or less untouched. Today's parenting 'experts' are less concerned with traditional family structures, but want to insinuate themselves into every corner of people's private lives. As far as they are concerned, parents should no longer be trusted to make decisions about their own and their children's lives. If these people get their way domestic privacy will no longer be a right, but a privilege you earn if you can prove that you are fit to be a parent. Jack Straw is already drawing up plans for New Labour's professional snoopers to pry into families' dirty washing.

The trend towards snooping into the relationship between parents and children is profoundly harmful. It separates children from the adults who are most likely to put their interests first, and sets up a higher authority to which both parents and children are bound. In undermining the autonomy of parents—their right to make decisions about the way they bring up their children—the new ethos of professionalised parenting also limits the potential for children's autonomous development, since it paves the way for intervention at every stage and in every aspect of a child's life. The best thing that could happen to children is for their parents to skive off classes.



boundaries. With all this advice (and the NSPCC urges that this pamphlet is given out to parents by health visitors and GPs) it is hardly surprising that many parents doubt their abilities to cope with childcare. Parenting now appears to be a narrow path through uncertain terrain with dangerous pitfalls on either side.

The implication of the increasingly prescriptive approach to what makes a good parent is that, if you do not practise the parenting skills prescribed by the experts, you may not be fit to have children. This is expressed explicitly by Mukti Jain Campion in her book *Who's Fit to be a Parent?* (1995).



Aids or animals?

Charity-conscious American celebrities are in a bit of a flap. The two favourite Hollywood causes are Aids and animal rights—so what are they to do when confronted with the stark reality that support for animal rights could halt vital Aids research?

In what is seen as an attempt by the pharmaceutical companies and research institutions to fight back against an increasingly irrational animal rights lobby, patient groups and scientists have started a persuasive counter lobby. Earlier this year, Aids campaigners joined defenders of animal research for the first time in public to question celebrity support for animal rights groups. Aids activists also disrupted a massive animal rights demonstration in Washington DC by co-ordinating sit-down protests.

A statement supporting the humane treatment of animals while highlighting their importance in medical research has been signed by more than 30 leading Aids organisations in the USA. It says: 'Animal research is essential to progress in the study, treatment and prevention of HIV-Aids including the development of new approaches that may ultimately lead to a cure.'

At a high profile press launch of the statement, Michael Shriver, director of public policy for the National Association of People with Aids, argued that 'We cannot afford to set HIV-Aids research back another 10 years by shutting down one of the most important avenues to curing this deadly disease'. Strong stuff.

And they have been getting personal. The Foundation for Biomedical Research ran a very stylish advert showing a pair of scissors slicing into an Aids red ribbon with the caption: 'What you're doing by supporting animal rights.' It quoted the director of the animal rights group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, apparently arguing that even if animal research led to a cure for Aids she would still 'be against it'. The poster copy ends with the question: 'with millions of lives at stake worldwide, which side would you be on?'

Another lobby group, Americans for Medical Progress, ran an advertisement questioning where actor Alec Baldwin stood. AMP claims that they have converted Sharon Stone.

And good luck to them. I am all in favour of putting these sentimental, irrational liberals, for whom the rights of hamsters match the rights of humans, on the spot.

Anybody who is poised to write, fax or e-mail to tell me that the Foundation for Biomedical Research and Americans for Medical

Progress are pharmaceutical industry 'fronts' can save themselves the time, expense and effort. I am sure they are, and I do not give a damn. Anybody who raises a flag for rational thought and scientific progress in these dark times gets my support. If the drug corporations are the only ones arguing in support of medical progress, that's our problem—we should have been there already.

I only hope we see something of the same vigorous defence of research in the UK, where I have noticed the animal rights lobby have shifted their attention from veal calves to the use of primates in medical research. They are very keen to show us cutsie pictures of monkeys doing people-like things, to let the 'ahhh' factor come into play. But

before sentimentality takes over, it is worth remembering that it is precisely because of their biological similarity to you and me that primates can have particular value in research.

Scientists (no doubt put up by industry) who wish to defend animal research when it is needed have put together an impressive dossier of research which has undeniably benefited humanity. To list but a few examples: The first vaccines to protect against hepatitis B depended on research with primates, because they were the only species to which the

disease could be transmitted. *In vitro* fertilisation techniques were extensively studied in apes, enabling them to be developed as a safe way of solving fertility problems in humans. And many of the successful intensive care regimes which save the lives of very premature babies were originally developed and tested on small monkeys.

Some non-human primates suffer from a form of atherosclerosis—a condition where the blood vessels get clogged up—which kills more than a million people each year in Europe and America. This is bad news for the animals, but good news for people. It means that doctors can study the disease in them, to see how the disease progresses in us. Work with primates is also under way to increase our understanding of Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease and memory disorders.

I am as sentimental as the next person about animals—probably even more so. I belong to a particularly wet breed of person who will not order lobster in a restaurant because sometimes they bring it still alive for the table's approval, before dropping it into scalding water. I am the thirty-something woman who cried when her gerbil died.

But when it comes to research that could prevent human suffering, there is little I would not tolerate. The American Aids lobby have got it right on this issue. It is time to put people first. ●

Let's put those sentimental liberals on the spot

A nation of saints and sinners

Frank Furedi asks why the private grief of the Dunblane parents and Frances Lawrence has been turned into a public institution

There was a time when political debates were about the clash between different policies and programmes, a confrontation of competing ideologies. Election campaigns provided an opportunity for parties to promote their distinctive visions of the future. At times, even the big ideas—socialism versus capitalism, planning versus the free market—got a hearing. But those days are long gone.

Now political parties in Britain vie with each other to show who is going to ban more instruments and weapons; hand guns, knives, who knows what next? A general election campaign that seems set to be dominated by paedophiles, stalkers and miscreant school children is itself a statement about the exhaustion of British political life.

The clearest expression of the exhaustion of politics is the speed with which all parties have sought to wrap themselves in the cloak of morality. Unable to sustain a political drama, public life in Britain has been transformed into a morality play. Politicians seem to draw inspiration not from any powerful vision of the future, but from the intensity of the suffering on display. That is why the most vibrant and respected players in the pre-election campaign so far are the parents of the Dunblane victims and Mrs Frances Lawrence, widow of a murdered headmaster.

The tragic killing of 16 children and their teacher in Dunblane has been

converted into a much sought after political currency. By encouraging the expressions of national grief, politicians have been able to give themselves an air of humanity sorely lacking in their profession. A discredited political class managed to use Dunblane to create a temporary impression of being closer to the people, by calling for the nation to unite in the face of tragedy.

It is significant to note that many Labour activists who reminisce about their autumn party conference, point to the platform address of a Dunblane parent as the high point. Many commentators also contrasted Tony Blair's astute grasp of the moment to John Major's failure of imagination, on the grounds that the Tories did not use their conference to cash in fully on the Dunblane effect. But the subsequent scramble by the parties to claim the title of the most effective banner of hand guns indicated that all sides of parliament were taking their cue from the same source.

Come together

And before you could say Dunblane fatigue, along came Mrs Frances Lawrence with her manifesto for the moral renewal of Britain through the schools. The speed with which this initiative was transformed into a national crusade, and the unanimity with which it was praised, was truly astounding. Overnight, Mrs Lawrence's manifesto became the sole point of reference for

political discussion. Labour seized the moment to place the call for a ban on combat knives at the centre of its agenda. In response, government ministers who have understandably never had a thought on the subject swiftly fell into line, and professed their heartfelt anguish about the evil of big knives with serrated edges.

There is something sad, even depraved, about a political culture that draws its inspiration from suffering. Britain has become a society which can no longer generate enthusiasm about its plans for the future. This is a culture bereft of ideas and objectives that could stir the heart and move people to action. The absence of common goals is palpable. That is why society has found it increasingly difficult to evolve an appropriate standard by which to judge what is right and what is wrong today. Unable to agree upon a positive system of values, British culture has found temporary refuge in the celebration of tragedies. So when Matthew Harding died in a helicopter accident, a public ritual of remembrance, transmitted through the media, transformed the death of a Chelsea football club vice-chairman into the focus of a national expression of solidarity.

Tragic events and suffering have taken on a new significance because the reaction to them provides a unique opportunity for society to come together—or at least to seem to come together. Many commentators



Matthew Harding's memorial at Stamford Bridge: The latest tragedy to become a focus for national solidarity

in the media have seen fit to boast that Britain can still consider itself a caring country because we all reacted with horror to the Dunblane tragedy. It is through the public reaction to tragedies—much of it carefully cultivated from the top—that society is striving to compensate for its intellectual exhaustion. There is something truly mawkish about the way that tragic deaths are routinely milked to the last drop, to remind the world about how deeply a community is effected. It seems that every loss of life has to be transformed into yet another statement about how virtuous we are because we care.

Banal manifesto

The tendency to ritualise tragedies is of course not new. After all, that is why we have ceremonies at funerals and special ways of mourning. What is new is the manner in which those who suffer are now routinely transformed into saints or oracles of wisdom.

It is as if the act of suffering provides special insights which entitle victims to speak with the voice of truth. Society seems desperate to invest high-profile sufferers with unquestioned authority. The media treated the Dunblane parents with unheard-of reverence. It was enough for a television commentator to state what 'this was not the view of the Dunblane parents' in order to silence an aspiring politician. Nobody questioned the right of this group

of parents to pronounce on what should be done about gun control or education. It appears that authority based on suffering does not have to be held to account. The beleaguered British establishment seemed pleased that here at least was a group of people who had some moral authority to speak out about right and wrong.

Probably the most grotesque manifestation of the British cult of victimhood was the speed with which Mrs Lawrence was transformed into a figure of reverence. Nobody pointed out that her homespun manifesto consisted of the usual banal moralising that we have come to expect from politicians bereft of ideas. Even those who are usually critical of the cheap moralising that afflicts British political life felt they had to pay their respect to the 'remarkable' document waved by a bereaved woman. Predictably, nobody enquired why the loss of a husband entitled Mrs Lawrence to issue manifestos to the nation. By definition, as somebody who had suffered grievously, she was now deemed to possess saintly qualities worthy of our attention and respect.

The elevation of suffering has helped to transform the character of public debate. Attention has been refocused away from political programmes, and towards moral concerns about good and evil, right and wrong. Politicians no longer make speeches, they give sermons. The effect of this has been to shift discussion further away from the

broader problems of society, onto an examination of the shortcomings of individual morality and personal behaviour.

Everyone seems to be agreed that Britain has experienced a major moral decline. But this gloomy consensus about Britain's moral decline is only superficially critical of the present state of affairs. The focus on personal morality actually obscures the British elite's failure of nerve about the future. In a world of moral decline, everybody is equally to blame. We are all sinners. The sphere of morality does not recognise relations of power, does not differentiate between those who have the clout to decide what happens and those who do not. That is why the moral crusade can target some of the most powerless and marginal figures in society, such as ill-behaved schoolchildren.

Therapy as politics

Once we accept the vision of moral decline and the view that we are all sinners, it means that nobody is really to blame. In this sense Mrs Lawrence's manifesto is the ultimate cop-out, which explains its appeal to Britain's political class. Everybody can agree that Britain has lost its way and that society needs to revive its standards of morality. But since morality is about individual conduct, values and norms, responsibility for the problem is diffuse and unclear. And that is good news for inept politicians and for all of those with their hands on the levers of power, fearful of being held to account for their failures.

One final point. Every civilised society mourns those who have died and seeks to support those who have suffered. Civilised societies also recognise that those directly afflicted by a tragic loss are entitled to grieve in their own way. From this standpoint, the actions of the Dunblane parents or of Mrs Lawrence are entirely understandable. It is the transformation of their private suffering into a public institution that is unworthy of a forward looking society. When the therapy of those who suffer is converted into political currency, empty moralising replaces real debate.

The celebration of suffering is ultimately about the worship of passivity. It invests authority in those who have had something done to them rather than those who have struggled to make something of themselves. This process is justified by appeals to our common humanity. From the pro-human point of view, however, the aim should surely be not to elevate the suffering of high profile victims, but to fight against the conditions which cause people to suffer across society.

Who's afraid of s

The teachers' campaign to exclude disruptive pupils suggests that it is scapegoating that is getting out of control, says Claire Fox

First we were told that one in 10 pupils at the Ridings school in Halifax was 'unteachable'. Then events escalated and the school was closed by Calderdale council after an alleged 'near riot'. This is extreme stuff—the first shutdown of its kind for 20 years. It makes me suspicious. I mean, what do they feed these children in Yorkshire?

What exactly did the Ridings pupils do that made their teachers throw up their hands and demand mass expulsions, and forced head-teacher Karen Stansfield to resign 'exhausted'? The issue began in March when 13-year old Sarah Taylor was accused of aggressive behaviour towards a teacher after a fight with her boyfriend. Sarah was expelled, but this was overturned on appeal; teachers called in their union, the NASUWT, and the discipline crisis in the school quickly made the national media.

It subsequently emerged that Sarah was concealing a pregnancy (she gave birth to a 7lb girl in October). Presumably disturbed and upset with her boyfriend—a fellow student—she behaved badly in class. Why were her teachers so keen to kick her out rather than investigating the reasons for her behaviour?

Evidence of more general 'unteachability' also seems dubious. Ian Murch, a NUT Executive member, claims that 'before the media circus arrived', NUT members at the Ridings 'did not feel physically threatened' (*Guardian*, letters, 2 November 1996). The assaults which finally led to the school being closed involved a 14-year old girl slamming a door in the face of a computer teacher, and a 14-year old boy who tried to fondle a French supply-teacher's breast. Neither experience could be called novel for teachers—they are bread and butter occupational hazards, and hardly merit the banner *Daily Telegraph* headlines declaring 'anarchy' at the Ridings.

Dr Carl Parsons of Kent University reports that 13 400 pupils were ejected from British schools during the past academic year—up from around 3000 five years ago. This is often cited as evidence of more disruptive pupils. However, in reality it indicates that schools are more trigger happy in kicking out perceived troublemakers. The pressure of league tables and the need to compete for resources, mean that schools are keen to rid themselves of the less able or more awkward. Of course this only exacerbates the problem. At least 20 of the disruptive pupils at the Ridings had been excluded from other schools.

NASUWT president Nigel de Gruchy feels the numbers excluded are still not enough,



PHOTO: PRESS ASSOCIATION

school children?

claiming 150 000 a year would be a more realistic target. His philosophy is summed up in the remark that he would, 'rather see them on the streets wrecking cars than in the classroom wrecking lessons' (*Independent on Sunday*, 27 October 1996). This 'not in my classroom' attitude provides a clue to what is really behind the focus on classroom discipline. Teachers who feel under siege and hard done by are keen to shift responsibility for problems onto somebody else: lax parents, disruptive pupils, the police, anybody.

Teaching is a demoralised profession. There is likely to be a shortfall of 20 000 teachers within five years, due to the lack of graduates entering the profession. Who can blame people for steering clear of a job with so little glamour and such bad publicity? Teachers are quitting in droves. Fewer than one in five now work to retirement age; of the 23 532 teachers who left the profession last year, only 4497 were aged 60 or over and 6000 retired on medical grounds, mostly complaining of stress.

Many who remain are bitter after years of being dumped on by the government for the failures of education. The recent strikes over discipline appear to be a way of turning the tables. Sick of being blamed for the problems of today's youth, teachers see a way of passing the buck to pupils and their parents. Nigel de Gruchy leads the profession's sneering at 'an emerging second generation of violent disrupters whose parents are at the root of the problem' (*Guardian Education*, 15 October 1996).

Such sentiments have been keenly picked up by New Labour, and Shadow education secretary David Blunkett has proposed intrusive home-school contracts. Tory minister Gillian Shepherd has now put them at the centre of her Education Bill, allowing schools to refuse to teach children whose parents do not sign. These contracts will only exacerbate the stand-off between parents and teachers, eyeing each other suspiciously over the heads of their misbehaving children. As Mhemooda Malek of the National Children's Bureau points out, "'Trust' is one of the words which seems to be missing in the debate on home-school contracts: the emphasis, intentionally or not, is on constraint" (*Times Educational Supplement*, 25 October 1996).

The issue of discipline is also becoming a way for teachers to avoid blame for poor educational performance. Under pressure to get good exam results, too often teachers cry 'poor behaviour' rather than tackle the educational crisis. Take the Ridings. The children may well have cause to riot when you look at their prospects. Only seven per cent of students have

The Unteachables?

Deputy prime minister Michael Heseltine was described by a study monitor at Shrewsbury School as 'rebellious, objectionable, idle, imbecilic, inefficient, antagonising, untidy, lunatic, albino, conceited, inflated, impertinent, underhand, lazy and smug'.

Tory Welsh Office minister Gwilym Jones set fire to the headmaster's study at Whitchurch High School, Cardiff.

Labour education spokesman David Blunkett was gated at the Royal Normal College at Rowton Castle, Sheffield, for letting off fireworks and being cheeky.

Shadow home secretary Jack Straw admits to being in a gang that bullied a fellow boarder in the dormitory for being 'different' until the miserable child was forced to quit Brentwood Independent School, Essex.

Persistent rule-flouter Tony Blair was given 'six of the best' by his house master at Fettes College who described him as 'the most difficult boy I ever had to deal with'.

(*Sunday Telegraph*, 3 November 1996)

got GCSE grades A to E this year. In 1995 only one per cent passed their GCSEs.

The reasons for this may be various. According to Karen Stansfield, the school's facilities are 'inadequate to deliver the national curriculum' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1 November 1996). The Ridings' problems are undoubtedly linked to the creaming effects of selection in the area. And yet the strike was against 'unteachable pupils'. Instead of teachers putting their energies into stimulating children's minds, or even fighting for more resources, they have used discipline as the catch-all explanation for the abysmal education on offer. The debate should be about the undoubted disaster the educational sector has become: declining standards, second-rate qualifications, shoddy teaching. Instead it is narrowly about disruptive pupils and dysfunctional parents.

As for behaviour in the classroom, the teaching unions' action is only likely to make things worse. Nothing is more certain to encourage children to misbehave than teachers telling the world they are scared of their 'unteachable' pupils.

Ofsted inspectors reported that, during their two-day emergency visit, the school was getting out of control 'despite their presence' (*Guardian*, 2 November 1996). Any sensible observer would know it was *because* of their presence. Men in suits with clipboards determined to find wildness will have their expectations fulfilled by pupils indulging their celebrity status as The Unteachables. Of course there was a constant supply of youngsters keen to perform for the media cameras, which were

trained inside classrooms from a 40-foot crane outside the school. One local resident said, 'The whole situation has turned into a circus. You can't discipline these kids—they just love the attention too much'. Why wouldn't they? Attention-seeking is part of being a child. But apparently, being a child is now a disciplinary offence—one 11-year old was suspended for talking to reporters when he should have been in assembly.

Pupils will always take advantage of teachers who signal that they cannot cope. If my students know I am ill or feeling sorry for myself, they misbehave. If I were to tell them I did not know how to control them, I would deserve all I got; they would lose respect for me and act accordingly. Children can smell fear and will not hesitate to go for the jugular, as one 14-year old from the Ridings made clear: 'everyone starts mixing it. The teachers don't do much about it. Most of them are scared. Most of the kids tell them to eff off.' (*Guardian*, 23 October 1996)

And what exactly does 'unteachable' mean? Teaching has always involved creative classroom management and an ability to get the most stropy youths to show some respect. Nobody said this was easy. But it used to be a prerequisite for earning your stripes as a teacher to look up to. I am under no illusion that children are misunderstood angels. I too have despaired of my charges. But I think it is about time teachers owned up, and started to accept responsibility for what they should be doing, or at least blamed the real culprits for the crisis in education, rather than scapegoating the easiest of targets. ●

Confessions of a footballer

Stan Bowles dribbled, drank, gambled and scored his way through seventies football without the aid of a therapist. Dominic Standish spoke to his kind of hero

Stan Bowles was my boyhood hero because he was a brilliant footballer, architect of the best Queens Park Rangers side ever. They lost the league championship by one point to Liverpool on the last day of the season in 1976. Although QPR were beaten in the quarter-final of the following year's UEFA Cup, Stan broke the record for the most goals ever scored in the competition at that time with 11 in eight matches.

Many good judges said Stan Bowles ran George Best a close second in terms of ability. Ex-England coach Terry Venables remembers his playing days at QPR with Stan: 'As far as playing alongside players, I think he is one of the finest I have ever known, and I don't say that kind of thing easily.' But Bowles was also compared with Best for other reasons: gambling, drinking, drugs, womanising and going 'missing' for important matches.

In his new autobiography, *The Original Stan the Man*, Bowles recognises that these weaknesses held back his career, particularly with the England team. But he never felt the need to declare himself a reformed character, or to set himself up as a role model, like many 'fallen' footballers seem to do today. In the seventies footballers were criticised for their antics, but they were not expected to set moral standards for the nation. What they did on the pitch seemed more important. How could Stan Bowles get away with turning up 12 minutes before an important match to tell his manager, 'You wouldn't

believe it, that fucking horse just got beat in a photo-finish!?' Answer: Bowles scored two minutes after the game had started.

I was recently reunited with Stan Bowles 10 years after our first meeting, the night before QPR lost the 1986 League Cup final. Neither of us can remember much about that night, nor want to remember much about the match the next day. We had a more memorable talk this time about the differences in football now compared to the 'Stan Bowles' era of 20 years ago.

Head-butt

There is an atmosphere of conformism being imposed on football today that somebody like Stan Bowles would have found hard to cope with: witness the trouble Mark Bosnich got into for his joke 'Nazi salute' at Spurs fans, and the frequent fining of players for gestures to the crowd. 'I think players should be able to have a joke with the crowd', says Stan. 'These days, they seem to think players are trying to cause a riot.'

Stan went further with the crowd than any player would dare today. He conducted supporters' songs after scoring and threw a bucket of water over those who jeered him. At Sunderland in 1973 his antics made the *News at Ten*. QPR travelled to Roker Park on the night Sunderland were displaying the FA Cup they had just won. Stan fancied a bet with one of his mates: 'Here you are, I bet you a tenner that the first time I get the ball I knock that thing clean off the fucking

stand!' Stan had to dribble the ball all the way across to the other side of the pitch in order to knock English football's most famous trophy up into the air. The Sunderland fans went mad and Stan took up the challenge. He scored and then got one of the Sunderland players, Micky Horswill, sent off by pretending Horswill had head-butted him. The referee had to take all the players off for their own protection, and it took 20 minutes to clear the pitch of Stan Bowles-hunters before the game could continue.

Stan is critical too of the way that the rules are being tightened regarding what players can do on the pitch. 'In the old days, there were some referees who would swear back at you if you swore at them, like Jack Taylor and Gordon Hill. I think swearing is an integral part of the game and footballers will always swear, whether you think it is right or wrong.' He can see some advantages for the ball players in the new crackdown on bad tackles—'I got kicked a lot and this would have benefited me.' But he also sees the dangers of official attempts to take the bite out of football. As he writes in his book, 'Football's a man's game; it's not bleeding synchronised swimming! There are far too many bookings, and it's only going to get worse.'

Off the pitch, many players complain that their every movement is splashed all over the media today. There are calls for protection from prying cameras and reporters, especially in what they regard



Reunited:
the author with
Stan Bowles

as their 'private lives'. Stan takes a different view. 'I don't agree with that. You might not want the media, but it is there. You just learn to live with it. I got on very well with the sports media. I had more problems with other journalists.'

Stan was referring to the time he walked out of the England squad's hotel just before a match with arch rivals Scotland, because he was angry at being substituted in the previous game. Instead of joining the England squad, he went to the Greyhound Derby at the old White City stadium. Somebody spotted him and telephoned the *Daily Mirror*. A photographer, Harry Prosser, and a reporter, Mike Ramsbottom, quickly turned up to pester Stan and his friends about why he had walked out on England. But it was Prosser who ended up on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* the next day looking, in Stan's words, 'like he'd been attacked by about eight rottweilers'. His book notes that 'street justice was called for and given'.

There were other times when Stan actively encouraged media interest in his exploits. On tour in Belgium, Bowles and team mate Don Shanks

were beaten up by police after a prank went wrong, and ended up spending

a night in the cells. The pair turned a nice profit on the affair by selling the story to the British press for a couple of grand. Indeed mugging the media proved a good source of revenue for Stan Bowles. He invented a drug story to get £1000 out of the *Daily Star*, and sold a 'scoop' to the *Sunday People* for £500 when he announced his retirement, only to play two days later.

Two contracts

Money was important to Stan because he went through it as quickly as an opposition's defence. Many commentators bemoan the way that football has been turned into a multi-million pound corporate business. Stan has mixed feelings about the massive injection of cash at the top of the game. 'It has definitely improved the Premiership, but I worry about the younger players at smaller clubs getting ignored.' While some have even suggested that players are more cautious today due to the pressure of sponsors, Stan saw them coming. Playing for England, he was initially under contract to wear Gola boots. But when Adidas offered

him more to wear their boots, he decided to take both contracts and wear one of each, with a yellow stripe on one and three white stripes on the other.

Stan Bowles also had less strong sides to his character, especially when it came to gambling. As the old wisecrack went, if only he could have passed a betting shop like he could pass a football....But unlike modern players such as Paul Merson, Tony Adams and Paul Gascoigne, Stan never tried to make a virtue out of weakness or present himself as some kind of martyr to the pressures of the game.

So what does Stan think of the counselling and professional care which weeping footballers receive today? 'It would not work for me. If I wanted to, I could stop myself. I don't need to be told. I'm very suspicious of these kinds of people. It's like you are paying them to put you off doing what you want to do. I think it is down to the individual.' Stan does confess to going to Gamblers Anonymous once. He was told not to hold back his emotions. So he spent the whole session laughing at other peoples' stories.

Frank Worthington, another seventies football legend both on and off the pitch, once summed up Stan Bowles' life: 'Stan has spent all of his money on gambling, booze and birds.' Stan's response was typical: 'Well, at least I didn't waste it.' Nobody can say his life has been boring. And this seems to have been reflected in the initial sales of his autobiography. It was released quietly at the same time as 'King' Kenny Dalglish published his autobiography amid a blaze of publicity. But it was *Stan the Man* that quickly topped the best-sellers list at London's Sportspages bookshop, and I strongly recommend it whether you like football or not.

Although Stan Bowles had many problems, as I left the pub where we had been talking I could not help wondering whether he might make a better role model than those footballers in the limelight today. But then I realised that I had drunk too much to drive home. Stanley, that's another fine mess you've got me into.

The Original Stan the Man: The Autobiography by Stanley Bowles is published by Paper Plane Publishing Ltd at £12.99.

Stressed out

It's official: Half of all students are going bonkers. 'Student mental health', a paper given by psychology lecturer Evelyn Monk at a conference on student well-being in September, hit the headlines with its assertion that more than half of students are suffering levels of stress equivalent to those of psychiatric out-patients. Having studied 210 students at three Scottish universities, Monk concluded that 'it is apparent that students are enduring high levels of stress and experiencing a wide range and depth of symptoms for which they require assistance'.

Psychologists, counsellors, welfare officers and sociologists are falling over themselves to warn of the traumatic nature of college life, while student unions, banks and newspapers engage in stiff competition to produce the most comprehensive freshers' guide to 'student survival'. When I wrote in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (18 October 1996) that college life was not particularly stressful and that all the fuss over students' 'well-being' was uncalled for, my article was attacked by concerned academics from around the country.

But having survived nearly three years of college life and having enjoyed almost every minute of it, I find it difficult to see what can possibly be considered so stressful about university today. And the explanations given for the high levels of student stress do nothing to convince me otherwise.

Monk's paper identified three major 'problem areas': finance, course work and emotional difficulties. Of these, 'course work...was the greatest problem, followed by emotions, with finances bringing up the rear'. No doubt course work puts more pressure on students than sitting in the bar. But before complaining that course work is the biggest 'stressor' in students' lives, it is worth recalling the alternative: examinations.

Why do most degree courses use course work based methods of assessment these days? Because exams are now widely considered

The experts say money, emotional and assessment problems are making college life too traumatic. Jennie Bristow considers the obsession with stress an insult to students' intelligence

to put students under unfair pressure to 'perform on the day'. Course work, by contrast, can be done in the students' own time, and can be continuously assessed over a long period of time. What this means in practice is that students are under less pressure; if you mess up a particular piece of course work, it is not the be-all and end-all, because it only forms part of your final mark. In my course, for example, each piece of course work is worth between 12.5 and 15 per cent. So provided you are capable of organising your time and writing essays—surely the most basic requirement of being a student—course work is a doddle, and far less 'stressful' than exams. (For a full account of how the replacement of exams by course work leads to a lowering of standards, see 'Degrading education', *Living Marxism*, November 1996.)

Stress is good

If you do let the course work get on top of you, tutors are far more sympathetic to excuses than they ever were in the past. Mark, a student at the University of Sussex, described the advice he received from a tutor when he did not meet the deadline for some course work: 'When I told him I had not done the essays, for no other reason than I had organised everything wrong, he positively encouraged me to write to the examiners saying that I was ill or that I had some big personal problems.'

Just as students have always blamed 'unfair' exam papers which ask the 'wrong' questions for their failure to get the mark they hoped for, so today they will complain about the pressure

of course work as a reason for their under-performance. All they are saying is that assessment—being judged for the work that you do—is more 'stressful' than no assessment. Big deal.

Stressful or not, assessment is a vital component of higher education, providing a measure of students' abilities and competence in their subject. More importantly, the fact that assessment puts students under pressure plays a large part in ensuring that they produce high quality work. As Monk's report shows, those students under most pressure to produce good work tended to get better marks than those with a less dedicated attitude: 'despite massive psychological difficulties resulting from high levels of stress some students excelled themselves in their examinations...while those with relatively low stress levels did not necessarily perform exceptionally well.' Monk sees these findings as 'puzzling', and contrary to her expectations that 'those who were extremely stressed would perform badly in their examinations'. But to anybody who has ever worked under pressure, the findings make perfect sense.

Few people find it easy to work quickly and produce something good when they are under no pressure, or have no incentive to do so. Whether the end goal is to gain a high mark, make money or impress somebody, that goal is what motivates you to produce the goods. Obviously, this motivation generates pressure, or 'stress'. But because this pressure ensures that you produce the best that you can,

on campus?



it can be incredibly creative. As Mark said about the 'stressful' process of completing his course work: 'I had had almost no sleep and I looked terrible, but I hardly noticed because I got such a buzz out of churning out this high quality work at high speed. I never knew I was capable of it before.'

To condemn methods of assessment because they are 'stressful' is to denigrate the values that form the core of university life and spur students on to produce original and high-quality work. Yet the only quibble raised with Monk's emphasis on the stressful effects of course work has been that it underemphasises an even more 'stressful' aspect of college life: student poverty.

Most discussions about the stressful nature of college life today tend to focus on the low level of students' income and high levels of debt. Financial problems are often cited as the reason why many students cannot cope with university life. In the words of a motion put forward to the National Union of Students conference in March 1996, 'Stress, caused by financial hardship and seeking and maintaining employment is a direct cause of the increasing drop out rate'.

Poor students

There is no doubt that students survive on low incomes and a lot of debt. The highest maintenance grant awarded to students in the academic year 1996/97 was £1710 (£2105 in London), supplemented by a student loan of up to a total of £4490 for the three years (£5555 in London), to be repaid after graduation. In addition, banks now offer overdrafts of up to £1500. The only way to avoid getting heavily into debt is to get a part-time job during term time; the Halifax building society estimates that around 20 per cent of students take this option (*1996 Student Magazine*).

Education should be free and students should have more money. But to link students' lack of money to stress is wrong. What determines the ➤

stress levels of 'poor students' is not their income, but how they deal with their financial situation.

Students may have a low income, but the good thing about being a student is that it does not necessarily matter. An 18-year old undergraduate starts college from a position of no debt and no responsibility, where the grant can seem like a fortune in comparison

'Student stress' has become a glorified term for the emotions and problems all of us experience in our everyday lives

with pocket money. Once rent and bills are paid, every penny you have is disposable income and it is entirely up to you how you spend it. Because everybody else is in a similar situation, there is no demand to live an extravagant lifestyle; and because you have no children or other dependants, you can determine your own spending according to your needs. If you cannot survive on the basic grant (and few students can, or want to), there are plenty of institutions begging to lend you money. Contrary to popular belief, there is nothing inherently stressful about student loans or overdrafts. While many students are no doubt daunted by the fact that they notch up debts of around £5000, the 'stress' of loans comes when it is time to pay them: in other words, some time after graduation. When you are a student, all you have to do is spend the money.

Mind-numbing

The fact that many students supplement their income by working is held up as a major contributing factor to stress. But again, there is no given reason why this should be the case. Part-time work is relatively easy to come by, and students, unlike people on the dole, are able to work to top up their income without losing any of their allowance from the state. Most work that students can get is of the mind-numbing, boring variety—hardly jobs that, in themselves, add to your level of stress.

What determines the stress levels of students is not their level of income, but how they handle it. And a lot of students do deal with it, in a number of different ways. Liz, a recently-graduated mature student, worked her way through her degree at the University of North London, doing a variety of cleaning jobs to pay her

fees and maintenance. 'Yes, they were crap jobs, but I wanted to get the degree so I just had to get on with it. If you allow lack of money to get on top of you, you become paralysed.' Unless those who harp on about student stress are going to demand more money for students, the only consequence of emphasising the stressful nature of student finances can be to increase this sense of paralysis, as students sit and cry over their bank statements instead of finding ways to sort their lives out.

Assessment pressure and low incomes are as much a part of college life as books and seminars. There is no real reason why the problems facing students today should be any more stressful than they were in the past. However, the assumption underlying the discussion of student stress is that students today are simply less capable of dealing with things.

University of life

The notion that students are now basically incompetent and incapable of fending for themselves is most clear in the wealth of literature aimed at enabling students to cope with the 'stresses' of everyday campus life. Freshers arriving at university today are bombarded with 'survival guides' produced by the students union, the university, the broadsheet press and banks. All take as their starting point the belief that college life is a minefield of loneliness, stress and hardship, through which vulnerable new students have to be carefully guided.

The Little Blue Book, produced by Oxford University as a 'health guide' for students, spells out the assumption that going to university is a traumatic and painful wrench: 'Problems may result early on from the stress of leaving the familiar and secure environments of home and school for the new demands of student life in an unfamiliar city.' (p74) The book cites the competitive academic environment, exams and career decisions as possible causes of stress, and uses worrying, inability to concentrate and weight changes as examples of ways in which 'emotional difficulties' are experienced.

'Student stress', particularly in the way it is described by the *Little Blue Book*, has become a glorified term for the emotions and problems all of us experience in the course of our everyday lives. Everybody worries occasionally, feels lonely sometimes and finds it difficult to concentrate on their work. And who has not lost or gained weight on going to college—generally as a result of eating rubbish and consuming vast quantities of lager. None of these things are new, and none of these things are serious problems.

They are manifestations not of stress, but of life; and a life that, as a student, you make for yourself.

Those who bang on about stress are denigrating everything about student life that is good. Student life has always been a challenge to teenagers growing up, providing the first step to independence and adulthood. For the first time in your life, everything—the friends you made, the degree you obtained, the things you got involved in—was down to you, and nobody else. And while there was always a downside, in that you had to sort out your own problems without looking to your parents, at the end of it lay a real sense of achievement, because nobody could claim that they had done it for you.

The killjoy attitude of those complaining about student stress is captured by the Halifax building society in its *1996 Student Magazine*. Amid its cheery advice on homesickness, stress and poverty is the dread warning: 'In theory, leaving home is very exciting (no restrictions, living with people your own age, looking after yourself), but the reality can be quite different.'

The Halifax is wrong. The reality of student life, for most people, is exciting, and challenging, and fun. The pressure of thinking about new things in new ways still inspires people to produce creative work, and the freedom to do pretty much what you want opens new doors and exposes you to different experiences. Take away the assessment, take away the challenges of living independently, encourage students to stay away from debt and live within the narrow margins of their grant, and you suck the lifeblood out of the student body.

Mollycoddled

The only consequence of indulging the obsession with 'student stress' is that 'paralysis' really does take hold and students become less capable of coping with, and enjoying, life. Surveys already suggest that around half of all students now stay safely at home with their parents while studying at a local college, rather than risk venturing out into the big, bad world beyond.

The real danger facing students is not psychosis, and the solution is not, as Evelyn Monk suggests, to provide even more counselling. The real danger comes from all those seeking to denigrate the most positive aspects of university, whether that be pressure of work or pressure of life, by attempting to play mummy and daddy to people who should already be grown up. I for one would rather be 'stressed out on life' than brain-dead on counselling, mollycoddling and boredom.

A year of living dangerously

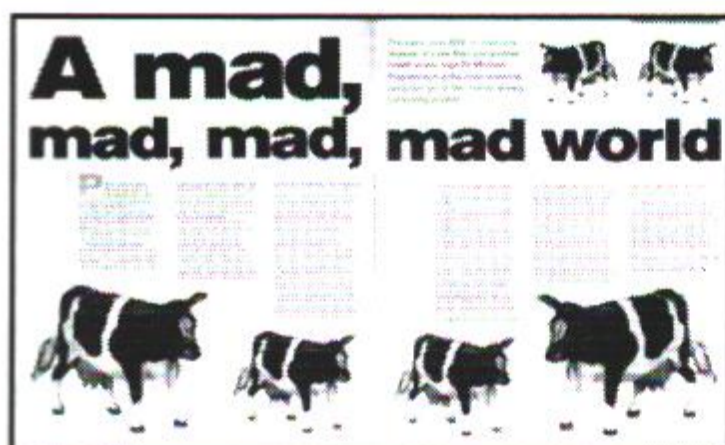
Andrew Calcutt reviews some of the panics of 1996

• Amid warnings that the nation's children could be driven to drink by the labels on 'alcopops', Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell backed new restrictions on adverts for Hooper's Hooch, Lemon Lips and Alcola. The chair of the National Consumer Council warned that 'pavements can be a major hazard for the unwary'.

• Tory MP Peter Luff introduced the Periodicals (Protection of Children) Bill, to stop teen magazines carrying 'explicit' information about such subjects as oral sex. The Home Office and magazine publishers agreed to take Luff's concerns into account. British men were warned that everything from driving a car to drinking the water could make them infertile following the publication of 'Evidence of deteriorating semen quality in the UK' (*British Medical Journal*, 24 February) by the Edinburgh Centre for Reproductive Technology.

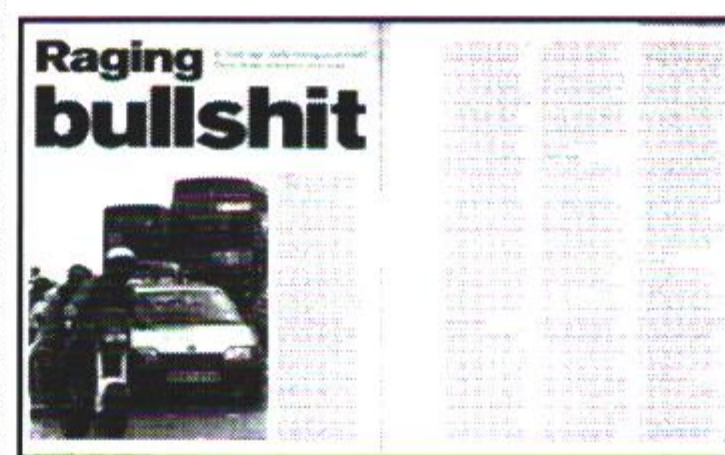
• The unprecedented killing of 16 school children and their teacher by lone madman Thomas Hamilton in Dunblane started a national scare about guns, paedophiles and school security. Journalists reporting on the Dunblane shootings said that they had been traumatised by the experience. The unproven connection between BSE in beef and the human brain condition CJD led to 'what could fairly be called hysteria' (*Spectator*, 30 March).

• Unsubstantiated reports of a rise in peanut and nut allergy among babies led the *Sunday Times* to suggest that thousands of children are at risk of anaphylactic shock. Teachers' union the NASUWT reported that it had authorised members in four nurseries not to teach children because of their violent behaviour. The parents of three-year old Morris Michener sought damages after their son was traumatised by a performance of Peter Pan at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.



Teachers at a Nottingham comprehensive called a strike against 13-year old Richard Wilding.

A heart specialist warned that athletes may risk blood clots from wearing tight shorts known as 'warm pants'. Familiarity with computer technology may be 'breeding anxiety in young people', said a psychologist from Strathclyde University. Mary Hartnoll, director of Glasgow social services, was pilloried for making the true but 'totally irresponsible' statement that ecstasy is statistically as safe as aspirin. The Independent Television Commission told Martini to ditch their 'beautiful drink' adverts which could offend people whose faces had been disfigured.



• The killing of Stephen Cameron on the M25 sparked a nationwide panic about 'road rage'. There were also reports of 'tube rage' among passengers on the London Underground. Omega announced that it would no longer advertise in *Vogue* because of the magazine's 'irresponsible' use of 'models of anorexic proportions'. The Independent Television Commission upheld 13 complaints against adverts shown after the Dunblane shootings. Warner suspended the video release of *Natural Born Killers*.

• Labour MP Tony Banks complained that the 'Harry met Molly' adverts for Safeways were 'dangerously close to encouraging people who molest children'. An experimental study sparked fears that babies fed on powdered milk could become sterile. The BBC's *Watchdog* advised viewers of the risks of beer and crisps, and suggested that they should munch celery and raw carrots during Euro96. Disturbances following England's defeat by Germany prompted police to claim that 'Neanderthal man' was running riot.

Motorcycle cops threatened to sue the Metropolitan Police because noisy bikes were damaging their hearing. Social workers in Dorset told



James and Julia Cross to give up smoking or lose the child they have fostered for five years. The government announced an inquiry into possible child abuse at all residential institutions, including public schools. Professor Michael Barber, a New Labour adviser, warned that *The Big Breakfast* was getting children 'hyped up'. Skin specialist, Dr David Harris suggested that tents be erected in playgrounds to protect children from the sun. Pop star Dave Stewart declared that he was suffering from the 'Paradise Syndrome', brought on by being rich and famous.

• Pundits asked 'is anywhere safe?' after the murder of Lin Russell and her six-year old daughter near their home in rural Kent. The safety of all coaches and buses was called into question after two road accidents. Professor Peter Fleming claimed that two-thirds of cot deaths are linked to smoking. The government announced that the police would be given new powers to get teenage drinkers off the streets.

• The *Observer* warned that paedophile pornography was rife on the Internet. Argyll and Bute council banned Hare Krishna monks from street-collecting because they 'intimidate' passers-by.

• The government announced new legislation to deal with 'stalkers'. Tony Adams confessed to alcoholism, and the Football Association announced plans to step up random breath-testing. The Institute of Management reported that sacking workers causes harmful anxiety among managers. A psychologist warned that Sindy dolls could make eight-year old girls obsessed with body shape. A flight to Milan was

diverted because the co-pilot was 'scared of heights'. There was an anxious debate about smacking children. Pharmacologists said that grapefruit juice can kill in combination with common drugs.

• Management guru Saul Wurman warned that we are suffering from 'information anxiety', and that 'overabundance of data' could become 'the greatest crisis facing modern civilisation'. Frances Lawrence, widow of murdered West London headmaster Philip Lawrence, issued a call for moral rearmament and demanded that 'evil' knife shops should be banned. It emerged that a storyline featuring under-age sex was cut from the version of *Neighbours* shown in Britain.



• Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley demanded cuts in the already-declining number of violent images on tv and video. A boy of 11 was excluded from a primary school in Teesside on suspicion of supplying drugs. It later emerged that he was sharing his sherbet with friends.

• New Labour councils announced that bearded men in red and white costumes displaying an unhealthy interest in women's stockings and children's bedrooms would be put on a register and offered a choice of therapy or prison.

Bill Clinton's re-election as President of the USA was no triumph for democracy, argues James Heartfield

The election that put politics aside

'The American people have told us, Democrat, Republican and independent to put politics aside, join together and get the job done.'

The first Democratic President to be re-elected since Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1944, William Jefferson Clinton was making his victory speech at Little Rock, Arkansas. Clinton's generous praise for the heavily defeated Republican candidate Bob Dole was seen as a magnanimous response to a famous victory over a lacklustre Republican candidate. In fact Clinton's unwillingness to rub the Republicans' faces in their defeat had a more serious point. He was signalling the suspension of ideological differences in American politics.

Clinton won 49 per cent of the vote—failing to bridge the credibility gap that yawned beneath his first term (he was elected in 1992 on a minority of the votes cast, as support split between outgoing Republican president George Bush and independent Ross Perot). It is true that Clinton won a decisive victory over Bob Dole this time. But voting was at an all-time low; only 49 per cent of those registered to vote bothered to turn out (George Bush was elected on 50 per cent of the registered vote in 1988, the previous low point). That statistic, added to the millions of Americans who are not registered to vote, means that Bill Clinton's mandate in fact rests on the minority of a minority—44.6m of America's 250m citizens voted for him. In practice, American politics, even more than Britain's, is an almost exclusively middle class pastime.

More problematically for the Democrats, the elections for both houses of Congress, which took place on the same day as the presidential poll, went in the Republicans' favour. Increasing their majority in the Senate (upper house) and hanging onto

a majority in the House of Representatives (lower house), the Republicans stymied Democratic hopes of riding into a dominant position on the coat-tails of Clinton's success.

Having lost control of Congress for the first time in decades in 1994's mid-term elections, the Democrat presidency has had to learn to work with a hostile congress under radical conservative Newt Gingrich. The return of the Republican Congress helps to explain Clinton's comments about 'putting politics aside' and getting on with the job. A bipartisan approach is the only one available to the Clinton administration for at least the next two years.

But bipartisanship is not just a matter of convenience, it is the new face of American politics. The election process confirmed that American politics has become a contest for the narrow 'middle ground'. The key to understanding the outcome of the elections is that, in general, the candidates who most successfully presented themselves as 'of the centre', and managed to brand their opponents as extreme, were those who won.

To most commentators the reorientation towards the centre seems to be a triumph for common sense. In fact it is a staging post on the way to abolishing democracy altogether. When the president of the United States imagines that his democratic mandate is to 'put politics aside', what he is saying is that no real differences exist in the way that the country should be run. The only debate to be had is over which is the better man to do the job. The contest for the presidency has ceased to be a debate about which direction society should go. It is instead a job interview to see who has a grasp of the technical skills needed to perform this managerial function under the prevailing conditions—a competition that Clinton was bound to win.

The narrowing compass of political contestation means that the opinions of the

electorate count for less. American voters were faced with a choice between candidates. But since both candidates stood on a similar platform of reducing the deficit, fighting crime and making America count in the world there was no choice between the political programmes on offer. It is little wonder that more voters than ever stayed away from the polling booths.

Of the major parties it is the Democrats, and in particular the Clinton-led Democratic Leadership Council, that have done most to get rid of the ideological baggage of the past. Consequently it is they who have been in the best position to take advantage of the contest for the centre.

The Democratic Leadership Council pioneered the policy of reinventing the old Democratic Party. In the past the party was associated with big-city politics, welfare spending and organised labour. As the remodelled 'New Democrats', the party appealed directly to voters in the suburbs and shed its old image. On advice from the columnist and strategist Ben Wattenberg, Bill Clinton pioneered the strategy of winning the battle to define 'values' before worrying about policies. Fixing the Democratic Party in the public imagination as tough on crime, looking to the future and inclusive, rather than exclusive, Clinton never had to think too much about the fine print. Not surprisingly the Clinton makeover is the model for Britain's New Labour Party.

Clinton's big break came half-way through his first term in office. Ironically it was the election of the Republican Congress under Newt Gingrich in 1994 that allowed Clinton to substantially redefine the political terrain.

Reeling from the defeat of George Bush, the Gingrich-led Republican party in Congress was struggling to get back on track. Gingrich reckoned that the Republican Party had to go further to the free-market right to recover the momentum of the Reagan years. He led a 'Conservative revolution' with his programme of cutting back big government, the 'Contract with America'.

Momentarily Gingrich took advantage of the American public's general hostility to politics and politicians to win support. But Clinton's deft performance in the White House meant that he could use the spectre of Gingrich to tame his own party's taste for grand policy initiatives, while taking on board much of Gingrich's programme. As Clinton compromised over spending Gingrich was forced to move further to the right to keep up the pressure on the president. Making a virtue out of occupying the centre ground, Clinton left the Republican-led Congress to take the blame for what went wrong.

When Congress refused to vote funds for the administration in protest at Clinton's 'excessive' budget, the federal government was literally closed down, with government offices and libraries shut to the public and government workers sent home. Gingrich had lost the plot. People might want smaller government, but they did not want no

government. The Republicans had walked into Clinton's trap, casting themselves in the role of doctrinaire fanatics. They were seen to be the ones who were playing politics with people's livelihoods. The Democrats had successfully defined themselves as the sensible centre ground.

Outside of the corridors of power the Republicans did not know whether to strike out to the right or contest the centre. When they attempted the first strategy they were isolated. In California Republican governor Pete Wilson had made some headway by attacking Mexican immigrants.

Indeed Wilson's attack on affirmative action quotas won support too at first. But when Bob Dole gave national backing to Wilson's anti-affirmative action crusade as part of his presidential campaign it blew up in his face. Why? To blue collar workers, Affirmative action means more jobs for blacks and hispanics. As such it is unpopular. But blacks are not the only, or major, beneficiaries. For many professional women affirmative action has been an important mechanism for breaking through the 'glass ceiling'. In terms of shaping the public mood such women carry more weight—and they were voting Clinton.

By the time of the election, Bob Dole was boxed in. If he attacked the President he was cast as a negative campaigner. But when he tried to contest the centre he found that the Clinton campaign had already defined it.

Dole was defeated because the traditional political themes of the right no longer had any purchase. With no Cold War it was impossible to paint the Democrats as soft on the enemy. Clinton's record overseas is interventionist. The unspoken race war that Nixon, Reagan and Bush fought to galvanise support among America's white majority would be unworkable today. The official ideology of multi-culturalism means that it is unacceptable to play the race card in the way that Republicans used to. Indeed the Clinton team has more cleverly attacked the black inner-city poor, not in the old race language, but with lots of upbeat talk about getting people back to work, breaking the 'cycle of dependency' and dealing with the underclass.

Dole's campaign slogan summed up his difficulties. He said he wanted to 'build a bridge to America's past'. Doubtless that made sense within the confines of the Dole household. America's past is honourable there, and its present rather less so. But to everybody else it was just looking backwards to an era that meant nothing to them. The changing contours of American politics ensured that Dole's nostalgia dragged him down.

Indeed Clinton turned the slogan around and made it his own. The Democrats were going to 'build a bridge to the future'. It was a slogan for Clinton that at once heaped ridicule on his backward-looking opponent and invested his own candidature with the appearance of real direction. In fact the future-orientation of the Clinton campaign was narrowly technical, revolving around connecting schools to the Internet and extending education. But Clinton had allied himself with the future and Dole with the past.

What Clinton has done is to ride the tide of bipartisanship, so that politics can be put aside as long as he is president. For the American people, though, bipartisanship is no victory. It means that there is little choice in policy and their own opinions weigh less heavily in the balance. For them putting politics aside means that they are even further from exercising real power over their own lives. ●



A triumph of style over substance as Clinton wins a second term

The Pope admits Darwin had a point, while Catholic priests complain that celibacy is past its sell-by date. Prince Charles hints at a divorce from the Church of England, while the C of E says it has given up believing in hell.

Why are the Christian churches, reeling from scandal to crisis, incapable even of preaching to the converted? In this Christmas special, lapsed Catholic Mark Ryan looks into the loss of faith

Hardly a day goes by without some new scandal, damaging rumour or doctrinal controversy afflicting one of the Christian churches. The Roman Catholic church has been hardest hit in recent months with a major scandal breaking after it was revealed that the Bishop of Argyll, Roddy Wright, had not only eloped with a married woman but had fathered a child by another. Even an atheist could not help feeling a certain sympathy for the plight of John Paul II, trying valiantly to hold the Church of Peter together while apparently wracked with almost every illness a man can have, besieged by feminists and liberals within the church all wishing quite openly that he would just drop dead, and with many of his own bishops and priests more concerned with their own personal growth than with defending the organisation to which they have pledged their lives.

Those such as the Swiss theologian Hans Küng, who suggest that the crisis in the Catholic church is due to the illiberal reign of its leader, would do well to look at the Church of England. The C of E is systematically unburdening itself of any beliefs which others might find offensive. It has abolished hell, or at least redefined it as 'a state of non-being' (otherwise known as death), ordained women priests, and looks set to give up the fight against the ordination of homosexuals. Its present policy seems geared towards finding out whatever it is that the public believes and giving it

a blessing. Its pathetic efforts to jump on every New Age bandwagon from animal rights to anti-road protests have not always been blessed with success, as the sex scandal around the Sheffield Nine O'Clock Service run by rave vicar Chris Brain showed. When church leaders suggested recently that the next Archbishop of Canterbury may not be English, it would have come as no surprise if a leading churchman had condemned the thoroughly speciesist assumption that the next head of the church would have to be a human being.

Defender of faiths

Yet for all its servility towards prevailing prejudice, the C of E is in an even worse state than the Roman Catholic church. Vocations are plummeting, as is attendance at service, while Prince Charles' promise to be a 'Defender of Faiths' rather than



Unholy

of the Faith raises the prospect of disestablishment followed by oblivion. A sure symptom of the C of E's terminal illness is the fact that it has just designed a new logo for itself. A spokesman said the design would help give the Church 'a common visual identity'. This can only confirm that people only start talking about their identity when they no longer have one.

So why are the churches having such a difficult time, and can they survive their present troubles? There are two main reasons for the churches' difficulties. The first relates to the general climate of relativism which has been gaining ground since the 1960s and which is now the accepted wisdom. For relativists, all belief systems are equally legitimate and possess their own truth. No one religion can be better than or superior to another. Such a doctrine poses obvious problems for the Christian religions, all of which can only justify their existence on the basis that they alone are in possession of the truth.

Genesis of species

Relativism deprives the established churches of their stature by reducing all religions to personal belief systems. It is deeply humiliating for the Catholic church that with all its history, doctrine and grandeur it can no longer put a convincing case for the superiority of its beliefs over those of a dope-smoking druid at Stonehenge. However, instead of trying to fight relativism head-on, all the Christian churches have adapted to and at times promoted it. For all his hardline orthodoxy, for example, John Paul II has gone further than previous pontiffs

in acknowledging the legitimacy of other faiths such as Judaism and Islam. He has even acknowledged that Darwinism may be compatible with the *Book of Genesis*.

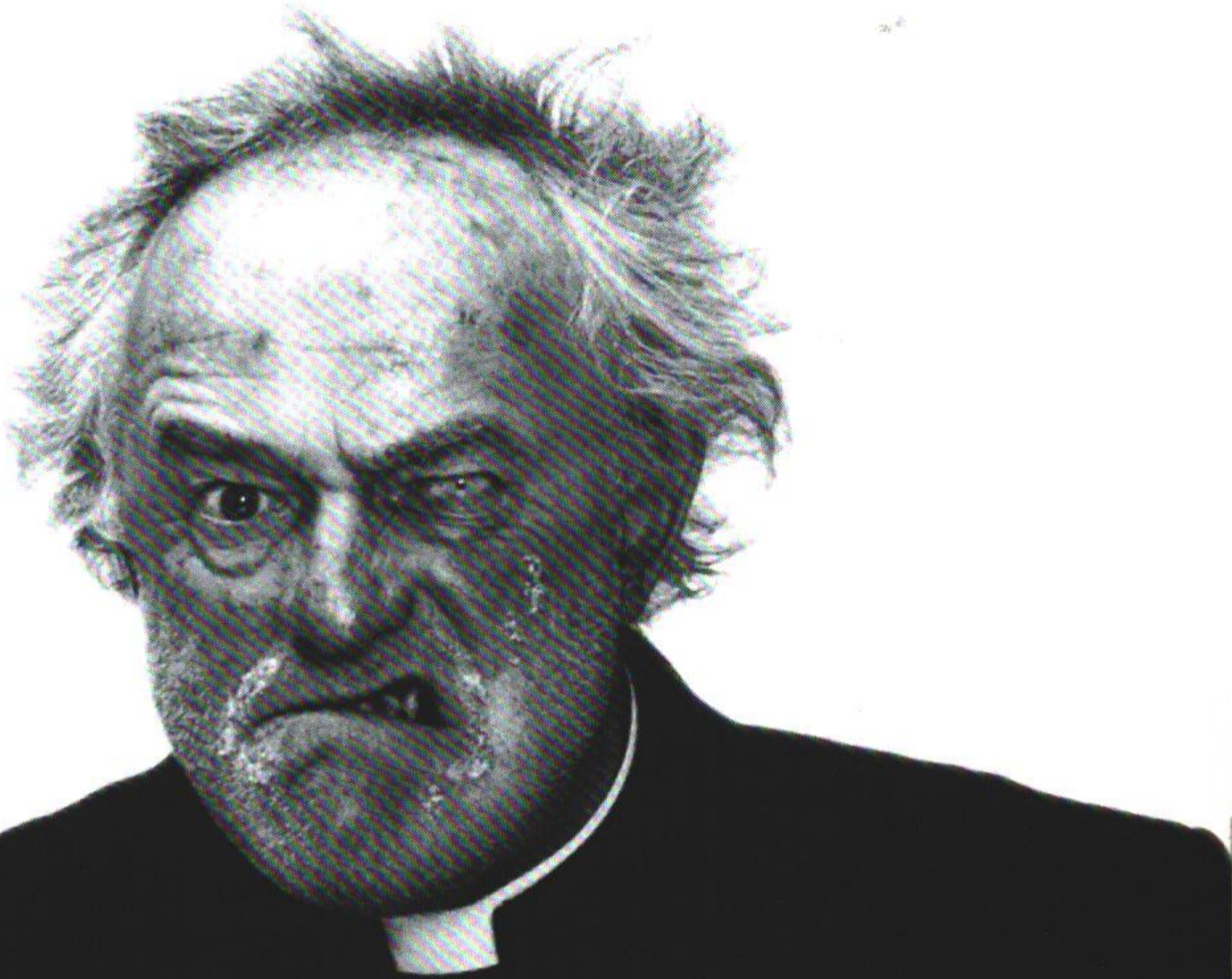
The second reason is related to the first. If no one religion is superior to another then the very idea of spiritual leadership is called into question. When Catholicism held an unshakeable belief in its own truth and superiority, the role of the leader was obvious. The priest was there to give guidance to his flock, explain the mysteries of the Church as best he could, and to generally intercede on our behalf with Himself. And of course to take the money too. The problem now is that priests and bishops no longer have it within themselves to lay claim to spiritual authority and leadership. If they are no better than anybody else, then how could they?

It is this renunciation of authority and abdication of responsibility which explains why the Catholic church in particular seems to stagger from one sordid scandal to another. Far from

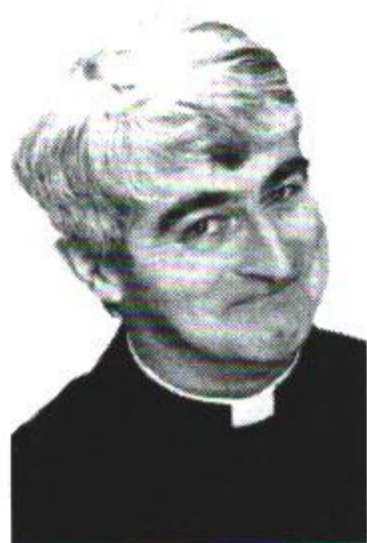
providing leadership, priests and bishops are more likely these days to clamber to the head of the growing swell of those claiming to be victims of some sort of abuse. The scandal surrounding Bishop Wright and his various love affairs is a case in point. As soon as the scandal broke, the entire clergy was judged to be victim of the tyranny of the celibate life, a verdict with which many priests seemed only too willing to agree.

Go forth and multiply

There was a time when the Catholic church was proud of celibacy. It was considered a sign of the unique dedication of the Catholic clergy and a key to maintaining the unity of the one truly global church. Introduced in the middle ages, the rules were tightened after the Reformation in order to prevent the dissipation of Church property. The tightening of the celibacy rule helped the Church mould its disparate and demoralised forces into a powerful and centralised fighting organisation. The fact that the clergy were not burdened with the usual family responsibilities allowed them a level of single-minded dedication to the cause which was the envy of the ►



orders



other churches. Throughout the world it was the Catholic church, and in particular its shock troops such as the Jesuits, which often proved the most formidable opponents of reason and progress.

What was once a sign of strength is now seen as an intolerable burden on the unfortunate clergy. Many of the disasters which have befallen the

In many parishes, priests now hold 'consultation meetings' to find out what their parishioners want

Church in recent years, such as the paedophile scandals in Ireland and America and now the antics of Roderick Wright are put down to the pressures of celibacy and the way it distorts the energies of men.

But celibacy only becomes a problem when the individual cleric no longer thinks it worth his while making sacrifices for what he believes in; or, what amounts to the same thing, does not think himself strong enough to rise to the challenge of the priestly life. It is only when the individual is considered too weak and lacking in self-reliance that the demands of celibacy appear so onerous. The problem with celibacy is symptomatic of the wider difficulty confronting the church; namely, how do you get people to make sacrifices if there is no longer any belief that you are in exclusive possession of the truth and are responsible for its dissemination? Celibacy always placed great strains on the individual priest. But in the past the demands of authority knocked the priest into shape and forced him to think of more important things than his own personal growth plans.

Confession on the box

You have only to read the sermons on hell delivered by the priest in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to gain a sense of the impressive, if misguided power of such men. The authority invested in them also carried with it a responsibility to win the hearts and minds of the young. The burden of responsibility allowed the clergy little scope for wallowing in self-pity and bemoaning the unbearable sacrifices which the church had imposed on them. Those who could not take the pressure simply left the priesthood.

Listen to a sermon preached in almost any Catholic church today and you will be overwhelmed by the excruciating banality of it all. The theme of the sermon will often be based on an event of deep religious significance such as the football the day before, and will be laced with hoary metaphors linking the saving of goals with the saving of souls, and suchlike. The priest often appears preoccupied not with imparting any truth or with affirming his spiritual authority, but with proving that he is just like everybody else. In many parishes, priests hold 'consultation meetings' to find out what their parishioners want. It may only be a matter of time before the priest needs the help of a women's support group before he can say mass.

What the clergy are doing in all this is divesting themselves of the constraints of authority. Laying claim to authority places enormous demands on the individual. You cannot just say the first thing that comes into your head or act in a thoughtless manner. Because there are many around you looking for guidance and leadership, you have to be prepared and alert, composing your thoughts into a coherent outlook. Most of all you cannot behave in a reckless and irresponsible manner towards others for the simple reason that it would undermine your authority. It has become fashionable to suggest that the Catholic church was always full of paedophiles and philanderers. Hard as it may be to defend the record of what was once the most reactionary institution in the world, this accusation does not stand up. No doubt there were cases of both, but these must have been exceptional. The vast majority of priests would have internalised the constraints of authority and therefore felt the need to conduct themselves in a responsible manner.

By contrast, now that priests have renounced authority in favour of playing the victim, they can do what they like and blame it all on the cruelty of the celibate life and the madness of John Paul II. Standards of intelligence and behaviour are collapsing as priests feel more at ease whingeing about the loneliness of their lives and the difficulty of controlling their sexual urges.

Shortly after the Bishop Wright affair, it was announced that priests were to receive counselling to help them cope with the pressures of celibacy. This is the next stage on the road to complete moral collapse. Instead of being the voice of God, Christ's ministers on Earth, they have turned themselves into just more fodder for the victim support industry.

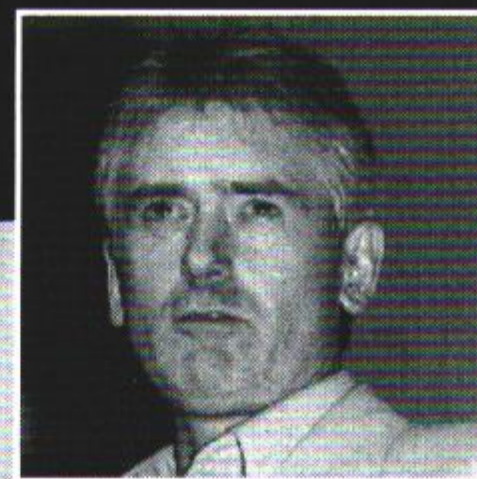
In passing it is worth noting how many of the rituals of traditional religion have been usurped and

deployed in recent years by the media and the social services. Take the confession. With the traditional Christian religions, confession was something you did in private, either in the confession-box with a priest if you were a Catholic, or in the privacy of your own heart if you were a Protestant. Today a confession is worthless unless made in public. Where once the priest quietly absolved you of your sins, today absolution comes in the act of publicly acknowledging your weakness and undertaking a course of counselling. In addition, the private confession absolved you only of the sins you committed. In the public confessional it is not only your own sins that you confess, it is also those committed against you, the abuse you have suffered. The public confession always involves a belittling of the self—as victim. Oprah Winfrey and her imitators have turned this degrading spectacle into prime-time entertainment.

Gazza Agonistes

The churches are now little more than an appendage to the victim support industry, parroting every pronouncement and eagerly promoting the new penance of counselling. Rather than fight the victim support industry for the souls of the damned, the churches direct their own clergy to seek absolution in the counselling chambers. The churches can always be relied on to echo the damning of miscreants and demands for repentance issuing daily from victim support groups. When England manager Glenn Hoddle, for example, was condemned for selecting wife-beater Paul Gascoigne for the England squad, a spokesman for the Catholic church backed the outcry from women's groups, solemnly declaring that 'forgiveness must be based on a willingness of the offending parties to put things right'. Obviously the monsignor in question felt that a private confession of his wrongdoing by Gascoigne was insufficient, and that a public self-abasement was called for in the presence of an ancient and venerable institution such as the International Conference on Violence and Abuse of Women.

The church of old may have taken a poor view of the human condition, but at least it had some conception of the integrity of the individual—if nothing else, that you alone were responsible for your own sins. There was also a spiritual grandeur about the old religions, a grandeur which can still be sensed in any of the great European cathedrals. To see the ministers of the old religion pay homage to the spiritless harridans of the victim support industry is a truly ignominious end for the oldest surviving institutions on the face of the earth.



Dr Michael Fitzpatrick

How now mad cow? Six months after Britain's great mad cow panic took off, the first hard evidence has been published of a link between bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and the 'new variant' of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (NV-CJD). The team headed by Professor John Collinge at St Mary's Hospital in London has identified a distinctive molecular 'signature' which not only distinguishes NV-CJD from its familiar forms, but can also be found in BSE itself and in cases of disease in other animal species resulting from experimental exposure to BSE (*Nature*, 24 October 1996). This elegant piece of research, though not conclusive, provides the first scientific backing for what was previously conjecture.

At the time I commented that the mad cow panic was a health scare 'not about a disease, but about the possibility of a disease', emphasising that the supposed link between BSE and CJD remained unsubstantiated (see *Living Marxism*, May 1996). So does this new research now justify the mad cow panic?

The critical consensus is that up to 20 March 1996, when government ministers first conceded the possibility of a BSE-CJD link, the authorities were guilty of at least prevarication and cover-up, if not of undue influence from the farming lobby. I take a different view. It seems to me that, until March, both the scientists and the government handled the BSE problem appropriately. It was their collective loss of nerve in March that triggered the panic.

The spectre of BSE spreading to humans in the form of CJD was first raised in 1988, less than two years after it was first recognised in cattle (*British Medical Journal*, 4 June 1988). This article was briskly dismissed as 'unnecessarily alarmist' by two leading British authorities, who insisted that there was no evidence to justify the fear (*British Medical Journal*, 9 July 1988). The scientists did not, however, rule out the possibility of BSE being transmissible.

The *Southwood Report* published in February 1989, approved an earlier ban on 'meat and bone-meal' feeds and recommended that carcasses of infected cattle be destroyed and milk discarded. It also proposed a specialist surveillance unit (established in Edinburgh in 1990) and an expert advisory body—the Spongiform Encephalopathies Advisory Committee (Seac) whose first report in June 1989 recommended a ban on 'specified bovine offals' which was implemented in November. Thus, within three years of the first case of BSE, the scientists had identified the likely cause; the government had introduced measures to prevent it from passing into the human food chain; and it had set up a surveillance system as well as sponsoring further research.

No doubt the scientists could have worked faster and the government could have clamped down harder on farms and abattoirs. But these are the sort of criticisms that can always be made, especially in retrospect; they have no particular salience in relation to the mad cow crisis.

In response to periodic flutters of public anxiety about BSE—notably in 1990 and 1995—the authorities simply reiterated the line that, as there was no evidence of any risk to human beings, beef should be considered safe, which was entirely sensible. Then, in March, everything fell apart. The Edinburgh surveillance unit identified 10 cases of what was to become known as NV-CJD, all in patients under the age of 42, with a remarkably consistent clinical and pathological pattern. It appeared that the nightmare scenario might be beginning to unfold.

Seac immediately advised the government that 'the most likely' explanation of the new cases was transmission from BSE. In fact, this could only be true in the absence of any more convincing alternative. Given the high level of uncertainty about many aspects of BSE and CJD, further research and monitoring of developments were the key requirements.

Instead of discreetly encouraging further scientific work, government ministers chose to make a major public issue out of what was in essence a relatively minor matter of concern to specialists at the departments of agriculture and health. It seemed that the scientists had communicated their anxieties to the politicians who, in turn, transmitted their anxieties to the public. Health secretary Stephen Dorrell's exemption of children from the general reassurance, pending further advice, was a particularly gratuitous step that could only fuel the panic.

Given that measures had been in place to keep BSE out of the human food chain for more than six years, why was it necessary to give such major publicity to the emergence of an exotic variant of a rare disease? The announcement had no public health value: if people had been exposed to the danger of BSE transmission, this must have been before the 1989 offal ban and there was nothing further that anybody could do

to avoid BSE. The government was not providing any useful information, only an invitation to panic about a risk that was indeterminate and still possibly non-existent.

The media seized on the dramatic about-turn in the official line. Given that the details of the cases of NV-CJD had yet to be published, journalists had to rely on the experts for information. But as anxieties rose, the experts were drawn into wild speculations. After conceding that he would not feed beef to his grandchildren, Seac chair Professor John Pattison wondered if the death rate from CJD

might reach as high as 500 000.

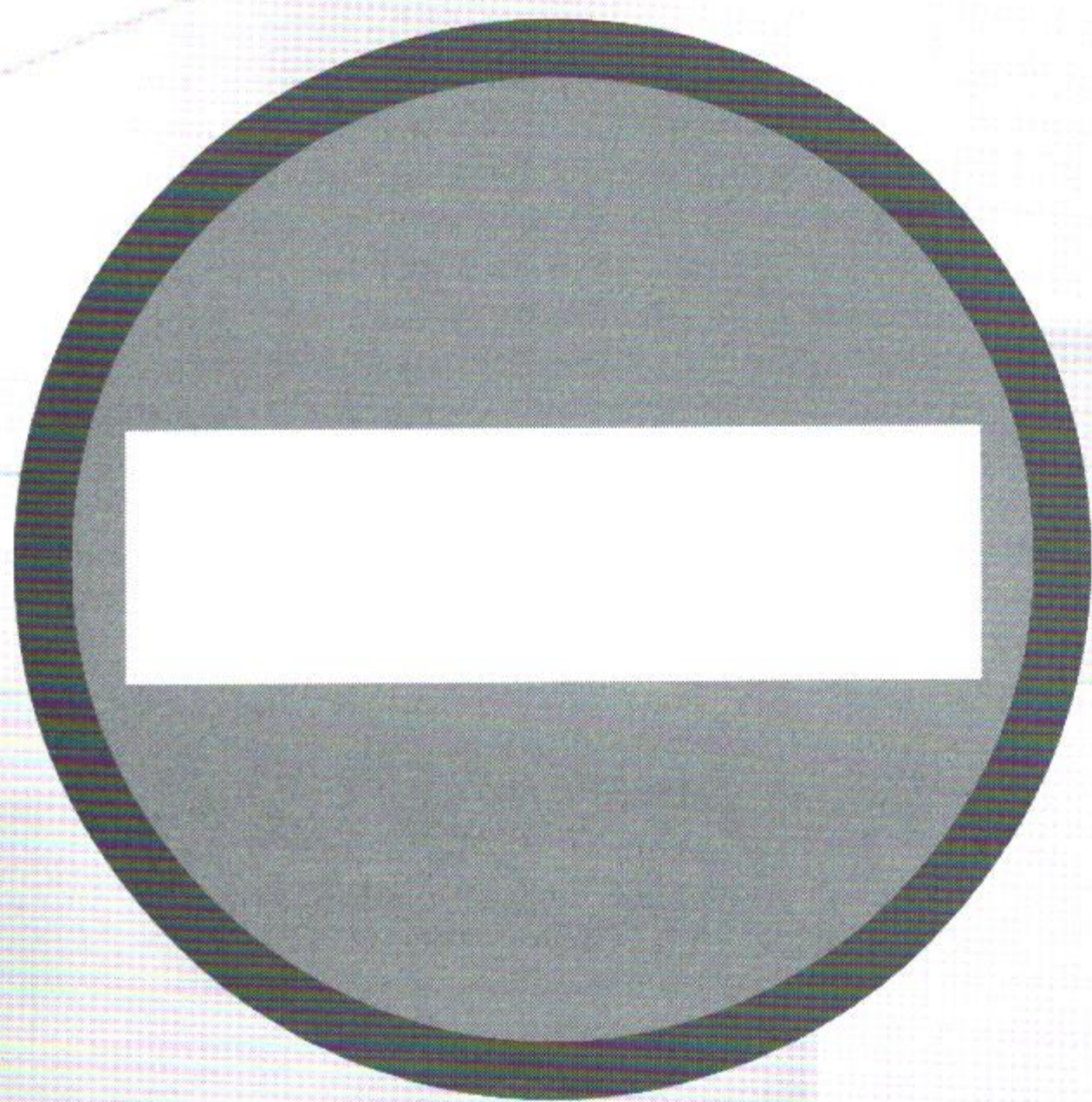
'It's not the cows that are mad, it's the people' proclaimed an exasperated Dorrell, surveying the wreckage of British agriculture a week later. But the mad cow panic did not begin on the farms or in the supermarkets. It began among the scientists, spread to the politicians and was amplified in their interactions with the media, which transmitted it to the public. Nobody was better placed to dampen down the panic than Dorrell, yet he did more than anybody to promote the madness that devastated farmers in Britain and beyond, causing much greater loss of livelihood than is ever likely to result from NV-CJD.

The mad cow panic revealed a society that is vulnerable at every level to irrational fears, particularly of novel diseases and threats to health. Fortunately, real scientists like Collinge stayed in their labs, and carried on with the sort of serious research that promises further advances in the understanding of NV-CJD. Thus science staggers on, even in a society in which it is more likely to provoke hostility than enthusiasm. ●

Politicians just passed scientists' fears on to the public

'I'm against censorship,

Chris Ellison of Get the Met Off the Net!—The Campaign for Internet Freedom reports on a new threat



The government, the police and leading Internet trade associations have joined forces to stamp out pornography on the Net. The measures proposed could effectively end the free distribution of any material on the Net.

In September the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA) and the London Internet Exchange (Linx), in conjunction with the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Metropolitan Police, revealed a collaborative package of new restrictions and regulation on the Internet. The measures were justified in the name of ensuring that existing legislation governing the possession and transmission of obscene materials was applied to the Internet.

The announcement marked the culmination of over two years of debate about pornographic material on the Net. In 1994, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act extended laws governing the possession and publication of child pornography to include computer storage and Internet transmission. Since this time the debate surrounding child pornography in electronic form has gained a momentum of its own and has

been associated with a mounting panic.

Ian Taylor, Science and Technology Minister, announced that the new collaborative venture was intended 'to clean up the Net, to reassure the public and business that the Internet can be a safe and secure place to work, learn and play'. Implicit in the announcement was the idea that pornography on the Internet had rendered it unsafe and threatening for users. To make it safe and secure, child pornography would have to be eliminated.

Interestingly, however, all parties concerned were quick to assert their opposition to censorship. Tory minister Ian Taylor insisted that freedom of expression was not at issue:

'This is not a question of censoring legal material or free speech. The Internet has never been a legal vacuum. Responsible service providers want to see the law upheld 'on-line' as well as 'off'. The core of this initiative is about dealing with material which breaks our existing laws, particularly where child pornography is involved.'

Even Superintendent Mike Hoskins from Scotland Yard felt obliged to reassure Net users that 'censorship is not in my vocabulary'.



but...

Ian Taylor's statement illustrates three key elements of the case put forward for imposing restrictions on the Net: the notion that child pornography is a major problem; the redefinition of censorship so that banning illegal or 'damaging' material does not count; and the accusation that service providers who do not go along with these changes are 'irresponsible'. To see how these ideas became the accepted wisdom, it is useful to consider what happened in the run-up to the September announcement.

Who needs protection?

In August, shortly before the initiative was announced, Scotland Yard wrote to 140 Internet service providers (ISPs), instructing them to ban 133 news groups allegedly containing illegal material. Turmoil ensued, as leading Internet service providers attempted to establish their anti-pornography credentials and prove that they had a more effective mechanism for regulating the distribution of pornography on the Internet.

Everybody seemed to accept that something drastic had to be done about pornography and images of paedophilia on the Internet. Yet of

the 16 000 or so news groups on the Internet, Scotland Yard was only able to identify 133 that it alleged contained any pornographic material. Even then, most of the postings to these news groups did not contain illegal images. Instead the existence of just one or two which might contravene existing legislation was used to justify the removal of whole groups. One of the news groups targeted by the police mainly contained exchanges between homosexuals keen to meet up with one another. And it is hard to suppress a wry smile at the thought of the obscenities that might be found in the proscribed news group entitled 'alt.sex.fetish.tickling'.

Although many ISPs were disturbed when Scotland Yard instructed them to withdraw certain news groups, they seemed more concerned to assure the police that they shared the concern about pornographic material and accepted the need for more regulation of the Net. Indeed the Internet Service Providers Association had already offered to help the Met, as the police letter acknowledged: 'At the seminar [at New Scotland Yard on 2 August] ...ISPA volunteered to pool information and assist in this initiative.'

The response of the ISPs is summed up by Andy Cowan from Wave Rider Internet: 'We would all like to ban some of these news groups, but this isn't the way to go about it.' (*Times*, 16 August 1996) The managing director of VBCnet GB Ltd similarly declared his firm 'happy to provide technical input to the police in support of their efforts to enforce the law. What we object to is their understandable attempt to shift responsibility...onto the ISPs' (*Independent*, 22 August 1996).

Very few voices could be heard rejecting all forms of censorship. The typical response was to assert opposition to censorship in general, while simultaneously proposing that something needed to be done about the specific risk posed by pornography on the Net. A response that can best be characterised as 'I'm against censorship, but...'. Even Tory minister Ian Taylor is against censorship, but 'wants to see the law upheld "online"'. Other common 'buts...' include 'child pornography is too disgusting', 'paedophiles must be stopped', and 'we should be responsible and regulate ourselves'. However, freedom of speech that is qualified is no freedom at all.

The unquestioned assumption in the discussion is that Net users ►

need protection from illegal or distasteful images and ideas. Little or no attempt was made to justify this need. It was sufficient simply to evoke the idea that protection was essential 'to control the Net access of the young and vulnerable' and to make the Net a 'safe and secure place'.

The debate about pornography on the Net has little to do with the Internet itself

Nobody questioned the dubious assumption that the nation's children are being seriously damaged by pornographic images. Nobody asked where the evidence is that there is any causal relationship between pornography and acts of paedophilia.

LEVEL	VIOLENCE	NUDITY	SEX	LANGUAGE
0	Harmless conflict, some damage to objects	No nudity or revealing attire	Romance, no sex	Inoffensive slang; no profanity
1	Creatures injured or killed; damage to objects; fighting	Revealing attire	Passionate kissing	Mild expletives
2	Humans injured, or with small amounts of blood	Partial nudity	Clothed sexual touching	Expletives; non-sexual anatomical references
3	Humans injured or killed	Non-sexual frontal nudity	Non-explicit sexual activity	Strong, vulgar language; obscene gestures; racial epithets
4	Wanton and gratuitous violence; torture; rape	Provocative frontal nudity	Explicit sexual activity; sex crimes	Crude or explicit sexual references; extreme hate speech

The five levels and four categories of the rating system which Safety-Net wants to enforce.

The entire debate had degenerated to such an extent that the merest warning of possible damage to children was accepted as adequate to justify any proposed control of the Net.

By the time the tripartite government-police-Internet associations initiative was announced in September, the idea that something needs to be done about pornography on the Net was already firmly established. The final package of measures was characterised by the launch of a new regulatory authority: the Safety-Net Foundation, a non-profit organisation set up by Peter Dawe, ex-chairman of Pipex Internet company, and backed by a £500 000 loan.

The watchwords of Safety-Net are: Rating, Reporting, and Responsibility. The authority will rate the contents of every news group to indicate the frequency with which illegal material appears. It has set up a hotline for Net users to report illegal material, and has undertaken to trace originators

and report them to the police. Safety-Net expects all 'responsible' Internet service providers to cooperate with the reporting system, and all 'responsible' Net users to submit materials to be rated under the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) scheme.

PICS is being widely adopted by service providers as a mechanism for regulating material on the Internet. Under PICS, users of the Internet have data screened by their machines, or by service providers, to prevent the spread of 'unsuitable material'. Originators of material must provide a rating for it or have it rated by a third party. The ratings are on a scale of zero to four, where four indicates the highest content of sex, violence, nudity or offensive language, and zero indicates none at all.

Advocates of PICS point out that the scheme is entirely voluntary: you do not have to let your software screen incoming material, and you do not have to submit your own material to be rated. Moreover, it puts the responsibility for screening on the recipient rather than on service providers. As a consequence PICS is likely to be more effective at screening material than news group bans.

So does PICS represent the ideal compromise between regulation and freedom of expression? Not at all. As PICS becomes more widespread the moral and social pressure from the fast growing breed of ratings authorities like Safety-Net will mean that originators of material have to succumb to third-party rating. In reality this will not be a voluntary process, but a compulsory one.

Providers and users who do not make use of screening systems risk being branded as socially irresponsible. The Internet community will become divided between the responsible (who comply) and the irresponsible (who do not). Responsibility is something that will have to be demonstrated to the satisfaction of third parties.

Abdicating responsibility

What this means is that, as an originator, if your material does not conform to the categorisation of the ratings authority, it is likely to be screened out. As a recipient PICS user, meanwhile, you will abdicate responsibility for judging controversial Internet material to the ratings authorities. PICS does not prevent the use of censorship. On the contrary, as the moral policemen from the new ratings authorities rush to adopt and adapt to the concerns of Scotland Yard, PICS seems set to become the acceptable face of censorship for our times.

This may seem better than banning news groups. But Scotland Yard's bans are at least explicit, public measures

that can be contested. By contrast, the Safety-Net initiative is far more insidious and repressive. There are no publicly agreed criteria for judging material on the Net, there is no public accountability for the actions of the authorities, and there is no room for dissent.

The premise of the rush for new ratings and regulation is that we need to be protected from porn on the Net. Yet most people are able to cope with pornographic images without suffering psychological damage, and in any case can avoid them if they choose. And those who hid pornographic magazines under mattresses as children will probably agree that the experience has not transformed them into perverts. Indeed such things are rightly regarded as part of the normal process of growing up. Arguing for ratings schemes to protect people only invites adults to be treated like children. Adulthood is all about your ability to act as an autonomous individual and to make up your own mind.

Fit for children only

The debate about pornography on the Net really has little to do with the Internet itself. It is a consequence of the exaggerated sense of risk that is prevalent throughout society today. The risk of pornography on the Net has been accepted as serious in a climate where life is widely perceived as being beset by hazards from knives to BSE. There is an increasingly downbeat and contemptuous view of human behaviour which assumes that, left to our own devices, we are always likely to harm others and ourselves.

As a consequence attention always focuses on potentially negative side-effects of anything new. So an inspiring development like the Internet only seems to be discussed as a carrier of pornography.

The result of accepting this view will be to transform the Internet into a sanitised, regulated world, fit only for children. With Safety-Net in place we would never be confronted by anything we did not solicit. We would have to submit to guidance and regulation from those worthies more 'responsible' than ourselves, and surrender our freedom.

Those of us who think that freedom is worth defending should reject all attempts to control and regulate the Net. The only ratings scheme we can subscribe to is the one where each individual judges each idea or image on its own merits; one where you are free to make up your own mind and not have it made up for you by PICS.

Get the Met Off the Net!—
The Campaign for Internet Freedom can be contacted on
censorship@www.junius.co.uk

No refuge from the West

PHOTO: AP



Rwandan Hutu refugees flee from attacks in eastern Zaire, late October

Far from saving lives, outside interference in Rwanda and Zaire has endangered a million refugees, reports Bernadette Gibson

As we go to press, the major powers who sit on the United Nations Security Council are debating how they should intervene in the refugee crisis in Zaire. But regardless of how many French, British, American or other foreign troops end up going into east Africa, one thing is certain. Western intervention will not resolve the desperate problems facing the people of the region. The crisis is the result of the West's interference in the affairs of Rwanda and Zaire. More of the same can only make matters worse.

The refugee crisis was precipitated by the Tutsi-dominated military government of Rwanda, a regime strongly supported by the West and armed indirectly by US aid (channelled via Uganda). At the end of October soldiers of the Rwandan government invaded neighbouring Zaire, joined forces with local Tutsi militia and took control of Kivu, a large region on the border with Rwanda, including the three towns of Goma, Bukavu and Uvira. The purpose of this act of aggression was to close down the refugee camps which have been home to more than a million Rwandan Hutu refugees who fled their country after the collapse of the Hutu government in July 1994.

Rwandan troops, fighting alongside local Tutsi militia which they armed and trained, shelled defenceless refugees in their camps and sent hundreds of thousands of people fleeing into the volcanic hills of Zaire with no access to food, clean water or medical supplies. The new Rwandan-backed force in the region refused aid workers access to the dying refugees, but supported the proposal for an international ►

◀ armed force to create 'return corridors' that could force the Rwandan refugees back home.

The conflict has destabilised the entire region, creating tens of thousands of new refugees from the local Zairean population, threatening the stability of one of the poorest African countries, and creating the prospect of one of the worst humanitarian tragedies of the decade.

Yet there has not been one word of criticism of the Rwandan government from the West. Instead the 'international community' has blamed the refugees for bringing this disaster on themselves. Western governments and even aid agencies have thinly disguised their relief that Rwanda's armed force has succeeded, where non-violent methods of 'persuasion' have failed, in closing down these refugee camps and forcing the refugees back home. There is a broad consensus in the West that, whatever happens in eastern Zaire, these largely Hutu-populated camps must remain closed.

Why has such an open act of aggression with such devastating consequences been silently supported by the major world powers? And why have these camps become so notorious that humanitarian aid workers agree that they must never be reopened?

To understand the background to this crisis we have to return to the civil war that gripped Rwanda until 1994. After Rwanda gained its independence in 1962, the Tutsi minority was dislodged from many of the privileged positions which it had enjoyed under the Belgian colonial regime, and the majority Hutu population took control. Some Tutsis fled to neighbouring Uganda, where they later formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA).

In 1990, the RPA invaded Rwanda to fulfil their dream of regaining power. The invasion was backed by Uganda and Uganda's main Western allies—Britain and America. The Hutu government held off the onslaught for four years but, isolated and under intense international pressure to share power with the invading army, the government began to lose control.

As the RPA looked increasingly assured of victory, Rwanda descended into a nightmare of violence. Hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, along with Hutu supporters of the RPA, were slaughtered by government soldiers and the notorious Interahamwe—Hutu militia—in a four month frenzy of violence. The killings ended when the RPA seized control in July 1994, sending nearly two million Hutus, a quarter of the Rwandan population, fleeing into neighbouring Zaire and Tanzania where they settled as refugees.

While the ferocity of the violence and the large numbers of people slaughtered within a short timescale drew international media attention to this war, in other aspects it was horribly similar to a string of wars in sub-Saharan Africa from Sudan to Liberia to Sierra Leone. Fuelled by grinding poverty and desperation for power, in countries where political power means access to scant resources, the war in Rwanda was all too characteristically brutal. Yet the treatment of this war by aid agencies and the international media set it apart from other African conflicts.

Soon after the Rwandan Patriotic Front had formed a government, Western commentators, human rights groups and aid agencies started

talking about the 'genocide' in Rwanda. Before long the real roots of the massacres, which lay in a four year civil war between an African government and an invading army backed by the West, had been buried beneath an avalanche of propaganda. The moral clamour to describe events in Rwanda as the third genocide this century—a pre-planned, well executed attempt to wipe out an entire ethnic group, Rwandan Tutsis—shaped international opinion on the issue. (For a full account of the issue and the row

condemned the massacres. Instead the Western media rallied to emphasise the need to suppress the threat from the 'Hutu extremists'.

Against this background it becomes possible to make sense of the extraordinary events that have taken place in Zaire since late October, where more than one million people have been driven towards possible death in order to achieve the widely held aim of closing down Hutu refugee camps.

Rwandan refugee camps are much like the

The 'international community' has blamed the refugees for bringing this disaster on themselves

which followed, see Helen Searls and Barry Crawford, 'Rwanda: the great genocide debate', *Living Marxism*, March 1996.)

In the highly charged moralistic atmosphere which surrounded the discussion of the Rwandan genocide, anybody who challenged the dominant version of events (such as *Living Marxism*) was accused of being pro-Hutu and compared with those who have sought to deny the Holocaust. People calling for reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda were condemned for promoting a climate of impunity for murderers. In this black and white version of history, the word Hutu soon became automatically linked with adjectives like 'killer', 'genocidal' and 'extremist', while Tutsis became portrayed as the world's ultimate victims.

The moral certainties offered by the 'genocide' version of events successfully justified and sanitised the activities of the new Rwandan government. As the force that stopped the genocide they assumed an almost angelic image. None of the atrocities committed by the RPA during the civil war or since they took power have been condemned by the West. No Tutsi soldiers are facing murder charges at either the International Tribunal on genocide set up in Tanzania, or within Rwanda. Indeed, as we have seen in recent months, the most brutal activities of Rwandan backed forces in Zaire can be justified by Western governments, and by the radical aid agencies and liberal journalists who have appointed themselves as the most dedicated proponents of the 'genocide' thesis on Rwanda's tragedy.

The Rwandan government has good reason to be confident that it has Western backing for its attacks on Hutus in Zaire. In 1995 it decided to close down Kibeho, the last remaining camp for Hutu refugees inside Rwanda, by surrounding the camp and firing into the crowd. Thousands of refugees were killed, many of them shot in the back as they ran for their lives. But already the notion that Hutus were genocidal criminals had stuck and few

camps produced by conflicts throughout the Third World. While the vast majority of refugees are civilians, predominantly women and children, most camps contain members of a defeated army who have brought their arms with them. Even where there are no former soldiers, it is not long before structures are created whereby one political group or another exerts some form of leadership within the camps. Refugee camps like these have remained open for years around the globe and have never become the focus of international criticism.

Yet within three months of Rwandan refugees settling into their camps, human rights groups and commentators were condemning aid agencies for supporting killers and calling for the camps to be closed. The French aid agency *Médecins Sans Frontières* pulled out of the camps, publicly stating that it could no longer justify feeding murderers. Those who stayed spent the next two years devising more and more aggressive ways of forcing the refugees to leave the camps and go home. Reducing food rations, refusing to treat new Aids and TB sufferers, and closing down all educational programmes within the camps were among the methods employed to 'persuade' the refugees that life would be better back home in Rwanda.

Even faced with the deterioration of the already horrendous conditions in the camps, however, Rwandan refugees defied all initial attempts to force them home. The common explanation is that the innocent refugees are being held hostage by the guilty—those members of the old army and the Interahamwe Hutu militia who fear punishment if they return, and would prefer to reorganise and fight their way back into Rwanda. While there are undoubtedly members of the defeated militias in the camps, this explanation by Western commentators suggests that the majority of refugees are being brainwashed by the 'extremists' in the camps, who are exaggerating claims of revenge killings inside Rwanda. Nobody has

asked why, if the Hutu militias in the camps were so well armed and organised, did they put up no resistance to the Tutsi attack, but fled into the hills of Zaire?

The United Nations relief agency UNHCR, the largest aid agency working in the camps, has repeatedly reassured the refugees that they will be safe back in Rwanda, even running a radio station and showing videos in the camps to counter 'extremist propaganda'. One refugee, who returned to the camps after he was

Rwanda. While some of the million refugees have found their way to Uganda and Tanzania, those returning to Rwanda can be counted in hundreds—and many of those may be Zairians newly displaced by the spreading conflict. Yet the wishes of the African refugees themselves appear irrelevant to those international bodies which now sit in American and European cities deciding their fate.

At the moment when Rwandan-backed Tutsi militias were pounding the refugee

ago. In their ideal scenario, the innocent refugees will be starved into going back home; while those who do not return will obviously be the guilty ones, and will either be dealt with by the international armed force or left to starve to death. Either way, in this Western view, the ongoing problem of the Hutu refugees and the 'extremists' in their midst will have been resolved. The fact that the Hutus are being forced back to face the wrath of an unelected, minority military government is apparently neither here nor there.

While aid agencies and commentators clamour for Western intervention and condemn the big powers for their apparent reluctance to act, the truth is that this tragedy is another story of too much Western interference in Africa. Western support of the RPA, and Western complicity in the criminalisation of Rwandan refugees has produced the current crisis, and further intervention can only make things worse.

Western intervention caused the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda to explode in the first place. Western support has given the Rwandan regime *carte blanche* to invade Zaire and close the camps without a word of condemnation from the world. Indeed Western sanctions against Zaire have paved the way for the invasion by bringing that state to its knees; its sovereignty is now routinely bypassed as aid agencies and journalists go to the government of Rwanda seeking permission to enter Zaire.

In military terms, the Western powers are probably as relieved as their allies in the Rwandan government to see the closure of camps which pose a threat from over the border. In political terms, the

colonial powers of yesteryear will be even more delighted to see themselves cast in the role of reluctant invaders, called upon to save Africans from themselves. Whatever its final outcome, the Rwandan-Zairean crisis represents another step forward in rebuilding the moral authority of imperialism. A century on from the first 'Scramble for Africa', the great powers can effectively ride back in to reconquer the continent under the banners of humanitarian relief, with cheers ringing in their ears.

In the past, an act of aggression by one African country supported by powerful Western allies would have been condemned by aid workers and human rights groups. Today, it is the aid workers and human rights groups who have legitimised Western intervention by promoting the idea that a criminal Hutu community has exported the seeds of genocide into a neighbouring country.

One thing is for sure—the one group of people who will not have a say in how this crisis is resolved are the million or so Rwandan refugees in Zaire. The criminalisation of these people as supporters of genocide has robbed them of a voice, and may well rob many of them of their lives. No doubt the aid workers will bemoan their fate—but the truth is that the role of these agencies has done much to seal it. ●



beaten and threatened in Rwanda while searching for his family, found his name on a UNHCR leaflet distributed in the camps listing the names of people safely settled back home.

It is little surprise that refugees should fear for their safety inside Rwanda—not least thanks to the way aid agencies have helped to criminalise Hutus in the camps over the past two years. According to Amnesty International, the army of the Tutsi dominated Rwandan government has carried out several hundred 'extra-judicial executions' on unarmed civilians this year. Rwanda's jails are overflowing with 80 000 Hutus, held without trial after being accused of involvement in 'the genocide'. Many have been rotting there for nearly three years.

Despite damning evidence of conditions within Rwanda, aid agencies have wholeheartedly endorsed the idea that the solution to the current crisis is the creation of 'return corridors', through which aid can be delivered to the hungry refugees on condition that they return home to Rwanda.

To date, however, it seems that many of these refugees would rather risk disease and starvation by fleeing further into Zaire than be taken back to

camps with shells and rocket fire, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, urged the camp occupants to go back to Rwanda: 'Because of

your current ordeal, I am sure you will consider where you will be safer—in Zaire or in Rwanda.' While Ogata assured the refugees that 'that is a decision for you to make', it appears that the international powers that be are making all the real decisions.

As this article goes to press, aid agencies and Western governments are debating the kind of military force they would like to see sent into Zaire to create the 'corridors' for the delivery of aid and the return of refugees. All are agreed that a key role of the intervention will be to disarm the armed killers in the camps.

Many commentators have blamed the current crisis on those governments and aid agencies who have fed the refugees and allowed the camps to remain open for so long. A recent editorial in the *Independent* echoed a common theme: 'The failure of the international community to deal with the evil presence in the camps must also carry the blame for the present crisis.' (30 October 1996) Many who share this view harbour hopes that the current crisis will finally produce the results which they wanted two years

New Food No Danger

Critics of biotechnology cannot stomach the idea of turkeys getting fat on genetically modified maize. John Gillott licks his lips at the prospect of more genetic engineering of food

It is more than likely that you have eaten food containing genetically modified products. If you are reading this article while munching a biscuit or a chocolate bar you are probably ingesting such substances right now. From being a novelty—such as the slow-ripening tomato Flavr-Savr—genetically modified substances are suddenly everywhere. American corporation Monsanto has mixed a bit of genetically modified soya into the mega-tonnage it ships around the world. Given that Monsanto is the biggest global supplier of soya, and that soya is included in 60 per cent of foodstuffs, you would have to try very hard to avoid this latest product of biotechnology. And there is more on the horizon. Ciba-Geigy are seeking approval to market a genetically modified maize in Europe—as a human foodstuff in processed form, and as an animal foodstuff in the unprocessed form.

According to one *Observer* story, 'within five years, the potential is there for most food production to become the horticultural equivalent of Frankenstein' (6 October 1996). Environmentalists and other critics of biotechnology take such talk seriously, and have gone into campaigning overdrive to stop the genetic modification of food (before it is 'too late').

Over 500 organisations from 75 countries are calling for a boycott of Monsanto's soya. Many want an outright ban on all genetically modified foods and organisms. Greenpeace talk of genetic 'pollution'. Genetic engineering,

they warn, 'is a vast experiment with unknown risks'.

Even if they lose the immediate battle to ban a genetically modified foodstuff, the environmentalists have successfully influenced public perceptions. The idea has been got across that there is no reason for the new product (except to make money for a filthy-rich multinational), in which case such 'vast experiments with unknown risks' should be curtailed. In order to establish a different framework for looking at the issue, it is worth first dwelling on the reasons for making such novel crops, and the scientific achievement involved in doing so.

Genetic engineering promises a wider diversity of better tasting, more nutritional foods. The more common result to date has been new varieties of boring old staples such as soya and corn. But this is no bad thing. Better ways of producing staples would be a major achievement.

Monsanto's new soya strain is 'Roundup Ready Soybeans', so-called because they are engineered for use with Monsanto's herbicide, Roundup. The new soya contains a gene from a bacterium which makes it resistant to the herbicide. So the herbicide kills weeds, but not the crop. This is a clever piece of biotechnology. The obvious benefit is improved crop yields. A less obvious benefit is the use of herbicides that are less toxic to humans and other plant life, as Michael Reiss and Roger Straughan have noted:

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

FUTURES



No need to fear the invasion of the killer tomatoes

'Genetic engineering holds out the hope that instead of researchers starting with desirable crops and then finding herbicides that kill the weeds infesting those crops without harming the crops, they could start with the most desirable herbicides and then genetically alter the crops so that they, unlike their weeds, are unaffected by the chemicals.' (*Improving Nature?: The Science and Ethics of Genetic Engineering*, 1996)

In terms of a wider impact on plant life and human health, one of the most suitable herbicides is the one marketed by Monsanto.

Ciba-Geigy's new maize is more novel still. It contains not one, but three engineered genes. One gene produces Bt toxin, which protects against the European corn borer pest (*Ostrinia nubilalis*), a beetle larva. Another gene is used to resist the herbicide glufosinate, marketed by Ciba under the trade name Basta. A third gene, resistant to the antibiotic ampicillin, is a genetic 'marker', inserted to facilitate the development of the product. The development of pest-resistant crops such as this new maize holds out the hope of reducing the damage done by pests which currently destroy around a third of the world's potential crop production. The European corn borer is a particular nuisance—and not just in Europe; in the USA it causes annual losses worth \$500m (in 1992 prices).

Critics argue that all the benefits of these developments flow to the company, rather than to the consumer (since economies are not passed on) or to the farmer (since they are forced to pay extra for the new seeds). This may be true—but that is a criticism of the way the corporate profit system works, not a criticism of genetic engineering. At least potentially, these new technologies promise to reduce the use of the more toxic herbicides and make cheaper staple foods available. But what about safety? Is it a case of New Food, New Danger?

Safety is the main issue raised by critics of the genetic engineering of life forms. It is the focus of the statement 'The need for greater regulation and control of genetic engineering', issued in November 1994 by a group of prominent, largely environmentally minded and left-leaning scientists. Their starting point is that genetically modified organisms pose a unique danger because 'recombinant techniques have enormously powerful new potentials'. The danger, as they see it, is that unforeseen interactions ►

with natural strains, or indeed within the genome of the organism itself, could lead to ecological destruction. They reject the claim that genetic modification can be compared to traditional selective breeding methods which, they point out, are much slower, and rarely involve gene transfer between species. The statement argues that regulation has not developed as fast



Green critics oppose 'unnatural' methods of food production regardless of whether they are safe or not

as genetic science, and that the scientific community has dropped its earlier concerns—expressed most clearly at the Asilomar conference in 1975—not in response to new evidence, but on account of the centrality of commercial funding for research. In other words, they have been bought off.

Yet contrary to the claims of the critics and public expectations, the evidence and the science indicate that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) pose no special risk.

The experience of GMO releases is reassuring. In Europe, by early 1996, over 500 releases of GMOs had taken place. Most were crops, along with some pharmaceutical products. No ill-effects due to genetic manipulation have been reported from any of the releases. There have been a number of panics—such as the claim by American environmentalist Jeremy Rifkin that the release of a crop with a gene altered to stop ice formation and hence frost damage might lead to climate change—but none have turned out to be true.

The chief reason to be confident is that all available evidence suggests that the level of risk is determined not by the *method* used to create the new organism, but by the *character* of the gene product incorporated in an organism or the trait produced by the novel gene. In other words, recombinant techniques—those involving genetic manipulation—pose no greater risk, in general, than traditional selective breeding techniques, since what matters is the end result—the new properties of the organism—not the method used to achieve the change.

The plausible hypothesis that commercial interests have ridden roughshod over safety concerns turns out, on a closer inspection, to be based on dubious science. It also fails to accord

with the real history of the matter. A strong case could be made that the original fears scientists expressed at the Asilomar conference were an over-reaction to a new technology. But whatever the truth of that, there grew up, after Asilomar, a tight code of regulation which has only been relaxed step-by-step as scientific evidence of safety has accumulated. The current understanding is that safety must be assessed on a case by case basis, and the regulatory codes reflect that. There is no need for a more general or more restrictive regime of regulation because there is no general risk, just as there is no general risk with selective breeding techniques.

So what are the risks associated with the products currently hitting the headlines—Monsanto's soya and Ciba-Geigy's maize? The modified soya is no risk at all to human health. The novel gene fools the herbicide by re-routing the production of certain enzymes that the soya would produce anyway. In other words, it is no different from ordinary soya. Greenpeace's talk of genetic 'pollution' is simply bizarre.

However, critics worry about the possible ecological spin-offs of making plants resistant to herbicides and pests. What if this genetic resistance was to transfer to weeds or pests? A similar concern is raised, in relation to human health, about the presence in Ciba-Geigy's maize of the 'marker gene' which is resistant to the antibiotic ampicillin. What if this gene was to transfer to bacteria in the gut? This issue is the cause of the delay in securing a European licensing agreement for the product.

None of these questions should give cause for much concern. For a problem to arise, an unlikely chain of events would need to occur: the gene would have to transfer; the new strain would then have to spread within the population to which it had transferred (weed, bacteria in the human gut, etc); and such an occurrence would need to go beyond the reach of science. In relation to Ciba-Geigy's maize, the view of most experts is that there is no realistic risk of the gene even transferring in a form that would matter—the processing of the maize destroys the mechanisms which allow the gene to express itself anew.

Even in the unlikely event of a slow spread of herbicide-resistant properties to weeds and drug-resistant properties to bacteria, so what? We cannot expect our relationship to nature to be a static one. Causing changes and then reacting to those changes is what development is all about. All the evidence suggests that we are quite capable of keeping ahead of the game in the areas that matter, such as coping with drug-resistant strains of bacteria.

(For an overview see 'The diseases of modern civilization', *Living Marxism*, September 1996. For a specific idea that would deal with the problem at a stroke, see 'Resistance is useless', *New Scientist*, 12 October 1996.)

In general, genetically modified food is as safe as other foods. In defiance of all the evidence, the 'concerned scientists' and Green critics of modern biotechnology are pursuing a private agenda which blinds them to reality. At root, they oppose 'unnatural' methods of food production regardless of whether they are safe or not. Their alternatives betray their real motivation. Prince Charles wants Britain to switch to organic farming. Greenpeace suggests pesticide-free farming. The results of such alternatives would be disastrous: more expensive foods, poorer yields and harder work for farmers. For people in developing countries, the price would be particularly high.

'Pay more for less choice of food' is not a popular slogan. So the critics of biotechnology try to win support by preying on people's wider concerns about genetic engineering. Environmentalists commonly tailor their arguments to connect with these fears. They will happily switch from trying to use science to demonstrate how unsafe something is to condemning science for promising safety when, they say, it is inherently impossible to do so because everything is so uncertain.

For Oxford philosopher John Gray, the novelty of genetic engineering makes it impossible to assess the risks, so we should forego 'promising technological innovations' such as biotechnology. This, Gray believes, is what adopting the 'precautionary principle' must mean. The reality is that attempts to limit biotechnology through a focus on risk rest not on a reasonable assessment of the limits of scientific certainty, but on a belittling of scientific knowledge. The environmentalists' claims can only be made if good science—science which points to both the benefits of biotechnology and the limited and known risks it poses—is dismissed.

Even where risks are as yet uncertain, 'playing safe' may not, paradoxically, be the 'safe' option. 'Playing safe' by restricting research and real-world applications could deny us the knowledge and techniques needed to deal with future circumstances, such as increased demand for food or the natural evolution of new diseases in plants (or humans); diseases which could be neutralised using biotechnology. Risk-aversion poses more of a threat than genetically modified foods. *Bon appetit!*

(Thanks to Christine Louis-Dit-Sully for material and ideas.)

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Empty Bosnian graves baffle UN' was the curious headline in the *Sunday Times*, above a piece by Jon Swain (3 November 1996). The investigative journalism that followed became curiuser and curiuser. Noting that less than 10 per cent of the predicted body count has been found in the 'mass graves' around Srebrenica, Swain demanded to know 'Where have all the bodies gone?...The empty graves speak volumes about the conspiracy by Bosnian Serbs to cover up the massacre at Srebrenica. Their leadership claims that few bodies have been found because the stories of atrocities there were exaggerated. The more plausible theory is that the bodies have been made to "disappear"...One explanation for the empty graves is that the bodies may have been dug up and taken to an aluminium factory at Zvornik to be chemically dissolved'. The other 'more plausible' explanation, of course, is that Nazi aliens from Hitler's moon camps (see 'It is all a conspiracy', *Living Marxism*, March 1993) were employed by the 'fascist' Serbs to spirit the bodies away. No further questions.

David Barker, spokesperson for the Scout Association, argues that the new 'Public Relations' proficiency badge (depicting a mobile phone) is part of a move to get rid of the 'funny hat and baggy shorts' image: 'Teenagers are sometimes embarrassed about admitting they are Scouts. It is not considered cool. The badge is to encourage them to get publicity when it is deserved.' And thus attract more embarrassing attention? Perhaps not, for as Mr Barker adds: 'We are not talking about placing stories with the tabloids. [Scout masters get quite enough of that attention already] It is more likely to be the parish magazine.'



And on the subject of public relations, a proficiency badge, please, for the press officer of the Nuffield Theatre in Southampton for its press release headed 'Nuffield Theatre appoints disabled person as stage director'. If the media cannot respond to stories like this, what hope is there?

Transport Secretary Sir George Young has personally approved a scheme by Croydon Council and local police to recruit 'specially trained' children to talk to other children about 'the dangers of misbehaving on buses'. 'Croydon is leading the way', declared Sir George. And who can disagree?

Readers of those bastions of moral guidance and discipline the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Spectator* have been revealed as among the most enthusiastic customers of Delectus Books, specialists in Victorian texts such as *The Romance of Chastisement*. 'It's amazing', says proprietor Michael Goss. 'Every time we place an ad in them or get a review [!] it produces three or four hundred inquiries. Some people ring up asking very specific questions: Do you have anything about really serious humiliation? Is it in front of the whole school?'

Syd Ambrose was treated by medical staff after clapping over-enthusiastically at a Beverley Sisters concert in Clacton. Still, better than risking cardiac arrest in the company of the Delectus oeuvre.

CAR ELET SST ALK

'It's all around, isn't it? It's the tragedy of life. I cannot be unaware of it. People who suffer, countries in trouble, famine in the world, destruction of the environment...Oh, I can't put it into words.'

Nicole Farhi, the not noticeably disadvantaged clothes designer, answering the question 'What is there to be sad about?'

'In Bosnia we are reliving forms which are outdated and outmoded—which were real conflicts. But I've got a feeling that the actors, those that were fighting, didn't understand it like that. They lived as though it were a real conflict.'

Jean Baudrillard

'It is to do with being brought up, rightly or wrongly, to believe one is superior. Eventually one comes to think of that superiority as tangible, and when one finds some intruder in one's damned drawing-room one either wants to jolly well give them what for, like Lady Kennet [who kneed a hapless intruder in the

groin], or to let them get on with it and not give them the satisfaction of causing one grief, they being, as it were, not fit to button one's cuff.'

A Tory peer, who wished to remain anonymous 'for fear of reprisals', explains why the upper classes have no need for counselling after burglary

'I had a fall in the bath last week and hurt my back. I was taking a heavy load of painkillers which interacted with a very small amount of alcohol.'

Sir Nicholas Scott MP explains why he was found face down George Brown-style in the street after a drinks reception during the Conservative party conference. 'When the police found me I was trying to get up', he added reasonably.

'He did a professional job on me—I went backwards into the cake stand.'

Trolley rage survivor Joseph Wilkinson of Wakefield

'We are treating it as a case of trolley rage.'

Murder by any other name: Darlington police give trolley rage the official endorsement, describing the killing of Gordon Edwards in a supermarket car park.

'He consumed the product for his own pleasure at the wrong ambient temperature.'

A Sainsbury's spokesman justifies the suspension of food manager Paul Freake for eating a clementine

Stick to your guns

A day's shooting is one of the joys of Paul McGibbon's life

This big beast of a Magnum .44 is hard to hold onto. I am shooting skittles (superannuated bowling pins) on a pistol range at Bisley Camp, home of the National Rifle Association. It is a lovely day—sunshine, smell of gun smoke, ear defenders just about make the unholy racket bearable. I am twatting skittles all over the place. A .38 just knocks them down, while a .44 sends them halfway to Timbuktu. Guns like Dirty Harry's Magnum are something you see all the time on tv and in the movies. It is fascinating to get your hands on the real thing and compare their performance with what you have seen on screen.

On my left somebody's semi-automatic ejects spent cartridges, which occasionally bounce off my safety glasses. Personally I prefer the beauty and simplicity of a revolver's mechanism, which, like that of a bicycle, is a work of genius yet simple enough to understand at a glance. The recoil of each of my shots brings the Magnum high above my head, and I am pleased with myself for having scored a hit with every one. But this .44 is just too big and too silly—ludicrously loud noise, cartridges ludicrously expensive. I will move on to something smaller for proper target shooting.

As I eject the empty shells I realise that the money just spent on six bullets would buy a thousand air pistol pellets.

Of course, air guns are not the real thing. But at least they are clean and quiet and you can shoot home-made targets in the comfort of your living room (simply *Blue Peter*—up your favourite politician). In common with rifles and small bore pistols, the air gun is relaxing rather than exciting, requiring a Zen-like control of muscles, breathing and even heartbeat.

Back on the range, one of our party, Kath, asks if we want to shoot a proper competition. I start to get nervous. 'Police Pistol' requires 12 shots in two minutes at 20 metres. Then 12 shots at two seconds per shot at turning targets 15 metres away, finishing with three sets of two shots rapid fire with the target showing for only two seconds at a time.

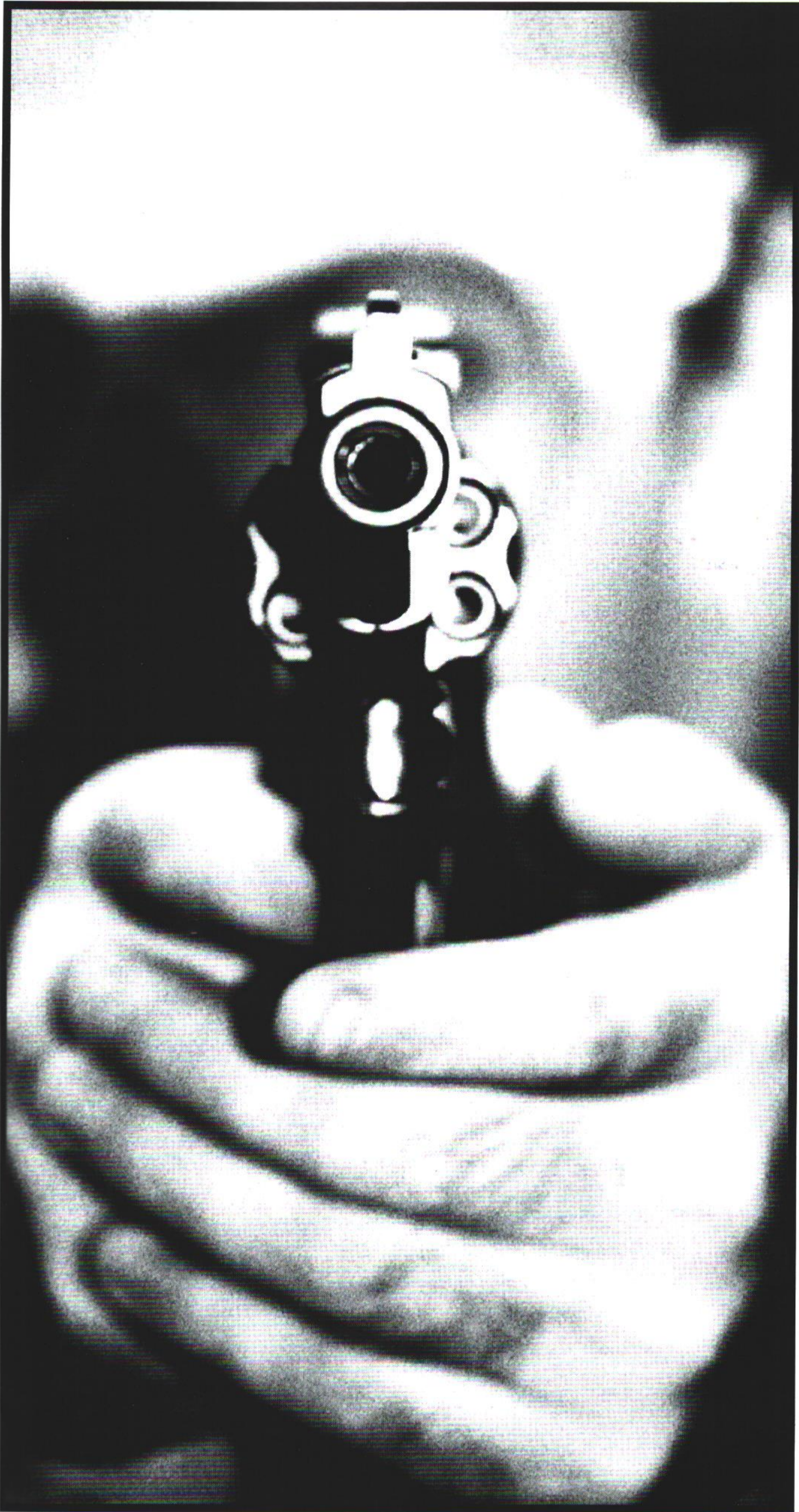
Deep breathing. Try not to rush but two seconds is not long. Doesn't help that the standard Advancing Man target looks like Elvis—the Las Vegas years. 'Load and make ready...Shooters, are you ready?...Watch and shoot, watch and shoot.' Then there is hell for a few seconds. I worry that my first shot was too hasty, and the next too deliberate.

'Show clear.' The range officer checks our guns, makes sure the range is clear, and only then do we approach the targets and see how we have scored. I did not do as well as I had hoped. We patch up the holes with black or white stickers, retire for a fag and make our excuses.

Fresh air makes you hungry. Walking back to the clubhouse for lunch we pass the members of the Muzzle Loading Club of Great Britain in their Confederate hats, cleaning out their muskets. History and tradition are an important part of the experience. Bisley is to shooting what Wimbledon is to tennis—world famous for over a century. This is reflected in the collection of colonial-style wooden bungalows with verandas, reminiscent of pink gins and stiff upper lips. Very Merchant Ivory.

Today the Yanks are here for a big army competition. They are surprisingly friendly, and over tea and hamburgers at the picnic tables one of them lets Kath handle his unloaded M16.

Lunch break over, time to think long distance rifle. On the way back to the range it starts to rain. The prospect of lying down all afternoon in the wet is not appealing (George has forgotten the waterproof mats). It is getting windy so we will have to calculate how much effect this will have on the bullet's trajectory over 1000 yards. It takes a few seconds to reach the target at this distance, and for the whole time it is dropping like a stone and being blown off course by the wind. This is where physics and ballistics come into play, and you wish you had paid more attention in the science classes at school. It took me a long time to be convinced that bullets travel in an arc rather than a straight line.



Slow pace. Long waits in between actual firing. There are the usual problems with the radio to contact the scorer in the butts. But I would rather be at this end firing a gun than at the other end hoisting targets on a pulley. Although in the security of the deep trench, the crack of bullets overhead gives you some idea of what it is like to be under fire, and I do not fancy it one bit.

I am using a Russian sniper's rifle from the Second World War, with a rather primitive telescopic sight. I personally think telescopic sights are cheating and I prefer to use the naked eye and the gun's built-in iron sights. Either way, mastering technology to conquer nature at such a distance is a great feeling. Easier said than done.

I am not helped by the pain in my shoulder from yesterday's clay pigeon shooting. And there is a slight bruise on my right cheek. I cannot have been holding the shotgun properly (maybe I should get one made to measure). But that is the problem with only using club guns and only having the chance to practise once a month. However, the good thing about shotguns is the low cost. At £15 for the afternoon even I could afford to go shooting every weekend—one of the few things I have in common with Prince Charles (by the way, swearing allegiance to the Queen is part of the constitution of all British shooting clubs).

Clay pigeon shooting is lots of fun because you are aiming at a moving target. The little black frisbee explodes into dust when you hit it right. It is a very different sport from shooting pistols or rifles since the clays move so fast that you go with the flow, relying more on instinct and rhythm. Of course you are not firing single bullets, but a cloud of tiny pellets. It is a particularly sociable sport—good to invite guests for a day out in the country with plenty of bangs and smelly smoke.

At the end of our day at Bisley, all my senses are satisfied except taste. Time to head for the village pub for a pint of traditional bitter. We would like to take advantage of the home-cooked grub but we have spent nearly £40 each on bullets. Pulling out my change to buy the first round, I find more empty shell cases than money. We sit down to compare scores and plan the next outing—best not leave it too long or the handgun ban will have come into force. It has been John's first time and he is well impressed. As he says, 'shooting is rock and roll for grown-ups'. ●

Paul McGibbon intends to carry on shooting.

James Bond is the latest cultural icon to come under intellectual scrutiny. Ian Walker investigates the enduring appeal of 007

Bond: heroic survivor

While most people in the outside world were saying that hand guns are an instrument of the devil, inside London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), fans of James Bond repeatedly referred to his Walther PPK semi-automatic as 'the holy grail'. These 'Bondies' (as in 'Trekkies') were speaking at a prestigious conference on 'the Bond phenomenon' held in October which featured, among others, producer Michael G Wilson and gold-painted Bond girl Shirley Eaton. After 33 years and 17 films seen by an estimated two billion people, the cult status of 007 has never been higher.

Many people identify with the fictional figure of Bond, the man of action licensed to hold the power of life and death, as a way of compensating for the passivity and the feeling of impotence in our day-to-day lives. Three generations of Bond fans have lived out their ambitions through him; and at the same time, each successive generation has become more acclimatised to the idea that its ambitions can never be fulfilled in real life.

Long before Sean Connery said 'yesh' to Miss Money Penny on screen, Ian Fleming's novels were best-sellers. At the ICA conference, Fleming's biographer Andrew Lycett pointed out that the creator of Bond was a child of the British Empire (Eton, war service in Naval Intelligence). Fleming was brought up to believe that Britain was always right. But by the 1950s the world had moved on, and it became clear that Britain's international role was to be relatively minor compared to that of the USA. The Bond books were a kind of compensation for Britain's loss of power.

After the Suez debacle in 1956, Britain's ailing prime minister Anthony Eden took refuge at Golden Eye, Fleming's house in Jamaica. But in Fleming's imagination, Bond always beats Johnny Foreigner, and Britain is still on top. In the original book of *Dr No*, for example, the Asian villain is despatched by Bond under tons of stinking guano. Fleming must have longed for the days when British contempt rained down on troublesome natives.

In an age of uncertainty, Fleming's

Bond displayed an unerring knowledge of what to wear, what car to drive, and what drink to order. Nick Foulkes, co-author of *Dressed To Kill: Bond as Suited Hero*, notes that 'it's comforting to have these immutable things'. For Fleming and his contemporaries in Britain's elite, Bond served as a model of confidence—albeit a fictitious one—in an Americanised world they found increasingly unnerving.

By the time Bond films were being made in the 1960s, the emphasis was different. Even more attention was paid to what Bond drinks, wears, smokes and who he sleeps with. But Bond the connoisseur was no longer a cipher for British good versus foreign evil. On the contrary, cinema audiences worldwide loved Bond because his consummate style seemed to put him beyond good and evil—a superman of style identified by his accessories.

It was not long before the action too became stylised. Self-parody began with *Goldfinger*, but it was during Roger Moore's long stint that it took over the Bond persona. Moore was always cocking that eyebrow to let us know that he knew it was all rather silly—chasing space shuttles and driving cars that turned into submarines. The message seemed to be that action cannot be taken seriously, even as fantasy. Special agent 007 had to be made ironic in accordance with the growing sense that human agency is implausible. Since the 1970s, films featuring the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone have gone further in the same direction.

Is there a future for Bond? After the recent success of *GoldenEye*, the next film, codenamed '18' by Bondies, is scheduled for release in 1998. 'Does Bond wear a condom?' mused '18' screenwriter Bruce Feirstein. 'He always carries protection. But it is a Walther PPK.' Feirstein insisted that the success of the Bond series—by far the longest series of films ever produced—lies in having the protagonist stay the same while the characters around him reflect changing attitudes (promiscuous seventies, safety-conscious nineties). But Robin Hunt, director of the *Guardian's* New Media Lab, noted that the identity of the new Bond, played by Irish-born Pierce Brosnan, is strangely unclear. 'We don't know what we want from our Bond', he suggested. 'All we can expect from our heroes today is that they should survive.'

James Bond—the conference took place at London's ICA on Saturday 26 October. *Dressed To Kill: Bond As Suited Hero* is published by Flammarion at £29.95.

Andrew Lycett's biography of Ian Fleming was recently published in paperback by Phoenix. Ian Walker is a lifelong Bond fan.





Car trouble

The centennial Motor Show revealed an industry in retreat before the anti-car lobby. Keith McCabe puts his foot down

The motor car has lost it. At the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, car capital of Britain, this year's Motor Show should have been a celebration of one hundred years of the automobile. But throughout the year the car has been damned by faint praise, and the centennial Motor Show seemed more like an act of contrition than a proud celebration of achievement.

In 1896 pioneer motorist John Henry Knight wrote that 'future prospects for the autocar are very bright'. He was not exaggerating, and the twentieth century turned out to be the century of the automobile. But in the last few years attitudes to the car have changed drastically. Campaigns against roads and attempts to outlaw city centre parking mark the new mood of hostility to the freedom to travel by car.

Walking round the Motor Show, I knew there was something missing. Porsche, Ferrari and BMW were there, and Jaguar had their new XK8. But somehow the thrill had gone. Today's responsible motorists are not even supposed to get a thrill from motoring. The no-thrills nineties driving experience was exemplified by Ford's new Ka—a suitably childish name for a vehicle designed to appear plump and homely rather than sleek and dangerous like the dream cars of my youth.

After the Second World War the masses were introduced to the pleasures of motoring, and the car became a popular symbol of pride and independence. When I was growing up in the seventies, car-ownership was an essential attribute of the young adult male (even if the car in question was a Ford Escort). Things

began to go awry in the eighties. Yes, there was the 160mph Lotus Esprit S4. But the bicycle was becoming popular again; and all the kids seemed to want to own was the VW badge, not the VW.

In 1896, when Henry Daimler began producing cars in Britain, the repeal of the infamous Red Flag Act prompted public celebrations. In the 1990s, 'reclaim the streets' demonstrators seem to want to take us all back to a 2mph speed limit. Autophobia is in fashion. To coincide with the Motor Show, Birmingham's listings magazine gave its 'open mike' slot over to an attack on the motor car as 'the century's most consistent killer', thus displaying both a breathtaking ignorance of modern history and an ignorance of the fact that road deaths in the UK are now at their lowest since records began 70 years ago. Environmentalists are preoccupied with PM₁₀s (little specks of black dust which you cannot quite see), even though most motor manufacturers are already introducing technology to reduce pollution caused by cars. Regardless of the facts, the perception is that things are getting worse, and the attack on the motor car continues.

Even within the ranks of the motor industry itself, it seems that cars and their drivers are now regarded as wild beasts which need to be tamed. The Motor Show was full of car security equipment and police speed cameras. Also on display was a DIY breathalyser. This is designed to be attached to your vehicle's ignition, which then cuts out if you are over the legal limit. Within the next 20 years it will probably be fitted as standard.

Mass production cars are no longer allowed to be associated with freedom and excitement. Safety is the watchword of the nineties, as symbolised by the Concept 2096, the car of the future specially created for the centennial Motor Show by Coventry University. Nicknamed the Slug, it only exists in mock-up form, and it looks like something from *The Magic Roundabout*. But if it ever went into production, it would mean the end of driving and the personal freedom associated with it.

In this vehicle all the non-driver would have to do is key in a destination, and the Slug would take you there by a pre-programmed route. Convenient, yes. But bear in mind that this is a 'car of the future' which reflects the preoccupations of the present. And in the design of the Slug, the freedom of the driver has been obliterated by the concern for safety. I wondered what would happen if you keyed in an 'unsafe' destination?

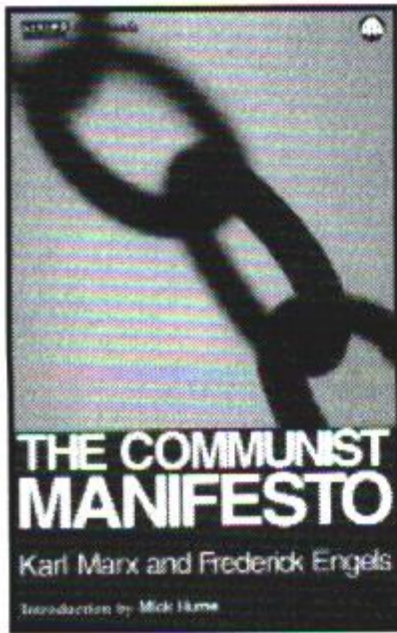
Of course I am not against safety as such. But it is no substitute for the freedom that comes with an open road and a well-tuned engine. I want the freedom to drive when I like and where I like. Without that we might as well bring back the Red Flag Act, and it will not be worth crossing the road. I toot my horn to Marlboro Man Jeremy Clarkson and his spirited defence of the technical excellence of Porsche and Jaguar. But in today's anti-car climate what is needed is someone to defend the Audi, Volvo and Renault. In short, a defender of Everyman's right to drive. ●

Keith McCabe is a transport planner.

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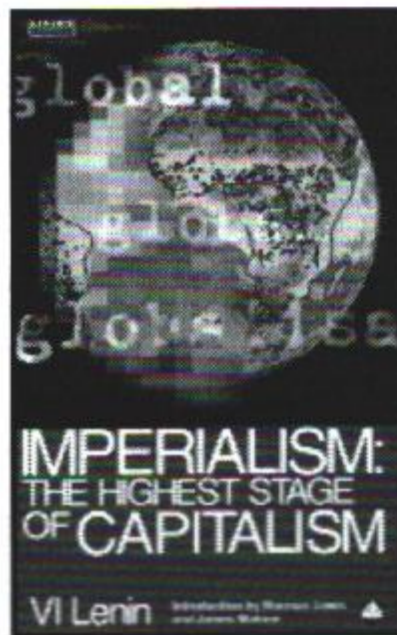


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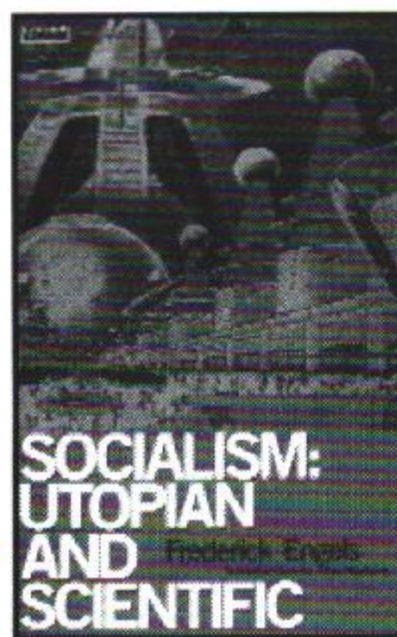


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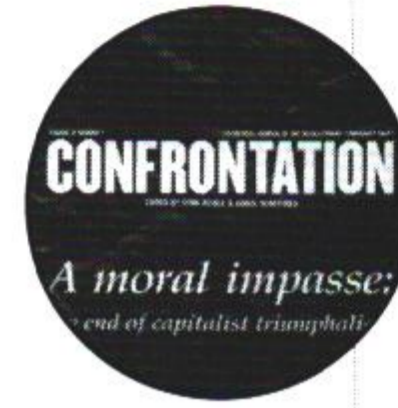


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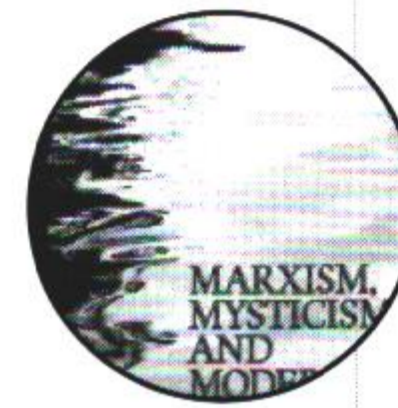
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REVIEW OF BOOKS

Helen Searls suggests that charity should stay at home

Aid as imperialism

The Reality of Aid 1996: An Independent Review of International Aid, Judith Randel and Tony Graham (eds), Earthscan, £14.95 pbk

The Poverty of Nations: The Aid dilemma at the Heart of Africa, James Morton, IB Taurus, £14.95 pbk

Christmas is an important time in the fund raising calendar. The charity Christmas card, the charity gift catalogue and the charity Christmas fair have become part of the British way of life. All organisations hope to benefit, but the charities that can do spectacularly well in the Christmas season are the Third World relief and development organisations—like Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, Action Aid and CAFOD.

Attention to the world's humanitarian crises tends to increase in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The aid agencies are past masters at tugging at the heart strings and getting us to cough up at Christmas time. But if the cause is good, should we worry that our emotions are being manipulated? To answer such a question you need to get behind the pictures of starving babies in the appeal adverts and take a cool look at how aid works. Before you put your coins in the buckets of those naff carol singers or get your Christmas cards from the charity catalogue, spare a thought for what is happening to your money. Is it really going to help the poor of the Third World? Will 'just £25 help provide an entire family with food and water?'. Or it is time that you found out more about the actual consequences of all that Western aid to the Third World? Two books that might help answer your questions are *The Reality of Aid 1996* and *The Poverty of Nations*.

The Reality of Aid is in its fourth annual edition. Published by Earthscan and funded by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, Eurostep and the Ford Foundation, its main purpose is to provide an independent review of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from leading OECD nations. It makes disturbing reading. The opening paragraph states that:

'Within the last five years, every one of the OECD donor nations (except the USA) has reaffirmed its commitment to the UN aid target of 0.7 per cent of GNP. But in 1994, eight out of 21 donors cut their aid, and a further four only managed to maintain their GNP ratio. Aid in real terms was below its 1990 level, at just 0.3% of GNP—the lowest level for 20 years.'

The report anticipates that in 1995 aid (as a proportion of GNP) fell to its lowest level ever.

The report details the work of every OECD donor nation in extensive county-by-country profiles written by activists in non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In the 'Aid, facts and figures' section all the major shifts and changes in patterns of development assistance are documented. Interestingly, it charts how more and more Official Development Assistance is now channelled through the non-governmental sector—calling into question whether these NGOs are 'non-governmental' at all. It also demonstrates that, despite promises to the contrary, more and more of today's official aid is channelled into short term emergency relief rather than long term development assistance.

Where the report is disappointing is in its uncritical attitude towards the actual impact of aid on the South. Five brief case studies fail to give any true sense of the impact that more than \$56 billion of ODA has on the South every year. The question of what consequence such a level of expenditure might have for the societies targeted ought not to be taken for granted. By and large, however, the only criticism levelled against the donor nations in *The Reality of Aid* is that they give too little to too few of the right kind of people. Since the report is compiled by activists in non-governmental aid agencies, this unquestioning approach to the efficacy of aid is unsurprising. It is taken for granted that aid works, as long as it is correctly targeted. The object of the report is not to question the role of aid as such. Rather it is to lobby Western governments to give more aid to more appropriate poverty alleviating projects, generally those sponsored by the NGOs themselves.

It is rare in fact to find anybody who questions the value of aid to the poor nations of the South. Today it is assumed that only reactionaries and racists could possibly object to giving money to help people worse off than ourselves. This has not always been the case. In the seventies many radicals rallied around the slogan of 'Aid as Imperialism' (Teresa Hayter wrote a book of ►

the same name)—particularly when Nixon made his infamous comment in 1968: 'Let us remember that the main purpose of American aid is not to help other nations but to help ourselves.'

A few radical critics remain. Alex de Waal from Africa Rights for example recently stated in the *Observer* that giving to Third World aid agencies was a waste of time. 'Most aid does not work', he wrote, 'it is a waste of sympathy'. His objection to aid focuses on the way it is misused and mismanaged, and his conclusion was 'Let's have less of it until we can ensure its quality and ethics' (20 October 1996). But even de Waal is not challenging the concept of aid. Rather his criticisms are part of the jockeying for position among non-governmental organisations. Misgivings about mismanagement, corrupt administrators or amateurism within the aid agencies is as far as most critics are prepared to go in challenging the holy cow of aid.

Morton's argument is that aid is not the solution to underdevelopment, but part of the problem

James Morton, however, crosses the line. In his book *The Poverty of Nations* he presents a damning critique of the very concept of aid. Morton repeatedly argues that aid does not simply fail to hit its target, it can positively 'retard the process of development' (p247). His central, often compelling, argument is that in a country like Sudan, the test-case in his study, aid is not a solution to underdevelopment, it is part of the problem.

The Poverty of Nations is an unfashionable argument that will no doubt be dismissed by many in the development field as right-wing propaganda. This is a shame. True, Morton's argument is based on the false assumption that the market, if only it is allowed to operate freely, will lead to development. From that starting point he is incapable of locating the real source of uneven development; the way that the world market has created a monopoly that favours the advanced capitalist nations over the rest. Morton also arrives at some dubious conclusions. Such is his frustration with the failure of development in Sudan that he resorts to calling for a return to colonialism as one way of gaining a grip on society.

His assessment of the potential value of structural adjustment and other supply side economic policies is also unconvincing. But then, as a development economist who has worked as a consultant for the World Bank, the EC, the UN, the Asian Development Bank, the British and Danish overseas development agencies, James Morton makes no claim to be a revolutionary. None the less, his critical stance means that he is alive to the way that aid perpetuates underdevelopment, even if he fails to understand that the market system is the final cause of the problem.

Leaving aside Morton's political leanings, the book's value lies in its detailed first hand observations. It is an important book because it painstakingly documents the real impact of aid, through the example of the Darfur region of Sudan. The rigour of the study makes Morton's observations difficult to refute. He is not concerned by the fact that aid is often mismanaged or corrupt. His criticism is directed at aid as such: 'The conclusion is

becoming inescapable that the problem lies not with the techniques of aid giving, not with the fact that individual practitioners do not do it properly, but rather with the concept of aid itself.' (p3)

Morton questions the whole impact of aid for the simple reason that it does not work. 'Some Africans are far poorer today than they were 30 years ago, despite per capita aid receipts substantially greater than anywhere else in the world.' (p15) Rather than making the assumption that some aspect of the aid programme is being mismanaged, Morton goes straight for the jugular and questions the two key principles on which modern aid is based. He challenges the idea that underdevelopment is caused by a simple lack of capital; and he questions the notion that underdevelopment can be solved by a 'knowledge transfer' from North to South.

Darfur is a useful place to start, since it was at the centre of the famine region in the mid-eighties, and has seen more outside intervention than most. Morton argues convincingly that there is no capital shortage in Darfur. Rather, there are too few outlets for profitable capital investment. The difference may sound semantic but it is an important one. If it was simply a shortage of money that held development in check, then the problems would have been solved spontaneously, long ago, through the market mechanism; money will automatically flow to where there are profits to be made. Morton cites Bauer, 'if all conditions for development other than capital are present, capital will soon be generated locally, or will be available from abroad commercially' (P Bauer, *Dissent on Development*, 1976). By contrast in most poor nations the market economy is too weak to make any effective use of aid because it can offer only a poor rate of return on investment.

Far from a shortage of cash holding society back some African banks are awash with the stuff

As evidence for this argument Morton looks at how local farmers frequently store large surpluses of grain and livestock from good years as insurance against bad ones. In most economies surpluses usually bear some correlation to subsequent productive investment. This is not the case in Sudan. It makes more sense for locals to save grain for insurance than sell surpluses in order to invest, because the returns on investment are meagre.

Far from a shortage of cash holding society back, Morton points out that some African banks are awash with the stuff. These high liquidity levels are a result of the shortage of outlets for profitable investment. In some African nations, Morgan argues, 'liquid assets are as much as 60 per cent of bank liabilities':

'Since the return on these liquid assets is low, this means that the banks cannot pay their depositors well, and indeed, that they are not interested in attracting deposits. In the Gambia, commercial banks actually ration deposits.' (p24)

Sudan, itself one of the poorest countries on earth, is a net exporter of capital because there is almost nowhere for capitalists to invest in the country.

Morton's point is better than he knows himself. It shows that capital is not just a sum of cash, but a social relationship, in this case a relationship between Third World producers and the West. The Western domination of the world market means that Third World economies cannot develop in an all-rounded way, but only according to the pre-established priorities of the West. In practice this means that Southern economies are generally one-sided, concentrating on extraction, cash crops or whatever narrow niche the West allows. In particular food subsidies in Western economies mean that agriculturally-based southern economies just cannot compete. Consequently sums of cash in the South generally remain simple hoards, without the possibility of profitable reinvestment. The social relationship established between the advanced countries and the societies of the Third World frustrates investment and hence holds back production.

What Morton calls the 'nanny tendency' of aid agencies has smothered the local search for solutions

The second orthodoxy of the aid industry which Morton challenges is the usefulness of 'knowledge transfer' from North to South—the idea that what the Third World needs to develop is to be educated by its betters. Morton systematically demonstrates that, by and large, the rural community knows what it is doing and is acting as rationally as it can within the constraints of low profitability. Western education is of little use in tackling the day to day problems of farming in Darfur.

Morton's real concern however is not simply that aid fails to address local problems. His point is that aid makes things far worse for the communities. In the key area of farming techniques, the fashions and fads of the aid community have suffocated local experimentation and positively held back development. What Morton calls the 'nanny tendency' of aid agencies—'that paternalistic wish to protect the farmer against all possible risk' (p149)—has smothered the local search for solutions.

For example the introduction of TSP, a phosphate fertiliser that has been proved to increase yields by up to 30 per cent, has been stunted while the international agencies attempt to refine the best methods of use and the safest methods of application. This may seem a wise precaution, but the chemical has been widely used in the West and trial and error by local farmers is likely to be the fastest way of developing the optimum method of use.

Environmental worries by outsiders have also thwarted local initiative. Until 1990 Aldrex-T seed dressing was the single most popular modern technology among farmers struggling to protect planted crops against termites and ants. Unfortunately it contains aldrin—a chemical that has fallen foul of environmental concerns in the West. Production of the seed dressing has now ceased. As Morton points out:

'The Western world used aldrin for decades, at much greater intensities than the Darfur farmer was ever likely to use, before it was suddenly abandoned. However genuine the aid community's concern about the environment,

it is impossible not to see it as grossly inconsistent and asymmetric when it prevents the use of relatively harmless chemicals by poor farmers in areas that are unlikely to ever face a pollution hazard one tenth' [of those in the West].' (p125)

Even the aid community's so-called 'bias towards the poor' causes problems. Tractors and even animal traction have been opposed by the aid community as favouring the better-off farmer. Since the aid agencies aim to target the grass roots they have put little effort into exploring the benefits of the tractor. And since the agencies control all agricultural research in the region, this bias towards the poor has held back more prosperous producers. But how does undermining agricultural production benefit the poor?

Aid organisations are actively trying to impose a more equitable distribution on Third World societies from the outside. But since such redistribution strategies ignore the unequal global relationship between North and South, they only affect the distribution of hardship within backward economies—often with disastrous results:

'Any "grass-roots" policy makes an arbitrary decision as to who or what is grass-roots. If it is to be the poorest of the poor, or women, who are to be "empowered to grass-roots action", then the opinions of the grass-stem, that is to say the slightly less poor and the husbands will have to be overridden. Yet how can the grass be any healthier with a broken stem?' (p54)

Morton is keenly aware that aid has a destructive impact because it imposes an agenda that is little suited to the needs of people in the South. But he is mistaken in drawing the conclusion that the market, left to its own devices, would create the conditions for development. Certainly, the argument in aid circles that the South ought not to follow the market model of Western development often serves as little more than an apology for poor development. But Morton is wrong to think that the South could simply reproduce the development of Northern economies through the market system. The monopolisation of the world market by the North is an established fact that stands in the way of development in the South.

The capitalist division of the world market is the cause of underdevelopment. In the context of a world divided between the powerful and the powerless, the role of aid can only be to consolidate Western control over Third World economies, by imposing agendas and priorities from without. Because the work of the aid organisations often seems to run counter to market rationality, Morton concludes that aid is the problem and the market is the solution. In fact the role of aid is to act as a guarantor of market interests, by maintaining Western influence over the terms of development in the South.

Morton's book is a valuable study. It might save you money this Christmas, as he persuades you to give the carol singers and the charity catalogue a wide berth. It may also persuade you to challenge what the aid industry is doing in the South today. For all his free market leanings, Morton makes a good case for change.

The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society,

Kenan Malik, Macmillan Press, £12.99 pbk

Race is a bizarre phenomenon. Most intelligent contributions on the subject understand that there is no such thing as race, but nevertheless continue to talk about it. At first sight race seems to be everywhere. But on closer inspection it becomes evident that relations and experiences that are subsumed under the category of race have very different, often contradictory, qualities. One of the main merits of Kenan Malik's book is that he does not take race as either a self-evident concept or as something to be rejected as unreal. Instead, using a historical method, he asks how racial thinking emerged and why it manifests itself in different forms.

Malik convincingly argues that the origins of racial thinking lie in the tendency to naturalise social differences. According to him it is the persistence of social inequality which requires the representation of difference as natural. This development is not the outcome of ideological manipulation, but of a historical process whereby the persistence of social difference has acquired a permanent status. Inequalities are interpreted as innate, and differences between people acquire a 'natural', racial character.

Many of the key works on the history of race are preoccupied with its classical nineteenth-century form—that of biological theories of race. Malik, however, contends that racial ideology should not be equated to the particular form it takes at any time. This approach provides some useful insights into the study of the subject. The emphasis on so-called scientific racism has led to some fundamental confusions about the dynamic of racism. As Malik points out, the discrediting of scientific racism does not undermine the tendency to naturalise difference and social inequality. So, for example, the representation of such differences as cultural can work towards the same outcome as that of biological explanations. Malik writes that 'the concept of culture can embody many of the same meanings as the idea of race'. He notes that cultural traits 'such as "individualism" or "power-index", can be as powerful a marker of human groups as biological traits such as skin colour or headform' (p130).

The *Meaning of Race* demonstrates that, despite the rise of anti-racism and the discrediting of biological theories, the impulse to naturalise social differences remains a powerful one. Indeed many who see themselves as fervent opponents of racism still accept such differences as rational. Malik's critique of multiculturalism and cultural relativism adds an important dimension to an understanding of this area. He insists that the emphasis on cultural difference in fact represents an adherence to the principle of inequality. He argues that

anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss depict inequality as an essential feature of the human condition (p168). This failure to challenge the eternalisation of inequality means that, while the particular form of racial thinking may have been discredited, its essential content has not. Indeed, theories of difference can themselves serve as an apology for social inequality. That right-wing racists in France adopted the language of difference was not the inevitable outcome of the influence of the ideas of cultural relativism. It is, however, a logical development of the culturalist worldview.

After studying Malik's book, the reader is left in little doubt that the discussion of race does not arise out of race relations. Rather the discussion reflects the ideas and the concepts through which society understands itself. That is why many contemporary works situate racialism within the development of the Enlightenment. One of the hallmarks of contemporary thought is its profound

The discrediting of scientific racism does not undermine the tendency to naturalise difference and social inequality

reaction against the values associated with the Enlightenment. Terrible tragedies like the Holocaust are often portrayed as the inevitable outcome of science and rationality. Racism, too, has been represented as the outcome of this process. Malik retorts with a point of view which is diametrically opposed to this consensus. He suggests that the notion of race, with its orientation towards difference, directly contradicts the universalist perspective of the Enlightenment. His work may be read as not just a historical survey of race, but as a critique

of the contemporary anti-Enlightenment theories of difference.

Theories of race often tear a particular form of racial thinking out of the moment in history when they appeared, one-sidedly declaring them to be either a mere ideological construction or of intrinsic importance in themselves. By contrast, Malik has successfully adopted an approach which situates the development of ideas on race in their specific social and historical contexts. Through studying the dialectic of ideas and experience, this approach allows him to gain important insights into the dynamic of racial oppression. Moreover through his critique of theories of difference, he has placed the issue of human equality at the centre of the agenda. Unlike many of his peers, Malik understands that without a commitment to social equality, anti-racism is just so much rhetoric.

The Meaning of Race represents without doubt the most advanced thinking on the subject. It is in the best tradition of critical thinking and will be welcomed by all currents of progressive thought.

Frank Furedi

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