

# LIVING MARXISM

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Confessions of a communist  
Michael Clark: the Johnny Rotten of dance

**The  
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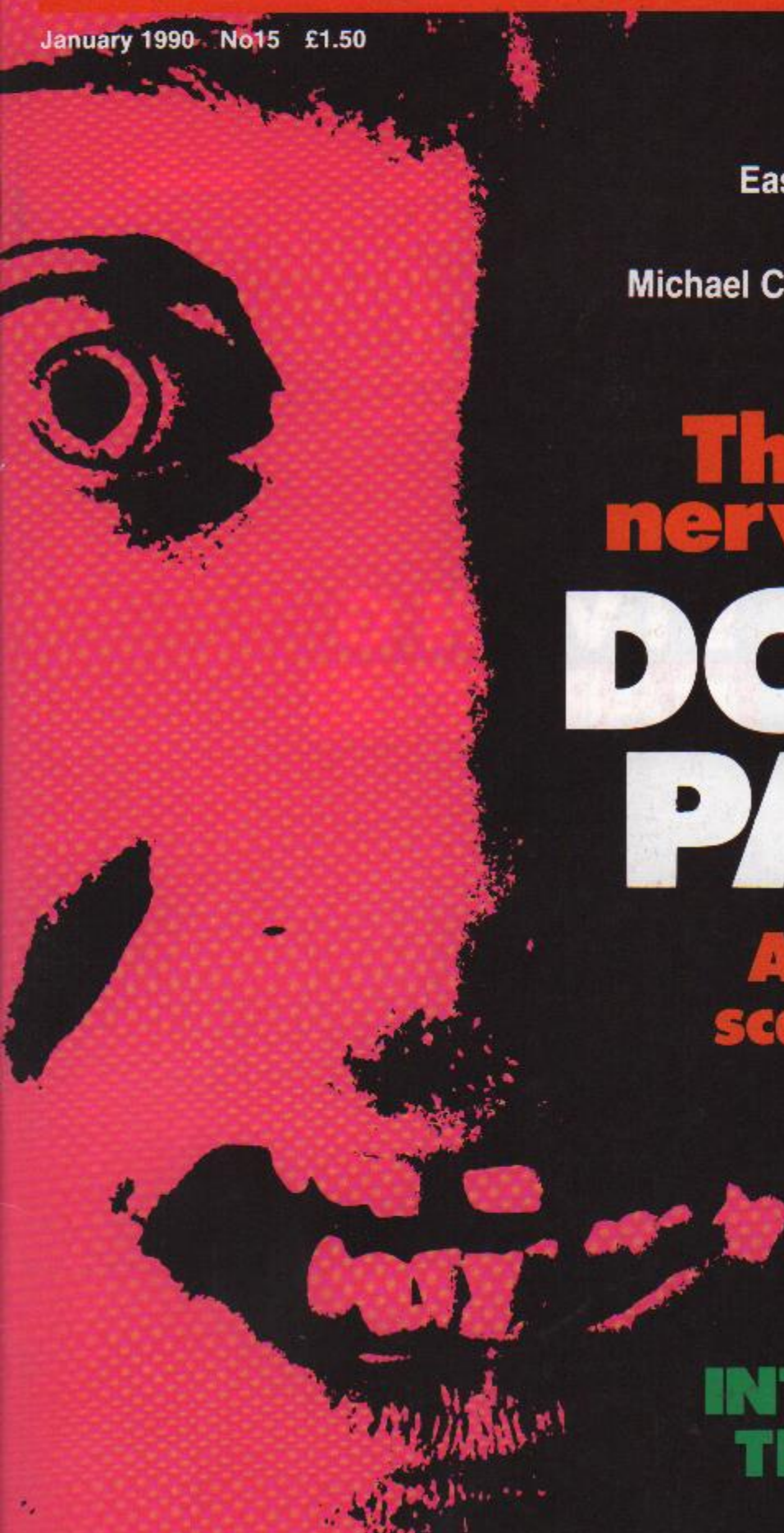
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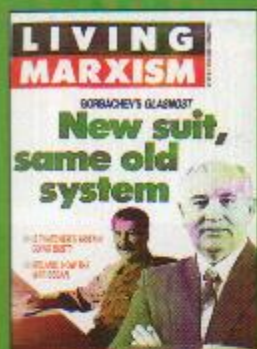
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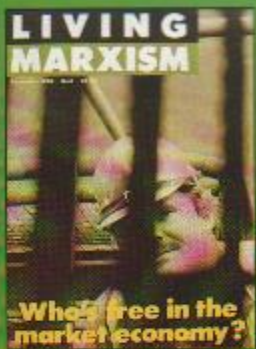
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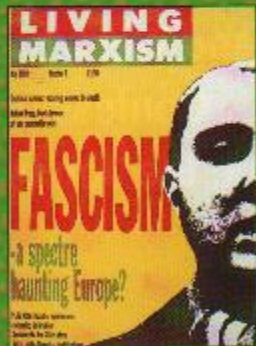
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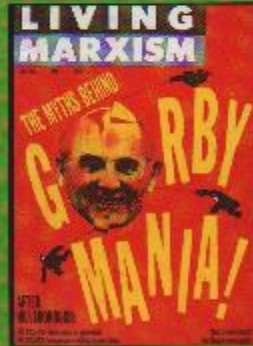
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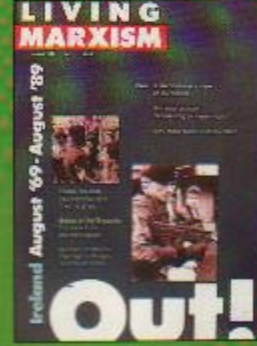
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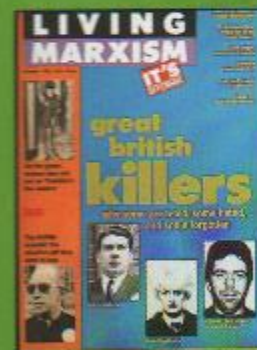
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## LIVING MARXISM

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● Living section: **John Fitzpatrick** ● Design: **Dave Lamb** ● Production: **Don Bannister**,  
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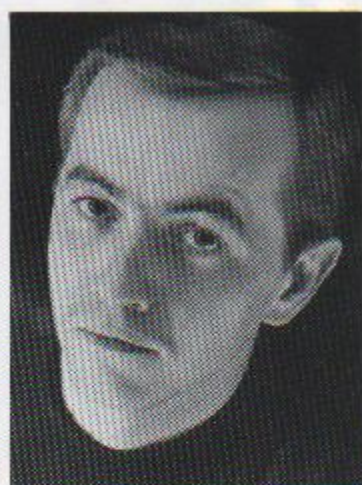
The drama unfolding daily in Eastern Europe does not signal the end of history; but at least it means that history is catching up with yesterday's people, from George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev to the home-grown Communist parties of the West.

Bush finally realises how important the division of Germany and Europe and the Cold War have been for the stability of the post-war capitalist world. So after 40 years of anti-communist hysteria, the White House (along with its allies in Downing Street) is now trying to control and slow down the changes and keep Nato and the Warsaw Pact intact.

On the other side, after living a lie for years, everybody from Gorbachev to Martin Jacques of the Communist Party of Great Britain today have to admit that their version of communism does not work and has not achieved a better society. All that we are waiting for now is for them to make the final confession, that they were never communists in the first place.

What we are witnessing in the changing world today is not the death of communism, but the death of a lie; a lie that claimed Stalin and his system were the children of Marx and his vision of a new society. What is being exposed as useless by the accelerating crisis in Eastern Europe is not the idea of working class revolution, but the bankrupt notion of state socialism which has long been promoted by both the Eastern regimes and the old Western left.

For much of the Western left the Stalinist system has, to one degree or another, represented a model of socialism for more than half a century. To the 'official' Communist parties, first Stalin's Soviet Union and



MICK HUME  
EDITOR

# CONFESSIONS OF A COMMUNIST

then its East European satellites have been examples of 'actually existing socialism', and they accepted these inefficient, bureaucratically run economies as planning in action.

Other Western left wingers have rejected this uncritical attitude towards the East, and railed against the brutal consequences of the Stalinist dictatorships. Yet they have still accepted that these states retained the foundations of a socialist society, which they usually defined as the nationalisation of the productive forces.

The Communist parties and their anti-Stalinist critics have been more or less united in the view that socialism is essentially about state management. The primary power for transforming society would not be mass action from below, but state intervention from above, building socialism from the top down.

Look at some examples of what leading British left wingers have celebrated as socialism over the post-war years, and their narrow focus on nationalisation and state intervention becomes clear—as does the problem they now face with the discrediting of their cherished ideas.

The highpoint of socialism in this country is usually said to be the first majority Labour government, elected in 1945. This government used the state to restructure the British economy, by taking control of basic industries and setting up the National Health Service. Anybody who has worked in the grim mines, steelworks or hospitals of the nationalised sector will know all about the 'socialist' benefits of this policy, as will those who have had to rely on the pinch-penny health and welfare services. British socialists who still celebrate the achievements of that government also tend to

forget the other uses to which it put the state machine: imposing rationing, using troops to break strikes and to fight colonial wars.

Over the years British socialists have drawn much of their inspiration, not from the struggles of the masses around the world, but from the state planning policies of the Stalinists in the East. The British left admired Stalin's rigid and bureaucratic economy in the thirties—an admiration which the Labour Party often cited as instrumental in the development of its own post-war policies. Even in the eighties, the British and Western left was largely swept up in the wave of Gorbymania, entrusting the task of 'socialist renewal' in the Soviet Union to those at the top of the Stalinist state machine itself.

The recent discrediting of the old ideas about state socialism has created a crisis on the Western left. In the



harsh economic climate of the eighties, Thatcher's free enterprise offensive drove British state socialists into a corner. Now the collapse of the Stalinist systems in the East is causing something close to a moral collapse among traditional left wingers in the West.

Sensing that the crumbling of the Eastern regimes means the undermining of their own worldview, Western socialists are desperately seeking a way out. Some are pretending that there is still something positive to be upheld about the old systems in the East. Others confess that the old is dead, and grab at new, off-the-peg brands of socialism which they claim are developing in East Germany or Czechoslovakia. All of them are putting forward an entirely unreal view of events in Eastern Europe, projecting their own prayers and wishes on to reality.

Let us deal first with the Western left outside of the official communist movement, since ironically these people often seem more keen to defend aspects of the past in Eastern Europe than do the Communist parties themselves.

Many leading left wingers have sought to portray the protests and reforms in Eastern Europe as the beginning of a long-awaited 'political revolution'. According to their scenario, the economic and social 'gains' made by state socialism will be defended and built up by the people, forming a foundation upon which Eastern Europe could quite quickly be converted into a truly socialist system. The example of East Germany demonstrates that this version of events exists only in the heads of panicky Western socialists.

To support the notion that there is something progressive about the economic base of the state

socialist societies, Western left wingers have had to establish that East Germans are not attracted by the capitalist charms of their neighbour state. So, as soon as the protests in East Germany began, the left asserted that there was no support for German reunification among the ordinary people of the East. Indeed, we were assured by left-wing journals, East Germans rejected the consumerism of 'the Mercedes-Benz society' in the West, because they still believed in socialism and wanted to defend their beloved welfare state while demanding political change—

under Stalinism will want many things that they see on offer in the West. What Mandel and others mean when they talk about a residual faith in socialism is that, if you ask East Germans whether they want to be exploited by capitalists and to have mass unemployment, they will say no; and if you ask if they want free hospitals, they will say yes.

That hardly qualifies as a commitment to partition and socialism. All it shows is that, surprise surprise, East Germans desire a decent life. Whatever their doubts about living under capitalism, this same desire propels them towards the prosperous West

### *I confess that I am a communist, and that I am very pleased to see the collapse of the 'communist' regimes in the East*

'an experiment in socialist democracy'.

The dream world constructed by these Western socialists has soon been shattered by the facts. Ernest Mandel, leading theoretician of the post-war Fourth International, might have seemed momentarily to have his finger on the pulse when he reported from inside East Berlin that 'during the big demonstrations of November 4-6, not a single placard called for reunification' (*International Viewpoint*, 27 November 1989). But within a week of his article appearing, 200 000 people were marching in Leipzig to demand 'one Fatherland'.

It is inevitable that people who have suffered the shortages and squalor of life

German example. If the only 'socialist' alternative to the Mercedes-Benz society on offer is the broken-down Trabant society, which would you choose? In these circumstances, championing the 'social gains' of an East German health service which is as bad as the British NHS is unlikely to convince many that they are better off without the West.

Most East Germans do not consider themselves socialists, since they have experienced life in a 'socialist' society primarily in terms of their own oppression. Far from wanting politely to request an 'experiment in socialist democracy', the underlying mood among many East Germans and other East Europeans is that of an anti-

communist lynch-mob. They may have suppressed these sentiments at first, and allowed moderates like the New Forum movement to do the talking, for fear of a Tiananmen Square-style crackdown. But, as people become more confident that the tanks are not coming, the attacks on Stalinist monuments, state bureaucrats and party officials have begun.

Perhaps it is not surprising that many British left wingers, who considered the Greater London Council to have struck a mighty blow for socialism by trimming tube fares, should think that the initial tinkering reforms implemented by the Stalinist states point towards a political revolution. But they do no favours to the cause of progressive social change in either the East or the West by pretending that there is still something positive to defend in the crumbling Stalinist bloc.

The Communist parties of the West have been shaken most directly by recent events, and been sent into the wildest panic in search of an escape route. Thus the biggest of them, the Italian Communist Party, is moving swiftly towards changing its name in an effort to persuade the world that it is really just a collection of harmless social democrats. Similar proposals are flying around inside other Western Communist parties, including the British one.

This is a striking comment on how history is unfreezing and leaving the Stalinists behind; the last time the future of Germany and Europe was in the balance, in 1945, it was the fascist parties which rushed to change their names, claiming that they were just Christian Democrats and had known nothing about Nazi crimes. Now the Communist parties go through the same exercise, assuring anybody who will listen that they were always



against Stalinism really.

The name-changing idea has met resistance among some Western Stalinists who recognise implicitly that, without a formal link to the communist tradition, their parties would have no reason to exist. Others, however, want to go further, and throw every political and organisational feature of the old ways open to debate. Prominent among these 'new thinkers' in the Communist Party of Great Britain is Martin Jacques, editor of *Marxism Today*.

Jacques confesses that events in Eastern Europe mean 'the end of the road for the communist system as we have known it' (*Sunday Times*, 26 November 1989). Yet he still puts faith in Gorbachev, a product of the Stalinist past, to guide the Soviet Union into the future. And the future which he now imagines developing in the East is as unreal as that dreamt up by Mandel and his supporters.

Over the Thatcher years, Jacques and his co-thinkers have picked up a lot of fashionably non-communist ideas about the benefits of Western society. Now he imposes these naive notions on to the East, predicting that the current changes there will result in a relatively smooth transition to Western-style 'multi-party democracies', with a mature 'civic society', 'integrated into the world market'. In an era of 'one world' and 'human solidarity', East and West will interlink (they'll get Western capital, we'll get Soviet tourists) and enjoy together the benefits of the democratic ideal.

The particular version of liberal values which Jacques sees taking hold in the East ignores certain inconvenient realities about life in the liberal West. It doesn't seem to have occurred to him that the world market has never been able to deliver on its promises of freedom and

democracy for all. Even in the most advanced Western nations, the Mercedes-Benz society is a myth; almost a third of Americans, for example, live below the poverty line. Nor does he mention the scourge of racism in the heart of the West, as recently evidenced in the electoral resurgence of the French National Front on an openly fascist platform, or the culture of militarism through which Western democracies have consistently terrorised the third world.

If the market economy, even with state intervention and welfare services, cannot deliver on its democratic promises in the advanced West, what chance is there of

towards a market economy involves hardship, violent unrest and instability.

Jacques' repeated emphasis on the need to develop a 'new' left-wing perspective is misleading. In reality, if you go shopping for an off-the-peg ideology, you are likely to end up with a warmed-over version of an old one. His determination to rid himself of any connection with the communist tradition has led him to look back beyond the Russian Revolution of 1917, and latch on to what is essentially a revamped version of the ideals of eighteenth and nineteenth-century liberalism. He has forgotten (if he ever knew) that 1917 was a response to the fact that

movement, and destroyed all of the gains of the Russian Revolution. There was never anything progressive about its artificial spread to eastern Europe.

The Stalinists discredited the name of Marxism, making socialism synonymous with bureaucratic corruption and repression. This made the present backlash inevitable, and we cannot wish it away. Despite any problems this causes, the most important thing for us is that the demise of Stalinism clears the decks, and creates an opportunity for popularising a new revolutionary communist outlook relevant to the nineties.

The Western rulers will be robbed of the old 'get back to Russia' diversion, and have to stand or fall on their own records. The chances of organising an anti-capitalist backlash among those, like the East Germans, who want the better life that capitalism cannot consistently provide, will then be much improved. The negative example of the Stalinist system had to go before this could be possible, and it was always most likely that the reaction would initially take an anti-communist form; only a fool could imagine that a Marxist movement would develop in opposition to states which committed their crimes in the name of Marxism-Leninism.

I confess to a desire to see all of the 'official' Communist parties change their names and disappear as soon as possible, leaving the name communist to those who believe in little things like working class struggle and the revolutionary transformation of society. Maybe Martin Jacques could also consider renaming his magazine *New Times* (perhaps as an offshoot of the other publication for which he writes, the *Sunday Times*), so that we can have Marxism back as well.

### *Only a fool could imagine that a Marxist movement would develop in opposition to states which committed their crimes in the name of Marxism-Leninism*

it doing so in the East? After all, it was the very weakness of Western-style economies and institutions in those countries which allowed the Stalinists to walk in and take over after the Second World War. Today, after 40 years of Stalinist stagnation, the economies of Eastern Europe are in ruins. In these circumstances, there can be no smooth transition to stable and peaceful democracies. Third world countries like South Korea have only been successfully integrated into the world market by the ruthless repression of the working class. And an East European state like Poland has already discovered that moving

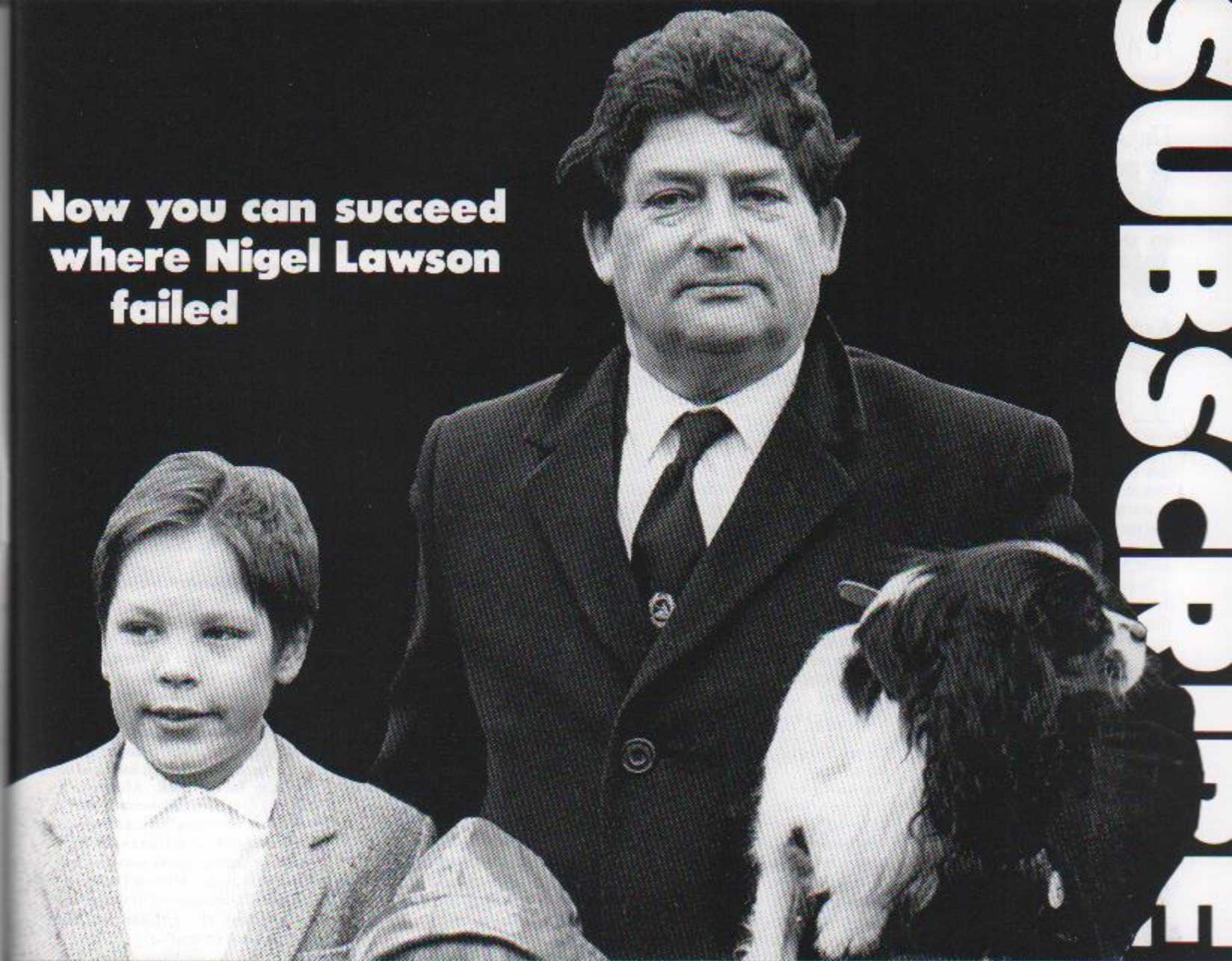
capitalism could not live up to its ideal then; it has still less chance of doing so in the West or the East today.

At a time when many who call themselves communists are making confessions, let me add mine. I confess that I am a communist, that I shall continue to be one, and that I am very pleased to see the collapse of the 'communist' regimes in the East.

No genuine communist has any need to apologise for the what has happened in Eastern Europe over the past 40 years, or to pretend about what is happening there today. We need only to face facts. The fact is that Stalinism was built on the corpse of the communist



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The Aldington libel trial

# WHOSE WAR CRIMES?

Kirsten Cale on the bigger issues behind the recent war crimes libel case

Lord Aldington, the Tory peer, was awarded a record £1.5m libel damages in December, over allegations that he was a war criminal. Attention has focused on the size of the award, which was more than the combined damages paid out to Jeffrey Archer and Sonia Sutcliffe. But the historical issues raised by the trial are of much more interest than Lord Aldington's bank balance.

Nigel Watts and Count Nikolai Tolstoy, the defendants, had alleged that Lord Aldington set in motion the forcible repatriation of 70 000 Cossack and Yugoslav prisoners to communist-controlled areas in 1945, knowing they would be killed by the Titoist partisans and the Red Army. Both Watts and Tolstoy had a well-publicised grudge against the peer. Watts had pursued Lord Aldington because, as chairman of Sun Alliance, he had failed to endorse an insurance claim made by Watts' sister. Count Tolstoy, himself of Cossack parentage, sought to pin the responsibility for the massacre of the anti-Soviet Cossacks on Aldington and other British officers responsible for prisoners in Austria at the end of the war. They set out these accusations in a pamphlet published in 1987, around which the trial revolved.

The jury upheld the peer's personal case against these allegations. But the issues raised in the trial should be seen in the wider context of the shifting debate about the Second World War among historians today.

As every schoolchild knows, the conventional view is that Britain, America and the Soviet Union waged a just and noble war against the evils of fascism. But some European historians are now arguing that the crimes of fascism were only a response to the barbarities carried out by the Soviet Union. This new school is particularly important in Germany; as the moves towards reunification proceed, right-wing historians are trying to rehabilitate German nationalism which was discredited by the Nazi experience. The anti-Soviet shift has also influenced some British establishment spokesmen, as a recent *Spectator* editorial revealed:

'A war that defeated a monstrous tyranny extended the power of a tyranny equally monstrous almost to the point of total victory... The countries that Hitler enslaved for five years, Stalin and his successors enslaved for 45.' (9 December 1989)

Tolstoy's highlighting of killings carried out by the Soviet Union and its allies fits into this pattern. And the Aldington trial showed how the repatriation policy is now being reassessed in the same light.

Throughout the trial, it was more or less assumed that the 70 000 repatriated Cossacks, Slovenes, Croats and Serbs were innocent civilians, and that the savage communist forces had carried out an unprovoked massacre of their own countrymen and women. The only issue at stake in court was whether one British officer could be held responsible for handing them over to the barbarian.

## 'Innocent' SS men

Count Tolstoy asserted throughout the case that Lord Aldington had sent 'innocent men, women and children, and even babies, to be massacred' (*Times*, 3 November 1989). A Mr Dusan Zivkovic, of the Serbian Volunteer Force, turned up to argue that the repatriated refugees 'had never heard of Karl Marx. They were simple peasants and working men who were sent to their deaths' (*Times*, 8 November 1989). This view was

never seriously challenged in court or investigated in the coverage of the trial. Despite the peer's early claim that the prisoners held by the British were German collaborators, the press was more interested in throwing the spotlight on the 'Red butchers'.

In fact, far from being innocents caught up in the maelstrom of war, many of those repatriated could be described as war criminals in their own right. They included thousands of Cossacks who had readily signed up for the German army and the SS, finding fascism far more to their taste than their own Soviet government. There were many other 'willing turncoats who had greeted the Nazis as opportune allies against Stalinism' (*Observer*, 3 December 1989), and done their bit for the death camp regime. But with the current vogue for rewriting history so as to blame communism for all the evils of the twentieth century, an English court is ready to accept that Nazi collaborators were hapless bystanders.

The new attempt to focus attention on the crimes of the Soviet Union is widely welcomed in the West as a boost for anti-communism, a propaganda weapon which increasingly has

to be justified with reference to the past, given Mikhail Gorbachev's Mr Nicely image in the present. Yet, for all that, Watts and Tolstoy lost the libel case, which confirms that rewriting history is not a straightforward matter.

However favourable it might be towards anti-communism, the British establishment cannot afford to downplay anti-Nazi sentiment, since this provides the basis of the idea that Britain's war effort was a crusade for justice and democracy. With Germany re-emerging as the major Continental power today, it is particularly important for the authorities over here to keep up a popular undercurrent of anti-German feeling. Thus the *Spectator* editorial on Stalin's crimes provoked a sharp response in the *Sunday Times* on 'the uniquely evil character of Nazism' (10 December 1989).

Nor was there ever any serious question of Aldington losing the case. Portraying the communists as barbarians is one thing; having a former deputy chairman of the Tory Party effectively convicted of war crimes is another. Aldington's fellow officers include a retired circuit judge and a former chairman of British Steel. If he was to be accused, then many other members of the establishment, some dead, many living, would have had to join him in the dock. After all, if handing over Nazi collaborators was a war crime, then slaughtering hundreds of thousands of civilians by fire-bombing German cities would surely qualify. As Justice Michael Davies felt compelled to emphasise to the jury in his summing up, 'England and the army are not on trial'.

## Troops out of Ireland now

Tuesday 30 January, 7pm

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The nervous 90s?

# Don't panic!

According to the prestigious Henley Centre for Forecasting, the citizens of the nineties are going to be 'anxious, guilty, lost souls' suffering from 'a hangover of guilt' and returning to the belief that 'pleasures are bad'.

The formidable array of everyday dangers which arose in the late eighties is enough to make anybody nervous about the decade ahead. We are now threatened by dodgy food, unsafe sex, acid house, terrorists, drugs, dogs, muggers, hooligans and countless other contemporary demons. We will have to change our lifestyles and give up the things we enjoy if we expect to survive into the twenty-first century. Or so they tell us.

The very number of these scares, and the rapidity with which one now follows another, should surely raise questions about the truth behind the horror stories. To the men with the 'End is Nigh' sandwich-boards, this doom-laden scenario might make perfect sense. But the rest of us ought to be very suspicious. Once you discount the idea of divine retribution, how can it be that humanity has suddenly been visited by an ever-growing, grim collection of new threats to our existence?

In fact the strength of most of these scares has largely been a consequence of political manipulation. The eighties were the decade when the politics of panic took hold—encouraged and sponsored by the authorities.

The powers that be have secured several advantages from promoting the politics of panic about health, morality and law and order. These issues act as a useful diversion from serious economic and political problems which could embarrass the authorities; the idea is that those who are panicking about personal survival are unlikely to spend too much time worrying about racism or unemployment in society.

The panics encourage a preoccupation with finding private solutions to personal problems—rather than collective solutions to social ills. A nation of frightened individuals who have taken refuge in the bosom of their families, barricaded behind security locks and studying the contents list on food packets, is far less of a problem for

the authorities than a confident political movement on the streets. Fear and insecurity discourage people from trying anything new, and breed conservatism and routinism—qualities which those whose power rests upon keeping things as they are always consider admirable.

The authorities have helped to spread the politics of panic by twisting statistics, elevating comparatively minor problems into major disasters, and removing any sense of proportion from the discussion. A food scare which kills three people makes banner headlines and prompts government warnings, while the mounting toll of death and serious injuries at work is hardly mentioned. Once a panic has been embedded in public consciousness, the authorities have usually taken advantage of it to introduce new repressive state powers, on the grounds of public safety.

In the pages that follow, we look at three varying examples of the great panics of the eighties which look set to run on into the nineties. The nonsensical fuss about acid house parties has been used as a cover for imposing stricter police control over society. The real threat which Aids poses to high-risk groups in Britain—notably gay men—has been sidelined by the hysterical campaign designed to encourage sexual conformity and prejudice among the population at large. And the anti-terrorist crusade has been mobilised to legitimise Western militarism.

These and other contemporary scares are really signs of panic on the part of the establishment. As their system spins further out of their control, our rulers desperately seek to maintain their authority by stirring up reactionary ideas and imposing more repression. They are playing with fire. These scare campaigns can easily blow up in their faces. Thus a food panic which begins as a convenient diversion can turn into an embarrassing exposure of how little attention profit-hungry food firms pay to the quality of their products. Even the strongest element of the politics of panic, the law and order campaign, is risky. As the recent flood of revelations shows, once the police

are placed in the political spotlight, their corruption, frame-ups and brutality are more likely to become public knowledge.

Of course the spate of panics over the past few years is not entirely the product of a top-level conspiracy. No matter what the *Sun* chooses to write horror stories about, they will only make a significant impact if public opinion is receptive. The eighties were fertile ground for the politics of panic, because more people were preoccupied with personal problems and individual solutions. In the Thatcher years, the decline and defeat of the old collective organisations and institutions, from the trade unions to the welfare state, has forced many to seek their own way out of the problems facing them and their families. An atmosphere in which people think and act solely as individuals is very conducive to panics about personal concerns like diet, health, sex and crime.

In the nineties, countering the politics of panic will involve popularising the case for new forms of collective action. Individuals can take various sensible precautions. But any serious problem facing us today can only be resolved by people looking beyond their own front doors, and coming together to fight for what they need against the system which is ultimately responsible for all social problems.

The Henley Centre for Forecasting concludes that in the nineties people will accept that 'what we want to do and what we ought to do are opposed'. This is what the authorities would like us to think. The true contradiction is between what we want and need to do, and what their system demands that we ought to do. The real dangers facing us in the nineties come not from acid house or international terrorism, but from the powers which the state is accumulating on the pretext of dealing with these 'threats'. To deal with this danger, we will first have to overcome our own fears.

As a new decade begins, our message is: Don't Panic. We have everything to gain from exposing the conservative scaremongers and championing the cause of change and experimentation. And while there is no cause for complacency, the prospects for turning the political climate around are good. The prominence given to the politics of panic over the past decade reveals the underlying weakness and lack of confidence of the reactionary British authorities; why else would they rely on the modern equivalent of the bogeyman to fight their battles for them?



Crackdown on acid house parties

# Licensed to killjoy

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

**Who's afraid of acid house parties? Sharon Clarke thinks that the crackdown is both the latest battle in the state's long struggle to regulate public entertainment, and a new sign of how desperate the authorities now are to keep control of society**

Acid house parties (or 'raves' to the ravers) were the last big law and order panic of the eighties, said to outdo football hooliganism and Rottweiler dogs as a menace to public order and civilised standards of behaviour.

For well over a year, the tabloids have been printing lurid tales of drug-induced frenzies of sex and violence at acid house parties in warehouses and fields. The Metropolitan Police have treated these events like riots, while the police forces of shire counties have used inner city-style methods to prevent the parties taking place—blocking roads, inventing offences and chasing carloads of would-be dancers across the countryside. The government has declared its intention to outlaw 'noise pollution' caused by acid house parties in its Green Bill, and one party organiser has already been jailed for 10 years; his crime, according to home office minister David Mellor, was that his publicity leaflets promised party-goers 'a good trip' rather than a good time.

At first sight it seems curious that there is so much fuss about acid house parties. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that these events are relatively safe gatherings of thousands of young people. So why have they attracted such a hostile response from the forces of law and order?

Perhaps the police have a lot of spare time on their hands; having more or less got the problem of crime under control, they can devote their attention to looking after the safety of the nation's youth. But statements by the police themselves suggest that this cannot be so. The police regularly complain that they lack the resources to tackle serious crime. Police chiefs are forever warning the public that the thin blue line is overstretched and fighting a losing battle against crime. Their statistics confirm that the police solve very few crimes. The clear-up rate in London is embarrassingly low. In these circumstances it is particularly surprising that the police are prepared to devote so much of their allegedly limited resources to preventing acid house parties from taking place.



Look a little closer and it becomes evident that acid house parties are not the only surprising events which merit resource-intensive police operations. Hippies travelling to Stonehenge emerged as another consistent threat to law and order in eighties Britain. Paramilitary operations protecting the British way of life from 'peace convoys' in the South-west of England have become a regular occurrence. As with acid house, it is worth asking why the police are so determined to prevent people from gathering around Stonehenge? It does not take a radical critic of British society to grasp the simple point that the ramshackle convoys of travelling hippies hardly constitute a major challenge to public security.

In principle, neither the British establishment nor the police object

strongly to large numbers of people gathering in public places. The police tolerate all manner of such gatherings, from the last night at the Proms and royal parades to Bros concerts, race meetings and firework displays. What the state dislikes is not public gatherings as such but public events which take place outside of its system of regulation. It's all a question of control.

For much of the time, capitalist society can rely on the market and the system of wage-labour to maintain social control. Work and the instinct for survival in the conditions of a market economy act as a powerful disciplining force on most people. The alarm clock in the morning is usually sufficient to get people to the factories and offices. However, outside work the discipline of the market needs to be



supplemented by more direct state intervention. The British establishment has spent the past 150 years worrying about what working class people, and youth in particular, do outside the workplace.

Through the nineteenth century the capitalist class was concerned that the hard-won discipline it enjoyed in the factories would be dissipated on the streets, in ale houses and at soccer matches. Many popular festivals, sports and public recreation were banned, often with the help of troops and police. The authorities placed special emphasis on preventing public gatherings in the streets, by moving street performers off the roads and preventing young people from playing there. Middle class moralists agitated against the freedom of ordinary people to 'idle' on the streets and 'loiter with impunity'. Any public activities involving the working classes were portrayed as 'immoral' events where disorder and sexual depravity reigned.

### Drive them away

The establishment's initial instinct was to drive people away from public spaces and back into the home. But

such a strategy had little chance of success—after all the poor, unlike the rich, must take their leisure in public. Unable to eliminate the public life of the working class, the state sought to *control and regulate* it. As one commentator noted, middle class attempts to regulate free space were 'not concerned with any simple repression of recognised pleasures, but with defining, regulating and locating them in their appropriate sites':

'Above all, perhaps, they were concerned to shift pleasures from the site of mass activity—fairs, football matches with unlimited players, carnivals verging on riot—to the site of individual activity.' (Quoted in J Wilson, *Politics and Leisure*, 1988, p25)

The privatisation of public space and the regulation of leisure emerged as a dominant theme of social control in Britain.

Since the mid-nineteenth century the pattern has been one of eliminating new forms of popular pastimes and reconstructing them under the regulation of the state. One

of the most common means to achieve this objective is the system of licensing. Thus alcohol consumption was institutionalised through standardisation—in the public house. Gambling and entertainment were simply reorganised under a strict system of state licensing.

### 'Drill' and 'games'

Towards the end of the last century working class youths were forced off the streets and prevented from playing informal games in public. A system of voluntary organisations was established and young people were pressed into joining youth groups and clubs set up by the middle classes. Sport was reorganised along clear class lines. In the state schools 'drill' was made compulsory for working class children destined for menial jobs in factories. In public schools, 'games' were considered appropriate for children who would one day rule Britain.

The establishment is as keen to control public space and leisure today as it was a century ago. Whether it is young people gathering at city precincts on a Friday night or football fans on their way to a match, the predictable response of the state is to control and regulate. Police patrols and staid discos 'licensed for music and dancing' are the complementary solutions to the problem of regulation and control.

It is never possible to prevent the emergence of new popular pastimes. But it is possible to regulate them. If the patterns of the past hold good, acid house is destined to be sanitised by the media and regulated by the state. It will re-emerge as a legitimate, well-licensed and far duller form of entertainment. But the taming of acid house will not prevent the invention of other equally 'dangerous' pastimes.

In one sense the attempt to destroy and reconstruct acid house is just the latest incident in a long struggle for the control of public space. In another sense it is part of an unprecedented wave of repression that is a distinctive feature of the late twentieth century.

### A sense of panic

The beefing-up of state control under the Tories—identity cards for football fans, censorship of the media, new official secrets acts—may seem to make little sense. After all, relative to other decades, the eighties were pretty stable. The ruling class in Britain faced little direct opposition, and as the nineties begin there is no visible threat to the status quo.

Establishment panics about morality and public order have usually coincided with obvious signs of social unrest. For example, the first serious public panic about football crowds this century was a response to the high level of

## 'It's nothing to do with the music'

Gilles Peterson is a familiar figure to the British jazz cognoscenti, with a long track record as a jazz/soul DJ and record compiler. Now 25, he runs a small label called Acid Jazz, and is in a good position to assess the house scene around which he does his gigs. Both for musical and political reasons, he sides with the rave-goers against the interfering authorities.

'It's really important that people can go to a massive warehouse party and they'll discover a little room there and hear something they haven't heard before. That's how you'll get jazz across to this whole new club-based audience.' What about the drug problem? 'No one does it at my gigs, it's a bit unfashionable, and certainly nobody comes up to me with massive pupils anywhere now.' So why do the police make such a fuss about it? 'It's the strength, anyone who can pull 10 000 people on a Saturday night is, they think, a threat to public order. I think it's evolved out of nothing, it's a classic case of Britain today.'

Norman Jay does a similar job to Peterson (I have at least 20 albums which credit him on the sleeve notes). He agrees with Peterson that acid house parties have integrated black

and white audiences 'more than any youth cult I can remember'. He also agrees that the scaremongering about drugs is 'just crap' and that the crackdown is politically motivated.

'What the government's afraid of is some DJ with political aspirations, good on a mike, who can get 10 000 impressionable young people in one place. It's nothing to do with the music, 10 000 people represent a threat to them. That's what they want to stamp out, even before it begins to appear.'

I told Jay that when a warehouse party was raided in Cardiff, the DJ played 'Fuck the police' by Niggers With Attitude. A good idea? 'Yeah, we wanted to do that when we were busted recently. The kids have got to be made aware that the police have no right to stop these parties, no right to block off the M25. They lay down the law as they see fit, no one says a thing. As long as the government's seen to be upholding the law then whatever means they use are justified. The police are only the tools of the trade, the robots who carry out the orders.'

Laurence Weller



Notting Hill carnival, 1989: another party gate-crashed by the riot squad





#### Your hosts for entertainment in the nineties

industrial militancy during the years 1917 to 1919. The solution which the authorities developed at that time was to provide more facilities for organised sports, so as to channel the emotions and energy displayed in class conflict on to the playing field and the spectators' stand. The *Sheffield Telegraph* suggested in 1919 that 'by providing facilities for games it is hoped in some measure to combat the evils of industrial unrest' (quoted in N Fishwick, *English Football and Society 1910-1950*, 1989, p13).

In the eighties, by contrast, industrial militancy has been neutralised. Trade unions have ceased, at least for the time being, to represent a problem for the employers. The 'Thatcher decade' brought the disintegration of the official labour movement. At present class conflict is minimal in Britain. In these conditions many people cannot understand why the government is turning the screw and adopting such a repressive attitude. Surely a confident and secure establishment could take acid house parties and small groups of travelling hippies in its stride?

It would be a mistake, however, to see the quest for control, symbolised by police operations against acid house parties, as an irrational response by an old-fashioned British establishment. It is a rational response to a modern situation in which the system is spinning out of the control of the people who rule it.

The supreme irony of the present situation is that, despite the many triumphs of the Thatcher government, the British establishment is not the master of its own destiny. The government is aware that Britain faces an economic disaster. The façade of prosperity barely conceals the grim fact that British capitalism is living off borrowed money and borrowed time. The government can no more control the fluctuations of the pound and interest rates than it can stem the flood of imports. Some time soon it will have to face reality and try to force the population to pick up the bill for its 10-year spending spree. The next decade will bring a recession that could make the deindustrialisation of Britain in the early eighties look like a high growth economy. That is why the government must have every possible means of social control at hand.

By preventing youth from travelling to acid house parties or football matches, the police have established important precedents for the nineties. Once roadblocks and paramilitary operations become the norm, it is that much easier to mobilise the forces of repression against political opposition in the future.

In the short term at least, Thatcher's success against the labour movement has paradoxically made the problem of social control more complex. Traditionally the ruling class knew what it had to guard against. The collective organisations

of workers were an obvious threat. Militants and the far left were old enemies of the state. Today it is far less obvious whence the threat to public order will come.

The Thatcher decade did not destroy anti-capitalist sentiment, the feeling of disaffection and alienation. It only destroyed the institutions through which these sentiments have conventionally been expressed. People's anger against their circumstances has become much more private and introverted. But it is there nevertheless, just beneath the surface. The large and rising number of spontaneous attacks on the police by crowds of youth is a symptom of this underlying social malaise. Such reactions are neither predictable nor susceptible to the traditional forms of regulation and control.

So long as disaffection exists in such an individualised form it does not pose any serious challenge to the system. It can manifest itself in blind rage and even in anti-social behaviour. By its very nature the privatisation of disaffection leads to the atomisation of protest and unrest. As such, there is no point romanticising the present forms of reactive behaviour, or attributing them with political motives. Nevertheless it is important to understand that the circumstances which lead to the unhelpful Friday night punch-up can also stimulate a very different kind of response.

#### A bit of life

The absence of collective working class organisations does not remove people's instinct to act together. It simply means that they try to overcome their atomisation and isolation in non-political ways. People, especially young people, are not prepared to sit at home and talk to their families. Artificial and officially sanctioned inventions like Live Aid or Red Nose days are unlikely to exhaust the energies of those looking for a bit of life and some wider contact with the world.

Like all the other policies of repression, the attempts to regulate acid house parties seek to establish a framework for containing the unresolved tensions and conflicts under the surface of society. As the British establishment becomes more fearful about its future the question of control assumes a special significance for the nineties. Football games played behind closed doors without a crowd, rock concerts performed in tightly policed arenas before strictly vetted audiences, and standardised ID cards providing access to standardised entertainment are the kind of 'enjoyment' that the authorities would have us look forward to in the nineties.



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# Reflections on the Aids panic

Three years ago this month, east London GP Michael Fitzpatrick got together with veteran gay rights campaigner Don Milligan to write a response to the government's massive publicity campaign about Aids. The result—a 64-page pamphlet entitled *The Truth About the Aids Panic*—was published in March 1987. The pamphlet challenged the central theme of the official 'safe sex' propaganda, that an epidemic of Aids among heterosexuals was imminent, and emphasised the urgency of combating the oppression of homosexuals to prevent the spread of the virus among the major risk group—gay men.

Fitzpatrick and Milligan argued that the Aids panic revealed 'the concern of a threatened establishment to strengthen its grip over society by seizing any opportunity to promote the values of conformity and discipline'. Linda Ryan spoke to them in London on the third anniversary of the launch of the biggest health scare in history.

**In *The Truth About the Aids Panic* you argued that 'Aids is not a problem for most people' at a time when all the publicity was saying that 'Aids is a threat to everybody'. Who was right?**

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** We were right. At the time we wrote the pamphlet there were four cases of people who had acquired Aids through heterosexual contact in Britain. Now, three years later, 12 people are considered to have acquired Aids through heterosexual contact with partners outside the recognised high-risk categories. There are another 95 people who are thought to have become infected through heterosexual contact abroad, and 21 who were partners of haemophiliacs, intravenous drug users or bisexuals. Aids is a terrible disease, but in Britain it is still mercifully rare, and virtually exclusive to fairly clearly defined groups.

It's worth adding that the figures for HIV infection—those at risk of developing the full syndrome in years to come—confirm the fact that in Britain there is no sign of Aids spreading outside high-risk categories. The latest figures show that only 33 people are thought to have acquired HIV infection heterosexually in Britain from partners who were not recognised as high-risk. These are the hard facts—the scaremongers prefer to derive their figures by counting in people who became infected abroad or from partners who were haemophiliacs or drug users, or even by including 'unclassified' cases. Better still, they like to use computer models of 'worst

case' scenarios that amount to nothing more than nightmarish fantasy.

When we emphasise the tiny number of cases of heterosexual transmission outside high-risk categories, this is not to minimise the problem for those in these categories who have become infected with HIV or have developed Aids. It is simply to highlight the absurdity of the government's claim that Aids is a threat to everybody. Similarly when we emphasise the figures for Britain, this does not mean that we are indifferent to the problem of Aids in other countries. At the beginning of 1987 our immediate concern was to respond to the British government's Aids campaign and to point out that there was no epidemiological justification for its emphasis on the danger of heterosexual spread—in Britain.

If the government was seriously concerned about the problem of heterosexual spread it would have been more efficient to send the minister of health around personally to give safe sex advice to the relatively few people at risk—mainly haemophiliacs and drug addicts and their partners—instead of wasting resources on posting 23 million leaflets to every household in the country.

**Don Milligan:** It is also worth recalling that it wasn't just the government that argued the 'Aids is a threat to everybody' line. This was fully endorsed by the whole of the established gay movement. Aids educators and campaigners within the gay scene have shown little regard

for the facts. They've never bothered to analyse or publish the government's figures. Instead they hoped to deflect all the finger-pointing at gay men by insisting that the entire population is at risk. They obviously thought this was a clever ruse. But the lies are rebounding on them now.

Against the fulsome attack of the right the Aids campaigners have tirelessly tried to defend themselves by playing with words and deploying the most banal pedantry. Early on they rejected the notion of 'high-risk' groups in favour of 'high-risk practices'. But how many straight men do you know who engage in receptive anal intercourse? The most 'high-risk practice' is of course restricted to the group at highest risk: gay men. Another favourite is to insist that there is no such thing as an 'Aids test' because the available test can only detect if a person has been in contact with the virus. The gay Aids educators and journalists have found this sort of mucking about very absorbing over the years.

When James Anderton accuses gay men of 'swirling in a cesspit of their own making' it is a bit limp to start quarrelling about terminology in the hope that nobody will notice that it is, by and large, gay men who are becoming ill and dying of Aids. Attempts to defend gay people from attack by insisting that 'everybody' is at risk from Aids are just stupid. Above all, it hasn't worked. It always has been unwise to attempt to counter anti-gay bigotry by evasion and deception. Now that the backlash is really gathering momentum, this evasive response is plain irresponsible.

**How do you respond to accusations that your attitude to Aids is complacent, even irresponsible? What about Africa and New York? How can you be so sure it couldn't happen here? Isn't it sensible to play safe and promote safe sex?**

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** The Aids panic-mongers are always quoting statistics about the transmission of HIV infection in other countries to keep the scare at fever pitch in Britain. But

(continued on page 17)



In June 1986 the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens published revised guidelines on Aids. Their views were endorsed by the health departments, the health and safety commission and the health and safety executive. In their guidelines the government scientists said:

'While there is no doubt that infection with this virus can lead to severe disease for which there is no effective prophylaxis or treatment, it still does not present a high risk of spreading in the community except in the high-risk groups. This view has not changed and on current evidence is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.' ('LAV/HTLV III—The causative agent of Aids and related conditions—Revised guidelines', Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens, June 1986)

The official figures prove that the government's scientific advisers were completely correct in their assessment of the true dangers of widespread infection. These figures are all but ignored in much of the Aids debate. We publish them here.

**HETEROSEXUALS:** Between December 1986 and October 1989 the numbers of heterosexuals with Aids who are

## The truth about the Aids epidemic in Britain

presumed to have acquired the virus heterosexually in Britain have risen from four to 12. Over the same period the numbers of such patients who have died as a result of Aids have risen from three to seven. The numbers of people with Aids who remained unclassified by patient characteristic rose from one in 1986 to 43 by October 1989. The numbers of unclassified patients who have died during the same period rose from one in 1986 to 25 in 1989.

**WOMEN:** The number of women with Aids outside the high-risk groups has remained at three; between December 1986 and October 1989 not one woman at low risk became ill with Aids. The total number of women, regardless of patient characteristic, who have become ill from Aids rose from 15 at December 1986 to 96 by October 1989.

**HIV INFECTION:** The latest figures for HIV infection reveal a similar pattern. The comparatively large unclassified

figure shown in Table 1 contains within it the same broad distribution of patient characteristics as are shown in Table 2. The unclassified HIV figures have invariably been redistributed, by the department of health, in similar proportions to the Aids figures, as more becomes known about the patient and the probable route of their infection.

**THOSE AT RISK:** These figures reveal that Aids was an extremely rare illness in Britain in 1986, and that it has remained so. Exponential growth of the illness and of HIV infection has not taken place. Neither has the illness shown any tendency whatsoever to move beyond the 'high-risk' groups in the community. Sexually active gay men are at some risk, and unprotected anal intercourse remains unwise. However the risks to heterosexual women and men who do not use intravenous drugs are statistically insignificant, and for all practical purposes non-existent.

**TABLE 1 HIV Antibody positive: Patient characteristics**  
Cumulative totals to end of September 1989  
from the department of health

Patient Characteristics	Male	Female	Gender Unknown	Total
Homosexual & Bisexual	5390	-	-	5390
Intravenous Drug User (IVDU)	1106	541	31	1678
Homosexual & Bisexual IVDU	93	-	-	93
Haemophiliac & Recipients of blood	1148	55	3	1206
Heterosexual partner(s) of above	14	119	1	134
Heterosexual infected abroad	216	127	7	350
Heterosexual no evidence of infection abroad	18	13	2	33
Child of at risk or infected parents	49	54	33	136
Multiple risks	7	-	-	7
Not yet classified	1761	292	138	2191
<b>Total</b>	<b>9802</b>	<b>1201</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>11218</b>

**TABLE 2 Aids Cases: Patient Characteristics**  
Cumulative total to the end of October 1989  
from the department of health

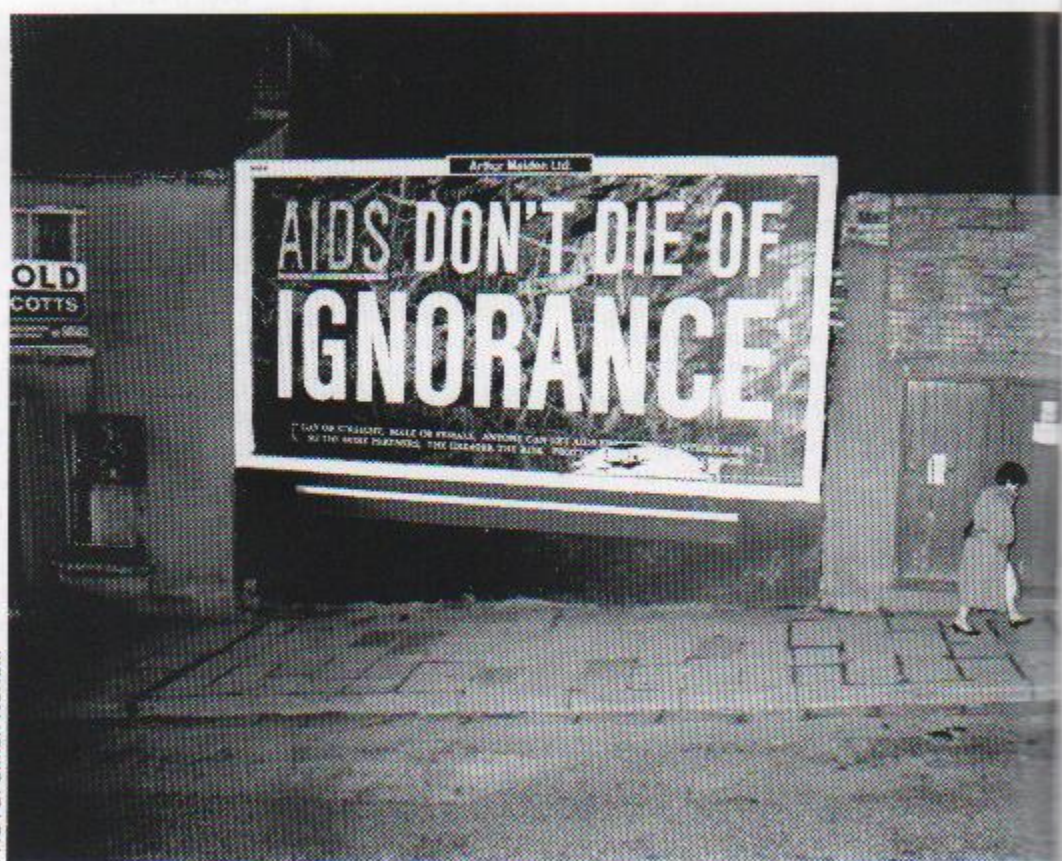
Patient Characteristics	Male	Female	Total	Deaths
Homosexual & Bisexual	2203	-	2203	1132
Intravenous Drug User (IVDU)	57	18	75	33
Homosexual & Bisexual IVDU	37	-	37	17
Haemophiliac & Recipients of blood	185	24	209	141
Heterosexual partner(s) of above	7	14	21	8
Heterosexual infected abroad	65	30	95	48
Heterosexual no evidence of infection abroad	9	3	12	7
Child of at risk or infected parents	9	13	22	11
Unclassified	36	7	43	25
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2608</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>2717</b>	<b>1422</b>

**SOURCE:** Official statistics on HIV infection and Aids in Britain are prepared by the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre and the Communicable Diseases Unit. They are published on a monthly and quarterly basis by the department of health.





**Free condoms and sexual repression: from government publicity campaigns to Durex-distributing nuns, the forces of reaction have used the scare about the heterosexual spread of Aids to encourage conformity**







the Aids virus, like many other pathogens, has quite different patterns of spread in different communities.

In Africa, there is little doubt that HIV has been widely disseminated, with devastating consequences, by heterosexual contact. A number of local factors appear to have encouraged this—a high incidence of other sexually transmitted diseases, particularly genital ulcers, now seems to be the most important. Prostitution and a high turnover of sexual partners, encouraged by the breakdown of traditional social structures under the pressures of urbanisation, migration, poverty and war, also seems to have played a part. Aids is unquestionably a major public health problem in Africa requiring urgent attention and resources. Yet, as none of these factors prevails in Britain on anything approaching an African scale, why should we expect HIV to spread in Britain in a similar way?

Again, in New York and in other big American cities, things are different. These cities, especially New York, include high concentrations of two of the main HIV high-risk groups—gay men and intravenous drug users. In some of the poorest areas of New York, largely populated by black and Hispanic people, conditions approaching those in the third world, compounded by drugs, have resulted in an epidemic of Aids cases. These particular circumstances lead to high death rates from Aids among young people and to large numbers of babies being born to HIV positive mothers. Aids is a major crisis in New York that makes grisly headlines. But the conditions of New York do not exist in any British city, so these headlines are no basis for public health policy in Britain.

British scaremongers have recently picked up on the fact that a relatively high proportion of Aids cases in Belgium became infected heterosexually. Because Belgium is closer to home these figures are considered to have more impact on British heterosexuals. But closer inspection reveals that most of the Belgian Aids cases arise directly out of its ties with its former African colonies, where rates of HIV infection are among the highest in the world. Again these figures tell us little about the prospects for the heterosexual transmission of Aids in Britain.

The scaremongers' last resort is Edinburgh, the self-proclaimed Aids capital of Europe. Here the key factor appears to have been the unfortunate coincidence between the arrival of the Aids virus in the city and a wave of intravenous drug abuse involving needle sharing on a large scale on a number of housing estates. The result is a relatively large

number of HIV positive cases in the city. Thus, while Scotland accounts for less than five per cent of British Aids cases so far, it contains 15 per cent of known HIV positives. This is a tragedy for many young people in Edinburgh and highlights the high risk of spreading HIV infection via shared needles. It shows the need for special resources and facilities to deal with the problem—and no doubt counselling on safe sex for those infected is an important priority. But the figures of HIV spread among drug abusers in Edinburgh are no guide to the risk of heterosexual spread in Manchester, Sheffield or even London.

All the evidence suggests that, in a community in which HIV has become established, infection is fairly easily transmitted via transfusion with infected blood products (now universally screened), through dirty needles, by receptive anal intercourse and by vaginal intercourse between partners suffering from other sexually transmitted diseases. Otherwise it is very difficult to contract. Though HIV has become established among gay men in Britain, especially in London, and among some drug abusers, it has fortunately not spread more widely. What's more is that it has been apparent from an early stage in the British epidemic that such spread was highly improbable. Six months before the government launched its campaign a report on HIV from the official Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens concluded that 'it still does not present a high risk of spreading in the community except in the high-risk groups'.

The charge of irresponsibility about Aids can be legitimately levelled against all those who have twisted and distorted the epidemiological evidence to justify their attempt to terrify Britain's heterosexual population into major changes in sexual behaviour. One result has been to create a wave of public anxiety on such a scale that special 'worried well' clinics have now had to be set up around the country.

**Don Milligan:** The great heterosexual scare has also distracted attention from the real problem of Aids—more than a thousand gay men have already died in Britain. More than a thousand are ill and well over 5000 gay men know they are HIV positive. Hundreds of Aids workers and campaigners have worked hard raising money for people and providing frontline care, but the columnists, lecturers and lobbyists have fought ruthlessly to conceal the real facts from the public. We have to confront the fact that Aids charities and organisations have put in the work where it matters—on the 'out' gay scene—while at the same time

they have attempted to promote a completely false impression of the epidemic to the general public. This has been a real disaster and we are paying for it now.

Safer sex campaigning on the gay scene has saved people from disease and death. I don't have any doubt about that. But in the wider community it has simply stirred up bigotry and legitimised the oppression of gay people at a more intense level. Fortunately the spread of Aids among gays has slowed, but will continue so long as homosexuals are oppressed, forced to conceal their sexuality and to conduct their sex lives in the shadows. Mounting anti-gay hysteria can only encourage the spread of HIV among gay men, bringing more suffering and deaths.

**How does it feel to end up on the same side as the Sun's regular columnist Dr Vernon Coleman who has also openly challenged the government's emphasis on the danger of heterosexual spread?**

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** We aren't 'on the same side' as a reactionary like Coleman, but we agree on the irrationality of the official Aids propaganda. It's ironic that a right-wing Murdoch hack can take a more sceptical view of a Tory government campaign than the vast bulk of the medical profession and the left. Coleman strikes a characteristic Sun populist tone against the establishment killjoys—those he calls 'prudes, religious maniacs and self-appointed guardians of public morality' who have used Aids 'to frighten youngsters into celibacy'. This is a striking illustration of how things have come full circle since the sixties, when the doctors provided easier access to contraception and abortion and the left took up libertarian postures on matters of sexuality, women's liberation and gay rights. Now that the British Medical Association and all the tired radicals have jumped on the safe sex bandwagon, the sexist and anti-gay Sun provides a platform for an isolated voice for sexual licence and experimentation!

It is remarkable how the Aids panic has created a consensus that excludes all questioning and tries to curtail any rational debate. Coleman reports how he has been shunned and scoffed at for 'telling the truth' about Aids, how he has been invited to appear on TV to talk about Aids and then turned away when producers found out that he opposed the official line. We have had similar experiences. The mainstream media tried to deal with our argument by simply ignoring it—promised reviews of the pamphlet were never published, feature articles submitted were dropped, letters written to





editors were rejected, TV interviews were edited to distort our message.

More radical commentators, with the zeal of libertines who had taken holy orders, took a more aggressive line. The *New Statesman* published a strident and dishonest denunciation and allowed only an edited and truncated reply. The London listings magazine *City Limits* went so far as to print two scurrilous reviews. Some left-wing bookshops removed the pamphlet from their shelves and others included specially printed warnings about its dangerous contents. When we were invited to speak at colleges or trade union meetings radical doctors would come along specially to warn audiences that what they were about to hear could be gravely prejudicial to their health. It was interesting that the more serious reviews came from abroad.

**Don Milligan:** Another irony has been the convergence of the gay scene and the medical profession. For obvious reasons, Aids organisations are almost exclusively run and staffed by homosexual men. Consequently, their argument that Aids is not substantially a 'gay disease' always sounds a bit thin. The paradox is that the gay men involved in doing this work know perfectly well that it is largely a problem for homosexuals. They are quite sensibly looking after their own—they know from bitter experience that the oppression of

gays makes it highly unlikely that anybody else will do it.

Yet, in arguing that it is only a matter of time before heterosexuals start getting Aids they have painted themselves into a corner. They now find themselves alone, allied only to the medical establishment. This is the real irony. After suffering a century of bigotry and repression at the hands of the medical profession most gay organisations are now compelled to rely on the British Medical Association. This strange alliance is all there is to sustain the prejudice that Aids threatens the general population. Nobody else believes this any more, and the government's own scientific advisers have never believed it.

**Lord Kilbracken's revelations last month about the small numbers of heterosexual Aids cases have provoked a wave of media questioning of the whole basis of the government campaign. Is this the end of the Aids panic?**

**Don Milligan:** No. It means that it is going to shift in a more aggressively anti-gay and pro-family direction. Something like the cancellation by the government of the health education authority's safe sex campaign does not mean at all that the panic is over. What it probably indicates is a decision on the part of the authorities to allow the idea of

Aids and the responsibility that gays have for 'spreading it' to take even deeper root.

The government's announcement of the pay-out of £25m to haemophiliacs is a case in point. Of course they should get this money—if anything, they should get eight or nine times that amount. But the effect of this isolated pay-out in the present climate will be to emphasise the innocence of the straight 'victims' of the 'gay plague'. The collapse of efforts to conceal the fact that it is now only gay men and intravenous drug users who are at serious risk from Aids in Britain will provoke a backlash of hatred and cynicism against gay organisations. The government safe sex campaign was used to promote its pro-family agenda. Its cancellation, after the damage has been done, will result in a further strengthening of the anti-gay climate. If gay organisations had confronted the onset of the Aids epidemic by telling the truth, fighting for equal rights, and fair treatment, we would be in much better shape to resist the repression that we now face.

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** The Kilbracken statement has been seized upon by the more right-wing moralists, including many in the medical profession, who were never very keen on the safe sex campaign. The BMA itself has always emphasised that the only real protection against Aids was not condoms, but chastity before

**ABOVE: Police arrest Act-up protesters in London last month; the Aids panic has been the cue for a crackdown on all lesbian and gay activity**



marriage and fidelity afterwards. Confronted with a disease for which they have neither prevention nor cure, many doctors have made a bolt for the pulpit, a place many of them have always found congenial anyway.

**How was it that the gay scene and the left were dragged so successfully into the safe sex campaign?**

**Don Milligan:** I think the slide of gay organisations into alliance with the medical establishment was unintentional. They were just trying to take the heat off homosexual men by supporting the 'Don't die of ignorance' line. But the effect has been the mushrooming of agencies and quangos. Literally hundreds of educators, writers, organisers and counsellors now depend upon the endorsement of the BMA for their bread and butter. If there is any change in the perception of the disease they can wave goodbye to their salaries, their mortgages and their status. This has, of course, strengthened the ostrich-like position of most of the Aids agencies and workers in the country. An orthodoxy, built entirely on the prejudice that heterosexuals are at equal risk, has arisen which people dare not challenge for fear of losing their livelihood.

In a similar fashion much of the gay press has benefited from government and local government advertising. Unlike commercial customers the government can be relied on to pay, and pay handsomely, for the safer sex and job ads that they place in the gay press. I'm not accusing anybody of really wilful cynicism or graft—just that these financial pressures have strengthened the tendency towards a blinkered and thoughtless approach.

This reliance of Aids agencies, and gay papers and organisations, on the authorities has eroded the capacity for independent thought. Political initiatives are now invariably staffed by people who are paid wages to represent the policies of Labour councils, government agencies and quangos. This could be seen very clearly in the anti-Clause campaign. The Association of London Authorities and a clutch of professional lobbyists dictated policy in Manchester and in London. It's the same on the Aids front. A tangle of modest, but nonetheless very real, vested interests are now determining policy.

The gravy train would be derailed by the shift away from the perception that Aids is a problem for the whole population. The tragedy is that the quangoisation of gay and Aids campaigning has ensured that the fight for equal rights—the fight against the oppression of homosexual people—has been the real casualty.

Instead of confronting the Aids epidemic with a combination of safe sex campaigning on the gay scene, and a fight for equal rights in the wider society, the gay organisations have walled themselves in with the medical establishment.

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** It's true that one of the more curious features of the Aids panic is that most of the radicals in the medical profession have joined forces with the traditionalists in the safe sex campaign. I think this is the result of their increasingly individualistic approach, the way they have come to operate like nineteenth-century philanthropists and social reformers. These radical doctors have largely given up any sense of collective activity for social change in favour of conducting missionary work in inner-city areas, trying to persuade the masses to give up smoking, fatty food and alcohol and take up fibre, vegetables and jogging. The safe sex campaign fits into this drive to medicalise the lives of ordinary people (as in the radical vogue for screening and prevention programmes) in the hope that this will improve their chances of survival.

Radical doctors have taken the Aids scare at face value as a legitimate public health campaign which it is their duty to support. But, as we have seen, the Aids scare is not about public health at all; it is essentially political propaganda designed to strengthen the grip of reaction. Unable to grasp this point from the outset, radical doctors—and other health professionals too—have become prisoners of the right-wing establishment. Hence, even when the heterosexual epidemic myth is exposed, the initiative goes to the pro-family campaigners in the BMA.

**How do you think people should respond to the problem of Aids in the 1990s?**

**Don Milligan:** This idea that Aids poses such a threat that we had to dispense with independent political campaigning for equal rights—the idea that we had to go into alliance with the medical authorities and government agencies—was always misplaced. It is based on the prejudice that the 'Don't die of ignorance' type of campaign actually saves lives among the general population. Of course, it doesn't. For the simple reason that straight people are not actually at risk. On the other hand, the government's initiative has indeed provoked widespread fears and anxiety. It has provoked suicides, serious depression and distress. Above all, it has provoked a much deeper level of hostility towards homosexuals for 'visiting this terrible

calamity' on society. It has made the jobs and social lives of gay men even more insecure; threatened our access to insurance and a host of other services.

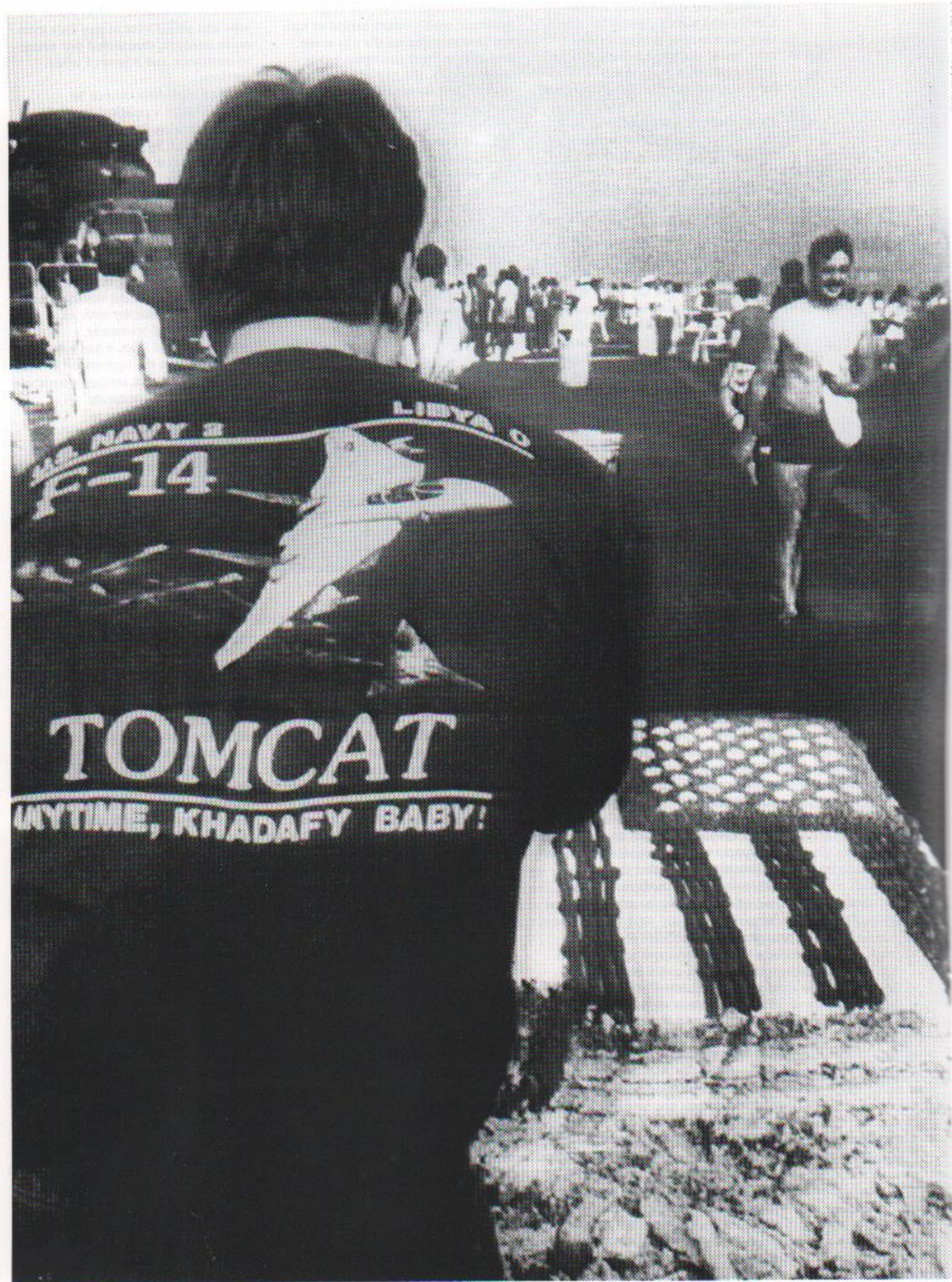
Of course, Aids cannot be conquered by a political campaign for equal rights. Incidentally, it cannot be conquered by propaganda campaigns that promote lies and anxiety either. Aids, the disease, will only be conquered by advances in medical science. However, dealing with an epidemic is quite definitely a social and political matter. It requires real knowledge of who is getting the disease and what might be done to protect them while the scientists are struggling to come up with an effective clinical treatment.

In the case of Aids it has always been clear that the oppression of the people most at risk seriously hampers any efforts to get accurate information and to create circumstances where they can adequately protect themselves from infection. The unplanned, furtive and often drunken nature of much sexual contact between homosexual men is produced by the conditions of oppression.

And before everybody starts getting outraged—let me say—I know very well that sexual arrangements between gay men who are more or less 'out' are of an entirely different character. But let's face it, most homosexual men are not 'out'. They are in the closet. They live silently in the midst of hostile and violently anti-gay prejudice. Inevitably, their sexual relations with other men are episodic and often thoughtless. It is their oppression that militates against safer sex. The idea that broadcast government propaganda will effectively reach them is absurd. It will make them more fearful and anxious, but it is unlikely to do anything else. In fact, it has simply fuelled the prejudice that already disfigures their lives.

**Michael Fitzpatrick:** It is from this point of view that I've always thought that we should view the Aids epidemic. Dealing with the disease is a matter for scientists, whereas the epidemic is very much our business; it is a political matter. Fighting for equal rights for homosexual people is not just vital for wider political reasons, it is also a matter of life and death. We have to tackle the real Aids epidemic, not some fanciful notion of it. Above all we have to fight the epidemic of fear and bigotry that is literally destroying the lives of tens of thousands of homosexual people. That's why I think that the fight for decriminalisation—for equal rights—is a matter of the utmost urgency.







Eighties-style imperialism

# The international anti-terrorist conspiracy

**Kirsten Cale suggests that the great anti-terrorist crusade of the eighties was little more than a new excuse for America and other Western powers to do some old-fashioned terrorising in the third world**

'We live in a terroristic age. Few... can fail to be haunted by the ugly sights and ghastly dreams of terroristic murder, massacre, and torture, and the suffering of innocents. Numerous international organisations and the mass media at least agree in characterising our era as one "full of dismal terror".—Britain's top anti-terrorist pundit, Professor Paul Wilkinson

The eighties were the decade of the anti-terrorist crusade. Over the past 10 years, the media and governments have sought to strike fear into the hearts of Western societies by conjuring up images of fanatical Arab gunmen and bombers, led by the godfathers of Tehran and Tripoli. World leaders have gathered at summits to pledge their commitment to stamping out this new international terrorist conspiracy. At home, Western politicians and police chiefs have used the terrorist bogey to introduce new state powers. From the tabloid press to university courses, an entire industry has been created to drive home the message that terrorism is now the most pressing threat to civilisation. But what is terrorism, and why did it suddenly assume such importance in the eighties?

## Which political ends?

British law defines terrorism, in the Prevention of Terrorism Act, as the 'use of violence for political ends...'. The CIA and the US state department have adopted a similar definition. According to the CIA, terrorism is 'the threat or use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, when acting for or in opposition to established governmental authority...'

Neither definition sheds much light on the issue. Both the British government and the CIA use political violence to secure their interests—indeed their authority rests on their ability to do so. So where do they draw the line between 'terrorist' violence and their own use of

'legitimate force'? Why are the IRA, PLO, Hizbollah, etc, classified as terrorists, when the SAS, the CIA and the Contras are not?

The Western powers do not define terrorism by its *violence*, but by its *political ends*. Their distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence is always determined by its purpose. If violence is used to challenge the authority of the Western powers it is branded as terrorism. But if it is used to promote the interests of the West in the third world, it is championed as the battle *against* terrorism. So the guerrilla groups fighting against US-backed regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala are condemned as terrorists. But the US-sponsored Contras, who spent the eighties making war on the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, are championed as freedom fighters. The Libyan regime is branded a 'terrorist state', but the American government which bombed Libya calls itself a peace-loving democracy.

## Made in America

The emergence of terrorism as a major international issue of the eighties had nothing to do with any sudden spread of violent psychopathy among third world peoples. The anti-terrorist crusade can only be understood in the context of the changing needs of American foreign policy.

The eighties were a decade in which the USA encountered increasingly serious problems maintaining its position as the unchallenged world power and keeping a grip on key regions of the third world. In 1979, two important regional props to American power were swept away by popular revolts. In Central America, the Nicaraguan Somoza regime, which had operated as an American stooge for over 40 years, was overthrown by the Sandinistas. And most importantly, the Shah of Iran, second only to the Israelis as a strategically vital American client in the Middle East,

was toppled by the Iranian masses.

The 1980 American presidential election was fought against the background of the humiliating hostage crisis, in which Iranian students imprisoned US embassy staff in Tehran. US politicians and media whipped up hatred against the Iranians, demanding military intervention and revenge. In this poisoned climate of national hysteria and chauvinism, 'soft' Jimmy Carter lost the election to Ronald Reagan, and a new bogey was born: the fanatical Islamic terrorist.

## Enter Reagan

Reagan entered the White House promising to restore the might of the USA in the international arena. His aggressive assertion of American interests in the third world, and calls for national unity against all alien threats to the American way of life silenced his critics at home and swung public opinion behind US rearmament and military adventures overseas.

Reagan resurrected Cold War anti-communism to justify a new round of sabre-rattling in the third world. Throughout the early eighties the Reagan administration legitimised American military intervention in Central America by inventing evidence of communist subversion there. The first target was Nicaragua. In 1981, Reagan promised to 'draw the line' against the 'Soviet-Cuban conspiracy' being hatched in Managua and threw his weight behind the Contras' attempts to destabilise the Sandinista regime. In 1983, America again mobilised the Soviet menace to justify sending the marines up the beaches of tiny Grenada.

However, Reagan's strident anti-Sovietism had only limited use in the changing landscape of international politics in the eighties. It may have been possible to brand Grenada as a 'Soviet-Cuban colony'. But the most pressing problem area facing the USA was the Middle East. And accusing the Ayatollah Khomeini,

LEFT: By attacking Libya US aircraft carriers took the West's message to the entire third world



Shiite fundamentalists and Islamic mullahs of pro-Soviet sympathies would have stretched credulity to breaking point. Furthermore, Mikhail Gorbachev's highly successful foreign policy initiatives from the mid-eighties drew much of the sting out of Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric. Even the most hardened Kremlin-haters had to concede that the 'evil empire' didn't look quite as sinister with the smiling Mr Gorbachev at the helm.

The American establishment needed a new bogey to justify its militarism overseas. Terrorism fitted the bill. Americans still remembered the Iranian hostage crisis, with the television images of chanting Iranians burning the Stars and Stripes. Now the American propaganda machine set about turning that memory into a more concrete threat to American lives. By magnifying the significance of a handful of bombing and hijacking incidents they conjured up a new threat to the entire international order. Images of Middle Eastern suicide bombers, fanatical Arab gunmen and blood-crazed Islamic fundamentalists added flesh to the new panic. One dramatic attack on the US state—the bombing of the marines in Beirut in 1983—was held up as evidence of a terrorist threat to every ordinary American.

Never mind that in 1985, when the anti-terrorist crusade was being launched in earnest, only 23 American citizens had been killed in terrorist attacks, compared to the 1.2m Middle Eastern people slaughtered as a result of direct or indirect Western interference since 1945. The Middle East became synonymous with terrorism. And the new international terrorist conspiracy joined the old Red Menace as a justification for more US militarism around the globe.

### Personal touch

Reagan's anti-terrorist crusade had a powerful effect in the USA, mobilising popular hatred against all things Arab and Iranian. Indeed, at least in the short-term, the new anti-terrorist message proved even more potent than the old anti-Soviet bogey. The communist menace had always been a bit distant and nebulous to the average American. But the supposed threat from Arab terrorism struck a more personal chord. The Middle Eastern bomber, hijacker or gunman could strike down US citizens anywhere in the world. When the anti-Arab scare was at its height thousands of American tourists cancelled their holidays in Europe, for fear of terrorist attacks on aircraft and airports.

As Reagan's phoney war against 'international terrorism' created a climate of fear sympathetic to rearmament and military action in

the third world, all of the Western powers joined in. Upstart third world nations which refused to toe the Western line were labelled 'terrorist states'. By the mid-eighties, Iran, Syria, South Yemen, Nicaragua, North Korea, Bulgaria and Cuba had all been accused of sponsoring terrorist activities. But Libya was to bear the full brunt of America's crusade against 'international terrorism'.

Libya's Colonel Gadaffi had long infuriated the Americans with his declarations of support for the Palestinian and other anti-imperialist struggles. But Gadaffi had done nothing to justify the way in which he was singled out for the hysterical witch-hunt which culminated in the joint US/British air-strike on Libyan cities in 1986. His 'international terrorism' amounted to the assassination of several Libyan dissidents living abroad, a bungled intervention in Chad, the poorest country on Earth, and the accidental shooting of one WPC in London.

Reagan needed a convenient target against which to demonstrate that America still had the will and the power to deal with a challenge to its authority in the Middle East. Gadaffi's Libya fitted the bill: it was small, weak and politically isolated from the more conservative Arab regimes in the Middle East.

### 'Flaky' scapegoat

Through the eighties Reagan launched an all-out anti-terrorist campaign against Libya. In 1981, intelligence agents mounted a black propaganda operation, which claimed that Libyan 'terrorist murder squads' were targeting the USA. Reagan branded Gadaffi as a 'flaky' psychopath, crouched at the centre of the international terrorist web. Reagan imposed economic sanctions against Libya, and banned Libyans from studying nuclear physics in the USA. Finally, when the White House claimed to have irrefutable evidence of Libyan involvement in the bombing of a Berlin disco used by US soldiers (an attack almost certainly sponsored by Syria), the F1-11s were despatched from RAF bases to bomb civilian areas of Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986. Under the guise of a campaign against terrorism, Reagan demonstrated to every third world nation that they could expect the same treatment if they dared to challenge American imperial authority.

The imperialist powers have always needed a bogey to justify their interventions in the third world. A century ago the colonialists claimed that they were sending the gunboats only to catch pirates and to abolish slavery. After the Second World War they used the myth of Soviet expansionism as the excuse. In the

eighties they had to invent the international terrorist conspiracy to play the same role. But, despite its immediate success, the terrorist bogey lacks the durability of the old Cold War propaganda.

It is one thing for America to conjure up the spectre of Middle Eastern terrorism to justify interventions against Libya and Iran. It is another thing entirely to try to justify a multi-billion dollar defence budget and rearmament strategy as necessary to combat a handful of Islamic fundamentalist groups. Reagan was able to use anti-Sovietism to legitimise the development of the Star Wars programme. But who could believe that the USA was developing deep-space laser technology to deal with the tent-dwelling Colonel Gadaffi or Abu Nidal?

### Green imperialists?

Nonetheless, as third world upheavals continue to erupt, new bogeys will be dreamed up to justify the West's attempts to control them. At the beginning of the nineties, the major Western powers are flailing around searching for new excuses to stamp their authority on the oppressed. The drugs scare is the latest. The biggest drugs-runner in the world—the CIA—has now transformed itself into an anti-narcotics squad to justify its activities against General Noriega and other Central American regimes. Who knows what new bogeys the future will bring? Perhaps Green imperialists will invade South-east Asia to clean up the region's polluted rivers. Or charitable imperialists may choose to invade Ethiopia to liberate the region from starvation. Whatever the West calls its campaigns, we can be sure that the sole aim is to secure control over the third world.

Because the anti-terrorist crusade provides such a thin cover for Western militarism, the eighties spawned a new breed of political commentator to lend it some intellectual legitimacy: the terrorism pundit. Now, every time a bomb explodes or a plane is hijacked these specialists are wheeled out in front of the television cameras to deliver their opinion on the latest outrage. They pose as independent and informed observers. But they are little more than professional propagandists for the Western powers' cause.

The pundits' writings unanimously assert that terrorism is the greatest present-day menace to Western civilisation, while simultaneously attempting to discredit the groups which employ violence in their struggle against Western domination. Professor Paul Wilkinson of Aberdeen University, the most prominent British terror pundit, sums up the prevailing wisdom:



Those who concede that terrorism is the central problem cannot offer a credible argument against a more decisive Western intervention

'Let us strip away the masks of terrorist illusions and expose the deathhead of murder beneath. Terrorists are fond of using romantic euphemisms for their murderous crimes. They claim to be revolutionary heroes yet they commit cowardly acts and lack the heroic qualities of humanity and magnanimity. They profess to be revolutionary soldiers yet they attack only by stealth, murder and maim the innocent, and disdain all the rules and conventions of war. They claim to bring "liberation" when in reality they seek power for themselves.' (*Terrorism and the Liberal State*, 1986, p100)

Wilkinson recites the standard litany: terrorists are murderous, cowardly, amoral and sly. But if he finds these attributes so repugnant he should turn his attention to the activities of the Western imperialist powers, where he will find them on a grand scale.

The Americans, British, French and others employ the 'romantic euphemisms' of freedom and democracy to justify the widespread and systematic use of murder and torture in the third world. They have demonstrated none of the 'heroic qualities of humanity and magnanimity' when their imperial ambitions have been thwarted in countries like Iran and Vietnam. They 'claim to be revolutionary heroes', but they only pick on small and weak targets like Grenada and Libya when they put their military strength to the test. They 'attack by stealth' on the borders of Nicaragua, 'kill and maim the innocent' in Belfast, Tripoli and the West Bank, and 'disdain all the rules and conventions of war' in Africa, the Middle East and Central America. They wave the banner of liberation and peace, but as every third world country has found to its cost, 'they seek power for themselves'.

### All in the mind

world has created nothing but upheaval, destruction and war. The violence of oppressed groups is a *response* to the domination imposed by the Western powers and their stooges. But the pundits make no mention of either the West's responsibility for third world instability, or the motivation for resistance. Their job is to distract attention from the underlying social causes of political violence in the third world, by blaming it on the peculiar psychology of the individuals involved. By concentrating on the 'terrorist psyche', they can remove the violence from the very real circumstances of imperialism and oppression which give rise to it.

Richard Clutterbuck defines the terrorist as a destructive

megalomaniac: '[The] motivation of terrorists is a psychological one, a desire to express hate and revenge, to smash, to kill and to disrupt—or simply "feel big".' (*Guerrillas and Terrorists*, 1980, pp94-5) Others argue that terrorists are driven by innate fanaticism. 'Terrorists', claims Christopher Hill, 'may be seen variously as criminals, lunatics, fanatics, nihilists...' ('The political dilemmas for Western governments', in *Terrorism and International Order*, 1986).

Other terrorism experts delve even deeper into the terrorist psyche, where they discover not only megalomania, criminality and fanaticism, but weird religious impulses as well. WF May argues, for example, that terrorism has an important ecstatic element, so terrorist activities become a religious experience. Paul Wilkinson also suggests that terrorism has this character. 'Headstrong youths', he claims, 'can become so hooked on the life of terrorist murder they perform their tasks in a kind of sacrificial ecstasy' (*Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p67).

### Christian soldiers

But Wilkinson is quite definite that the ecstatic element does not emanate from the decent, civilised Christian God worshipped in the Western world: 'As terrorism involves systematic cold-blooded murder it is particularly repugnant to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and to all societies which are deeply infused with human values.' (p66) He seems to have forgotten Thatcher's ecstatic Judaeo-Christian response of 'Rejoice! Rejoice!' to the news that the British army had successfully slaughtered Argentinian soldiers in the swamps of South Georgia and Goose Green, while the Royal Navy had committed 'systematic cold-blooded murder' in sinking the *Belgrano*.

By ignoring the social circumstances that give rise to political violence the pundits are able to invent a random list of irrational forces which drive the 'terrorists' to their acts: lunacy, criminality, adolescent bravado, blood-lust, religious mania. But their attempts to discredit the West's opponents present them with certain logical problems. On the one hand, they argue that terrorism is an international threat which throws its shadow across the entire civilised world. But on the other they claim terrorist groups are small, bizarre sects which lack popular legitimacy. Yet why would Wilkinson and his colleagues have built their academic careers around denouncing terrorism and sought to scare entire societies if anti-Western resistance in the third world was confined to a few crazed fanatics?

Contradictions of this kind riddle

the work of terrorist pundits. A cursory scrutiny of their writings reveals the weakness of their case. They do no more than provide an academic veneer for the rapacity of the imperialist powers. Yet these flimsy theories have been accorded the status of profound analysis because no alternative viewpoint has been put forward. Indeed, the entire anti-terrorist crusade was only accepted at face value in the eighties because its crude manipulation of reality was never subjected to a serious challenge.

Liberal critics of Western militarism did object to such outrages as the bombing of Libya. Most argued that terrorism should be fought with economic, rather than military weapons. For example, the Labour Party criticised Thatcher's complicity with the air-strike on the grounds that economic sanctions would have been more effective against Libya. This sort of thing is no match for the Thatchers and Wilkinsons. Those who concede that terrorism is the central problem cannot offer a credible argument against a more decisive Western intervention. As a consequence, the liberal and hardline anti-terrorists only quibble over the method to be used to deal with terrorists and terrorist states: some favour blowing them away, others support starving them out.

The West's interventions in the third world have created carnage, destruction and widespread political instability. Resistance to the repression and indignity meted out by the Western powers and their local allies can take all manner of desperate forms. But whatever form it takes, it should not blind us to the fact that Western interference is the *cause* of the conflict in the third world. The violence of the oppressed is a *reaction* to the situation the West has created. An incident like Lockerbie, for example, can only be understood against the background of America's bloody role in the Middle East in the eighties, symbolised by its shooting down of an Iranian airliner.

The West's hysterical campaigns against terrorism have simply been an excuse for further terrorising third world countries. As such the anti-terrorist crusade, and any similar tricks they invent in the nineties, should be unequivocally opposed. Whatever banner it is launched under, Western intervention in the Middle East or Central America can only intensify the oppression and suffering of the peoples in those regions, and further set back the cause of peace and freedom which it pretends to uphold.



## JANUARY

- **MON 1**  
OLIVER & COMPANY (U) 2.00, 4.00, 6.00  
DEAD POETS SOCIETY (PG) 8.15
- **TUE 2**  
OLIVER & COMPANY (U) 2.00, 4.00, 6.00  
DEAD POETS SOCIETY (PG) 8.15
- **WED 3**  
OLIVER & COMPANY (U) 2.00, 4.00, 6.00  
DEAD POETS SOCIETY (PG) 8.15
- **THUR 4**  
OLIVER & COMPANY (U) 2.00, 4.00  
ROUND MIDNIGHT (15) 6.45 +  
THELONIOUS MONK:  
STRAIGHT NO CHASER (PG) 9.10
- **FRI 5**  
THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 6.15, 8.45
- **SAT 6**  
KIDS: LEGEND (U) 11am  
THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 3.45, 6.15, 8.45  
At 11.15: THE AMERICAN WAY (18)  
+ EASY RIDER (18)
- **SUN 7**  
THE THIRD MAN (PG) 1.45  
- WINGS OF DESIRE (PG) 3.35  
THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 6.15, 8.45
- **MON 8**  
DROWNING BY NUMBERS (18) 6.35  
+ THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 8.45
- **TUE 9**  
DROWNING BY NUMBERS (18) 6.35 -  
THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 8.45
- **WED 10**  
DROWNING BY NUMBERS (18) 6.35 +  
THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE  
& HER LOVER (18) 8.45
- **THUR 11**  
THE PASSENGER (PG) 7.00 +  
MELANCHOLIA (15) 9.10



- **FRI 12**  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 6.30, 8.40
- **SAT 13**  
KIDS: EXPLORERS (U) 11am  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 4.20, 6.30, 8.40  
At 11.15: DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18)  
+ RUMBLEFISH (18)
- **SUN 14**  
AU REVOIR LES ENFANTS (PG) 2.00 -  
JACOBA 3.55 Plus discussion.  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 6.30, 8.40
- **MON 15**  
RUMBLEFISH (18) 6.55 +  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 8.40
- **TUES 16**  
RUMBLEFISH (18) 6.55 +  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 8.40
- **WED 17**  
RUMBLEFISH (18) 6.55 +  
DRUGSTORE COWBOY (18) 8.40
- **THUR 18**  
BREAKING ICE 7.00 +  
CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD (15) 8.10  
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- **FRI 19**  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY (15) 5.00, 7.00, 9.00
- **SAT 20**  
KIDS: THE TWELVE TASKS OF  
ASTERIX (U) 11am  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00  
At 11.15: HELLRAISER (18) -  
HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II (18)
- **SUN 21**  
THE COMMISSAR (PG) 2.15 +  
ASYA'S HAPPINESS (PG) 4.15  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00
- **MON 22**  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00
- **TUES 23**  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00
- **WED 24**  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00
- **THUR 25**  
SUGAR BABY (15) 7.15 +  
BAGDAD CAFE (PG) 8.55
- **FRI 26**  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 7.00, 9.00
- **SAT 27**  
KIDS: GREASE 2 (PG) 11am  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY (15)  
5.00, 7.00, 9.00  
At 11.15: BATMAN (15) +  
PRINCE: SIGN O' THE TIMES (15)
- **SUN 28**  
MY MOTHER THOUGHT SHE WAS  
AUDREY HEPBURN 2.30 -  
SURNAME VIET GIVEN NAME NAM 2.55  
(Women only)  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY... (15) 7.00, 9.00
- **MON 29**  
MANHATTAN (15) 7.15 +  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 9.00
- **TUE 30**  
MANHATTAN (15) 7.15 -  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 9.00
- **WED 31**  
MANHATTAN (15) 7.15 +  
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY....(15) 9.00



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# KRAUT-BASHING MAKES A COMEBACK

When I was a kid we all hated Germans with a vengeance. We spent hours re-enacting skirmishes with them in the bomb ruins of a neighbouring street. Our first real-life encounter with a 'Kraut' came around 1954; a boy of our age (eight or nine) came to live in the same road. He was suitably blond, and worse: he had the most amazing bike we'd ever seen. It had thick chunky tyres, small wheels and a brightly coloured light-metal frame. Amidst the dark paintwork and flaking distemper of Kilburn in the early fifties it was rather conspicuous. He was never forgiven. Him, and his family, had to move away. They acted guilty. They were guilty. They were Germans.

All the adults around us regaled us with German crimes at every opportunity. My grandfather never forgave them for locking him up in 1914. My father never forgave them for gassing his brothers to death on the Western Front in 1916. And nobody would forgive them for demolishing half the street with a V2 rocket in 1944. In the comics the 'Krauts' always had particularly cowardly ways of making their unfortunate victims spill the beans. At the pictures, Jock, Taffy, Cockney Charlie (and even the usually despised Paddy), expressed a cheerful make-do-and-mend determination against the steely, inhuman efficiency of the German master-race. These impressions were nicely confirmed when our history teacher openly wept as he told us about his months in the mire on the Somme.

All this led easily to my first political speech, in 1960. I was standing on a small platform, addressing an even smaller crowd, outside a pub aptly called The Rifle Volunteer on the Kilburn High Road. The legend on the Young Communist League banner read: 'NO GERMAN FINGER ON THE NUCLEAR TRIGGER'. It had a graphic of a finger, presumably German, poised to vaporise us all. This non-mass rally was part of an anti-German campaign which the Communist Party and the Labour left had been running through the fifties. While Britain and America armed themselves to the teeth at the height of the Cold War, the British left concentrated on opposing German rearmament and membership of Nato.

Around this time the British Peace Council (Youth Committee) organised a big demo against the German Panzer units exercising in Pembrokeshire. We were a mixed bunch: CNDers, Welsh miners, Labour Party activists, trade union militants, Young Communists; a broad cross-section of the British left. As we got off the coaches in Carmarthen several hundred local working class people descended upon us hurling a large number of rotten eggs. They weren't internationalists; they just wanted jobs at the base.

Since then, hatred of the Germans started to ebb away, even in left-wing circles. It lingered on in sedimentary form in the common practice of denouncing very British racists as 'Nazis' and splashing swastikas and

Europe is rejuvenating prejudices that I thought had petered out. If not quite yet on the march, the 'rebirth' of the German nation is on the cards. And, we all know what that means, don't we! Eighty million steely, efficient, master-race types with an army more than twice the size of Britain's and a GDP of \$1.5 trillion. Is it any wonder, as one left-wing paper recently observed, that the leaders in Bonn have started singing 'Deutschland Uber Alles'? The dream of a Greater Germany is stirring them up.

That's not all it's stirring up. In Britain, from the right to the left a faint fluttering can already be heard, reminding us about 'German guilt'. Of course the left-wing voices warning against German reunification assure us (and themselves) that they are

These are old tricks that they have imbibed from the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The alignment of the British left with British imperialism around the issue of 'German guilt' is once again on the agenda. Cursory references to the 'pioneering German socialist, Rosa Luxemburg' (who was in fact a Polish communist) and the great traditions of the German working class do not conceal their wretched commitment to the idea of a unique 'German barbarism'. Somehow, British Petroleum, Imperial Chemical Industries or British Aerospace are supposed to bear a smaller responsibility for European barbarism. British socialists will not be able to argue that German imperialism is only driven along by the need to keep the workers in line and the profits rolling in. After all, they do know that this is exactly what happens in dear old Blighty. No, they will have to attribute the particular viciousness of German capital to its tectonic character.

*Vorsprung durch Technik will conjure up nightmares about a German military machine, rather than dreams of owning a flash car*

other Hitlerite insignia across leaflets, newspapers and walls. The intention was always to present racism and bigotry as peculiarly foreign ideologies. But still, by the end of the sixties hatred of Germans had lost the purchase it had formerly over the minds of most British people.

Today, of course, it is well-known that Germans out-sell us, out-buy us and with Prussian efficiency, always get to the sun-beds on the beach before the happy-go-lucky Brits. As Germany moves inexorably towards reunification, and the battle for investment and markets among Europe's capitalist powers warms up, I predict that we shall be hearing a lot more about aggressive Germans again; *Vorsprung durch Technik* will conjure up nightmares about a formidable German military machine, rather than dreams of owning a particularly flash car.

It seems that the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' in Eastern

determined not to encourage anti-German chauvinism. But judging by their record, I doubt they'll succeed. The minute the British left starts finding one imperialist power (usually Germany) peculiarly more frightful than all the rest, concessions to those who wave the Union Jack are rarely far behind.

Many on the left are trying to cover their tracks, opposing German unity by calling for the maintenance of the progressive aspects of the German Democratic Republic. It makes their narrow nationalism sound different from Margaret Thatcher's narrow nationalism. Consequently, British socialists have dubbed the GDR 'social democratic', talked about the necessity of defending 'the gains that the working class of East Germany presently enjoys'. Some have even started talking about the 'East German welfare state'. This claptrap enables them to support German unity in the abstract, and oppose it in practice.

The allegation that 'They bombed our chippy!' has, of course, not got much going for it. The slightly less ancient, but more triumphant cry from the football terraces, 'Two world wars and one world cup!' is equally anachronistic. At the moment the British authorities are satisfied with reminding us about the Anschluss and the destruction of Poland. But I'm sure that British imperialism, with the able assistance of the old British socialists, will soon think of something more appropriate.

Still, I'm not too worried, because I don't think I'm going to fall for this line again. I'm now armed with a cosmopolitan experience. I have worked for a Texan millionaire (he was tall, lean and elegant); I worked for a dumpy fat German who sucked on his cigars like some wicked capitalist in a film by Eisenstein; I've even worked for a firm of sleek Japanese hoteliers. And, it's true, none of them were better than the Brits that I've grafted for. But neither were they any worse. In fact they all seemed remarkably similar: I did the work and they took the profits. It's not that I've come to love the Germans. It's just that I've come to the conclusion that we're going to need the reunited workers of the Fatherland to help us settle up with all our bloody rulers.



The Cold War thaw means...

# History is unfreezing

The momentous events in Eastern Europe may have undermined the Cold War. But, suggests Frank Richards, the breakdown of the old world order and the re-raising of the German question also point the way towards other, hotter, conflicts among the Western powers over who will control the future

Suddenly all the old assumptions seem dubious. The centre stage of the drama is Eastern Europe. But no less significant are the changes sweeping the whole world. It is clear to all observers that the USA no longer has a coherent foreign policy. Even the founding father of America's containment policy—the strategy of using the Cold War to neutralise the Soviet Union—now concedes that the Kremlin is no longer a problem. Instead, George Kennan demands a 'departure by Washington and its leading Nato allies from the silly belief that Nato's most urgent task is to frustrate an attack on Western Europe by a militant Soviet Union, accompanied by its supposedly faithful and militant Warsaw Pact allies' (*Guardian*, 15 November 1989).

For George Kennan to describe the 'Soviet threat' as a 'silly belief' represents a *volte face* at least as profound as Gorbachev's admission that his system does not work. Kennan made his name in the late forties by arguing that the Soviet Union was different to other big powers, because its very existence was a danger to world peace. Mikhail Gorbachev achieved power by following the rules of the tired Soviet bureaucracy to the letter. Today both men advocate policies which they would have bitterly contested just a few years ago.

## Germany calling

This conversion to new thinking does not mean they have given up on the old world. Kennan's main concern is to find a new justification for the maintenance of the Nato and Warsaw Pact military alliances. Consequently he advocates retaining these institutions until a new European order is established. Implicit in Kennan's argument is the view that the two 'superpower' alliances must be retained, not to fight each other, but to prevent the emergence of a united Germany.

The new arguments advanced by Kennan may be interpreted as a sign of the changing times. But probably it is more appropriate to suggest that Kennan's view of the world has not changed all that much. It is just that his views on Germany can no longer be presented in the traditional vocabulary of the Cold War. As

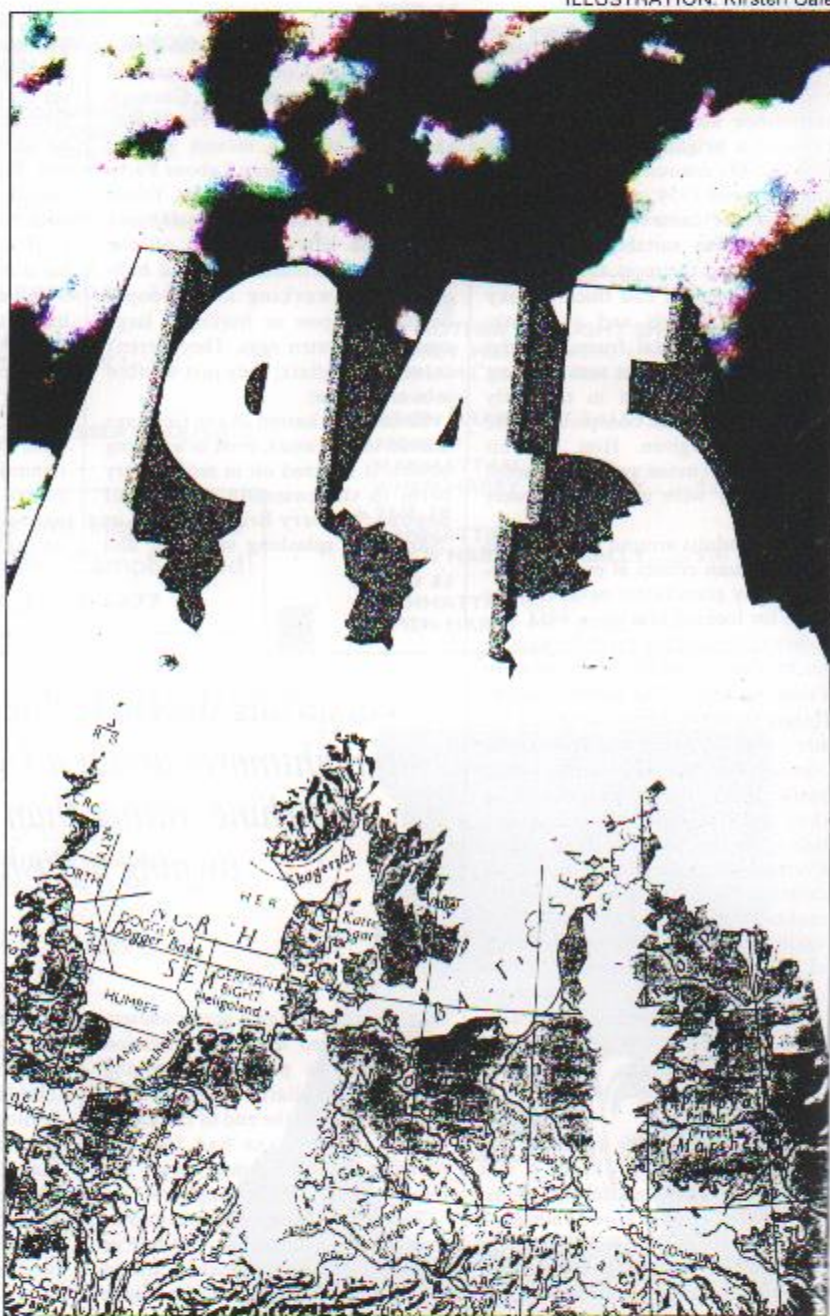


ILLUSTRATION: Kirsten Cale

Kennan noted recently, even back in the forties the German question was the US state department's real preoccupation:

'The principle by which most of us were guided when we found ourselves faced, 40 years ago, with the problems of Germany's future was this: that there must not again be a united Germany, and particularly a militarised one, standing alone in Europe and not firmly embraced in some wider international structure—a

structure that would absorb its energies and give reassurance to its neighbours.'

The solution to this problem was to divide Germany. The justification for this territorial division was the Cold War. The entire international order was constructed around this fundamental fact of life. Behind the rhetoric about the Soviet threat lay the constant fear of the re-emergence of a powerful German state.

The mainstream studies of the



What excites concern in London today is not Soviet military strength but the power of the deutschmark

Cold War interpret the conflict as an intense struggle between two ideologies and social systems. Even more critical observers have accepted the Cold War as the fundamental source of tension and conflict in the world order established after 1945. The images of the Berlin blockade, the 'Iron Curtain', the Cuban missile crisis, the Berlin Wall and the East-West arms race all seem to confirm the central importance of the Cold War in understanding post-war international relations.

To this day, the premise that the Cold War shaped the modern world is accepted by left and right alike. The only argument concerns who is to blame for causing the Cold War. Right-wing writers blame the Kremlin, whereas more liberal authors tend to be more even-handed—some even suggest that Britain played a major role in the creation of the Cold War. Those who call themselves Marxists have tended to emphasise the role of the USA in launching the Cold War.

### West against West

From our perspective it is the very premise of the Cold War which needs to be questioned. In a book published in 1986, *The Soviet Union Demystified*, we argued that the Cold War, including the arms race between East and West, was not the fundamental conflict within the international system. We suggested that the potential conflict between the main Western powers was more significant and that Western re-armament had little to do with the so-called Soviet threat. At the time this proposition was met with derision by leftist critics. They repeated the well-rehearsed argument that Western missiles were pointing towards the Soviet Union. Some even suggested that the tradition of Western imperialist rivalries, which produced the Second World War, was now a phenomenon of the past.

Today neither the received wisdom of the right nor the dogma of the left on the character of the Cold War stands up to the scrutiny of history. There is no internal tendency towards an East-West conflict. What excites concern in London is not Soviet military force but the power of the deutschmark. In Washington, Gorbachev is treated as a reliable ally in an otherwise unpredictable world. As the credibility of Cold War images crumbles, perceptions of international relations begin to correspond more and more to the real global trends. The Thatcherite *Sunday Times* has warned the British establishment of the need to face the modern facts about intra-Western rivalries:

'The break-up of the Soviet empire and the reunification of Germany will have consequences that most

politicians have yet to grasp: the end of the post-war settlement, which divided Europe between the world's two superpowers, the end of Nato and the Warsaw Pact, the end of a major American military presence on the European mainland, the end of the Soviet Union as a superpower and the emergence of a Fourth German Reich as Europe's economic superpower.' (12 November 1989)

It is clear from the vantage point of today that the Cold War was a mere episode in international relations—whereas the balance of power conflicts among the major capitalist nations remains the durable theme of this century.

The most useful interpretation is to see the Cold War as a short-term solution aimed at overcoming the absence of a stable balance of power. The failure to resolve this problem has caused two world wars. The Cold War did not solve the problem, but succeeded in postponing the day when its consequences would have to be faced. This war was cold because it froze history in Europe. Through the division of Germany and Europe the old conflicts were temporarily suspended. The German question was dissolved into an ideological conflict between East and West. All of the main protagonists from Washington to Moscow had a common interest in the partition of Europe.

For the West, the Cold War was a tremendous source of stability. It is important to recall the major crisis of legitimacy experienced by capitalism at the end of the Second World War. In many parts of the world—Japan, South-east Asia, East and Central Europe—the capitalist class stood completely compromised by its association with militarism and fascism. Its political system was in ruins. Even Western Europe experienced widespread disenchantment with the status quo, reflected in the growth of mass left-wing movements in France and Italy. In Britain the Churchill government was humiliated when Labour won its greatest electoral triumph in 1945. This fragility of the capitalist system allowed Stalinism to expand into East Europe and Asia.

The launch of the Cold War gave coherence to what was otherwise a badly fragmented capitalist world. Under the pretext of the Soviet threat, the 'free world' was converted into a permanently mobilised military alliance. The old conflicts among the Western powers were suppressed relatively painlessly because Germany had ceased to be a source of instability.

Anti-Soviet ideology became a universal Western outlook, which could bind together a collection of potential rivals under the domination of the United States. Cold War

ideology was not simply a fabrication. It was credible because it was based on the real, albeit distorted, perceptions of life in the Soviet bloc. The Stalinist system acted as a perpetual advertisement for capitalism, endowing Western society with legitimacy. It made Cold War ideology plausible and won it a degree of popular support.

The Berlin Wall may have prevented East Germans from fleeing to the West. But, more importantly, it seemed to provide tangible evidence of Western superiority, as an implicit admission by the Stalinist authorities that their people would rather live under capitalism. Such impressions gave Western governments a powerful weapon to use against their opponents at home. They could argue that, whatever minor faults their system might have, the 'communist' alternative was far worse; and left-wing critics of capitalism could easily be dismissed—'if you don't like it here, get back to Russia'. Thus, within the West, the practical effects of the Cold War were experienced in terms of domestic stability, rather than at the level of East-West international conflict.

In one sense the post-war order has worked remarkably well. Its main achievement has been its ability to neutralise conflict among the major powers. In the West the traditional relations of conflict between imperialist powers were converted into a permanent military alliance. Of course the post-war world order has not been trouble free. Three main sources of conflict have limited the effectiveness, and ultimately the durability, of the post-war settlement: the tendency towards economic crisis and conflict in the capitalist world; the challenge of third world revolution; and the crisis of the Stalinist system. Let us examine the impact of these factors in turn.

### A. Economic conflict and crisis

During the past 40 years economic conflict between Western industrial powers has been a major subject of discussion. Since the global crisis of the early seventies, economic conflict has become an increasingly significant issue. However, thanks to the close political and military relationship forged by the capitalist powers, the post-war period has been marked by an unprecedented level of international cooperation on economic matters. This cooperation has helped to minimise the effects of the structural weakness of the world economic system. The well-coordinated international response to the October 1989 slump on the world's stock markets showed how important imperialist cooperation has become.



International cooperation is underwritten by the US-dominated system of alliances. This alliance is itself the product of the post-war settlement based on the division of Germany and Europe. It is the freezing of history in Europe that allows the unprecedented degree of international economic cooperation to continue. Economic conflict has played a minimal role in undermining the post-war settlement during the past decades. However, now that the framework which has successfully contained economic rivalries is itself being brought into question, the conflict between the industrial powers can no longer be managed by a

gentlemen's agreement. At the most elementary level, it is clear that the power of a united German economy would challenge the existing international equilibrium.

## B. The third world revolution

The continents of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East never shared the benefits of '40 years of peace' after the Second World War. These regions have experienced permanent war since 1945. The weakness of global capitalism is reproduced in a particularly intense form in the third world. That is why

anti-colonial revolutions have provided such a consistent challenge to existing power relations.

Behind the façade of Cold War conflict has been the brutal reality of military confrontation in the third world. Most of these conflicts have either directly or indirectly pitted Western imperialism against the oppressed world. Indeed during the past 40 years the most consistent challenge to the post-war settlement has come from the third world. China, Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria and Iran are some of the experiences that imperialism would prefer to forget. The humiliation of Britain at Suez, of France in Algeria and of the USA in Vietnam and Iran show the limits of the post-war settlement. These conflicts indicated that, even at the best of times, the post-war settlement could not truly operate at a global level. They have also shown that, while the West could win the Cold War in Europe, it is less certain about its prospects in the Middle East.

For 40 years, the Red Army has provided the excuse for Western militarism



PHOTO: Popperfoto

## C. The disintegration of Stalinism

The existence of the Stalinist system was a constituent part of the post-war world order. The partition of Europe presupposed two stable blocs and guaranteed the territorial division of Germany. The Soviet Union emerged as a status quo power, concerned with preserving international stability rather than exporting revolution, as its sphere of influence was recognised as legitimate under the post-1945 settlement. In turn the Soviet Union provided the justification for Nato, the arms race and high levels of Western defence spending. During this period the Soviet bloc was the fixed counterpoint to the institutions of the West. With hindsight it is evident that the Soviet Union was one of the most stable influences in sustaining the post-war order.

Traditionally the West could always rely on the Kremlin to keep its side of the bargain. Moscow would keep East Europe in check and do its best to consolidate the division of Germany. This was most useful for the Nato countries since the division of Europe could be blamed on the actions of the Soviet Union.

Since the disintegration of Stalinism has become a fact of life the existing division of Europe appears to have little justification. Even the division of Germany seems temporary in the conditions of Soviet retrenchment. Now that the Soviet Union has reduced its superpower pretensions, it can no longer be relied on to carry out its side of the bargain in the post-war settlement. Western diplomats are horrified at the prospect of Gorbachev taking more



Disarmament,  
particularly  
for the USA,  
is not a  
realistic  
option

unilateral decisions in Europe. It is almost as if Western leaders are pleading with him to retain the Warsaw Pact so that they can keep their military alliance.

Ironically, the disintegration of Stalinism has been the catalyst for calling into question the post-war settlement. The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe is responsible for putting the question of German reunification back on the political agenda. The disintegration of Stalinism has indirectly but seriously undermined the foundations for economic cooperation in the West. By withdrawing from the Cold War, Moscow has undermined the *raison d'être* for Nato and the system of Western alliances. In all but name the post-war settlement is finished.

Those who have always believed in the centrality of the Cold War are doomed to misunderstand the present era and the future. There is a tendency to misinterpret the disarmament negotiations taking place between Washington and Moscow. With such good relations, it is easy to conclude that disarmament is a realistic prospect in the not too distant future. Such naive views are based on the false premise that the arms race is solely a product of East-West conflict. In fact, the trend towards rearmament is a consequence of the capitalist system, and therefore is not immediately susceptible to diplomatic solutions.

Recent statements by president Bush and prime minister Thatcher reveal that their instinctive response is to invent new reasons for maintaining Nato and even the Warsaw Pact. Their argument is to equate security with a high level of militarisation. According to their story, in a changing world security is more important than before and a high level of military expenditure remains necessary. Thatcher puts this argument more forcefully than Bush, since she correctly senses that Britain has most to lose from the breakdown of the post-war settlement.

The emerging new balance of power presents the Western world with new conflicts. The USA and Britain can no more remain indifferent to the implications of their economic decline than to the consequences of the rise of Japanese and German power. One reactionary columnist recently warned of the dangers of German reunification:

'I do not believe that the Fourth Reich—which will not immediately take that name—will be the clone of the Third. But I think its dominant mood may resemble that of the Second Reich: Hohenzollern Germany. That is a chilling thought to be going on with.' (Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Times*, 17 November 1989)

This reaction is by no means eccentric. Implicit in all the assessments of the changing balance of power is a call for vigilance—a response which is quite conducive to keeping the military in an updated state of alert, if not to a full-blown arms race.

Disarmament, particularly for the USA, is not a realistic option. The militarisation of the American economy has gone on for more than four decades. The so-called military-industrial complex has a profound reality that shapes the American political economy. Proposals to reconvert American industry for producing non-military goods require a level of capital investment that is simply beyond the means of the USA, now the most indebted nation in the world. Disarmament in the American context would be synonymous with deindustrialisation. In these circumstances, despite any token concessions it might make in dealing with Gorbachev, the American establishment has to find new ways of making militarism pay. At a time when America's world status rests not on economic superiority but on military might, the decision to maintain militarisation will not be a difficult one to take.

### 1914, 1939, 1997

It is unwise to speculate about the future patterns of international conflict. What is clear, however, is that the process of transition from one balance of power to another cannot be completed without a major disruption to the world order. Such a transition leads to a situation where the question of redividing the world among the capitalist powers is placed on the agenda of history, as it was in 1914 and 1939. Not every player will benefit from the changes, and in such circumstances the potential for conflict in the West will be considerable—not the ritualised stand-off that characterised the Cold War, but conflicts that are intrinsically out of control.

The speed of change in the international balance of power depends on the Soviet Union and the USA. These two declining 'superpowers' have every interest in slowing down the pace of events. Bush and Gorbachev will do their best to impose a framework controlling the changes taking place in Europe. They will do this not as rivals, but as allies holding the fort against the unpredictable future.

Bush's main worry is that Gorbachev is an uncertain ally. It is not yet clear whether the Kremlin is prepared to stand firm against the future. As matters stand, the state department is already concerned that the Soviet bureaucracy seems to lack the will to retain a firm grip on East Germany. Bush needs Soviet troops

in East Germany to justify the continued American military presence in Europe. Whatever deal they finally work out, Bush and Gorbachev can affect the timing but not the process of change itself. The two 'superpowers' will do well to retain that title until the end of the nineties.

The breakdown of the post-war settlement inevitably brings back memories of the problems that led to the Second World War. At the very least there is a profound sense of pessimism and despair about the future. There is now a realisation in Britain that, despite the military outcome of 1945, Germany won the war, and that the 'reshaping of the world in the 1990s is going to present Britain with some pretty unpleasant and unusual choices' (*Sunday Times*, 19 November 1989). Unlike in 1945, British capitalism has no Empire to fall back on. The Anglo-American special relationship has little practical meaning at a time when Bush's main diplomatic priority is to cultivate Bonn. And if Britain settles for the European option, it will mean playing second fiddle to the Franco-German axis.

Since the Second World War, Britain's decline as a world power has been partially obscured by events. The British establishment has been remarkably successful at salvaging some of its old international prestige. This proved to be an enormous asset to a ruling class unable to halt the erosion of its economic power. During the past decade the Thatcher government was even able to use its international status to win credibility at home. For a while, a significant section of society even believed that the British economy had become a model for the world. Today, such illusions only influence those who are determined fiercely to contest the facts.

British capitalism now faces the humiliating prospect of being squeezed out of the premier league in international affairs. Instead of being a source of strength, Britain's diminishing role in international affairs threatens to become a cause of embarrassment to the establishment at home. A sense of unease, and even of malaise is already evident within the British establishment. But it is unlikely that the British state will follow the example of its Polish equivalent and abandon its pretensions or authority. It is much more realistic to expect one more assertion of British power against its rivals, and the militarisation of society. But yet another attempt to prevent the flow of history becoming unfrozen seems certain to prove one too many.



*Theses on the collapse of Stalinism and the German question*

# CLEARING THE WAY FOR COMMUNISM

*In November the Political Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party agreed a set of theses in response to events in the East. We reprint them here, and welcome contributions to the discussion*

**1** The cumulative process of disintegration in the Stalinist bloc has assumed momentous proportions. The dramatic changes now taking place in East Germany represent a qualitatively new stage in the crisis of Stalinism. These events call into question explicitly the viability of the Stalinist system and indicate that a point of no return has been reached. It is worth emphasising that the whole chain of events from Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programme to the breaching of the Berlin Wall confirms that the bureaucracy lacks any mechanism for controlling the pace of change.

**2** Stalinism is falling apart as a result of the crisis of the ruling bureaucracy that is apparent everywhere from Moscow to Prague. It was not popular protest that forced Gorbachev to embrace glasnost and perestrojka, but the pressures on the bureaucracy resulting from the systemic crisis of Stalinism.

Even in Eastern Europe the dimensions of the protest movements have been far more restricted than in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 or Poland in 1979. In Hungary and Bulgaria there were no visible popular protest movements and the changes were initiated by the

Stalinist bureaucracy itself. In most cases popular protest gained momentum only after the bureaucracy had made the first move.

Events across Eastern Europe reveal that the Stalinist bureaucracy has lost the will to continue to rule in the old way. It no longer believes in its own system and is experiencing a fundamental crisis of identity. The scale of the bureaucracy's internal moral collapse is exposed by the fact that it is now prepared to countenance the dissolution of its own rule.

The various survival strategies adopted by the Stalinist regimes are unlikely to work. It is difficult to see how the bureaucracy can survive simply by putting Solidarity in government in Poland or changing the name of the party in Hungary. Ultimately, the question at stake is whether or not the bureaucracy is prepared to use military force when everything else fails. The fact that the bureaucracy still possesses a military option explains the pragmatism and moderation of the anti-bureaucratic forces so far.

**3** The crisis of Stalinism has assumed a more advanced form in Eastern Europe than in the Soviet Union. This is because the bureaucracies in



Eastern Europe never established a social base for their rule. In contrast to the Soviet Union, the East European regimes never had an organic relationship with society. Their power was always underwritten by the Soviet military and the threat of intervention by Moscow.

Because they lack strong roots in society, the East European bureaucracies cannot enjoy the breathing space that was initially available to Gorbachev. The speed of change in East Germany shows that nothing less than the abdication of the bureaucracy will meet the demands of the mass movement.

**4** The immediate political impact of the crisis of Stalinism is to boost the confidence of the capitalist class internationally. In general the crisis of Stalinism is perceived as the defeat of the anti-capitalist alternative. In the short run all this will lend legitimacy to the capitalist market and the model of Western liberal democracy.

In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union the hatred of the masses for their system provides tremendous opportunities for the growth of right-wing capitalist ideas. The middle of the road leaders of Solidarity in Poland or the New Forum in East Germany do not represent the general mood of the masses. Only a deep-rooted fear of repression is holding back a popular explosion of more virulently anti-communist views.

The breakdown of the Soviet model has already had a particularly devastating effect on anti-capitalist forces in the third world. The retreat of the Soviet Union has isolated anti-imperialist forces in Latin America, Africa and Asia even further. Most third world liberation movements have become noticeably more conservative under the impact of recent events.

**5** In public the imperialists are gloating at the demise of their traditional opponent, but in private they are profoundly concerned about the consequences. The crisis of Stalinism has put the 'German question' back on the agenda of international relations in dramatic fashion. This development directly calls into question the whole framework of global relations which was established after 1945.

The very foundations of the

post-war order—the division of Germany and Europe—cannot now be sustained indefinitely. The delicate balance of power which allowed for an unprecedented degree of imperialist domination under the hegemony of the USA cannot continue without major modifications. As a result, America and the other imperialist powers are desperately concerned to minimise the international repercussions of the Stalinist crisis.

In the first instance their reaction is to perpetuate artificially the status quo. All the imperialist powers are trying to find some new pretext for maintaining Nato, the Warsaw Pact and the division of Europe. The crisis of Stalinism exposes the uncomfortable fact that the problems which caused two major international conflicts have yet to be resolved.

The re-emergence of the German question helps to remove the illusion that the peaceful co-existence of the imperialist powers could endure indefinitely. It calls into question US world hegemony and puts on the agenda the necessity for a new redivision of the world.

**6** The crisis of Stalinism has had a destructive impact on the left internationally. It has forced on to the defensive all parties that are either directly or indirectly linked to the Stalinist tradition. The announcement by the leader of the Italian Communist Party Achille Occhetto that the organisation is to change its name is a sign of the times. It is inevitable that others too will be forced to reconstitute themselves in new guises and alliances.

Even non-Stalinist left-wing parties are traumatised by developments. Today it is clear that Stalinism has had a decisive influence in shaping virtually the entire European left. Western Marxism has always had a strong affinity with Stalinism, especially in its Eurocommunist form. While the left has always been repelled by the consequences of Stalinism, it shares a common political heritage. It is impossible to understand the European left's enthusiasm for policies of nationalisation, state collectivism and redistributionism without reference to the Stalinist tradition which even the Trotskyist left never really broke from.

In a perverse way Stalinism has kept the left going all these years.

The existence of the Soviet Union has provided the left with the moral certainty that it is possible to construct an alternative to capitalism. Today the left is being deprived of this moral certainty: the failure of Stalinism appears to be an irrefutable argument against any attempt to transcend the capitalist system. In the absence of a thoroughgoing critique of Stalinism, the left cannot put forward a convincing case for communism.

All this explains why the left is in such a state of panic. Although it dislikes the Stalinist system, the left often sees it as a lesser evil to capitalism. For this reason most sections of the left fear the process of German reunification and are busy inventing excuses for retaining the division of the nation between East and West.

It is unlikely that the left in its present form can survive the crisis of Stalinism. The entire European left including its anti-Stalinist wing is intellectually rooted in the past. It lacks the capacity to confront the momentous events that are now taking place. Some on the left will follow the road of the PCI, while others will pretend that nothing fundamental has changed.

**7** Although the cataclysmic events of recent months are likely to boost the right, Marxists wholeheartedly welcome the demise of Stalinism. It is not possible to turn back the clocks and wish that the working class did not have to face the unpleasant consequences of the collapse of the Stalinist system.

It should be evident to Marxists that so long as Stalinism appeared to be the anti-capitalist model, the project of building a working class revolutionary movement could make only limited progress. By its very existence, Stalinism provided a powerful ideological argument against proletarian revolution. At the very least, the demise of Stalinism creates the possibility of clarifying the issues at stake in the class struggle.

Marxists welcome the collapse of Stalinism because this process removes one of the most powerful props of the imperialist order. The Soviet Union has been complicit in maintaining the status quo and has been the most effective force in undermining the revolutionary movement.

Nor are Marxists worried about the reappearance of the German question. The question of German

unity places imperialism under incredible pressure. The ability of the imperialist powers to sustain a high level of international co-operation has been instrumental in strengthening their capacity to maintain domestic stability. The end of the post-war world order creates the conditions for putting revolution back on the agenda of history.

**8** The Revolutionary Communist Party supports the reunification of Germany. The partition of Germany has divided the German and the European working class. This division has benefited only the capitalist class and the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Of course we oppose unequivocally the specific policies of the West German bourgeoisie on the question of reunification. Already the West German government is dictating terms to the East German regime, demanding free elections, a swifter transition towards the market and other reforms in exchange for economic aid from Bonn. These are all steps along the road to reunification which we strongly oppose. We are also wholly opposed to the way in which the German bourgeoisie will manipulate nationalist fervour on this issue to advance its own interests at the expense of the working class.

At the same time we recognise that we are not in any position to have a decisive influence on events in Central Europe. Therefore, it is likely that reunification will take place on terms which are not in the interests of the working class. Nevertheless, in relation to the present reality of partition and its destructive consequences for the European working class, reunification is a step in the right direction. At the very least it will clarify the class struggle instead of confusing it through the phoney Cold War.

The short-term problems caused by the disintegration of Stalinism are far outweighed by its long-term positive consequences. The task facing Marxists is to look to the future and make their ideas relevant to the new circumstances. If this task is confronted properly then there will be nothing to stand in the way of the recreation of a communist tradition which will enjoy real moral authority within the working class.

(Reprinted from *the next step*, 1 December 1989)



Peace movement conference

# More CND, vicar?

**Can you tell the difference between 'unilateralism' and 'unilateralism'? If so, suggests Andrew Calcutt, you should join the increasingly select church of CND**

The vicar was dressed informally, in a plum-coloured cardigan, grey slacks and trainers. Slightly tanned and trim for a man of his advancing years, he was relaxed and smiling as he made his way to the lectern and prepared to address the congregation. Many adjusted their hearing aids in anticipation. It was a cosy gathering of less than 500. Mighty in numbers they were not. But in their hands lay miraculous powers.

'We have called for the dissolution of the two European military blocs. It is now happening under our noses.' Opening the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's annual conference, held in London in November, chair Bruce Kent—for it was he—was in triumphalist mood. Surveying the dramatic events in Eastern Europe, he declared that the end of the Cold War world was nigh, and that CND

had shown the path to non-nuclear salvation. Delegates and CND council members shared Kent's sense of vocation. Mary Brennan proclaimed that 'momentous change was initiated by peace movements'. 'Henry Kissinger has joined the ranks of the peace protesters', chimed Martin Butcher. Vice-chair Marjorie Thompson was almost overwhelmed by it all: 'I feel happy. I don't care if I'm run over by a bus.'

Were these people speaking in tongues, or did I really hear them say that the momentous changes in world politics have been influenced by the handful of British eccentrics now congregated around the rump of CND? In their wilder moments, Chaos theorists have been known to suggest that the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Latin America can cause a monsoon in India. Here

we have the political equivalent of this idea: Bruce Kent holds a press conference in London, and Stalinism collapses in Eastern Europe.

The CND conference did not look like a meeting of campaigning Earth-shatterers. It had far more of the pious and pedestrian air of a Church of England parish outing. The part of the 'trendy' but rather pompous vicar-in-charge was taken by Kent, a Catholic priest who has not been defrocked but relieved of pastoral duties. General secretary Meg Beresford stood in as the vicar's quiet and long-suffering 'wife'. She must be the only person in public life who cannot be heard at her own press conference even when the microphone is turned on.

Like the C of E, CND is an organisation living off its past, subsisting on a diet of jumble sales



Nato has clearly got no chance



and picnics, and desperate to find a contemporary relevance. At their conference, the wearers of floppy hats and garden-gnome beards (shave to the jawline, then comb straight downwards) chanted over and over again that 'history is flowing with us' and that they were 'setting the agenda for the nineties'. This would indeed be a miraculous achievement for an organisation whose membership and income are down by a third since the mid-eighties. Or perhaps they meant that CND is moving with the times in the sense that, like many another creaking British institutions, it has had to introduce redundancies at head office.

The theme of the November conference was to find some life-restoring miracle cure for CND, by attaching it to anything which seemed to be enjoying current popularity among respectable and establishment opinion-makers. Gorbachev and the Greens were cited as prime candidates. Diplomacy and moderation were in; militancy and unilateral nuclear disarmament were out.

### In from the Cold War

Kent presented a new constitution which pointedly omitted CND's fundamental commitment to unilateral disarmament. The first day's debate focused on his document. Kent argued that 'Gorbachev's remarkable initiatives' are 'bringing Europe together'. In this new climate of 'political pluralism', he said, the unilateralist tag is more hindrance than help. 'I'm fed up with people saying that we're not concerned with other ways of disarmament....The best way is to promote the dissolution of Nato while you are still in it.' Or to rephrase that, the best way to avoid any more flak from the right is to say that we now support Britain's membership of the West's nuclear weapons club. Kent's CND is the campaign that came in from the Cold War.

But the vicar's sermon met with some resistance from the 'fundamentalists' in the congregation: enough to make him offer to put 'unilaterally' back into the prayer book (sorry, constitution). At the same time, Kent redefined unilateralism so that the one thing it does *not* mean is campaigning for 'the unilateral abandonment by Britain of any nuclear alliance'. This would be 'damaging'. Kent had argued that 'the word "unilateralism" is now almost meaningless'. Whatever meaning 'unilateralism' originally had, it had certainly lost it by the time Kent declared himself to be 'a unilateralist, bilateralist and multilateralist'.

Delegates accepted the tortuous logic of Kent's new theology, and

came up with some labyrinthine variations of their own. Jack Jones from Newham suggested that unilateralism and multilateralism were always 'mutually assisted not mutually exclusive', and that 'the media' were responsible for 'introducing a false dichotomy between them'. Now the British press can be held responsible for many things. But inventing the difference between the prefixes 'multi' and 'uni' is not one of them. That was the work of the ancient Romans, who it seems were also out to embarrass CND.

If the debate was meant to confuse, it worked. Asked if he was pleased with the outcome, the delegate who had begun the day by leading the attack on Kent's constitution said: 'I don't know if I'm happy or not.' An agnostic.

The CND leadership is definitely unhappy about its past association with mass demonstrations and left-wing politics. Beresford told reporters the conference was 'a relaunch for the 1990s as a Greener, more pluralistic campaign'. 'Nuclear-Free—Air, Land and Sea' was the slogan. Beresford hoped it would be 'a positive message in contrast to the "no nukes" slogans of the past'. She wants the CND message to be received by 'Greens and value conservatives'—she mentioned John Biffen and Edward Heath—and other people interested in quality of life issues.

'Linking with the Inuit' is in, trades councils and left-wing Labour wards are out. Nuclear weapons have been redefined as 'an environmental factor', like road-building in the South-east. CND has become 'a very devolved operation', in line with Green small-is-beautiful philosophy. 'Going green with a small g' is the direction which Beresford & Co have mapped out. Most delegates approved. When Beresford announced that 'someone from the Green Party has said that the sun is shining so could we turn the lights off and save energy?', she received almost the warmest applause of the day.

CND is changing its campaigning methods to suit an exclusively middle class audience. Kent may have been ecstatic about November's mass protests in East Germany, but he wanted to forget about the CND demonstrations which, in London in the mid-eighties, attracted up to 250 000 people. 'We are not in the time of great demonstrations here. We're not in the business of Hyde Park protests.' CND is now in the business, according to treasurer Frank Parker, of telephone fundraising, use of outside consultants, and 'individual campaigning', which means putting up a poster in your window and writing to your MP.

For members who can't sustain that kind of hectic activity, there was

a conference workshop on 'Dealing with burn-out and exhaustion'. Rumour has it that would-be attenders didn't make it down the half-mile of corridor to the room where the session was due to be held. Not that it mattered. The workshop could not have dealt with the real problem—the burn-out and exhaustion of CND itself.

Narrowing its focus further to concentrate on middle class lobby politics has emphasised CND's eccentricity. Most conference delegates looked as if their idea of a rave Saturday night is a couple of vegeburgers (the conference canteen sold out of them) followed by an episode of *Saracen* (I know it's wicked but I like it). In charge of the docile flock, vicar Kent cracks unfunny religious jokes (conference arrangements are mysterious like the Vatican) and, peering over specs at the end of his nose, runs the whole show like a parish council.

Kent also has a remarkably unconvincing line in false modesty. 'It's time for me to go, but I'm prepared to hang on [as chair] for another year....I voted for the other candidate. I wouldn't want to see him humiliated.' He said the same thing about retiring last year. He soon drops the concerned-cleric pose when he wants to turn the evil eye on those who grumble about his moderation programme, dismissing founder-member Pat Arrowsmith (who resigned from Labour over its shift from unilateralism and was rumoured to be unhappy with the new CND constitution) as someone 'who has a habit of leaving organisations'.

The incoherence of CND today was best summed up by the conference star, retired Air Commodore Alistair Mackie, who likes to engage in dazzling verbal dances, full of puns and alliteration and every other literary device he can think of. Mackie's pyrotechnics made him the darling of the conference floor. Kent sent him as special envoy to the Gorbachev-Bush summit in Malta, where he will have made life extremely difficult for Soviet interpreters.

Life is set to become extremely difficult for the leaders of CND, too. The myth of the Soviet threat might have been exposed, and the Cold War might be thawing. But this will only bring the more serious rivalries between Western capitalist countries to the fore, and start a new round of militarisation. Meanwhile, the naive believers of CND have not only fallen for the idea that peace is breaking out; they even think that they made it happen. But then self-satisfied self-delusion is, I am told, a common trait among small religious sects.



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



The wealth of the Windsors

# Royal family fortunes

**Toby Banks on a new book that blows the lid off the royal family's treasure chest**

There's no doubt about it, the royal family works hard. Works hard at its public image, that is. The Windsors are model citizens, the family of the nation and 'one nation' politics. They are held up as the epitome of British middle class values: church twice a week, WI fetes at Sandringham, make do and mend, and no swimming pool in the garden. The fact that it is considered un-royal for the Duchess of York to pocket the profits from her 'charity' book *Budgie the Helicopter* and blow £30 000 on tasteless clothes in one afternoon in Manhattan demonstrates how well the House of Windsor has sold itself as a symbol of frugality and fair play.

## 'Simple lives'

We are told of how the thrifty Queen saves bits of string and goes around the palace turning off lights; how she gave the young Charles a lecture entitled 'Dog leads cost money' and sent him off to find one he'd mislaid; how Prince Philip did the pools for years; how Diana, Andrew and Edward bought Telecom shares to get the £18 rental rebate. As Labour prime minister Clement Attlee observed during his post-war austerity administration: 'The royal family live simple lives, are approachable people, hard working and with no excess of luxury.'

In a disused aircraft hangar, behind a maze of 14-inch steel doors and a portcullis, the excess of luxury which the royal family is not supposed to have sits in plastic bags. Or rather some of it does—the stuff they can't get into Buckingham Palace and Balmoral. This overflow includes Fabergé-carved animals, ornamental weapons, jewellery, art, rare stamps and books, furniture, glass, china and plate; 'there's nothing here as common as gold bars' remarked a member of staff. Masterpieces turn up from time to time in cleaners' cupboards and cellars.

It is impossible accurately to calculate the Queen's fortune. Some suggest it is over £15 billion. Suffice it to say that the Queen employs two people full-time to wind up her clocks—and that's just at

Buckingham Palace. More interesting than speculating about the market value of this cornucopia is looking at the way in which it was acquired, as revealed in a new book, *Theirs is the Kingdom*, by Andrew Morton.

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 the crown was £50 000 in debt, morally bankrupt and widely despised. Victoria's dowdy image—she wouldn't wear a crown or cloak at her coronation—was a blessing in disguise. She trained in accounting for seven years and struck up a close association with the Coutts banking family. Marriage to Albert completed the efficient new financial team at the palace. They began acquiring the ugly country houses which are a central part and parcel of the modern royal heritage. Victoria negotiated state hand-outs for her family's expenses. But the real turning came when prime minister Disraeli made

her Empress of India, and royal tribute began to accrue on a fantastic scale.

After one Indian trip, Prince Bertie delivered the spoils to his mother: 'The Queen's plump eager fingers could barely hold the ruby necklaces, the pearls and the diamonds as she dipped into the chests which her eldest son proudly set before her.' (*Theirs is the Kingdom*, p109) The vaults of the Indian maharajahs and the mines of the Transvaal rapidly transformed the monarchy into a super-rich institution.

Royalty's old debauched reputation was kept alive by Bertie (who became King Edward VII), frittering away fortunes on his rakish lifestyle. He lowered the tone with his spivish schemes for making money by charging for personal audiences, and drew American cattle men and loan sharks into his orbit. Even the





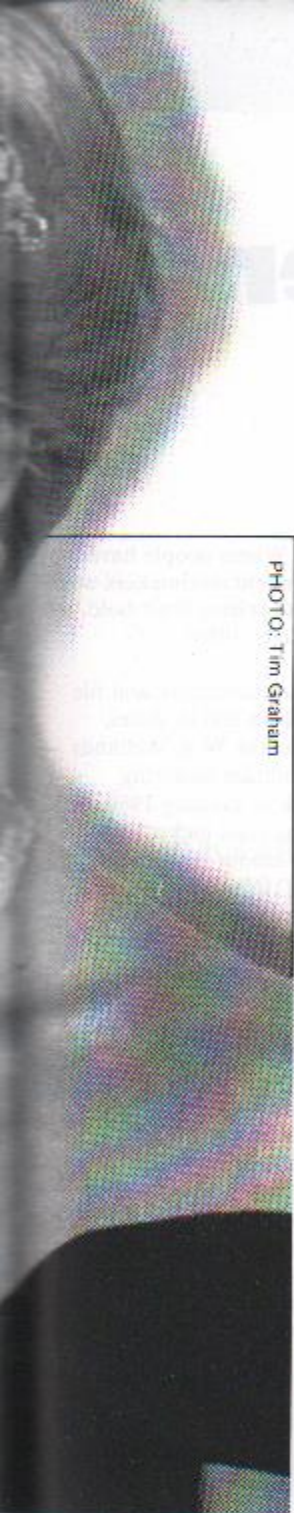


PHOTO: Tim Graham

Princess Diana and the fabulous jewellery which she officially was not given by the Sultan of Oman

*Times* was moved to comment on his 'hobnobbing with American cattle men and prize fighters'. But his affairs were saved by financial wizard Ernest Cassel, who paid off his debts in return for titles. By the time George V had changed the family's name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor (to avoid embarrassment during the First World War against his German cousin), the royal show was on a more secure financial footing, and there was no further requirement for Jewish businessmen.

The royal family became a private institution which carried out public duties in return for privileges from the state. The House of Windsor continued to accumulate riches, but in a more discreet way, under cover of the privilege of financial anonymity. Queen Mary, wife of George V, used every trick in the book to get her hands on any available booty. She offered 'help' to European royals fleeing revolution, buying up their imperial treasures at rock-bottom prices. She looked after the jewels of the Romanov dynasty until the worst days of the Depression, then offered a paltry \$60 000 for them in 1933, leaving her cousins to die in poverty in Canada. Mary was obsessed with jewels: her famous dolls house boasts a jewel vault bigger than the nursery. When she stayed at Sandringham, local families hid their valuables, as one biographer relates:

"Visiting the homes of friends, acquaintances and strangers, sometimes self-invited, she would stand in front of a covetable object and pronounce in measured tones: "I am caressing it with my eyes." If that evoked no impulsive gesture of generosity, the Queen would resume her tour. But on taking her leave, she would pause on the doorstep and ask: "May I go back and say goodbye to that dear little cabinet?" Should even that touching appeal fail to melt the granite heart of her host, her letter of thanks might include a request to buy the piece. Few could resist that final assault." (K Rose, *George V*, 1983, quoted in *Theirs is the Kingdom*, p160)

The tension between the dignified public façade and the grubby business of accumulating private wealth came to the fore in the crisis around the abdication of Edward VIII. His dandyism and conspicuous consumption, like that of Edward VII, had been an embarrassment to his hypocritical parents. Mary haggled hard over his severance payment, trying to cling on to the Windsor jewels and prevent him selling off his father's valuable stamp collection. The matter was resolved under the pressure of impending war, and he

ended up with a private stash of £1m from his stock market dealings as well as his private properties. Edward left Britain and his legendary largesse left him. He became adept at avoiding meal bills and Lord Monckton, his loyal adviser for 30 years, got a pair of cufflinks for his troubles—with his name engraved incorrectly.

The new King George VI and Queen Elizabeth presided over the war and the post-war austerity years of rationing. Here the low-key middle class image was born. The King forked out for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Philip to save the nation the expense. The Labour government checked that the silkworms used for the dress were British rather than Japanese or Italian. Philip wore darned socks to Westminster Abbey, but times weren't too bad for the young couple—fabulous gifts were showered on them from all over the globe, adding to the vast fortune Elizabeth stood to inherit. Queen Mary was still around, warning her granddaughter to ignore the Hungarian relatives 'crawling out of the woodwork, hoping for crumbs from the royal table'.

### Unwritten rules

The new man, Philip, set about a modernising, cost-cutting reorganisation of the royal estates. Today Buckingham Palace is fully computerised. But the mystique that surrounds the royal family remains, and is assiduously cultivated. All attempts to delve too closely into its private wealth are rebuffed. As Prince Charles says, 'money is a vulgar subject'. Nonetheless it is a subject dear to the royal heart. Since the unwelcome attention of the parliamentary inquiry in the early seventies (set up to *increase* the Civil List allowance), they have taken further steps to hide their ill-gotten gains. The City scandals of the seventies led to the Companies Act and compulsory disclosure of share ownership. To sidestep this problem a special company, Bank of England Nominees Ltd, was set up for the anonymous use of heads of state, their families and governments. This kind of chicanery hasn't stopped the Queen pontificating on the subject of standards in the City, as in her Big Bang speech of 1988, about the importance of abiding by 'unwritten rules' to 'make the whole system work'.

It requires a combination of legally enforced secrecy and a strict self-imposed protocol to sustain the myth of royal decency and restraint. To keep up appearances, the royals publicly accept only token gifts of esteem and donate all cash and business gifts to charity. Privately, however, the tribute rolls in.

Andrew Morton recounts a gem of

a story from 1986, when the *Sunday Times* revealed that Charles and Diana would be given £1m worth of jewels during a trip to the Gulf states. This embarrassing disclosure (which also infuriated loyal hacks from the other papers) was promptly denied by a palace spokesman; and as the press entourage flew on to Saudi Arabia, they were officially informed that Charles had accepted only a nominal gift from the Sultan of Oman. A year later, however, Princess Diana appeared at a banquet in Bonn wearing modern Middle Eastern jewellery worth a fortune. Where had she got it from? 'They were', said a palace official innocently, 'private gifts from the Sultan of Oman'. Meanwhile, the Queen presents foreign dignitaries with a photograph of herself and a pair of cufflinks, saying 'I know this is rather small...'

On a grand scale, the royal family illustrates the hypocrisy of the ruling class. In public they dress up in regal costumes and parade noble virtues. In private they stuff their coffers with wealth robbed from around the world. Of course the wealth of the royal family is secret in detail only. Everybody knows that they are rich, and there is always a quiet grumble about the Queen being exempt from paying the poll tax, or indeed any other tax. But the monarchy is much more than an expensive anachronism.

### The price of hay

The Queen's fabulous wealth and receipt of tribute symbolise her position as head of state, constitutionally invested with sovereign power. The royals sit among their booty in the political wings, ready for a moment of national crisis when the establishment will call upon the monarch to act as its figurehead, declaring a state of emergency or dissolving parliament or doing whatever is necessary to protect the capitalist order.

To get away with such an act, the royals need to cultivate the common touch and appear to stand apart from the propertied classes. This explains the penny-pinching image. Andrew Morton's conclusion translates the point into the affectionate language of the professional royal-watcher:

'As long as Prince Charles chaffs at the price of hay for his polo ponies and the Queen does not obviously flaunt her great dynastic fortune, then her subjects are happy to give them their trust, their deference and their loyalty.'

● Andrew Morton, *Theirs is the Kingdom: The Wealth of the Windsors*, Michael O'Mara Books, 1989, £12.95



January 1980—the steel strike

# Why Bill Sirs never became Sir Bill

**Do you remember Bill Sirs? Can you recall when Britain was a great steel-producing nation? Linda Ryan on the forgotten strike that set the confrontational trend for a decade**

Ten years ago this month, Bill Sirs was the secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), who called out his members on a national strike. Faced with the British Steel Corporation's threat of 53 000 redundancies, the ISTC leaders had no choice but to respond. The steel strike which started on 2 January 1980 was the first major event in British politics in the eighties. It was to provide a taste of the things that were to come during the rest of the decade.

Bill Sirs and his union colleagues thought that they were starting a strike like any other. They failed to understand that, in the changed circumstances of the eighties, there could be no such thing as a simple industrial dispute. Thatcher had come to power the previous year, and the basic rules of industrial relations were in the process of being rewritten. Employers were no longer interested in bargaining. They wanted to dictate terms to their workforce. The economy was in disarray and the capitalist class could not afford the

luxury of compromising with union leaders. Their objective was to alter the balance of class forces in their favour by breaking the trade unions. The steel industry was to be the first national battleground for the employers' offensive against the working class.

Sirs and his fellow union officials expected to work out a deal through the usual channels of negotiation. It soon became clear that this industrial dispute was to be a one-sided contest. The main concern of the union leaders was to prevent militant strikers getting out of hand. Sirs insisted that moderation would be rewarded by a positive response from the employers. When BSC strikers attempted to spread the strike to the private sector, ISTC officials worked hard to quell militant picketing and a worried Sirs sought to reassure the ruling class:

'We are trying to make sure there is discipline on the picket lines and we have firm control because this is in the interests of the labour movement

and our union. Where people have stopped independent steelmakers we have managed to release their hold.' (*Times*, 10 January 1980)

Despite his assurances, rank and file workers pressed on and in Wales, South Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Scotland militant picketing continued. Back in January 1980, the militant working class picket had not become part of labour movement history.

Today, the image of ambulance workers marching behind banners which appeal for 'Arbitration now' can easily obscure the tradition of militancy that was still alive a decade ago. The transformation of working class action, from angry mass picketing to the present day obsession with gaining the backing of respectable public opinion, is a legacy of the eighties. Sirs' attempt to curb his own pickets was only one of many contributions from union officials which helped to destroy the old-style industrial militant.

From the start, the British



**Last anorak in Downing St: steelworkers' leader Bill Sirs (kipper tie) discovered that collaboration with the government and employers had been replaced by confrontation with the courts and the police**



Back in January 1980 nobody in the TUC would have believed that within a few years it would be impossible to conduct an effective strike within the law

establishment was determined to win. This was a new-style industrial dispute, in which the employers would leave nothing to chance. The prominent role of the police, which was to be a central feature of industrial disputes in the eighties, first became evident during the steel strike. By the second week of the strike the police had arrested more than 150 pickets, beaten up scores of them and put several in hospital.

Alongside the police, the now famous court injunction made its appearance during this strike. Throughout most of the post-war era, the judiciary tended to keep out of industrial disputes in order to retain its façade of impartiality. In the steel strike, the judges began to shake off their traditional inhibitions and intervened on the employers' side. Lord Denning outlawed the steelworkers' 'secondary picketing'.

As it turned out, the establishment did not need to mobilise all of its resources in the steel strike, since the union bureaucracy and the Labour Party were doing a wonderful job in policing the steelworkers. Labour leader Michael Foot told steelworkers in Cardiff that 'all of us in this country have to understand that we have to obey the law' (*Times*, 29 January 1980). Sirs reiterated the same message:

'We have always been a union which obeys not only the letter but the spirit of the law. We accept that the law is paramount because without law there is anarchy.' (*Times*, 3 January 1980)

In a strike during which the legal machinery of the British state was being wielded by the employers, the unions' obedience to the law could only speed up the defeat of the steelworkers. By accepting rules which favoured the enemy, the steelworkers could do little to defend themselves against mass redundancies.

During the strike, respect for the law was a very one-sided affair. While Foot and Sirs praised the virtues of the British legal system, the employers, the police and the judges made up the law as they went along. This was to set the trend for the rest of the decade. Year by year one anti-union law has followed another. More ominously, the police can now arbitrarily define how many workers constitute a legal picket. Solidarity action is now illegal. Back in January 1980 no one in the TUC would have dreamed that in just a few years it would be impossible to conduct an effective strike within the confines of the law. As in the steel strike, the judiciary is now systematically mobilised to defeat working class resistance.

In such an uneven combat, it was

no surprise when the steelworkers were defeated. Tens of thousands were made redundant. The steel industry was privatised and transformed into a small-scale operation that no longer pretends to be a world leader.

The demise of the ISTC can also be seen as symptomatic of the decline of Labourism. In the early part of this century the leaders of unions like the ISTC created and dominated the Labour Party. The ISTC's first secretary Arthur Pugh and his successor Lincoln Evans held important posts in the Labourist establishment. As individuals representing an important sector of the working class they enjoyed power and influence. They were both knighted for services rendered to the British authorities.

People like Pugh and Evans and their colleagues in other unions gave Labour a sense of direction and purpose. It was a party that rested on the influence of the labour bureaucracy. That bureaucracy—a layer of professional officials at the top of the labour movement—became a legitimate partner with employers in the running of Britain. As long as this partnership survived, Labour was always seen as a party in with a chance.

### Shown the door

The steel strike showed that the employers no longer wanted their old partners. Poor Bill Sirs was shown the door and became an isolated pathetic figure who never understood that his kind had become expendable. Without its traditional role of loyal collaborators, the labour bureaucracy faced a steady erosion of its influence. Today even the general secretary of the TUC is a nobody. Just over a decade ago, anything that the leader of the TUC did was big news.

The decline of the labour bureaucracy during the past decade explains why its party has become so insubstantial and insignificant. Without a strong union bureaucracy to give it shape and direction Labour has become the party of the Neil Kinnocks. The Kinnocks who run the Labour Party are all distinguished by the fact that none of them represents very much. There is no movement and only a relatively weak union leadership behind Labour. Its leaders seem to have little experience of the real world, and are singularly out of touch with working class life.

Kinnock himself received his training in the ethereal world of student politics. Many in his immediate entourage, for example, Jack Straw, have a similar background. Others such as John Smith are lawyers and their experience of life is confined to the courtroom or the polytechnic lecture hall. It would be unfair to blame

them for their lack of life skills and stature. The fact that the Labour frontbench consists of such lightweights is symptomatic of the weakness of the union bureaucracy—the force that has traditionally provided Labourism with substance.

Back in January 1980, the steelworkers did not realise that the terms on which industrial disputes were fought had changed. Their union leaders never countenanced the possibility that their services were no longer required by their old partners in the British establishment. The Labour leaders expected that it was only a matter of time before they were re-elected into government. They would not have believed for one moment that the capitalist class could become so hostile to their policies of state intervention in the economy and the welfare state. Nobody, not even Thatcher, imagined in 1980 that it would be so easy to defeat the official trade union movement and temporarily to neutralise the power of the working class.

### Another decade

And yet today it is possible to see how the steel strike set precedents for the rest of the decade. The long tradition of union-employer collaboration had helped to destroy workers' capacity to take effective action. The British working class was organised to collaborate and not to fight. In the conditions of the new employers' offensive, these organisations served only to demobilise groups of angry and frustrated workers; that anger and frustration soon turned into resignation and passivity.

The decade began with the steelworkers' strike and ended with the ambulance workers' dispute. It began with flying pickets and ended with workers distracted towards futile gestures like threatening hunger-strikes and mass resignations. This change has been as dramatic as it is devastating for the working class. But may we be allowed a more optimistic prediction for the nineties?

The steel strike did not only mark a setback for the working class. It was also the beginning of the end for the old labour bureaucracy, which had helped to hold the working class in check for decades. As more dramatic changes occur in the nineties, a new generation of workers free of the restraining influence of bureaucrats like Bill Sirs may well prove to be a far more formidable force than those organised into highly institutionalised unions like the old ISTC. Writing a resumé of the previous decade in January 2000 will, we have no doubt, prove to be a much more uplifting experience.





Punk meets ballet

# IN CLARK CONTRAST

Andrew Calcutt talked to Britain's best-known skinhead in tights, the dancer and choreographer Michael Clark

Michael Clark has been called the Johnny Rotten of dance, but it doesn't worry him: 'I take that as a compliment.' He has little time for the exclusive, poseur-ridden club which the public knows as the dance world. 'I dislike the dance establishment and they dislike me. I don't fit in with the "new dance" crowd either. My work deliberately pokes fun at most dance, which I see as quite ridiculous, as most people do.'

## Ugly confrontations

As dancer, choreographer, designer, Clark sets out to be confrontational—'I try to deal with ugliness as well as beauty'—and approachable: 'It's not like you have to know the whole history of dance to understand my work.' He thinks that there is too much 'dance about dance', and wants to break out of the rather introspective dance scene by developing work that is 'reflective of what's happening now' in the world. He draws on the classical tradition, which he loves and hates, and on the formative experience of his youth—punk. Wearing a tutu and Doc Martens, the costume which put

him in the Sunday supplements, was for Clark only a natural juxtaposition of the two things he is most interested in.

## Bonnie Langford

Making extraordinary dance out of everyday experience is Clark's trademark. 'The last show was just a list of what we consider to be bad things: British Rail, Bonnie Langford, Margaret Thatcher.... Things that everyone can relate to.' Some of the piece was based on well-known sociopolitical gestures, 'the Hitler salute, the Black Power salute, the Larry Grayson stance'. Although Clark starts out from the familiar, his work is far from simplistic. 'We're not being condescending. We're not saying make it easy because people can't understand. It is very sophisticated, and people appreciate that.'

They certainly do. Clark's dance company (total Arts Council grant this year: £3000) attracts a wider audience than any other group. He is trying to tear down the curtain of affectation which usually separates the precious ballet elite from the rest

of us. 'We still get dance people coming, but our audience is much broader than the usual dance audience. There hasn't been a strategy to draw in people who don't usually come to dance, but that is how it's worked. Our audience is often painted as a young, trendy set. There is an element of that, but it's more varied—there are older people too! It's a broad spectrum.'

## Punk bonds

Clark was a born dancer—from the age of four, dance was the only way I could get something out'. But his childhood was no fairy story. In Aberdeen (the accent still breaks through) school was tough. 'I used to get a lot of aggro from the other kids. There was one who used to sit and wait for me where you come out to get the bus, and every day he'd give me a boot as I went past. He had more fashionable clothes than me, which annoyed me even more. When he was 16 he was driving a manure truck and it blew up and killed him. It really made my day.'

At 13, Clark left Scotland for the Royal Ballet School in London, and

was soon 'leading a Jekyll and Hyde existence. The school was a good training. Then at the weekend I was leaving to go and see bands like the Slits. Punk was much more complicated and much more interesting than Malcolm McLaren would like it to seem. The great thing was that it meant something different to every person involved. To some it was just a fashion, like the secretaries with spiky hair and the eyes. To others it was a political thing. I was drawn to the theatrical side of it. I liked the fact it was a little bit scary. It was a catalyst for new things, and it is still present in a lot of what I do.'

Clark retains an affection for punk, but not for its would-be Svengali, Malcolm McLaren, whose latest vehicle is 'voguing', the New York club-cult for street people to catwalk their own costumes like models in a high-fashion show. 'Voguing has been going on since the early eighties. They started having competitions. Malcolm was judging one, and that's when he saw it and decided it was going to be "his" new invention. He has to spoil everything....'



'My ideal showtime  
would be the  
interval at a  
Celtic-Rangers  
match'

PHOTO: Michael O'Brian

Many choreographers only start writing ballets when they are too old to dance. Clark began when he was still in his teens, 'because I thought the two lives—dance and punk—could feed off each other, because as a dancer there wasn't anyone I could work with who was dealing with my life, and also I wasn't getting enough from being just a dancer'.

After a short spell as a leading dancer at Ballet Rambert, Clark left 'to make my own way'. He drew together compatible people, tried a collective approach, and found it wanting. 'I had to take the reins. I have a strong idea of what I want, and it gets the best results.' Later he felt ready to collaborate, with other 'strong people, such as Mark from the Fall or Leigh Bowery'. But there will be no going back to 'non-hierarchical' working. 'There was an idea that everyone is equally creative, but some people have something to say, others don't.'

Clark feels society is increasingly hostile: 'Ecstasy suits the times because it makes you feel you belong, you can cope. For a few hours you feel as if you're doing something, even if it's only dancing with someone from the other side of the river.' He also has something to say about being an 'out' gay man battling against bigotry. 'Everywhere we've been, Steven [his lover] and I have been kicked out of hotels, bars, clubs. Steven was arrested for wearing an indecent t-

shirt. It was Notting Hill carnival weekend, and they were out to arrest as many people as possible. We've been attacked just for being together, and if you've been hit in the street just for kissing, it makes you think, is this the right time to leave London or leave the country. But it's the same everywhere, even in New York. There the "war against drugs" is used as justification for withdrawing civil liberties.'

Clark sees confrontation as a better option than escape. He does not want to be pigeon-holed as a gay artist, but 'Clause 28 and the general climate' have 'forced' themselves into his recent work. 'In the sixties, people like Lyndsay Kemp were reflecting the permissiveness of the time, whereas we are trying to confront reaction. It has to be confronted, by as broad an audience as we can attract. My ideal showtime would be the interval at a Celtic-Rangers match.'

*Heterospective*, which ran at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in October, was certainly confrontational. 'The piece started with Steven and I having sex—as much as we could. The first night we couldn't get it up, we were too nervous....'

Clark is prepared to put himself 'on the line'. But he is under increasing pressure from would-be censors who want him to back off. *Because We Must*, a film by Clark scheduled to be Dance on 4's programme for the New Year celebrations was subject to management interference. 'Even Channel 4, the alternative channel, wanted to take bits out.' When *Heterospective* was staged, 'people called the BBC and said "get some cameras down there because this is illegal"'. The show could have been closed down, the gallery could have been closed down. Not only artists but people who put things on are also at risk, which means that venues that might want to put on my shows are taking all this into consideration. And if you're not careful, you start censoring yourself'.

### The new

Much of Clark's appeal stems from his willingness to experiment. 'For me there is no one way to work. I'm always trying to find new ways, depending on what you're trying to do.' He makes it his business to look at everything from punk to showbiz—'I'd like to incorporate tap into my work'—to the classical tradition in which he was trained, and combine them all into a form of dance which is avant-garde without being exclusive. While others may feel the need to cut their cloth in line with creeping conservatism, Clark seems in no mood for compromise. He plans to develop *Heterospective* in such cities as New York and Sydney, before returning to London in the autumn to restage the show at a larger venue. Let's hope he can find someone to put it on.



# MONSTER HITS

With ITV broadcasting its new film version of *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (starring Michael Caine), and video viewers queuing up to rent all four parts of *Nightmare on Elm Street* (starring Freddy Krueger), the horror story is alive and well. We look at some of the monsters, old and new, and at the circumstances which created them

*Jekyll and Hyde*

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

Through this bitter conflict Stevenson explores the human potential for both good and evil, wrong-doing and repentance, and it is this duality, present within us all, that gives the book its lasting universal appeal. So says the blurb on the back of the new Penguin edition of *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, published to tie in with the latest film version of Robert Louis Stevenson's story. The film, made by the same director (David Wickes) and actor (Caine) who recently turned Jack the Ripper into a mini-series, gets its premiere on ITV early in the New Year.

The publicity blurb summarises the traditional view of Jekyll and his alter ego; but it is less than half the story.

Stevenson was indeed concerned with good and evil, and it is possible to read his strange tale as a timeless moral fable. Viewed in its historical context, however, it is a much richer and more significant work. Published in 1886, at the highpoint of industrialisation in Britain, Stevenson's story is the product of a period of unprecedented scientific development. But the constraints imposed by society often prevented

scientists and other progressives from realising their full potential (and still do). These constraints were most often expressed through the morality of Victorian values, with its warnings against interference with 'the natural order of things'.

Whether or not Stevenson was fully conscious of it, the chief significance of the tale lies in its counterposition of scientific experimentation and conventional morality. Stevenson, like Jekyll, was caught on the horns of a dilemma. He seemed instinctively to recognise that scientific development must involve breaking the rules, yet believed that experimenting beyond the bounds of moral certainties would lead to evil.

### 'Doom and burthen'

It follows that when his protagonist Dr Jekyll tries to transcend the circumstances of his life in middle class London in the late nineteenth century, he comes unstuck. He experiments with his own identity and is punished by being turned into a monster, the barbaric Mr Hyde. In Jekyll's own 'full statement' he spells out the conservative

lesson: 'I have been made to learn that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man's shoulders; and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure.'

The peculiar tension in the story derives from the real life conflict between Stevenson the Calvinist and Stevenson the child of science. His forebears were Scottish engineers who educated young Robert in mechanics and Presbyterianism. The result was a writer who yearned for and wrote romantic fiction, such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. He spurned naturalistic writers like Emile Zola who dragged to the surface the 'dirt' of human experience, and yet showed himself to be keenly aware of the power of science and technology and its impact on society.

The tensions within Stevenson are expressed not only in the polarity between Jekyll and Hyde, but also in the relationship between Jekyll, the audacious scientist finally obliterated by his own unquenchable curiosity, and his friend Utterson. He is the lawyer who, against his better nature, briefly unfolds

the strange tale before returning to the fusty bosom of his professional cronies. It is a relationship which points up the fact that, notwithstanding the conventional resolution of the story, it is Jekyll, like Milton's Satan, who is the true hero here.

Stevenson's writing reflects these tensions. It veers between those terse and jagged statements which look forward to the more dislocated world of the twentieth century and traditional Victorian prose, as solid yet ornate as the furniture of the period: 'He reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth....I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it....As for the moral turpitude which that man unveiled to me, even with tears of penitence, I cannot, even in memory, dwell on it without a start of horror.'

Stevenson, a tubercular invalid, left England for the USA and the South Seas, to avoid the damp climate. He was probably not sorry to go. His publishers had censored at least one of his stories and critics found his later, more experimental work, 'unwholesome'. They are using the same arguments against the scientific and artistic experimenters of today.

For generations *Jekyll and Hyde*, like the Frankenstein story, has succeeded by touching upon the raw nerve of irrational fears about interfering with nature, about science and technology running out of human control. As such, perhaps it will enjoy a popular revival in these fearful times when all manner of mysticism is making a comeback. The irony is that the barbarism which Stevenson brought to life in Mr Hyde is not created by scientific experimentation in itself, but by its suppression and distortion in our backward-looking society. The problem is, as Michael Caine would say, there's not a lot of people know that.

Andrew Calcutt

● Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Penguin, £2.99



# MAD SCIENTISTS AND PSYCHOS

**M**ad? Is one who has solved the secret of life to be considered mad?' The answer to Dr von Niemann's question, posed in that now forgotten classic *The Vampire Bat* (1933), was of course yes. For von Niemann was an early incarnation of that peculiarly sinister breed, the mad scientist.

Andrew Tudor, author of *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, seems to have endured much in his attempt to locate wherein the 'madness' of the mad scientist lay. He spent 10 years watching the 990 horror movies released in Britain between 1931 and 1984. He assures us that the experience left him

with no desire to 'kick kittens, drink blood' or 'disembowel members of the moral majority'.

Tudor, a lecturer at York University, has produced an interesting book even if he does make rather heavy academic work of it. He attempts to chart the changing attitudes of society towards science as reflected in the horror movie.

He identifies three sub-genres in the tradition—the mad scientist, the supernatural and the psychotic.

Tudor's research reveals that the mad scientist was for many years the mainstay of the horror movie genre following his first classic appearance in 1932, when Hollywood put Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* on the silver screen. He does not explore the origins of the mad scientist in the books from which these films came, and which articulated the growing apprehension about science and technology in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Until the post-war years, the movies invariably portray the mad scientist as an aristocrat or gentleman. He hangs out in impressively equipped labs in the basement of his Gothic mansion or castle, in some suitably isolated European setting. He's either evil and uses science to pursue his own perverted ends, or so obsessive in his commitment to the power offered by science that he is corrupted and driven insane by his misguided pursuit of scientific knowledge. Either way he's no good.

The mad scientist can still make an impassioned plea extolling the virtues of his enterprise. In the original *Frankenstein* film the Baron laments: 'Where should we be if nobody tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you ever wanted to look beyond the clouds and stars to know what causes trees to bud and what changes darkness into light? But if you talk like that people call you crazy.'

## Atomic horrors

So they did. Scientific experimentation, or experimentation of any kind for that matter, wasn't part of the prevailing culture of Western society in the years of two world wars and the Depression. The doom and gloom is reflected in the rash of mad scientist horror flicks, where science threatens humanity, instead of offering the potential for human liberation.

The advent of atomic energy complicated the issue considerably. Gothic fantasy receded and a more sober attitude prevailed. Both the problems and the potential were appreciated. Professor Bernstein in *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957): 'Is the world ready for the revelations that scientists make? There's a great difference between knowing that a thing is so and knowing how to use that knowledge for the good of mankind.'

Now comes a noticeable move away from the mad scientist, to scientists who are neither responsible for nor in control of their investigations, the unwitting agents of disaster. In *The Fiend Without a Face* (1959) a scientist inadvertently creates a monster nourished by nuclear energy; in *Beginning of the End* (1960) giant locusts result from an accidental exposure to irradiated plants; and in *The Horror of Party Beach* (1964) monsters are created from radioactive waste.





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Tudor rightly points out the ambivalent attitudes such films express concerning the nature of science. Scientists may indirectly unleash the 'horrors', but they are also ultimately responsible for vanquishing them—backed up by the institutions of the state. They are seen as the harbingers of both progress and disaster. Science is still viewed as a risky and dangerous business, but the danger is no longer embodied by a mad individual—it has become an intrinsic feature of the scientific enterprise.

These two periods are characterised by Tudor as 'secure horror'. A closed narrative is employed and there is scope for successful human intervention. 'Secure horror', Tudor thinks, 'can only make sense in the context of a culture and a social world which is confident of its own capacity to survive all manner of threats'.

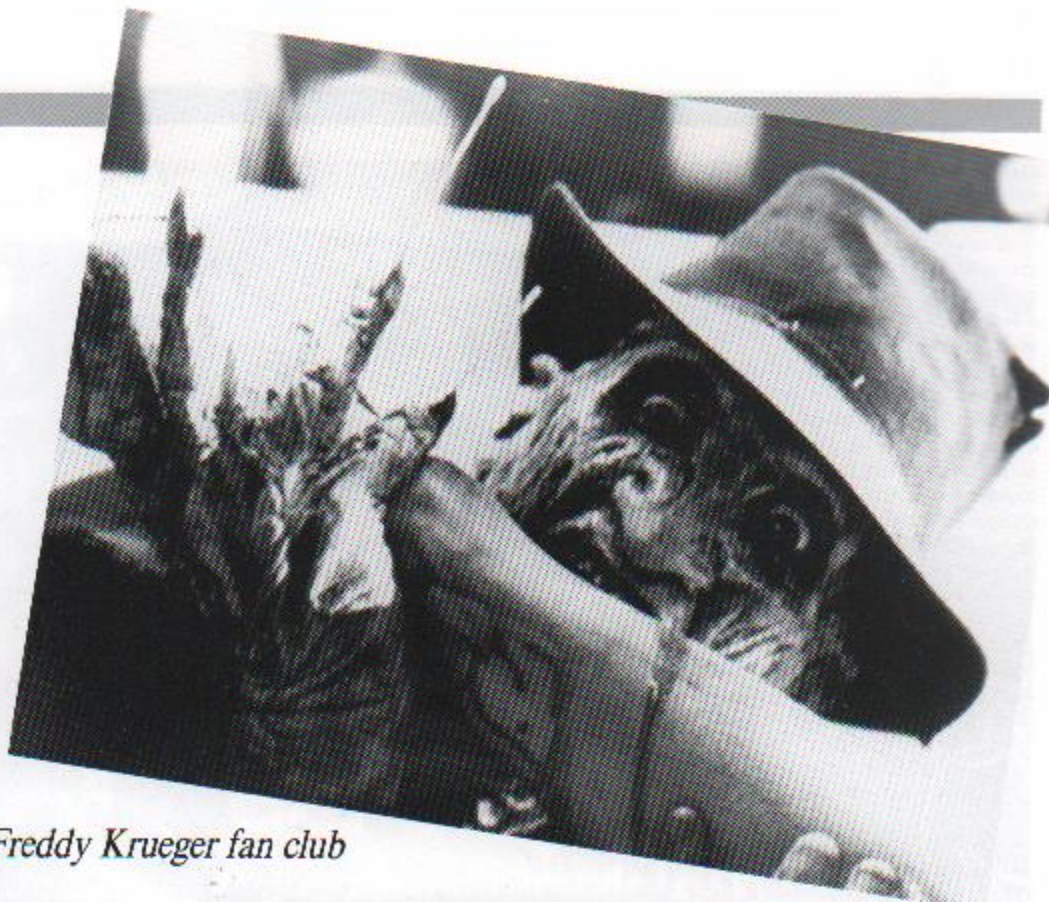
During phase three (1965-76) the science-based horror movie fades from view, Tudor believes this is because science was increasingly assimilated and demystified in Western culture. It could also have been because the dynamism and optimism of the post-war period was on the wane, and society was no longer confident of its own capacity to survive anything much. In any event the supernatural became the stock horror form with such classics as *Rosemary's Baby* (1969), *The Exorcist* (1974) and *The Omen* (1976).

The final phase of horror movies (from 1977 to the present) has been dominated by outright pessimism. The notion of science as a force for progress (even if a risky one) has completely disappeared. Science now is nothing more than the instrument of one kind of disaster or another, the most common being eco-doom. Paranoid horror becomes the most popular form, in which everybody is at risk from a murderous psychotic, and there is probably a supernatural aspect as well, as in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films of the late eighties.

The emphasis of the past decade has been on individual survival in a world full of psychotics and ghouls: remember *Halloween* (1979) and *Friday the 13th* (1980) and all the sequels. In a period of pessimism, reaction and even despair, when the social order is haunted by its inability to prevent one crisis after another, horror movies have changed again to reflect the times. A culture which can offer no prospect of progress through human knowledge ends up concentrating on the supernatural and the irrational, realms beyond our control. When we are getting our fun by being frightened, let's not mistake this world for an inevitable reality; and let's remember that those who put their faith in scientific progress are truly the sane ones.

Manjit Singh

● Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, Basil Blackwell, £8.95



The Freddy Krueger fan club

## ELM STREET IS THE NIGHTMARE

**E**lm Street is a symbol in America. It's the street that two characters live on in our reading primer, the Dick and Jane books. So the *Nightmare on Elm Street* is a sort of loose, allegorical symbol for a kind of evil returning to the white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant suburb of America.' So says actor Robert Englund, who will be better known to you as Freddy Krueger, the psychotic monster from Wes Craven's films.

It is a perceptive comment on a series of films which have been a phenomenal success. *Nightmare on Elm Street Part IV, Dream Warriors* took over \$22m—more than any of its predecessors, or its rivals *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. The films have spawned a prime-time series in the States and the merchandising is enormous. 'Freddy razor hand' toys are best sellers in the toy shops. An allegorical tale of evil has become very popular entertainment. Perhaps most bizarrely, the character of Freddy—a child killer with a hideously burnt face and lethal claw—has established mass appeal among teenagers and even children.

*Dream Warriors* certainly has a lot going for it: the production values of a blockbuster, state-of-the-art special effects, blasting soundtrack and a fast-paced, well-scripted plot. So what's new? Well, to start with, the setting. As Englund points out, this is ordinary, middle-of-the-road suburbia. Not too rich, not too poor. The characters are

everyday teenagers. Once you've allowed for the terrible threat they face and the amazing dreaming skills they possess, they do all the normal things like dating, studying and working out at the gym. These are not the caricature teenagers of many a horror film who do nothing but whoop it up in a constant orgy of sex and drugs.

There is a strong pitch to women too in the main female character. Her development through the films, from weepy submissive daughter to a hardened independent 'warrior', is an important complement to the traditional good versus evil theme.

There is no doubt however about the films' main attraction: Freddy, the villain they love to hate. His hands, his floppy hat, his red stripy jumper are unforgettable. Who can remember what Michael Myers or Jason Vorhees wore in *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*? But then they never got the funny one-liners either. They are the silent, anonymous, mechanical killer types. For a psychotic, Freddy has a pretty witty rapport with his victims. He announces his presence to a hard-working student in the middle of an exam by making all the figures on her paper jiggle around. 'Suck on this' he rasps, before sucking out every breath in her body. The man clearly has no respect for the education system, which might provide a clue as to what it is about his character that young people find so appealing.

Englund aptly describes Freddy as 'a sort of anarchist figure trashing middle class America'. Middle class America is represented by parents, teachers, psychiatrists and policemen—the enemies of countless adolescents. It's lucky for the adults that they don't get much of a look in, since they are shown in a very unflattering light.

Self-obsessed, drunk, narrow-minded and ineffectual, the adults can only shout at and put down the teenagers. They are incapable of helping or protecting their children, and often do the opposite. In one of the films, a misguided mother secretly gives her daughter a sleeping pill, whilst she is struggling to keep awake to stop Freddy entering her dreams. Mistrust and anger at the arrogance and presumption of adults is never far from the surface.

Freddy is an evil psychopath and goes for the children, but it is as much the world and values of these adults that he threatens to destroy. Indeed at times that world threatens physically to disintegrate under the impact of supernatural forces. This is what makes Freddy such an ambiguous baddie. Elm Street, in its stifling conformity, is a bit of a nightmare in itself, and he represents a sort of gut instinct to snap out of it, to rebel, to trash middle class America. No wonder the young people have taken the monster to their hearts.

Alka Singh



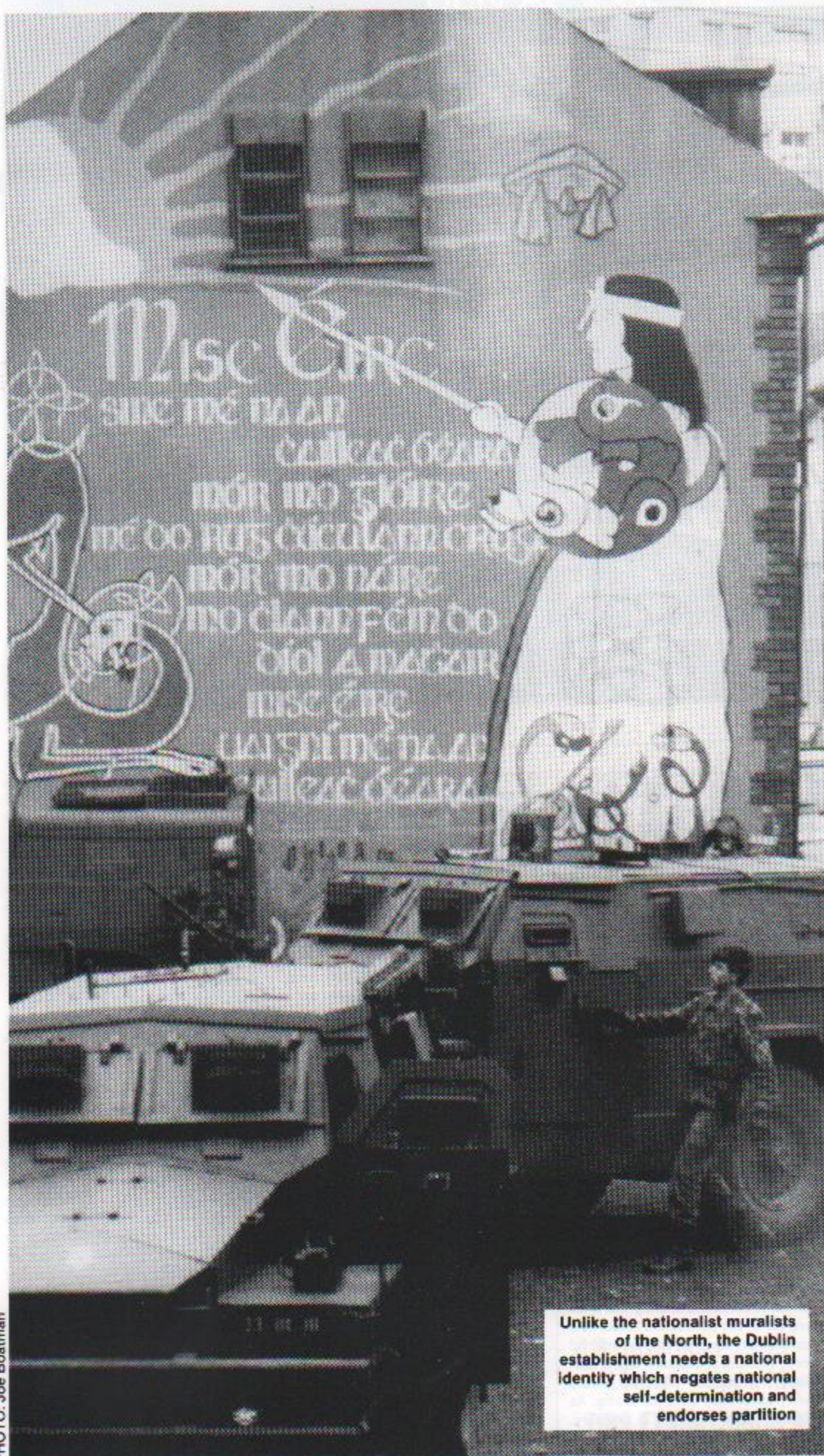


PHOTO: Joe Bostman

Unlike the nationalist muralists of the North, the Dublin establishment needs a national identity which negates national self-determination and endorses partition

'How does the music of U2 relate to our being Irish? I come to this question as one who does not know who he is.' Bono (John Hewson), U2

'When Bono began by saying he doesn't know who he is—well that's exactly how I feel.' Paul Durcan, poet

Nowhere on Earth is so much paper and ink consumed in the search for the meaning of nationhood as in Ireland. Artists and critics, like Bono and Durcan above, are now in a complete muddle. To be Irish, they conclude, is to be confused. 'Disillusioned with the "hard ideologies" which have defined us according to a single unadulterated "identity" (nationalist, Unionist, Catholic or Protestant)', says Richard Kearney, one of the leading lights in this discussion, 'this new generation of Irish artists affirms the positive value of confusion, uncertainty, homelessness, migrancy, questioning, questing for "another place"' (*Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s*, edited by Richard Kearney, 1988).

The reason for this byzantine debate has little to do with any developments in Irish arts or letters and everything to do with a crisis of Irish national identity. The outbreak of war in the North in 1969 exposed traditional Irish nationalism as a lot of hot air. Sixty years of stability through partition bred a complacent pap of nationalist myth which glorified the republicanism of the past while accommodating to British rule in the present. After 1969 that pretence could be sustained no longer. Now the simplest act of remembering the patriot dead is hedged around with such a litany of disclaimers and declarations of 'utter revulsion' at the violence of the IRA that no normal human being would come back for a second round.

#### National malaise

Nationalism is now one of the biggest problems for the Irish establishment. Like any state, the Irish one needs to command allegiance. Most states do that through promoting a national culture which often includes a fair dose of anti-foreign sentiment. Ireland's problem with foreigners however is real, not imagined: 30 000 Britons and British agents form the world's best-equipped and most experienced counter-insurgency force policing the north-east of Ireland and preserving the existing order throughout the island. The Dublin establishment, which depends on that order as much as Whitehall does, is in the peculiar position of needing a national identity which negates national self-determination and which positively endorses the division of the country.

One answer it has come up with of late is summed up in the buzzword 'inclusivism'. Against traditional establishment nationalism which stressed a uniquely Gaelic, Catholic



## A non-nationalist national culture?

IRELAND'S  
IDENTITY CRISIS

Mark Reilly examines the cultural debate about forging a new national identity for the Irish people, and talks to leading Irish historian Roy Foster

identity, the Irish establishment now preaches the virtues of a nationalism which can incorporate the views even of anti-nationalist Protestant Loyalism. The problem is that such a project is about as realistic as the British establishment making Irish republicanism a part of the British national identity.

Richard Kearney, however, is doing his bit for the Free State. His work can best be summed up as post-structuralism adapted to the cause of sanctifying the status quo in Ireland. The hybrid produces a language not unlike a post-Vatican II church sermon—'rediscovering ourselves through our encounter with others...', 'rupture complemented by remembrance', 'history a healthy confluence of tenses—past traditions mingling fruitfully with present crises and future aspirations'. Many hours are squandered by people in Dublin trying to make sense of this. While some writers now feel uneasy about Yeats' involvement in the Celtic Twilight movement, James Joyce has had never had it so good.

*Politics of art*

For Kearney, Joyce is the perfect post-nationalist, whose ambition it was to 'hibernicise Europe and Europeanise Ireland'. Regarded as a dissolute pervert 20 years ago, today his words adorn the pavements and his image every other pub in central Dublin. It is ironic that Joyce should become part of the Irish identity and lauded as the negation of the narrow-minded nationalist. For Joyce, politics were just another distraction for the artist. He had no objection as such to art which was inspired by nationalism. His praise for the nationalist poet of the 1840s, James Clarence Mangan (author of 'My dark Rosaleen') is well-known. What he objected to was the attempt to fuse art and politics. Yet it is this Platonic notion which fires Kearney—'The politician and the artist must reconvene a debate in common pursuit of the good' ('Myth and motherland', Field Day Pamphlet No 5, 1984).

Joyce was worried about art being degraded in the cause of politics, and he would be very unhappy about the situation today. While Ireland still produces fine poets such as Seamus Heaney, it also produces poets like Paul Durcan, who rates with Heaney only in popularity. His poetry consists of easily digestible prejudices presented in a form that verges on doggerel. In his efforts to be inclusivist Durcan has taken the dogma of confusion to its furthest limits. He even condemns the IRA for British violence.

Take these lines from 'In memory of those murdered in the Dublin massacre, May 1974'. Most observers now agree that these bombings, which caused the highest single day's casualties in the history of the war were the work of Loyalists with the backing of British intelligence. That doesn't matter to Durcan. He's decided what he's going to do with the incident. Pondering on the ghastly bombs, he observes an old woman in a Wimpy bar:

'She'd make a mighty fine explosion now if you were to blow her up; An explosion of petals, of aeons, and the waitresses too, flying breasts and limbs, For a free Ireland.'

So there it is, those fighting for a free Ireland caused the Dublin bombs. This sort of wilful blindness is apparent elsewhere in his work. In *Across the Frontiers*, Durcan refers casually to 'David's "The death of Marat" (the 14-year old boy shot dead for shouting "Vive le Roi")'. Whatever else he may have been at the hour of his death, Jean-Paul Marat was definitely not a 14-year old boy. Obviously it was beyond Durcan's ken that a ruthless advocate of revolutionary terror could possibly have been the inspiration for the greatest masterpiece of neo-classicism. So the great tribune is turned into a nice 14-year old royalist. To make matters worse, Durcan has confused the Marat painting with another David,

'Joseph Barra', the 14-year old republican shot in the Vendée for refusing to shout 'Vive le Roi'. So much prejudice and confusion in one sentence.

There is worse still. Almost in the same breath Durcan gushes 'I thought of Trafalgar Square—one of the most crowded and democratic places in the world—and the visit I made to the National Gallery to see the floor mosaic by the Russian emigré Boris Anrep. It is called "Compassion"'. He must have been so transported that he failed to notice that Trafalgar Square isn't very crowded with Irish people. Demonstrations about Ireland have, not very democratically, been banned there since the early seventies.

*'Liberal wanking'?*

Not all contributors to the debate share Durcan's nonchalant ignorance. Roy Foster is a leading Irish historian, currently working in England. His recently published *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* is an erudite synthesis of some recent approaches to studying Irish history. His work, he told me, is 'very much about social movements in Ireland that didn't either achieve very coherent political expression or which seemed to be in contradiction with the overall themes of Irish history as imposed by a synthesised view'. I suggested that this new method of historical research, of exploring the more obscure episodes of history, while downgrading the nationalist aspect, was largely the result of the last 20 years of war and the wish on the part of both left and right-wing historians to rubbish militant republicanism. 'Well I think it's taken off, I mean you relate it to that, I'd relate it to the changes in methodology of historical research exactly over the same period.'

How would he explain the fact that social conflict in Ireland has tended historically to assume a nationalist form? 'I think the construction of the ideology of Irish nationalism owes more to the rhetoric and imagination than has often been allowed. Irish mentalities of resistance continually

call back on a whole hidden tradition of rhetorical and real resistance to the powers that be...it's those sort of behavioural and geographical continuities of resistance which are very interesting to a historian, if not to somebody who is trying to impose a blanket theory of development over the whole thing.'

Roy Foster has a blanket theory of his own: inclusivism. At the end of his book he calls for the adoption of 'a more relaxed and inclusive definition of Irishness...'. Had he not introduced a note of political exhortation into his work, and one moreover which had not the faintest hope of being realised? 'It's a devout hope, it's a plea. But it's not only a plea for an inclusive form of Irishness to be accepted nowadays, which I think is important. It's also, if you like, a wish that inclusive forms of Irishness had been more widely prospected in the period my book covers. If it's an exhortation, I suppose it's provoked by my belief, for instance, that in Ulster there are regional identities and cultural allegiances which can overcome the kind of sectarian duality that's imposed in other areas. In that kind of approach lie the seeds of a more positive national attitude than the exclusivist use of "pure Irish" and "cursed foreigner", tags which have long outperformed their purpose.' He paused. 'If you say that's liberal wanking, so it may be, from your political standpoint, but I can do no other.'

So that's why the Irish have been fighting all this time. They've got an 'attitude', a negative 'national attitude'. If only they'd stop thinking of themselves as Irish and the British and Loyalists as foreigners, everything would be all right. And if they'd done it during the period my book covers, very likely there'd have been no war at all; and no gerrymandering, discrimination or pogroms either, I suppose.

*Wet blanket*

Roy Foster would strongly disavow any association between his ideas and the political needs of the British or Irish establishments, but they must be very pleased with a theory which so happily complements their own propaganda about the war. It is unlikely that 'inclusivism' will go down in a big way with the youth hanging around the streets of Dublin scratching lottery cards or waiting for the boat to England. If for them the old bogus nationalism was irrelevant, this new one is even more so. Nevertheless it may help to throw a wet blanket over the smouldering embers of something which is very threatening to the powers that be in London and Dublin—a true anti-imperialist Irish nationalism.

● Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1988, £18.95



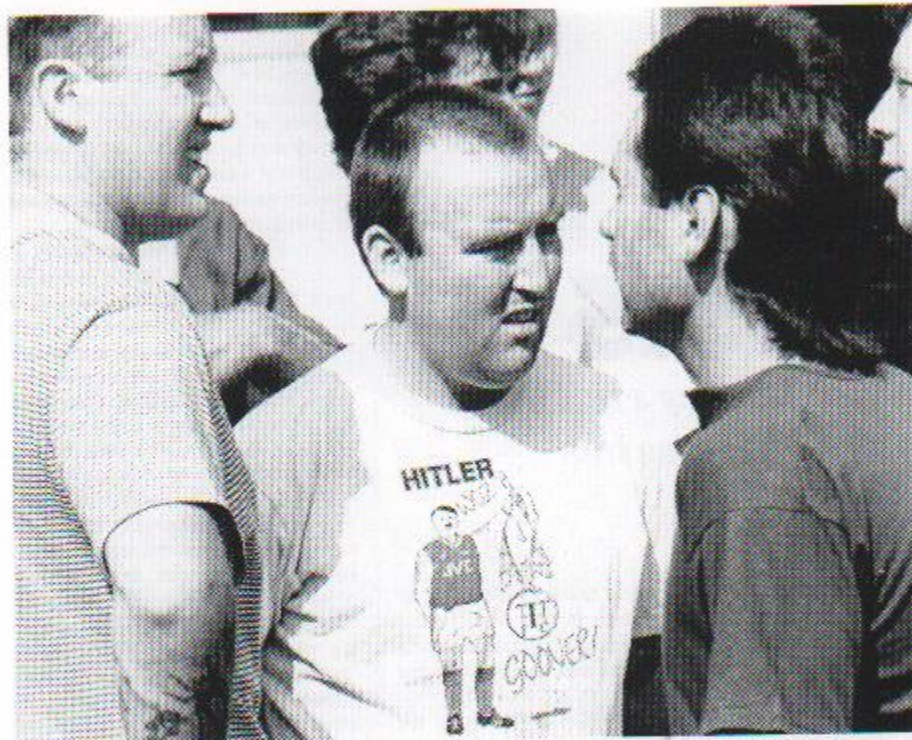


PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

'They fight with foreigners because that's how they believe Englishmen abroad have to behave'

Football hooliganism

# KICK-AND-TELL STORIES

Alex Kershaw met Colin Ward, author of a controversial book that claims to give an inside view of football violence

Colin Ward would not give me his address over the phone. He says some people are still 'out for' him. About to start a business studies course at the age of 33, he has recently written a controversial book about his experiences as a football fan. *Steaming In* was cobbled together from his memory and old match programmes while ex-butcher Ward was laid up with a back injury. Described as a 'hooligan's-eye view', the book is an ugly and only half-believable account of life on the terraces in the seventies and the eighties. It is banal autobiographical thuggery in which the phrase 'the boot went in' recurs like a repetitive terrace chant. Fortunately, Ward himself has some more interesting things to say about football violence.

Ward's wife insists we drink from cups not mugs. We're in a clean, very neat flat, worth a lot these days in Leatherhead in the heart of the commuter belt. He tells me how he's been accused of glorifying violence and celebrating his wasted years on the terraces. He protests that he is not a football hooligan, but his close-to-the-knuckle, scarf and dagger chronicles of the rougher edge of football

life have made his reputation. Last year he covered England's match in Stockholm for *Today*, concentrating on the off-the-field performance of English football fans.

I ask Ward what he thinks makes a hooligan. 'It's a basic way of getting one over, of feeling in control. Only football can provide the excitement and feeling of belonging which these people seem to get out of it. For some people life is about growing up, leaving school as early as possible. They do a manual job, their life revolves around going to the pub, getting married, having children, bringing up a family. For them, violence is a way of life. They are taught that when they have a disagreement with someone and they get het up, then they deck the bloke. Look at Alf Garnet, he is the epitome of the working class guy. He doesn't take crap from no one, and he's proud of the Queen. That is the way their history taught them. We marched off, won the war, beat anyone who stood in our way.'

Military metaphors abound in Ward's book: the hooligan 'uniforms', the fighting manoeuvres, the 'armies' of fans. 'These hooligans we're talking

about are the sons of people who were in the National Service. National Service created the stereotype for parents to create these children. That again is a working class thing. They are the class which join up, fight in peacetime armies. People still say that we won the war, we are the greatest, and they make it loud and clear when they go abroad.'

### 'Bollocks froggie'

'It is not just football either. You go to Boulogne on a Saturday night and the day-tripping army are out in force. They are on parade. They are middle-aged guys, they have their kids with them, "bollocks froggie" and all that. Look at our own prime minister: "I'm beating the drum for Britain", and she is supposed to be an intelligent person. When she goes abroad she acts in exactly the same way as a Mrs Alf Garnet, handbagging her way around the world.'

So does Ward think Thatcher is to blame for the rabid nationalism of some English football hooligans? 'Yes, she has had some effect. Some of the 18-year olds in Stockholm were only 12 at the time of the Falklands War. But I think she has contributed to the

nationalist jingoism they show. In Stockholm you had the classic example of the young guys' nationalism at its worst. They have gone out there, draped themselves in the Union Jack, got drunk, started some trouble, then, they have fights with the locals because that is how they believe Englishmen abroad have to behave. Some of the commentators talk about Nazi subcultures, etc—it's just an excuse to look tough. That kind of racism is inherent in every strata of society, the worst being the aristocracy—have you ever seen a black person marry into the upper classes?'

Ward also sees the fans' 'us and them' attitudes and the constant search for confrontation as a product of the British way of life. 'We've created a monster, a militaristic society where everyone has their place. Our history is all about military conquest and being born in society to take one's place. Accept your place and that is your lot—the idea of deference. The regimentation of society along class lines, however subtle, is our main problem in society.'

'When my father came back from the war he had fought for six years, given up almost everything, what did they give him? A demob suit and 15 shillings. "Thank you very much and now get back into line." Amazingly he did. After the First World War people very nearly did not get back into line and we were so close to very real change. This is not taught because the upper class did not want to tell the working class that they have the power to change things.'

Ward's book bears little trace of these sentiments. It reads like two decades' worth of boozy post-match bullshit sessions: the thrill of the fights, the beer, and the cowardice and violence of the other side (your side never starts it). Nor is his writing immune from the crude prejudices of the young men in the Union Jack t-shirts, as he describes Italians 'foaming at the mouth' and 'running like dogs' after an Arsenal-Juventus match in Turin. So how does he square the banality and brutishness of these stories with his reflections on hooliganism as a social phenomenon?

'You can't go where I have been and not get involved in some way. It is like people who write about the Vietnam War. Michael Hare in *Front Line* claims: "I went to the frontline and I never carried a gun." That's bullshit. You know damn well that when he was on that line he was firing away with his M16. And they were all doing it, and they were all getting a kick out of it. Then they come back and sit down at their typewriter with the airconditioning on and say dispassionately: "The war is awful." And yet they were part of the war.'

● Colin Ward, *Steaming In: Journal of a Football Fan*, Sportspages/Simon & Schuster, £5.95



TV times

# THE BLANKETY-BLANK GENERATION GAME

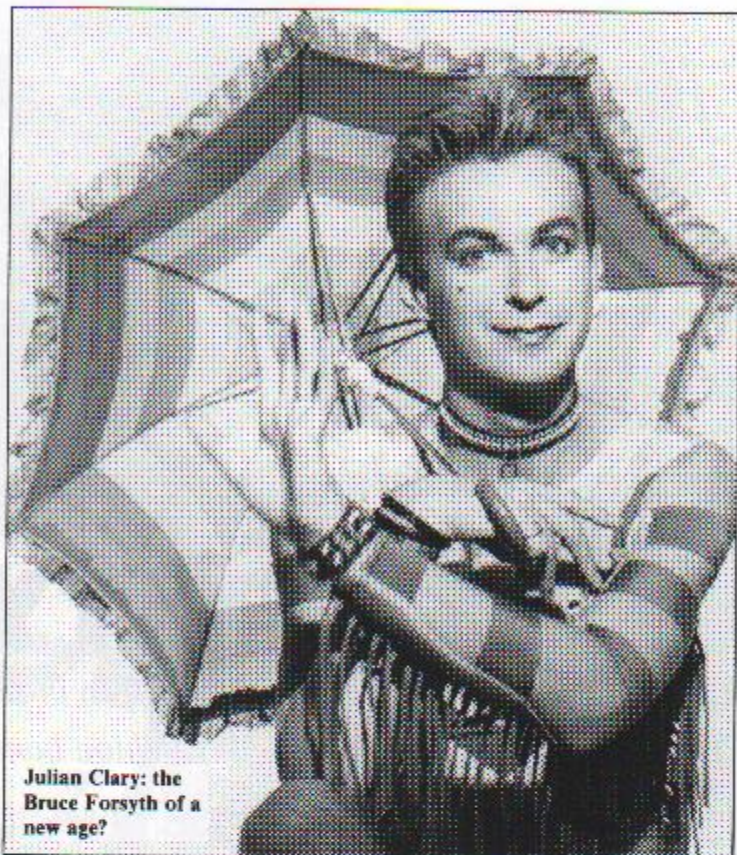
Frank Cottrell-Boyce looks at working class people, as seen on TV game shows

Someone asked me this month what I thought about the representation of working class people on British television. I started in about *Cathy Come Home*, *The Blackstuff*, *Eddy English* and other British classics. It was my wife Denny who stopped me to say that the dominant image of the proletariat to be found on British TV comes not from drama but from quiz shows. It's an image of working people cheerily humiliating themselves in the hope of grabbing some of the totems of middle class life—a holiday, a car, or best of all, the chance to be on the telly.

Have you seen *Telly Addicts*? This recalls Robert Robinson's *Ask the Family* in that each team is a different family. Where Robert's (middle class) contestants sat up straight behind their desks, pencils in their mouths, ready for anything, the *Telly Addicts* slump stupefied on couches for all the world like members of the house of lords. The monitors on which the clips are shown are placed on the floor so that the players' eyes are always humbly cast down, while their double chins flop on to their chests. The questions leave no room for a witty riposte or original thought. The answers are usually the names of TV characters or actors. The 'contestants' are asked to acknowledge over and over that all kinds of people are important and famous apart from themselves.

## Viewing the viewer

The positioning of the couches is interesting too. Instead of facing each other in a way which would suggest discourse or even combat, both families face the audience. They provide the audience with a mournful, immobile mirror image of itself. The programme promotes television viewing as having nothing to do with sharing information and culture, enhancing our ability to participate in the world around us, but as a drug



Julian Clary: the Bruce Forsyth of a new age?

(hence the title), a sedative to be precise. These people are acting out how we are supposed to watch. Strung out on television, they demonstrate their zombie-like pliability by putting up with the ultimate humiliation, sharing the same frame as Noel Edmonds.

*Blankety Blank* provides us with an even more chilling celebration of nullity and inertia. This is the programme Samuel Beckett never dared to write. The idea is that you complete a popular phrase. You get a point if your answer coincides with that of a member of the celebrity panel. So if you

think of something banal and obvious, you're in with a good chance. If you think of something witty and original you're sure to be punished by not getting a point.

There is a twist, however. The stars get to show off, usually with naughty jokes. The programme reinforces the contrast between the media aristocracy, who are allowed to cavil, cavort and plug on screen, and the plebs who are there to look on, admire and be outshone. OK the blank generation was blank, but it was never *blankety blank*.

In stark contrast is the way people are presented on up-market programmes like *Mastermind*, where we get a close-up picture of the contestant's face, framed in suggestive shadow, like a Rembrandt self-portrait. The wacky precision of the specialised rounds celebrates the individuality as well as the erudition of the players, and the tense intimacy of that close-up with the clock ticking away ensures a rich sympathy and identification from the viewer.

Julian Clary's *Sticky Moments* is a step forward from all this. Quite apart from the fact that it's great to see gay people on television having uncomplicated, desegregated fun with straight people, it has a lot going for it. There's an inversion of the *Blankety Blank* formula. You're expected to complete a well-known phrase, but to do so as naughtily as you can. You also get the chance to create a work of art out of foodstuffs.

*Sticky Moments* reminds me of the *Generation Game*, and not just on account of the smutty innuendo. Compared to the current era of *Catch Phrase* passivity (yet another show in which you are invited to show off your knowledge of cliché) it had a bit of life to it. 'The eight who are going to generate', Bruce Forsyth used to describe his guests, boosting their usually apparent energy and creativity. They performed in plays, learnt to make noodles, threw pizza bases. They were even instrumental in choosing their own prizes off the conveyor belt. Even the audience was allowed to make itself heard: 'Cuddly toy!', 'Teasmaid', it would chant, prefiguring the scenes in Wenceslas Square or Vaci Utca where a similar thirst for consumer durables has led to something like a revolution.

## A Beadling liberty

I suppose the powers that be thought Brucie and Anthea were responsible for the winter of discontent, which is why they put Beadle about on the streets to scare us back on to our couches. Into the shopping malls and public squares they sent Esther and her crew to break up suspicious gatherings with displays of unusual vegetables and, the ultimate weapon, the chance to be on the television. Oh well, that's life.

All these things were thrown into relief for us because we'd just come back from working in Eastern Europe where the dominant images of working people tend to be 80 feet high and made of granite. They may have inscribed on them somewhere something about Czech or Hungarian gratitude to the great Russian nation. The imperishable image now is of ordinary people acting together to overthrow their oppressors. Just think, if their rulers had employed the services of Noel they might still be in charge.



**S**cenery from an *Execution* started life as a radio play on the BBC in 1984, and won the Prix Italia in 1985. Howard Barker does not think that Ian McDiarmid will have any problems transferring it to the Almeida Theatre. Apart from the fact that Glenda Jackson played the lead on the radio and will now do so on the stage, Barker insists that 'I don't make any distinction in writing between stage, TV and radio. The form of narrative is the same. The theatre is principally a verbal medium, and my plays are densely linguistic'.

The play is set in a fictional sixteenth-century Venetian republic. A woman is commissioned to celebrate a victory over the Turks in a huge painting. Apparently seeking martyrdom, she incurs the wrath of her state patrons by her flagrantly subversive treatment of the theme. The authorities, by the context within which they exhibit the painting and have it publicly interpreted and celebrated, attempt to cut their losses. Even with her collusion, however, they can restrict but not obliterate its meaning.

#### *Left and right out*

The relationship between the artist and society is a theme close to Barker's heart. In his early plays, including *Claw*, *Stripwell*, *Downchild* and *The Hang of the Gaol*, he joined with other writers of the seventies and early eighties in issuing a sustained critique of the state of the nation. But today he no longer sees the issues in the same way. The earlier period ended with *A Passion in Six Days* (1983): 'That is the last play in which I was consciously committed to a position which I wanted publicly to endorse—that the Labour Party was stagnant. The terms left and right are not meaningful to me any more. The Labour Party is neither here nor there now so far as my writing is concerned. The first responsibility of the artist is not to alignment but to imaginative life, to free speculation. I'm not interested in delivering a message, my plays aren't intended any more to clarify. We have to return the responsibility to the audience to sort the material out.'

The break came with the lengthy narrative poem 'Don't exaggerate' which Barker wrote in 1984. He felt 'it liberated in me a poetic mode of address'. He had anyway been dissatisfied with what he saw as the 'coarse and uncomplex' description of the establishment in the theatre of protest. Once bracketed with a generation which included Howard Brenton, David Edgar, Caryl Churchill, David Hare and Trevor Griffiths, to name but a few, Barker now feels that they have all long since gone their own very separate ways.

Feeling part of no tradition does not worry him, nor has isolation slowed his prolific output—now more than a score of stage plays, more than a dozen TV and radio plays, four

'In a bad time laughter is a rattle of fear'

PHOTO: Ian Sanderson

Howard Barker

## THEATRE OF COMPLEXITY

*This month two Howard Barker plays open in London.*

*John Fitzpatrick visited him at his Brighton home*

collections of poetry, a film script and recently a collection of reflections and epigrams, *Arguments for a Theatre*, which brings together the case he has been pushing for a new type of theatre in Britain. He knows by now what he's against—clarity, messages, naturalism, realism, accessibility, unity and laughter. This may make him seem a rather gloomy old coot, but not a bit of it. Anyway his complaint that there is a lot of complacency, cowardice and fear in the contemporary theatre has much force.

He reproduces in the book his '49 asides for a tragic theatre', a set of theses amounting to a manifesto. Containing their fair share of the obscure and the inconsequential,

some of them are suggestive and provocative: 'Tragedy is not about reconciliation. Consequently, it is the art form for our time.' 'In a bad time laughter is a rattle of fear.' Barker thinks laughter, easy and false, is the pervasive sound of the age. 'You turn on the radio or television and you instantly hear it. The majority of plays in London are comedies. The laugh is the noise of the group. It unites an audience, tragedy returns each member of the audience to their place in the dark. I think the theatre should be a dark place, I don't agree with Brecht illuminating it.' What is wrong with eliciting a collective response? 'There is a fake collectivism abroad, a sinister populism of both right and left.'

In one of the essays, 'The consolations of catastrophe', he pursues this theme. The 'imperative to enlighten, amuse, and stimulate good thoughts of a collective nature (family, nation, party, community) clings to the carnival mania of the left and the moral crusade of the right. But the banging of the drum is hollow and the rhetoric shallow. It is simply not credible. It is not the sum of experience'. Against this Barker poses a new form of tragedy in which the audience is in control. 'Traditional tragedy was a restatement of public morality over the corpse of the transgressing protagonist—thus Brecht saw catharsis as essentially passive. But in a theatre of catastrophe



there is no restoration of certitudes, and in a sense more compelling and less manipulated than in the epic theatre, it is the audience which is freed into authority....In catastrophe, whose imaginative ambition exposes the reactionary content in the miserabilism of everyday life, lies the possibility of reconstruction.' Like much of Barker's commentary useful insights are swept along in a rush of rather superficial libertarianism. There is no mention either of that collective category, class.

The key words for Barker's theatre of tragedy or catastrophe are complexity, ambiguity, pain, knowledge and desire. His critical champion David Ian Rabey, of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in an introduction to *Arguments for a Theatre* describes the methods of the recent plays: 'Barker has rejected the reducible "message" and, increasingly, the linear narrative in favour of cumulative effects, variations on themes and contradictory experiences which rupture familiarities and conventional pieties to permit the release and range of imagination. Incongruities, shifting identities, unpredictable events, with the disturbing power of a newly forged myth infused with the power of dream or nightmare—phenomena which are held together by connections which are emotionally powerful but logically inconsistent. Like life.'

Barker is dismissive of critics who have accused him of pessimism and 'failing to give a lead'. 'I think people are empowered by the complexity of my work. Just because a play is not accessible does not mean that it must be mysticism.' But isn't he making an unnecessary and abstract principle out of being complex, overreacting to the easy solutions of contemporary theatre? I put it to him that in his more recent plays such as *The Bite of the Night* and *The Power of the Dog* the drama was in danger of being drained out of them as characters spoke at each other rather than to each other, delivering gobbets of epigrammatic wisdom for the audience to chew on.

#### The actor's the thing

He doesn't agree. 'You don't only get drama from dialogue and naturalism. My plays may not have a receivable meaning, but you can only keep an audience for two, three, four hours if they're compelled by the the experience of the performance, by the live actor.' This is indeed consistent with the importance he attaches to the work of his actors, and to the emphasis he places on involving the audience with the characters as much as involving the characters with each other. Indeed he is increasingly concerned not to present character in a stable way at all. There seems to be a danger that he will provide, not a challenge, but a despairing aesthetic

complement to the fragmented, dislocated spirit of the age. I quoted the remark of his character Sorge in *The Power of the Dog*: 'the idea of a neutral art is utterly redundant', and that despite his disclaimers he was still handing down a message, this time about the inscrutable nature of social reality, that it is resistant to understanding.

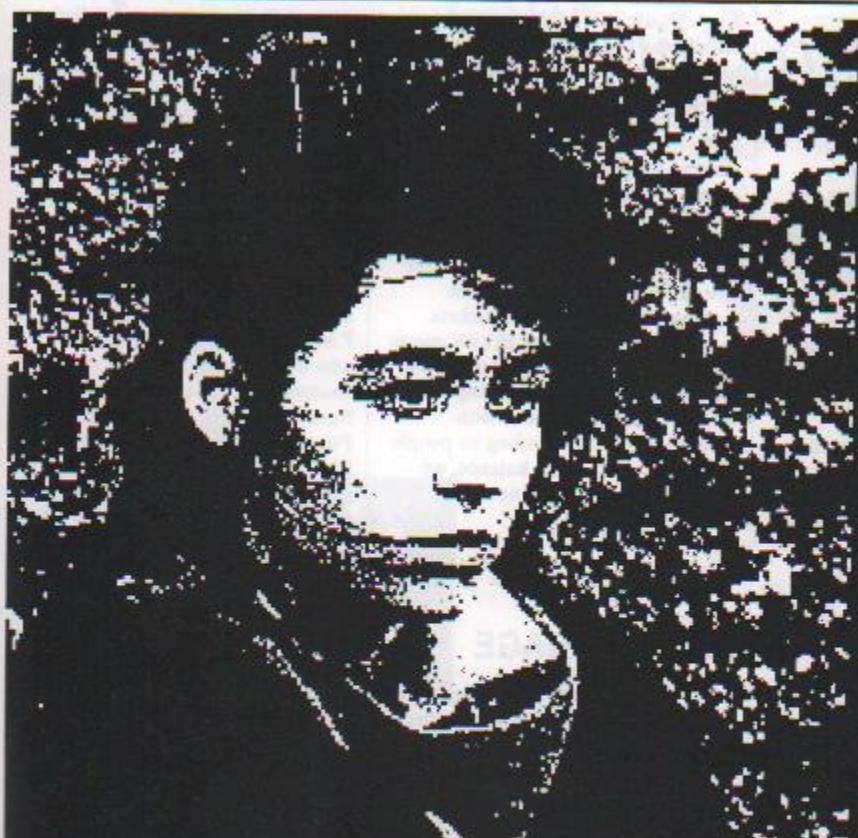
'I don't agree with the view Sorge expresses. I do think that there is no such thing as objective description. It depends where you are looking at the issues from.' He was also keen to emphasise that in his more recent work he has been drawing on the energy of sexual desire and the will to power. Rabey calls him 'an aesthetic existentialist theorist'. I put it to him that identifying and feeding off such energies was all very well, but the expression of such drives in the real world is entirely structured, not to say confined, by the prevailing social relations. Registering their existence without addressing those relations risked making a statement which was merely banal. 'Yes, which is why sexual relations in my plays are transgressive, they go beyond the ordered structure of social relations.'

At the heart of this existentialism is an unashamed emphasis on the individual. He thinks that his best known work *The Castle* 'celebrates human willpower and dignity, and the triumph of individual freedom'. He

has not found it easy however to promote his vision. 'I have never had a play put on at the National, and I've sent them every single script. The Royal Shakespeare Company have never put me on the main stage. The theatre in this country is still controlled by liberal humanists. Thatcherism hasn't changed that. For some reason they find my work troubling.' He has established his own company, The Wrestling School, with actors Kenny Ireland and Hugh Fraser for the sole purpose of producing Barker plays. The company is bringing *Seven Lears*, a play about that king's wife, from the Haymarket, Leicester, to the Royal Court this month.

Barker is a serious and thoughtful contributor to British theatre. His theories may reflect the pressures of isolation and the general poverty of the theatrical culture within which he has to work. But I for one will be going to see for myself how in his latest phase he is doing it on stage.

● *Scenes from an Execution* plays at the Almeida Theatre, London, from 9-30 January (inclusive)  
*Seven Lears* plays at the Royal Court Theatre, London from 4-27 January (inclusive)  
 Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, John Calder, £3.95



Goretta Friel and her school friends are fifteen, and full of youthful exuberance despite living on the hard edge of political warfare in Derry's Catholic ghettos. Relationships change when Goretta meets Qiaran and they fall in love. They are living out the classic conventions of a comic book romance together when her world suddenly falls apart.

Attitudes to sexuality are explored in a society where religion is an important foundation of human behaviour. It was scripted, directed and produced by Derry Film & Video members who also achieved a high level of local involvement in the project.

Goretta is played by Emer McCourt from Dublin in a demanding lead performance. The original theme music and song for the film has been composed and performed by Sinead O'Connor who also acts in the film.

Funding provided by Channel Four T.V. (Britain), R.T.E., (Ireland) and British Screen Finance. *Hush A Bye Baby* will be screened on both R.T.E. and Channel Four early in 1990.

For further information please contact:  
**Tommy Collins, Producer,**  
 at Derry Film & Video Workshop,  
 1 Westend Park, Derry,  
 N. Ireland, BT48 9JF.

Derry Film & Video's latest production  
**" HUSH - A - BYE BABY "**  
 will be released on Channel 4 next year.

Mother Ireland is available from the address supplied; £30.00 plus VAT & Postage for individuals, £60.00 plus VAT & Postage for institutions.



# letters

We welcome readers' views and criticisms of *Living Marxism*. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX.

## WHAT DO EAST GERMANS WANT?

Frank Richards' article on German reunification hardly mentioned what millions of workers in the East are calling for ('The West will miss the Berlin Wall', December). I've been amazed by ordinary people from East Germany who, despite their horrific experience of Stalinism, still retain an instinct for some sort of 'socialism'. On demonstrations organised by the moderates in the New Forum ordinary people refused to sing the West German national anthem and instead chose the 'Internationale'. Hundreds of thousands who went to West Berlin for the day chose to return.

Ordinary East Germans, as the *Financial Times* put it, 'do not want to risk losing what they have' by becoming cheap labour in the 'prosperous' West, where there are two million unemployed and an atmosphere of vicious racism aimed at foreign competitors for jobs. The state-run economy of the East, although managed (or mismanaged) by a corrupt band of wasters, at least gives the population some defence against the ravages of the market.

The bureaucracy have always sought a more efficient way of exploiting the population: that's why they've now turned to the market. But privatisation of the economy, as workers in Poland and Hungary are discovering, means price rises and unemployment as the subsidies are removed and 'rationalisation' begins. In practice, this is what reunification would mean for workers in East Germany. No wonder they have little enthusiasm for it and seek to defend the little bit of security they already have.

I don't disagree that we have to get rid of the degenerates who run East Germany. For years they have wasted the potential for real development which a democratically run, non-market economy offers; but the argument that reunification offers the only way to unite ordinary people 'East and West' seems utopian, if not dangerous. Workers

in East Germany are right to defend their corner against the West, the best way they can do that is to remove the bureaucrats who are inviting the West in. The logic of Frank Richards' argument is to give up the fight against privilege, agree to price rises and unemployment, and line up with the reactionary pro-marketisers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. I'm no apologist for Stalinism, it has ruined the name of socialism for many years, but to me the imperialists remain the biggest danger to working people all over the world.

Simon Wedge  
Bristol

When I told my friends I was going to East Germany for a holiday, they all said I must be mad: 'Everybody else is leaving!' The night we crossed the border at Checkpoint Charlie, it seemed they were right. In East Berlin the streets were eerily empty, because everyone was at the Brandenburg Gate. Our guide Kirsten explained that nearly everyone thought they would close the border again. From East Berlin we travelled to Karl MarxStadt. Looking from the bus window, it was funny to see the street names: Rosa Luxemburg Place, Karl Marx Street, Lenin Place. So many symbols, but communism was as much in evidence here as in Albert Square.

Sunday was designated demonstration day in Karl MarxStadt. At least 4000 people assembled in front of the headquarters of the Socialist Unity Party. Maybe now a bit of Marxism! Speaker after speaker—there were 31, mostly councillors and party officials—spoke of the mistakes of the past, apologised for not providing better housing, and promised to make amends. One criticised those leaving East Germany. The crowd booed this. A voice from the crowd called on the Socialist Unity Party to give their headquarters over to the elderly for flats, as they lived in appalling conditions. This received the loudest cheer. 'Be patient and work harder' was the message from the platform. 'We've waited long enough' was the response.

One councillor 'quoted' Marx: 'Marx said certain things from the old society will get taken over with the new', meaning we can mix capitalism and socialism and get a better society. Another said that the threat of unemployment might 'motivate' workers.

My hosts the 'Free German Youth' invited me to speak. I condemned both capitalism and Stalinism. I spoke of the fight for change in Britain, and of the need to build a revolutionary party. But my hosts would not interpret the rest of my speech, in which I wanted to voice my criticisms of market-oriented

reform. They said I should not criticise too much: 'You are a guest.'

That evening, we were invited to a youth club. The young people asked me about football, hooliganism and double decker buses. They wanted to travel—they had only seen England on slideshows which showed London taxis, men in smoking jackets and the Yorkshire Dales. But they did not want to leave their country permanently. They also wanted to own a video and have good football players like Liverpool.

On Monday morning I went to the greengrocers: all they had were potatoes, cabbage and apples, and not exactly fresh. I went to the exclusive Intershop, where I bought orange juice and potato crisps with my English pounds. Carrying them through the streets, I realised that I might as well have had 'foreigner' tattooed on my forehead: everyone was staring at me.

On our last evening, Kirsten invited us to her flat. Kirsten, her husband and two small daughters lived in a two-bedroomed flat with living room, kitchen/bathroom and an outside toilet shared with eight other families. A piece of formica over the bath served as a worktop and the kitchen sink was adjacent to the bathroom sink. There was no room for a table, and only one gas heater in the living room which was too expensive to run. Electricity had to be monitored, to ensure that they did not overspend their allowance. Kirsten's life was made doubly difficult by the endless queuing for basic provisions. For the first time in two years, her children would eat bananas she had bought on the black market. Her social life was restricted because state creches closed at weekends, as this was considered 'family time'. She relied on parents to babysit, and recently enjoyed seeing *Dirty Dancing* at the cinema, for which there was an eight-week waiting list for tickets.

Myself and the other British guests were left with an impression of East Germany as a place struggling to function and go forward, with increasing divisions among its people as to the solution. On balance, we decided that we would not swap places.

Jane McAllister  
Liverpool

## AIDS OUTRAGE

I was outraged to read that Jenny Ross ('Sex for everyone', December) agreed with Dr Coleman's view of the threat of Aids to heterosexuals as irresponsibly exaggerated, and that the only real risk in Britain is to homosexuals and drug addicts.

Firstly it is extremely dangerous to associate Aids with high-risk groups. This can only lead to complacency and prejudice. Rather Aids should be thought of as affecting all of us who

practise high-risk behaviours such as unprotected sex. Although in Britain so far a relatively small number of people have been infected heterosexually, we are at an early stage in a fast-growing crisis. It is estimated that 90 per cent of the world's five million HIV positive people were infected heterosexually.

The message is simple: use condoms. The number of partners is now considered of little importance provided condoms are used properly and consistently. These measures are far from promoting 'insecurity about sex' or a return to Victorian values. We can have whatever kind of sex we want, as often as we want, with whom we want, as long as we do it safely. Indeed if condoms were more widely used we would also have fewer unwanted pregnancies and deaths from cervical cancer. What could make sex more secure?

It's time heterosexuals took Aids seriously. We must talk frankly about sex, which can be very liberating. We must adopt safer sex which does not necessarily mean less sex or less fun. It does mean better health, particularly for women.

C Cupitt  
London

## COLOMBIA: M19 MISTAKE

Stefanie Boston ('Bush is not after the narco', October) said that 'large areas of Colombia are controlled by the guerrilla movements M19 and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)'. However, M19 has hardly been active for the past two years. Laying down arms at a time when the Colombian government has gone on the offensive against ordinary people has been the last nail in its coffin.

The guerrilla movement is now the Coordinadora Simon Bolivar, an umbrella organisation embracing FARC, whom you mention, and who do control large areas of the country; the Ejercito Popular Nacional (EPN); and the Ejercito Popular de Liberacion (EPL), a split from FARC. There are other smaller groups too. The M19 is no longer in the umbrella. In February 1989, M19 signed the government's 'peace initiative'. The Coordinadora Simon Bolivar does not support this. The Coordinadora offered to talk to the government as a whole movement. However, now that president Barco has stepped up his offensive against all ordinary Colombians, under the pretext of the war against the drug barons, the Coordinadora sees the need to step up its actions, not tone them down. By entering into negotiations, M19 has become a tool of the Colombian government which is trying to divide and confuse the guerrilla movement.

Alvaro Gomez  
London



**progress.** 1. (prōg'ris-es); n.  
Forward movement, advance,  
improvement, development, in-  
crease, (make p., move forward,  
get on, improve; civilisation, &c.)  
now, the new, &c., transform,  
change, fresh, **living marxism,**  
different, substitute for the old,  
éxpe'rimēt. 1.(-ent), n. Test, &c.  
science, novelty, &c., **the future.**

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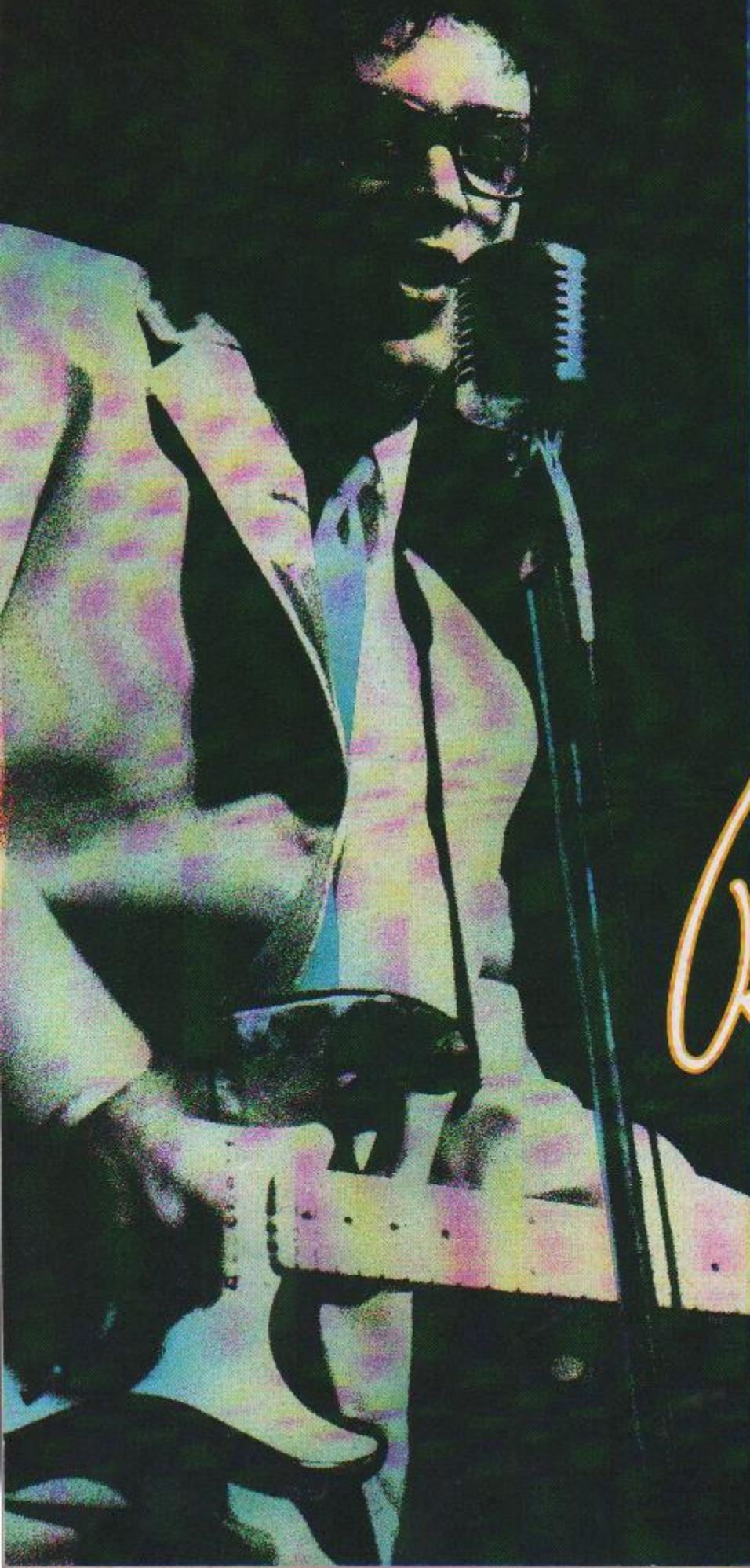
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