SAVE LIVING MARXISM!

The best way to keep your magazines safe from the perils of everyday life is to get into binding. For a limited period, we are offering our readers *Living Marxism* embossed binders (1988-89 issues) for just £5 plus 80p postage and packaging.

More cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to LM Binders (14), BCM JPL Ltd, London WC1N 3XX.
## Contents

### Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Editorial: The End of the Decayed. The Thatcherite vision of the future is finished even before the achievable close.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What they said in '88. A selection of choice quotes from throughout the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Cheltenham Five. Sara Llewellyn on the latest case of injustice for the Irish in Britain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Burying Lenin. Don Milligan on saints and Stalinists and revolution ennobled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Goodwill to all? Andrew Cucutt meets some of the workers excluded from the season of 'goodwill to all men'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The ghosts of Christmas past. From fertility rites to family values, Mark Reilly examines the changing face of the December festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The British and God. A survey of some attitudes towards the church and its teachings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>By order of The Management. Lindsey Danis on a political clampdown in the colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The other refugees. While the British government cheered East Germans fleeing to the Free World, Sila Hurgen burnt to death in a British cell in protest at the Tories' treatment of Kurdish refugees. Andrew Cucutt reports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Living

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Then and now: December 1976—the Soviets invade Afghanistan. Ten years on, Sue Nicholls examines how America's intervention has helped to 'Lebanonise' Afghanistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>EFMs...yes and no. Jon Fryer looks at the bigger issues behind the Tony dilemma over joining the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Segregation in school playgrounds. Neil Fletcher, Labour leader of the Inner London Education Authority, demands an apology and a retraction. We can't oblige.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Freedom of speech bubbles. American comics have been accused of everything from political subversion to sexual perversion. Pat Ford spoke to the director of a new film about the comic book story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Here come the sound bites. What have Edward Heath and Elvis Presley got in common? Being televised only from the waist upwards, Frank Cottrell-Boyce on the cameras in the common.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Snobbery with violence. Toby Banks and Sean Thomas throw up over Tony Parsons' attacks on the working class in Arena magazine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Prints in emperor's clothes. Joe Boatman and Pandora Andrewson question the ideas behind the Art of Photography exhibition at the Royal Academy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>A little light reading: Sunational sex; Thurbth thoughts; Woman with X appeal; Male pin-ups; Pogonomy; Lenin's Scissors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While 1989 is still warm, the faces of the eighties are already fading into the past.

Nigel Lawson, unsassailed economic miracle man, has been successfully assailed. Inflation, interest rates and the EMS mess have pricked his boated reputation and reduced him to a blip in the history books.

Cecil Parkinson, Thatcher's favourite insider, has lost his brycream sheen in a succession of scandals (who's the father? whose are the shares?) and disasters (first as minister for Piper Alpha and nuclear power, now as secretary of state for the Channel). Heir today, gone tomorrow.

Elsewhere, the businessmen who spent the eighties doing billion-dollar deals before breakfast are now having trouble paying the bills.

Sir James Goldsmith, prince of stock market predators, no longer knows where his next highly-leveraged transatlantic takeover bid is coming from.

Rupert Murdoch, ruler of the Sun and Sky, has been born again and, like many another desperate debtor, now looks to Heaven for salvation.

The Saatchis, who sold Britain Thatcherism and bought up their overseas competitors, are reduced to selling off their paintings and worrying that their own firm might become part of a foreign corporation's private collection.

Plenty more of the big financial and political players appear to be going down with their decade. Not least among them is Margaret Thatcher, who beat the eighties into shape and said she would do the same to the nineties, only to discover recently that somebody has taken the brick out of her handling.

In 1982 Thatcher walked on water through the South Atlantic. In 1984 she stomped on the coalfields. Today, in two embarrassing privatisation debacles, even water and fossil fuels are getting their own back. 'Ten more years, ten more years' the Tories brayed on her anniversary a few short months ago, and she promised them that she would 'go on and on'. Now the woman herself suggests that one more election victory will be enough, while more and more people believe that it would be one too many; the popular refrain is, in the words of Brian Walden, 'prime minister, I must stop you there'.

The close of the decade brings closer the end of the decayed. It couldn't happen to a nicer bunch of people. But we are witnessing more than the decline of a few charmless capitalists. The entire enterprise culture of the late eighties is being called into question.

Just a couple of years after the Conservatives conjured it up, their vision of the future appears outdated. The promise of a Thatcherite millennium, in which free market economics would spread prosperity ever further, sounds out of step with the times already.

Buzz-words of the business age—'popular capitalism', 'share-owning democracy'—have turned stale and been discarded as quickly as a piece of playground slang. The recent spate of films and TV series about smooth, successful City dealers and the continuing advance of yuppies must have seemed a good and topical idea when production started a short while ago; yet even as they reach the screen today, they look...
like tired repeats. The sensitive
scouts from the high fashion
houses have also picked up a
change in the wind: 'power-
shoulders' and shoulder-pads are
already considered passe on the
catwalks of London and Paris.
The eighties were supposed to
be only the beginning, the dawn
of an age of miracles, economic
and otherwise. They were going
to turn plastic into the magical
provider of endless consumer
goods. The working class was
to be abolished. Everybody would
become a self-employed owner-
occupier, a citizen of the share-
owning democracy, their
personal organisations organising
their personal pension and
health schemes, their designer
cars and designer clothes
developing a conservative
designer consciousness. The
miracle was that they kept that
illusion alive for more than
a fortnight.

'Let's make money' was the cry
on the City dealing floors, which
became a slogan for the age.
And the Tories and British
businessmen did make money;
but they didn't make anything
much else. The decay of
uncompetitive British industry
forced them to look elsewhere
for a quick profit. So
manufacturing went to the wall
as falling investment and soaring
imports passed each other,
travelling at speed in opposite
directions. Meanwhile, to keep
their system alive, they printed
cash and lent it out by the
wheelbarrowful.
Credit exploded across society.
Bankruptcy became distained into
a symbol of affluence; the more
you owed, the more status
points you accumulated. Low-
waged council tenants who owed
a few quid to the local loan
shark (big interest rates and
bigger debt collectors) were
considered members of the
'underclass'. High-salaried
homebuyers who owed six figures
to the banks and the building
societies were doing rather well
for themselves. The really
seriously 'bad' debtors to be
called bankrupts; in the eighties
they became yuppies.

With credit notes being
handed out like calling cards, the
Tories were able to create the
appearance of an economic
boom. The billions of borrowed
poundsaveling the place
allowed capitalists to ask fancy
new prices for old assets, and
increase the spending power of
many in work. For a moment,
the decayed had a chance to
look fresh again. From City
institutions through high-street
stores to suburban semi-
detacheds, everything was going
up. It seemed that by entering
the market to buy and sell (or
bid and offer as the City has it),
anybody could do a modern
Dick Whittington and make
a million.

Unfortunately, however you
dress it up, debt is debt. If the
long as the paper economy has
some real wealth-making
industry behind it. But Britain
has no such thing. Establishment
spokesmen have recently let
this closely-guarded secret
slip in the debate over Britain's
relationship with the European
Monetary System.
British politicians and
economists are expressing fears
about sterling being dominated
by the deutschmark. They talk
as if German banknotes have
some mystical power that makes
them 'stronger' than British
pound coins. Yet there is nothing
dependurisation of Britain,
like an estate agent clinching a
sale while the demolition gang is
knocking the house down. The
short-lived credit-fuelled boom of
the eighties was centred on the
City and the financial sector.
Capital flowed away from
unprofitable industries and into
junk bonds and overseas
investments, and the Square
Mile rose in stature as an
international centre for share
and currency dealing. The Tories
said this showed Britain was in a
strong position to face the
future. In fact it was always an

The promise of a Thatcherite
millenium, in which free market
economics would spread
prosperity ever-further, sounds
out of step with the times
already
deregulated eighties, there was plenty of cream for the City to feast upon. But this successful sponging off the world economy did nothing to alter the long-term decay of British industry.

The self-important British capitalists of the eighties left the menial tasks of investing in new technology and training engineers to ordinary mortals like Johnny Jap and Gerry. Meanwhile the Brits made a fat, fast profit by buying shares in other people's companies and producing an army of accountants and financial consultants.

Now the movements in the world are turning against sterling and the City speculators, leading to a loss of international confidence and business, and stripping away the flashy frondage that hid Britain's decay for the last few years. British businessmen are left sitting atop a house of credit cards, watching handfuls of depreciating paper shares and currency. They have high interest rates, a record trade deficit, their pretensions to play a leading world role have been exposed as empty arrogance, and they have little of industrial substance to fall back on at home. Britain's economic weakness is not underlying any more. It is right up front, and the lying government stands exposed.

The eighties are ending in a dizzying round of economic crises, Tory Party ructions and new City scandals. Every showcase of Conservative economic strategy seems to be turning into an almighty show-up. The government can only sell water at a loss, it cannot sell nuclear power stations at all, the London Docklands development is turning into a ghost town even before the cranes come down, the Channel tunnel link is making poor progress through the seabed and none at all through the Kent countryside.

With the decline of the North Sea oil industry symbolised by the collapse of a rig in November, just about all the only companies reporting good prospects are those which dispose of toxic waste produced by foreign firms, and those which dispose of the assets of insolvent British ones. Meanwhile the collapse of underfunded public services continues to turn Britain into a shoddily, dirty and dangerous hole that no self-respecting European would want to put their hand into without gloves on.

As always, the capitalists are seeking to ensure that other people pay for their problems. The millions who were promised a prosperous future through the Thatcher revolution are left to cook nervously into the nineties. Sid sold his British Gas and Telecom shares a long time ago. Far from making money out of the water and electricity sell-offs, he is worried about how much privatisation will put on his bills. He is probably having trouble paying for more and more for his mortgage on a house that is worth less and less. And, as the economy veers towards recession, he could soon be out of a job. Instead of becoming a nation of self-employed entrepreneurs, Britain looks set to experience another sharp increase in the number of people breaking free from the boss by signing on the dole.

What is a fitting epitaph for the eighties' headstone? We would suggest the slogan which the financiers tried to hide in the small print of their get-rich-quick adverts, but which sums up the inability of their decaying and out-of-control system to secure prosperity for more than a few moments: The value of investments can go down as well as up.

Yet Thatcher insists the nineties will be 'business as usual'. Her government has no alternative vision of the future with which to replace its bankrupt strategy, no new solutions with which to attack the rising pile of problems on its desk. The new faces in Thatcher's cabinet look as bereft of brain as the old ones. But the problem facing the Tories is not just an intellectual one. The roots of their crisis are firmly buried in the state of British economy which has been declining for a century. Such a plunge downward through history cannot be reversed overnight by a reshuffled minister waking up in a cabinet meeting and having ‘just good idea about this making Britain great again business’.

The exhaustion of the Thatcher government's policies is now evident to many of its longstanding supporters. Only a fanatic or a member of the house of lords could seriously believe government claims that the economy has 'overheated' and been too successful for its own good, or that everything from transport disasters to clashes between party-goers and the police are just the 'problems of prosperity', caused by people having too much money to spend on a trip on the Thames or on Eustathy.

Discontent is welling up within the Tory ranks as the government loses direction. Yet Thatcher's critics are no better than she is at identifying a Big Idea that can carry Britain into the future. Listen closely to the grumbles, and you will hear no brilliant policy proposals being put forward. Instead, Tory complaints focus on the deficiencies of Thatcher's style.

There is no doubt that watching the prime minister rant and froth is enough to make a saint throw his sandals at the TV set. But how can Thatcher's style be blamed for the approaching crisis? Her tendency to shout at people seems an unlikely explanation for this year's expected £20 billion trade deficit. Her dislike of foreigners and falling-out with the diplomatic Sir Geoffrey Howe is hardly an adequate cause of the pound's slump on the international exchanges.

Thatcher's Tory critics concentrate on matters of style because on matters of substance they have nothing new to say, no political alternative to fight for. As with most of the designer goods of the eighties, all they offer is the same old tat under a different label. Serious though they be, the conflicts within the Conservative Party at the moment represent more of an attempt to shift the blame for past and present problems than to plough a fresh path into the future.

Since nobody is challenging the Thatcherite programme, the odds currently favour Thatcher carrying on as leader as the nineties begin. From the Tory point of view, she at least has a reputation for strength and can appear resolute as she stands amid the rubble. From the point of view of the rest of us it seems clear that, whatever the outcome of their interminable squabbles, the Tories will pursue the same discredited course and the old defunct policies.

Whether or not it sticks with Thatcher, the British establishment has no vision left. It is terrified of the nineties and the uncertainties to come. That is why the dominant mood in Britain today is to look longingly backwards, to seek comfort in the mythical good old days. Nostalgia is back in fashion in the arts, in entertainment, in dress and in politics. The right-wing press and politicians would far rather talk about Victorian values or the glorious Second World War years than consider the approach of the twenty-first century. It is a sign of how little they can offer a day that they should turn to the times of Dickensian squalor or wartime suffering for future inspiration.

The British authorities feel so insecure about what is to come and so desperate to preserve what they can of the past that even the decline of their old enemies in Eastern Europe scares them. Of course the hired guns of the capitalist press are trying to use the death-throes of the Stalinist regimes to prove that their own system is alive and well by comparison. But pointing out that the patient in the next bed is even sicker than you is hardly evidence of blooming health. And despite all the back-slapping about the 'victory for freedom' in the East, the accelerating pace of change there is causing panic in the West.

The British ruling class and its American allies knew where they were with the Cold War. The division of Europe and the solidity of the Iron curtain' have been key sources of stability for them as well as for the Soviet Union throughout the post-war years. The existence of the unattractive Stalinist bloc acted as an advert for Western ways, and a justification for the militarism of Nato. Today they are frightened of losing the prize of the past, and more frightened still of what might
replace them. Above all, the re- raising of the question of German unity threatens to pull apart the old world order, primarily at the expense of the decayed powers which benefit from the status quo—like the USA, the USSR, and the UK.

So alongside the eulogies to ‘the expansion of freedom’, we hear Thatcher urging caution about altering traditional East-West relations, asserting that East Germany will remain part of the Warsaw Pact, and trying to think up some excuse for will not declare themselves to be outdated, as the East Germans have done, nor will they pull down their institutional equivalents of the Berlin Wall. These representatives of the past will fight us to control the future. And they have a powerful armoury to do it with. Not everything that the Thatcher government achieved in the eighties was illusory. It also constructed an all-too real machinery of repression. Piece by piece, almost imperceptibly, the Tories have put together an

Labour Party was Thatcher’s greatest source of strength through the eighties. Today Labour appears to be getting its act together, operating more smoothly, telling better jokes in parliament. But it has no more vision of the future than the Tories.

Thatcher’s ministers have gone back a decade and taken a leaf out of the last Labour government’s book, lecturing low-paid ambulance workers about the need to accept a real wage cut or risk destroying their fire on Thatcher’s style of government. The consequence is that, even if they were to succeed in unseating her, it would make little difference to the future direction of British socialism. Kinnockism would be a caricature of Thatcherism, another strain of the politics of the past.

The decayed remain in power, but without the confidence and authority which they enjoyed for a decade. A gap is opening up today for a fresh vision of the future. The defenders of the old order are trying to close it by devoting what’s left of their energies to asserting that Marxism is an outdated dogma.

Marxism has nothing to do with insatiable sacred laws written long ago (that’s religion). Nor has it had a hand in sustaining the stagnant Stalinist regimes of the East. Marxism is always the most modern of ideas, because it addresses the future; it is the theory of human liberation through social revolution. Marxism has no detailed blueprint for tomorrow’s world. But it has a vision to fight for, of a society freed from the restraints which hold us back—the profit laws, the police states, the moral hypocrisy—in which the future would be something to strive towards and get excited about, not to fear and shy away from. As the inability of capitalism to provide a decent future becomes apparent once more, a new chance arises to bring Marxism alive among those seeking a better life.

Let us enter the nineties aware that there are many dangers ahead, but convinced too that there are unprecedented opportunities for popularising an alternative, positive view of future prospects. East and West the world is changing, and all the safe bets of yesterday are off.

The struggle to give shape and direction to the nineties has already begun. But with Christmas and the New Year approaching, we take a moment to remember the reactionary politicians and rich financiers who rose high and have fallen low in the eighties. As the decayed depart the public stage, we send them the season’s greetings: Goodbye. It has been very unpleasant knowing you.

The British authorities feel so insecure about what is to come and so desperate to preserve what they can of the past that even the decline of their old enemies in Eastern Europe scares them
WHAT THEY SAID IN ‘89

It took us a long time to get over the effect of the French Revolution 200 years ago. We don’t want another one.
Margaret Thatcher.

Is it that we know more of every single disaster, or is it that the standard of living is higher and more people go out and do things than ever before?
Margaret Thatcher explains away the disaster boom, standing at the spot where the Marchionessa sank.

Thatcher: I’m staying my own sweet, reasonable self.
Walden: Prime minister, I must stop you there...
Thatcher: No you must not.
Thatcher sweet-talks Brian Walden.

We are fighting on slightly more fronts than we intended.
Peter Brooke, former chairman of the Tory Party.

Inflation never comes down in a straight line.
Nigel Lawson, former chancellor of the exchequer.

I absorb my ideas from the ether, not from the written word.
John Major, chancellor of the exchequer.

We’ve closed quite a lot of hospitals over the past 20 years. I think it’s a good thing. We haven’t closed enough.
Health secretary Kenneth Clarke.

I could abolish poverty tomorrow simply by abolishing all benefits.
John Moore, former secretary of state for health and social security.

Identification cards had been in use it would have helped to identify the dead.
Irvine Patnick, Tory MP for Sheffield Hallam, on Hillsborough.

Homeless people may be examples of a rise in individualism and a taste for independence.
David Willetts, director of the Centre for Policy Studies, scraping the bottom of the Tory think-tank.

The capitalist system—it is the system we live in and we have got to make it work more efficiently, more fairly and more successfully in the world marketplace. This is what the policy review is about, and we shall reject any sort of naive shopping-list socialism.
Neil Kinnock.

It has been the happiest week of my life
Eric Hammond on the Labour Party conference.

The flickering flames of democracy and representation are being snuffed out in the name of New Realism and victory.
Tony Benn at the Labour Party conference.

We have been stuffed.
Campaign Group supporter Tim Beacock on the left’s performance at the Labour Party conference.

It’s disgraceful. Why should God suddenly save him?
Barbara Cartland after Neil Kinnock escaped unhurt from a car crash.

I’m pleased that the level of wage settlements is marginally down.
Michael Meacher, Labour spokesman on employment.

A visit to the opera on the South Bank can be spoiled by having to run the gauntlet of those reduced to begging.
Labour Party News.

In Grimsby we know a woman’s place. It’s on her back on a kitchen table.
Labour MP Austin Mitchell.

We may be bastards. But we’re your bastards, not Ford bastards.
Jack Adams, transport union negotiator at Ford, after his union executive told Dagenham workers to stop wildcat strikes.

The egalitarianism of modern America represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx.
Francis Fukuyama of the US state department, whose Washington office is essentially yards from a third world ghetto.

Our people are linked by more than sentiment.
President George Bush on relations between the USA and Poland.

[We] will work very closely with the new government to ensure the total elimination of human rights in El Salvador.
US vice-president Dan Quayle in El Salvador, where the death-squad party Arena had just won the presidential election.

The secret service is under orders that if Bush is shot, to shoot Quayle.
Senator John Kerry.
The market is breathing a sigh of relief that Deng is coming out on top. *Wall Street Journal* after the slaughter in Tiananmen Square.

We are against doctrines which export revolution and counter-revolution. 

Gorbachev during his visit to Cuba.

Socialism need not be synonymous with absence of unemployment. 

Soviet labour expert Vladimir Kostakov on perestroika.

We have taken power into our own hands in the city. We have allocated patrols of workers for the mining settlements, the city centre and the pits. 

Power is controlled by us. 

Member of the Ukrainian miners' strike committee.

Our defeat is total. 

General Wojciech Jaruzelski on the June elections in Poland.

If they want to go back to Africa then we can give them some ladders and they can climb up trees. 

Tory MP Terry Dicks on black immigrants.

I deplore the collaboration of the banks with the evil system prevailing in South Africa. They give capitalism a bad name. 

Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

I think it's really terrible what they do to those rhinos. 

*Kylie Minogue on South Africa.*

He has been in power for 20 years and clings on to it by showering oil wealth on Libya's poor, housing them in modern flats, schooling their children and giving them adequate healthcare. 


If you are Irish and you're arrested on a terrorist, political type of offence you don't stand a chance, you just don't stand a chance. 

*Gerard Conlon on the day of his release.*

Thank God for our bobbies. Their image has been severely dented recently. But how many of the Guildford Four were driving ambulances in London yesterday? 

*Sun* editorial on the release of the Guildford Four coincided with management's look-out of London ambulance drivers.

I would class them as animals. 

*Police sergeant Robert Burns on Liverpool fans at Hillsborough.*

If you want to be involved in good crime, you must join the Met. 

Anonymous police officer speaking on Radio 4.

The sinking of the *Belgrano* became a great issue, yet at the time it was one of the simplest decisions that I personally found myself involved in. It was taken when some of us had gone down to Chequers at the weekend for lunch. 

Lord Whitelaw.

When we were going through the trenches and seeing lots of corpses, I can always remember thinking that the politicians who sent us should come and bury the dead. 

Frank Gilchrist, former Scots Guardsman decorated in the Malvinas War.

(South Armagh) may be a seldom-go area, or a slow-go area. 

Unionist MP Ken Maginnis denying that Crossmaglen is a 'no-go' area for British forces.

The UDR have done remarkable work ... A very, very, very brave group of men. 

Margaret Thatcher speaking on the day two Ulster Defence Regiment members were charged with sectarian murder.

He is the last person in the world I would invite to come to anything, anywhere at any time. 

Neil Kinnock on Sinn Fein MP Gerry Adams' appearance at the Labour Party conference.

Wanted dead or alive, Fenian bastard taxi drivers for skimming. Good rewards given for whole body parts or knees caps with proof of Fenian connection. 

Leaflet distributed in West Belfast by British soldiers.

The music brought the roof down. Big Deal! 

*Graffiti, Falls Road, West Belfast.*

There is a hell of a lot of straw lying around which gets burnt every year. You can heat largeish houses that way. 

Prince Charles.

I really care when someone shouts 'parasite', because of course it is going to affect you. 

The Duchess of York.

The ruling class cliche is out of date. Anyone who has the desire, ability and the cheque book can play. 

Geoffrey Kent, Prince Charles' polo associate.

We don't pay taxes. The little people pay taxes. 

Leona Helmsley, New York billionaire and convicted tax evader.
Exposed: British injustice for the Irish

The Balcombe Street bombshell

The authorities have known who was really behind the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings since 1975, says Sharon Clarke. The story of the Balcombe Street unit of the IRA shows the lengths to which the establishment will go to preserve the illusion of British justice where Ireland is concerned.

"Find the REAL killers" demanded the Mirror's front-page headline on 25 October. The Guildford Four—Paul Hill, Gerard Conlon, Patrick Armstrong and Carole Richardson—had been released a week earlier, amid long overdue revelations of a frame-up. Now the police wanted to change the subject and to recover their reputation by focusing attention on the hunt for the guilty men. "Someone did carry out those murderous attacks all those years ago", said a Scotland Yard spokesman in the Mirror: "We have a duty to find out who."

This should not prove too difficult a piece of detective work for Britain's finest, since they know 'who' and have known it for the last 14 years while the Guildford Four were rotting in jail. The bombing of pubs frequented by soldiers in Guildford and Woolwich in 1974 was carried out by the men who became known as the Balcombe Street Active Service Unit of the IRA. Don't take our word for it. The IRA volunteers themselves first told the police that they were responsible for those attacks after their arrest in December 1975. They told the world the same thing at their trial in January and February 1977.

The authorities and the media conspired to suppress these admissions, because they had already jailed Hill, Conlon, Armstrong and Richardson for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings. They did not want that frame-up exposed by the IRA. The Balcombe Street trial must surely have been the only occasion on which the British legal system fixed the evidence so as to 'prove' that a group of Irishmen were not responsible for acts of violence.

The story of the Balcombe Street unit is the least-publicised side of the Guildford Four saga. It demonstrates that, despite their high-minded statements about justice, the British authorities are not concerned with such legal niceties as 'guilt' and 'innocence' where Ireland is concerned. They want to criminalise all Irish people in the minds of the

(Continued on page 12)
'Our whole nation is the prisoner'

Speech from the dock by IRA volunteer Joe O'Connell at the end of the Balcombe Street siege trial, 7 February 1977

'Members of the jury:

There has been an attempt by this court to isolate certain incidents which have been called "crimes". These incidents have been put completely outside the context in which they occurred, in a way that is neither just nor consistent with the truth. The true context is that of the relationship between this country and our country—Ireland—that relationship is one of a state of war against the occupation of Ireland by Britain.

'Mention has been made in this court of the violence suffered by the Irish people: the use of internment without charge or trial in the Six Counties; of the conviction before the European Court of Human Rights of the British government for the torture of Irish people; of the many brutalities of British colonial rule.

The judge has attempted to restrict the reference to bombings and shootings to "terrorist" offences. We would like to ask the judge whether the bombing of Hiroshima and Dresden were terrorist offences? Whether the torture carried out by British soldiers in Aden and Cyprus and Hola Camp, Kenya were acts of terrorism? Whether the British were guilty of terrorism when they forced thousands of civilians into concentration camps in South Africa where thousands of them died?

'No mention has been made in this court of the violence suffered by the Irish people: the use of internment without charge or trial in the Six Counties; of the conviction before the European Court of Human Rights of the British government for the torture of Irish people; of the many brutalities of British colonial rule.

The judge has attempted to restrict the reference to bombings and shootings to "terrorist" offences. We would like to ask the judge whether the bombing of Hiroshima and Dresden were terrorist offences? Whether the torture carried out by British soldiers in Aden and Cyprus and Hola Camp, Kenya were acts of terrorism? Whether the British were guilty of terrorism when they forced thousands of civilians into concentration camps in South Africa where thousands of them died?

'We say that no representative of British imperialism is fit to pass judgement on us, for this government has been guilty of the very things for which we now stand accused. This government carried out acts of terrorism in order to defend British imperialism and continues to do so in Ireland. We have struggled to free our country from British rule. We are patriots. British soldiers in Northern Ireland are mercenaries of British imperialism. Yet none of them has ever been convicted for the murders of unarmed civilians which they have committed in Ireland. We ask the members of the jury to consider this paradox.

'We are all four Irish republicans. We have recognised this court to the extent that we have instructed our lawyers to draw the attention of the court to the fact that four totally innocent people—Carole Richardson, Gerry Conlon, Paul Hill and Paddy Armstrong—were serving massive sentences for three bombings, two in Guildford and one in Woolwich, which three of us and another man now imprisoned, have admitted that we did. The director of public prosecutions was made aware of these admissions in December 1975 and has chosen to do nothing. We wonder if he will still do nothing when he is made aware of the new and important evidence which has come to light through the cross-examination of certain prosecution witnesses in this trial.

'The evidence of (police forensic experts) Higgins and Lidstone played a vital part in the conviction of innocent people. Higgins admitted in this trial that the Woolwich bomb formed part of a correlated series with other bombings with which we are charged. Yet when he gave evidence at the earlier Guildford and Woolwich trial he deliberately concealed that the Woolwich bomb was definitely part of a series carried out between October and December 1974, and that the people on trial were in custody at the time of some of these bombings.

'Lidstone in his evidence at this trial tried to make little of the suggestions that the Guildford bombs could have been part of the "Phase one" bombings with which we are accused, with the excuse, and this appears to be his only reason, that the bombings in Guildford had occurred a long time before the rest. When it was pointed out to him that there were many clear links between Caterham and Guildford and that the time between Guildford and the Brooks Club bomb with which we were originally charged was 17 days and that Woolwich occurred 16 days later, and that equal time gaps occurred with many of the incidents with which we were charged, Lidstone backtracked and admitted there was a likely connection.

'Those two men, Higgins and Lidstone, gave evidence at the Guildford and Woolwich trial which had no place in their true conclusions as scientists: they gave evidence which they must have known was untrue. The evidence which they gave was completely in line with police lies so as to make the charges stick against those four people.

'Then we come to (bomb squad) commander Nevill. He said he only wanted to get the truth concerning Guildford and Woolwich. When he gave evidence in this trial; yet he has not done. Why? Because Nevill knows that the truth means the end of the road for him and many other senior police officers and because his superiors know it would be a dangerous insight into how corrupt the British establishment really is.

'This shifty manoeuvring typifies what we, as Irish republicans, have come to understand by the words "British justice". Time and again in Irish political trials in this country innocent people have been convicted on the flimsiest evidence—even no more than extorted statements or even "verbal" from the police.

'Despite the often repeated claim that there is no such thing as a political prisoner in England, we would like to point out the stress laid in Irish trials on the political beliefs of the prisoners and the fact that over the last few years convicted republicans have been subjected to extreme brutality in English prisons. This brutality has led to prisoners being severely injured like six republicans in Albany in September last year, and to the almost constant use of solitary confinement for such prisoners. It has also resulted in the deaths of three of our comrades—Michael Gaughan, Frank Stagg and Noel Jenkinson.

'We do not wish to insult the members of the jury when we say they are not our peers. An English jury can never be the peers of Irish men and women. We will be judged only by our countrymen. Any verdict or sentence from this court is nothing more than the continuation of the hypocrisy of British rule in Ireland and the injustice it has inflicted on our country and its people.

'We admit to no "crime" and to no "guilt", for the real crime and guilt are those of British imperialism committed against our people. The war against imperialism is a just war and it will go on, for true peace can only come about when a nation is free from oppression and injustice. Whether we are imprisoned or not is irrelevant, for our whole nation is the prisoner of British imperialism. The British people who choose to ignore this or to swallow the lies of the British gutter press are responsible for the actions of their government unless they stand out against them.

'As loyal Irish Republican Army we have fought to free our oppressed nation from its bondage to British imperialism, of which this court is an integral part.'
British public, to help prevent the war in Ireland as a legitimate law and order operation. To this end, one Irish face will fit into the frame as well as any other.

Shortly after 4pm on Friday, 12 December 1975, two men with their hands on their heads walked on to the balcony outside 22b Balcombe Street, a flat in Marylebone, London. A few minutes later two more followed. They walked towards an army of armed police and the massed ranks of the world’s media. It was the end of the six-day Balcombe Street siege, and the end of the IRA’s most successful military campaign in Britain.

Fifty missions

The four IRA men had taken refuge and hostages in the Balcombe Street flat during a police chase, after they had fired a gun into Scott’s oyster bar in London’s West End—one of several attacks on what one of them was later to describe as “a new class” restaurant. This turned out to be the last mission in a campaign of bomb and gun attacks that spanned 18 months and almost 50 operations. The Balcombe Street four were Joe O’Connell, Harry Duggan, Eddie Butler and Hugh Doherty. Along with another man, Brendan Dowd, who had already been captured, they had run the police forces of London and the county of Kent ragged, outwitting and humiliating the authorities time and again. Their best-known attacks included the assassination of Ross McWhirter, after he offered a £250,000 reward for their capture as part of a “Best the bombers’ campaign (“That man thought he lived in Texas”, said Butler, “he put a bounty on our heads”), and the bombing of the London flat of famous Tory prime minister Edward Heath (“He was prime minister when internment was introduced”, said O’Connell, “so he was classed as fair game”).

After their capture, and before the Balcombe Street trial began in January 1977, O’Connell, Duggan, Butler and Dowd had revealed their part in the Guildford and Woolwich attacks (Doherty had not been in Britain at the time of those bombings). They had given solicitors detailed accounts of how the operations were carried out, including facts which could only have been known to those responsible. This threatened a major embarrassment for the authorities.

In October 1975, at the end of a tactical trial, the Guildford Four had been convicted of those same bombings on the strength of invented and uncorroborated confessions. Paul Hill had been sentenced to serve “the rest of his natural life”. Paddy Armstrong had been given 33 years, Gerry Conlon had got 30 years and 17-year-old Carole Richardson (an English girl whose crime was to be Armstrong’s girlfriend) had been ordered to be detained “during Her Majesty’s pleasure”.

Police had only obtained these confessions through beatings and bullying (and by drugging Richardson), and had only sustained the convictions by deliberately suppressing all evidence. Now they were faced with a highly professional team of IRA volunteers who declared that they had bombed Guildford and Woolwich, and that they had never heard of the people convicted of these attacks. The dedication and expertise of the Balcombe Street men made them far more credible than the Guildford Four, young drifters who were living a twilight existence on drink and drugs. Stage two of the state frame-up went into operation, with the doctoring of evidence relating to the Balcombe Street trial. That trial was a remarkable affair, at which a top-level political conspiracy began to be revealed.

The missing charges

The initial charge sheet against the Balcombe Street Four totted up 144 charges when the trial opened. This had been reduced to 25 incriminations against each of the four. While the original list included offences dating back to August 1974, the first charge in the edited edition related to an incident in December 1974. The authorities had thus erased any suggestion that the IRA unit was operating at the time of the pub bombings and of the Guildford Four’s arrest.

The censored statements

When the charges were put to O’Connell, Duggan and Butler, each refused to plead, following the IRA tradition of refusing to recognise British courts. But they did announce from the dock that Guildford and Woolwich should be included in the charges—the first public announcement that the Guildford Four had been framed. Every British newspaper was represented in the packed press gallery when the IRA men made their short statements; all except the Guardian chose not to mention this extraordinary development. The press kept up these high reporting standards throughout the trial.

The experts’ omissions

The men of the Balcombe Street unit offered no defence during the trial, instructing counsel only to cross-examine prosecution witnesses with the intention of exposing how the Guildford Four had been framed. Under cross-examination, police forensic experts Douglas Higgs and Donald Liddon agreed that the methods and the devices used at Guildford and Woolwich fitted perfectly into the series of attacks which had continued for more than a year after the Guildford Four were arrested. Higgs further admitted that he had included Woolwich in his original list of connected throw-bomb attacks carried out between October and December 1974. So why had he later omitted Woolwich from his report? Because, said Higgs, the bomb squad, in the person of police sergeant Doyle, had told him to take it out.

The police and the DPP

The Met’s detective chief superintendent Bill Huckle and detective superintendent Peter Imbert later gave evidence, as did commander Jim Nivell of the bomb squad. Between them they conceded that Butler and O’Connell had made statements admitting to Woolwich and that, on the strength of these and Higgs’ original forensic report, the director of public prosecutions had been advised that there was sufficient evidence to charge members of the Balcombe Street unit with Woolwich. The DPP had clearly decided that no such embarrassing charges should be brought, and the senior policemen who had gone along with the cover-up by dropping any further investigations.

The judge and the jury

As it became obvious that the authorities had suppressed ample evidence linking the Balcombe Street unit with Guildford and Woolwich, Mr Justice Cantley halted the cross-examination on the grounds that, since the pub bombings were not on the charge sheet, the court could not concern itself with what had carried them out. The prosecution case ended. All that remained was for Joe O’Connell to make his speech from the dock, speaking over continued interruptions from the judge. The jury then retired to consider its verdict.

Before the trial began, it was discovered that the police had vetted the jury panel: 10 panel members admitted that they had been affected by the bombing campaign. They were stood down, after which each IRA volunteer exercised his right to reject seven potential jurors. The first consequence of this was a largely working class jury including five women and three black people; the second consequence was a speedy change in the law to reduce the number of jurors whom a defendant could reject from seven to three.

After retiring to consider their verdict, the jury asked for a copy of O’Connell’s speech, which the judge refused them. Then, after just under eight hours, the jury returned as expected with unanimous verdicts—except that some of the verdicts were “not guilty.” All of the defendants...
were acquitted of five bombing offences, which the forensic experts had established were part of the same campaign as those for which the jury returned ‘guilty’ verdicts. The implication was clear: the jurors were not happy with the prosecution case, and were impressed by the IRA volunteers’ response, as one anonymous juror later explained:

‘I remember the police were very shocked by the fact that there were acquittals and, of course, it was quite likely that the Balcombe Street men did do the lot. But what happened was that we were, in a way, rebelling against being railroaded by the court into unanimous verdicts of guilty. Some of us got very upset. We thought it was immoral... Also, we definitely felt that at least some of them were connected with Guildford and Woolwich.’ (Quoted in G. McKee and R. Francy, *Time Bomb*, 1983, p.387)

After the judge scolded each of the IRA men to a recommended minimum of 30 years, the jurors adjourned to a nearby pub and continued discussing the case. As a reward for their performance in court, the police went in, arrested some of the jurors and chased others down the street.

Why did the authorities go to such extraordinary lengths to clear IRA men of bombings which they admitted, and to keep four hapless people in jail? The cover-up can only be understood in the context which O’Connell sought to establish in his speech from the dock: that of a colonial war in Ireland, fought between a British army of occupation and the IRA, a guerrilla army which enjoys the support of thousands of nationalists in the North for its fight to unite Ireland free from British interference.

The British state has sought to lend legitimacy to its occupation of Ireland by denying that there is a war on, and by portraying the Irish republican movement as a small criminal conspiracy. The case for British involvement in Northern Ireland rests upon the notion that justice and the unbiased rule of law are on the side of the Crown.

**Focus of frenzy**

To sustain this lie within Britain, all Irish people are depicted as potential criminals and ‘terrorists’. In the seventies, the Guildford Four (and the Birmingham Six, framed for pub bombings in a similar fashion) became the focus of the British establishment’s frenzied campaign of anti-Irish propaganda. For the authorities to admit that they had been the victims of a political conspiracy would have seriously undermined the illusion of British justice which hides the truth about the dirty war in Ireland. So, whatever the Balcombe Street unit said, Hill, Conlon, Armstrong and Richardson had to languish in jail for 15 years. Since evidence of how the Guildford Four were fitted up finally came to light, the authorities have moved on to another stage of the cover-up. They released the four without an open appeal hearing, which could have implicated senior members of the establishment past and present (such as, to name but two, Sir Michael Havers, prosecuting counsel at the Guildford trial who became attorney general, and Sir Peter Imber, leading detective in the Balcombe Street case who is now chief constable of the Metropolitan Police). And they are trying to shift the blame onto to a few bent Surrey PCs. It remains to be seen how successful this ploy will be.

Whatever the final outcome of the Guildford Four saga, one thing is certain: their release, while a cause for celebration, does not mean the end of British injustice towards the Irish people, any more than the release of a few political prisoners in South Africa signals the end of apartheid. The Birmingham Six and others like Judith Ward are still in jail on the strength of similarly fixed evidence. And then there are the Irish republicans, like the men of the Balcombe Street unit, imprisoned for their part in the war. They too are political prisoners, not ordinary criminals. If there were no British troops on Irish soil, they would not be in British jails.

The story of the Guildford Four and the Balcombe Street unit demonstrates that the British authorities make no distinction on the grounds of guilt and innocence in their ruthless efforts to maintain their domination over Ireland. Those who seek some real justice will surely have to adopt an equally uncompromising attitude: by supporting an amnesty for all Irish political prisoners, as part of a campaign to expose the truly guilty men and women—the criminal conspirators of the British establishment.

---

**A present for the future**

This Christmas and New Year, give a revolutionary gift to your friends (or give serious offence to your enemies) by sending them a subscription to *Living Marxism*.

Nobody can afford to enter the nineties without the magazine that gives you the politics of tomorrow today. For just £15, you can have *Living Marxism* delivered to the door of your choice for 12 months—along with a greeting card so they know who to thank for their good fortune.

Readers are also permitted to buy subscriptions for themselves.

Send to *Living Marxism* Subscriptions (14), BCM JPL Ltd, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to Juntas Publications Ltd.
The Cheltenham Five

'SUSPICIOUS'

Sara Llewellyn on the latest case of injustice for the Irish in Britain

At the crack of dawn on 12 October, armed police stormed a small hotel in Cheltenham. Guests at the Cleveland House hotel were woken by shouts and bangs to find the corridors full of gunmen in flak jackets and baseball caps, sniffer dogs searching the rooms and more armed police surrounding the building. Assisted by marksmen from the Defensive Weapons Section, the Special Branch was commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Brighton bomb with a vengeance, by arresting five Irishmen staying at the hotel under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Initial media reports linked the arrests to the IRA attack on Deal barracks. In fact, the five were arrested on suspicion of having Irish accents and looking at Cheltenham town hall, where a Conservative Party conference is due to be held next March. While forensic scientists hoovered up every scrap of evidence from the hotel carpets, the five were held and interrogated for two days, then released without any charge.

Marked men

Local press reporters say that the hotel raid followed a tip-off from a 'member of the public' who picked up their 'suspicious' accents. The five men were steel contractors working on an industrial estate in a village ten miles from Cheltenham. Hotel manager Gary Whatford said that the workers, from a Northern Ireland based firm, had stayed at the hotel since work began on the Winchcombe by-pass. Builder Brian Compton, who lives next door to the hotel, said he noticed nothing strange about the men. 'They just seemed like ordinary blokes. I was led to believe they were Irish by their accents. They were quiet but they liked a drink—after that they were a bit noisy.'

Mr Hughes, the men's boss in Kilkeel, County Down, was with them during their ordeal. 'I was appalled at the way they were treated,' he said. 'They were just drugged from their beds. They have nothing to do with politics at all, let alone anything to do with terrorists. No one has apologised for what happened and their names have not been cleared. They are marked men.'

Two days after the men returned to the Six Counties, one was spotted by an Ulster Defence Regiment road block. As his identity was checked, a soldier looked at him and said: 'You're one of the Cheltenham Five. They're marked in Northern Ireland now.'

Commented Hughes, 'and they're completely innocent.' His steel business has also suffered from the effects of criminalisation. 'My company has lost thousands of pounds as a result of what has happened. People I have dealt with will no longer take a cheque in business dealings.'

'Not one word'

Cheltenham police had just 23 words to say about the case after the men's release: 'Following extensive enquiries, the five persons detained at Cheltenham under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act have been released without charge.' Detective Inspector Terry Moore later stated: 'Not one word will be added to the official statement. We are not trying to be difficult, but we have orders not to add anything. The prevention of terrorism is not something we will be questioned over.'

The police refuse to be questioned about pulling Irish people out of bed at gunpoint. They will not be questioned about interrogating Irish construction workers in cells for 48 hours. They will not be asked what that might discourage others from treating their victims as terrorist suspects for the rest of their lives.

Same old story

In any case, the police are under no pressure to answer embarrassing questions. The media simply echoed the official version of the Cheltenham events. When the men were arrested, the papers gave the case banner headlines and fretted front-page coverage. When they were released, the papers buried the story in the centre paragraph 'News extra' columns inside. This is par for the course. Over the past year, Living Marxism has reported the truth behind several cases where the Prevention of Terrorism Act has been used to intimidate and harass Irish people in Britain. Every time, the mainstream media have used the police line. The Cheltenham case shows that, even in the light of the release of the Guildford Four, the press still go along with the opinion that all Irishmen are, by definition, guilty.

The most hardened Tory hack could not have believed the police story that they arrested the five men on suspicion of being an IRA unit. The five members of this secret cell hardly went out of their way to be inconspicuous. They made no attempt to conceal their identities, accents and contact with each other from the residents of Cheltenham. They lived together (occupying almost half of the space in a small hotel), travelled to and from work in a van together, and drank together in the local pubs where, it has been claimed, they got 'a bit noisy.' They even asked the locals for directions to the town hall which they apparently planned to blow up.

The Conservative conference in Cheltenham this spring coincided with the Gold Cup festival—one of the major events on the horse racing calendar. Thousands of Irish people make the trip every year. Now, with one time loyal at the town, the police have set the tone for Irish Crimewatch. Members of the Cheltenham public will be on the lookout for 'suspicious' accents. They have a licence from the British authorities to suspect on sight, and to invite in the uniformed gunmen.

'Pilger is a first-rate disinterested journalist. Tenaciously researched, fiercely argued, both unsparing and patriotic, A SECRET COUNTRY presents a harsh narrative of class, race and power; of the oppression and resistance, the betrayal and amnesia, that lie behind the sunny illusions of the Australian self-image.'

ROBERT HUGHES

'\'A moving account of the abuse of Human Rights in Australia, all the more valuable because it is written by an Australian writer.'

GRAHAME GREENE

£13.95 • Jonathan Cape
We are now entering the ninth season—a time of corny jokes, mausoleum sentiment and foolish mummery. So I was particularly taken by a seasonal statement from the Soviet information service in London: ‘Lenin’s tomb closed.’ A kindly woman at the embassy thought I needed reassuring: ‘Oh no, Lenin’s tomb will be reopened very soon.’ The new season at the mausoleum begins on 15 January 1996. My suspicions were unfounded. Apparently, it’s simply time for Lenin’s check-ups. He has one every 18 months. Dr Sergei Belyakov, chief embalmer to the central committee, is topping up the chemicals. When the temperature has been adjusted and the air expelled, it will be time for Dr Sergei to bring on the cosmetic experts and the lighting technicians to prepare the effigy for his public.

And what a public...more than 100 million people have queued to see the corpse. It has been on more or less continuous public display since 23 January 1924. When I went to see it, I was suitably impressed. Moscow's Red Square is dominated by St Basil's an ancient dark stone building, white-washed and brightly-coloured gingerbread style, favoured by the rulers of Muscovy. The elegant golden and silver domes of the Kremlin's churches glimmer high above the cressetted red walls. In contrast, the Lenin Mausoleum looks modest, rational, unobtrusive. As you approach it, you gradually become aware of its massive no-nonsense design: like a bunker left over from the Great Patriotic War.

You enter into the gloom between the ceremonial soldiers, who guard Post Number One, as they have been doing for 66 years. Down some steps into a dark corridor. Suddenly turning a corner you find yourself in the gallery of a tastefully simple marble chamber. You look down and there in the eerie half-light is a bourgeois-looking gent, apparently asleep. Clean shirt, new tie, decent dark suit, neatly-trimmed beard. He’s Lenin! It’s Lenin! The impassive guards, propped up in the corners, so as not to prevent them from breathing their sighs of relief. You recover your solemn composure and stand and stare.

As you regain the daylight you begin to wonder what other wonders your tour guide has in store. Personally, I was a bit sorry to have missed Stalin, but he was only briefly in residence. However, I did have a nagging doubt: what was Lenin, the foremost materialist and political organiser of his (and our) century, doing on display, at best as a tribute to Soviet embalmers, and at worst, as the bones of a saint?

Of course, like most things in the Soviet Union it wasn’t planned, it just sort of happened. When Lenin died at Gorky on 21 January 1924 the Bolsheviks realised they had to bring the body back to Moscow to secure its ultimate resting place. The gun carriage and the six white horses sent to the railway station to haul his body in pompous state to the Kremlin were sent away. Instead the coffin was carried shoulder-high through the streets of frozen streets.

Lenin Mausoleum was hastily constructed. At the end of the funeral his body was placed in the mausoleum, the ‘lying in state’ simply continued. The mausoleum was not made permanent until the consolidation of the Stalin dictatorship. In 1929 a tomb fit for a pharaoh was ordered ‘LENIN’ was carved on a 209-cm block of red granite and a pile of marble, porphyry, black marble and stone was assembled to house the body. The building that was opened in October 1930 was five times the size of the temporary wooden structures. The Lenin cult was official.

The iconography of the Stalinist bureaucracy was now well established through paintings, books, films, posters and statues. Voluptuous women overfulfilling their quotas and workers from the factories served with bright red tractors. An elaborate fantasy was constructed where the men have retailed little Lenin pamphlets printed in Moscow and Beijing. They sold little plaster busts of the man in the mausoleum that obviously came from the same factories that produce effigies of Beethoven (or the top of the piano and the desk). Possession of such objects, possession of the name, like possession of the body itself, apparently bestows some status on the owners. They are in some ways manifestations of the cult of Lenin and the October Revolution.

Things brightened up for the sponsors of the cult when chic youth from New York to West Berlin started to sport tiny little Lenin scarfs and red stars on their black windcheaters. But the pleasure was short-lived; the youth of the bourgeois world had clearly never heard of Lenin and were not even vaguely interested in the claims of the ‘official’ Communist parties. As the political parties and the regime loyal to the majority of the people in Moscow have started to decay (rather more recently), Moscow has been hounded into taking the icons off the shelves, dumping the Leninite dogma and trying to make sense of it all. The old Moscow Communists have been so dazzled by the new wave of their own selection committee. Having embalmed Marxism they are moving rapidly towards the announcement that both Lenin’s body and his ideas are well beyond them.

No doubt the spread of anti-Leninism to the East will give a temporary boost to the propagandists of the West. But in the longer term it is a victory of the cult of personality. These ‘official’ Communists have proved themselves to be much more suited to tending graves than fighting for working class interests: they’ve certainly never had the slightest conception of what Lenin was all about. The sooner they bury his bones the better. I would be prepared to lend them a space.

Once the body and the authorised plaster bust and icon factory have gone the Stalinism will be done for. In Britain the old Communist Party will probably apply for affiliation to the SLP, while in Moscow and elsewhere they’ll attempt to stay on top by opening a stock exchange and a chain of boutiques. Much good may it do them. Whatever these ‘heirs of Lenin’ get up to, their days of dragging the name of communism through the mud will be well and truly over.

But I don’t want to end on a bitter note. It’s time to maintain a sense of balance and proportion...give credit where it’s due. But Lenin’s followers definitely produce the cheapest copies of his books; bound volumes of everything the great man ever uttered or wrote. Set against their skill at corpse manufacture it is not much of an apparatus for an apparatus. But don’t introduce market prices they’ll have the edge over Penguin Classics.

What was Lenin doing on display, at best as a tribute to Soviet embalmers, and at worst as the bones of a saint?

Initially, Lenin’s body laid in state for 72 hours: 750 000 men, women and children queued six-deep for two miles to pay their respects to the leader of their revolution, the symbol of all their aspirations. The thermometer was fluctuating between 25 and 35 degrees below zero. The party leadership was delayed with telegrams and letters from the delegations of workers and peasants’ organisations who were desperately trying to reach Moscow in time for the funeral. They delayed it for one day, but this would not be sufficient—coping with the vast and devastated country could take weeks.

Professor Abrikosov had embalmed the body the day after Lenin died and a temporary wooden mausoleum was hastily constructed. At the end of the funeral his body was placed in the mausoleum, the ‘lying in state’ simply continued. The mausoleum was not made permanent until the consolidation of the Stalin dictatorship. In 1929 a tomb fit for a pharaoh was ordered. ‘LENIN’ was carved on a 209-cm block of red granite and a pile of marble, porphyry, black marble and stone was assembled to house the body. The building that was opened in October 1930 was five times the size of the temporary wooden structures. The Lenin cult was official.

The iconography of the Stalinist bureaucracy was now well established through paintings, books, films, posters and statues. Voluptuous women overfulfilling their quotas and workers from the factories served with bright red tractors. An elaborate fantasy was constructed where the men were men and the women were women, and the well-fed children, all suitably equipped with red kerchiefs, sang songs about Lenin. It was a world where all the multicoloured races of the earth held hands around a gaiety garlanded in sheaves of wheat. And Lenin, supposedly the author of this purely imaginary Soviet utopia, was plastered here, there and everywhere. On bridges, on street signs and headscarves. Lenin praises for peace, art, science, technology, literature. Lenin institutes, schools, factories and kindergartens. Everywhere monuments to the soaring genius of the little body in the big glass-strepped coffin.

In the West, Communist parties...
Two thousand years on

Jesus Christ: the man and the myth

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

(St Luke, 2:11-17)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

(St John, 3:16)
The events commemorated in the festival of Christmas lie at the heart of the Christian religion. The incarnation of God in human form was the first act in the process of his redemption of humanity which was finally fulfilled through the ultimate sacrifice of the crucifixion. Christmas is therefore a good time to reflect on some of the mysteries of the Christian faith. Who was Jesus? How did Christianity get established? What keeps it going? What is the Marxist line on Christmas?

There are many different interpretations of the personality of Jesus. For traditionalists who insist on a literal reading of the scriptures, Jesus is simply God made man. For those who take the more modern and enlightened view typical of liberal Protestantism, Jesus was a decent man who proclaimed a set of inspirational moral teachings. On the other hand, many radicals and socialists regard Jesus as a primitive communist preaching a subversive political and social doctrine. Before examining these views more closely, it is first useful to consider the historical context in which Jesus lived and worked.

The only facts about Jesus that can be established with any degree of certainty are that he was born into the Jewish community in the region of Palestine around 5BC and that he was executed by the Roman authorities in 30AD. This was a period of great turmoil for the Jewish people as they were incorporated into the Roman empire after several centuries of enemy occupation, exile and foreign domination. The Jews were already a predominantly town-dwelling and trading people with a strong cultural and religious identity, a priestly elite and a defined social hierarchy. Their territories also included substantial agricultural areas worked by peasants, wage-labourers and slaves. In 63BC Judaea, the central region of Palestine including Jerusalem, became a Roman protectorate and in 44AD direct rule by Roman procurators was established. The Roman occupation was fiercely resented as a desecration of the Jewish holy land; it was enforced through harsh repression and punitive taxation of the Jewish people.

One consequence of Jewish hostility to the Roman conquest was military revolt. In the second and first centuries BC the Maccabees, a clan of mountain peasants (including some priestly families) who refused to pay tribute to foreign rulers, had briefly upheld Jewish independence through force of arms. From around 64AD a militant Jewish sect known as the Zealots followed this example. They launched guerrilla attacks on the Romans, culminating in a full-scale rising in 66AD, which succeeded in capturing control of Jerusalem. Four years later the Roman generals Vespasian and Titus recaptured Jerusalem and razed the Temple to the ground—a devastating blow to the morale of the Jewish people. In 73AD the last revolt of the Zealots was crushed at the Dead Sea fortress of Masada, where the fighters committed collective suicide rather than submit to the Romans. The last Jewish revolt against Rome took place in 132AD, led by Bar-Kokhba. It was decisively beaten by 135AD. The diaspora of the Jews around the Mediterranean basin and beyond, already well underway before the Roman conquest, now intensified.

Another consequence of the profound social, political and psychiatric trauma of the Roman occupation was the emergence of millenarian sects within Judaism. The famous Dead Sea Scrolls reveal details of one such grouping in that area—the Essenes—an ascetic and contemplative sect given to ritual bathing and property sharing. They anticipated the coming of a ‘teacher of righteousness’ and a ‘war against the sons of darkness’. With their prophecies of an imminent deliverance from the diverse oppressions of the present, such sects attracted a ready following among those most alienated from the Roman regime.

The end is nigh

Though there is no evidence that Jesus was involved with the Essenes, there is little doubt that he emerged from the millenarian trend within Judaism. His teachings reflect the preoccupation of a section of contemporary Judaism with eschatology, the ‘last things’—heaven and hell, death and judgement. The familiar slogan of the evangelical banner ‘Rejoice, the end is nigh’ sums up his apocalyptic message.

For Jesus, as for the Essenes, the ‘end’ anticipated was no metaphor, but the literal end of the current cruel world, and the establishment in its place of the ‘kingdom of God’. In particular, the end meant the restoration of God’s people from their present degradation to their rightful place in the firmament. And this end was ‘nigh’. Jesus’ concern was to indicate how a good Jew should behave in the last moments of suffering on earth: ‘Rejoice for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (St Matthew 4:17) There was little new in Jesus’ ethical teaching, which was common to the contemporary rabbinical tradition; what was distinctive was his declaration that the end of history was imminent.

The last book of the New Testament, The Revelation of St John the Divine, clearest expresses the spirit of the times, the ‘chiasm of despair’ resulting from the national and religious humiliation of the Jews. Its wild and rambling narrative, its almost hallucinatory visions and fantastic prophecies reveal a mind unhinged by terrible experiences, desperately seeking fulfillment in another world.

In the event the anticipation of the kingdom of God failed to materialise. Moving from rural Galilee, an area still not fully integrated into the Roman empire, to Jerusalem, the centre of Roman authority in Judaea, Jesus was soon arrested, tried as an agitator and crucified in the customary manner. For Romans and nationalists alike it was clear that Jesus or his followers believed he was divine, ‘the son of God’, and nobody now thinks he believed himself to be ‘the messiah’. These titles and the whole idea of Jesus as ‘the Christ’ were creations of the early Christian communities in the years following the supposed resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Written around half a century after the death of Jesus, the gospels appropriated the historical Jesus as the founder of a new religion: ‘He foretold the kingdom, but it was the church that came.’ (P Fuller, Images of Jesus, 1985.)

In the New Testament the primitive millenarianism preached by Jesus in the remote countryside in the local dialect of Aramaic was transformed into a sophisticated synthesis of elements of contemporary Graeco-Roman philosophy and morality, expressed in the cosmopolitan Greek of the city states at the Eastern reaches of the Roman empire.

For centuries the Bible was accepted among Christians as the ark of history as well as of faith. However, from the eighteenth century onwards the development of scriptural scholarship and scientific methods undermined the historical status of the Bible story. Theologians began to retreat from the literal interpretation of the scriptures that had guided Christians through the centuries.

Away with the manger

In a key work published in 1835, The Life of Jesus, the German philosopher David Strauss insisted that the idea of ‘God made man’ did not depend on the life of Jesus as a real person. For Strauss, as for a generation of young philosophers influenced by Hegel, the gospel was not an historical narrative but an unconscious tradition of myths, the product of the human imagination, not divine revelation. Variations on this theme have become predominant in modern liberal Christianity, especially among Western Protestants; the Bishop of Durham is the latest champion of such views. From this perspective, the validity of the story of the
incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus does not depend upon proofs of the actual existence of a baby in a manger, a man on a cross or empty tomb. The life of Jesus is a 'redemptor myth' expressing the yearning of humanity for divine salvation.

Some liberal opponents of fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible are prepared to dismiss much of the New Testament—the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, the shepherds at Bethlehem, the three wise men, the miracles performed by Jesus, even the very idea of incarnation and resurrection. Yet they still protest their faith in Christianity, in its central myth of redemption, and in what they identify as the kernel of the Christian religion: its morality—an exalted, godly, super-human morality? (N. Machovec quoted in J. Bentley, Between Marx and Christ, 1982, p.140). But what was the moral code of the early Christian church?

**Christian slavery**

In his monumental study of the ancient world Geoffrey de St. Croix surveys the approach of the early Christians to a number of key moral questions (The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World, 1981). On slavery, he notes that the advent of Christianity marked no advance towards liberation. St Paul exhorts slaves to obey their masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ (Ephesians, 6:5). He concludes that whatever the theologian may think of Christianity’s claim to set free the soul of the slave...the historian cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles more firmly on his feet. There was no change in the status of slaves in the Roman empire after Christianity became the official religion in the fourth century AD. Indeed there was no absolute condemnation of slavery within Christianity until the emergence of Protestant fundamentalists set in the seventeenth century: the mainstream churches continued to favour slavery as anecessary means of conversion up to the eighteenth century.

In relation to property, St Croix notes in the New Testament a process of adapting the Jewish tradition, that poverty was associated with virtue, to the Graeco-Roman obsession with wealth and status and the view that riches were a mark of moral worth and poverty the opposite. The characteristic millenarian themes of the 'sermon on the mount' (St. Matthew, 5) and the 'magnificat' (Luke, 1) give way to the sober teachings of St Paul that a Christian may own property so long as it is no more than a sufficiency and used charitably.

Noting, in conclusion, the prevalence of slavery and other forms of unfree labour, the widening extremes of poverty and wealth after the Roman empire became Christian, and the subsequent intensification of torture, persecution and mutilation, St. Croix asks 'why did early Christianity so signally fail to produce any important change for the better in the Graeco-Roman society?' (pp.438-39). He points the finger at the narrow individualistic morality upheld by early Christians:

"...it was precisely the exclusive concentration of the early Christians upon the personal relations between man and man, or man and God, and their complete indifference as Christians to the institutions in the world in which they lived, that prevented Christianity from even having much effect for good upon the relations between man and man." (p.439)

Nearly 2000 years later Christian leaders continue to present a decent and compassionate Jesus and a resolutely other-worldly Christianity. In 1906, for example, the German theologian Adolf Harnack defined the gospel of Jesus as 'the joyous news to the poor and with them to the peaceable, the meek and those who are pure in heart.' It's the news that the kingdom of God is near, that this kingdom will soothe the sorrows of the distressed, bring justice and establish their childhood in God, in addition to giving all good things (quoted in Between Marx and Christ, p.166). He continued that this gospel brought with it a new order of life 'above the world and politics' and defined the sphere of faith as 'pure inwardness'.

History has irrefutably confirmed that the end was nigh and the kingdom at hand neither in 30AD nor in 1906AD, indicating the need for a different foundation for ethics than the supposed imminence of the last judgement. But if, in a meantime already nearly two millennia in duration, the kingdom is to be sought on earth, then what is the purpose of Jesus Christ? A radical trend in Christianity has consistently sought to harness the biblical Jesus to the project of progressive social change, the goal of achieving salvation not merely in the next world, but also that of achieving liberation in this.

Writing in 1906 about the flourishing German 'New Testament' scholars, one observer commented that looking down through nineteen centuries of darkness they saw only the reflection of their own faces at the bottom of a deep well. Indeed the 'lives of Jesus' produced in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries revealed a Christ in the colours of the Enlightenment, German idealism or irreligious socialism, according to the author and his times. In 1908 the leading German socialist theorist Karl Kautsky observed that everyone had presented in Jesus not what he had taught, but what they wished he had taught. He promptly jumped on the bandwagon, portraying Jesus as a primitive communist rebel leader in his influential work The Foundations of Christianity. More moderate socialist politicians have discovered in Jesus and the early Christians a model of social reform and communistic living. Kautsky's view of Jesus as a
revolutionary traditions of Jesus and the first-century Christians as precedents for their campaigns against the established order. They too are increasingly coming under pressure from fundamentalists, often in the form of pentecostalist missions closely in league with the forces of reaction (see S Diamond, Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right, 1989). How can we understand the survival and vitality of religion in the modern world?

While the disgrace of prominent American televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart reveals the extraordinary levels of hypocrisy and corruption in modern Christianity, it is important not to overstate the amount of deception and falsification involved in religion. As Engels recognised in his writings on early Christianity, 'a religion that brought the Roman empire into subjection and dominated by far the larger part of civilised humanity for 1800 years cannot be disposed of merely by declaring it to be nonsense gleaned together by fraud' (in K Marx and F Engels, On Religion, 1844, p171).

Indeed both Marx and Engels took religion very seriously and many of their early writings were taken up with the question.

Marx and Engels closely followed the controversies arising from the intensive New Testament scholarship undertaken by David Strauss, Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach in the 1830s. Marx welcomed the bold demystification of the scriptures and the parallel humanisation of religion by exposing it as a product of human self-consciousness. At the same time Marx was critical of the way that the young Hegelians confined their 'critical criticism' to the realm of ideas, while never considering the connection between ideas and the real world. For them, both humanity and God were highly abstract. By contrast Marx insisted that the secret of religion was to be found not in the realm of thought, but in society:

'The foundation of irreligious criticism is this: man makes religion, religion does not make man. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state and society produce religion's inverted attitude to the world because they are an inverted world themselves.'

('Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law', On Religion, p38)

This Marx turned from the criticism of religion to the criticism of society, emphasising that as long as history was at a stage where humanity's essential nature was negated by social and material conditions, then religion would remain.

How did religion survive the triumph of capitalism, and the challenge of democracy and the
Marx maintained a vigorous hostility to all forms of religion and their role in offering spiritual compensation that detracts from the struggle for material betterment.
Christmas stories

GOODWILL TO ALL?

The alleged season of 'goodwill to all men' doesn't extend to many workers. Andrew Calcutt met some of them

'You may think I am a man dressed up in this, but that is not so. I am Father Christmas and I can only speak to you as such. That is company policy.'

Enrobed in a well-appointed grotto, which opened in October—to catch the half-term trade—Selfridge's Father Christmas is a polished performer working the up-market end of the Xmas industry. Here you can buy special Christmas gifts including a leather drinks case with four glasses and a cork screw at £99.50—a personalised card with 16 different calligraphic typefaces to choose from, and the largest selection of crackers in the West End, with prices ranging from £1.75 for a box of 12 and £16.95 for a more luxurious box of 50. (Christmas at Selfridge's press release) This is suitable for yuppies, and it doesn't come cheap.

But who puts the crack in Christmas crackers, and how much do they get paid for it? Research by the Birmingham-based National Group on Homeworking reveals that some women cracker-makers are paid 20p or 30p an hour. Working from home, far from the bright lights of the department stores where Christmas is all wrapped up, their story is the hidden side of the festive season.

DEPENDENT ON CRACKERS

The National Group on Homeworking points to the case of Mrs F., a 67-year-old married pensioner, as a fairly typical example of the cracker-makers. For the past nine years she has depended on making Christmas crackers at home to make ends meet.

'Make crackers from scratch. My speed is quite good now, but when I first started I made mistakes and would often have to unravel a cracker because it was incorrectly put together or not presentable.'

'I do the work in the bedroom on the floor. One of the worst parts of the job is when I glue the ends together by using my fingers dipped in the glue pot, which makes them very dry and irritated.'

'I get paid the set rate of £1.30 per dozen crackers but I also make the boxes to display the crackers for which I don't get any extra payment. I have trained other homeworkers to make crackers for which I received £5 payment over a period of 10 days' work. It usually takes me about three days to finish a batch and I am working up to seven hours a day during most of the week. Sometimes I have to meet deadlines, especially at Christmas, but my husband helps me in these circumstances and I also try to get my friends and relatives to give me a hand when they come to visit me.'

'I do not get any discount or special perks but occasionally I have some spare pieces of crisp paper left over which I use to make crackers for some of my relatives, but my employer does not know about this.'

'I used to work in a factory but since I have retired I have been doing homework to earn some extra money. It goes on food and bills. As I am a pensioner I would not like anyone to know I do homework even though the money is not much.'

'When I have been doing this work for as long as I have it even becomes a bit of a joke to some people and I get comments like 'obsessed with your homework' and they must be making you crackers'. I must admit the work can be very boring and repetitive and all you can think about is finishing as many as you can.'

Mrs F.'s experience is a long way from recent hype about computerised homeworking. Cracker-makers endure Victorian conditions, working long hours for pence. Like thousands of other homeworkers, they get no sickness or maternity benefits. They are not even recognised as employees, except by the National Revenue. They pay their own overheads. If they don't declare their earnings—and it's hardly worth working if they do—they must live with the fear of being exposed to the DSS by their employer. Few are willing to speak out about their plight. The scrrouges who make a cracking profit out of Christmas are determined to keep their side of the industry under wraps.

'CHRISTMAS IS CANCELLED'

The five drivers had been locked out of a north London ambulance station, in the dispute over management's attempt to impose a 6.5 per cent pay deal. Although they were not being paid, they were standing ready to answer all emergency calls. They said they would stand there until Christmas Day if they had to.

'Christmas is 100 per cent cancelled,' said Des. "I had to tell my two young boys down and explain the position to them. For nine years I've been working seven days a week to keep our heads above water. You can't survive on the basic money. You have to do overtime, but you only get one rate for it, even on a bank holiday weekend. Now there's the overtime ban and this week we've suspended. The money's just not there for Christmas.'

"When I told my boys about it, they could understand. They're used to me not being there at weekends, day-tired when I'm at home. They're used to having an early Christmas dinner before I do a late turn, or have a late dinner after I've come home from an early shift. I've worked nearly every Christmas Day, it's part of your normal shift pattern. Anyway, my family accept that Christmas is cancelled this year. If we gave in now we'd be in the same position every year. They'd stamp all over us every time we ask for a pay rise.'

"There will be no Christmas in my house this year," said Jean. "That's been gone by the board. Last year we could afford a proper Christmas because of the overtime, 5am to 10pm some days. This Christmas I won't even be able to pay the rent.'

Dave will be spending Christmas with his parents. "My family understand that I won't be able to afford presents this year. I live with my parents. I took home £515 last month. I know I'll never get a mortgage unless I change my job or move to another area. On my wages I couldn't even buy a car.'

Christmas always highlights the hypocrisy of those in power who each year expect us to believe that they have suddenly become friends of the hungry and the homeless. In their pay dispute, ambulance crews have experienced similar treatment from the two-faced Tories. When there's a major disaster we are glorified. After Brighton they couldn't praise us enough. Now we're third-rate taxi-divers.'

The drivers were appalled by the deaths, most unreported, which had been caused or made certain by the government's use of police and troops to man ambulances. Steve recalled one incident after the London crews were locked out:

"The police radioed the Royal Free Hospital that an elderly man had 'suspended'—stopped breathing. When the police car got to the hospital, they dragged the body out like a piece of meat. The man was blue. There was no equipment, no blanket, nothing. The only oxygen he was getting was through the car window. We'd already answered calls that morning, put to us unofficially by doctors. All management had to do was put the call through, and we would have answered it. It was legalized murder. It's heartbreaking.'

Small wonder if the festive spirit is in short supply among ambulance crews this year.
Fertility rites and family values

GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Mark Reilly on the changing face of the December festival

Christmas is a time to eat, drink and be sick. Many look forward to it as a brief annual respite from the drudgery of everyday life. Moral codes are suspended for the office party, and even the sight of the incapable vomiting in public seems to bring on seasonal feelings of fond expectation. All of this libidinal release is done in the name of home and family.

Such hypocrisy rested easily with the creators of the modern Christmas. Contrary to popular belief, Christmas is not a bellowed feast celebrated in much the same way for 2000 years. It was an ancient ritual all but forgotten until it was reinvented and cleaned up by the Victorian moralists.

True, Christmas was celebrated before, but with little regard for modern Christian values. Long before the alleged appearance of Jesus Christ, the Romans celebrated Saturnalia from December 17 to 24—a period of unrivalled debauchery even by Roman standards. The fun and games culminated in Brumalia on 25 December, also known as the ‘Feast of the Unconquerable Sun’.

No contest!

The feast celebrated the sun’s resurgence after the winter solstice. It was a conglomeration of the Mithraic religion which by the third century AD would be the major rival to Christianity in the Roman Empire. By all accounts it was a real wholenight of a time. Customs were reversed—masters waited on servants, men dressed as women and it was fertility rites all round.

The Christians had little chance of competing with this. Rather than fight the hopeless fight, they adapted to Mithraism.

The Feast of the Unconquerable Sun became the feast of the unconquerable son, Christ, replaced Mithras. But the early Christians didn’t celebrate the birth of Christ. Some questioned whether he could have been born at all; since he was baptized at the age of 12, they argued, what state of grace was he in before that?

To put a stop to this potentially damaging debate Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome, declared that the nativity should be celebrated. December 25 was settled on as the best date. The Church was spared the popularity contest with Mithras when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

During the Middle Ages many Roman customs mixed with the festival of Yuletide celebrated in the northern lands. Fertility rites played an important part. In the Mummers’ plays, actors dressed up in animal clothing and performed lewd and explicit rituals. It was in the Middle Ages too that the Lord of Misrule emerged. Appointed as a master of ceremonies, the lord was usually one of the king’s or noble’s servants in whom was vested absolute control of the day. Any humiliation he chose had to be carried out, even if the king was the victim. Despite this, Christmas remained a time for reaffirming the existing hierarchy. Alms were distributed to the poor and the king asserted his power by putting on a bash to impress his nobles. Richard II provided a feast of 2000 oysters and 200 turns of wine to 10,000 party-goers.

One the most well-known Christmas feasts that Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol captured the commercial origins of the festival that turned the Carol into a commercial success was at the inn of the Royal Black Prince, where he met other Dickens fans who were discussing the novel. During this time a character named Jacob Marley, who appears in the Carol, is portrayed as a alcoholic. But at the same time his anti-Christmas crackdown struck a popular chord. The impoverished English masses did not exactly have turkey and all the trimmings at Christmas. And they had fought a civil war against the excesses of the court and the aristocracy. With mounds of spending far more on drink than alms. Cromwell’s crusade against Christmas was widely supported as punishment for Glorious Parliaments.

When Cromwell took his executed father’s throne after Cromwell’s death, he brought Christmas back to the court, but pruned the excesses and ditched the Lord of Misrule. There was a general feeling, after the restoration, that kingship had been dealt so dangerously a blow by Cromwell that it might not be able to withstand further repeated assaults of laughter and parody.” (M Harrison, The Story of Christmas, 1951, p151)

The changes in British society brought on by the rise of capitalism finally destroyed the old ways. As people were driven from the land and into the urban maw of the industrial revolution, a sense of turmoil replaced the parochial Christmas customs of the past, as Robert Southey noted in 1827:

“All persons say how differently this season was observed in their fathers’ day, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete. The cause is obvious. In large towns the population is continually shifting; a new settler neither continues the customs of his own province in a place where they would be strange, nor adapts those which he finds, because they are strange to him, and that all local differences of costume and language are wearing out.” (Quoted in JM Golby and AW Purdse, The Making of the Modern Christmas, 1956, p63)

The new capitalist class had more important things for their employers to be doing than frolicking around dressed up as goats. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Christmas had become the most important seasonal holiday, a normal working day.

The Christmas we know today was invented by the Victorian establishment, as an aid to stabilizing their shaky system by promoting conservative religious and family values. Charles Dickens’ Pickwick Papers, published in 1836, marked the beginning of the revival. While Victorian society was tearing the family to shreds in the drive for profit, its apologists promoted the family ideal in the myth of the family Christmas. This new celebration, usually the day after the traditional mining days and into the swags, the Victorians created the idea of childhood innocence. The authorities adapted old customs to create a sense of continuity and project their whole some Christmas into the past: thus the Carol, a French dance song adapted by the church as festive and pagan, became a seasonal Christian hymn.

The new festival took off because it had something for everybody. The
manufacturers fought hardest against it, conducting a rearguard campaign through the mid-nineteenth century to save their work hands from the depredations of a holiday. But by the century's end, as British capitalism lost its dynamism and began to shift from manufacturing towards retail and services, the employers accepted Christmas as a chance to offload goods on the public. For the middle classes the social and moral crises of Victorian society could be oblivious in this annual celebration of health and home. To the working class, Christmas offered short deliverance from the grinding torpor of everyday life.

Of course, the Lord of Misrule had to go; the lower orders could not be allowed to get ideas above their station. Instead, the Victorians broadcast the new Christmas message of peace on Earth and goodwill to all men. The ruling hypocrites promoted the idea that the exploited and their exploiters could forget their differences and come together to celebrate the birth of Christ. Popular literature—of which Dickens' *Christmas Carol* was the outstanding example—portrayed the new rich as seasonal philanthropists; how could you go on strike against that nice Mr Scrooge who gave Tiny Tim a turkey?

Similar Christmas images played a part in popularising imperialism as a civilising mission. Victorian propaganda emphasised the eternal gratitude of the loyal colonial subject receiving a 'wreath' from the Scottish soldier who had brought Christmas to the heathens—a particularly distorted image, given that the Sox was likely to be a hardline Presbyterian who still considered Christmas itself to be a heathen festival.

**Lords of misrule**

Today, from the school nativity play to the Queen's Speech to the Commonwealth, the message of peace on Earth is still drummed home by those who spend the rest of the year breaking strikes, sacks workers and making war. They never mention the tradition of appointing a servant as king for a day, which might prompt the question as to why it's not like that all the time. Instead our little bit of hedonism is wrapped in a moral straightjacket. So we spend Christmas in the bosom of our families, which often means a dreary day with people we would never see otherwise. The fact that millions of decent people will resort to watching Bob Monkhouse is testimony to the awfulness of the alternative. For many, the office party provides the only occasion to let themselves go all year; the closest they get to a Bacchanalian revel at Christmas is another re-run of *Carry on Carmen*.  

**Alternative Xmas**

I think we can do a lot better than that. A future society could take a tip from the Christians by keeping the old festival but changing its meaning. Our 'Christmas' would not be laden down with sanctimonious tripe from the pulpit. There would be no worship of beard and horn, no glorifying of a non-existent past. It would be an uninhibited celebration of our own genius and power; the Feast of Unconquerable Humanity.

---

**BLACK COUNTRY WORKING WOMEN**

A multi-media historical exhibition reviewing the role of women who made chains, bricks and nails...  

AT  
LIGHT HOUSE MEDIA CENTRE  
WOLVERHAMPTON ART GALLERY,  
LICHFIELD STREET,  
WOLVERHAMPTON WV1 1DU  
18 November 1989 — 13 January 1990  
10am — 6pm, Monday — Saturday  
THIS EXHIBITION IS AVAILABLE FOR HIRE  
TEL: (0902) 312033
religious survey

The British and God

‘We believe in Him, but not in His beliefs’

Most people believe that there is a God, but they don’t believe in very much of what His spokesmen on Earth teach. That is the conclusion suggested by our survey of British attitudes towards some aspects of religion.

The survey was restricted to people of Christian origin. It was deliberately weighted towards younger people (half of the respondents were aged between 16 and 25), and it was conducted only in urban areas. No doubt these two factors explain why the results show a more liberal attitude to social issues than would be found in the Tory shires.

Among the respondents there is a hardcore of dedicated Christians, and an equally resource and apparently larger section of atheists. Many of the other responses suggest a general and vague attachment to Christianity, and a willingness to abide by the more socially acceptable conventions. Thus a majority believe that God exists, and are into church weddings, christenings and funerals. Although many admits that they see these ceremonies simply as British traditions, in each case the largest section of those who wanted church services said it was for religious reasons.

At the same time, however, only a little under half of the respondents said they went to church for such family ceremonies, or never went at all. This lack of any active relationship to the Christian religion was starkly reflected in people’s attitudes towards the church’s teachings on social issues.

As soon as religious doctrines touch upon people’s personal lives and experience, they are widely rejected. Our survey recorded large majorities against the church’s teachings on sex before marriage, divorce, abortion and homosexuality. Largest of all was the majority of respondents from a Catholic background who rejected their church’s anti-contraception line. The church was on the side of adultery (by one per cent) and embryo experiments (by 0.2 per cent, with a large number of people ‘unsure’). These results suggest that despite the moral crusades of the past 10 years, there remains a healthy public resistance to prejudice, especially among many younger people in Britain today.

Thatcher’s creed

Now there was much support for the Thatcher government’s attempt to use religion for reactionary political ends. Most respondents opposed the government’s attempt to make religious ceremonies compulsory in schools. The Tories have also tried to reviree the blasphemy laws as a form of state censorship in the light of the Rushdie affair. But less than 12 per cent of respondents backed these laws in their present Christian form, while almost 40 per cent thought that they should be abolished altogether. More than 70 per cent thought it wrong for politicians to use religious arguments to justify their causes, as Thatcher has increasingly sought to do.

However, the survey also suggests a quite widespread view that the bishops are still on the side of the angels in political debates; a party that thought it right for the churches to become involved in politics. No doubt this partly reflects the fact that the pacifist performance of the opposition parties has often left the churches as the most outspoken critics of Thatcherism during the past decade. But that in itself is a worrying trend.

Almost half of the respondents thought that religion had become less influential in the past 10 years. In terms of its impact on the way people live their lives, they are right. But religion has returned to the centre of the political stage. Our survey suggests a welcome advance of many secular attitudes. It would surely be a stabilising change if that development if the bishops were allowed to influence the anti-Tory audience with their pious lectures on the meek inheriting the Earth.

Archbishop Runcie, the nation’s moral policeman
Compiled by Ian Haden

1. Do you believe there is a god?
   - Definitely: 43.2%
   - Probably: 18.0%
   - Probably not: 6.4%
   - Definitely not: 16.5%
   - Not sure: 15.0%

2. How often, on average, do you attend church?
   - Every week: 10.9%
   - Every month: 5.8%
   - Up to six times a year: 11.3%
   - Once a year: 9.3%
   - Only for weddings and other ceremonies: 37.0%
   - Never: 20.7%

3. Have you been, or would you be, married in a church?
   - Yes: 72.3%
   - No: 27.7%

4. If yes, why?
   - Religious reasons: 37.9%
   - Tradition: 31.8%
   - To please parents: 9.8%
   - Sense of occasion: 14.0%
   - Other reasons: 6.5%

5. Have you had, or would you have, your children christened?
   - Yes: 65.5%
   - No: 34.5%

6. If yes, why?
   - Religious reasons: 51.5%
   - Tradition: 33.0%
   - To avoid stigma: 5.2%
   - Other: 10.2%

7. Do you want a religious ceremony at your funeral?
   - Yes: 59.8%
   - No: 41.2%

8. If yes, why?
   - Religious reasons: 57.3%
   - Tradition: 17.9%
   - For family's sake: 19.0%
   - Other: 5.8%

9. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against sex before marriage?
   - Yes: 18.1%
   - No: 73.0%
   - Don't know: 8.9%

10. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against extra-marital sex?
    - Yes: 44.9%
    - No: 43.9%
    - Don't know: 11.2%

11. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against divorce?
    - Yes: 23.3%
    - No: 67.1%
    - Don't know: 9.6%

12. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against homosexuality?
    - Yes: 32.0%
    - No: 57.9%
    - Don't know: 10.1%

13. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against abortion?
    - Yes: 27.0%
    - No: 62.2%
    - Don't know: 10.8%

14. Do you agree with the churches' teachings against embryo experiments?
    - Yes: 39.4%
    - No: 39.0%
    - Don't know: 11.6%

15. If from a Catholic background, do you agree with the church's teachings against contraception?
    - Yes: 15.2%
    - No: 81.2%
    - Don't know: 3.6%

16. Do you agree with the government's attempt to make all schools hold religious ceremonies?
    - Yes: 27.6%
    - No: 63.3%
    - Don't know: 9.1%

17. In the light of the Rushdie affair, do you think that Britain's blasphemy laws should be:
    - Maintained to protect Christianity only: 11.8%
    - Extended to cover other religions: 24.0%
    - Abolished: 39.9%
    - Don't know: 24.3%

18. Is it right for the churches to become involved in political issues?
    - Yes: 52.6%
    - No: 47.4%

19. Is it right for politicians to use religious arguments to support their political positions?
    - Yes: 29.1%
    - No: 70.9%

20. Has religion become more or less influential in the past 10 years?
    - More: 29.9%
    - No change: 23.4%
    - Less: 47.7%

This survey is based on the responses of 1010 people and was conducted in major British cities between 21 and 28 September 1989.
The German question

The West will miss the Berlin Wall

Despite the political mileage they have made out of cheering the opening of the Berlin Wall, the prospect of German reunification frightens the Western powers far more than the Cold War. Frank Richards examines why, and suggests a Marxist answer to 'the German question'.

It is no longer possible to keep up with the speed of change in East Germany. Although protest has not been on the scale of recent events in Armenia or Poland, its effects have been more far-reaching. With hundreds of thousands fleeing the country and mass demonstrations in all the major cities, the political isolation of the East German bureaucracy has been fully exposed. The overnight demise of the Stalinist leadership in East Germany and its most famous symbol, the Berlin Wall, has come as a shock to the West and has touched a raw nerve across Europe.

The political crisis in East Germany, and Bonn's growing involvement in events there, threatens vested interests throughout the world. These developments bring to the surface the artificial character of the division of Germany, and implicitly call into question the entire geopolitical shape of Europe.

Shaky foundation

As Financial Times correspondent David Marsh explains in his new book, The Germans: Rich, Battered and Divided, the division of Germany provided the foundation for the post-war balance of power. However, he notes, with 'both West and East Germany now less under the control of their respective superpowers, and more free to evolve their own policies, than at any time since both states were founded in 1949, it is uncertain how long the delicate equilibrium can be maintained' (p.2). Anything that threatens the division of Germany poses major problems both for the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact and for the Western Alliance. That's why the drama unfolding in East Germany is less than welcome to all the major powers.

Even before the recent wave of protest and paralyzing reforms in East Germany there were signs that 'the German question' was back on the agenda of world diplomacy. In the era of Gorbachev's diplomatic offensive, the East-West arms race and the Cold War make little sense to most Germans. Public opinion came out strongly against the Nato proposal to modernise short-range nuclear missiles in West Germany. When Gorbachev visited Germany this summer he was greeted as something of a hero. The relaxation of East-West tensions has had the most profound effect in Germany, where these conflicts have been concentrated since the Second World War. The rapprochement automatically raises serious questions about the commitment of the two Germanys to their respective military alliances.

Any mention of the German question provokes a nervous reaction in Western capitals. According to the Times, a 'reunited Germany is unacceptable to many people because of the political, geographic and economic dominance it would command in the centre of Europe' (20 September). The Western media were worriedly calculating the economic and political power of a united Germany before the drama of October and November. The
Economist had already noted that, thanks to Mr Gorbachev, reunified Germany is no longer entirely unimaginable:

'Stick together the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic and you have a state with 78m people, more than 660,000 of them under arms, and a GDP of close to $1.4 trillion, about half that of Japan.' 
(2 September)

Once you add on the impact of using more West German technology in the East, it is easy to conclude that a united Germany would rival the USA, dominate the EC and challenge the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

The question of German reunification has always been the weak link in the post-war international order. After the upheaval in East Germany it can no longer be evaded through the international conspiracy of silence which has held good for 40 years. Inadvertently, the trainloads of refugees from East Germany unleashed a chain of events the final outcome of which may prove decisive in shaping the next century.

What is the German question, and why does it cause such consternation in ruling circles?

In most school history books, Germany is blamed for starting two world wars. This reputation for militaristic adventures is used to create a sense of doom about the consequences of a united Germany. Such simplistic accounts tend to ignore the fact that, traditionally, German militarism has not been a reflection of the national character, but a response to that nation's exclusion from the leadership of the capitalist world order.

By the time Germany became a powerful capitalist nation at the turn of the century, the world was already divided up under British hegemony. In this situation Germany could not expand its influence without coming into conflict with the main beneficiaries of the status quo—Britain, France and the USA.

Nowhere to turn

Since Germany was the most powerful capitalist nation in Europe, its very existence constituted a threat to the other powers—most directly to its neighbour, France. Since British diplomacy relied upon preventing any one nation from dominating Europe, it too came to fear the assertion of German power. Later, from the twenties, the USA also began to worry about the consequences of a German-dominated Europe.

In principle these powers had no objection to Germany leaving its empires alone and turning eastwards to establish its own sphere of influence. But here Germany came up against another barrier: tsarist Russia in the First World War, and Stalin's Soviet Union in the second. The misfortune of German imperialism was that its existence posed a direct threat to the interests of all the status quo powers, East and West. Moreover, because its needs could not be satisfied within the prevailing world order, German imperialism represented a permanent source of instability at the heart of the international system.

World stability and the creation of an international equilibrium depended on solving the German question. During the course of the Second World War the other powers kicked around many ideas for solving this problem. Discussions among British and American diplomats centred on eliminating Germany as a player in the European balance of power. At one time the American state department even considered implementing the Morgenthau Plan for 'pastoralling' Germany by destroying its industries and turning the country into a desert.

Although there were serious differences of opinion about how to deal with Germany, there was a general consensus among the Allies that its power had to be neutralised permanently.

When they came to work out the post-1945 settlement, the most pressing issue facing France and other Western European nations was to find a solution to the German problem. For the dominant imperialist power, the USA, the situation looked somewhat different. As the end of the war approached, diplomats in Washington began to realise that Germany's defeat would leave a power vacuum in Central Europe. The only power that could benefit from this situation was the Soviet Union. The twin objectives of preventing the growth of Soviet influence while eliminating Germany as a factor in the new balance of power led to the main beneficiaries of the status quo—Britain, France and the USA.

We insist that either a central German authority be established along lines that will make it impossible for the Soviet Union to eliminate Germany, or that we retain complete control over the Western zones. I think it may mean the partition of Germany, and we all admit this is undesirable.' (Quoted in J. L. Gaddis, The United States and the question of a sphere of influence in Europe, 1944-49, in G. R. Wills (ed.), Western Security: The Formative Years: European and Atlantic Defence 1947-53, 1985)

The decision to partition Germany coincided with the realisation that the country had to be stabilized to ensure European recovery. Without the restoration of German capitalism, the future of Western Europe would be put to question. But France and other Western European countries were fiercely opposed to any reconstruction of German economic power. To counteract these fears, Washington promised a guarantee to France by establishing a permanent US military presence in Germany. At the same time European integration and the eventual creation of the EEC provided a framework for economic and political collaboration, which gave West Germany a stake in cooperating with its traditional enemy, France.

The partition of Germany also suited the Soviet Union. It removed the threat of German expansion eastwards and it helped to consolidate a sphere of influence around Stalin's western borders.
Soviet troops permanently stationed in East Germany thus provided Moscow with a defensive shield against any potential danger from the West.

Whatever their differences, all the major powers of the anti-Nazi coalition could accept a settlement that eliminated Germany as a major force in world affairs. But partition did not provide a solution to the German question. It created a cleavage which artificially divided Europe and, indirectly, the whole world. The German question acquired the form of an East-West conflict. But the fulcrum of the international balance of power remained within Germany.

So long as the USA exercised unquestioned domination over the globe, the German question could remain unresolved without serious consequences. However, with the decline of American power, and the consolidation of European and Japanese capitalism, the question rises to prominence again. What makes this issue so pertinent is that both guarantors of a divided Germany—the USA and the Soviet Union—are experiencing an erosion
of influence simultaneously. The two main beneficiaries of a divided Germany are no longer able to shape the world.

The balance of power established during the Cold War was relatively simple. It allowed America to run the capitalist world and gave the Soviet Union a regional sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Despite Cold War tensions, the ‘superpowers’ cooperated in reinforcing the division of Germany. Even the policy of détente in the seventies was mainly about formalising the red vision of Europe after 1945. This settlement could be justified by the exigencies of fighting the Cold War. Today it is difficult to defend the post-war settlement, as a leading US publication recently noted: The post-war order of Europe—the division between East and West—is fast breaking down, and institutions erected to preserve it are beginning to look outdated. (Newsweek, 16 October)

The recognition that the post-war settlement is breaking down immediately focuses attention on the linchpin of that arrangement—Germany. German reunification would lead to its domination of Europe and the further erosion of American power. The fear of the dislocation of the world order has motivated diplomats and politicians to find a solution to the German question—one that stops short of reunification.

**Euro-solutions**

Many Western strategists would like to speed up the full integration of Western Europe. France in particular believes that this could give the EC added influence over future negotiations concerning the partition of Europe. They hope that any unilateral German initiative could thus be prevented. The British authorities are being pressed to adopt a similar stance. According to the Sunday Times, the view that the European community is the best way to contain the Germans has long been understood in Paris, where fear of German nationalism is almost paranoid, but it has yet to be grasped in London (11 June).

A possible alternative favoured by left and right-wing politicians in the EC is to deal with the German question in the context of some kind of a European federalist solution. In this scenario, two Germans would coexist side by side within a united Europe.

The European-oriented solutions are an attempt at damage limitation. They are unlikely to be viable since the forces of change that have led to the re-raising of the German question also tend to undermine European cooperation. It is already clear that 1992 will benefit some but not others. Weak capitalist nations like Britain are already having second thoughts about how far they can go towards joining a single European market.

There is also a joker in the pack. Western powers are publicly happy about the crisis of the Stalinist bloc. The destruction of the East European systems and the explicit admission of failure by the Stalinist bureaucracy are portrayed in the West as arguments for capitalism. However, such public celebrations in Western capitals are qualified by the realisation that the end of the East-West conflict could upset the carefully created international balance of power.

**Winners and losers**

British and American rulers who enjoy making propaganda points about ‘the end of communism’ also recognise that, if the East goes West, they have most to lose and Germany has most to gain. The breakdown of the Stalinist system creates an unprecedented opportunity for West Germany to expand eastwards...

‘It is an increasingly fair bet that Germany is set to win in peace the European supremacy that has twice eluded it in war. As communist Europe goes capitalist, a market of 400m frustrated consumers beckons.’ (Economist, 14 October)

Indeed, the crisis in East Europe provides West Germany with an alternative to EC and the Western Alliance. So the discussion of the German question among the international powers concerns more than the reunification of one nation. They calculate that, above all, the crisis of Eastern Europe presents a lucrative opportunity for German imperialism. This calculation provides the most optimistic argument in Washington and London about the dangers of going too fast on the road to rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

Given the opportunities for expansion which it involves, it might be thought that the West German capitalist class ought to be extremely enthusiastic about the prospect of reunification and the easing of East-West tensions. However, matters are not so straightforward.

The West German ruling class has prospered under the American-dominated post-war settlement. It knows that if it takes any unilateral step towards reunification it will face the hostility of its major economic partners. It also understands that such a course of action could destabilise the foundations of its economic success. From the vantage point of the West German ruling class, the best way to exploit the international order entails risks which it needs carefully to consider. This explains why, until very recently, the German media were very hesitant about conducting discussions on the question of reunification. Until mid-October, there was more media debate about this question outside West Germany than inside.

**Nazi shadow**

There is also a more profound problem facing the German capitalist class. As a result of its past experiment with Nazism, the German ruling class faces a permanent crisis of legitimacy. Unlike its peers among other Western powers, the German establishment cannot claim the legitimacy of history and tradition. The moral collapse of German nationalism in 1945 makes it difficult to project a confident image around which a popular consensus can be built. In The Germans, David Marsh shows how the basic symbols of German nationalism are often an embarrassment to the state. At the very least the use of such symbols tends to provoke an international outcry that Germany is reverting to its Nazi identity. Thus the present German chancellor Helmut Kohl got into trouble a few years back when he tried to rehabilitate the word ‘Fatherland’ because of its Nazi connotations.
Kohl cannot easily imitate people like Thatcher or Mitterrand, waving the flag and pontificating about the past glories of the nation to mobilise support. That is why Willy Brandt, West German chancellor between 1969 and 1974, stated that 'a good German cannot be a nationalist' (The Germans, p.46). The West German state cannot assume an overtly nationalist stance without reminding the world of its Nazi past.

The West German ruling class has tried to resolve its crisis of legitimacy by institutionalising anti-communism as a state philosophy. The virulence of anti-communism in West Germany is a symptom of the weakness of the state. In other words, the West German state has only developed any legitimacy by contrasting itself to the discredited East German alternative, and by emphasising the supposed internal communist threat. This is why, from Adenauer onwards, the West German ruling class sought to present itself as the vanguard of the anti-communist struggle.

Paper policies

The ironic consequence of this is that the credibility of the political system in West Germany has depended upon intensifying partition and promoting the Cold War anti-communist crusade. As long as Germany is divided, the capitalist class can justify its existence by pointing across the border. This explains why German capitalists have generally been less than enthusiastic about reunification through the post-war years.

On paper, every major West German political party, except the Greens, is committed to a policy of reunification. In practice, however, the policies of these parties have been mainly concerned with formalising the relationship with East Germany. The West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) has generally taken the initiative in regularising this relationship. Its Ostpolitik is based upon the premise that reunification is not a realistic option. Instead the SPD traditionally argues for reconciliation. In the words of Egon Bahr, the main ideologue of Ostpolitik, the objective is that of Wiedervereinigung—change through reconciliation. From this perspective, Germany is seen as one nation consisting of two states.

During the past decade the main themes of Ostpolitik have been adopted by all the major parliamentary parties.

New history

From the point of view of the West German ruling class, the main virtue of Ostpolitik is that it strengthens Bonn's influence over developments in the East without raising the difficult problems associated with reunification. The precondition for decisively going beyond Ostpolitik towards reunification is the rehabilitation of German nationalism. The recent historical debates about Germany's Nazi phase, the so-called Historikerstreit, reflect fresh attempts to come to terms with this problem. Right-wing historians led by Ernst Nolte now argue that Nazi atrocities were a reaction to Stalinist terror. By equating the Nazi Holocaust with Stalinism, right-wing historians attempt to 'redistribute responsibility for the evils of the Third Reich' (see The Germans, p.35).

Rewriting German history is of course fraught with danger. At the very best it would provoke an angry reaction from abroad. Consequently, the German ruling class must develop a more subtle approach towards reestablishing a legitimate nationalist tradition.

Recent events in East Germany have forced the Kohl government to make some panic adjustments to Bonn's traditional restraint on the issue of reunification. The chronology of the Kohl government's response to the East German crisis shows its indecisiveness.

'One people'

Bonn's first reaction was to counsel moderation, to make some half-hearted calls on the Stalinist regime to reform itself. Indeed, by calling only for reforms, the Kohl government implicitly accepted the partition of the country and the legitimacy of the East German state. Benn was particularly anxious not to cause offence among its NATO allies. Kohl went out of his way to assure Nato that he would not embark on any unilateral policy which could threaten the Western Alliance.

It soon became clear, however, that Kohl had been overtaken by events. The resignation of the East German government and most politburo members showed the world that there was now a political vacuum in the middle of Europe. Kohl responded by promising economic aid to East Germany in exchange for political reforms. Even at this stage the old policy of caution held sway. It was only on 9 November, when the East German Stasi leadership announced that they had granted their citizens unrestricted travel rights, that the Bonn government began to shift its emphasis. Since then, leading West German politicians have begun to speak without the usual qualifications regarding reunification.

It is unclear how far this trend can go. But Kohl's 'we are one people' speech, and the singing of the German national anthem in the federal parliament show how, since 9 November, the West German ruling class has been forced to modify its traditional conservatism towards partition. It still remains hesitant, but it cannot ignore the power vacuum across the border. Moreover, the Bonn government can no longer remain indifferent to the growing popular mood in favour of reunification among its people.

It may be that the crisis in East Germany can provide a foundation for a new nationalist legitimacy in Bonn. The spectacle of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing communism and the manifest unpopularity of the Krarz regime strengthens Bonn's claim to represent all Germans. The enthusiasm prompted by the ending of travel restrictions and the prospect of dismantling the wall has encouraged the growth of popular nationalism in West Germany. The insecurity of the German working class about its national tradition, which has characterised its outlook for 40 years, may well be at last temporarily suspended under the impact of current events. The emergence of popular nationalism is an asset that the West German ruling class cannot but accept.

Obviously, the German ruling class cannot change policy overnight. It still must consider its international relations with other powers. However, it is now clear that it is not possible indefinitely to perpetuate the artificial division of Germany. The problem for the capitalists now is how to resolve this problem in a way that minimises the destabilising consequences of a united Germany. It is a problem for which, as yet, the Bonn government has no answers.

Left behind

Many left thinkers in Germany and Europe are also worried about the consequences of German reunification. According to Egbert John the question of German reunification is a problem in the context of East-West conflict. It is the 'political character' of the border that acts as a barrier to any resolution. (See 'Governments, social organisation and peace movements', in M Kaldor et al (eds), The New Defense, 1989, p.89). This perception confuses form and content. East-West conflict provides only the form in which the contradiction of German unity is expressed. The content of the problem remains the old dilemma of how to integrate a strong Germany into the international balance of power. The fundamental cause of the division of Germany is not the ideological conflict between East and West but the interests of most Western nations in preventing the growth of a strong Germany.

John is hesitant about arguing for real reunification because of the deep-seated fear that a united Germany could become an aggressive military power again. In liberal
left-wing circles in central Europe, there is an unstated assumption that whatever the problem with partition, at least it prevents the re-emergence of a predatory German imperialism. This view is reinforced by the fact that the far right is the most vociferous in putting the case for German reunification.

**Partition's purpose**

The reservations about reunification expressed by liberals and the left are based on a confused appreciation of events. The aim of partition is not to preserve world peace but to establish a framework for negotiations called into play by the collapse of power which excludes Germany. Now that this balance of power has been called into question by the decline of the USA and the USSR, partition can no longer prevent the re-emergence of the German question.

The main catalyst for the re-raising of the German question is the crisis of the Soviet bureaucracy. Since the maintenance of the unpopular East German regime has been entirely dependent on the power of the Kremlin, any significant change in the Soviet Union is of decisive importance for the future of Germany. East Germany would not stand still once the Soviet Union began to change. The longer it attempted to hold back reform under the old regime of Erich Honecker, the more it demonstrated that it was run by bureaucrats without a shred of public support. Regardless of what the Western left would like to happen in East Germany, facts are a stubborn thing. And the most overwhelming fact about East Germany is that it contains a vacuum of power.

**American regrets**

It is ironic that the democratic impulses of the left and the image of America are fully shared by its bitter enemies in Washington. For American imperialism the partition of Germany was a source of enormous stability. That is why it is concerned to play down the importance of recent events. President Bush must regret the day that he called on Gorbachev to get rid of the Berlin Wall. More than a few American diplomats must be fervently praying that Gorbachev will decide to crack down on popular protest in East Germany. No doubt such an action will be met with a wave of opposition that will undermine the Eastern front. But the decisive factor is the way in which the Western left--and the USA--will respond to the new situation.

**Knocking holes in the Berlin Wall directly undermines the justification for NATO.**

What attitude should we take to these events? The most important consequence of the division of Germany for Marxists has been the division of the European working class. Splitting the working class enabled the capitalists to rebuild a new post-war politics under their control. In Germany the very process of partition restored some legitimacy to the capital's class. Under the guise of uniting against the supposed communist threat, the Nazi past of German big business would be forgiven. Germany's balance of power was fuelled by partition, the Cold War divided workers and consolidated the power of the capitalists. The existence of 'socialist' East Germany, clearly compromised by its puppet status, gave the capitalist government in Bonn a degree of moral authority. So long as Germany remains divided it will not be possible to rebuild an effective working class movement.

**Workers' unity**

Since Germany is the key to developments in the whole of Europe it follows that the development of the German working class is of decisive importance on the Continent. The successful resolution of the problem of partition is of direct relevance to Marxists throughout the world.

The question of reunification needs to be turned into an issue for the working class. This will mean reposing the question at stake as the unity of the working class. We should advocate the elimination of the border to facilitate the realisation of that class unity. The German question can only be finally resolved through the struggles of the working class. This is because it is only by forging class unity across state lines that we can counter the danger of conflict among the Western capitalists powers.

Perhaps the capitalists will find some solution to the problem of reunification, but they have no answer to the question of Germany and its place in the world. A united Germany under capitalist rule would inevitably re-raise the old question of where it fits into the balance of power. It would act as a catalyst for the consolidation of imperialist rivalries around the world. Most ominously it would become the dominant influence in Eastern Europe—-a good position to build a new empire.

**Settle accounts**

Whatever the dangers represented by a united Germany, this question can no longer be avoided. German capitalism will not hesitate for long. If the working class does not take the initiative, the question of partition will be resolved on terms dictated by German imperialism. The alternative is for workers in the East and West to unite against the border and settle accounts with those in power on both sides who have perpetuated the divisions for over four decades.

There can be little doubt that in the current turbulent events the crisis of Stalinism will boost reaction. The crisis of Stalinism can be represented as a vindication of Western values. The sight of hundreds of thousands fleeing with only the clothes on their backs provides a much-needed vote of confidence in the Western way of life. These reactions are inevitable, and we cannot wish them away. Indeed it is better that we suffer the negative consequences of Stalinism now rather than later. At least we will know that the capitalists will also be uncomfortable at seeing their cherished post-war order coming apart.

**None too soon**

Despite the negative fall-out, the re-emergence of the German question has come not a moment too soon for Marxists. As long as the Stalinist system survived intact, the project of a working class revolution stood discredited. The Stalinist bureaucracy usurped for itself the banner of Marxism and succeeded in disorienting successive generations of working class militants. By their very existence, the Stalinist regimes legitimised the imperialist system. So long as it could point to Stalinism as the only alternative to capitalism the Western ruling class had nothing to fear. The grim reality of Stalinist society was used successfully to curb dissent in the West and discredit Marxism in general. Anti-communism became a powerful religion, sustained by the division of Europe. With the demise of Stalinism the rulers of the West will have to convert to another religion. They will not find it easy to rewrite their holy texts.

We cannot predict the future nor wish our solutions on history. But we can see that the emergence of the German question raises new possibilities for Marxists throughout the world. The culture of the Cold War which was so successful in discarding communism must now succumb to the culture of imperialism and nationalism across the Western powers. As this shift takes place we must be ready to project the alternative political culture of Marxism and internationalism.

Political witch-hunts in students' unions

BY ORDER OF THE MANAGEMENT

Lindsay Daniels notes a new regime in higher education

The first day at North London Poly was memorable. Within minutes of our arrival, a letter from management was thrust into our hands.

'Dear Student,

Code of Discipline. Disciplinary procedures may be invoked if [there is] any act that the director has reason to believe is a breach of good discipline of the polytechnic.'

New students have been greeted like this in colleges all over the country. And The Management have been backing up their threats with action. Posters on controversial subjects have been ripped down from college walls. Meetings likely to cause 'a breach of the peace' have been banned. And in some cases, outside speakers invited to address political meetings have been forcibly prevented from entering college property.

The Education Reform Act has made its mark. In the past, polytechnics and colleges relied on local education authorities to fund staff wages and maintenance costs. Now colleges have to apply to a government-appointed funding council which has the power to refuse grants to colleges that do not meet the 'terms of contract.' And they are being encouraged to look to private sector sponsorship to compensate for the cuts.

Strictly business

Colleges have reacted by rewriting courses to suit the demands of the marketplace, expanding technology and business studies departments at the expense of the humanities, or merging social science courses with business-oriented ones to create such hybrids as 'sociology and computer science.' The political clampdown is another consequence of college management's need to project an image of good housekeeping and corporate responsibility in order to compete for funds. There is no place for even the mildest agitation in the capitalist market. So The Management are clamping down on student union expenditure and potential disruption. Students have been resisting management attempts to cut costs at the expense of these before the autumn term began. Students at Newcastle Polytechnic occupied the Fashion Centre, the polytechnic's showcase for the business world, after art students were told to pay £25 for course materials. And in Cardiff, first-year students occupied the local library because the college had not organised accommodation for them before term.

This kind of student activity has not received the backing of the 'official' students' union leadership. The National Union of Students, machine has at best given token support to students, and at worst, actively collaborated with management to ensure that student activity does not get out of hand. In some colleges, students' union executive members have invited management to union meetings to listen to plans of action against them. In others they have refused to book rooms for political meetings and cancelled video showings of the Irish republican film 'Behind the Mask', presumably to save management the trouble.

Pot Noodle politics

The problem with the NUS is not just that its officials are little bureaucrats more concerned with building a career than with building an effective union (although many of them are). The bigger problem lies with the very nature of the NUS as a non-independent institution.

Students' unions are reliant on college management for their funds. This dependent relationship automatically means that the union is hamstrung when it comes to opposing management attacks. In Newcastle, for example, the authorities have just reacted to the art students' occupation by cutting £2000 of the union budget to pay for alleged damages, and similar punishments have been handed down elsewhere. Students union officials are becoming increasingly unwilling to back their paymasters. As NUS becomes little more than a provider of subsidised beer and other services, it is no surprise that few students are inspired to play an active role in the union; at some colleges, officials have been reduced to tempering students to register for an NUS card by offering them a decidedly unpromising free Pot Noodle.

The Management have shown they will do whatever is necessary to impose the new business regime in the colleges. In these circumstances, students need a union which is financially and politically independent from the college authorities if we are to resist the attacks involved in the privatisation of education. The battle is on.
Forget all the gushing statements from the British and other Western governments about how wonderful it is to welcome East German refugees to the Free World. Remember how Britain treats refugees from the oppressed capitalist world; people like Silo iyiguen.

Silo iyiguen came to Britain in May, one of 3700 Kurdish refugees who have recently fled here from Turkey, where possession of a cassette of Kurdish music can get you arrested and tortured by the military police. His application for asylum in Britain was rejected, and he was locked up to await deportation back to Turkey. On Thursday 5 October Silo iyiguen set fire to his cell in Harmondsworth detention centre in a desperate protest against Britain's treatment of Kurdish refugees. He died in the blaze. Three weeks later, 4000 people marched behind iyiguen's coffin from east London to Downing Street, where No 10 remains a firm base of support for the butchering Turkish generals.

When refugees first arrived in Britain many were imprisoned, some for more than six months. They are not criminals but the immigration office made them guilty because they came here for asylum. One of our number was Silo iyiguen. On 2 October he went for an interview at Harmondsworth. He wasn't optimistic: we know from experience that translators working for the home office are sending information about refugees back to the Turkish government. Immigration officers refused his appeal and detained him. On 5 October he burned himself.

Silo and the other refugees had to stay in halls and community centres. Most have now found accommodation, but landlords charge us £200 or £300 a room, so people have to live like animals in a single room. We didn't get any accommodation from any council. Some are still living in halls.

"The British government sucked the oil out of our country. Now they don't want us here. They say we come here for economic reasons, but Kurdish people aren't allowed to work in Turkey. I don't think many are coming for £279 a week. We are a colony of Turkey and we come here to Europe to live like free people. Whether we are allowed to stay depends on British people. We expect their support."

Diyar Akin, Kurdish Workers Association

In his application for political asylum, Silo pointed out that he was Kurdish and Alevi [a Muslim sect with a radical tradition], and that is why he was being persecuted in Turkey. When he was told that he was to be deported, he said "Only my dead body will go back to Turkey." Then he and Dogan Arslan [now recovering from 30 per cent burns] decided to burn themselves. This was not a suicide attempt resulting from depression. It was a protest against the way that the British government is treating the refugees, in order that others will not be treated the same way.

"At one point there were over 200 refugees in detention. Then after Silo's protest we suddenly found people being released virtually overnight. For months we had requested this but the home office flatly refused—until this incident. They kept only eight in custody. Two were to be deported, and there was a protest in the prison that same night; the warders beat some of the refugees very severely.

"Many families came here with only the clothing on their backs. But the department of social security will not give them a grant to clothe themselves and their children. When the refugees are interrogated, the immigration officers say "We have to inform you that the secretary of state has a mind to refuse you your application." Then a two-and-a-half page provisionality decision is read out and they are expected to give an immediate answer. The officers take it badly if the refugees ask for legal advice.

"I protested about an interpreter who was mistranslating the story of a man who had a document to show that he had been denied a position in the Turkish civil service, despite passing the exams, because he was a Kurdish Alevi. To my dismay, the immigration officer told me she had complete confidence that the interpreter was interpreting correctly. I asked her if she spoke Turkish. She said no.

Ayse Hasoz, Union of Turkish Workers
Chaos theory has been hailed as the science of the future. John Gibson and Manjit Singh believe that it belongs with the mysticism of the past.

Top American management guru Peter Drucker has just produced a book, *The New Realities*, with a novel analysis of the failure of the Soviet system and the instability in the world economy today. Apparently these diverse events can all be explained by applying the fashionable mathematical theory of Chaos.

According to Drucker, Chaos tells us that complex natural and social systems are inherently unplannable, so there is no point blaming governments and economists for the mess things are in. Reviewing Drucker's book in the *Sunday Times*, Simon Jenkins summarises the argument. 'To accuse Nigel Lawson of having “got 1989 inflation wrong” or of being “five per cent out on his money supply” will one day seem as daft as flat-earthism—like accusing American forecasters of not seeing Hurricane Hugo coming a year ago.' (24 September)

**All in one**

Chaos theory seems to be sweeping the scientific world. It attempts to explain everything from the micro-world of subatomic particles, through the movements of the international economy, to the origin and evolution of the universe. It has been hailed as a revolution in science, a ‘new paradigm’.

Chaos theorists argue that natural processes are unknowable and hence uncontrollable. They reject the outlook of Newton and the science of the Enlightenment. The Newtonian revolution of the eighteenth century was a product of the rise of the capitalistic system. It was a time of intense ferment, when old barriers were torn down and an air of creativity spread from intellectuals to influence society as a whole. The widespread optimism of the period led to the belief that there was no limit to humanity's knowledge of, and hence control over, nature.

But the capitalist system has long ceased to be optimistic or confident about the future. Today, proponents of Chaos argue that we should shelve ideas about controlling the natural world and instead seek a more harmonious relationship with it. In the words of Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prize-winning chemist, it is time to start a 'new dialogue' between humanity and nature (I Prigogine and I Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos*, 1985).

If these theorists are right, then the revolutionary project of transforming society through a planned economy is doomed. So what is this new Chaos theory? And can it really explain everything from the earthquake in California to the turmoil in the Eastern bloc?

**Simple complexity**

There are two intertwined strands to Chaos theory. The first is the search for simplicity in complex behaviour, and attempts to explain complexity from simplicity. The origins of this idea can be traced back to the late nineteenth-century mathematician Henri Poincare. It really took off in the 1960s with the work of Edward Lorenz. From his attempts to simulate weather patterns with a computer, Lorenz drew two startling conclusions:

1) It is impossible to predict the weather more than a few days in advance because the smallest of changes in one part of the world can lead to major effects elsewhere. This has been popularised in the idea of the ‘butterfly effect’—a butterfly flaps its wings in South America, which leads to a monsoon in India.

2) Although the weather never repeats itself exactly, there are certain patterns which tend roughly to recur. These he called ‘simple attractors’.

The twin phenomena of super-sensitivity to initial conditions and simple attractors are said to be present in dynamical systems, both natural and social. This is the essence of the first strand of Chaos theory—its claim to universality. It has been used to explain the dripping of a tap, gaps in the asteroid belt in the solar system, the growth of insect populations, and the fluctuations in the stock exchange.

These ideas have recently been popularised in James Gleick's best-selling book, *Chaos*:

'Simple systems give rise to complex behaviour. Complex systems give rise to simple behaviour.'

And, most important, the laws of complexity hold universally. Caring not at all for the details of a system's constituent atoms. (Chao, 1988, p364)

The second strand of Chaos theory, articulated above all by Prigogine, concerns the development of ordered structures from less ordered matter, eg, biological organisms. Prigogine and his associates go so far as to suggest that matter and energy possess an 'innate' tendency towards creating ever more complex and ordered forms within dynamic systems. They have used this assertion to explain the emergence of human life and a host of other phenomena from turbulence in liquids to the evolution of all the ordered structures within the universe.

The universal claims of Chaos theory result from the fact that scientist model dynamical systems with the same kind of mathematical equations: second order equations, of which $x'' + x = 0$ is a simple example. Lorenz modelled the weather using three such equations. It is not surprising that this approach discovers common features in the most diverse phenomena: the common features are the properties of the similar equations which Chaos theorists use. It is highly questionable whether these represent the essence of the phenomena under investigation. What we are seeing with Chaos theory is a lot of speculative mathematical model-building. Simple systems like the motion of a free-wheeling pendulum may well exhibit chaotic behaviour under the influence of external forces. However, does the same apply to the evolution of the universe? Who knows? In fact very little is known about the dynamics of a river, never mind such cosmic problems. One Chaos theorist admitted as much in a recent book:

'Much of turbulence remains a mystery. Fully developed turbulence, if it involves strange attractors at all, may require attractors of enormous dimensions—a thousand, a million, At the moment we can say nothing worth knowing about these. Many
turbulent effects seem to be caused by boundaries—the walls of pipes, for example—and strange attractor theories haven't yet been related to the influence of boundaries.' (I Stewart, *Does God Play Dice?*, 1989, p.191)

Indeed, the more Chaos theorists descend from the world of mathematical model-building to the study of real processes, the more speculative their theories become. In *The Cosmic Blueprint*, leading science writer Paul Davies begins his qualifying remarks on page 37 with 'a good approximation', moving on to 'it is tempting to believe' by page 63 and finally getting to 'it has been conjectured' on page 185.

A writer like Davies does bring out the appeal of Chaos theory. It has taken off, not so much because it is a new coherent body of thought, but because it addresses the limitations of Newtonian science and provides an all-encompassing answer from fairly simple equations. After one fairly wild bit of speculation, Davies says that his ideas may be 'bizarre', but that they fit handily into a gap in scientific understanding.

'The rather bizarre ideas I have mentioned in this section do not form part of mainstream science and should not, perhaps, be taken very seriously. Nevertheless they illustrate the persistence of the impression among scientists and laymen alike that the universe has been organised in a way that is hard to explain mechanistically, and that in spite of the tremendous advances in fundamental science there is still a strong temptation to fall back on some higher principle.' (P Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, 1989 edition, p.164)

This is a common feature of science in the twentieth century. Despite a recognition of the shortcomings of Newtonian mechanics, only partial, speculative alternatives have been put forward.

The stagnation of modern society imposes limits on the practical challenges facing science and the potential for carrying out
Social laws are created by humanity—and thus they are subject to human control.

...
December 1979—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

AMERICA'S FAILED CRUSADE

Ten years after the Soviet invasion, Sue Nicholls looks at how America's intervention has helped to 'Lebanonise' Afghanistan

A few months ago, as Soviet tanks rolled out of Afghanistan, the media assured us that the 'communist' regime in Kabul would soon collapse. It hasn't quite worked out that way. President Najibullah is still at his post, which is more than can be said for the head of Pakistan's secret service and the CIA chief in Afghanistan. They have both recently been assassinated and expropriated for the miserable failure of US policy in the region. The leaders of the mujahideen Islamic rebels, meanwhile, are divided, nowhere have they been for the past decade, squabbling in their US-funded refugee camps in Pakistan.

Soviet troops moved into Afghan-istan in December 1979. It wasn't long before the mujahideen joined the Nicaraguan Contras as America's favourite freedom fighters. Now they are an embarrassment, a public reminder of US weakness in the region. The mujahideen were never likely to be reliable US allies, divided as they are between ethnic and sectional lines. They were third world countries with uneven borders drawn by colonialism, and were often used as a proxy by powerful neighbors in the region. Overall, the mujahideen movement was split between the different leaderships. The Sunnis were split between the two largest movements: the Muslim brotherhood, which was a political force, and the Taliban, which was a militant group. The Taliban were more interested in establishing a theocratic state, while the Muslim brotherhood was more concerned with establishing a secular state.

Kabul Polytechnic, which were hotbeds of Islamic fundamentalism (and, ironically, of Marxism) in the sixties. Both of these groups expressed the disenchantment of the middle class intelligentsia and state employees who were denied political influence and economic advancement under the old regime. There are eight main Shii fundamentalist groups and four Sunni groups. The more numerous Sunni fundamentalists. The Sunni groups are themselves split between two moderate and two extremist factions.

Squall scrumbl

Both sections of the mujahideen represent narrow interests. On one hand the privileges of the feudal khan, on the other the Islamic aspirations of Khabibutaul's. The litigating among them was as irrational as a scramble for personal power. In the late 1970s, the Soviet invasion helped to consolidate this power and the resulting factionalism. The Taliban were able to take advantage of this fragmentation to gain control of the region. They were able to impose their own brand of totalitarianism, which was based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law and the establishment of a theocratic state. The Taliban were able to consolidate their power by eliminating their rivals and establishing control over the region. They were able to control the distribution of resources and enforce their strict interpretation of Islamic law, which included the oppression of women and the suppression of free expression.

Khans and infidels

There are three main traditional parties. They are based upon the old village khans, who either sent land from the Soviet power to the khan. The shock and oppression of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul was never a principled ideological struggle. The landlords just want to maintain their privileges and wealth. It would not be surprising to see their interests best served by a return to the corrupt old regime of King Zahir Shah.

By contrast, the fundamentalists have claimed ideological motives for making war on the 'infidels' in Kabul, and want to create a new Islamic state. Their leaders come from a different background. The Khomeiniists were the right-wing wing of the Khomeini movement in Iran. In 1995 they formed a puppet government and present instability spreading over their own borders, the struggle broadened into a war against an invading power. This made it all the easier for the Islamic factions to win local favour. Thus the mujahideen were able to claim the support of a far wider range than their own interest groups. Many of the Afghan people, however, displayed a marked reluctance to play a role in the battle for the Islamic state. A third of the population have fled the country and are now living as refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

The mass exodus from Afghanistan caused a popular backlash which was capitalised on by the mujahideen. But the opposition factions needed more to keep 115,000 Soviet troops at bay. Without large-scale external backing from the USA and its allies—Britain, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia—the mujahideen could not have sustained the war with the Soviet regime.

The smoked and erratic nature of the mujahideen made them an attractive target for the USA. The USA supported the resistance movement in Afghanistan from the beginning, providing assistance to the mujahideen and training them in refugee camps in Pakistan and elsewhere. The USA provided military equipment and other support to the mujahideen, including funding for their operations and training facilities. The mujahideen were able to use this assistance to launch attacks on the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The mujahideen were able to make the war a costly one for the Soviet Union, who was forced to commit large numbers of troops to contain the resistance.

Made in the USA

The US crusade in Afghanistan has deteriorated into an expensive and embarrassing adventure, posing a serious threat to the survival of the modernity and its aspirations. It has been a failure on all fronts. It has not helped to bring about the change that the USA was hoping for. It has only served to strengthen the hands of the Soviet Union and its allies, who are able to use the conflict in Afghanistan to further their own strategic objectives. It has also served to undermine the prestige of the USA and its allies, who have been seen as weak and ineffective in the face of the Soviet challenge. The US intervention in Afghanistan has been a costly and expensive venture, and has only served to polarize the region and its people.
Should Britain join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism?

ERM... YES AND NO

Jon Fryer thinks that, in or out of the European Monetary System, British capitalism is in a no-win situation

In the continuing fall-out from the Lawson-Thatcher-Walters controversy over the European Monetary System, it might appear strange that an apparently technical discussion of exchange rates could excite such passions. But there are far bigger issues at stake below the surface. So what is at stake here?

The European Monetary System (EMS) is a product of the disintegration of the post-war international economic order. As the US dollar slipped from unquestioned world dominance in the late sixties and early seventies, it destabilised the international monetary system. Currency exchange rates fluctuated wildly, and European nations tried to control them through coordinating monetary policy. But early attempts at European currency coordination—such as the 1973-79 "snake in the tunnel" system—failed to end the instability, since countries simply left the "snake", allowed their currencies to depreciate and then re-entered the system.

When today's EMS was founded in 1979, the members took new steps to strengthen the coordination of national monetary policies and to move the centre of economic gravity still further away from the dollar and towards the West German mark. Now they are making efforts to reinforce the system: not as a high-minded move towards the European ideal, but as a pragmatic reaction to the increasingly bleak outlook for wider international monetary coordination. The EMS is a symptom of the break-up of the world economy into rival trading blocs. Britain is formally a member of the EMS. The current debate focuses on whether (and when) Britain should integrate more closely by joining the system's Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). This mechanism allows eight of the 12 European currencies to fluctuate against each other within fixed margins. All (except the Italian lira) are allowed to shift by up to 2.25 per cent either side of the centrally agreed rates.

When a currency threatens to break out of the range, concerted central bank intervention tries to pull it back. If a currency is sliding because of a flight of capital, central banks try to reverse the flow by buying it up. If this fails, coordinated measures such as interest rate changes aim to attract foreign investors into the flagging currency. Conversely, when a currency has the roof, the central banks switch to selling their own currency and interest rate moves to dissuade foreign investors.

'Half-backed'

The ERM is not a system of fixed exchange rates. It is more a system of compulsory adjustment. The lack of any compulsion means in a sense that Thatcher's ex-personal adviser Alan Walters was right to call the system 'half-backed'; it can easily fail, and when it does governments have to get together to realign exchange rates and establish new target ranges.

The ambiguity in Britain's attitude to the EMS reflects the ambiguous interests of British capitalism. Britain's growing reliance on trade in goods and services within Europe stimulates trends towards closer monetary cooperation. But the closer Britain becomes a full member of the EMS, the closer will its economic subordination to West Germany become apparent.

The day Britain stops posturing as an independent financial power, and takes its place as a secondary European state, it will find it all the harder to claim a role as a major player in the world economy. This poses a serious problem, since British capitalism has residual—and very important—advantages to be gained from what remains of its international influence. The

Thatcher is no more a consistent opponent of the EMS than Lawson is a 'good European'.

PHOTO: Gerald Littet

mountain of assets which Britain holds across the world is one valuable legacy of Empire. British capitalists raked back a profit of £5.6 billion on these overseas stockpiles in 1988. Such windfalls from abroad are now vital, given Britain's mounting difficulties in managing a burgeoning trade deficit at home.

British belligerence towards the EMS results from the tension between the need to cooperate with Europe and the desire to maintain some semblance of independence. Alan Walters claims that the Mayhem treaty may perhaps be the instrument by which capital flows around the world market. The exchange rate control measure:

The compelling argument against any pseudo-exchange rate system is that, because of the enormous funds sloshing around in world capital markets, exchange rates cannot be held either by feasible amounts of intervention or by acceptable monetary or fiscal policies. Surely our current Black Monday proved that yet again.

(‘Financial Times’, 6 April)

Walters might express concern about the general possibility of sustained monetary coordination; yet he is really talking about the particular interests of British capitalism.

The City of London earns billions each year from the financial servicing of the capital that flows around the globe. Although Britain's capitalists cannot make much profit from exploitation in the home economy,
they excel in the world of financial manipulation and the handling of other countries' creditors. All of this has apparently precluded calls for "free trade" and an open world economy, especially if financial services are really an attempt to preserve the competitiveness which has allowed the UK to hold on to an extensive economic empire. Domestic stagnation and decay enhance Britain's dependence on such international factors. It has made the national economy splinters into rival and exclusive deutscharms, yen and dollar zones.

The particularly volatile nature of the pound also counts against Britain's participation in the exchange rate mechanisms. Since the Second World War the pound has experienced major swings and falls and recurrent speculative crises. The anti-EMS lobby looks back at the disastrous attempt to put sterling into the European currency "snake" in 1972, when massive speculative forces pushed the pound out within weeks.

There are short-term factors which helped to push sterling upwards in the eighties - North Sea oil, the strength of the City, the relative weakness of other European economies, the uncertainty in Brazil political stability - are all either waning or exhausted. The projected £20 billion trade deficit for this year, and high interest rates, are sufficient to stimulate a new rash of bankruptcies and insolvencies, point to the prospect of a run on the pound which would not only endanger British entry but could blow the entire European EMS apart. The pound is now the "banana currency" hard on the outside, soft in the middle and always set to slide.

Extravagant claims

Thatcher is no more a consistent opponent of the EMS than Lawson is a "good European". Both are committed to British entry into Europe, and both are opposed to any drift towards full monetary integration. Both have accepted British membership of the ERM in principle for "diplomatic" reasons. Britain may lose by going in, but it loses still more by staying out. Like the rest of the EMS lobby, Lawson hopes the ERM can provide a more stable and predictable environment for intra-European trade. He wants to recoup the powerful reserves of the West German Bundesbank to help bail out the British economy.

Whether Britain goes in or stays out of the ERM it will not tackle the real problems facing British industry. The great EMS controversy is largely a focus around which the establishment can project its problems into the monetary sphere. Both supporters and critics of the EMS make extravagant claims for their approach, each side claiming that their monetary policies are high growth, low inflation, and the exchange rate differentials and low inflation. In fact, such changes reflect shifts in the sphere of production, not that of circulation.

In his recent interview with Brian Walden, Lawson referred to the turn-of-the-century Edwardian prosperity that accompanied the pound-dominated gold standard. He took this to be a reflection of the superiority of international coordination and currency management, especially under British supervision. But it was not the gold standard which made Britain great; the power of the British industry, the gold standard the global standing of the pound. The Chancellor can daydream in the old rectory at Huyton, but the world is going on forever, and with it the supremacy of the pound.

Rewriting history

In order to depict the crisis of British capitalism as a narrow monetary problem, both Thatcher and Lawson now blame the government's own monetary policies for endangering its economic miracle. In a televised interview in June, for example, Lawson primarily blamed the rise in inflation on the fact that we deregulated our financial sector far more than any other country. The government went wrong with the loosening of monetary policy in the wake of the 1987 crash.

This analysis turns reality on its head. Relaxing restraints on the amount of money in the economy did not cause the crash, indeed it was only such monetary measures which were postponed the potentially devastating consequences of the October 1987 crash. Now that the beneficial effects of monetary expansion are all but exhausted, Lawson tries to blame the easy money policies which even the most strident monetarists and financial disciplinarians begged for at the time.

For her part, Thatcher has claimed that Britain picked up its inflationary tendencies when Lawson encouraged the pound to shadow the deutschmark. Her famous "you can't buck the markets" speech against this policy gave the impression that she favoured a free market attitude towards interest rates. But she is no more a supporter of a "hands off" approach than Lawson. Central bank control of interest rates has remained and been used throughout the Thatcher years; and it is now clear that she rebutted his proposal to give the Bank of England more independence from government control of interest rates.

The Thatcher-Lawson dispute was really about how to use what small scope still exists for monetary manipulation to tackle inflation at home (Thatcher) or to maintain exchange rate stability abroad (Lawson). Even in the Tories' own narrow terms, this dispute is now pretty irrelevant to the conduct of economic policy. Since the dominant trend towards a depreciation of sterling persists itself, the conflict between different uses of monetary policy means little in practice. Both the attempt to squeeze demand and the attempt to stabilise sterling now imply a high interest rate policy.

Within the British establishment, all the diehards can now see some advantage in having the Bundesbank assist in propping up sterling. Thus they propose at least a temporary accommodation within the ERM.

'No change'

The continuing EMS controversy is the symbolic expression through which the dwindling authority of Thatcherite economics is expressed. It is testimony to the weakness of the opposition that the debate has not gone beyond the narrow terms set by the Tories. The important lesson of the row is that in or out of EMS and ERM, there are no easy solutions for British capitalism and advisers for the diminishing credibility of government policy, the resultant run on the pound and the rise in interest rates.

Both sides seek to blame, and to dissociate themselves from, the economic strategy of the late eighties. Yet what alternatives do they offer? As a substitute for the half-baked EMS, Thatcher offers a half-hearted scheme for freely circulating privatised national currencies. Other than that it's 'no change' and 'business as usual'. On his return to the backbenches, Lawson announced that his dispute with Waite's was merely a tip of the iceberg. We waited for him to reveal his iceberg that could cool the 'overheated' economy. But instead of describing some comprehensive counter-crisis strategy which had been thwarted by Thatcher, all Lawson had to offer was a paltry proposal for a bit more independence for the Bank of England. Even his own economic adviser - Samuel Brittan of the Financial Times - quickly disclaimed this idea.

Tory strategy is exhausted. But there is still no alternative. The EMS dispute has become the symbolic expression through which the dwindling authority of Thatcherite economics is expressed. It is testimony to the weakness of the opposition that the debate has not gone beyond the narrow terms set by the Tories. The important lesson of the row is that in or out of EMS and ERM, there are no easy solutions for British capitalism.
The making of EastEnders: Segregation in School Playgrounds

In the September issue of Living Marxism, we published an article by Kenan Malik — ‘The making of EastEnders’ — on racism in Tower Hamlets, east London. One small part of the article dealt with racist violence at school and the authorities’ response to this problem.

In October, Neil Fletcher, Labour leader of the Inner London Education Authority, wrote to Living Marxism (and to black community newspapers which reprinted Malik’s article) demanding a retraction and an apology. We can grant him neither. Here we publish Fletcher’s letter, with a reply from Kenan Malik.

Kenan Malik

I did not raise the issue of racist attacks at school and segregation in the playground, the Bangladeshi community did. The comments about segregation in my article come from Kutub Uddin, general secretary of the Cubitt Town Bangladesh Cultural Association. Bangladeshi parents also expressed their concern at a meeting in Cubitt Town over the summer. I am surprised Neil Fletcher has no knowledge of this given that local representatives were at some of these meetings.

On 13 June a meeting of the Isle of Dogs Race Committee was presented with a number of reports which showed an alarming rise in the scale of racist attacks on children both inside and outside schools in the Cubitt Town area. The committee asked Tony James, chief executive of the Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood, to convene a special meeting to discuss the problem.

This meeting was held at George Green School in Cubitt Town on 6 July. Attending were a number of local employers and officials including the head teachers of Cubitt Town infant school, Cubitt Town junior school and George Green School, the acting head of Seven Mills school; the deputy head of George Green; and the deputy education social worker from Isle Division 2. Also present were Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood officials including the chief executive, the chief of police, the race and immigration officer and the housing office team leader.

On the previous day, Bangladesh parents had met under the auspices of the Bangladeshi Cultural Association to discuss what points to put to the meeting. Parents reported that two major issues of concern were raised: the scale of racist attacks and the fact that children appeared to be segregated in the playgrounds.

Two parents’ representatives, Elias Mam and Mr Chowdhury, attended the special meeting on 6 July. According to Elias Mam, he asked the school authorities why the children were segregated in school playgrounds. He says that a representative of the teaching staff replied that they too were concerned about the separation of Asian and white children, but that they had insufficient teachers to ensure otherwise.

The Neighbourhood chief executive presented a report on this meeting to the racial incidents panel. Under the heading ‘School Perspectives’, the report notes that in George Green School ‘play often took place in separate racial groups’ and that at Cubitt Town junior school ‘children did not integrate well in their play’. In the section ‘The way forward’, the report records the feeling of the meeting that ‘whilst integration of play patterns was difficult some attempt should be made to bridge the divide between black and white children. The implication is that no such attempts were being made at that time.

The chief executive’s report implies that the authorities accept that segregation exists but seem to believe that it happens naturally. Bangladeshis, on the other hand, feel it is the result of the way the children are treated.

I recorded an interview with Kutub Uddin on 8 August. He said of Cubitt Town junior school: ‘In Cubitt Town school, they’re treating Asian students as second class citizens. The thing is, they’ve got two playgrounds and one is used only for white people and one is only for Asian people.’ When I asked him how he felt about this, he replied, ‘They’re teaching white kids how to discriminate. They’ve no right to do such a thing… The head teacher was saying they’re very short of teachers so where students come together white pupils beat up Asian pupils and they can’t control them.’ I tried to contact the school for its response, but as my interview with Kutub took place during the school holidays this proved impossible.

I saw Kutub Uddin and Elias Mam once more on 25 October, after receiving Neil Fletcher’s letter. They both confirmed that there had been segregation in the playground. Both were also worried that the authorities seemed to be complacent about the situation. For example, despite the 6 July meeting having agreed that a follow-up meeting would be held in September to review the situation at that time, no such meeting had so far taken place.

But, despite Fletcher’s assertion to the contrary, it is widely accepted in the area that some form of segregation takes place. As for ‘undermining good race relations’, the intensity of racism in Cubitt Town ensures the isolation of the Bangladeshi community. As my article argued, Labour’s token anti-racist policies have tended to reinforce this isolation and to deepen the divisions.

At Cubitt Town junior school, the lack of resources meant that it was easier for the authorities to prevent racist violence by keeping the two groups separate, or at the very least by not actively promoting integration. I am not suggesting that the school has a formal policy of segregation, but, in the context of a shortage of resources, the outcome of its bureaucratic approach to anti-racism is to reinforce the isolation of the black community. If any apology is merited, it is from the school. The authority should apologise to the Bangladeshi parents in Cubitt Town, and more generally to the black community in London, for its failure to tackle racism in schools.
Racism After Rushdie

Do Muslims want to be alone?

SEGREGATION IN BRITISH SOCIETY

Kenan Malik questions the notion that Muslims are the ones promoting racial segregation in Britain.

In West Yorkshire, hit the national headlines after a group of white parents refused to send their children to a predominantly Asian school. The parents were outraged at the idea because for years the council had colluded in an informal policy of segregation, effectively reserving certain schools for whites. Figures in the table below from an inner-city council document show the extent of segregation.

The obvious conclusion is that the Thornhill schools had been preserved as exclusively white. This was not by accident, or because Asian parents did not want to send their children there. The report notes that four of the original applications for the Thornhill schools were Asian — a far higher proportion than had ever applied but admits their applications were rejected. (The Thornhill school affair, Kirklees chief executive report, 1988).

Examples like the Thornhill education scandal demonstrate that segregation has not been invented by Muslims. It already exists in society as a result of institutionalized racism. Racial oppression ensures that black people are denied access to the mainstream of British society. While we are under a system which treats black people as second-class citizens in all matters from immigration to education, integration is impossible.

The experience of racism prompted Muslims to look to their own for support. But this was not inevitable. An effective anti-racist movement could have struck at the foundations of segregation. However, the British left has consistently failed to combat racism. This has further isolated the black community, and encouraged Muslims to seek their own solutions.

Islamic refuge

As racism has intensified in Thatcher's Britain, more Asians, especially of the younger generation, have turned to Islam as a source of strength and comfort in a hostile world. Many young Asians back the anti-Rushdie campaign. But their primary motive for adopting Islam is not to defend fundamentalist movements but to protest against a book. Instead, the campaign against The Satanic Verses has become a vehicle to show their contempt for a racist society and express their solidarity with fellow Muslims. This is why, for example, young Asians on this year's anti-Rushdie marches directed most of their anger against those who have not written a word about the Muslim faith but who have been in the forefront of the racist assault on Asian communities. The growth of Muslim separatism is the result of the intensity of British racism and their isolation.

Yet, despite the hostility to their presence in this country, a great many Muslims still regard themselves as part and parcel of British society. The Public Eye poll asked Muslims whether they would rather live in Britain or an Islamic country. A third preferred an Islamic nation. But 49 percent said they would rather stay in Britain. Given the intense hostility faced by the Muslim community, that is a remarkably high figure.

'I was born here', one young Muslim woman told Public Eye. 'I am British. We want our rights because we are their rights and we will get them no matter what.' Whether she and thousands like her, turn to Islam or secular politics as a means of fighting for those rights, largely depends on whether the left in Britain shows an equal determination to stand up to the racism and the system which supports them.

Dewsary's divided schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Percentage of Asian pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill Lees Infant</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penland Infant</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savile Town Infant</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headfield</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill Middle</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill County</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westborough High</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birkdale High</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornhill High</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In black and white

The poll also showed that Muslims were very concerned to preserve their culture and way of life. Almost half the sample said they would rather have separate Islamic schools, while 55 percent preferred mixed schools. Sixty-five percent said they would obey Islamic law if it conflicted with British law; even among 16-20-year olds, 61 percent were of this view.

The Muslim response was in sharp contrast to that of the white population. Not a single white person polled backed the anti-Rushdie campaign. Three out of five felt that the government had to act to prevent the Muslim community from becoming 'completely separated'. 'They're never going to integrate if they don't mix from the beginning,' said a typical white respondent.

At first glance the evidence suggests that Muslims do see segregation. A closer inspection of the facts, however, tells a different story. Muslims did not raise the demand for segregation, a racist society imposed segregation on Muslims living in Britain. It is little wonder that a community under siege should now turn towards for support and protection.

Muslims, like all black people, do form a community apart. Even before they set foot in Britain the authorities have segregated them out. Immigration laws are specifically designed to keep black people out of the country. And for those who manage to squeeze past the immigration desk at Heathrow, a framework of racial laws and practices often described as the 'British capital of Britain'. To this day, less than five per cent of council house tenants in Bradford are black. Where black people did get access to council housing, they were allocated the worst estates and the most rundown blocks. A survey in Tower Hamlets, east London, seven years ago showed that the proportion of Bangladeshis on the borough's 10 most desirable estates was less than five per cent; on some it was as low as 0.7 per cent.

Segregation in employment and housing has led in turn to segregation in schools. Two years ago Dewsary,
Is there life in the cabaret old chum?

LAUGH? I NEARLY DIED!

What's alternative about the alternative comedy scene 10 years on?
John Fitzpatrick asked cabaret circuit veteran John Hegley and newcomer Jenny Bone

It wasn't the heckling which did it. It was the vicious indifference of the half-drunk audience as they began to chatter among themselves. The tearful comic fled the stage, choking some rubbish over her shoulder. I strained in sympathy but her material was hopeless and what matters more, the mob sensed her lack of confidence like a dog smells fear.

It doesn't stop them coming back—the comics or the audience. This 'death' occurred at the Cartoon at Clapham, one of the still growing number of pubs, clubs and theatres which put on evenings of cabaret, usually three or four comedians although there is a fair amount of poetry, magic and music too. When John Hegley first did an open spot at Soho's Comedy Store in 1980 (it opened in 1979) there was no circuit. Now the cabaret circuit is almost as big as fringe theatre in the London listings magazines, and the circuit extends beyond the capital. Hegley can work five nights a week, one of which will be out of town.

Hegley was bashed off more than once at first. But after working as a bus conductor and a mental nurse he realised 'this was a job I liked doing and could be good at.' Now for anything between £20 to £100 a gig he'll take himself, his mandolin and his little poetry books down to the venue about 5pm, have a drink, watch the other acts and then climb on stage. 'It's not a chore. I love it.' And by and large they love him. He topbills, wins awards, and starred at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh this year. With a series of poetry programmes made for Border TV due next year, he now prefers to be called a poet.

Perhaps Hegley is about to make the same transition to the big time as Alastair Sayle, Ben Elton, Rick Mayall, Ade Edmondson, Nigel Planer, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Harry Enfield and others who started out on the 'alternative comedy' circuit, as cabaret has become known. According to a new history of the scene by Roger Wilmot and Peter Rosengard, it was called alternative because it was levish, frowned on racist and sexist jokes and saw the likes of Max Bygraves and Bernard Manning as the other alternative.

Mainstream circuit

Many critics claim that there is nothing alternative about the circuit today. So what's changed? 'It is less political now,' says Hegley. The fact that you're now working in an established form in itself means that it is less political. When it started out it was new comedy. There is something political about the unknown. It's a known quantity now. The joy has gone out of it a bit. It's an industry now, promoters care more about making money. The audience is more mainstream. People just want to have a good time. It's changed that's all. That's OK.
furnishing at the Queen Mother and urging the audience if they see a nappy on the way home to ‘mug the bastard!’

‘Most women comedians seem to be feminists who do jokes about periods. “Let’s break the taboo!” It’s done so much it’s just boring. There are too many middle class, university-educated wanker types performing to middle class audiences.’ Her kind of comedy is “anything that increases working class people’s confidence and sets up their hatred for the ruling classes. Just so long as you’re not slagging off prolet, your own kind, but having a go at the middle class and the trendy lefties. And the Queen Mother deserves all she gets’. What she gets from Jenny Bone is unreserved abuse about her relations with ‘little Willie’ and the ‘gusset soup’ she feeds him.

Repetitive sets

Bone at least makes a change from the often tame and predictable older generation. It’s hard to argue with her complaint about repetition, which has always seemed to me to be the bane of the business. Even Hegley admits to surviving on a total repertoire of about two and half hours of material, although he has the advantage that much of his stuff is still good (his poems/song ‘Eddie don’t like furniture’ is now demanded as an encore in the way that established pop groups use their fondly-remembered first hit), and he ad-libs freely with his audience. But Bone is going to have this problem, too, and isn’t yuppies-hashing a bit stale already? ‘Yes, I’m going to have a good think. I want to be political but not ranting, which is just boring. You have to find a way of being more dangerous, doing something that’s well out of order but funny with it.’

Hegley would not criticise other performers but conceded that while standards at the bottom end of the bill had risen, at the top end there is ‘not much brilliance’. He remains optimistic, particularly about breaking down the barriers between comedy, poetry and music. He also thinks there should be more humour and art in politics as well as vice versa. He flicked through a copy of last month’s Living Marxism. ‘Where are the jokes? Why don’t these articles rhyme? The Shankill Bouchers,maybe that isn’t the one to make rhyme. You’ve got to be careful. Ah, “Death on the dole”, that sounds like sort of thing which ought to rhyme.’

- R Wilmut and P Rosengard, Didn’t You Kill My Mother-In-Law? Alternative Comedy from the Comedy Store to Saturday Live, Methuen, £7.99
- Jenny Bone appears at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 13-16 December (inclusive).

This Christmas what could be better than Jane Austen in stockings?

The shop opening hours are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mon - Fri</th>
<th>Sat:</th>
<th>Sun:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charing Cross</td>
<td>9.30 am - 7.30 pm</td>
<td>10.30 am - 7.00 pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampstead</td>
<td>10.00 am - 9.00 pm</td>
<td>10.00 am - 8.00 pm</td>
<td>11.00 am - 7.00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High St Kensington</td>
<td>9.30 am - 10.00 pm</td>
<td>9.30 am - 7.00 pm</td>
<td>11.00 am - 6.00 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Brompton Road</td>
<td>9.30 am - 9.00 pm</td>
<td>9.30 am - 7.00 pm</td>
<td>12.00 am - 7.00 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American comic movie

THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH BUBBLES

American comics have been accused of everything from political subversion to sexual perversion. Pat Ford put in a transatlantic call to Ron Mann, director of a new film about the history of the US comic book, which opens in London in December.

One of the reasons why I made this film is that I wanted to find out why my mother wanted me to throw out all those comics when I was a kid. Ron Mann has long been interested in the less respectable byway of American popular culture. In 1981 he made a film, Imagine the Sound, about jazz musicians Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon and Paul Bley. In 1982 he made Poetry is Magic about performance poets like Tom Waits, Charles Bukowski and William S Burroughs. He describes his new film Comic Book Confidential as completing the trilogy, 'What I'm all about is finding history in the margins and the out-takes.' American comics have a rich and dramatic history and that fine documentary, combining archival material, interviews and generous stills and animation of the comics themselves, packs it brisly in. In the early thirties came the 'Puniers' to help sell the newspapers. In 1938 Superman was born, leading a parade of superheroes which marched steadily on to this day, including Jack Kirby's Second World War classic Captain America, and his later creations with Stan Lee. The Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk and The Silver Surfer. It was in the forties too that Will Eisner took the comic art to a higher plane with The Spirit.

The Cold War crusade for conformity and against "un-American activities" hit the EC comic group of William M Gaines and Al Feldstein in the fifties. Their horror comics, such as The Crypt of Terror, were branded as dangerous to children. Censorship, in the form of a code, blighted the comic landscape until the sixties, when Robert Crumb (Fritz the Cat, Mr Natural) and Gilbert Shelton (The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers) encouraged by Harvey Kurtzman, the founder of Mad magazine (1952), blasted their way out of the underground. The tabula has kept coming over the last 20 years, with artists such as Françoise Mouly, Art Spiegelman and Charles Burns of Raw magazine, Jaime Hernandez of Love and Rockets fame, and Harvey Pekar of American Splendor.

Sometimes Mann's rollicking look at the great comic creations becomes a little breathless and unoriginal but there is much of interest besides. He has, for example, clips of the hearings of the 1954 senate subcommittee on juvenile delinquency which attacked EC comics in a cartoon caricature of the McCarthy witch-hunts. It was part of the whole Cold War hysteria. Senator Kefauver wanted to run for presidency and J Edgar Hoover falsified statistics about juvenile delinquency. Both wanted to further their own political careers. A psychologist called Frederik Wertham gave evidence. His book The Seduction of the Innocents had fanned the hysteria by telling parents that comics would lead their kids to juvenile delinquency.

Mann doesn't just think it could happen again; he believes that it is happening again. There are busts all over the place in North America. There is a cycle of outrage. Parents still treat their kids like furniture and don't want them to think for themselves. Pressure groups like the Parent Teachers Association and Moral Majority are always threatening. A few years ago in Washington there were hearings about sex in rock and roll. Pressure groups wanted records to be stickered with warnings. Frank Zappa spoke eloquently about the freedom of the artist.

He says that comics have been so controversial because of the mis-conception that they are for kids, and are bad for you, lowbrow stuff. They do have incredible power. Cartooning is simplifying, and drawing down to an essence in words and pictures. They have always been that in the hands of kids the comics have this power. Certainly Mad magazine doesn't have to have a punchline at the end. He just goes out to work, tries to start his car, it doesn't work. That's it. I must say, it doesn't sound very subversive.

It is certain that the comics industry, now resting, can, on 5000 comic stores across North America, can resist the corporate pressures which shape television and movies. He sees comics as much nearer to video in terms of the access and control which small producers are able to exercise. He hopes his film will encourage people to discover and explore comics on their own terms. 'Comics have always been compared to literature or painting or movies or dance. But what is great about comics is that they are comics.'
HERE COME THE SOUND BITES

Frank Cottrell-Boyce on the televising of parliament from the waist up

History has ended. On 21 November the Mother of All Parliaments finally succumbed to the seductive black hole of the camera’s lens and went live (and thus died). That’s according to the ideas of Jean Baudrillard anyway, yet another of those oddball history merchants whose theories are currently doing the lecture circuit.

According to this particular Old Master, history’s terminus is not the market but the box. Once an event or an idea gets on to the screen, the real class relations which structure it (and not history) disappear into a strange semantic ephemerality—a kind of postmodern Alka Seltzer that eases all our social ills and transforms them into an empire of signs.

This is called hyper-reality, and it is the theoretical version of a moral panic that is currently giving the media establishment a headache, namely, the collapse of the distinction between information and entertainment. You know the horror stories—the tabloid printing ‘news’ stories about soap stars; one tabloid printing ‘news’ stories about alien sex fiends; and the one you hear increasingly, the big American news programmes becoming vehicles for star presenters. I like this one a lot because the evidence for it seems to be drawn not from ‘real’ life but from the film Broadcaster News.

Tedium medium

Anyway, the powers that be are stoutly and they’re taking steps to ensure that these mimetic confusions don’t happen here. They will save history from the fizzy corruption of the airwaves. Information will not make its unholy marriage with entertainment on British soil. And here’s how we’re stopping them:

The first weapon is a traditional English speciality, tedium. Enter, the guidelines for televising parliament. With no coverage of disturbances or improper activity, we won’t even get to see a coup d’état, so no repeats of those hilarious pictures of the coup in the Spanish parliament. Instead we’ve got the wide shot of the chamber and the solemn portrait shot of the speaker. From the waist up. Below-the-waist disturbances—for instance gunpower plots and pelvic thrusting—are out. The MPs have the same broadcasting restrictions as Elvis Presley.

It just won’t work. It’s hopeless trying to minimise the presence of a Canon Sure Shot at a wedding, let alone a big news camera in a public place. The eye of the lens coaxes people to perform in different, often bizarre ways. They look for checks in; they expose their gestures, they pull toilet seats down around their necks. In the Commons, members are remembering history, the sound of etchings at home in case they strode through them to gesture and shout. Low down they see how TV magnifies these things. Of course they will be turning up more often now, equipped with a snappy term of phrase—alas of thought that lends themselves to quoting on the News at Ten (the sound bites).

Esteemed members

Their self-esteem will improve when constituents start to pretext their enquiries with, “My God, the TV was on the other night. Some of them will take the opportunity to go over the heads of their bosses and lay their wares directly before the public. These are real changes which will have real effects on real people in a real building. They are on telly now, and there is nothing mysterious or difficult about it. It does not signify the end of history. And neither for that matter does the Sunday Sport.

Nobody believes the stories in the Sunday Sport—only have to look at their letters page, which is actually written more by them than by the Fiz—to see that. In fact, each edition of the paper deflects any intention you might have of believing it. You can see for yourself that the Killer Shrub did not get the Queen Mum. You have only to roll over in bed to find that the alien sea friends are not in there with you. The academic stardust has seen all this as an evidence of a kind of collective loss of faith in all meta-narratives—eg. history, reason, the future and so on.

But buying the Sunday Sport is not a rejection of truth, it’s a cynical and canny comment on the newspaper industry.

The Fred Magazine, on behalf of its readers, contributors, advertisers, printers, distributors, retailers and suppliers, would like to wish a universally joyous and happy time to all peoples of the world.

Subscribe now. For the 90s! 12 issues for £14 in the UK, or $50 internationally, inc P & P. Please send all correspondence to: F11 D Park Hall, Martell Road, London SE 21 01 761 9202.
Who is he calling a ‘fat fuck’?

SNOBBERY WITH VIOLENCE

Toby Banks and Sean Thomas throw up over Tony Parsons’ attack on the working class in the up-market men’s magazine Arena

...while stay-pees [sic] Levi strides, highly polished DM boots, button-down Ben Sherman shirt, this brace, eighth-of-an-inch cropped and over the football on a Sunday running with the Shed because for the first time in your life the society that produced you was terrified of you. And it made you feel good... (Tony Parsons, Arena, 2, April 1977)

‘You see them at the post office on Monday morning, at the football ground on Saturday afternoon, at every pub—those many tugs—at any time. They belch and fart and threaten their way through life. They and their lads are a fat fuck...’

They turn the city into a tattooed jungle... (Tony Parsons, Arena, No 17, September/October 1989)

There have always been those who move from the public bar to the white bar, and eke a living there by dragging off the working class which they are now ashamed to come from... (Tony Parsons, Arena, No 17, September/October 1989)

There are many aspects of working class culture which nobody would want to celebrate. There is no point romanticising traditions and tastes which are often nothing more than desperate escapism or the pathetic malingering of the isolated and left behind. No. But there are also those who have found a positive and creative and invigorating in working class life, in music, fashion and sport, not to mention in literature and the visual media.

Who’s to blame?

Working class people are not the source of the ugliness which so offends the fashionable Parsons, even when they are their bearers. Is it the least powerful people in society, the ‘people at the post office on Monday morning’, the ‘fat fuck’ who set the trends, the mass consumption, theosharacters’ opinions and disseminate the ideas? Hardly. These people, as Parsons calls them, didn’t even invent lager; never mind racism or chauvinism or greed. And if he wants to find a powerful champion of backward ideas and somebody to blame for ‘ruining socialism’, he would do better taking a look at the fascist who was never forced to eat tinned food or be thrown out of job.

Of course once you’ve written the working class off as a race force it’s a short step to identifying them as the main enemy, and blaming them for the fact that the social fabric is nasty, brutish and short-lived. You become a snob, in sympathy with the Auberon Waugh of this world who sincerely wrap the word worker in inverted commas to conjure up the notion, threatening, fish-eating rabble. This snobbery is dangerous. It’s one thing to swallow the Thatcher line even at this late stage and the game, and another to take a last look ahead and see how the football hooligans, lager louts, Kentwell owners and acid houseers are the biggest menace to civilisation since Adolf Hitler. It’s even worse to blame urban squatters, decay and poverty on all the people who are only trying to live in them. The next step is snobbery with violence.
The invention of photography, 150 years ago, brought three entirely new features to the world of art. First, it brought an element of actuality, a picture content recorded much more directly from the material world than those images fully mediated by the vision and execution of the artist. Second, it provided the capacity to reproduce identical images: the concept of the unique original did not apply. Third, it enabled printers to mass reproduce images, including famous paintings. We are still measuring the impact of photography on our ideas about the nature of artistic production. The mechanical but faithful nature of the new medium undermined the special role of the artist; anybody could do this. The reproducibility of identical images challenged the idea of the work of art as unique and unrepeatable. The dissemination of millions of prints of famous paintings made it easier to question mystified notions of artistic genius and to dispel the aura of the original work.

The claim that photography cannot really be art has long been swept away by events. "Art" photography, along with every other genre of photography, has now become widely available. What's more, the prints of Brassai and Henri Cartier-Bresson are likely to be piled high on market stalls alongside the reproduction Picasso, Magnets, and Leonardo's, all for the price of a t-shirt.

Dress code

The exhibition Art of Photography is a belated admission by the Royal Academy of Arts of the place photography occupies in contemporary culture. It is an admission of how widespread photography now is, which the academy seems to make on its own terms. It dresses certain photographs in a new set of emperor's clothes and sits them on the throne of high art. The exhibition guide promises "carefully selected images...what scholars, critics and connoisseurs on both sides of the Atlantic now acknowledge to be the key contributions to photographic art in the West."

In no doubt to establish a place for photographic prints in the upper echelons of the art-as-investment market, the exhibition guide assures us that these prints are nearly as unique as paintings after all. Although the negative post-positivist position invented by Lippard, Fox Talbot and the like has secured prints and photographs, an art of distinct categories is created by an exhibition guide which, however, allows images to be reproduced in numbers, in practice very few of the images in the exhibition exist in more than a few prints, and even these are not identical. All the artistic works are prints, either created by the photographer or under their close supervision.

The most frequent criticism of the exhibition has been the conservativeness of the selection, which features only a few well-known contemporary photographers. It is not simply that the selection is tame; it is rather that the project of the photographer's own ends transcends the document to achieve the intensity of poetic observation. "Alexandra Roditi (1941-1958) took up the camera to exploit its capacity to document events, to combine pictures with words on montages, to mass produce its images. He used the portability of the camera to look at life from new angles. He wanted to challenge existing ways of looking at the world in order to change it. He is no doubt included here on account of his innovative use of photography, but might just as well have been excluded because his art was in a means not just an end." Some of the prints are beautiful, and despite the RA's pretensions and prejudices, well worth a look. Here is the versatility of the camera and the diversity of the world. Arthur Winger's Easter Sunday, Harlem (1940) suggests community in downtown black America; by contrast Robert Frank's Canal Street in New Orleans (1957) evokes a stark sense of alienation; each person-by a literally pursuing their own private business. Den McCullin's Fallen, North Vietnamese Saigons in 1969 captures in the style of the old, the brutal callousness of war. Dmitri Baltermants's bleak pictures of Stalingrad and Moscow in 1941 are epic battlefield scenes, history in the making. Closing the show are some works from Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman and Victor Burtin who have consciously sought to exploit the new visual language of photography.

The Royal Academy has nothing new to say about photography here. Worse, it has tried to justify these well-established works within the criteria it traditionally uses for art. For example, is it "literary"? Or is it "emotionally"? or "technically"? Or is it "innovative"? What it has failed to promote (indeed it has tried to destroy) is the significance of those specific forms. The medium, such as its perceived artistic authority, its reproducibility and so on, which make it such a revolutionarily-developed in the way that we can see the world.

Photography, whether produced as art or otherwise, has expanded, clarified and complicated our view of the world. This year, for example, it has taken us to the outer reaches of the galaxy with Voyager's pictures of Neptune, and the inner reaches of life with much of Mesa's pictures of DNA. If, 150 years hence, the Royal Academy sticks these images up and calls them art, so what? It is still insisting that is because they are just like paintings, it will still have nothing to tell us about photographic art.

PRINTS IN EMPEROR'S CLOTHES

Joe Boitman and Pandora Anderson question the ideas behind the Art of Photography exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts

For the photographer's own ends transcends the document to achieve the intensity of poetic observation. "Alexandra Roditi (1941-1958) took up the camera to exploit its capacity to document events, to combine pictures with words on montages, to mass produce its images. He used the portability of the camera to look at life from new angles. He wanted to challenge existing ways of looking at the world in order to change it. He is no doubt included here on account of his innovative use of photography, but might just as well have been excluded because his art was in a means not just an end." Some of the prints are beautiful, and despite the RA's pretensions and prejudices, well worth a look. Here is the versatility of the camera and the diversity of the world. Arthur Winger's Easter Sunday, Harlem (1940) suggests community in downtown black America; by contrast Robert Frank's Canal Street in New Orleans (1957) evokes a stark sense of alienation; each person-by a literally pursuing their own private business. Den McCullin's Fallen, North Vietnamese Saigons in 1969 captures in the style of the old, the brutal callousness of war. Dmitri Baltermants's bleak pictures of Stalingrad and Moscow in 1941 are epic battlefield scenes, history in the making. Closing the show are some works from Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman and Victor Burtin who have consciously sought to exploit the new visual language of photography.

The Royal Academy has nothing new to say about photography here. Worse, it has tried to justify these well-established works within the criteria it traditionally uses for art. For example, is it "literary"? Or is it "emotionally"? or "technically"? Or is it "innovative"? What it has failed to promote (indeed it has tried to destroy) is the significance of those specific forms. The medium, such as its perceived artistic authority, its reproducibility and so on, which make it such a revolutionarily-developed in the way that we can see the world.

Photography, whether produced as art or otherwise, has expanded, clarified and complicated our view of the world. This year, for example, it has taken us to the outer reaches of the galaxy with Voyager's pictures of Neptune, and the inner reaches of life with much of Mesa's pictures of DNA. If, 150 years hence, the Royal Academy sticks these images up and calls them art, so what? It is still insisting that is because they are just like paintings, it will still have nothing to tell us about photographic art.

PRINTS IN EMPEROR'S CLOTHES

Joe Boitman and Pandora Anderson question the ideas behind the Art of Photography exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts
SOAR AWAY SEX

Dr Vernon Coleman, Sex for Everyone: How to Have Fun Without Fear, Angus & Robertson, £4.99

Sensational

The serious side

THURBER THOUGHTS

Michael Rosen (ed), Collecting Himself: James Thurber on Writing and Writers, Humour and Himself, Hamish Hamilton, £14.95

James Thurber said he wanted to write three sure-fire best-sellers: How to Make Love and Money, How to Tell Your Blessings from Your Burdens and How to Piss the Joneses at a Dogfight. Sounds quite like the whimsical chronicles he did write of smalltown, middling America: a world of moping dogs, electricity-leaking light fixtures, white rabbits, barking seals and the piers of Aunt Wilma. His stories of the little man battling against the superior intelligence of gadgets, animals and women have a quirk, if slightly anemic, intelligence. But Michael Rosen's new anthology of Thurber's articles, essays, reviews and cartoons shows he had a sharp appreciation of the vanities and idiosyncrasies of the New York literary and cultural world in which he moved from the twenties until the fifties.

His commentaries are best when he abandons the gentle menace for the poke in the eye, particularly in his book reviews. He rightly called Gertrude Stein 'the most eminent of idiots', and had a go at a Steinbeck novel about the Nazi occupation of a small town: 'I suspect that if a writer conceived of a war story in terms of a title like The Moon is Down he is likely to get himself into soft and dreamy trouble. Maybe a title like Goons in the Mud would have produced a more convincing reality.' Steinbeck's publishers complained that, as a time when all decent writers should be acting as propagandists for the war effort, the review was 'slag in the face'. Thurber retorted: 'I am sorry...I didn't realise my hand was open.'

'Having tried for four decades to make some social comment', Thurber regretted, 'it is something less than reassuring to discover that what a jittery America wants is the boppy laugh or nothing'. But it is the boppy laugh, rather than his more perceptual pieces, that he will be remembered for. Thurber fans will enjoy this collection, but it is his other stories of sweet, incompetent middle class people failing about in an irrational, but essentially cosy world which were so reassuring to the jittery America of the thirties and the forties. Maybe America will need them again in the nineties.
DO YOU WANT X APPEAL?
Lesley Abeela, Women with X Appeal, Optima, £6.99

How did Edwina Currie feel after she resigned as junior minister? How does Clare Short handle the male chauvinists in the house of commons? How does Shirley Williams see her future in politics? asks the cover blurb. Who on earth cares? Lesley Abeela cares. She is the founder of the 300 Group, which wants to get 100 women into parliament (you get the distinct impression she wouldn’t be too worried about the other 299 if she made it herself). Her interviews with women MPs and hopefuls aim to show ‘what it’s really like to be a woman in politics today’.

Did you know that when Rosie Barnes plays Lego with the kids, or how difficult it was for Maggie Ewing to find the Ladies in the house of commons, then this book is for you. But you’ll need a strong stomach for all the pushing about sisterhood and the fawning about parliament. The worst thing is how complimentary they all are about their opponents just because they’re all women in the ‘man’s preserve’ of parliament. Jo Richardson complain about the ‘male’ atmosphere of the chamber than about the Tories, and Teresa Gorman praises the ‘different feeling of camaraderie among us women’ as the debate is between women speakers.

In fact, the baseline Tory women are much more straightforward about where their loyalties lie than the Labour women, who try harder to preserve the pretense that all women have something in common. At least Edwina Currie cut the crap: ‘I’m not a woman, I’m a Conservative.’ Polls are of such indifference to Lesley Abeela that although we learn she was an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, the doesn’t say for which party.

Abeela concludes: ‘I see Political Woman as the spearhead of great social and political change.’ This account suggests that if Political Woman is to achieve anything, she will have to find her inspiration outside parliament, in the fight against the bi-wards of both sexes who are attacking our rights inside it.
Sara Hardy

POGUETRY

Words without music

POGUETRY

POGUETRY: The Lyrics of Shane MacGowan, Faber & Faber, £8.99

Glossy books with lots of photos and the subject of rock bands can normally be given a very wide berth indeed. Luckily this one has, in addition to the photos by Steve Pyke, three advantages: a short foreword, some wonderful drawings by John Hewitt and nothing else but the lyrics of Shane MacGowan of the Pogues.

It is difficult to quarrel with Sean O’Hagan’s opening assessment of the band. Since their inception in 1984, the Pogues have cut a reckless and singular swath through an increasingly conservative pop culture. Along the way, their fiercely individual music, drawing elements of Irish trad-folk, Eastern melodies, rock ‘n’ roll and post-punk attitude, has gathered a huge audience disaffected from the superficial values of the mainstream. Also, to their credit, they did a song for the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four, at a time when it was unpalatable to lend public support. No doubt reference to the massacre at Loughgall contributed to their radio ban.

Poguery is not poetry because the lyrics of songs can rarely be satisfactorily considered in isolation from the music. That is particularly true of the Pogues’ rambunctious musical idiom. Reading these words can only serve as a hint or reminder of what a very good songwriter Shane MacGowan can do. Songs like ‘A pair of brown eyes’, ‘A man in satin Soho’, ‘Fairy tale of New York’ and ‘The body of an American’ will undoubtedly stand the test of time, and it is up to the reader to have them set attractively down.

Finally, some confusions can now be cleared up. The early sleeves did not carry the lyrics, and I had always heard ‘The dark streets of London’: ‘Every time that I look; On the first day of summer; Takes me back to the place; Where they gave me some tea.’ Now I discover that it is really ‘Where they gave FCT.’ So, that’s what it goes on: ‘And the dragged up psycho; With death in their eyes.’
Pat Ford

AN OPEN BOOK

Ronald W Clark, Lenin: The Man Behind the Mask, Faber & Faber, £7.95

For Ronald W Clark, Lenin was an enigma. How could a charming, nicely spoken, gentleman, fondly remembered by staff at the British Library, also be the cold, calculating commander-in-chief of the Bolshevik Terror? Revisited Lenin’s life and wrote it up carefully enough, but failed to solve the riddle because he tried to separate the man from the events that shaped him.

Focusing on Lenin’s personality, Clark perceived his tactical flexibility as something bordering on schizophrenia, and the pretorian revolution as a perveting influence on Lenin’s intellect, rather than as the reverse of his inspiring insight. Not that Clark was opposed to social change in a society such as tsarist Russia; he would simply prefer it to have been organised in a more civilised fashion, from the top down, with that nice Mr. Keynes playing Lenin’s part.

In any event the details are intriguing: for example, Lenin’s routines for maintaining physical and mental fitness while in prison, and for working two days in a row without sleep (a hot bath, cold shower, good breakfast and a brisk walk). But we are more interested back to Clark’s view of the October Revolution primarily as a product of Lenin’s personality, in the way that many commentators talk about Thackeray’s ‘revolutions’.

Clark died shortly before publication of this, his last volume. The sad thing is that he need not have bothered. Lenin never hid behind a mask. His own writings speak for clarity, and if you want the personal touch in your Christmas reading, stick to Alan Brin’s Lenin the Novel.
Andrew Calcutt
We welcome readers' views and criticisms of Living Marxism. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to: The Editor, Living Marxism, BM RCP, London WC1N 1XK.

AN EMBRYODIOUS ARTICLE

I would like to correct Ann Bradley's misuse of me in her article "Embryo experiments: playing God or helping humanity?" (Living Marxism, October) in my next. I never called him an "egg-satcher". It was irresponsible to imply that I did, and to give the impression that it is the highlight of my analysis. That language is not my style, nor does it reflect the evidence on which I based my explanation as to why women's eggs embryos are so desirable in scientific research.

Further, I do not see him or any other IVF practitioner as monsters. I see a serious situation, and medical scientists who are caught up in an oppressive worldview and modern medicine, one that the drug and biotechnology companies just love.

Pat Spallone York

It seems rather strange that Living Marxism can publish an article on embryo experiments which is so blind to the anti-life and authoritarian nature of the medical and pharmaceutical establishment.

The drug companies and medical researchers like Dr Robert "Labour man" Edwards are making huge sums of money out of the socially conditioned obsession with fertility and blood relationships. Is it not at least open to question whether it is valid to invest huge amounts of resources into allowing women (and men) to have children that are genetically theirs—particularly when thousands of children are condemned to misery in state institutions because people will not adopt them? To judge by Ann Bradley's article it is not.

The final example of technical foresight and relevance in the article relates to Mantegazza and his predictions concerning the artificial insemination of farm animals. Again an example of technological advancement is given which unquestioningly assumes that the exploitation and killing of animals by the food industry is a good thing. It is really just emotional to think of the Nacts and their obsession with fertility and genetics.

Karen Elliott Hastings

PET HATES

It was disturbing to see the reaction to the article "Pappy love and pet hates" (October). If Lesley Roberts' letter (November) wiped away the green froth from her mouth, and thought about the implications of equaling genocide against Jews with dogs, she might have made such an odious comparison. By the way, I suspect there were no letters from distraught dachshunds or perturbed poodles, only from their pious, self-appointed representatives.

I would also disagree with David Morris' point that a revolution would have to be accompanied by therapy to overcome the social alienation that capitalism has inflicted on human beings. Therapy cannot alter reality; it can only reflect on social problems that individuals face. A revolution would not immediately solve alienation, but it would remove the barriers to doing so.

Michelle Carriere London

I found Lesley Roberts' letter most offensive. An animal must have some form of consciousness; it has a perception of space, of the world around it, of pain, of what it needs to survive. But this consciousness is very basic and simple—it is qualitatively different from human consciousness which is socially conscious. Unborn babies can only have a simple animal consciousness, and therefore are only animals until they have the womb and have participated in social interaction. If you are not against the experimentation or destruction of simple organic creatures, then you should not be against abortion or embryo experimentation. It can also be said that a computer can possess a type of consciousness, not necessarily different from that of animals. Parallel distributed processing computers are not fundamentally different from simple neural network creatures, apart from the fact that they live in simplified or different worlds. The most reactionary sources show us pictures of cuddly rabbits being hacked about to support their arguments about animal rights. Computers should be equated with animals, but no one would bat an eyelid if they were shown a disassembled computer.

I hold the view that we should condemn nature rather than obeying it, as people like Lesley Roberts would have us doing. We are not animals.

Benjamin Fairhead London

BORIS AND 'BOSSES' STRIKES

Boris Kagarlitsky of the Moscow Socialists' Committee of the Popular Front believes that the Russian minority strikes in Estonia this summer are not really working class strikes because they are organised by 'the Russian management of the enterprises' (interview, November). How lovely life would be if the working class always fought under its own banners! Unfortunately, life is too complicated to allow us simply to put a cross wherever the bosses put a tick.

If the managers oppose Western interference in Soviet affairs, should we support it? Of course not. Socialists have to work out what the interests of the working class are first, and then decide on tactics. If incorrect bosses organise a strike that happens to defend workers, then we have to back them when fighting to remove their influence.

Kagarlitsky didn't say why the workers went on strike, or why they agreed to cooperate with their despised managers. There was nothing reactionary about the reason for the strikes. They broke out because the Estonians proposed to disfavour migrants in order to railroaide through their political policies. The bureaucrats, anxious to save their privileged positions, encouraged their workforces to imitate the Serbian and Ukrainian actions and so block the reactionary nationalist project. The problem was not the strikes, but the fact that the managers' role in them increased their standing in the workers' eyes.

It is the responsibility of Kagarlitsky and other Soviet socialists to ensure that workers get an independent lead, whatever the squabbles between the Baltic nationalists and the Soviet bureaucrats. But Kagarlitsky's refusal to back the strikes at all accommodates to Baltic oppression.

Andy Clarkson

LABOUR GUILLOTINE ON GUILDFORD FOUR

The article on the formation of the Uster Defence Regiment (Death squads don't change their spots) (November) was a timely reminder of the Labour party's guilt and timidity because of Labour's display of hypocrisy when the Guildford Four were released. To see Labour MPs like Roy Hattersley waving their hands about the injustice of the Guildford case and applauding their release, you would think that Margaret Thatcher was responsible for fitting them up. But Labour (and Hattersley) were in office when the state organised its conspiracy against the Guildford Four, and almost right up to their release Labour played a part in stifling discussion on the case.

It was the Labour government which pushed the Prevention of Terrorism Act through parliament in 30 hours back in November 1974, giving the police a free hand to harass and arrest anybody Irish. It was in this climate and under this law that the Guildford Four were detained, beaten and framed. And only a few weeks ago, at the Labour Party conference, the party leaders refused even to discuss the case.

Instead a motion calling for their release was deferred to a future meeting of the national executive committee—where it could be forgotten about.

Now that the lid is off the case, Labour wants to jump on the bandwagon, get us more apathy and remind people what this party has done since it entered the troops and created the UDR 20 years ago, including the fact that it considered the Guildford Four to be dirty words as recently as September.

Stephen O'Hare
Glasgow

50 LIVING MARXISM DECEMBER 1989
IN DEFENCE OF REVOLUTION

Limited edition Living Marxism t-shirts and vests, based on the cover of our July issue

£6 plus 50p postage and packing
Sizes: (t-shirts) L, XL (vests) XL

Make cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd and send to RCP, 11 York Rd, London W1N 3DK.
A GOLDEN AGE: ART AND SOCIETY IN HUNGARY 1896-1914

Celebrating the fine and applied arts and architecture in Hungary


BARBICAN ART GALLERY

Level 8, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2
Recorded information 01-588 9023

Part of the MACYAROK: BRITAIN SALUTES HUNGARY festival at Barbican Centre 25 October - 21 November