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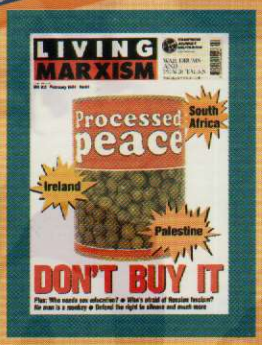

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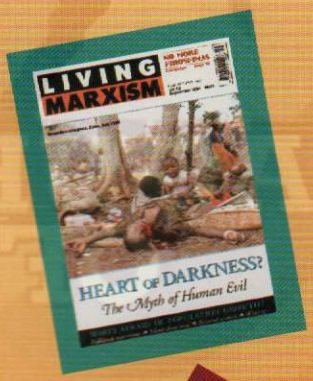

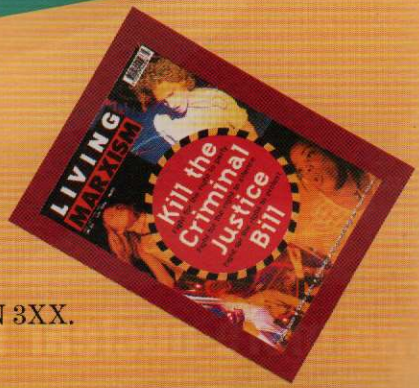

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CAMPAIGN AGAINST MILITARISM

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NO MORE HIROSHIMAS

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

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

The No More Hiroshimas year of action could not be more timely. The threat of militarism and war seem more pressing in the 1990s than at any time since the forties. The October images of American forces, with British back-up, returning to the Persian Gulf hot foot from Haiti and Somalia symbolise the way that gunboat diplomacy has become the stuff of international relations today, turning the world into a powder-keg.

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

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

Editor: **Mick Hume**
International Editor: **Daniel Nassim** ● News: **Andrew Calcutt** ● Living: **Kenan Malik**
Books: **James Heartfield** ● Design: **Richard Stead** ● Production: **Michael Kramer, Peter Ray, Alec Campbell, Sally Gray** ● Managing Editor: **Phil Murphy**

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Mick Hume

So what is left now?

We should no longer be embarrassed to call ourselves socialists says Tony Blair, promoting his 'New Labour' message. As it happens I am not, but only because I refuse to call myself a socialist at all these days. Socialism now seems to represent nothing more than a repackaged job-lot of poisonous old prejudices, sold under the flashy wrappers of feminism, communitarianism and fairness.

The political battle lines have been redrawn almost beyond recognition in recent years. The ideological labels 'left' and 'right' have lost the distinctive meaning they once had. This has created a perilous situation where it is easy to get confused about who stands for what. Look behind the old left/right labels, however, and it becomes possible to see that something very different and very dangerous is afoot.

The language and ideas of those now identified as socialists and feminists are being used to lend fresh energy and credibility to thoroughly reactionary proposals, on everything from cutting welfare benefits to strengthening police powers. At a time when the shambolic Tory Party symbolises the chronic state of right-wing capitalist politics, it appears that socialism (or 'social-ism' to Blair) has been entrusted with the task of rehabilitating all of the old crap, only this time in the guise of an initiative from the left.

Anybody who still believes that British socialism is about reforming the country for the benefit of the majority should be made to watch the depressing evidence of October's conference exchanges between the New Labour supporters of Blair's modernised 'social-ism', and the Old Labour champions of 'the socialist traditions of Clause IV'. Neither side had anything to say to people facing the real problems of living in Britain today.

The defenders of the irrelevant anachronism that is Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution (what Arthur Scargill proudly calls 'the old-time religion') have succeeded only in confirming the widespread impression that traditional Labourism is about as pertinent to the nineties as religious fundamentalism. As the Tories never tire of pointing out, the more modern alternative which Blair's people offer is largely a matter of style, not substance. However, despite the preponderance of media managers and spin doctors, New Labour *is* promoting a political message. But it is not a message that really qualifies as new. It is more like a new voice through which the old conservative concerns about controlling society can be better relayed to a modern middle class audience.

New Labour has abandoned any pretence of being a party of the working classes. The change in the party's relations with the trade unions has been ratified by the formal abolition of the block vote. At a time when there is no longer any organised pressure on Labour from working people, Blair & Co calculate that they can safely ignore the concerns of the old working class and still pick up most of the votes from these traditional Labour supporters. Their priority now is to pitch for new votes, primarily in the south of England. Even here, New Labour's appeals are directed less at the majority of working people than at the professional middle classes, who exert such influence over the political agenda in Tory Britain.

The move to introduce quotas for women in the selection of Labour conference delegates and parliamentary candidates symbolises what Blair's socialism is about. It demonstrates the narrow orientation of New Labour towards the new middle classes—and points up the narrow-mindedness of the politics which result.

The switch away from the union block vote and towards quotas for women MPs has been hailed by commentators as proof that the Labour Party is now more democratic, more representative, more in touch with the people. In fact, all it means is that Labour has substituted one form of undemocratic organisation for another, sending a signal that it is now accountable to an unrepresentative minority of middle class professionals rather than an unrepresentative minority of trade union officials.

In this sense, quotas are just the new block votes. They have nothing to do with democracy; that is about giving people a free vote for the person of their choice, not telling them that they can only vote for candidates of one sex/race/religion. Nor have electoral quotas got anything to do with addressing the real social inequality which prevents most women from taking an active role in public life. They are an undemocratic device designed to meet the concerns of a clique of middle class careerists. No doubt some well-heeled women are now lining up to join the Labour Party so as to walk straight into parliamentary seats.

The influence of this middle class constituency now reaches far beyond the Labour Party's internal selection procedures. It shapes the language and the presentation of every New Labour policy—and increasingly does the same for all public debate in this country.

Many of the fashionable political themes of our time reflect the values of the Blair-ist strain of middle class professionals: the values of feminist, ethical, communitarian politics, of no-smoking policies, anti-harassment codes and equal opportunity charters, of children's rights, parental responsibilities and the 'feminisation' of everything from the Church of England to the Royal Air Force.

The advance of this mood has been interpreted as a radical change in the political climate, as a kind of 'left' turn which has allowed New Labour to reaffirm the relevance of its socialism. That impression is reinforced by the prominence of somebody like Clare Short MP, seen as on the left of the Labour Party, in promoting many of these issues.

Yet what does any of this have to do with the aim of liberating people by changing the way society is run, which is what socialism was supposed to be about when the term meant something a century ago? By contrast, the new political culture of the 'left' is helping to consolidate some damaging conservative notions about society, but in a form that is more palatable for modern times.

Take, for example, an issue like unemployment and job-creation. The switch towards more part-time and other insecure, low-paid forms of employment makes Tory boasts about falling unemployment ring hollow for many people. But bring on a New Labour woman like Patricia Hewitt to celebrate the 'revolution' in flexible working which has 'empowered' more women with children through enabling them to get part-time jobs, and things look a bit better.

It is a similar story with state welfare. Get a Tory back bencher to argue for cutting benefit payments to the poor and it could cause an outcry. But invite Blair to give a lecture about how individual responsibility is an important part of community values, and allow an ardent feminist like Sue Slipman, of the National Council for One-Parent Families, to demand that errant fathers be made responsible for their children, and the notion of introducing tighter restrictions on access to benefits becomes more acceptable.

The same pattern even tends to hold true today for that most Tory of issues, law and order. The mistake which home secretary Michael Howard made with his unpopular Criminal Justice Bill was to present it as too much of an old-fashioned draconian crackdown. Somebody could have told him that the way to win support for a law-and-order crusade today would be to package it much more as a police campaign against racist attacks, domestic violence, child abuse and pornography. The merest mention of anti-harassment measures in the bill was enough to persuade New Labour to abstain rather than vote against it; a few more concessions to the new political culture of the nineties and they would surely have cheered it to the rafters.

The way to win support for a law-and-order crusade today is to package it as a police campaign against racist attacks and domestic violence

The 'left' has been transformed into a contemporary voice for conservative values. This raises important questions about what it can really mean to be left-wing today, about what we should stand for now. That is an issue on which *Living Marxism* is happy to encourage debate. One thing we should be clear about from the start, however, is that the alternative to Tony Blair's social-ism cannot be any campaign to defend Clause IV.

Clause IV of the Labour constitution commits the party to 'secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry' through state control of the economy. Since Blair made his coded announcement about ditching it, the rump of the traditional Bennite left has protested that it is a sacrosanct article of socialist faith. Come off it.

When Clause IV was written by the Fabian Sidney Webb in 1918, its main purpose was to contain the militant working class within the bounds of parliamentary politics, and to head off any demands for revolutionary change. Having witnessed at first hand the start of the Russian Revolution of 1917, Labour leader Arthur Henderson told British prime minister Lloyd George that 'employers are beginning to realise [that the] only safeguard against control by workmen is control by [the] state'. Clause IV was Labour's political contribution to preventing the horror of 'workmen's control' afflicting British employers in an era of revolutionary upheaval. It outlived its purpose long ago. Whether it stays or goes (and it will go) makes no difference whatsoever to the grim prospects for people under any future Blair-run government.

It is high time to forget about Clause IV, and indeed everything else about the Labour Party, to tear up all of those old 'What We Stand For' statements, and get down to the task of developing a new generation of anti-capitalist politics that is relevant to the real problems facing people at the end of the twentieth century. The first step in that direction will be to develop a critique of the dangerous left-right culture now shaping every issue in political life. That is *Living Marxism's* aim—and it is one we hope to take further at the Making of Moral Panics conference in London on 19-20 November (see centre pages).

Blair's insistence on giving social-ism two syllables can serve as a reminder of one thing from the past that is worth remembering. In its origins, left-wing politics was about the 'social' question, of how to transform society in order to achieve universal emancipation. It was not about reserving a few more seats in parliament for professional careerists, or demanding more repressive powers for the police.

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

LETTERS

No surrender in Ireland

The British left has never been kind to Irish republicanism. Its inability to organise around British disengagement from Ireland reflects its failure to organise effectively around anything—poverty, unemployment, racism, whatever. However, the article by Mark Ryan ('A ceasefire but no peace', October) goes too far. It is deeply insulting to republicans for Ryan to claim that the IRA has surrendered unconditionally. It is deeply offensive to the nationalist community who have suffered so much.

There are many in the wider republican family (myself included) who are concerned, to say the least, at recent developments. Bernadette McAliskey has articulated those concerns very clearly. However, the struggle continues. Gerry Adams may shake hands with Albert Reynolds and Edward Kennedy, but he is an honest man and as such deserves more time and space before informing us of where he and Sinn Fein are going. If we are not happy with that then we (Irish people) and not Britain's *Living Marxism* will decide if we are going that way also.

In the meantime I would thank Mr Ryan to remember that there has not been any surrender, no weapons have been handed over and no matter how much the British want to play around with words, with partition intact, there cannot be, and will not be, any permanent ceasefires!

James Doherty *London*

Although Mark Ryan concedes that 'given the unfavourable balance of forces' it would be 'foolhardy to continue the military campaign', he still concludes that Sinn Fein has given in to constitutionalism. But nothing has been surrendered yet. This is only the beginning of a new stage in the propaganda war, which given the military stalemate and the lack of a wide Troops Out movement, is the only war open to victory. Though there are risks it is significant that the first demand Gerry Adams made after the ceasefire was for the withdrawal of British troops from nationalist areas.

Now is the time, if we are serious about defeating British imperialism, to put as much pressure as we can on the British state to stand aside from a process of Irish self-determination. Ryan however seems to see some future in abjuring this work in order to form another little party in Dublin. What next? A caucus in Somalia? It will be our surrender if we don't fight collaborationism, militarism and imperialism at home.

Mike Belbin *Chelsea, London*

Sean Fearon (letters, September) is quite wrong to accuse Mark Ryan of 'wallowing in his own brand of nostalgia'. One of the strengths of Ryan's book *War and Peace in Ireland* is the way in which all the lies, myths and distortions that have helped to bring about the defeat of the struggle for national liberation are demolished. Ryan's criticism of McAliskey's position over Articles 2 and 3 of the Southern constitution is further proof of this (' "We have been weakened" ', August).

The past had its comforts. With the sophistication and pervasiveness of today's mystification and deceit, understanding who our enemies are has certainly become much harder. Ryan urges Irish nationalists and all the rest of us to face the harsh reality, learn from past mistakes and resurrect the struggle for Ireland's liberation. I would not call this nostalgia—I would call it political and intellectual honesty.

Barbara Rossi *London*

Democracy and the state

Alan Tait asks whether *Living Marxism* favours 'majoritarian democracy' or the fight against 'all forms of legal, social and political restraints which seek to curb human action' (letters, October). It is a question that assumes, wrongly, that the threat to individual autonomy comes from the majority, who as Tait darkly warns 'brought the mullahs to power in Iran'.

Democracy is in its very meaning 'majoritarian', while state power under capitalism is always minoritarian, the subversion of democracy: the substitution of a part for the whole. The majority of people, the working class, are the best defenders of individual liberty because they have no vested interests to protect. Middle class elitists, by contrast, while talking endlessly of liberty, instinctively favour state power, such as written constitutions and social regulations, because only the coercive power of the state can guarantee their subsidised and privileged lifestyles.

James Heartfield *London*

Hurrah for Clinton in Haiti

It would appear in the aftermath of developments in Haiti that your analysis of Western intervention in the third world has been proved wrong. Whilst we can all agree that American adventures around the world have never had the purest intentions at heart, perhaps for the first time we have seen an intervention that has proved positive for the people in the country at the receiving end.

Bill Clinton has indeed been involved in foreign affairs for cynical motives, hoping that a success abroad will boost his standing at home. In Haiti he has certainly achieved a foreign policy success, ridding the Haitian people of a hated dictatorship. In this case, the advantage of the American establishment has also been the advantage of people in the third world. While Bill Clinton has got his foreign policy success, the people of Haiti have got back their elected government. And when the American troops pull out of Haiti it will not be with the same sense of shame they had when they pulled out of Somalia.

These recent events should make you re-examine your analysis. Of course it is the case that Western governments always intervene abroad in their own selfish interests. But now we can see that such intervention also can work to the benefit of people living under regimes like that one in Haiti. If you deny this, you are making a particularly cruel and cynical gesture to the deprived masses of the third world.

James Bradley *Leicester*

Mad buggers and the Bomb

Nigel Wackett (letters, October) is worried about 'mad, crazy buggers "out there"'. I hope by now he will have read the article by Joan Phillips in the same issue ('The sting in the suitcase'). Phillips revealed that the widely reported stories about the Russian mafia smuggling plutonium are a con-trick to encourage unwarranted fear and hostility towards renegade third world countries. Wackett should consider himself well and truly stung.

But I don't want Wackett to get complacent. There are real dangers and they emanate from Western countries like Britain and the USA. It was these big powers that dropped the bomb on Japan, and who deployed nuclear weapons in a war which killed 200 000 Iraqis less than four years ago. As I write, it's conceivable that President Clinton might do it all over again—just for the sake of a few votes in the forthcoming congressional elections.

Wackett wants to equate the 'mad crazy buggers "over there" with the 'mad crazy buggers "over here" '. It's easy to agree that it's a mad, mad world all over, but it doesn't get anyone very far in dealing with the real danger.

Eddie Preston *Bletchley*

Female circumcision

Sandy Deegan ('A civilising mission?', October) exposed how the sudden concern about female circumcision is an act of manipulation which provides Western agencies with the means to exercise greater control over the lives of African people. She made an especially apposite contribution by highlighting the usefulness of post-feminist ideas for the interventionist purposes of Western governments. But, near

the end of her article, she gives the impression of being a bit of a post-feminist herself.

Deegan writes, 'It is one thing for African women to demand the ending of female circumcision. Only they are entitled to decide on this matter'. Perhaps I'm missing something, but isn't this like saying 'it's a black thing: you wouldn't understand'? Deegan seems to be suggesting that only those who've been brought up in a particular culture should be allowed to say whether or not it ought to continue. This in turn implies that all cultures are separate but equally valid—a classic case of the cultural relativism that celebrates the differences between groups of people in the world today.

I, on the other hand, would prefer to emphasise the common experience of living under a system of global capitalism. To put it simply, I'm not afraid to say that Africa is backward, and that this backwardness is the consequence of the domination of Africa by a reactionary system of global power. At the moment there is a concerted attempt to redefine the backwardness of Africa as cultural difference. I'm sure Deegan would not want to get caught up in this line of argument, which ends by saying that if Africans occupy a different (ie, inferior) position in the world, that's what their culture made them fit for.

Cynthia Taylor *Southampton*

Police riot in Hyde Park

After participating in the march against the Criminal Justice Bill, Mick Hume's comment on 'doing it for ourselves' ('Between the lines of the bill', October) has a strong ring of truth to it. Especially when I heard the appalling bias on the 10 o'clock news on Radio Four: 'police *managed* to disperse a crowd of several thousand protesters.' The report took the stance that any large grouping of people takes on a collective intelligence of zero. The real culprits were the police who prevented coaches from entering Park Lane and pushed people back into the park disallowing any normal dispersal after the event.

What happened at Hyde Park was that the police deliberately created and provoked a confrontation to show off their new paramilitary hardware, and to justify their case for increasing state power over our lives. The encouragement of all alternative media networks is our only hope, when the mainstream media dissolves into faceless conformity.

Andrew Cox *Deptford, London*

Cereal killers

A recent trip to Shrewsbury to support Bristol Rovers brought home to me the ludicrous reality of authoritarian trends in the policing of football fans. On our thirsty arrival in the pleasant Shropshire town my friends and I found ourselves locked out of one pub and barred from another because two of us were wearing football shirts. When we arrived at the ground, still without refreshment, we were searched by the local constabulary. What were they looking for? Weetabix.

For the last 10 years it has been a curious tradition for Rovers fans to throw Weetabix around on the terraces when visiting Gay Meadow. On this occasion, the boys in blue were wise to our hooligan intentions and removed from our persons what they described as 'potentially dangerous projectiles'. We refused to have our spirits crushed and once inside the enclosure proudly tied to the fence an emblem of our club—a skull-and-crossbones flag. Our protestations that Bristol Rovers are nicknamed 'the Pirates' held no sway with the police, who ordered the removal of this 'provocative symbol' which was 'likely to cause a violent reaction'. The madness of searching for breakfast cereal and removing pirate flags was apparent to all bar the coppers. Therein lies hope.

Alan Reid *Bristol*

Whale meat again

Anti-whaling has nothing to do with racism. We're opposed to whalers wherever they come from. No one objects to whaling 'cos whales are 'special' or 'cos they have a 'beautiful song'. We object to whaling 'cos we think having a bomb blown up inside your guts and being left to die is a bit cruel. It's also unnecessary, as whale products can be produced artificially and we think whales are more important than hair oil.

We are not responsible for any of the comments in the gutter press—and none of us are saying that Brits are kinder to animals than foreigners. Like a lot of Greens/animal rights people, I'm a vegan, and certainly don't think we've anything to be proud of over here. But the whales issue can focus people's heads on an aspect of cruelty which is so blatantly obvious, you'd be blind not to see it. And then if you've got any sense you can start thinking about other aspects of cruelty, and finally come to the conclusion that the only humane way of life for humans and animals is to stop abusing a lesser-regarded life-form at the expense of a higher-regarded one. Make sense?

Anti-animal reds get right up my hooter. It's not all right to exploit *any* animal—human, fish, cow, rat, spider. We have to get away from exploitation and realise our superior hunting ability does not make us gods.

Cathy Dunlea *Harlow, Essex*

Popular classics

I was always led to believe that the likes of Trotsky and Lenin considered that ordinary working people should aspire to the very highest values of bourgeois art and culture. Yet to read your incessant coverage of 'pop music' in your Living section, it would appear that all your contributors aspire to is a job on the NME.

Do you have to waste two or three pages of your excellent magazine on something your own reviewer described only last month as 'as disposable as a daily newspaper'?

'Pop/rock music' is to serious music what a McDonald's is to a sirloin steak. Tell your reviewers to throw away their *Smash Hits* and *The Face*, and invest in a good introduction to the classics and a real history of music. That way you may be able to educate yourselves as well as the rest of us to appreciate, in the words of Classic FM, 'the world's most beautiful music'.

Don Van Vliet *Leeds*

Re: 'What's soul got to do with it?' (Living, October). The article might more accurately have been titled 'What's *truth* got to do with it?'.

There are no 'loon pants and frilly shirts' on the cover of Sergeant Pepper. In fact there is no such LP as 'Sergeant Pepper'. However, there is a classic Beatles LP, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. And it has *no* loon pants or frilly shirts.

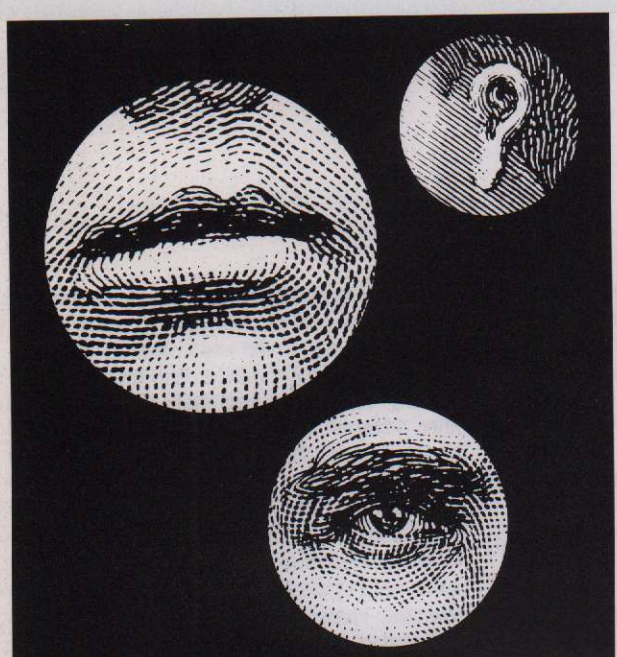
Check your facts, comrade!

A True Beatles fan *London*

PS Tell Neil Davenport to wait till he's out of nappies before writing about grown-up music.

We welcome readers' views and criticisms

Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, *Living Marxism*, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX fax (0171) 278 9844 e-mail lm@camintl.org



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

TABOOS

Who says teenage sex is a health risk?

'Adolescents are increasingly experimenting with sex, smoking and drinking in ways which seem to be heedless of the long-term health consequences', according to the *Guardian's* coverage of *On the State of Public Health,* the latest report by Kenneth Calman, the government's Chief Medical Officer. The other papers reported it only slightly less solemnly.

It is noteworthy that Calman includes sex with smoking and drinking as a problem of public health, and interesting that neither the media nor organisations working with young people have questioned its inclusion. While it is probably reasonable to accept that habitual smoking is damaging to young lungs, and excessive drinking can eventually lead to liver damage, what are the long-term consequences of having sex? Why should young people's sexual behaviour be turned into a public *health* concern?

The authorities might find the sexual antics of the young problematic because they show no respect for the supposed virtues of old-fashioned family values. But there is no consistent medical evidence that sexual activity among teenage, but post-pubescent girls, is physically damaging. So why lump it in with legitimate medical concerns?

Medical studies have notably failed to demonstrate that early sex is damaging once a girl has passed puberty. It is generally accepted that there can be an association between early age at first sexual intercourse and cervical cancer, but that is not the same as saying that teenage sex *causes* cervical cancer. Most medical specialists in this field think that the association is probably due to an accumulation of different factors. Not just sex, but smoking, drinking, vitamin deficiencies, poverty and other factors to do with the environment in which a young woman lives have all been associated with cervical cancer. Indeed the statistics suggest that poverty is a far more significant 'risk factor' than teenage sex, but Calman does not

PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

Beth Adams finds the latest official warnings about the 'long-term health consequences' of adolescent sex about as convincing as the old tales about masturbation making you go blind

draw attention to the 'long-term health consequences' of being poor.

The most convincing research on sex and cervical cancer links the cancer to the virus that causes genital warts. This is one of the most common, often symptomless, sexually transmitted infections. The more partners a woman sleeps with, the greater her chance of becoming infected—unless she uses a barrier method of contraception. So, if cervical cancer is the 'long-term consequence of sex' that is of concern to Calman, an appropriate response might be simply to provide easier access to condoms, allowing young women to enjoy wart-virus-free sex.

Or perhaps teenage pregnancy is the 'consequence' of sex that concerns the government's medical officer. After all, it is sometimes described as a 'health risk' of youthful sex, and family planning organisations have expressed concern that abortion is the most common cause of hospital admission among 15 and 16-year old girls. But again, these don't really stand up as reasons to slap a health warning on sex itself. Pregnancy can usually be prevented by contraception, and the risks associated with abortion in early pregnancy are negligible—less than a trip to the dentist. Furthermore, to say that more young women are treated in hospital for abortion than for other conditions is a shameless misuse of statistical comparison. Only a tiny proportion of 15 and 16-year olds have abortions, but there are very few other reasons why women of that age are admitted to hospital.

If there really were 'long-term health consequences' of teenage sex, they would probably have wiped out much of the human race by now. Teenagers have been having sex for fun for as long as adults have been having sex for fun, with no ill-effects. Moral crusaders may dispute this and claim that teenage promiscuity is a modern phenomenon, but they are undoubtedly wrong. In his seminal study of teenage sex in the 1960s, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*, Michael Schofield may have found that only a fraction of teenagers were sexually active before the age of 16, compared to the 25 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls who have had sex today, but it is arguable that it is Schofield's youngsters, rather than today's, who belonged to the unusual generation.

Studies which compare sexual behaviour today with that before the war suggest that, particularly in rural areas, many young people routinely engaged in the same physical activities which have today been designated 'health risk'. It would be wrong to suggest that young people's attitudes to sex in the 1920s were the same as those of today's *Just 17* generation, but, as Steve Humphries identifies in his delightful account of attitudes to sex earlier this century, *A Secret World of Sex*, actions which would now be regarded as adolescent promiscuity were, for many young people, no ▶

more or less significant than a game of marbles.

Take the account of Bill Griffiths, the son of a civil servant, who explained how children growing up in his North Cumbrian village during the 1920s entertained themselves. Imitating farm animals was a popular game:

'Unused farm buildings were favourite spots, preferably with lofts containing hay. The girls made the suggestion of what we would play, retire to the loft, remove their knickers and lay on their backs with their legs open and shout "ready". One girl in particular would open herself with both hands and made sure you got inside before letting them close on you. I was not too bothered personally and was content just to lie on top but the girls would say, "Come on, put it in properly" and that was that....One girl, a farmer's daughter and somewhat older than the rest, maybe 12, called it "bulling", and would invite me to "bull her". We once did it spontaneously in the dried up bed of a stream while having a walk in the field.' (pp36-7)

John Costello, writing in *Love, Sex and War* about changing values and attitudes in Britain during the war years of the early 1940s, reveals that your grandmother is as likely as you to have had sex as a teenager. No fears about cervical cancer then, and no evidence to suggest its prevalence either. Nor is there any evidence that there are long-term health risks associated with the early sexual activities practised by women living in third world cultures where sex routinely starts with their first menstrual period.

In a way it is wrong even to respond to Calman's report by discussing the heath risks, or lack of them, involved in teenage sex. The real message which the government is concerned to promote through this debate is not medical at all, but moral.

In presenting promiscuity as a health risk, the government Chief Medical Officer's report extends an approach which has become the orthodoxy when discussing recreational sex. Since the panic about the anticipated Aids epidemic began in the mid-eighties, sexually active individuals of all ages have been regaled with warnings about the need for 'safer' sex and the dangers of 'high-risk' activities, most notably sex without a condom. Over the past decade the term 'sexual health' has been widely accepted as a distinct area of medical concern.

This would be fair enough if sexual health was confined to what 'old-fashioned' doctors refer to as genito-urinary problems, or even

to issues which are perceived as 'problems' by those they afflict. After all, some people do catch unpleasant infections, or fall pregnant in problematic circumstances, and it is right that doctors should invest their energies sorting out such problems. But these are by-products of sex in particular circumstances. Why should they lead us to conclude that sex in itself is a problem?

Young people are more likely to have a life-threatening accident in a car than in bed

Treating teenage or other recreational sex as a medical condition with long-term consequences is as ludicrous as treating driving a car as a medical condition with long-term consequences. Young people are far more likely to have a life-threatening accident with a motor vehicle than with a sexual partner, but we do not assume that doctors should assume responsibility for policing behaviour on the roads.

When it comes to sex, however, medical practitioners and officers like Calman have been appointed the final arbiters on what is and is not acceptable behaviour among members of the public. Your inclination to share your bed with a succession of sexual partners is now perceived as a legitimate concern for your doctor to lecture you about, since it puts your health—and possibly the health of others—'at risk'.

In effect, medical professionals have stepped into the shoes of the traditional moralists. Where it used to be only vicars or self-confessed moral conservatives who railed against promiscuity, today it is bodies such as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners—not to mention the government's Chief Medical Officer. But where the moralists could only argue against promiscuity and teenage sex on the grounds that it was wrong, the medics can put on their white coats and argue that it is 'risky'. And in its medical form, the message is far more effective today.

Victorian-sounding moral messages do not have a lot of credibility in our more sophisticated times, but medical advice is sought and obeyed as never before. Telling teenagers that their sexual antics may lead to cervical cancer or fertility-wrecking infections is far more persuasive than threats of hell or accusations of improper behaviour.

This 'medicalisation' of moral issues is now presented in the concerned and modern language of something like a safer sex campaign, but at root it is a tried-and-tested practice. In fact, it is such old hat that it is surprising that more people have not spotted the parallels between the current health warnings slapped on sexual behaviour and those of the past. The claim that teenage sex damages health is about as scientifically valid as the old stories about how masturbation would make you blind.

Nobody today, reading the turn-of-the-century edition of *Virtue's Household Physician,* could fail to smile at the description of the consequences of masturbation. We are told that we will recognise, from his physique, a man who indulges in such 'self-pollution':

'His nervous system feeble, tremulous and broken, his memory weakened and faded out, his eye unsteady and incapable of gazing a friend in the face; his loins and back weakened, giving him the feeble gait of old age; his once erect form cowed and bent; his high sense of manliness all oozed out of him....'

And so it goes on for half a page, ending with a glimpse of the 'chaotic insanity opening before him'. It is doubtful whether many adolescents in the 1990s would be put off the practice of masturbation by reading this dusty old horror story. Yet the government confidently expects us to take on board its equally fantastic claims that teenage sex is a health risk that will lead to cancer, Aids and other modern equivalents of 'chaotic insanity'.

Moral guardians at the turn of the century knew only too well that there was no point in telling young boys to forego the pleasures of masturbation on the grounds that it was wrong—terrifying them about the possible consequences for their strength and sanity proved a far more effective deterrent. Today conservatives understand equally well that there is no point in giving young people moral lectures about their sinful sexual behaviour, but that visions of disease and even death might just scare their pants back on. In some ways it is puzzling that the medical messages about the risks of sex have retained any shred of credibility, given that most people suffer no adverse consequences whatsoever from engaging in such supposedly 'risky' activities. But then maybe we all think that we are the lucky ones—or maybe masturbation really has addled our brains.

ANN BRADLEY

Mad dogs and Englishmen

Those anti-rabies posters stuck liberally around Britain's ports and airports have always struck me as rather daft. OK, I accept that rabies is a particularly nasty virus to contract, and I know that the treatment (injections directly into the stomach with a very large needle) is not something that anyone with compassion would wish even on David Alton. I also understand that the death which results if treatment does not start in time is one of the most agonising exits from this life known.

Still, so far as my personal health worries are concerned, rabies does not rate a tenth of a point on the anxiety scale. And you could say that, as UK residents go, I belong to an 'at-risk' group. I live quite close to Dover, so if ever a gang of rabid foxes, bats or dogs flocks through the Channel Tunnel I will be well within biting range.

According to a flurry of vets who wrote to the *Times* to complain about EU pressure on Britain to allow free passage of animals without the current compulsory quarantine, my complacency is born of the success of British anti-rabies measures. Not so. I have been just as complacent when I have visited Europe and North America, and so has everyone I have ever travelled with.

Ask yourself, do the residents of Calais live under siege from rabid livestock? They do not. You might think twice about cuddling a kitten in Turkey or Greece, but not in France or Germany. Even in the USA, the land of health obsessions and rabid squirrels, people hold out handfuls of nuts to the animals in the parks. So why the bizarre British obsession with keeping our animal quarantine regulations?

Rabies is simply another metaphor for foreigners

You might remember that this was a big issue during discussions about plans for the Channel Tunnel, when designers and engineers appeared on TV to reassure us of a range of deterrents which would be strategically placed throughout the tunnel and around its entrance to keep potentially rabid animals out. This high-level concern with keeping the nation free of rabies has now been going for more than a century. It might have made some sense back in the 1880s, when the virus was untreatable, but that hardly explains the official paranoia about it today.

Surely nobody can really believe that quarantine does what it is meant to anyway. Every summer there are tales of woe as several little Johanns, Pierres and Claudettes are separated from the pet gerbil/rabbit/puppy that they smuggled into the UK. Nobody knows how many unauthorised pets get through UK customs to start happily incubating rabies over here. And what's more, with the exception of the vets in the *Times*, nobody seems to be that bothered.

If the powers that be thought that rabies was a genuine health risk in the UK there would be public discussions about the systematic immunisation of domesticated animals—the standard course of action taken by countries where there is a significant risk of them contracting rabies. Not a peep of that here.

But it would not suit the British authorities to talk about vaccines. Such measures are both expensive and unnecessary. Exclusion sounds a much better policy—especially since, so far as the British authorities are concerned, rabies is simply another metaphor for foreigners.

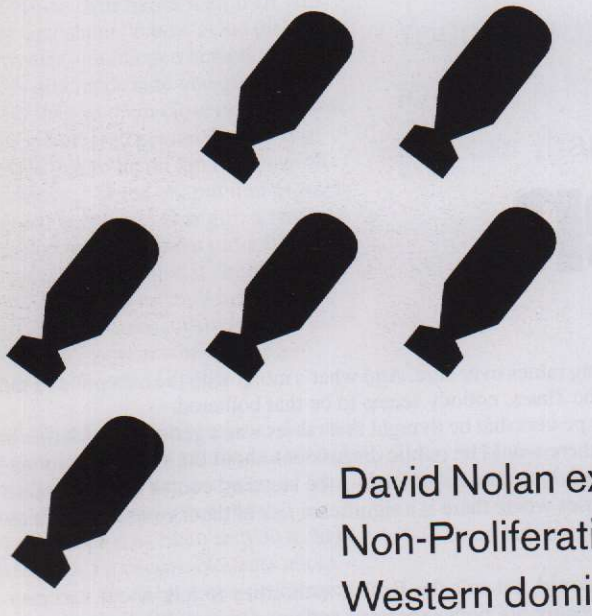
The British carry-on about the importation of potentially rabid pets is a case of displaced anxiety. The animals have become symbols of their owners. The immigration authorities generally have to be diplomatic about dirty foreigners of the human kind, but the system can feel free to vent its spleen on potentially rabid animals, in the name of protecting the beloved British pet.

As you wander through immigration control, you sense that what some of the immigration officers would really like to do is to replace the picture of the snarling rabid dog with a picture of a snarling rabid Johnny Foreigner. It sends a sort of 'Keep out' warning, a message that we are only going to let you in once you have demonstrated that you are house-trained and healthy. The more recent 'lock-them-up-or-keep-them-out' plague panic, directed against people arriving from India, briefly revealed the true sentiments underlying debates about 'foreign' diseases in Britain.

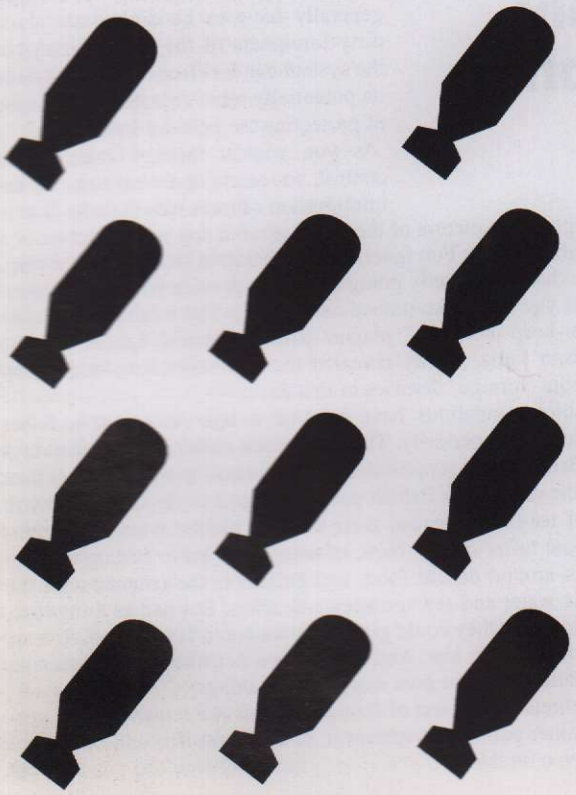
The rabies regulations have become a last vestige of a rather pathetic patriotic superiority. They hark back to the days when everything in Britain was supposed to be so much more civilised than 'abroad'; the days when British people tramped to the Continent with supplies of tea-bags, cleaned their teeth in bottled water, and complained about toilet smells. Now, of course, we leave Britain to wrap our mouths around decent food, and Britain is the country with the undrinkable water and sewage-strewn beaches. But bad as things are, the message is that they could get worse: we could have rabies. At least we have not sunk that low. And nor will we, because we are different, an island nation with our own way of doing things.

The continued exclusion of foreign animals is a rather pathetic gesture by a rather pathetic government, and I doubt if it will be able to hold firm even on this. ●

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty? No



David Nolan explains how the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) makes Western domination of the third world an article of international law



Next April negotiators from 165 countries meet in New York to discuss the future of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). At stake is an agreement under which all but five of them agree not to own, acquire or develop any nuclear weapons.

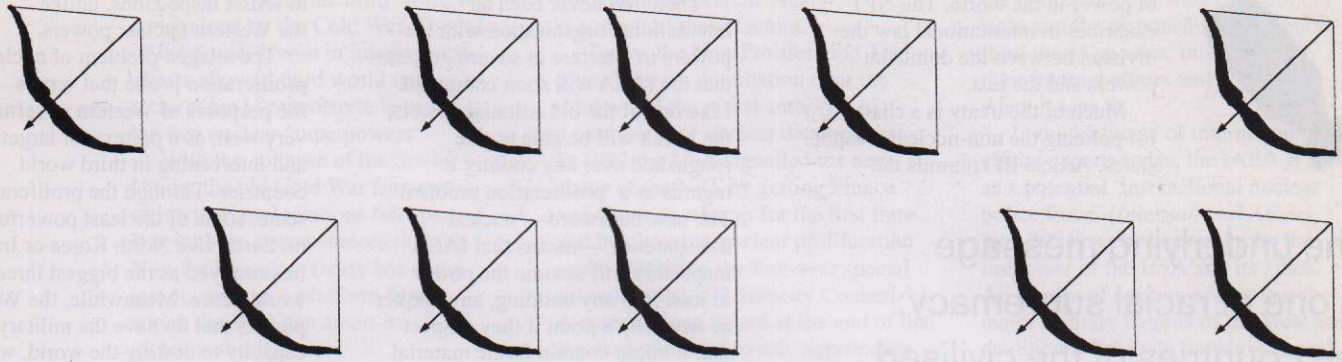
Articles VIII(3) and X(2) of the treaty, signed in 1970, allow for a review every five years and a decision on its extension after 25 years. The previous reviews have all been fairly low-key, ignored by all but the specialist press. More recently, however, as the date for the extension debate approaches, the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons has become a major international issue. Scares about North Korea's atomic programme, India and Pakistan's nuclear status, and the alleged smuggling of fissile material from the former Soviet Union have all made headline news.

The NPT codifies a clear global division. Under the terms of the treaty, only the five countries which tested a nuclear device before 1 January 1967—the USA, Russia, China, Britain and France—are permitted to own nuclear weapons. These privileged five, known as nuclear weapons states (NWS) are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. The other 160 signatories are not permitted to develop nuclear weapons and are subject to inspections, with severe penalties for transgressors. There are 29 countries outside the treaty, several of which, including most of the ex-Soviet states are in the process of joining. India, Pakistan and Israel all possess nuclear weapons and are the major absentees.

The treaty is explicit about what is and is not allowed. Under Article I, the five NWS 'undertake not to transfer...nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices directly, or indirectly; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear weapon state to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or devices, or control over such weapons'. Every other country is not permitted to 'receive nuclear weapons, otherwise acquire nuclear weapons...and not to seek and receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons' (Article II).

Bending the rules

On the face of it, the treaty has a laudable aim: the prevention of a nuclear holocaust by working towards disarmament and keeping the numbers of nations with atomic weapons to a minimum. However, in practice the NPT has not prevented the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Instead it has ratified the right of the major powers



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to dictate who else can and cannot acquire the Bomb.

The energy put into the prevention of proliferation is very much dependent on who is getting the weapons. For much of the past 25 years, Israel and South Africa played vital roles for the West in policing the Middle East and southern Africa respectively. These client states were quickly provided with the technology to build nuclear bombs irrespective of the injunction on the nuclear weapons states not to arm other countries. India, Pakistan and China got their nuclear weapons by playing off the West against the old Soviet bloc to their advantage. Their nuclear arsenals were ignored in the interests of Cold War power politics.

The panic about nuclear weapons being smuggled into third world states by petty crooks with suitcases full of plutonium ignores the realities of building a nuclear weapon. Since the USA and the Soviet Union developed weapons in the 1940s, no nation has done so independently. The Manhattan Project, which produced the American bomb during the Second World War, required the same level of resources as the entire American car industry. To acquire nuclear weapons capacity, every other country has needed considerable help from the nuclear powers. Most recently both Japan and Germany acquired important bomb-making technology from the USA. The question in their case is not whether they can develop the Bomb, but whether it would take them two weeks or two months to build a missile. Yet nobody is demanding sanctions, ordering inspections or threatening Berlin and Tokyo with pre-emptive strikes.

You do not even have to be a major player in international politics to gain bomb-making technology. Tom Johansen works for Frontier Salvage of Idaho. In 1993 he apparently bought all the major components of a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant from a US energy department contractor. The $10m worth of government surplus equipment cost him $154 000 (*Guardian,* 22 September 1994). It seems that lucky bidders in American auctions can now buy the sort of nuclear capacity for which Bill Clinton threatened North Korea with annihilation.

Pie in the sky

The other important section of the treaty is Article VI which calls on all states 'to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament...'. Nuclear disarmament would seem to be an admirable goal, especially for the nuclear weapons states that have put their weight behind the treaty. Yet, during the years that the NPT has been in force, the nuclear powers have continually modernised and improved their nuclear arsenals without incurring any sanctions.

Britain may have put Polaris on the scrapheap, but in the meantime the navy is being equipped with the new Trident submarines, so increasing the number of nuclear warheads at its disposal from 128 to 512—equivalent to about 5500 Hiroshimas. The British government is spending an estimated £33 billion on the project, and has refused to include Trident in any future disarmament talks.

The Americans are equally coy about committing themselves to any further disarmament. At the UN on 26 September, Bill Clinton rejected out of hand an offer from Boris Yeltsin to cut the number of nuclear missiles below the current limit of 3500 each (a level which neither country has got down to in any case). The US government supports an indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, yet refuses even to talk about further disarmament, despite the disarmament clause in the NPT.

The NPT promises much in the way of disarmament and the prevention of proliferation. Yet in reality more and better nuclear weapons are built while only obsolete stock is destroyed. Some small states are harried for allegedly attempting to build a bomb while more powerful nations are given the technology by the back door or—as in Japan's case—straight through the front one.

It is clear that the NPT has nothing to do with getting rid of nuclear weapons. Instead, the treaty is a political weapon which reinforces the division of the world between the haves and the have-nots. Nuclear weaponry has, since the demonstration of US hegemony at Hiroshima in 1945, symbolised the real relations ▶

of power in the world. The NPT enshrines in international law the division between the dominant powers and the rest.

Much of the treaty is a charter for policing the non-nuclear weapon states. Article III commits the non-nuclear weapon states to 'accept safeguards... for the exclusive purpose of verification of the fulfilment of its obligations assumed under this Treaty'. All of the 150-plus non-nuclear weapon states must open any alleged nuclear energy site to inspection by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The underlying message is one of racial supremacy: the countries of the civilised world must control those which cannot be trusted

There has never been an international organisation with the powers to interfere in sovereign states that the IAEA will soon command. Like one of the old colonial powers, the IAEA will be able to ride roughshod over any country it regards as a 'proliferation problem'. The new buzzword—'nuclear transparency'—means that IAEA inspectors will assume the power to look into any building, any bunker or any baby's pram if they suspect that it might contain fissile material or anything else they regard as a problem.

At the recent Geneva preparatory meeting on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, IAEA officials stated that they could now tell from 'a speck of dust' whether there was a nuclear weapon within 200 miles. And of course they want the powers to inspect any 'speck of dust' they choose, in any country apart from Britain, the USA and France. Even though Russia and China are grudgingly permitted to retain nuclear weapons, they are open to IAEA inspections, unlike the Western nuclear powers.

The alleged problem of nuclear proliferation is one that serves the purposes of Western governments very well, as a pretext for targeting and intervening in third world countries. Through the proliferation scare, some of the least powerful states on Earth, like North Korea or Iraq can be portrayed as the biggest threat to world peace. Meanwhile, the Western powers that do have the military capacity to destroy the world, with either conventional or nuclear weapons, can fulminate against the third world in the name of peace, using the NPT as their nuclear blackmail note.

Police the third world

The NPT was a product of the West's desire to police the third world. It was negotiated in the late sixties and signed in 1970, at a time when events such as the Vietnam War highlighted the threat which liberation movements seemed to pose to the US-led world order. But the NPT had little practical relevance at the time, since the West's ability

Why does CND back the NPT?

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) march through London on 29 October was called under the slogan, 'Nuclear free world or nuclear free for all'. CND has produced a 'blueprint' for the march which contains steps towards a nuclear free world. You might think that it would home in on the numbers of weapons held and being developed by the Western nuclear powers. In fact, CND's demands centre on the nuclear weapons that do not exist—the ones that third world countries may get if the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is not renewed next year. CND sees containing proliferation of nuclear weapons as the priority, and is calling for a 10-year extension of NPT.

In September the United Nations held a major preparation committee meeting on the Non-Proliferation Treaty in Geneva. CND and other Western Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) attended under the umbrella of the Special NGO Committee on Disarmament. The discussion at this conference was not about getting rid of the West's huge nuclear stockpiles, it was about the danger of third world proliferation.

In her statement to the conference, Janet Bloomfield, chair of CND, spoke on behalf of 'the largest membership organisation concerned with nuclear disarmament in Europe'. But if nuclear disarmament in Europe is its concern, why doesn't CND focus on campaigning against Trident, Britain's new nuclear programme? Janet Bloomfield mentioned Trident only once, then concentrated on the argument for a 10-year extension of NPT.

Being based in Britain provides plenty of opportunity for having a go at one of the most aggressively militarist and pro-nuclear governments in the world. Yet CND makes the imaginative leap from its rhetoric about disarmament to demanding the extension of a treaty that sanctions Britain's continued membership of the nuclear cartel.

Unfortunately, CND is only one of the organisations that manages to reconcile its anti-nuclear principles with a defence of the status quo in practice. Greenpeace International, also at Geneva, rightly says that NPT is a problem because it legitimises the West's monopoly on nuclear weapons. But it goes on to demand a five-year extension. War Resisters' International (WRI), another well-known voice in peace campaigning, explains that NPT contributes to world instability by dividing the world between the nuclear 'haves' and 'have nots'. Yet still WRI ends up arguing that the treaty be extended, albeit with conditions. But if the NPT is such a problem, why extend it at all?

The arguments of the NGOs can sound very different to those coming from the Western capitals. While Washington wants the NPT extended indefinitely, one NGO seeks to draw the line at 10 years, another at five. But these future distinctions mean little to those against whom the treaty is being used as a blackmail note *today*. The threat of US military action against third world fall-guys accused of violating the NPT, like North Korea, Libya or Iraq, is not years ahead, but in the here and now.

By focusing on the issue of proliferation rather than the nuclear stockpiles of the USA, Britain and France, the peace movement has effectively accepted the agenda laid down by the governments of the West. The Western states want to talk about proliferation because it relocates the problem of war and peace on to the third world. The NGOs are prepared to endorse this assumption, as CND spells out in its proliferation briefing:

'Too many people now believe that nuclear weapons are no longer a problem...[but] the danger is still there in a different form—the threat is proliferation—the spread of nuclear weapons around the world.'

The fact that 'the danger is still there' in the arsenals of the West barely merits a mention these days.

Other NGOs go so far as to specify countries like Iraq and North Korea as the problem. Once campaigning against nuclear war meant marching against the nuclear weapons on British soil, at Greenham Common or Aldermaston. Now fears about imaginary ones come to the fore. It is ironic that while the USA was covering Iraq with shells coated with depleted uranium

to dictate terms to the third world was constrained by the Cold War. The role of the Soviet Union in international affairs allowed third world states some room to manoeuvre between the two nuclear 'superpowers'.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the old Cold War framework of international relations fell apart. It is in these circumstances that the Non-Proliferation Treaty has come into its own, as a platform from which the West can assert its global authority.

'Problem states'

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the USA and its allies have been unable to use the 'red menace' to justify their interventions around the world. They have sought to elevate the threat from the third world as a replacement ideological framework for Western foreign policy. At the same time, the collapse of Soviet influence has given the Western powers a far freer hand to intervene and dictate terms to third world states. The renewed emphasis on the Non-Proliferation Treaty is a result of these factors.

Today, the Non-Proliferation Treaty gives Western domination over the third world the moral authority of a campaign for nuclear disarmament. In 1992 the USA signalled the new status of the NPT by getting France and China to sign up for the first time and by choosing nuclear proliferation as the subject of the first-ever special summit of the UN Security Council. A communiqué issued at the end of that meeting promised to use 'appropriate measures' against any state suspected of violating the NPT. Wearing the badge of peace campaigners, the Western powers can now threaten war against the 'proliferation problem states'—that is, any country that refuses to kowtow to the IAEA.

Peace warriors

The new demand for 'nuclear transparency' further legitimises the division between the decent, responsible governments of the West and the dangerous, untrustworthy regimes of the third world. It reinforces the notion that the West has both the right and the responsibility to police third world peoples, intervene in their internal affairs and take over when it sees fit.

In the language of international affairs experts today, the IAEA is seen as a potential 'international nuclear police force' (*International Affairs*, No1 1994), to be backed up by the firepower of the USA and its allies. All shades of opinion accept that the major military nations of the West are qualified to arbitrate on who can and cannot own weapons. The underlying message is one of racial supremacy: the advanced countries of the civilised world must control those which cannot be trusted.

The new emphasis on the Non-Proliferation Treaty lends a modern legitimacy to old-fashioned imperialist interference in the affairs of the rest of the world. It hangs over the heads of every third world country as a threat of war to be waged in the bogus name of peace. It should not be extended, or strengthened, but abolished. ●

in the Gulf War, anti-nuclear groups were worrying about the threat Iraq might pose to the rest of the world if it got hold of the right materials.

The lurid tales of mad mullahs stealing plutonium from incompetent Russians in order to threaten the civilised world are fairy stories designed to focus attention on the third world when the real threat of war comes from the West. These arguments are nowhere more prevalent than in the NGO disarmament meetings, in the disarmament literature and over coffee with the sincerest of anti-nuclear campaigners. It is a strange obsession. North Korea, for instance, one of the countries targeted by these scares, does not produce enough nuclear energy to light up its own government buildings, let alone to produce a bomb. Yet, in parallel with the Western states, the peace groups endorse the idea that 'over there', in the dark continents, foreigners are plotting to destroy the world.

In the real world, meanwhile, over here, Britain is going ahead with its new multi-headed Trident missiles and America continues to research new nuclear hardware at its computer-simulated labs at Los Alamos. And the Western powers continue to threaten third world states with their huge conventional arsenals, in the name of nuclear non-proliferation. The reality of the threat of war has been turned on its head.

The reason this has happened is that the disarmament lobby has accepted Western assumptions about the source of the world's problems. The NGOs have swallowed the basic idea that some countries are civilised and others are not, that the threat to us all comes from the excitable countries of the third world. Proliferation is something which happens 'over there'.

ILLUSTRATION FROM *BROUGHT TO LIGHT* BY BILL SIENKIEWICZ, 1989

Nuke-hungry mullahs are the stuff of Western paranoia, not the real threat of nuclear war

Campaigns like CND would have nothing to do with the overt racism which some Western statesmen display in their discussion of the alleged threat from the third world. Yet the NGOs have accepted the essentially racial division between the responsible countries of the metropolitan West and the dangerous hordes of the south and East. It is that which leads the anti-nuclear campaigners to defend the West's monopoly on nuclear might by calling for an extension on the Non-Proliferation Treaty. By accepting the basic assumption that underpins the Western agenda, CND and other peace movements seem to have virtually become mouthpieces for Western militarism. Indeed their radical credentials mean that they are more credible mouthpieces than the US state department could ever hope to be.

Kate Margam
No More Hiroshimas campaign organiser

Both supporters and critics of President Clinton's 'Operation Uphold Democracy' in Haiti seem to have forgotten what democracy means, argue Phil Johnson and John Croke

Operation Redefine Democracy

What is democratic about Bill Clinton and his US marines deciding who is to govern Haiti, and dictating what that government's policies will be? What is democratic about the money men of the World Bank being given a free hand to run the Haitian economy and exploit the island's main resource—the cheap labour (around 20 US cents an hour) of its people?

September's television images of US forces being cheered through the streets of Port-au-Prince strengthened the notion that Clinton invaded the island to save Haitians from repression, get rid of the military dictatorship, and restore the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. America's record in Haiti, however, suggests that the real reasons for intervention were very different, and that genuine democracy is the last thing Haitians can expect as a result.

Shortly before the invasion, Clinton went live on US television and pledged to rid Haiti of 'the most violent regime in our hemisphere'. Yet if that is Washington's attitude, why has the US Coast Guard spent most of the past two years rounding up Haitian asylum-seekers and sending them back to the tender mercies of 'the most violent regime' in the Western hemisphere?

In the run-up to the invasion, Clinton cornered any journalist he could find and showed them his photographs of dead bodies, to prove how much he cares for the oppressed people of Haiti. Six months earlier the line was rather different. US embassy officials in Port-au-Prince told visiting human rights observers that there was no political violence in Haiti. The dead bodies lying in the street didn't count; they were just 'exceptions' or the result of 'personal grudges' (quoted in the *Nation*, 14 March 1994). In April, the US embassy cabled Washington that reports of repression were lies: 'the Haitian left...consistently manipulate or even fabricate human rights abuses as a propaganda tool.' (Quoted in *Haiti News Digest*, June 1994)

Alongside the denials of political repression went reports that Haitian refugees fleeing the non-existent violence were just crafty scroungers, *en route* to Florida jubilantly shouting *'Vive la Welfare!'*, as the *New York Post's* cartoonist put it (11 May 1994). Yet by September, Clinton had suddenly discovered that Haiti's military rulers were 'the most violent regime' in the Western hemisphere as a humanitarian pretext for his invasion.

'Your time is up', Clinton told Haiti's junta in September. Since the 1991 coup, the USA's stated aim has been to remove the military leaders and retrain or 'professionalise' the Haitian armed forces. Yet the Haitian army is the creation of US interference in the first place. The military first became a power in Haiti during the US occupation from 1915-34. Throughout the Cold War, the USA was content to see that army, and the paramilitary Tontons Macoutes, terrorise the Haitian population under Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier, dictators propped up by millions of dollars in American aid.

Now the US authorities say they want to retrain the army, but as recently as June of last year American military trainers were in Haiti doing just that for the junta. The generals Clinton now says have got to go are prime examples of US training. The former police chief, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Michel Francois, for example, who is held responsible for organising much of the political violence in Haiti, is described by reporters as a 'shadowy figure'. This 'shadowy' quality could easily be dispelled by a visit to Fort Benning, Georgia, where journalists would find a thick file on Colonel François, since Fort Benning is where he did his military training. Nor did such training trips end with the 1991 coup; according to Papay, a Haitian solidarity group in Miami, US defence department records reveal that at least 10 Haitian military officials have been trained inside the USA since the junta seized power. The military rulers of Haiti were on the CIA payroll for years, and continued to be for some time after the coup.

Restoring democracy in Haiti is supposed to mean restoring to power President Aristide. The USA has never been keen on Aristide, a man with a reputation for radicalism. But given that he was elected with an overwhelming 67 per cent of the popular vote in December 1990, Washington has been stuck with him. The US authorities have made a project out of undermining and domesticating Aristide, to turn him into the sort of tame ruler they are used to dealing with in the third world.

Under President George Bush, the CIA compiled a report suggesting Aristide had a history of mental illness. In October 1993, almost a year

PHOTO: REX FEATURES

US troops restoring self-respect to a Haitan in Port-au-Prince

after Clinton replaced Bush, the report was re-released and widely carried in the press. It told the story of how Aristide had been a patient at a Canadian mental hospital (which he had never visited), and been treated by a psychiatrist, Dr Hervé Martin (who does not exist). Around the time of the invasion, the same smear stories were dragged out again and the CIA report treated as good coin. *Newsweek* flatly stated that 'a CIA report branded Aristide a psychotic' (19 September 1994), while the *Guardian* noted that 'the CIA considered Fr Aristide psychologically disturbed and "unstable"' (20 September 1994). Neither article mentioned that the CIA is known to have been lying.

The constant US pressure on Aristide has paid off. The extent to which the Haitian president has been domesticated during his Washington exile is already clear. When Clinton invaded Haiti without even informing him, the resentful Aristide tried to remain silent; but before long he was publicly giving effusive thanks to the USA. Aristide also acquiesced to US demands for an amnesty for the military leaders. Washington's aim now is to use Aristide's democratic legitimacy to create some stability, while emasculating him politically. As one senior state department official put it, the goal is 'Aristide without Aristidism'.

'Restoring democracy' will mean imposing an economic policy drawn up by Western financiers, and preventing Haiti's government from implementing major policies of its own. At a meeting in Paris on 22 August, a 'structural adjustment' plan for Haiti was discussed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The plan includes sacking around 20 000 civil servants, privatising state-owned industries (described as the 'democratisation of asset-ownership'), abolishing restrictions on the operations of foreign capitalists and making the Haitian government start repaying its $800m foreign debt (*Haiti Info,* 23 September 1994). The Paris plan has been foisted on Aristide as a condition of Western support. The USA hopes that an austerity programme will be more palatable to Haitians if implemented through an elected government rather than a dictatorship.

Far from bringing democracy, the invasion has ensured that the Haitian people are denied control over their affairs and that real power remains in US hands. There is no such thing as democracy imposed from without. Powerful nations do not interfere in the affairs of weak countries in order to hand over to the masses. The USA's aim now is to maintain control through a democratic facade, while somebody is groomed to be Washington's man in Haiti when Aristide's term of office comes to an end.

The real reasons for US intervention in Haiti have nothing to do with democracy. In fact, they have nothing to do with Haiti. Clinton has invaded Haiti primarily because of his own problems in the USA. It is hard to recall now, but Bill Clinton was supposed to be the domestic policy president. During his 1992 election campaign, Clinton's slogan was 'Come home America'. Domestic issues were to be the key preoccupations of the Clinton presidency, with major initiatives to tackle health reform, crime, economic regeneration and job-creation.

Two years on, the *Economist* calls Clinton the foreign policy president. Clinton now stands exposed as having no solutions to America's problems. The centrepiece of his programme, the Health Reform Bill, failed to get through congress the week before the Haiti invasion. Beset by scandal, Clinton commands no authority in American politics, and is the most unpopular president since polling began. He has turned to international affairs as the one area in which he can hope to reassert some authority and win a degree of consensus. That is why it seemed as if US marines had no sooner pulled out of Somalia than they were landing in Haiti—and steaming back to the Persian Gulf a few days after that. Clinton has instinctively grasped that it is easier for his administration to look strong and capable of resolving problems in the shanty towns of Mogadishu or Port-au-Prince than in the urban wastelands of Washington or New York.

For the *New York Times,* the Haiti intervention showed 'what a difference decisive commitment can make in American foreign policy....The denouement is a critical victory for a politically battered Bill Clinton....It was a very large gamble and it worked' (19 September 1994). Clinton had gambled that, despite widespread US opposition to the plan for an invasion, by going in he could rally support, and come out looking decisive. And he appears to have got away with it, in the short term at least. ▶

◀ The secret of Clinton's temporary diplomatic success is that, despite divisions over policy, everyone in the USA and the West agrees that the basic cause of the problem in Haiti is the violent, voodoo-crazed Haitian people, and not an unjust society created and sustained by US domination. There have been disagreements over which Haitians are the biggest problem: the generals, the left-wing president, or the boatloads of Haitian refugees. But once it is assumed that the savage natives are to blame, it follows that some sort of policing operation by the USA is the solution; the case for intervention is made and the only question is when and how.

Yet why should anybody believe that American intervention could be the solution for Haiti? The US record in Haiti is no secret. We are being asked to forget the decades of exploitation and sponsorship of dictators, ignore the repatriation of refugees and the cynical manipulation of Aristide, and believe that Washington now genuinely wants to help. That is only credible to those who accept the basic premise of Clinton's approach: that whatever its problems, the USA is a mature and civilised power which knows what's best for the people of a backward place like Haiti.

The striking feature of debate today is the extent to which leading liberal voices now accept that premise. 'Haiti is a hell hole of modern plagues and ancient curses', says the *Guardian* (30 July 1994). In such a hell hole, everyone is surely damned unless an angel of mercy can save them. For *Newsweek*, the alternatives to US intervention are a 'dysfunctional family' (the leaders of the junta) or 'mob violence' (Aristide's supporters) (25 July 1994). Whether as childlike victims who need to be saved from themselves, or a mob of looters who must be controlled, the media portrayal of the Haitian people has served to establish their inferior status. Some reports even suggest we should feel sorry for the American troops having to mix with such scum: 'The slime could rub off', as one corporal put it (*Newsweek*, 3 October 1994). When US marines shot dead a dozen Haitian police, there was no more reaction in the West than if they had burned out a rats' nest.

Many commentators have even concluded that democracy is beyond the ken of the primitive Haitian people. Edward N Luttwak of the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies, for instance, argues that 'captive to a voodoo mentality that converts not only religion but also politics into superstition, the Haitian majority cannot possibly understand and sustain a genuine democracy' (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1994).

Captive to a racist assumption of their own superiority, Western politicians and journalists seem to think that a military occupation, the imposition of economic austerity and the dictating of Haiti's internal politics is the very epitome of democracy. ●

Phil Johnson is the author of a Campaign Against Militarism briefing paper, 'Haiti: A Lesson in Democracy', which has been carried on pro-democracy radio in Port-au-Prince. John Croke chairs the CAM Latin America Workgroup.

Watching the watchers

Ben Brack reports from Mexico on how student observers from the USA helped legitimise a major electoral fraud

Mary and Yvette had come to the dusty town of Tehuantepec, in the southern state of Oaxaca, to help make Mexico democratic. They were well-off MBA students from California who had volunteered to monitor the presidential elections in August. They didn't know much about Mexican society, they weren't sure what kind of electoral 'irregularities' they were looking for, but they were certain they could do their bit to usher Mexico into the 'new democratic era'. As we spoke, a truckload of heavily armed government troops crossed the town plaza.

The tumultuous events of this year inclined many people in Mexico to at least hope for real change at the elections. The explosion of the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas on 1 January, the huge protest demonstrations, the Democratic Convention organised by the guerrillas in the Lacandon jungle, the new laws and bodies supposed to ensure electoral fairness, all encouraged people to vote, even though polls showed only a minority ever believed that the elections would really be fair.

On election day, in rural areas such as Chiapas, families tramped along mud roads to reach the polling station, and indigenous women queued for hours in the burning sun to vote. In villages under the control of the Zapatista rebels there was almost a party atmosphere, as whole communities turned out in their Sunday best after eight months of military repression and blockade.

Yet the optimism soon turned to bitterness as it became clear that the hoped-for change had not materialised. Ernesto Zedillo, presidential candidate of the widely despised Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which has ruled Mexico for around 65 years, won comfortably with 50 per cent of the vote. The observers conceded that the election had generally been fair, and Mexico's corrupt old regime was declared a born-again democratic government.

How did the PRI win? The usual vote-rigging practices certainly did occur; ballot boxes were stolen, people disappeared from the register, the dead turned out to vote in large numbers, and so on. However, these tricks were not enough to explain Zedillo's victory, and the observers were probably right to say that he got enough votes to win. But that misses the point about democracy in Mexico. While the observers were looking out for ballot boxes with false bottoms and forged ballot papers, they failed to realise that the electoral fraud had already taken place.

The polls took place in an atmosphere of generalised intimidation and corruption. The government manipulated rural subsidies under the PROCAMPO schemes to reward communities supporting the PRI and curtail funding and the settlement of land claims for those supporting the opposition. Some village assemblies were

PHOTO: JOE WOODLEY

San Miguel, Mexico, a stronghold of the Zapatista guerrillas registering its vote against the PRI government

called on the very morning of the elections where long-awaited concessions were suddenly announced by PRI representatives. The week before the polls, changing money in small town banks became impossible—huge queues of campesinos from outlying areas were lining up to get their PROCAMPO cheques.

Municipal employees were told they would have their pay docked or be dismissed if they did not attend PRI rallies. PRI officials corralled voters to the voting booths, stood over the ballot boxes, and often even deposited the ballot papers themselves. Meanwhile, with government-run television warning darkly of violent chaos if the opposition won, heavy police and army contingents saturated opposition areas on voting day.

In small communities and impoverished urban barrios across the country, people had been cajoled, threatened, bribed or misled into voting for the PRI by a formidable array of petty government officials, rural bosses, satellite political parties, trained journalists, policemen, soldiers, employers, sociologists and hired hit men. The cute, liberal electoral observers from the US campuses were simply the icing on the cake.

Around 76 000 national and 1000 foreign observers monitored the elections. By focusing narrowly on the technical proceedings of election day—the stamping of voters with indelible ink, the sealing of ballot boxes, the electoral register, etc—they played a perfect role in legitimising the elections, both in Mexico and abroad. All through southern Mexico I came across American students from groups such as Global Exchange, Grassroots International and Solidarity Summer, all with the same self-assurance about their right to decide what was democratic, the same naivety about the role they were playing.

A visit to a regional Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) office in Tuxtla Gutierrez revealed how the government valued the observers. In a luxurious press suite complete with computers, videos, free fax machines and bars, a horde of glamorous government spin doctors and bearded IFE officials attended to our every need and tried to press-gang us into an official tour of polling stations. The set-up in Mexico City was even more lavish. At a luxury hotel, waiters in bow ties distributed free brandy while government officials assured journalists that the PRI would win easily and advised observers to stay in the central region of Mexico, as places like Chiapas in the south were 'not representative'. A lot of expense to go to perhaps, but good value for money from the Mexican government's point of view, as the presence of observers lent respectability to its election.

The United Nations had already endorsed the electoral register and preparations a week before the elections, and observers from the US-based Carter Center, International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute were falling over themselves to follow suit. The day after the elections, everybody from Bill Clinton to Nelson Mandela rushed to add their endorsements.

These endorsements were played up for all they were worth by the government-controlled Mexican media. American liberals like Mary and Yvette were naively shocked by the way that the TV networks used their statements to support the PRI. Their group, Global Exchange, was so outraged that its observers even staged a protest (illegal for foreigners in Mexico) outside the government-run Televisa network. Their protest might have been more effective before the elections, given the blatant TV bias in favour of the PRI and exclusion of the opposition.

Such ironies are the consequence of a situation in which just about everyone looks to Western agencies to decide what is democratic in a third world country like Mexico. Assured of their moral right to pronounce on Mexico's future despite understanding little of the political realities, liberals like Mary and Yvette are then horrified when what they thought was a mission for democracy becomes an endorsement of an altogether different agenda, set by the US government and its Mexican stooges. ●

With people panicking about everything from crime and disease to family crisis and sexual abuse, it can sometimes seem as if we are all under siege these days. Frank Füredi offers a guide to survival for our fearful times

A plague of moral panics

This is the age of the moral panic. Newspaper headlines continually warn of some new danger which threatens our health and happiness. Television programmes echo the theme with sensational accounts of crime and illustrations of the breakdown of family life. Tory Party conferences excel in this department. Rhetorical images of predatory single mothers, wild and wicked children, and the culture of the working class yob can always be relied on to get the Tory faithful going.

And yet it is not only the media and a small circle of reactionaries who are consumed by moral uncertainties and fear of forces which they neither understand nor control. In every pub or social gathering around the country, it is possible to overhear conversations about crime and the sense of insecurity that prevails in the community. People are ready to swap stories about local vandals and teenagers who are beyond redemption. Mothers will convey their fears regarding the safety of their children. Predictable reminiscences about the good old days are followed by the gloomy assertion that it is no longer easy to tell right from wrong.

From rockers to muggers

In one sense moral panics are nothing new. Throughout this century and before, there have been countless instances of panics over crime. The activities of youth, in particular, have always been presented as potentially immoral and a threat to 'our way of life'.

At one time it was suggested that jazz and rock 'n' roll led to promiscuity and anti-social behaviour. Panics about the 'drug culture' were widespread in the fifties and sixties, when it was widely believed that an entire generation of young people would turn into crazed addicts. The 'sexual revolution' of the sixties was indicted for its subversive impact on traditional values. Independent women were castigated as bra-burners who would destroy family life. In the seventies, the image of the young black mugger became the favourite target of the law-and-order merchants.

However, it would be wrong to interpret the contemporary preoccupation with moral panics as merely the continuation of past patterns. Today we do not just have moral panics—we have a veritable explosion of them. The variety of such panics is now truly phenomenal. No sooner does one panic exhaust itself before another one bursts into the news.

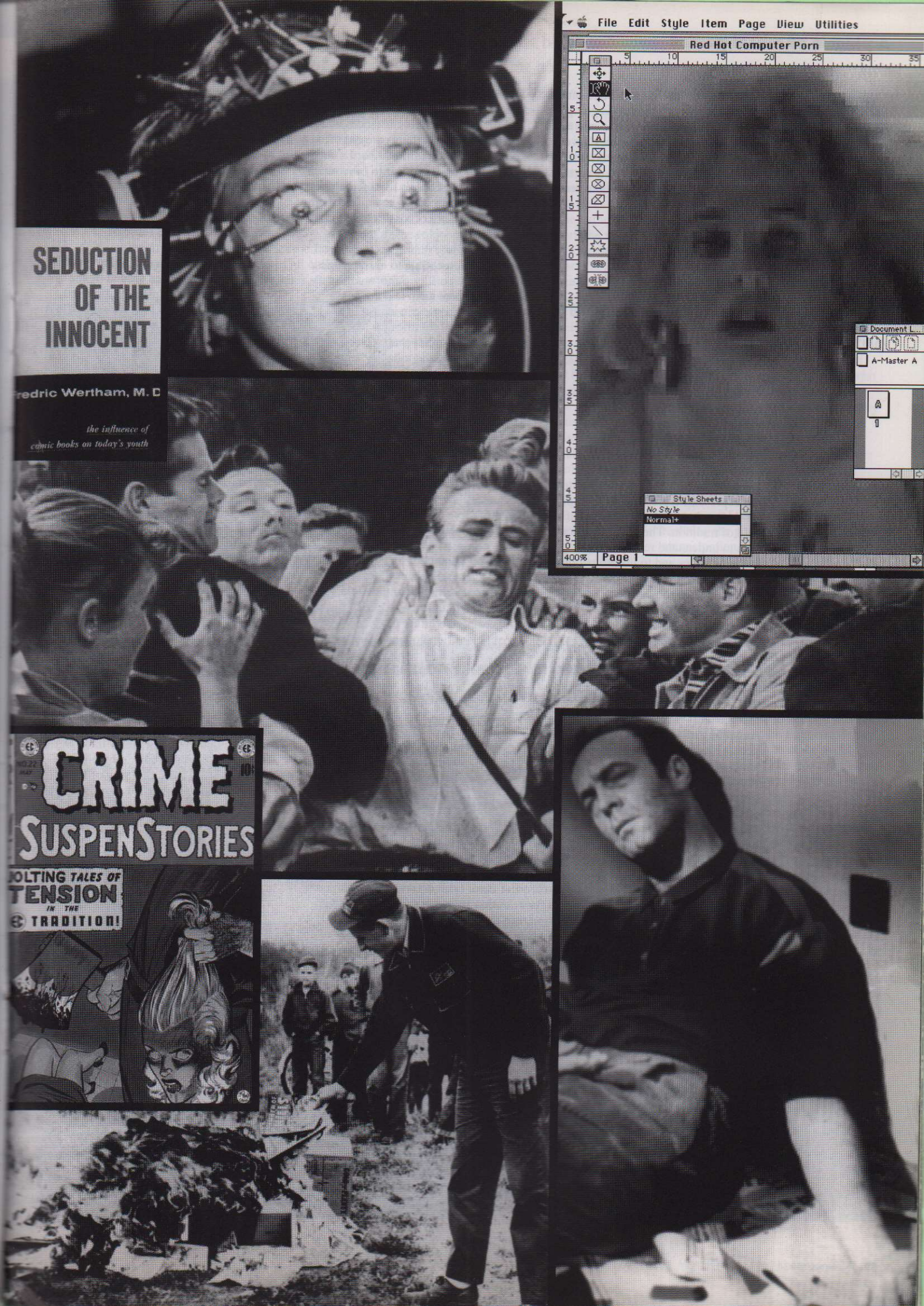
Law-and-order concerns now range from crack-pushing Yardies to children who kill other children. In between crime panics, society discovers yet another source of moral pollution. One day it is video nasties; the next it is computer porn. First the world is informed that it is about to be wiped out by the Aids epidemic; then a fresh threat to health comes from flesh-eating bugs. Throughout the summer of 1993 single mothers, especially ones that left their children at home, were the favourite targets. Since then, there has been an epidemic of child-related concerns, the most fashionable of late being the discovery of bullying in school.

It is not just the quantity of moral panics that distinguishes our era, but the all-pervasive quality of the panics. In the past moral concerns were clearly focused. The target was the promiscuous teenager, the drug addict or the black mugger. Today the range of obsessions has extended far wider, catching many more people in its net.

For example, the major panic about child abuse implicitly indicts the institution of the family, so often upheld as the bedrock of decent society. It appears that everyone is at risk from their own parents and relatives. And the discovery of the dark side of the family calls into question the most elementary of human relationships. Everything a man does with members of his family, from bathing his children to playing games with his nieces, can now be reinterpreted through the prism of abuse. This has taken on the character of a religious revelation. These days it seems people are less likely to discover Christ within themselves than to uncover a hitherto suppressed experience of abuse. Counsellors now ape the methods of religious inquisitors, and encourage the discovery of hidden truths.

Fairytale guidelines

In this atmosphere, where nothing is as it seems, where everyone has been abused and degraded, and where we suspect the worst possible motives behind every human action, the most irrational of fears can thrive. So the present-day obsession with the prevalence of child abuse can effortlessly acquire the form of a fantastic panic about Satanic abuse. Well-educated social workers and related professionals have become so involved with the drama of confronting evil that they seem prepared to believe anything. If a four-year old child being coached by a social worker draws a picture of a man in a hood, it suffices as hard evidence of Satanic abuse. It seems that old volumes of fairytales now serve as training manuals for a new generation of earnest professionals. What distinguishes them is not just their profound gullibility, but a self-righteous contempt for what motivates human beings. ▶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OLTING TALES OF
TENSION
IN THE
TRADITION!

The key to surviving these fearful times is to understand what is going on. How does an atmosphere of panic take hold in this way? Moral panics have tended to occur at times when society has not been able to adapt to dramatic changes, such as during the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution or the modernising trends of the 1960s. When the old system of values has difficulty explaining new developments, society and individuals within it can experience a sense of a loss of control. For the ruling elites, this represents a breakdown in respect for their values and a weakening of the hold of tradition. They find it difficult both to understand reality according to the old rules and to inspire people (especially young people) to have any faith in the old values.

The term 'at-risk' captures the fear within a society that half expects the worst possible outcome in any situation

In such a situation, an entire generation can be accused of undermining society's moral foundations. This panicky response to new developments is by no means a direct consequence of the events themselves. It is evident, for instance, that the term 'sexual revolution' was something of a hyperbole, and that in general the condemnation of the sixties generation has had little to do with what actually happened. Indeed it is this disproportion between what takes place and the reaction to it that endows the response with the character of a panic.

Home alone

The underlying cause of moral panics has nothing to do with the thing on which they focus concern. Children have sometimes killed other children in the past, but such tragedies have never provoked the kind of national reaction that followed the death of James Bulger last year. Such killings remain extremely rare, yet the Bulger story helped to instil a widely held perception that all children were now at risk from a new breed of infant murderers. Similarly there is nothing new about the reality of child abuse—what is unique is the contemporary reaction to it. And it's the same story with home-alone children. When did mothers not leave their children at home on their own? That this everyday act should generate such a strong reaction today cannot be explained by any dramatic increase in the incidence of home-alone children.

These reactions to events reflect far wider concerns about the nature of society today, in circumstances where people sense that things are out of control. When traditional norms and values no longer appear to have much relevance to people's lives, but there is nothing with which to replace them, a tangible sense of loss can prevail. It is when people sense such a loss of control over their lives that they are most susceptible to moral panics. Against this background, an ordinary event like a woman leaving her children at home can assume extraordinary significance as a symbol of social chaos. That is what is happening today, when the problem of a loss of control is intensified by crucial developments at every level of society.

Whose basics?

The problem of a loss of control is experienced most intensely by those who rule society. That is why such issues as law and order, tradition and family values preoccupy the establishment's imagination today. These conservative themes have become even more important because of the general exhaustion of the capitalist political culture. Today there is a manifest absence of vision regarding the future of society. Politicians, ideologues and intellectuals self-consciously eschew any big ideas. This erosion of political ideas also affects conventional moral values and norms. The failure to uphold a system of ideas means that even basic principles have lost their authority. So every attempt to defend standards is doomed from the start because there is no real agreement as to what should constitute those standards today. It is not possible to affirm family values if there is no consensus regarding how the institution of the family should operate.

In today's circumstances, every attempt by conservatives to defend traditional values culminates in a dispute: witness John Major's 'Back to basics' debacle. The absence of any consensus about moral principles and appropriate modes of behaviour makes it difficult for those at the top to regulate relations in society. After all, if the world can see that even the royals do not know how to uphold British family values, what hope has the establishment of instilling its traditional attitudes in Joe Blow and his children?

Even something as routine as the smacking of children can now become a subject of controversy for government ministers like Virginia Bottomley. Such relatively trivial issues explicitly raise the question of what is to replace traditional forms of discipline. Conservative pleas about the need to confirm what is right and what is wrong are not entirely rhetorical. They represent a reaction to a real loss of authority and of moral control.

It is not only those in authority who experience the sense of moral malaise and of things being out of control. It afflicts society as a whole. During the past 20 years, working class organisations and institutions have been destroyed. The sense of collectivity and community which was expressed through a living working class culture has been eroded by the experience of deindustrialisation and the political decline of working-class movements. With the erosion of the ties that linked working people to one another, life has become far more individuated and privatised. Economic instability and communal decline has reinforced a sense of isolation.

The insecurity of life today has contributed towards a situation in which people feel even less in control of their lives than before. This insecurity can easily call into question all of the old assumptions about how we should live. For instance, people have long taught their children that the key to a decent life is to get a good job and a nice house and be better off than their parents were. But if parents are no longer sure of what they can expect, do not know whether they will still have a job next month, it becomes much more difficult for them to know what they can expect for and demand of their children.

Anything a threat

What's different about today is the peculiar convergence of the crisis of authority within the ruling elites and the breakdown of a way of life for working people. The resulting insecurities explain the widespread susceptibility to moral panics.

What might begin as rational anxieties about everyday life now tend to foster a disposition where everything can be interpreted as threatening. The tendency is to attribute the worst possible motives to any acts that appear in some way unusual. The idea of an at-risk society sums up the situation today. The term 'at-risk' captures the fear within a society which half expects the worst possible outcome in any situation. In turn, the concept of risk introduces a new level of fear into society. In the past we reacted to children who were actually hurt. Today we are concerned that children should not ever be at risk of being hurt in any way.

Once the risk that something bad might just happen is equated with it actually happening, then virtually every situation can be defined as threatening. Moreover, actions that in the past would have been considered a routine part of growing up or of

ordinary life can now be treated as raw material for a future moral panic. Bullying illustrates this trend. Until recently this was seen as one of the unpleasant facts of growing up. It was recognised that, as in most human relations, some children suffered more than others, and that a minority were no doubt traumatised by the experience of humiliation. However, now we are told that bullying represents a far greater danger to the lives of all children than hitherto thought possible. It makes you wonder how most people survived this experience in the past.

The current receptivity of individuals to moral panics is based on the convergence of the exhaustion of the elite's vision of society and the breakdown of communities. The consequence of this process is that no institution seems to have the authority to define values and to determine what is right and what is wrong. The absence of such authority means that it is difficult to forge a consensus on even the fundamentals. If such a traditional source of moral wisdom as the Anglican church now finds it difficult to agree on whether women or homosexuals can be priests, it is not surprising that there should be a fierce debate about what is the problem facing family life.

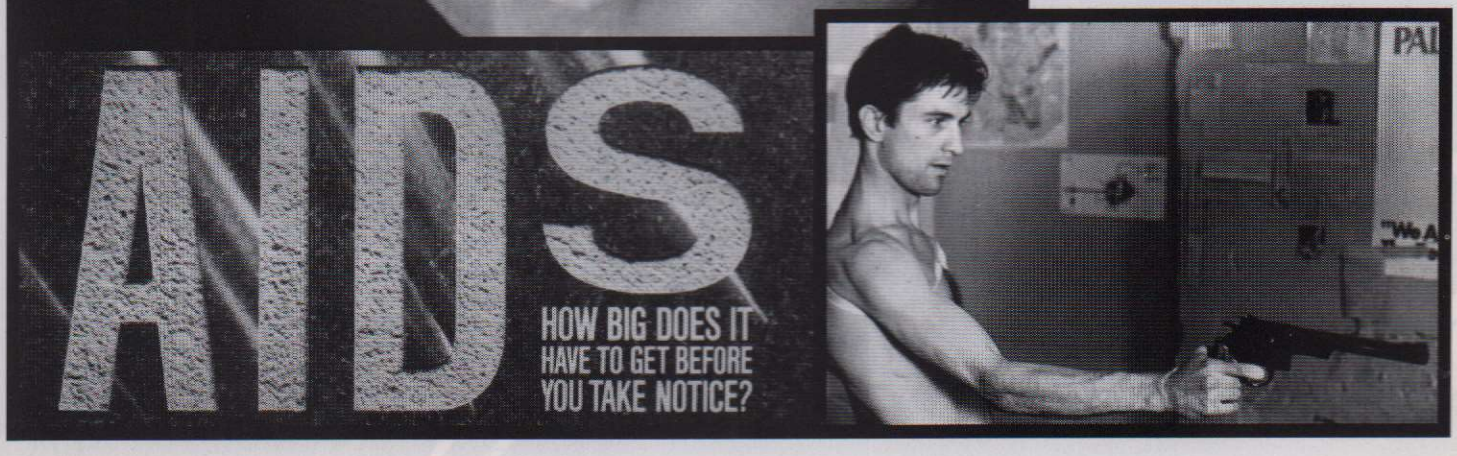
The absence of consensus does not only pertain to the big issues. Parents find it difficult to train their children for everyday life in a climate where nothing is certain and they are encouraged to negotiate. When the act of laying down the law to a child is dismissed as old-fashioned, it is not surprising that parenting becomes a minefield. As with everything else, individuals experience the absence of standards as yet another weakening of their control over their life. The lack of unquestioned common values can be experienced as a life in which people seem to have very little in common. This wider pattern of moral exhaustion can be experienced by the individual as a heightened isolation from the rest of society. It is this threatening vision which makes everyone just that much more suspicious of their neighbour, and just that much more ready to believe the next scare campaign produced by the media.

Unfortunately there are no ready-made solutions to the problem of moral panics. Telling people to look at the facts or to think rationally provides no easy antidote to fears generated by a society that feeds on privatised insecurity. Those of us who are genuinely concerned by the way in which people's lives are blighted by the culture of hysteria must question the peddlers of the 'you-are-at-risk' philosophy at every opportunity, over every panic. But most important of all is the need to evolve an alternative vision of the world, one in which the fundamental values consistent with realising the potential for human emancipation are boldly promoted.

Collective priority

If we are to overcome the individual insecurities of our age, there is one value which most needs to be upheld: the idea that the collective, public need must always have priority over private profits and the privileges of a few when it comes to using the resources of society. From that collective standpoint, it becomes possible to say definitively what we believe to be right and wrong. It becomes possible to make people more aware of the links that bind them, and to limit the destructive sense of isolation.

Creating a contemporary sense of collectivity can be the first step towards making us all more confident of our ability to cope with a changing world, less suspicious of one another, and less prone to the influence of moral panics. That way lies the best chance of climbing out of the lonely holes into which we so often dig ourselves in these fearful times. ●

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Michael Fitzpatrick sees the 'British underclass' as both a metaphor and a scapegoat for the malaise of society

Yob cultu

'A predilection for irresponsible copulation among the ignorant and economically unviable lower orders, is the thrust, as it were, of Charles Murray's argument that they are trapped in a mire of their own making.'
Report on the *Sunday Times'* British Underclass Forum, *Sunday Times,* 18 September 1994.

'It is grotesquely irresponsible for him [Murray] to write off a whole swathe of people who—while they do constitute a parasitic and predatory cancer—are themselves the victims of high unemployment, the increasing disparities in wealth and income and, as the sociologist David Downes once put it, "the Faustian experiments in social engineering of the Conservative administrations since 1979".'
John McVicar, Murray's adversary in the British Underclass Forum, *Sunday Times,* 4 September 1994

Charles Murray, American academic and ardent promoter of family values, faced John McVicar, once an armed robber, now a liberal commentator on issues of law and order, at a major public forum on the 'British underclass' in London in September. While Murray demanded welfare cuts and other measures to penalise single parenthood and stigmatise illegitimacy, McVicar suggested that 'we should reach out and help' marginalised groups in society.

Yet, as the above quotations show, when it comes to the 'underclass', these two adversaries share much common ground. Both are agreed that the 'underclass' is a race apart, and a menace to civilised society. It is striking that the liberal McVicar outdoes Murray, the professed reactionary, in the vehemence of his biomedical metaphors. Indeed if any public commentator referred to members of an ethnic minority in such abusive and contemptuous terms as 'a parasitic and predatory cancer', there would be a flood of demands for action under the race relations legislation.

The debate about the 'underclass' has been gathering momentum for the past five years. In 1989 the *Sunday Times* first invited Murray to Britain, to develop in the British context the pro-family argument for which he had become well known in the USA. He identified three significant trends—higher rates of illegitimacy, rising crime and increasing economic inactivity (not merely unemployment, but refusal to work, especially among young men). He concluded that 'Britain does have an underclass, still largely out of sight and still smaller than the one in the USA. But it is growing rapidly' (C Murray, *The Emerging British Underclass,* 1989).

Predators, scum, parasites

Returning in 1993, he found that his worst fears had been confirmed and that all three dangerous trends had worsened (C Murray, *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens,* 1994). His only consolation was that the public mood in Britain had become more sympathetic towards his theory of the 'underclass' and more amenable to his draconian policy solutions.

One of many articles and television features on various aspects of the theory of the 'underclass' in this period particularly caught my eye. Last year the *Sunday Times* gave frontpage treatment to an account of how 'Britain is becoming overrun by yobs' focusing on 'the notorious drug-dealing area around Sandringham Road' in the east London borough of Hackney (31 January 1993). Here was an area in which violent crime was endemic, crack dealers operated openly 'day in, day out', and the police, 'instead of stamping on the problem' were merely 'tip-toeing' around it. Here was an area 'on the first stage of the slope into crime and chaos'.

The author, journalist Keith Austin, had recently returned from a spell

re clash

in China, an experience on which he now looked back 'with different eyes':

'There children respect their elders, understand the importance of education, and know that if they rob, murder or rape, they will be shot. I am not advocating that here. Not yet. But it is time we took a stronger stand against the scum rising in our society.'

Austin proceeded to discuss some measures to deal with this social menace: corporal and capital punishment, castration for rapists, and the revival of national service and Sunday School.

I had read similar articles about drug wars in Manchester's Moss Side, ram-raiders on the Meadow Well estate in Tyneside and joy-riders in Blackbird Leys in Oxford. The tone of anger, fear and hatred degenerating into a bilious rant was already familiar. And, though I was sceptical about these accounts, I had no first-hand experience from which to contradict them. Sandringham Road, however, I know well.

The first place I stayed when I came to London more than 20 years ago was just around the corner from Sandringham Road. For nearly a decade I have worked as a GP in Stoke Newington, a few streets further north. I have often met friends in The Norfolk on Sandringham Road, in The Mitford on adjacent Amhurst Road, or in the local soul food cafe, once named by Lenny Henry as his favourite London restaurant.

My first reaction to Austin's piece was one of outrage. *Who* is he calling *scum?* The people he characterises as a sub-human rabble are my patients, my friends, ordinary people, many of them struggling to get by in difficult circumstances. One might well also ask, who is *he,* writing for the Murdoch press, which has won international notoriety for its sewer-scraping journalism, to call anybody scum?

The casual use of dehumanising terms—scum, predator, parasite—in referring to a particular section of ▶

PHOTO: BBC TELEVISION

society recalls the Victorian preoccupation with the 'residuum', which occupied a position of moral opprobrium similar to that of today's underclass. With their great interest in sanitary engineering, the Victorians derived the term from the solid matter that sank to the bottom in tanks of sewage.

Labelling people as sub-human is the first step to treating them as less than human

Radical social reformers devised schemes for disposing of the residuum by forced emigration or labour camps. Winston Churchill proposed a policy of forced sterilisation to stop the scum breeding. The Nazi Final Solution was the logical conclusion of this sort of approach to social problems in particular historical circumstances. Labelling people as sub-human is the first step towards treating them as less than human.

On further reflection, my outrage turned to irritation at Austin's ill-informed outburst. His level of ignorance of local realities is indicated by his innocent criticism of the police 'tip-toeing' around the drug problem. As everybody in Hackney apart from him knows, several officers at the local Stoke Newington station are currently under investigation on allegations of involvement in drug dealing in Sandringham Road.

Austin's depiction of Sandringham Road as a British equivalent of the south Bronx simply bears no relation to reality. What strikes me about the area is how little it has changed in the two decades I have known it. It has always been rather poor and run down; there has always been an element of more or less surreptitious drug-dealing; no doubt it was never very safe for people as streetwise as Austin to go nocturnal wandering. Unemployment is higher and even Margett's historic jam factory is long gone; poverty may well be more pervasive. But not all is dereliction. Where there were once crumbling terraces, there are now new maisonettes and other improved amenities.

Middle class fears

What is striking about Austin's account of Hackney, and similar 'underclass' articles, is their tendency to exaggerate and amplify the scale of social problems out of all proportion to reality. Just as Austin sees crack-dealers and muggers and burglars on every corner down Sandringham Road, so other commentators lump together the widowed, the divorced and the never-married to create the impression that the family is disintegrating. Others accept at face value crude statistics that confirm the impression of rampant crime, while ignoring figures that contradict this impression. Loose correlations, such as that between rising illegitimacy and rising crime, are widely accepted as proving causation.

What is really behind the 'underclass' debate? On closer inspection it seems to reveal more about the concerns of the middle classes than it does about the real problems of inner-city areas. Austin quotes favourably from a book by the conservative social policy commentator Digby Anderson entitled *Loss of Virtue:* 'what attracted me was the sub-heading: *Moral Confusion and Social Disorder in Britain and America*. It seemed a direct reflection of the public mood.' This statement certainly provides some insight into Austin's mood. It seems that he is projecting the prevailing sense of loss of moral cohesion among the higher orders of society on to the 'underclass'. In a society widely perceived to be in decline, the theory of the 'underclass' provides both a metaphor and a scapegoat for the process of decay.

Wish-fulfilment

In recent debates about the 'underclass' there has been a significant shift away from a narrow focus on marginal social groups. In Murray's recent update on his apocalyptic warning to the British people, as well as discussing the 'new rabble', he also identifies the 'new Victorians', among the professional and managerial elites, as a source of hope for the future (*The Crisis Deepens,* pp15-17).

While the 'new rabble' is descending further into depravity and sloth, the 'new Victorians' are, according to Murray, rediscovering the joys of traditional family life and old-time religion. Furthermore he anticipates a revival of the 'intellectual respectability of concepts such as fidelity, courage, loyalty, self-restraint, moderation, and other admirable human qualities that until lately have barely dared speak their names'.

Though I cannot claim the same familiarity with the inner life of the upper classes as I have with Sandringham Road, I rather suspect that Murray's portrayal bears as little relation to reality as Austin's. Again it is more revealing about its author's mental state, illustrating the wish-fulfilment fantasies that arise from mainstream theorists in their current state of pessimism and despair.

Despite their interest in correlations, one that has not occurred to the theorists of the 'underclass' is that between the rise of their theory and the perception of Western decline. So these debates began earlier in the USA, where the world recession has had a major impact since the mid-1970s and urban social tensions have always been more acute. In Britain, the discovery of the 'underclass' coincided with the destabilising effects of the end of the Cold War and the onset of slump.

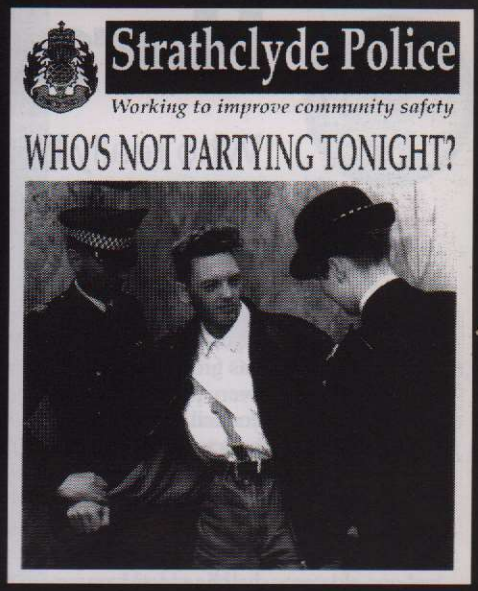
Critics of masculinity

During the postwar decades, poor inner-city areas never went away, but they were not at the centre of public debate. There was a sense that society as a whole was moving forward and that things would gradually improve. Schemes for 'slum clearance' and other welfare reforms were based on this presumption. Today, when there is a widespread perception of decline, attention shifts to the most visible manifestations of the failure of the system. Those who are most threatened by economic and social instability, the poor and marginalised, have become at once victims of and scapegoats for the failures of the system.

The image of the yob now dominates the 'underclass' debate. As Rosalind Coward has written, it 'seems to encapsulate the real and imaginary fears of our times' (*Guardian,* 3 September 1994). The campaign against the 'yob' unites the Tory prime minister John Major and veteran feminist Beatrix Campbell, Charles Murray and Sue Slipman, patron of single parents. For Coward the yob 'is the classic scapegoat, lugging around the sins of our culture while the rest of us look sanctimoniously on'. As she observes of the new convergence of feminist and reactionary ideas, 'a critique of masculinity which was originally intended to undermine the claims to male power has now become a way of attacking the least powerful men in our society'.

The 'underclass' debate has an ambivalent character. On the one hand, it helps to present the crisis of an economic and social system as a crisis of individual morality. By focusing on issues of morality, it diverts attention from the real problems of the market system, and creates division, conflict and scapegoats. On the other hand, the focus on the 'underclass' exposes the weakness of the established order. It is not a very impressive advertisement for 15 years of Tory rule that the party can only move forward by launching a campaign against a 'yob culture' which has apparently developed during its time in office. The inevitable conclusion is that the real problem lies not in the 'underclass', but in the system itself, and its loss of dynamism and moral authority. ●

Neds under the bed



Dolan Cummings reports from Glasgow on how the police have profited from a scare about tooled-up young 'neds'

Late at night a young man walks home through the mean streets of Glasgow. As he approaches a corner, he hears the buzz of a surveillance camera as it turns to face him. Then suddenly there is a screech of tyres and the sound of footsteps. He begins to run, but a hand grips his shoulder. 'Right, ye wee bastard—in the back of the van.' The young man breathes a sigh of relief as he realises that he is being arrested. 'Thank God', he exclaims to a burly policeman, 'I thought I was gonna be chibbed!'.

Glasgow is known as 'knife city'. The current version of this urban myth is that the city is blighted by knife-wielding 15-year olds—'neds'—intoxicated on Buckfast tonic wine and ready to rumble. Innocent citizens may be attacked at random and scarred for life. The panic about neds echoes the scare stories about razor gangs in the fifties and sixties. Like then, the hype far exceeds the facts. But this time around, more people are ready to believe it. The idea that the police are there to protect us is gaining credibility even among young people who would previously have rejected it.

Last year Strathclyde police launched Operation Blade, a campaign which police claimed would 'tackle "the knife-carrying culture" prevalent with young people in the west of Scotland' by encouraging them to hand in their blades. Rangers and Celtic football clubs signed up for the campaign. In March 1993, 4569 knives were melted down into a replica of a fifteenth-century bas-relief, entitled 'Allegory of Agriculture'.

Under the cover of Operation Blade, Strathclyde police began gathering new powers and introducing new controls over young people in Glasgow. Between March and May 1993 alone, nearly 30000 were stopped and searched. Police records show that 548 weapons were found. Metal detectors and closed circuit television systems (cctv) began to appear in clubs. In May 1994, a new law decreed that police in Scotland no longer have to prove that a knife is being carried as a weapon. The onus is now on the carrier to prove that his intentions were innocent. The influence of Operation Blade is so widespread that Strathclyde chief constable Leslie Sharp has boasted 'you try to buy a kitchen knife in Safeways now. If you are under 16, you won't get it'.

At the same time as Operation Blade, a curfew was imposed on Glasgow night clubs, which curtailed opening hours and barred entry after midnight. The CityWatch cctv system is now operational in the city centre (staffed by disabled people), and six more surveillance schemes are planned. After four drug-related deaths at raves in Ayrshire, Strathclyde police are gaining more ground with claims that tighter control of music venues is essential for the health and safety of young people.

Previous crime panics focused on a narrowly defined criminal element such as razor gangs. But the new folk devil is a poorly defined fusion of rave-goers with the traditional Glasgow ned. The fuzzy image of the target allows the police and their media supporters to suggest that all young people are dangerous, either to themselves or to others.

The police have undoubtedly gained street credibility in Glasgow through their campaigns of the past 18 months, even among young people themselves. Only four complaints were recorded during three months of intensive stop and search. Many more clubbers now seem to accept the exaggerated claims about neds and nutters. Although clubbers opposed the imposition of the curfew, many rejected it on the grounds that it was not enough to solve the problem. 'A ned is a ned...any old time of day', said the author of a club-goer's opinion piece in the Glasgow *Evening Times:* 'It's crazy to believe that if you stop the nutters from dancing to Kylie Minogue a whole hour earlier they will forget about the knife in their pocket and go home quietly minding their own business.' (23 May 1993)

On the streets of late-night Glasgow, it seems that traditional stranger danger has now been replaced by peer fear—anxiety about members of our own generation. And the new peer fear often outweighs hostility to the police. As a result, an intrusive surveillance scheme like CityWatch now enjoys broad support, or at the very least acquiescence.

Suggest that the increasing use of surveillance cameras is dangerous or authoritarian, and you will probably be accused of paranoia—despite the fact that such measures are justified on the premise that someone on the street is out to get you. It is considered reasonable to fear footsteps behind you on Argyle Street, but hysterical to worry about the police video-recording your movements—as they did on the march by striking signal workers and the recent M77 protest in Glasgow.

Young people from different backgrounds see the bogeyman through different eyes. To the most sheltered student types, the problem is simply working class youth: a ned is anyone in an Adidas ski hat. For the more streetwise, the threat comes from people who go to bad nightclubs or take the wrong drugs. These are harder to pick out in an ID parade, but you can't deny they exist, man.

To be fair not everybody is willing to accept what is going on. Those bearing the brunt of the police offensive are sick of being pushed around. Liam from Castlemilk is often lifted and searched in the back of a police van. He says that students who cross the road when they see him coming deserve to get battered. Unfortunately it's not just paranoid students who find Liam more threatening than the police these days.

In a way young people in Glasgow have always accepted the hype about violence in the city. But in the past the city's bad reputation was a source of pride rather than anxiety. Teenage boys would argue passionately that Glasgow was 10 times more dangerous than New York, Sao Paulo and Beirut put together. There was an element of glamour attached to the urban myth.

Today the glamour has gone, and the city streets are a source of anxiety rather than excitement. Egged on by those in authority, almost everyone has found somebody to be scared of. In this climate of fear, more young people appear willing to exchange whatever freedom they have for a false promise of security under the watchful eye of the increasingly powerful Strathclyde police. ●

Harassment—says who?

Who really benefits from the fashionable preoccupation with harassment at work? Juliet Connor investigates

Harassment is the workplace issue of the 1990s. A veritable industry has grown up around it. Practically every trade union, employer and local council now has an anti-harassment policy. In one Sheffield Employment Department office there are as many as a dozen 'harassment advisers' to deal with complaints. There are harassment counsellors, harassment helplines and harassment training groups. Guidelines give employees checklists so that they can work out whether or not they are being harassed. There's even money to be made: Midland Bank sells its training programme to other companies that don't yet have their own.

Do we really need all of this attention to harassment today? According to many studies, it's not enough. One 1993 survey, conducted by the Industrial Society, found that more than half of all working women felt that they had been sexually harassed by a male colleague. The number of claims of sexual harassment has increased by 50 per cent over the past year. Many more cases are assumed to go unreported. According to all sources, harassment is an escalating problem. But what do they really mean by harassment?

The categories of people who are considered targets for harassment are being broadened all of the time. Harassment is no longer simply an expression of sexism or racism. Anti-harassment policies have extended the boundaries of victim status to include not only every recognisable group at work, but just about every individual too. The National Union of Teachers has a policy which illustrates this move towards an all-inclusive definition of harassment:

> 'Harassment is behaviour which has the effect of diminishing a person's position, status or esteem. It is imposed on an individual by another on the basis of their sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion, cultural or language difference, age, HIV status, or other medical conditions, physical attributes, class, trade union membership or political affiliation.' (*Harassment: A Union Issue,* August 1992)

It seems that everything from race to 'physical attributes' provides a basis for harassment. Even that white, heterosexual male in the office, who could pass the Richard Littlejohn test of normality, could now be considered the victim of harassment if someone drew attention to one of his 'physical attributes', like ginger hair or a regional accent. The introduction of this kind of policy means that, in the words of the Sheffield Employment Department's new guidelines, 'anyone can find themselves the target of harassment', from black people to old people and even members of the Tory Party.

The kind of behaviour considered to be harassment has also been broadened. Groping and physical assault are still the most serious forms. But many kinds of verbal and non-verbal behaviour have now been included.

The definition of harassment has always included aggressive language. Today it can also mean using language which is claimed to be affectionate. In the same Industrial Society survey, *No Offence?,* 54 per cent of the women said they had been sexually harassed by being called 'dear, love, girl, etc', and being looked up and down.

Builders' bottoms

But harassment is not just the use of patronising language. It can now mean using everyday words. For instance, Hackney Labour council includes the 'use of sexist language' in its harassment policy for employees. Here, sexist language means words such as 'mankind, manpower, man-made, man hours, he, his', and job descriptions such as dustman, foreman or housewife. Using these words is no longer simply considered sexist, but now constitutes sexual harassment by council employees, whether in a spoken or written form. This presumably means that by writing down 'housewife' instead of 'consumer', you are guilty of harassing women. It seems that you no longer even have to be in the same room as someone to sexually harass them. The best option would seem to be to keep your mouth shut altogether.

However, even saying or writing nothing is no guarantee that you are innocent of harassment. The guidelines produced by Midland Bank for their managers have a category of 'non-verbal' forms of sexual harassment which is fast becoming the norm:

> 'Offensive letter/memos
> Gestures
> Staring/leering
> Pin-ups
> Offensive publications
> Unsolicited and unwanted gifts'

('What is harassment?', Midland Bank plc)

This kind of definition has become so commonplace today that it rarely raises an eyebrow. But on closer inspection, it becomes clear just how far-reaching these definitions have become. Leering is a prime example. Who is to say what is 'leering' and what it is not? And even if someone is leering, what does this really mean? He has not done anything physically. He hasn't even said anything. He has just got a few sordid ideas going through his head and a facial expression to match. Not content with telling us to mind our language, the harassment experts can now apparently read our minds. In another context, they would be called thought police.

Harassment has even been reduced to a matter of rudeness. Wolf-whistling is outlawed on many building sites because women passers-by feel harassed. Sheffield council has ordered manual workers to pull up their jeans and cover up their bottoms (though how the sight of a builder's arse can be interpreted as a sexual advance is anyone's guess). One expert has extended the definition of sexual harassment to encompass just about every type of behaviour imaginable:

> 'Sexual harassment may be likened to a more general class of inconsiderate behaviour or gross impoliteness which is commonly, but not exclusively, directed by men against women. It includes standing too close to another, presuming an inappropriate familiarity, staring at strangers, gate-crashing another's sphere of activities, and putting them in a position of having to say no.' (J Minson, *Questions of Conduct,* pp101-2)

These days it seems that just entering into conversation with a colleague can be hazardous. In this climate, everyone is a potential victim. And if harassment can mean something as mundane as standing too close or 'staring at strangers', then we are all potential harassers too; especially since the

WEEPING WOMAN, PABLO PICASSO 1937, ANTHONY PENROSE COLLECTION

emphasis is now laid less on what the perpetrator actually *does* and more on how the victim *feels*. According to the Transport and General Workers' Union, 'what is important in any definition of sexual harassment is the complainant's perception of the behaviour' ('Dealing with sexual harassment', 1993). Definitions of harassment have become so subjective that it is almost impossible to draw a firm line between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. What one person finds unobjectionable another may find intolerable. And if harassment means feeling pestered, uncomfortable or even fed up, it's enough just to walk into the office to feel like ringing up a 'harassment adviser'.

Who's harassing who?

The most obvious problem with such all-embracing harassment policies is that they appear unworkable. What is 'inappropriate familiarity'? If you are standing next to someone, how close is too close? Must we all walk around the office with a ruler to measure appropriate distances from one another? Enforcing these kinds of policies is just as difficult.

If every new-style harassment policy were rigorously enforced, companies would need a lot more than a dozen harassment advisers. Everyone in the workplace would either be suspended pending the outcome of their tribunal or in counselling sessions. Office communication would break down entirely. The kind of behaviour which is defined as harassment in many guidelines is often part of the rough and tumble of everyday working life. From hospital wards to the trading floors of merchant banks most women just give as good as they get and don't make a fuss. So why worry about harassment policies?

The new all-encompassing policies against harassment may be unworkable, but they still have an effect. Indeed, the consequences of the preoccupation with harassment are more dangerous for people at work than a leer or a pin-up could ever be. And the more the definition of harassment is broadened, the more dangerous it becomes.

Through the preoccupation with harassment, the problems that people face at work are being redefined. The focus of attention and debate is being shifted away from issues of pay, ▶

hours and employment rights, and towards matters of personal conduct.

According to the Association of University Teachers (AUT), harassment is a big problem because it can cause 'an intimidating and stressful work environment, and may threaten job security or promotion prospects'. People do indeed endure considerable stress and insecurity at work today. But this has nothing to do with harassment

The perfect politically correct excuse for disciplining workers

by other employees. In today's economic climate, employers are holding wages down and obliging employees to work longer and harder for no extra money, all in the name of 'flexible' working practices. More and more people, especially women, work on short-term contracts or on a part-time basis. These are the real cause of insecurity at work. Yet we are not issued with guidelines on how to survive on £100 a week. And there are no checklists designed to tell you if you are being ripped off by your boss. If anyone is a threat to security at work, surely it is him. Yet, according to the reams of anti-harassment literature, you should be looking over your shoulder and worrying about the person at the next desk.

Them and us

The focus on harassment preys on people's insecurities at work and relocates the problem on to other employees. It helps to reinforce a tense atmosphere in which employees can become preoccupied with one another's behaviour. Workplace relations have usually been organised along 'us and them' lines, where 'us' means the workers together and 'them' meant the management. By contrast, in the age of the all-embracing harassment code, every other worker is being defined as 'them'—potentially hostile, dangerous and ready to pounce.

Where does the employer fit into all of this? Through the new anti-harassment policies, employers have been given the moral authority to police workplace relations. If an employee feels harassed, the boss is supposed to be called in to protect her and defend her rights. If there is a dispute between workers, it is deemed the responsibility of management to intervene and pass judgement for the apparent good of all concerned. It is a strange situation where the more senior a manager is, the more heightened sense of equality he is assumed to have.

All of this comes at a time when employers and managers are eager for new ways to monitor and impose more discipline on the workforce. The moral authority invested in them by the harassment industry gives managers the ability to police the workplace in a way that was not possible before. After all, if managers are presented as protectors of the workforce, they have a responsibility to keep a much closer eye on what goes on. By means of the anti-harassment machinery, employers can police our behaviour, they can police our conversations and, if Midland Bank's policy is anything to go by, they can even police our minds.

Trade unions would once have opposed management attempts to police the workforce in this way. Yet today, under the influence of the preoccupation with harassment, the unions are demanding that employers go further still. Unison, the major public sector union, has recently produced an interim document on workplace bullying. Under the heading 'We need from employers' the union demands the following:

'An investigation within the organisation into:
management style;
morale levels;
sickness absence levels;
sickness presence (ie, when people come to work sick because they feel their job security would be at risk if they did not);
any unexpected changes of behaviour;
patterns of turnover of staff; etc.'
(June 1994)

According to Unison, management should be encouraged to monitor how many days off sick workers take and how they are feeling when they do come to work. Anyone having a bad day at work or taking a day off sick could be investigated by their employers. Worse still, Hackney Labour council has ordered its managers to deal with what they consider incidents of harassment, regardless of whether anyone else reports it. In effect, trade union officials and Labour councillors are giving managers a free hand to mount surveillance operations and disciplinary crackdowns in the workplace, in the name of dealing with the increasingly broadly defined problem of harassment.

Those at the forefront of the anti-harassment campaign claim to be standing up for equality at work. But greater equality on paper has not led to greater equality in practice. So who is it that really benefits from the concentration on harassment? The fact that employers are keen to adopt these policies should be enough to set alarm bells ringing. Why would bosses who on average pay women two-thirds of what they pay men, suddenly want to protect their female employees from harassment? Railtrack has waged a protracted fight against its signal workers to maintain their low pay. Yet in the middle of the dispute, the railways management enthusiastically issued a new anti-harassment policy, allegedly to protect the rights of their employees. Why would those people who are trying to undermine workers' rights in every other area of work be so keen on upholding their rights when it comes to harassment?

Love letters

Fighting harassment at work gives employers the perfect politically correct excuse for imposing more discipline on the workforce. Through the demand for protection, management has been endowed with the moral authority to monitor what goes on in the office, interfere in workplace relations and ultimately discipline workers for not complying with the rules. It is not hard to work out who gains most from the fixation with harassment.

Making a big issue out of harassment at work has always tended to trivialise the real problems that women or black people face, by reducing their unequal treatment in society to a petty matter of prejudiced personal conduct. Worse still, today's catch-all definitions of harassment ignore social inequalities altogether, by generalising the problem to include any kind of behaviour that anyone at work finds offensive or even simply annoying.

Once harassment is removed from any social context in this way, it becomes so meaningless that women can be adjudged to have harassed male colleagues—and be disciplined or even sacked for it. The recent case of Janette Hustwitt is a sign of the times. Railway ticket-collector Janette sent letters to a train driver, declaring her passion for him. Following complaints from the object of her desires, British Rail made tabloid headlines and legal history by sacking her for sexual harassment—even though her crime consisted of nothing more than sending love letters.

The Janette Hustwitt case is a warning of how the preoccupation with new harassment policies gives employers the right to police the personal behaviour of the workforce and hand out punishments on the flimsiest of pretexts. Personally, I would rather put up with a wall covered with pin-ups or a sackful of smutty letters than allow management to get away with that. ●

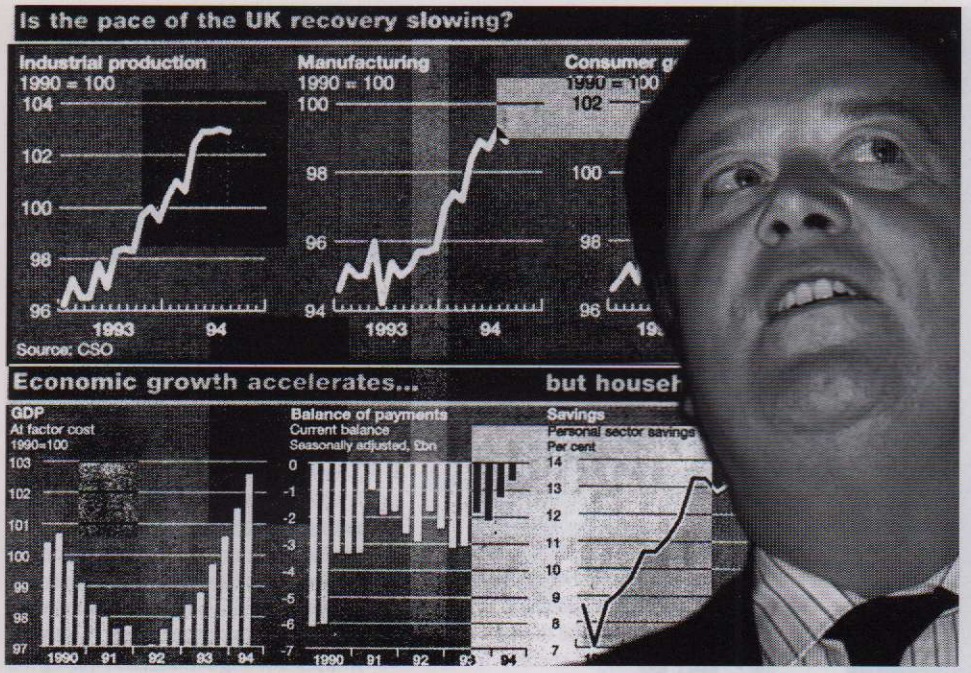


PHOTO: MICHAEL KRAMER

What feelgood factor?

Is the economy booming or slowing down? Phil Murphy on an outbreak of economic schizophrenia

Two weeks is a long time in economics these days. Spot the difference between the following frontpage headlines from the *Financial Times*: 'UK growth hits six-year high—recovery looks increasingly healthy' (24 September 1994); 'Surprise falls in output indicate slower UK recovery' (7 October 1994).

Within a fortnight Britain's leading business daily found that 'further evidence' of a healthy recovery had been disproved by 'indications confirming' another economic slowdown. What's happening here? Nothing changes in the economic fundamentals in two weeks. It seems fair to conclude that the headlines provide 'further evidence confirming' that our troubled society has spawned an outbreak of economic schizophrenia.

One day the economic correspondents fret about the danger of another 'boom-bust cycle'; the next, they are concerned that economic activity will splutter to a halt before it gets going again. One day they worry about renewed inflation due to a shortage of machines and workers; the next, they envision mass unemployment as a permanent feature. One day they celebrate the narrowing trade deficit as a sign of British industry's strength; the next they bemoan the slowdown in consumer demand—which improves the trade balance by cutting imports.

All this see-sawing economic commentary can safely be ignored as a guide to what is happening in the real economy. It tells us less about any economic volatility than about the instability of economists and politicians. The British economy is not volatile. It is stuck in the mire of slump. So wishful thinking about a cyclical upturn is continually confounded by reality. And back in the real world of producing and selling things it seems certain that not much will change into the indefinite future.

Just remember: official figures show the British recession ended in the spring of 1992. We are now *two and a half years* into the 'recovery phase'. Does that make you feel better or worse? That is the dilemma facing the government. On the one hand, if—as they do—the Tories go on claiming the recession is only recently over, and the recovery is just starting, they sound like foolish forecasters who never get any closer to the light at the end of the tunnel. On the other hand, if—as they also do—ministers boast that Britain has Europe's fastest growing economy and say we need to slow the pace of recovery, they sound as if they come from a different planet from the one where the rest of us live and work.

The truth is that Britain is well out of the trough of the output recession, but this is about as good as things will get. That is why the 'boom-bust' discussion always has a decidedly downbeat air; the emphasis is much more on the problem of the 'bust' than any positive feelings for the 'boom'. John Major and Kenneth Clarke are bound to be disappointed in their wait for the feelgood factor to rise from the ashes of a burned-out economy.

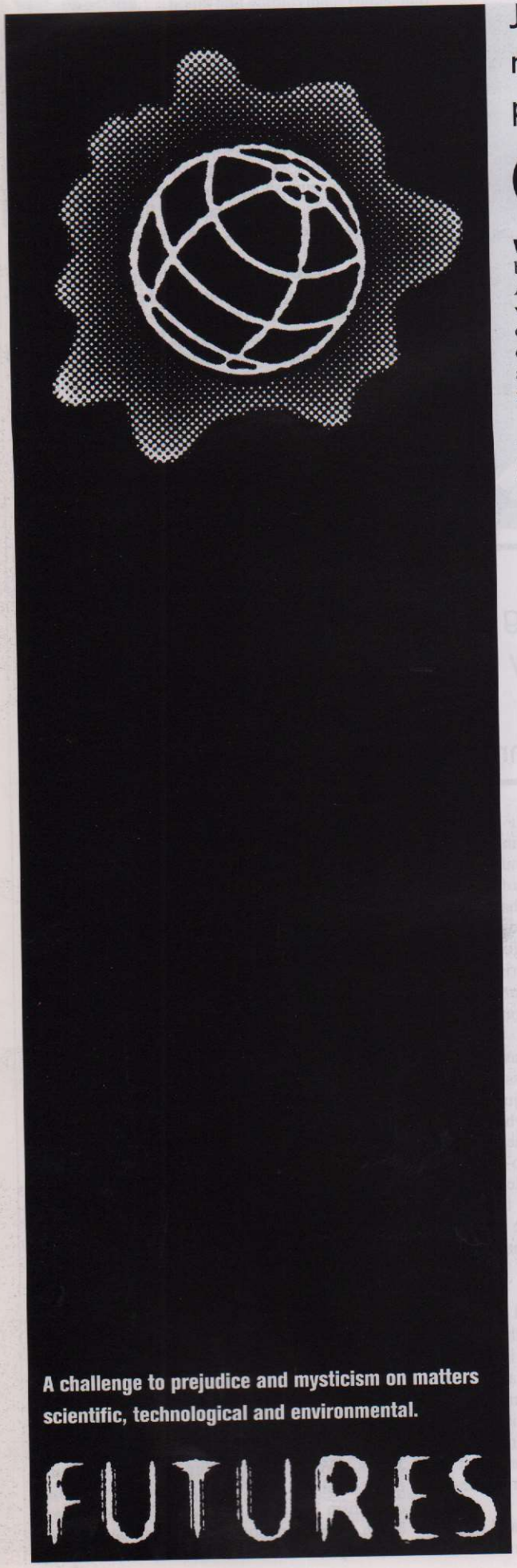
Unemployment won't fall much, and when it does it is only because people are forced to take low-paid part-time or other sub-standard work, or to leave the labour market entirely for the dubious attractions of the black economy. For those still in work, confidence won't return either, with the Damocles sword of more 'downsizing' (ie, redundancies) hanging over them. Wage rises are sure to remain tightly restricted. And while we might pick up the odd bargain in the discount shops or at the car-boot sales, living standards and the quality of life won't pick up. This is the recovery, 1990s-style, slump-style.

The problem of scrambling around in the economic hole explains both the mood swings of economists and the peculiar behaviour of the financial markets this year. Behind the immediate knee-jerk reaction—sometimes positive, sometimes negative—to every bit of economic news, the overall prognosis is dark. Even 'good' news soon provokes gloom in the financial markets. For example, reports that the economy is growing *too slowly* undermine share markets as dealers worry what it means for corporate profits. Fair enough. But when the next week the hype is about the economy growing *too quickly* this has the same depressing effect on share prices, as the financiers anticipate that deflationary interest rate rises may follow. The underlying sentiments that a financial crash is coming could well prove self-fulfilling in the unreal and unstable world of share prices, derivatives trading and the other sophisticated gambling on the global money markets.

There is a rational aspect to all this pessimism and fear, even of an 'overheating economy'. The productive capacity of the economy really is too limited today—not because output growth is so strong, but because the creation of new productive capacity has been so weak for such a long time. Real productive investment has failed to pick up since the end of the recession, just as it has been failing for the past quarter of a century. And without sustained investment in new machines and technology an economy can never really prosper.

Lack of manufacturing investment is the fundamental drag on economic activity. It has been held back by the endemically low profitability of capitalism in Britain. Even during the 'miracle eighties' it was 1989 before net investment had replaced the write-off of capital stock from the industrial shake-out of the early eighties. Almost as soon as investment scaled this molehill, levels fell away again, becoming negative from 1992 if capital depreciation is taken into account. In gross terms, manufacturing investment is now lower as a proportion of gross domestic product than it has been throughout the past quarter century of on-off economic crisis.

Take one crucial area of manufacturing investment: plant and machinery. This provides a fair gauge of industrial innovation and economic dynamism. Today, relative to the size of the economy, such investment is smaller than it was in the 1980s. And that measure of 1980s investment was itself lower than in the 1970s, which in turn was lower than the 1960s. We are witnessing a steady secular decline of productive investment in British capitalism since the heady days of the postwar boom. Their economic hole just gets deeper and deeper. ●



John Gillott protests that genetic scientists researching human behaviour are treating people like rodents

Of mice and men

What are the causes of human behaviour? What shapes the way we act? And in particular, what makes people violent or turns them into alcoholics or causes them to pursue some other form of deviant behaviour? According to a growing consensus among scientists, it is almost all in the genes.

Earlier this year, the prestigious American magazine *Science* published a special issue on human behaviour. The editorial, entitled 'Genes and behaviour', summed up the theme: 'Nearly every other day it seems, a headline in our newspapers announces the discovery of yet another gene linked to some aspect of human biology, behaviour, or disease. Perhaps most disturbing to our sense of being free individuals, capable to a large degree of shaping our character and minds, is the idea that our behaviour, mental abilities, and mental health can be determined or destroyed by a segment of DNA.' (17 June 1994)

There followed 55 pages said to show conclusively that 'most researchers have moved beyond the "nature versus nurture debate"; they agree that genes influence behaviour in both humans and animals'. Reports have appeared in the popular press linking genes to alcoholism and violence, as well as to medical disorders such as Huntington's disease and breast cancer.

The old 'nature versus nurture' debate was about how much everything from our health to our intelligence is determined by our genes, and how much by our upbringing. The right tended to emphasise nature, and the left nurture. The influential new model, which can be called the genetic-behavioural model, argues that genes are the most important factor affecting both our health and behaviour, but that the way in which genes express themselves is influenced by the conditions in which we live.

The model as applied to diseases is a fruitful one in many cases. Genetic defects which relate to various disabling diseases have recently been isolated. Some, like Huntington's disease, are rigidly determined by a genetic defect. If you have one of the defective genes, you will get the disease. Other conditions are thought only to be influenced by defective genes. An example is cancer, often thought to result from an interaction of genetic problems with the carcinogens encountered in the outside world.

For example, it is now thought that a defect in a gene labelled BRCA1 is responsible for almost half of inherited cases of breast cancer. BRCA1 is a 'tumour-suppressor' gene which acts as a biochemical brake. A mutation in the gene can prevent it functioning properly, allowing cells to turn cancerous. However, women have two copies of BRCA1—one from each parent—like every other gene. If only one copy is damaged, the functioning one overrides the damaged one and no cancer results. Unless, that is, some external factor damages the normal gene in a cell.

Women with one mutant gene are said to be 'predisposed' to breast cancer. This means that their genetic make-up puts them at a higher risk of getting breast cancer than those with two normal genes, but does not determine that they will necessarily get it. Whether they do or not will be partly determined by the environment in which they live. This probably means that smoking 40 Rothmans a day and drinking 40 units of alcohol a week would increase their chances of getting breast cancer more than it would for a woman with two normal copies of BRCA1. Hence, until genetic modification of the defective gene is possible, it might be sensible to cut down on the cigarettes and drink less if you have a defective copy of the gene.

This model of genetic 'predisposition' could help to understand many diseases with a genetic component. It could be applied to all patients, since the components of the model—genes and external natural influences on the body—are much the same in every case. For example, the elements of the environment which influence cancer don't change. Carcinogens may have different sources in different situations—radioactivity can come from natural sources or nuclear power stations—but the body cells react to the product, not the source.

So far so good. The trouble is that things have now gone much further. According to researchers today, the same model of genes-in-conjunction-with-environment can also be used to understand human behaviour. Our genetic make-up can 'predispose' us not just to cancer, but to violence or alcoholism.

If this was true, it would have sweeping consequences. It would mean that what we do is determined not just by our will or our situation, but by the DNA which we were born with. That in turn would point towards some pretty authoritarian conclusions. If people are believed to indulge in violence and anti-social behaviour because of their genes, the only solution would be genetic surgery. Since that is not possible today, it suggests instead the need for the authorities to contain and control those deemed genetically unfit or dangerous. But is it true?

All of the research done in the genetic-behavioural framework has been strikingly insubstantial. Bold claims have been made for genetic explanations of human behaviour, but even empirical evidence, never mind a real explanation, is missing.

One problem genetic behaviourists are aware of is that association does not imply causation: even if a genetic mutation was associated with a form of behaviour, it would not mean that it caused that behaviour. In reality, however, they have not shown genetic *association* for any human behaviour, never mind *cause*. Referring to work done in the 1980s, *Science* noted that scientific reports then tried to link 'schizophrenia to chromosome 5, psychosis to chromosome 11, and manic depression to chromosome 11 and the X chromosome. All were greeted unsceptically in the popular press; all are now in disrepute'.

In the 1990s, some of the big claims have been for genes linked to homosexuality, alcoholism and violence. Once again, the evidence for association, never mind causation, is missing. Nobody has been able to replicate the results for homosexuality and alcoholism which have been claimed by much-hyped but still one-off studies; and the link between a gene and violence is based on a study of just one abnormal Dutch family. Even the man who carried out that study, Han Brunner, says it is 'highly unlikely that this is anything other than an extreme rarity'. Not, then, a likely genetic association with violence, which is hardly 'an extreme rarity' in the world today.

So how can *Science* claim that 'our understanding of the genetic basis of behaviour, although still in its infancy, is advancing rapidly'? Its assertion rests on the assumption that human behaviour can be modelled on animal behaviour. Taking the example of alcoholism, *Science* declares that 'we are coming close to understanding the genetic basis of addictive behaviours in rodents', and then leaps to the conclusion that the pattern of rat behaviour will hold good for humans.

But this is an illegitimate extrapolation. Human behaviour has ▶

ILLUSTRATION FROM ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS II*

no model in animal behaviour, because unlike animals our behaviour has changed alongside the development of human society. Our genetic make-up has not changed significantly for 50 000 years, and yet human behaviour has been transformed many times during the same period. How can the human attitude to violence today be compared to the barbarism of the distant past? And what sense can be made of the notion that there is a gene 'for' homosexuality, when the homosexual as a distinct type of person with a particular behaviour pattern did not exist before the emergence of modern urban society. Even basic categories that we take for granted today as defining humanity are recent phenomena. The idea of individuality, for example, would have made no sense to people in the society of 600 years ago. And yet genetically, people then were the same as now.

What matters for understanding human behaviour is human society and culture, which have developed *since* our last significant genetic changes. Human behaviours have a range and variety absent in animals precisely because humans have cut loose from their animal instincts. Unlike animals, humans do not respond in an instinctual way to biological stimulation. How people behave is determined by the interaction between the individual and their social circumstances—and far from being genetically predetermined, these factors change all of the time.

To illustrate this, consider the issue of addictive behaviours, which *Science* confidently believes have a genetic basis. According to American scientists Kenneth Blum and Ernest Noble, alcoholism and drug-addiction are predisposed by a mutation of a gene responsible for producing dopamine receptors in the brain. They claim that some people are more likely to become dependent on booze than others because they have a different biological reaction to alcohol. Top British geneticist Steve Jones has given a guarded welcome to this research ('Are you a natural addict?', London *Evening Standard,* 12 July 1994).

The idea is based on a statistical association they found between possession of the mutated gene and alcoholism in a sample of people. Other researchers have found it hard to replicate their findings, which is not surprising. After all, if it were true that there is a mutant gene for alcoholism, we would have to assume that it was somehow spreading rapidly through the increasingly drink-soaked Russian population at the moment.

But to be generous to Blum and Noble, suppose there was such an association. What would it prove? It would prove that the consequence

of having the mutant gene—fewer dopamine receptors in the brain—is that alcohol gives you a bigger kick (since a given amount of alcohol will effect a higher proportion of your dopamine receptors). But that is about all. If there is a correlation between the mutation and alcoholism, this does not imply causation. Even the researchers admit that many people with the mutation are not alcoholics, and that there are plenty of alcoholics without the mutation.

Rodents fed alcohol are no more alcoholics than parrots are linguists

Human behaviour and problems such as dependency are a little more complex than these geneticists would have us believe. The same form of behaviour—such as drinking alcohol—can have completely different causes and consequences in different social contexts. Drinking at a party can be conducive to lively conversation; drinking at a funeral might lead to morbid reflection; drinking under the railway arches in the freezing rain is more likely to make you depressed.

Whether or not drinking leads to dependency is not determined by genetic factors or how much alcohol effects which parts of the brain. Alcohol dependence has a crucial social dimension; it is closely linked with being out of control of your life, with motivation and ambition destroyed. The highest consumption of alcohol is generally among young men who are single. Most alcoholics, on the other hand, are men in their mid-forties, or women in their early fifties. There is a clear differentiation between what drinking means for those enjoying the freedom of youth, and those feeling trapped by the drudgery and imprisonment of a mid-life crisis. And the difference is not a genetic one.

To say that human behaviour is determined by our interaction with human society is not to echo the caricatured liberal argument that 'society is to blame', that people are just the helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control. If you are under a lot of stress or are down-and-out or feel trapped in a dead-end job, you might well become dependent on drink. But there is no inevitability about it. People do not passively respond to society, like robots whose buttons are pushed by circumstances. The traditional emphasis on nurture over nature tends to share this defect with the new genetic-behavioural model: it ignores the fact that people do not just passively respond, but also react and interact with society. And how different people react to the same conditions varies greatly.

Underlying different human responses to the same circumstances is the question of motivation. Human motivations, aspirations, goals are a product of human society and culture. It is this varied motivational component to human behaviour that the genetic-behavioural scientists cannot or will not explain. And that is why animal models of instinctual behaviour are so attractive to the researchers. But this is a cop-out; it means scientists are explaining *away* human behaviour rather than explaining it, because its unique character is ignored.

Rodents can be conditioned to need drugs and alcohol because they get a biological kick from them and they are behaviourally influenced by their environment—in this case a scientist pumping the stuff into their blood. However, they are no more addicts than a parrot is a linguist. I will only be convinced that a mouse craving for alcohol or drugs has any relevance for human dependency when I see a rodent in the wild turn to booze because it is depressed about its prospects, or I hear that lab mice have formed a support group in a determined effort to kick the habit.

The logic of the genetic-behavioural view is that humans, like animals, can have no control over their behaviour. Or rather, *some* humans, since the implication is that society needs the intervention of those who can control the biological causes of drug-addiction and violence—well-educated scientists and experts, for example. In other words, the scientists are putting themselves above this kind of behaviour, as the ones who can contain the problem by proposing appropriate adjustments to the way others live. It is an elitist perspective that blames people for the problems they face, and in practice justifies a coercive social policy.

Frederick Goodwin, ex-director of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Association (ADAMHA) says there are similarities between the behaviour of inner-city minority youth and monkeys subjected to environmental stress. The consequence of this argument is surely that, if zoos keep stressed-out monkeys behind bars to protect little children, then it must be right to ghettoise inner-city communities. The genetic-behavioural model needs to be exposed not only because it is wrong, but because it gives anti-people prejudice a veneer of scientific respectability. ●

(Additional material and ideas from Stuart Derbyshire.)

TOBY BANKS

Save us from scrimping

Brace yourselves for the 'new frugalism', which TV producer David Collison describes as 'a serious public statement that resourcefulness is a deep-seated and valuable activity—a reaction against the supermarket culture where all you do is jump into a car, drive off and buy stuff, then throw away what you don't use'. If you think that this supermarket culture sounds like a civilised way to live, then you are hopelessly behind the times.

The future, according to the new frugalists, lies in village barter economies (Local Exchange and Trading Systems), car-boot sales, a 'proud-to-be-poor mentality' (key texts: *The Concept of Honest Poverty, The Tightwad Gazette, The Cheapskate Gazette*—all genuine titles), and a 'local economic renaissance', as second-hand charity shops take the place of the high street chains.

David Collison is responsible for the Channel 4 series, *The Scrimpers,* which attempts to present the degrading penny-pinching activities of very desperate or very eccentric people as part of the green revolution. This view is shared by Ed Mayo of the New Economics Foundation, who thinks that the 'informal economy' offers 'an element of rediscovering the joys of self-reliance, autonomy and community'.

The actual content of *The Scrimpers* is so farcical that it must have been taken from *Viz's* 'Top Tips' page. Toilet roll cores can be turned into Christmas decorations! Bicycle saddles can be painted and turned into 'modern art'! As I write, the first programme has just gone out, and already the bottom of the barrel has been scraped clean.

In fact, having no friends is a great way to save money too

The highlight was an old couple from Yorkshire who had 'scrimped' an extra room in their house—by putting a table up against the front door and putting a couple of chairs into the hallway. Visitors have to use the backdoor, they explained, but I don't imagine they'll be troubled by too many callers after this programme is transmitted—especially after she explained how she cleans the dishes with her husband's old underpants.

In fact, having no friends is a great way to save money too, what with no phone calls or stamps to pay for. 'This t-shirt I'm wearing is actually a thermal vest!', the old girl cried delightedly for no apparent reason, then explained how she uses junk mail as scrap paper to 'practice me typing!'.

The theme song ('Wa-a-ste not, wa-a-ant not') comes courtesy of a man who collects rubbish and plays the organ. ('The wife thinks I'm mad, but she changes her tune when I come home with the pound notes', he lied.)

I don't suppose for one moment that people like David Collison would care to experience the joys of self-reliance and autonomy themselves, but I'm sure it goes down a bomb at Channel 4 development meetings. The point is, of course, to empower those less fortunate than themselves. They used to show pictures of East Europeans selling their meagre possessions in the street, and encourage us to feel pity; now they show single mothers rummaging around in skips, and ask us to celebrate their resourcefulness.

The launch of 'Streetwatch', Michael Howard's snooper patrols of right-thinking citizens with attitude and notebooks, has caused a certain amount of disquiet. There is a feeling that this sort of upfront grassing is not quite British. I'm not so sure.

The 'urban myth' that fathers who are photographed bathing their baby daughters are reported to the social services by processing labs is proof that many people are already suspicious enough to believe such things as a matter of course. Such paranoia is understandable, given the numerous real examples of such public-spirited behaviour. Staff at Boots in Newcastle reported a student to the police, after they spotted that he was smoking dope in the pictures he had sent for developing, and last month, a person from the marvellous *Crimestoppers* programme informed the employment service that *Big Issue* sellers were claiming benefits, resulting in a visit from the fraud squad. An anonymous snooper has been sending police his own personal video recordings of motorists using an illegal short-cut near his house.

The entertainment industry has not been slow to catch on to this crime-fighting impulse. For those who prefer the twitch of a net curtain to the swing of a truncheon or the wail of a siren, there is a new release which takes 'reality video' to the most perverse lengths yet. Move over *Police! Stop,* here comes *You're Nicked!*—clips of shop-lifters in action, taken from in-store security cameras. The cover warns shoplifters that 'Crime doesn't pay!', although the only shop-lifters likely to see the video would have successfully stolen a copy in order to learn from the mistakes of others. The true target audience is too awful to contemplate: security-porn for Neighbourhood Watch leaders and special constables.

About 15 years ago, a horrible little boy called Simon was featured on a local London 'news' (ie, crime) show. He had formed his own junior police force, which went around checking tax discs and taking the numbers of illegally parked cars. He drilled his 'force' every day, and they had a chant which included the telling line 'smart lapels and u-n-iforms!'. Not surprisingly, Simon received a fair amount of abuse for his troubles—a prophet is never honoured in his own land.

A while ago I went to a photocopy shop to send a fax to Germany. 'Where's that then?', replied the lady in the shop, perusing the geographical price chart. 'Germany', I said again, thinking she had misheard me. 'Yeah, Germany', she said, 'that ain't in Europe, is it?'.

I had assumed that this particular woman was exceptional, but now I'm not so sure. What else could explain the strange insistence of football commentators to add the prefix 'David Platt's', 'Paul Gascoigne's', and so on when referring to world famous Italian football clubs like Sampdoria and Lazio. We still hear of 'Glenn Hoddle's Monaco' and 'Chris Waddle's Marseilles', although these players left France years ago. If this is the price of education, so be it, but I draw the line at 'Bruce Grobbelaar's Zimbabwe', as it was referred to in all seriousness the other day. The era of 'Luther Blissett's AC Milan' beckons, I fear.

Shohei Imamura is one of Japan's greatest film-makers and director of a harrowing account of the Hiroshima bombing. He talked to Ed Murray about politics and film-making in modern Japan

Witness to hell

PHOTOS: ARTIFICIAL EYE

Photographs from Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain*

One consensus worth joining is the growing agreement about the work of Japanese director Shohei Imamura. Long neglected by Western critics, Imamura's work is now being reappraised. Jonathan Demme—director of *The Silence of the Lambs*—believes that Imamura's films 'are among the greatest ever made'. Steven Spielberg and *Star Wars* director George Lucas have reputedly spent 15 years trying to meet him. It is hard to find a reference to his name that is not followed by a superlative. After meeting Imamura at this year's Edinburgh Festival, and watching a retrospective of his films, I believe the hype.

Imamura's CV makes impressive reading. After a spell working the black market in devastated postwar Japan, he began training under the legendary Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu. Reacting against what he considered to be the middle class style of Ozu's studio, Imamura left to produce a remarkable series of films and documentaries for TV. In the wake of Hideo Sekigawa's groundbreaking film *Hiroshima*, he began making films for the cinema in 1958. Over the next four decades Imamura produced a string of great films. None has been greater than his most recent film *Kuroi Ame* (*Black Rain*, 1989), a harrowing account of the impact of the atomic bomb on a village outside Hiroshima.

It is more than his obvious technical ability that make Imamura's films stand out. Imamura is far more concerned with ideas than with camera angles. 'I am more interested in mankind than I am in other film-makers', he says. At the heart of Imamura's films is a fascination with the reality and the minutiae of people's lives. At the same time his films tackle head on many of the complex political and social issues that have faced postwar Japan. 'I understood that my film-making would only be truly international', he says, 'if it was derived from a Japanese cultural and ideological struggle'. Imamura has always refused to accept government offers of sponsorship for his films, to avoid being censored or compromised.

This approach, particularly against the background of Japanese history he has lived through, is what makes Imamura's films fascinating. His interest in detailing the changes that have transformed Japan from a demolished nation to an ascendant world power, and how these changes have affected the lives of ordinary people, has lead him into areas rarely touched by cinema. In *Buta to Gunkan* (*Pigs and Warships*, 1961) he used his own experience of the postwar black market to depict the degradation of those forced to live on the fringes of a country under American occupation, contrasting the corruption of the new Japan with the official promises of 'democratisation'. When, in the documentary *Karayuki-San* (*The Making of a Prostitute*, 1973-75), he attempted to reconstruct the life of a former Japanese prostitute forced abroad during the Japanese colonisation of South-East Asia, he faced threats of official censorship.

Imamura's films are a useful antidote to Western prejudices about Japanese society. Those who accept the stereotype of docile Japanese women will be surprised by the heroines in these films. Imamura said that he wanted to depict the generation of working class women in Japan who lost everything in the war. Rather than passively accepting a return to servitude, they survived on their own resources. 'I think that they contributed to the destruction of the old family system in Japan.' It is a contribution that, says Imamura, both Western and Japanese historians have ignored.

The value of Imamura's approach is vindicated most strongly by *Kuroi Ame*. Based on the Masuji Ibuse novel of the same name, the film took Imamura 20 years of struggle before he could get it made. 'As a film-maker', he says, 'I thought it would be my obligation to make a film about the atomic bomb'.

Kuroi Ame is the story of a collection of Hibakusha (survivors of the atomic bomb, known in Japan as 'those who have seen hell'). The film follows them through the prejudice and isolation they face and the gradual depletion of their numbers from radiation sickness. Flashbacks to the bombing itself offer a striking depiction of the atrocity. The film is full of fascinating insights, from the inability of Japanese society to reabsorb the survivors to the reaction of the Hibakusha to the government's attempt to prepare the population for its support for the USA's Korean War—just five years after the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a war in which, at the time, many felt the bomb might be used again.

In one of the most effective scenes in the film, two survivors try to comprehend why the bomb was dropped at all. 'I hear it was to end the war quickly', says one. Both they and the audience know that that is just not so.

Imamura believes that the film is still of relevance. 'When I made *Black Rain* the newly registered deaths of victims who died of atomic radiation were just about 2000. But this year in Hiroshima 5000 people were newly registered and I couldn't believe that number. It is very difficult to see who died of radiation and who died of leukaemia or some other reason. It is going to be even more difficult when the second and third generation issue comes up. I wanted to provoke the kind of discussion that people would otherwise rather forget.'

Beyond paying tribute to those who survived, Imamura wanted to test the taboo nature of such a film. In America several critics attacked it for not representing Japan as an aggressor. In Japan, there was outrage at the film's black humour. (One character, a shell-shocked ex-soldier, spends the film attempting to disable passing buses, mistaking them for enemy tanks.) 'It was probably easy for me to make an obviously polemical or political film about the atomic bomb but then that would not move the people, and this personal story would actually tell the real issues of the atomic bomb more, I thought.' ●

A sick portrait of war

Vanessa Piggot on the controversy surrounding the 'Bosnia' exhibition at the Imperial War Museum

CROATIAN AND MUSLIM, 1994 BY PETER HOWSON

Britain may not be officially at war in the former Yugoslavia, but nevertheless it has an official war artist there. Peter Howson was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum and sponsored by the *Times* to record on canvas the conflict in the Balkans. His work is now showing at the 'Bosnia' exhibition in the Imperial War Museum.

The exhibition was hit by controversy after the museum refused to buy one of Howson's paintings. 'Croatian and Muslim' depicts the brutal rape of a woman in her home. One man rapes the woman while his accomplice shoves her head down a toilet, pressing his hand against a family photograph on the wall to get better leverage. Howson claims to have interviewed 150 rape victims in Bosnia before conceiving this painting and its companion canvas, 'Serb and Muslim'. Howson's depiction of rape has earned him praise for his sensitivity towards the issue of women in war.

The Imperial War Museum, on the other hand, has been criticised for failing to show a similar sensitivity in its decision not to purchase 'Croatian and Muslim'. While the two women members of the museum's artistic committee, curator Angela Weight and critic Marina Vaisey, were keen to acquire Howson's painting, they were overruled by the three men on the committee. According to museum director Alan Borg, the Imperial War Museum cannot buy the painting because Howson did not actually witness the rape. Critics of the decision, such as former Victoria and Albert Museum director Sir Roy Strong, have accused the Imperial War Museum of shying away from the realities of war.

The real question to be asked, however, is not whether or not Howson witnessed the rape scene, but what is the message of Howson's painting? The painting is entitled 'Croatian and Muslim'. Croatian and Muslim what? Soldiers? Men and women? Rape? War? Life? The title generalises the rape scene to the level of national characteristics, suggesting that this is what Croatian men do and Muslim women have done to them. It seems as if the horror stories of 'rape camps' and 'systematic policies of rape' in Bosnia, which nobody has been able to substantiate in the real world, have here been elevated into works of art.

Howson, a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art, and a key figure in the crop of social realist painters that came to the fore in Scotland in the eighties, has long been known for his portraits of working class life. While his earlier work romanticised the lives of working class people, his more recent paintings have been infused with a sense of despair about the brutality and ignorance of the working class. 'Apathy', 'The Blind Leading the Blind', 'The Bridge to Nowhere', 'Screaming Drunk'—the very titles give a sense of Howson's themes. This feeling of contempt for ordinary people infuses Howson's paintings of Bosnia too.

The whole exhibition amounts to a condemnation of Bosnian society. Alongside the rape scene, there are paintings like 'Muj', 'Muslim Fighters on Drugs' and 'Drunk Man on Battlefield' which depict Bosnian soldiers drugged up to their eyeballs. In 'Deutschmarks and Derv' Howson depicts soldiers making drug deals. In 'Ustazi', a soldier, hands in pockets, slouches by three figures impaled on stakes. Presumably the soldier does not share the sensitivity of former British squaddie Howson, who apparently was so revolted by what he saw on his first visit to Bosnia that he was unable to paint.

In Howson's paintings it is not just the soldiers who have become brutalised. In 'House Warming' a woman hanging out the washing seems complicit with the violence of soldiers carrying out a raid on a house. In another painting, 'Travnik', a child has already donned a soldier's uniform, as if even children share in their society's brutality. In 'Bosnian Harvest', women in black, reminiscent of vultures, put human remains into sacks. The message is clear: war is the product of a sick Bosnian society. Unlike us, Howson seems to be saying, they are monsters, they are uncivilised.

In an article about rape Linda Grant, summed up the message of Howson's painting: 'Their husbands and sons returning from the war with their own traumas exert a greater trauma on the women than the rape she might have experienced. The rape is over. The rapist is gone. But the men they married or gave birth to have turned into monsters and that is an on-going situation.' (*Guardian*, 24 September 1994)

The very location of Howson's paintings underlines the double-standards of the exhibition's message. When you enter the Imperial War Museum, you are greeted by a huge collection of tanks and other military vehicles. Having negotiated your way past this display of British imperial power, you are faced with a notice outside the Howson exhibition: 'This exhibition contains images of violence.' There could not be a better illustration of the warped message contained inside. ●

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Not so ambient

Neil Davenport talks to Stereolab about music, ambience and politics

For a band that has been loosely described as 'ambient' and has an album with the title Space Age Bachelor Pad Music, you might suspect that Stereolab would hold fast to some kind of slacker ideal. Not so. Stereolab's lyricist and singer Laetitia Sadiea has recently attracted attention for what one music paper described as the 'heavy duty Marxist analysis' in their top 30 album Mars Audiac Quintet. On tracks like 'Ping Pong', light and breezy Anglo-French pop rubs shoulders with a chorus that you might describe as crisis theory for indie kids: 'Huger slump\Greater war\And then shallower recovery.'

Although it is Stereolab's very fine music that has grabbed attention since they were formed in 1991, the lyrics should have come as no surprise. Stereolab's prime muzak mover, Tim Gane, was previously in McCarthy (as was Laetitia, briefly), the band which, with the input of Malcolm Eden's lyrics, combined scathing polemics with taut, ringing guitars.

Politics play less of a role in Stereolab than they did in McCarthy, partly because of what Tim describes as a 'bad level of understanding' of Eden's lyrics. Stereolab's music, however, is far more interesting than McCarthy's Byrdsian pop. Instead of exhausting the roll-call of acceptable cool, Stereolab prefer to mine largely unexplored areas and bands: Faust, Canned Heat, fifties exotica, stereo-testing records, even the widely reviled 'elevator music'. Nor is Stereolab's music really ambient. 'We're more interested in repetition and minimalism than in Brian Eno's idea of ambience', says Laetitia.

A cursory listen to Stereolab's seamless drone can elicit the response, 'It all sounds the same'. 'The idea that we have one song and it's a good one is very corny', says Tim. 'When you are dealing with something outside of the immediate traditions of music then it tends to get generalised. There are minute differences, but we always try to push it forward each time.'

Stereolab's churning, chugging chords are simply the backdrop around which their music is intricately built. The clank of a xylophone, the gurgle of an old Moog and Laetitia's swooping harmonies provide an understated shift in mood and melody. Try, for a good example, 'Anamorphse' from Mars Audiac Quintet. A repetitive rolling bass line and a two-note organ amble gently along until stately horns lock with cascading harmonies. The climactic finale is nothing short of euphoric.

The band's name and their record label, Duophonic, and song titles like 'La Boob Oscillator' suggest an interest in the technological innovations of the sixties. What's the appeal? 'I'm attracted to that period', says Tim, 'mainly for its optimism and the belief that the future was unlimited. At that time the idea of exploration was unlimited and one aspect of that was through technology. What people could do, their capabilities, seemed unlimited then. Today the urge seems to be to clamp down on people's capabilities'.

This 'clamping down', says Tim, is not simply a fear of technology that seems so pervasive today but also support for censorship and conformity. Even the music press are prone to it. 'There is a sense of awkwardness about it', he says. 'In the music press you will have outrage against the Criminal Justice Bill banning raves and so on. And then you will have another article promoting the banning of certain extremist political groups. The very process of banning and censorship needs to questioned.'

Although Tim and Laetitia do not want Stereolab to be pigeonholed as a political band, their sharp comments and exploratory music puts them on a superior footing to the combat rock of Rage Against The Machine or S*M*A*S*H. Although they want to 'engender a critical reaction', they are all too aware of the limitations of politico-pop. As Tim points out, 'If what we say leads to a questioning of bigger things, like censorship, it would be a good thing. But I'd be silly to think that music is the best way to do it.' ●

THE MARXIST REVIEW OF BOOKS

Today's military thinkers seem to be dedicated to mystifying the drive towards war, says Kirsten Cale

Cultural wars

A History of Warfare, John Keegan, Hutchinson, £20 hbk, Pimlico, £8.99 pbk
War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age, Daniel Pick, Yale University Press, £19.95 hbk
War and the Rise of the State, Bruce D Porter, The Free Press, £19.95 hbk
On Future War, Martin van Creveld, Brassey's, £26.50 hbk

Clausewitz's famous maxim, 'war is the continuation of policy', is being written out of existence. Forget politics: the message today is that war is caused by tribal atavism or psychic self-gratification. 'The real reason why we have wars is that men like fighting', asserts Martin van Creveld in *On Future War* (p221). 'Warfare', says John Keegan in his *History of Warfare,* 'reaches into the most secret places of the human heart' (p3).

In the new military thinking, the rational is sacrificed for the irrational. The link between politics and war is rejected, and links between conflict and human nature proposed in its place. In the interpretations of these military theorists, war is transformed from a means to an end into an end in itself, the product of forces beyond human control—whether human nature, sexual characteristics or 'culture'.

Van Creveld might deny the existence of a '"war gland" or "aggressive gene"', but he asserts that given a choice, 'men might very well give up women before they give up war' (p222). And while Keegan detours into the brain's 'seat of aggression', he concludes that, 'half of human nature—the female half—is in any case highly ambivalent about war-making' (p75).

Are wars merely a matter of sex and psychology—or are they waged purposefully by rational men and women? Let's examine the emergence and the dissolution of the concept of war as an object of rational enquiry.

Military theory was really born in the Enlightenment—the eighteenth-century Age of Reason. Enlightenment men turned to human reason, rather than God, to understand the world. They set themselves the task of revealing the universal principles that governed natural and social phenomena, ordering and explaining the world in rational terms.

The wars of the time were often cautious and inconclusive because monarchs wanted to husband expensive manpower and scarce resources. Army manoeuvres were primarily defensive and organised around the forts that still dotted the European countryside. The speed of war was dictated by the speed of men and draft animals. Cast iron siege weapons had to be dragged to the field, accompanied by great wagon trains of supplies to feed the beasts that dragged the weapons—for example, it took 16 000 horses and 3000 wagons to drag the 18 heavy guns and 20 siege mortars of the Duke of Marlborough's army in 1708.

Yet despite the economic backwardness of eighteenth-century Europe, the impact of the Enlightenment on military theory is incontestable. The most lasting legacy of the early military theorists was the military academy. The age of reason had spawned the idea that war should be studied, and academies were set up in Austria and France in 1752, in Prussia in 1765, in Bavaria in 1789. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the Royal Military College was founded in 1799, West Point in 1802 and Sandhurst in 1812. The economic and social transformations that began towards the end of the eighteenth century allowed the new military elites to put larger and more lethal armies into the field of battle.

The French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars, which began in 1789 and ended with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, sent shock waves through European societies and revolutionised warfare. When the French battalions of the revolutionary government beat a Prussian intervention force back at Valmy in 1792, the poet Goethe, consoled one of his defeated compatriots: 'From this place and from this day begins a new era in the history of the world, and you will be able to say, I was there.'

The revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had their own enlightened interpreter—Carl von Clausewitz, the great advocate of the application of reason to conflict. As a Prussian, who spent his entire military career fighting the French—on the Rhine in 1793, then in the battles of Auerstadt (1806), Borodino (1812) and Wavre (1815)—Clausewitz was well qualified to reflect on the success of the Napoleonic campaigns. ▶

Like others, he was astonished by the speed, mobility and mass of revolutionary warfare. The plans of generals —schooled in eighteenth-century wars of manoeuvre and drill—were useless in the face of armies inspired by patriotism and revolutionary fervour. Clausewitz spoke of the French as 'a force that beggared all imagination. Suddenly war became the business of the people—a people of 30 millions, all of whom considered themselves citizens'.

Clausewitz made careful note of the political factors that gave shape to the new warfare, especially the mobilisation and motivation of the French army. In France, the revolution ennobled soldiering. Men fought for the Republic and for liberation, as citizens, not subjects: as patriotic bearers of nationhood, not the brutalised prisoners and mercenaries of the armies of the *ancien regime.* This new kind of soldier, who was less likely to desert, enabled French commanders under the new military supremo, Napoleon Bonaparte, to try out the tactics advocated by some earlier military theorists.

They abandoned the rigid lines of troops used by other armies of the period. They skirmished in open formation, and attacked in great masses. They developed efficient mobile artillery that could support infantry at all phases of combat. They broke armies up into smaller units that could operate more flexibly and independently. And they solved the problem of supplying huge armies by getting soldiers to live off the land. Napoleon became the master of initiative, concentration and surprise.

These changes prompted Clausewitz to ask: what is war? By setting the European wars in the context of political and social change he arrived at the insight that guided his theory: war was not a thing in itself, but was shaped by politics. As he wrote in the first chapter of *On War,* published in 1832, after his death, 'war is nothing but the continuation of policy by other means'.

After the carnage of Verdun in 1916, it seemed that the Gatling, the Browning, the Lewis and Maxim machine guns had snatched the lethal initiative from soldiers, generals and planners

Every war is the product of deliberate, calculated decision. No war is ever conducted without political purpose. Men do not fight because they are of a particular culture or sex, but because they are the instruments of reasoned and deliberate policy. If you want to understand war, look at politics.

The Enlightenment belief that war was a rational human activity has been superseded by the twentieth-century prejudice that war is guided by the inhuman and the insane. It is not hard to understand why modern theorists want to deny the deliberate character of modern warfare. Unlike the revolutionary wars of the past, modern warfare has nothing positive about it.

Instead of fighting for the liberation of nations from the *ancien regime,* warfare in the twentieth century has put millions into the field in the interests of Great Power rivalry and the domination of weaker nations. In the first half of the twentieth century, international competition between the major economic powers laid the basis for a cycle of world wars, colonial domination, and almost continual slaughter.

From the Accrington Pals wiped out on the Western Front to the fleeing Iraqi conscripts caught in what one US airman described as a 'turkey-shoot', twentieth-century warriors can be forgiven for thinking that warfare is indeed inhuman and insane. But the appeal of the modern theory of war as something beyond rationality is that it excuses the policy-makers and generals who make the decisions.

Theories which summon up the rage of the unconscious, the spectre of willed machines and 'smart' missiles, the march of human automatons, and the rapacious and self-generating 'military industrial complexes' have contributed to the belief that war is beyond human comprehension and control. Without a rational guiding principle, war can be presented as an unstoppable technological vortex of violence and mass destruction. Machines appear to govern men in combat. The experience of Ypres and the Somme showed, as John Ellis notes, that 'man himself was no longer the master of the battlefield...all that mattered was the machinery of war' (*The Social History of the Machine Gun,* 1993, p142).

After the carnage of Verdun in 1916, when a French general noted that, 'three men and a machine gun can stop a battalion of heroes', (quoted in *War and the Rise of the State,* p149), it seemed that the Gatling, the Browning, the Lewis and Maxim machine guns had snatched the lethal initiative from soldiers, generals and planners. During the Cold War, the Bomb was seen to dominate issues of war and peace. Today, the Patriot missile, 'smart' bombs, satellites, and guided mini-nukes appear to reign over conflict in the post-Cold War world.

The unstoppable-technology theories have the practical effect of denigrating politics, and absolving those responsible from blame. Wars do not start by themselves: they start because external political interests decide war is expedient to the powers that be. As the conservative British military historian Michael Howard rightly notes, 'However inchoate or disreputable the motives for war may be, its initiation is almost by definition a deliberate and carefully considered act and its conduct...a matter of very precise central control. If history shows any record of accidental wars, I have yet to find them' (*The Causes of Wars,* 1983, p12).

These theories also have the effect of displacing aggression away from the aggressors and on to pieces of machinery. Who incinerated 200 000 people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The nuclear weapons named Fat Man and Little Boy (not Harry Truman). Who killed 200 000 Iraqis? 'Smart' bombs (not American and British pilots).

The loss of rational principle in war also enables the military thinkers to present war—at least the wars of which they disapprove—as the activity of crazies governed by deep-seated atavistic impulses. This is especially true since the end of the political divide of East and West that used to suggest at least a semblance of ideological differences. Today, wars are invariably seen in anthropological terms. Conflicts which have been spawned by Great Power *realpolitik* are redefined as wars caused by ancient tribal and ethnic animosities. Culture, not politics, is taken to be the well-spring of militarism.

The anthropologisation of conflict was an intermittent feature of the past century. In *War Machine,* Daniel Pick notes that the 1870 Franco-Prussian War gave rise to extensive debates about the raw, virile Teutons and cultured, effete French (pp97-106). Throughout the Second World War, the Japanese and Germans were accused of militaristic instincts inculcated by generations of Junkers and Samurai—if not through harsh toilet training. Today, though, the backdrop of cultural type-casting that used to run alongside the political explanations of conflict has become the whole case for war, as the Rwandans and the Serbs are accused of imbibing hatred with their mothers' milk.

The attribution of war to cultural traits is by no means confined to foreigners. The 'nationalist' masses are regularly accused of 'forcing' the Western elites to march to war—a shameless inversion of reality. During the Boer War, the liberal John Hobson denigrated the masses for 'the democratic saturnalia of Ladysmith and Mafeking Days' when people celebrated British victories, and condemned 'the black slime of [the jingoist's] malice' (quoted in *War Machine,* p113).

John Keegan especially exemplifies the view that modern warfare has been so barbaric precisely because of its popular character. In *A History of Warfare* he puts a malevolent twist on Clausewitz's doctrine. Writing about conscription, Keegan argues that it was Clausewitz's 'single powerful idea', the idea of militant nationalism that 'turn[ed] Europe into a warrior society' in the period from 1813 to 1913:

'This *rite de passage* became an important cultural form in European life, an experience common to almost all young European males and, through its universality, its ready acceptance by electorates as a social norm and its inescapable militarisation of society, a further validation of Clausewitz's dictum that war was a continuation of political activity. If peoples voted for conscription or acquiesced in conscription laws, how could it be denied that war and politics indeed belonged together on the same continuum.' (p21)

Keegan's version of the relationship between militarism and democracy stands reality on its head. As he sees it, democracy puts government at the mercy of the machismo of the masses. But militarism came straight from the top of European societies that were trying to head off the democratic challenge to their rule. Far from acquiescing to conscription laws, electorates resisted conscription, and during the First World War rank-and-file infantrymen mutinied on many fronts, while rebellions in Ireland, imperial Russia and Germany frustrated the war efforts of the great powers.

The relationship between war and democracy is all the more questionable today, when most governments are uniquely unpopular and the old nationalist symbols have been discredited as a consequence of the unravelling of the politics of the Cold War. Back in the days of the Falklands War, Margaret Thatcher could whip up a degree of popular support by waving the flag for 'our boys'. Today, as the debacle over the D-Day commemoration demonstrates, such old-fashioned patriotic tub-thumping will not work for John Major.

If Keegan's assessment were correct, conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Haiti would be the result of popular mobilisations. Indeed they are presented as such: the popular mobilisations of third world nationalists like Saddam, Aideed and Milosevic. But the real record is that contemporary militarism is a policy generated in the West in an attempt to redeem the authority of unpopular governments. Bruce Porter, predicting an unravelling of the American state, says 'we can expect growing public disdain for the political process, rising unrest in the inner cities, proposals for radical constitutional change, third-party movements, one-term presidents and a serious national identity crisis over what it means to be an American' (*War and the Rise of the State,* p295). It is this crisis of political legitimacy, rather than technology or mass demand that provides the backdrop to contemporary militarism.

The 'nationalist' masses are regularly accused of 'forcing' the Western elites to march to war—a shameless inversion of reality

Time and again, Western leaders have sought out the international stage to promote an impression of decisive action. Standing up to third world leaders with little fire-power and even less support is a cheap way for Western politicians to walk tall in the world. Military intervention overseas provides a less intractable arena for policy-makers than domestic politics, where politicians and their programmes are held in contempt by electorates.

Despite having been elected on the basis of concentrating on America's domestic problems, Bill Clinton has been at the forefront of military intervention in the third world. But even here the American electorate have been pointedly unenthusiastic about Clinton's sabre-rattling. The current intervention in Haiti has been marked by a distinct lack of public support.

As to the popularity of third world nationalism, the Haitian intervention demonstrates that there is little enthusiasm for that either. Although the Organisation of American States intervention was supposed to take on the Haitian military rulers, the US forces' principal activity has been to defend Colonel Raoul Cedras and his supporters from the vengeance of the Haitian people. Even in the Balkans, where the image of profound nationalist movements seems to have some content, the reality is different. Few of the nationalist movements that emerged after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact command much support. Once portrayed as the new Nazis, the rump Yugoslav republic of Slobodan Milosevic has little stomach for conflict and has sued for peace with the West.

Where current conflicts call out for a clear explanation, the academics' mystification of the war drive only serve as an apologia for Western militarism. Every conceivable variable, from the biological to the cultural and psychological is invoked to explain war—every variable except the interests of those capitalist powers that have been at the forefront of promoting militarism. In the spirit of Clausewitz, we should relocate the drive towards war where it belongs—in the realm of the political machinations of the Western elites.

The last anti-communist hero

Karl Popper, the champion of anti-communist ideology in the postwar period, died in September. Popper made his reputation with his volumes *The Open Society and its Enemies* (ie, Plato, Hegel and Marx, published in 1945), *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957) and *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959).

Popper considered himself a Marxist in the Austria of his youth but, after seeing his comrades gunned down by the Viennese police during a demonstration, he drew the conservative conclusion that confrontation was not the way. He had read veteran anti-Marxists like Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk and Anton Menger in his father's study. He was influenced by the logical positivist circle of Moritz Schlick, though they always viewed him with suspicion.

Popper's case against the 'enemies of the open society' was that they presumed to understand how society worked, or the laws under which it operated. And, deceiving themselves that society as a whole could be understood, they supported dictatorial plans of how society could be organised. So Plato supported the tyrannies of ancient Greece, Hegel supported Prussian absolutism and laid the basis for German fascism, and Marx provided the blueprint for Stalinism. According to Popper, holistic planning fails because 'it is easy to centralise power but impossible to centralise all that knowledge which is distributed over many individual minds' (*Poverty of Historicism,* p89-90).

The real meaning of Popper's argument is that this champion of capitalism—or the 'open society'—was vacating the field of reason. According to Popper, it is impossible to understand society because it is too complicated. What he means is that capitalist society depends upon ignorance of the outcomes of people's work. Instead of planning the production of what we need, there is a market which wastes unsaleable products, closes down unprofitable industries and throws 'unwanted' workers on the dole. Incapable of rationally organising capitalist society, the capitalist's ideologue damns any attempt to create a more rational society as dictatorship.

But Popper's rejection of rationality was not restricted to the social sciences. His contribution to the natural sciences, the theory of falsifiability, though once widely considered to be the classical restatement of scientific rationality, was in fact a backward step into scepticism.

Popper argued that all scientific theories were really only hypotheses because they could not be proved right—only proved wrong by the discovery of evidence that did not fit the theory. So the proposition that 'all swans are white' will always be a hypothesis because there is always the possibility that a black swan will turn up.

Popper conflates two concepts of 'proof'. In the Dark Ages only absolute proofs, like those of geometry, were accepted as proofs (though confusingly, the authority of the Bible was seen in the same light). That the sum of the angles of a triangle will always be 180° can be proved logically and is called a deductive proof today.

But with the emergence of the natural sciences, pioneers like Francis Bacon and Galileo established a second kind of proof—inductive proof. Proofs that are worked out from the known facts can never be the last word because we are always learning more about the world we live in. The idea that a proof could be anything less than absolute and eternal scandalised the religious schoolmen, but the more modest goal of establishing the momentary truth in specific historical circumstances has been more fruitful.

Popper was right to say that any inductive proof is conditional, but wrong to say that it was therefore a hypothesis. That would amount to saying that scientific theories are not real, but just ways in which we order the facts for our own satisfaction. But the principles on which the Clifton suspension bridge was built are more than just a hypothesis, they have been tested in fact. The thing that eluded Popper was that science is not an either/or, but a process of getting nearer to the truth of the matter.

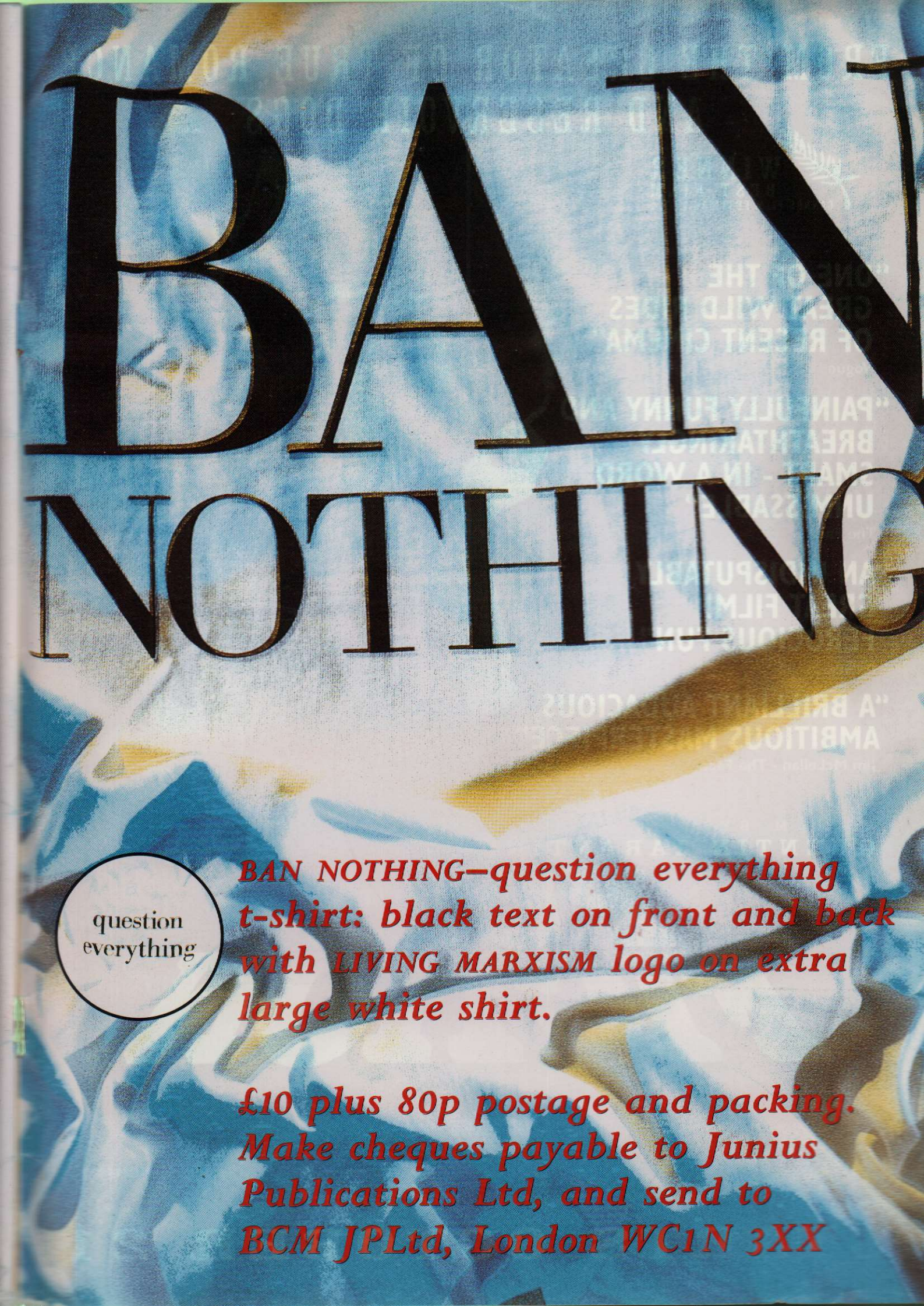
Popper's tendency to undermine the claims of natural science was an outcome of his hostility to a planned society. The scorn he poured on the social sciences spilled over on to the natural sciences. The case he made against holistic planning rested on a cynicism that is hostile to all rationality.

A student I knew was once set an essay on Popper and, finding his ideas difficult, resolved to ring him up and ask him directly what he meant. After making enquiries, the enterprising undergraduate got through to the elderly academic, who was surprised: 'Do they still read my book in England?', he asked in a cracked voice, before going on to explain the theory of falsifiability.

It is true that Popper's contribution to the natural sciences is not held in high regard today. Recently the scientist and populariser of science Lewis Wolpert has complained that the natural sciences have been ill-served by the philosophy of science all round. Even Popper's scepticism about nationalism and the state is less attractive to elites who would prefer a bit more respect for their hallowed institutions today.

In the end, Popper's reputation as a great intellectual rests almost entirely on his strident anti-communism. A preface to the 1992 edition of his autobiography (*The Unending Quest,* first published in 1976) was written by the German chancellor Helmut Kohl, who paid tribute to the opponent of 'class determinism'. In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Kohl congratulated Popper for having stood fast. But the record is that for all the triumphalism of the free world, twentieth-century capitalism produced few thinkers of any merit. Popper's work only stood out by comparison to the dearth of competition, with Friedrich Hayek, who died in 1992, the only other serious contender. And then there were none.

James Heartfield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