GERMANY: REUNITING ALREADY

GORBACHEV: GOING, GOING ... ?

COMMUNIST PARTIES CRACK, BUT STALINIST STATES STILL STAND

WHO RULES BEHIND THE WALL?

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Subscription rates: British and Northern Ireland £9.00 E Europe (excluding Eire) £12 E Outside Europe (excluding Eire) £17 E Overseas (surface mail) £25 E (institutions add £5)

Monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party, Telephone: (01) 375 1702

March 1990. Unolicited manuscripts are welcome but not only do we use it for 'SAJ' occasionally.
This is the question of the moment. With all of the changes taking place in the East, there seems to be a general idea that if you still want to be associated with Marxism you must be stuck in the past.

But I am a Marxist because I have had enough of being stuck in the present. I am a Marxist because I believe in the liberation of humanity from its present state of semi-misery. No doubt many liberals or even conservatives would pay lip-service to the same thing. But which other political current favours the sort of thoroughgoing liberation which Marxism desires and demands?

- Marxists believe in the liberation of society from the domination of an oppressive minority. So we support the much-celebrated revolts against the dictatorial committees of bureaucrats, generals and spies which have run Eastern Europe. The difference is that we also favour rebellion against the clique of cabinet ministers, civil service mandarins, police chiefs, judges and cronies who boss Britain.

- Marxists are the most uncompromising opponents of state repression and militarism employed in the service of reactionary regimes. We are all for the exposure and abolition of secret police forces like the East German Stasi and the Securitate in Romania. We would only point out the need to do away with all the other undercover gangs of state agents while we are at it: like the dirty tricksters of M15 and M16.

- Nor do Marxists shed any tears over the removal of Soviet troops and tanks from Eastern Europe. We would, however, be much happier if the US forces were leaving the Panama Canal and the British Army of occupation pulling out of Ireland at the same time.

- Marxists also stand for the liberation of humanity from material want. Those who produce the wealth of society should control and benefit from it. We are opposed to exploitation and the parasitism of living off the labour of others.

- Thus we will join in the chorus condemning Stalinist rulers like Honecker of East Germany and Ceausescu of Romania, who led luxurious lifestyles and accumulated hunting lodges at their people's expense. But we will ensure that we save enough voice to start an outcry about the inequalities of the British system, in which five per cent of the population own getting on for half of all the wealth, and a Queen accumulates far more fabulous assets than any East European ruler for doing even less productive work.

- We will stand alongside many others in the West in calling for an end to the inefficient Stalinist command economy in the East, which leaves goods rotting in railway sidings while people go short. Yet we will put no more faith in the anarchy of the profit-driven market economy, which creates record levels of homelessness in Britain while more houses stand empty than ever before, and institutionalises starvation in the third world while destroying tonnes of surplus food in the West.

Perhaps you need not be a Marxist to support some or even all of these liberational aims. But Marxism finally parts company with its
contemporary critics over the matter of how to achieve them.

It is a fundamental tenet of Marxism that progressive change does not come about by accident, or through the actions of important individuals with a social conscience, or because governments feel guilty about the way they have treated their people.

The motor for liberation is the political action of the masses, bringing pressure to bear from below. And for those seeking fundamental change, it is not enough just to pressure the government to introduce reforms. The goal of our action must be to bring the majority section of society—the working class—to power. For we can only be sure that change will serve our interests when we introduce it ourselves.

By contrast today, East and West, the fashion is for the authorities to introduce change from the top down, instigating a revolution from above. Such is the path embarked upon by presidents Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and FW de Klerk in South Africa. Both of these reform-minded rulers have won fulsome support from the British government for showing the way to a new world. But who are their changes intended to benefit?

Gorbachev was groomed for high office by the KGB. De Klerk came to office with a past reputation as a hardliner in the Nationalist Party of apartheid. These are unlikely backgrounds from which to hand over power to the oppressed in the Soviet Union or South Africa.

The true aim of their revolutions from above is to prevent revolution from below. Both men have proved prepared to introduce superficially important changes—formally breaking the Soviet Communist Party’s monopoly on power, formally legalising the ANC—to contain popular unrest and give the impression of progress. But Gorbachev’s military intervention in Azerbaijan showed that his softly-softly approach ends at the first sign of a serious challenge to the authority of the Stalinist state. De Klerk is even less inclined to reform away the institutions of apartheid; as he reportedly told Margaret Thatcher, ‘Don’t expect me to negotiate my way out of power’.

system of which they are so proud came into being. It was not created through the democratic inclinations of the aristocracy, but through civil war, mass agitation and the threat of insurrection.

From the execution of Charles I by the parliamentary forces in the seventeenth century, to the extension of the suffrage in the nineteenth century, to the wake of Continental revolutions, the British voting system was constructed in the shadow of violent struggle.

Events in Eastern Europe have served to confirm, rather than refute, some basic propositions of Marxism: most importantly, that mass struggle for change is the only reliable road to a better future. Reforms introduced from the top down seek instead to restrain the cause of progress, as they pull off a similar stunt today—abolishing their party monopolies, holding elections, but hanging on like grim death to the levers of state power.

Thus the events in Eastern Europe have served to confirm, rather than refute, some basic propositions of Marxism: most importantly, that mass struggle for change is the only reliable road to a better future. Reforms introduced from the top down seek instead to restrain the cause of progress, as they

Events in Eastern Europe have served to confirm a basic proposition of Marxism: that mass struggle for change is the only reliable road to a better future. Reforms from universal male suffrage to votes for women had to be forced upon the reluctant authorities by further protests. Yet because ultimate authority was left in the hands of the ancient regime, even these democratic reforms have proved inadequate. The ruling class has used them to give people a stake in its system, while it retains real power via the machinery of the state. The old Stalinist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe are trying to have done so far in the countries behind the Berlin Wall.

Of course there is never any guarantee that a struggle will succeed. And even if it does so, nobody knows how long its victory will last. When the Russian proletariat, led by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, brought off a successful revolution in 1917, their attempt to construct a new society was sabotaged by Britain and the other Western powers, who sent 130 000 troops to invade the fledgling Soviet state. The
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The Irish are still in the frame

After the Guildford Four

With rumours flying around that the Birmingham Six are about to follow the Guildford Four through the prison gates to freedom, you could be forgiven for thinking that the bad old days of injustice and persecution are over for the Irish in Britain.

But the British authorities still won't forgive you for being Irish.

Alex Campbell and Joe Boatman met an Irishman who had just been deported from London to Derry; Chris Allen went to investigate anti-Irish clampdowns in Cheltenham, Luton and London.

Daniel McBrearty (right) believes only the release of Gerard Conlon and the other Guildford victims saved him from the same fate.

'I don't want you to be sad. I don't want you to be angry. I want you to make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else ever again.'

Paul Hill, of the Guildford Four was addressing the rally at the end of the annual Bloody Sunday commemoration march in Derry, Northern Ireland, on 28 January. Among the listening crowd was 36-year-old Daniel McBrearty, to whom it very nearly had just happened.

Like Hill, McBrearty had been arrested in Britain and framed on bombing charges. Hill had to spend 15 years in jail before the British authorities finally admitted that he was not responsible. In contrast, McBrearty spent three months behind bars before the charges were dropped; but he was then excluded from Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He now considers himself 'imprisoned within my own area'. What's worse, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has told him that his personal details are among those 'leaked' to Loyalist murder gangs.

McBrearty lives in Derry with his wife Mairi and three young children. Their home is in the republican Creggan estate, and his brother George was an IRA volunteer shot dead in 1981 in a gun battle with undercover British soldiers. But Daniel denies any active involvement with the republican movement. He went to Britain last September not to make bombs, but to make some money for Christmas presents by getting a job—and signing on at the same time.

'That was my only crime', says McBrearty. 'I presume an IRA man wouldn't work and sign on with his own name, wouldn't get stuck with no money, and wouldn't live in the Irish community so openly, in an Irish house where everyone came and went. I even joined the local bingo club using my own name, because it kept me from the bars at night and saved me a few quid to send home'.

When McBrearty signed on one day early in October, the police were waiting for him. They were not interested in his petty fraud, however, they arrested him under the...
Prevention of Terrorism Act. It was just after the IRA bombèd the marines’ barracks in Deal. ‘As soon as they scooped me I said, “What’s happening here, boys?” They said, “Well, we have to be seen to be doing something about the marines’ bombings”. Those were their first words to me. They knew I wasn’t involved at all.

Paper overall

McBrearty was held at the top-security Paddington Green police station for seven days and interrogated about Deal. They removed all my clothing, wedding ring, watch and handed me a white overall made of paper. That’s all I had for seven days. They put it to me that I was connected with an active service unit that had carried out the bombings, and for seven days I continuously denied, denial after denial, that I was ever involved in anything to do with explosives.

Then I was charged with having some substance called RDX on my hands, a military high explosive I hadn’t even heard of. Before I left work to sign on I’d washed my hands. I wanted to make sure they were clean. Then they swabbed my hands and there was this military high explosive, a constituent of Semtex. It wasn’t on my wedding ring or my watch, or my shoes. It wasn’t on my jumper or in my pocket. It was only on my hands which I had scrubbed half an hour before because I was going to the dole. So it was obviously a set-up. They also swabbed my hands again on the second morning, which was very odd. My forensic scientist has never seen such a report because they refused him access.

‘The house that I was in, they raided it and searched it. And I found it very strange that all the other men in the house weren’t swabbed or arrested. Now if I was an IRA active service man they would all be scooped as part of it. Either they were grossly incompetent or intent on setting me up.’

Like almost all men from a nationalist area of Northern Ireland, McBrearty had seen the inside of a British cell before. ‘Because I have been through Strand Road and Castlereagh interrogation centre years before, I knew how to handle seven days of interviews. But for somebody who hadn’t handled seven days of interrogation it would have been very hard. If it had been a younger man of 18 or 19, or somebody a wee bit weak, no way could they have handled it. They could easily have signed statements for something they hadn’t done, like the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six.’

No answers

On 8 January, after three months in detention, the Crown suddenly dropped the charges against McBrearty at a remand hearing in Lambeth magistrates court. Crown prosecutor Martin Haslop announced that McBrearty had agreed to drop the explosive traces accidentally, but immediately ruled out any police malpractice. McBrearty’s lawyer Gareth Pierce asked why this possibility had not been raised before. ‘I don’t intend to answer questions’ snapped Haslop, and the magistrate agreed, dismissing the charges without further discussion.

McBrearty believes that he was on the conveyor belt to jail, until the row that followed the release of the Guildford Four in mid-October put pressure on the British authorities and put them off the idea of another immediate frame-up. ‘I think it was an ongoing plan. They thought, we’ll put him in there, and then find something else to connect him with A, B or C. Only for the Guildford people being released I think they would have gone on and stiched me up. Had this happened to me last year, I would be sentenced now and that would be it. But it all fell apart after the Guildford Four walked out. I believe they saved my skin.’

When the charges were withdrawn, McBrearty and his family were elated. But as he stepped from the dock he was re-arrested, and later that day he was served with an order excluding him from Britain for three years under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. ‘When they re-arrested me the police said “Waddington [home secretary] should sign the order this afternoon and we’ll fly you home”. He couldn’t be found until seven that night, so he just signed without looking into the case. He could have signed it on anybody at all, and that’s—you’re branded a terrorist.’

‘It can happen again’

‘On my arrival home I learnt that Loyalist murder gangs are in possession of my security files which had been held by the RUC. That’s always happened before me. I can’t enter Britain and I am scared for my own safety and that of my wife and three children. The unemployment here is upwards of 70 or 80 per cent. No work and no future, just sign on the dole and live on the poverty line. I am imprisoned within my own area, all because I’m Irish. I went over to earn some extra money for Christmas time, and it turned into a nightmare. I was just an ordinary man over there working for my wife and children, and this is how it all ended up, you know? After all these years some people, including myself, began to think “It won’t happen again”. But it can happen again. It happened here, it happened to me.’

FORTRESS CHELTENHAM

Anyone with £4.50 to spare can take tea in the four-star Queen’s Hotel in Cheltenham. You can sprawl on the Laura Ashley-style sofas, sip from a silver teapot surrounded by a portrait of her majesty. But remember to smile—you’re on candid camera.

As I left the hotel, two plainclothes policemen stopped me and wanted to know what I was doing there. It soon became clear that they had been watching me on closed circuit TV all the time I was in the hotel. I understand that the Security had a similar set-up in the major hotel in Bucharest. I showed them my press card. They were not impressed. They demanded my home address, told me to expect a visit from my local police if I didn’t cooperate, and informed me that they were ‘sensitive’ about the security arrangements at the Queen’s, and did not want the details published. I was then followed around Cheltenham by two plainclothes officers using walkie-talkies disguised as personal stereo.

The surveillance at the Queen’s is part of large-scale preparations for the conference of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, which will take place in Cheltenham town hall on 30-31 March. New, state-of-the-art equipment in the hotel included two television cameras above the main reception desk, one of them trained on the tea drinkers. Three plainclothes police officers patrol the hotel. Somewhere in the building there is a control room. All new arrivals are asked to provide personal details. When Patricia Wheeldon, who was accompanying her husband on business, refused to comply, a tape was quizzed by two plainclothes police.

The likelihood of prime minister Margaret Thatcher and other senior ministers attending the conference, and dropping in for a cup of tea at the Queen’s nearby, has prompted Gloucestershire police to mount the biggest operation ever seen in the Vesey Conference. The police have made a particular fuss about the fact that the Tory conference will take place less than three weeks after thousands
of Irish race-goers arrive in Cheltenham for the racing festival, which includes the Gold Cup on 15 March.

"Anti-terrorist" policing involves directing suspicion against anyone in Britain who is Irish. In the aftermath of the Deal bombing in September 1989, for example, five Irish building workers in Cheltenham were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. They were subsequently released, but not before the press had whipped up hysteria against them. In the run-up to the Tory council conference, local media coverage and the distribution of 20,000 "anti-terrorist" leaflets have combined in an attempt to make Irish race-goers the object of suspicion even before they set foot on English turf.

**Positive thinking**

The *Gloucestershire Echo* got the ball rolling with an article entitled "The lonely walk in the world" on the Royal Army Ordnance Corps bomb squad based in Hereford. The men of "T" company stressed that their job was not to "destroy Irish people" but to "fight for all those who are oppressed by the war machine". "It's a battle against the terror," they explained. "I think we are doing the right thing."

A leaflet issued to 6,000 hoteliers in Cheltenham, warning that the town was "not a safe place" for Irish people, has been criticized by some local residents as "racist".

"If I was going to the races, I would stay away," said one local resident. "There is too much violence on the streets and we don't need that sort of trouble here."

Positioning themselves as "defenders of the community", the hoteliers have insisted that their leaflet was simply a matter of "practical advice".

However, the leaflet has sparked a debate about the role of the police in Cheltenham and the extent to which they are willing to enforce anti-terrorism laws.

The police have insisted that they are not "targeting" Irish people, and have defended their actions as necessary to "protect the public".

**Luton: No House is Safe**

"Bedfordshire police and anti-terrorist officers raided a number of addresses on Friday 23 December... A spokesman for New Scotland Yard was not prepared to discuss the number of people detained, their sex or the locations that were searched." *(Luton Herald & Post, 29 December 1989)*

Luton's Irish community was shocked when police arrested several people under the Prevention of Terrorism Act shortly before Christmas. All were later released without charge. But by then Luton was gripped by the climate of suspicion directed against all Irish people in the area.

According to Scotland Yard detectives, they had reason to believe that the IRA had a "safe house" in the Luton area, possibly used by the Deal bomb builders. They set out to ensure that no house was safe for Irish people. Two weeks after the initial arrests, police announced that 15lbs of Sentex explosive were found during the pre-Christmas raids.

Nobody was charged, however, with possession of explosives or anything else, which makes the police "find" more than a little suspect.

Meanwhile, towards the end of the first week in January, Bedfordshire police appealed to landlords and hotel proprietors to contact the police immediately if Irish men or women suddenly vacated premises around the Christmas period leaving behind all or part of their belongings. This description could have applied to hundreds of young emigrants travelling back to Ireland for the holidays. "Suspicious mix may not have been aroused," said a police spokesman, "because it was thought the tenants had returned home for Christmas."

The fact that this was precisely what the tenants had done didn't matter to the police; their concern now was to "arouse suspicion".

According to Scotland Yard, there was "an excellent response" to the appeal. But at least one landlord, who preferred not to be named, wanted nothing to do with it:

"I don't agree with it. I had an Irishman here who left just before Christmas but I believe his circumstances were as he told me and I didn't want to get him hassle from people I know would not be sympathetic to him. Since then I've had lots of Irish people here, and I know that suspicion has been put upon them. It's a bit of excitement...somebody comes to the door and the other guests are saying "is this the one?". That kind of thing has been going on in the town, to some extent. Anyone with an Irish accent is suspected. So I wouldn't do it. It seemed to me there was a solution to overcome the whole thing—it really meant, tell us about anyone who is Irish."
GUN LAW IN LONDON

"A" and "B" are two Irishmen charged with explosives offences. Their arrest on a Welsh beach in December 1989 was the culmination of Operation Pebble. Since then they have made repeated appearances at Lambeth magistrates courts. Reporting restrictions prevent the publication of anything said in court—except that the defendants have been remanded in custody until their next appearance. The security cordon around the court is supposed to be beyond the scope of official censorship. But who knows these days? The judiciary has already warned Times journalists for describing what the prisoners were when they first appeared on Boxing Day 1989.

Police marksmen from the crackshot blue beret squad looked down from rooftops and the balconies of nearby flats. They carried rifles and revolvers. Officers wearing heavy-duty bullet-proof vests patrolled both ends of the street. There were so many police that a 30-foot catering trailer was needed to feed them. The phone box outside the courthouse had no phone in it; police had ripped out the whole unit. A police helicopter flew over the prison van which brought "A" and "B" to and from the court. Throughout the hearing, officers on the courthouse roof trained powerful binoculars on all approach roads.

When the hearing ended, no one was allowed on to the street until the prison van and its escort had left the vicinity.

In the lobby of the court, police were having trouble with a new metal detector. They had to resort to old-fashioned body searches on some journalists. All visitors to the court were required to give their names and a contact address. Male police officers joked about making a private note of the addresses of women journalists.

The courtroom boasts £30,000 worth of newly installed bullet-proof glass which separates members of the public from the wall of the court. The bullet-proof glass extends from ceiling to floor; it is even fitted inside the wood paneling which rises from floor to waist-height. It is said to be impregnable.

The cordon around "A" and "B" is a show of strength which reveals all the paraphernalia of a police state. It symbolises the status of the Irish in Britain as an "enemy within."
We are all for the release of Nelson Mandela. But what is the ANC leader for?

During his 27 years in jail, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela has become a symbol of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, saluted from many sides of the political spectrum. The songs of the impoverished masses in the black townships ask him to ‘Show us the way to freedom; Freedom is in your hands,’ while even the sardonic Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group has fallen under the Mandela spell, describing him as ‘a living legend’.

The legendary status which Mandela has acquired seems to make it difficult for opponents of apartheid to view him objectively. Mandela the man has become inseparable from the mythology which surrounds him. But to assess what role he might play in the attempt to find a political settlement in South Africa, it is necessary to unravel the myth.

To survive the best part of 30 years in the prisons of the apartheid state and maintain your dignity is no mean feat. But neither is it in itself proof of political reliability. In Africa, many nationalist leaders have spent long periods in prison, and their credibility has increased accordingly. Yet how many have repaid the faith invested in them once released?

Jomo Kenyatta made a triumphal exit from a British colonial jail when Kenya gained its independence. He went on to found a repressive and corrupt ruling dynasty. Hastings Banda of Malawi was also imprisoned and harshly treated by the British authorities; he became one of the most brutal rulers in post-colonial Africa, and an open collaborator with the apartheid regime. There are several similar examples.

It is important, then, not to get carried away with applauding Mandela’s resilience in prison, but to ask what are his political perspectives for South Africa today? Of course, he has had little opportunity to air his views over the last 27 years. The policies which he proclaimed before and during his trial, however, reveal him as an essentially moderate lawyer turned politician. If any of his views have altered while he has been isolated in prison from his forties through to his seventies, then, the drift is unlikely to have been to the left.

Mandela has consistently refused to refuse the use of force by the African National Congress. This position was at the heart of a widely publicised document, published in January this year, which Mandela wrote and submitted to the then president PW Botha before their talks last year. His support for armed struggle has been crucial to maintaining Mandela’s reputation over the years, especially among angry young blacks. But what does he mean by it?

Mandela has never believed in the forcible overthrow of the South African state. Since the fifties, he has continually sought a negotiated settlement with the white supremacist regime, as he explained in a letter to Botha in 1985:

I am not a violent man. My colleagues and I wrote in 1952 to [prime minister] Dyer asking for a round-table conference to find a solution to the problems of our country, but that was ignored. When Strijdom was in power, we made the same offer. Again it was ignored. When Verwoerd was in power we asked for a national convention for
all the people in South Africa to decide on their future. This too was
in vain. It was only when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us as we turned to armed
struggle.' (Mandela speaks', ANC pamphlet, p7)

Mandela was one of the founders of the armed wing of the resistance movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe
(Spear of the Nation) in 1961. It was a desperate response to the legal crackdown on all peaceful forms of
protest. Even then, Mandela and his comrades made clear that Umkhonto would use the least violent form of
armed struggle available—sabotage, with no threat to life. In the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the forces
of apartheid had shot dead 69 black people in cold blood; Mandela's response was to blow up some
buildings and electricity pylons.

'Disturbing ideas'

At his trial in 1964, Mandela explained that the sabotage campaign was intended to head off demands for
more forceful action, at a time when events like Sharpeville meant that our followers were developing
disturbing ideas of terrorism'. He did not believe that the campaign would overwhelm the ruling whites, but
hoped that it would scare them into negotiations by suggesting that worse violence would follow if the lack
of concessions encouraged less reasonable black leaders to emerge.

'We were aware that the effect of the pressure was not so strong as to get a regime like the South African
regime to change', said Mandela's ally Walter Sisulu, 'but at least it was going to educate white people that
danger was coming. This is what we wanted to highlight: that danger is coming, and unless something is
done, an ultimate conflict—actually a shooting war—will take place' (quoted in J Collinge, 'Comrades in
arms', Work In Progress, 02/63).

Thus the sabotage campaign which led to the long imprisonment of Mandela, Sisulu and others was
considered as an educational initiative for whites as much as an act of war by blacks.

Alongside his attitude to armed struggle, another issue of controversy in Mandela's support for the ANC's
Freedom Charter, which calls for the nationalisation of mines, banks and other 'monopoly industries' in South
Africa. This too has played an important part in sustaining his support among black militants over the years.
However, in January 1962, Richard Maponya, Mandela's old friend and a black millionaire
businessman, emerged from a visit to Mandela's prison bungalow and announced that the ANC veteran had
changed his position: 'He said he did not believe in nationalisation because such a policy ran counter to the need
to keep the South African economy growing to provide jobs and so that we can generate resources for training
our young people.' (Sunday
Telegraph, 21 January)

Maponya's claims caused a stir among radical ANC supporters, and Mandela almost immediately issued
a handwritten statement confirming that he still supported the nationalisation policy. This prompted
protests from disenchanted ANC members with South Africa's businessmen. But there is evidence to suggest that
they need not be so downcast. Maponya is sticking to his version of Mandela's views. And even if he is in error,
statements Mandela made before his imprisonment show that he interprets the nationalisation and anti-monopoly
policies as fairly modest initiatives.

The Freedom Charter was written in 1955, and immediately came under fire from the right for advocating
revolutionary socialism. Mandela replied that the charter was 'by no means a blueprint for a socialist state
but a programme for the unification of various races. He described the anti-monopoly policies as a boost for
black entrepreneurs.

'The break-up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up
fresh fields for the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois
class. For the first time in the history of this country, the non-European bourgeois will have the opportunity
to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories, and trade and
private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.'

A few years later, in his speech from the dock during the Rivonia sabotage trial, Mandela provided further
reassurances that, while nationalisation would dispossess some individuals while mineowners, it was not intended to threaten the capitalist economy. Just as the ruling National Party had supported nationalisation as a redistribution measure back when the mines were all owned by British capitalists, so the ANC supported it as a way of breaking the racial monopoly on the ownership of capital.

'Under the Freedom Charter, nationalisation would take place in
an economy based on private enterprise. The realisation of the Freedom Charter would open up
fresh fields for a prosperous African population of all classes, including the middle class.

'The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic
structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever
condemned capitalist society.' (Quoted in F Meir, Higher than Hope: The
Authorised Biography of Nelson Mandela, 1990, p239)

Mandela's recent declarations of support for the traditional ANC policies of armed struggle and
nationalisation were clearly aimed at reassuring the rank and file of the black resistance movement. But a
glance back at his motivation for endorsing these policies in the first place suggests that his true priorities
lie elsewhere.

Contrary to the impression given by the Mandela mythologists, he is not able to call the shots at will
within the black resistance movement. There are rivalries of a younger generation, schooled in the
struggles of the last 15 years, who mistrust older ANC leaders like Sisulu and Mandela and want to see
more militant action. The wider balance of forces in South Africa will decide which path the movement
takes.

As Nelson Mandela takes his place in the unfolding political process, he should be judged as a nationalist
leader rather than a living legend. Much of Mandela's career suggests that he is essentially a mainstream
politician who has been forced to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances of black politics in South
Africa. Had he been born in Britain instead, it seems he could have sat quite happily on the benches of the
house of commons.

Indeed, while seeking to refute the allegation that he was a communist
during the sabotage trial, Mandela hinted that his aim was to recreate within South Africa the relatively
civilised capitalist environment of British politics.

'From my own reading of Marxist
literature and from conversation with
Marxists, I have gained the impression that communists regard the parliamentary system of the West
as undemocratic and reactionary.

But, on the contrary, I am an
admirer of such a system... I
have great respect for British
political institutions, and for the
country's system of justice. I regard
the British parliament as the most
democratic institution in the world,
and the independence and
impartiality of its judiciary never fail
to arouse my admiration.' (Higher
than Hope, p232)

• Fatima Meer, Higher than Hope: The
Authorised Biography of Nelson
Mandela, Hamish Hamilton, 1990, 
hb £15.99
Asian cabbies attacked from West London to West Yorkshire

**Taxi drivers on mean streets**

In Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, Robert De Niro blazed away at the 'scum of the streets'. In Britain today, the scum are getting their own back. Asian taxi drivers are the victims of spiralling racist attacks.

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On 31 January, Asian taxi drivers joined the cortège through Southall, west London, for the funeral of Kuldip Singh Sekhon, stabbed to death in his cab. Similar attacks are being reported around the country. Police do little or nothing to stop the attackers. But if the drivers try to defend themselves, the police are quick to move in against them. Asian cabbies are, as one of them says, 'out there on our own'. Andrew Calcutt and Jane Wilde report from London and Yorkshire.

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On the evening of Friday 10 November 1989, after finishing work at SDS airport cabbies, Heathrow, 35-year-old Kuldip Singh Sekhon called in at his Southall home before clocking on for the night shift at nearby Aregal minicabs. Sekhon had a wife, five daughters and a mortgage to support. He needed extra money and so for the past two months he had been moonlighting as a part-time minicab driver. Soon after midnight he answered a call from the Golf Links estate, Southall. At 1.30am Sekhon's body was found about three miles away on the Redwood estate, Cranford, near Hounslow. He had been stabbed 54 times. Unemployed Steven Coker, a white 20-year-old, has been charged with his murder and is now in custody awaiting trial.

A gold watch and £80 in cash were found on Sekhon's body. Robbery was not the motive for his murder. It seems certain that the brutal attack on Sekhon was racially motivated.

Southall's Asian drivers agree that verbal abuse is 'part of the job'. They
is the least of their worries. Apart from Sekhon, two more black minicab drivers (a Sikh and an Afro-Caribbean) have been murdered in the west London area during the past 18 months. The body of one of them was left to rot in the boot of his own car. In December, a cabbie was hospitalised for four days after a near-fatal stabbing. Asian drivers are as vulnerable as Catholic cabbies in Northern Ireland. They now face the same kind of physical threat.

Racism in Southall first hit the headlines when Abdul Malik was murdered in 1974. Today racist violence is an everyday occurrence which hardly qualifies as news. In the London borough of Ealing, which includes Southall, 2276 incidents of racial harassment were reported to the police last year. Many more went unreported. The Golf Links estate, where Sekhon picked up a fare shortly before he died, contains a social club and tenants' association which are said to have barred Asians from membership.

**SOS code**

The ferocity and frequency of recent attacks has led to the formation of the West London Minicab Drivers Association (WLMA), which organised a 24-hour minicab strike on the day of Sekhon's funeral. Scores of drivers walked behind the coffin at the longest cortège seen in west London. 'We want people to know it's not just the stage where our drivers are frightened to work the night shift,' says WLMA chairman Gaswinder Singh Sidhu: 'If they're late getting home, their wives are ringing up the control room asking what's happened. We are on our own out there and anything could happen.'

WLMA now circulates a list of no-go names and addresses ('N Holl', skinhead, 32 Constable House). It provides common sense information (don't pick up from a phone box without having a look at the caller first), and issues driver-to-driver secret codewords for 'I'm being robbed' and 'I'm in trouble — this is an SOS'.

Basic self-help of this kind is essential, because drivers, especially Asian drivers, cannot get protection from the police.

It is not unusual for Southall police to accuse Asian cabbies of stealing their own cars. If a fare refuses to pay, they say it is a 'civil offence', and advise an exchange of addresses. The WLMA wants to know 'what chance has a driver got of obtaining a correct address'? If he's been robbed, he might have lost £30. The last thing he needs is to lose three hours in a police station filling in forms. The best thing is to get back to control and take the next fare out.

According to WLMA, Southall police are just not interested in the dangers faced by Asian cabbies. Senior officers say they lack resources. But they have time to harass drivers for parking on single yellow lines or for court cases in front of minicab offices. They found the manpower for Operation Shampoo last year, which was said to be a crackdown on Southall's 'Asian mafia' but turned out to be an attack on all Asian youth in the area. Eleven years ago, police swooped Southall to protect a National Front election meeting. The Special Patrol Group killed Blair Peach, an anti-fascist demonstration. Southall's Asian community has not noticed any change in police priorities since then.

Community police visited Sekhon's family, presumably to ensure that the public procession which accompanied Sekhon's funeral would not cause any trouble. Then they put the problems of Asian drivers back at the bottom of their agenda. As a WLMA spokesman commented, 'Politicians make speeches, the police say they investigate, but it's still drivers like Sekhon who have to go out and face the thugs'.

Yet Southall police soon take an active interest if drivers start defending themselves. On the record, WLMA's spokesman would only say that 'sometimes we find drivers have already got to an incident and sorted out the trouble before the police arrive'. The police know that 'sorting out' can mean more than a police conversation, and they are not happy about it. When a Hounslow driver sped away from an attack on his cab office, he was arrested and jailed for knocking over one of the attackers. Any Asian driver who defends himself or comes to the aid of his colleagues risks being hammered by the full force of the law, regardless of the provocation he faced. It's the same story from west London to West Yorkshire.

On 19 December 1989, Andrew Brown, 26, died in Huddersfield Royal Infirmary while undergoing treatment for stab wounds to the stomach. Brown was fatally wounded at about 5.45pm, when a fight broke out at the premises of the Asian-owned Three Star minicab hire in the centre of Huddersfield. When police were called to the scene they arrested 24-year-old cab driver Mohammed Ilyas Ahmed. He is now held at Armley jail, Leeds, charged with murder.

Later that evening, a group of white men attacked the Three Star office and the adjoining Asian restaurant. They damaged windows, phones and cars, and assaulted several people. One driver needed eight stitches after they threw a gas fire at him. Police made five arrests.
All five men are out on bail awaiting trial for violent disorder. After the events of 19 December, Huddersfield police mounted extra patrols in the town centre.

Huddersfield's Asian community believes that the fight at the Three Star office and the subsequent attack were part of the ongoing campaign of racist harassment in the town, and that whoever stabbed Brown was acting in self-defence. Cabbies mounted an immediate 24-hour protest strike against Ahmed's murder charge. Fellow drivers have attended Ahmed's remand hearings. All the Three Star drivers have visited him in Armley. They see Ahmed as the latest victim of a wave of attacks on drivers—a victim who is accused of murder for fighting back. Tahir, a cabbie at Three Star, says the level of attacks is so intense that 'you could see it coming'.

On 11 December, an Asian driver was called to the Rose and Crown pub in the white suburb of Greetland. According to a fellow driver from Station Taxis, 'the whole pub jumped on him.' The driver managed to radio for help, and a dozen of so cabbies came to his assistance. The driver was severely injured, however, and his colleagues called a 24-hour protest strike.

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"One policeman said "What are you doing with a Paki bastard? Can't you get one of your own?"".

"10-15 minutes to get through. If it's an English-based taxi firm, they'll stop the trouble. If it's Asian they'll stand there and let it happen. The coppers certainly won't break the speed limit getting there". Linda was even more sceptical: 'Half of them are racist anyway. My boyfriend is an Asian driver. One night they stopped us twice. One of them said "What are you doing with a Paki bastard? Can't you get one of your own?"'. There was one who used to come down and ask if everything was all right. But he didn't last long.'
NOTHING NAZI ABOUT IT

As the debate about the government's Embryology Bill hots up, Sara Hardy answers the scaremongers

It is illogical and insulting to compare scientific experimentation on embryos with the genocidal experimentation on Jews.

Similarly, it is both illogical and insulting to compare scientific experimentation on embryos with the genocidal experimentation on Jews in the death camps. The Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, communists and others who suffered and died at the hands of Mengele and other Nazi scientists were living, conscious human beings. An embryo is not a human being. It is a potential human life, but it can only fulfill that potential by being born into the world. An embryo cannot be killed, since it has no independent life of its own to lose.

In my book, Nothing Nazi about it, I argue that even Nazi scientists seem to be based on a couple of assumptions which crop up time and again. First, that the attempted use of genetic engineering to eliminate handicap and 'improve' the human race is inherently fascist. And second, that experiments carried out on embryos are morally equivalent to the experiments on Jews and other victims carried out by Nazi doctors like Mengele in the concentration camps. Other opponents of embryo experimentation are concerned that they are not yet the same thing, but argue that one thing will lead to the other. Each of these assumptions is fundamentally misguided.

It is certainly true that, as the international science journal Nature wrote in 1983, the aim of human embryo research is 'to improve, so to speak, on nature.' But why should this have sinister implications?

The potential benefits of embryo experimentation are undeniable. The possibilities include new contraceptives, medical help for infertile couples and for women prone to miscarriage. The human fertilization process is notoriously inefficient, and any improvement that science can make on it should surely be welcomed. Research into the genetic material in embryos holds the promise of new breakthroughs on all manner of physical and mental disabilities.

Every year thousands of babies are born with genetic disabilities, some so severely handicapped that they stand little chance of survival beyond a few weeks, and others destined to a life of dependence. Some doctors and scientists believe that, with adequate research facilities, it may be possible to find ways of screening to detect many genetic defects at an early stage of a fetus's development, and to allow the mother to make an informed choice about her pregnancy, allowing her to opt for an early abortion or to prepare mentally for the ordeal to come. This seems a major improvement on the 'shoddy ignorance' which assaults many women through their pregnancy, and a sheltered only by the unexpected birth of a severely handicapped baby.

Opponents of embryo research argue that using genetic screening to facilitate aborting handicapped fetuses under the Nazi programme to 'purify the gene pool' which began in the early thirties. Under the Nazi programme, more than 225,000 people were sterilized in an attempt to stop 'understables' procreating and thus help create a master race. This act of genocide has nothing in common with the aims of genetic screening today.

'To improve on nature'

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JUDGING GAYS

There is no truth whatsoever in any allegation that he has engaged in homosexual conduct, associated with homosexuals or otherwise behaved in a manner unbecoming a judge. Thus did Lord Weir instruct his solicitors to tell the world a few weeks ago. This rather paranoid novelette, so far as our legal knowledge is concerned, was prompted by rumours in Edinburgh that a quarter of the judges in Scotland are 'as queer as nine-holed notes'. The Lord President, Lord Hope, reportedly felt obliged to ask one judge, Lord Dervard, to resign, and to give a stern dressing down to several others. The message is that judges must now be seen as pure as Edinburgh's gay scene in the company of young harriers.

Drood's old Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, wrote an article for the Sun saying that homosexuals should not be judges at all. Predictably, the gay press with the able assistance of Bernard Levin and Sunday other right-thinking folk, said that homosexuals make just as good judges as anybody else. Their point was that every part of the British establishment has its complement of homosexuals doing their duty as well as the next man. This, of course, has been true for a very long time. It's more meaningful that the majority of homosexuals have no fixed occupation. From the soubrepett and the foreign office, from the Bank of England to the police staff training college, homosexuals are as busy ruling Britain as their heterosexual colleagues.

I am sorry to say that Bernard Levin is right: homosexual men make just as good judges as anybody else. Lesbians could do so as well if they were only given the chance. But this is hardly the point. The arcane rules of the British establishment are not open to arguments about justice and equity. Some homosexual, almost seems de rigueur for the members of the ancien regime—just as the capacity to spend £2000 to engage the company of a 'limbo' for the weekend is just the thing for aristocratic businessmen and Tuchenne newspaper editors. The former editor of the Sunday Telegraph, Peregrine Worsthorne, can tell the public that while at Stowe school he wore a floppy black hat and a cloak to attract the attention of senior boys. He can tell us that he was seduced 'with grubby little longings' by George Melly on the sofa in the art room. Melly sweats it was the other way around. It's all jolly good banter about their school days at Stowe.

However, the treatment of homosexuals in ruling circles has never been easy-handled. Some fall and others do not. Some flourish; others are disgraced, broken financially and professionally, and even driven to suicide. In the fifties Tom Driberg had very little difficulty as an MP and a senior Labour Party manager while being a close friend of the gay spy, Guy Burgess—Tom even visited Gay in Moscow. Driberg's homosexuality was well-known. It even landed him in Bow Street, but he survived to become Baron Bradwell. Actor Sir John Gielgud was given a rapturous reception by audiences following his arrest and conviction in 1953 for indecency in a public toilet. It was also widely known that Winston Churchill's private secretary, Sir Edward Marsh, was homosexual. Similarly, the attorney general knew that Liberal leader, Jeremy Thorpe, was homosexual. 10 years before he was destroyed by scandal.

Homosexuals can do well in the establishment. If they have good and powerful friends, do not make too many powerful enemies, and are discreet, they can aspire to run the government, the church and the army. You can rise, like Maurice O'Driscoll, to head M16 or, more modestly, to the management of the Labour Party's public relations department.

With the right connections and appropriate political prejudices a gay boy can go far; you can emulate Solomon. They are hired to preside, in ties, wigs and buckled shoes, over the law and to maintain the ritual and mystique of the monarchy and its courts. The ratification of popular prejudices against homosexuality and other forms of sexual misconduct is an important part of any judge's brief.

Hated of homosexuals is deployed by the authorities because they believe that the foundation of stable households by heterosexual couples is the only desirable sexual arrangement for the mass of ordinary mortals. It has never been the case that the rich and powerful are expected to live like this—but it is useful to keep up appearances. Just as the boss tells the workers, 'I never ask anybody to do anything I'm not prepared to do myself', so the ruling class feel compelled to promote the myth that they do live in the warm embrace of family life.

Accordingly, gay judges and government ministers usually marry, have children, and try to look like the taxi drivers they are. No matter how women business they attend are of the exclusive sort in Bond Street and Mayfair, they avoid garish hairdos and tailoring the attention of the police. If they are frequented by the owners of the gay bars they attend are of the exclusive sort in Bond Street and Mayfair, they avoid garish hairdos and tailoring the attention of the police. If they are frequenting the favoured haunts of ordinary homosexuals gay Scottish judges would be considered guilty of a serious lapse of judgement.

I believe that we should defend anybody who is attacked for being gay, irrespective of their position or policies. This practice was built into the administration of British justice in the early nineteenth century when, fearing that the 1789 revolution across the Channel had been partly caused by the sexual excesses of French aristocrats, the British establishment sought to promote a more puritan image for itself. The witch-hunts continue because the ruling class still regards theprofessionalisation of family values as essential for the maintenance of social stability and discipline among the lower orders. Dragging a few powerful homosexual men through the gutter is a popular and efficient way of teaching the public this lesson.
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Inflated opinions

The government is trying to blame greedy workers for the economic crisis enveloping Britain. The message from Tory ministers is that wage rises, not government policies, are responsible for pushing up inflation, sending the economy into recession and undermining Thatcherite free market policies.

The Tories' claim that inflation originates in rising wages is designed to justify cuts in our living standards that will benefit the employers. Of course they don't put it so bluntly. Instead, the Tories and their pet experts try to argue that wage restraint will really serve the best interests of workers.

The government points out that money wages are rising faster than output per worker. The implication is that the cost of the labour in each product is rising, forcing employers to inflate their prices. This makes British business uncompetitive and forces employers to cut costs by shedding labour. In other words, if you want to keep your job, you have to accept that your pay rise cannot outpace the rate of increase in productivity.

Looked at in isolation from broader trends in the economy, the claim that wage rises cause inflation can seem convincing. Latest figures show earnings growing at an annual rate of around nine per cent. This compares with output per person rising by less than two per cent for the economy as a whole. The cost of the labour in each unit of output in the British economy is therefore rising by seven to eight per cent a year—a trend which will necessarily be reflected in inflated output prices.

Even taking this narrow view, however, does not justify the government's focus on the inflationary effects of wages. The rate of increase in unit labour costs today is just two per cent higher than in 1988 when the Tories were celebrating an economic miracle. Over the same period the cost of imported raw material and semi-finished goods used in production in Britain rose by nearly eight per cent.

So British employers have experienced more pressure on production costs from imports than from wages.

RIGHT: An alternative analysis of the relationship between productivity, profits and pay.

LIVING MARXISM MARCH 1990
If the Tories wanted honestly to identify the main pressures forcing employers to raise output prices, they would look at imports. However, this would raise questions about government policy stoking up inflation. The main cause of rising import costs has been the reduced purchasing power of the pound resulting from the Tories’ softer line on defending the pound against other currencies. In effect, UK employers have had to pay more for imports because the government has given up its fruitless attempts to sustain a weak pound.

The weight of evidence suggests that the Tories have turned the truth on its head: it is inflation which exerts upward pressure on wages. A comparison of trends in productivity and real wages over the Thatcher years, for instance, shows that workers have more or less experienced what the Tories preach: real wage increases have been in line with productivity increases.

Output per hour by workers employed in manufacturing has grown by around 50 per cent since 1979. For the economy as a whole the figure is about 22 per cent. In that time the real earnings of male workers in the whole economy have increased by an average of 28 per cent. For male manual workers in manufacturing, mining, construction, power and transport the figure is just 13 per cent. For the lowest-paid 10 per cent of manual workers earnings have increased by a paltry four per cent in the last decade. And women workers—now make up nearly half the UK workforce and are concentrated in poorly-paid part-time and temporary work—have fared even worse than the men.

### Every penny

Even an unfavourable interpretation of these figures suggests that workers have paid for every penny of higher wages in increased productivity. In other words, the wage paid to workers for each unit of output has fallen in real terms; real wages have grown simply because workers produce more units.

The figures for productivity and earnings confirm that the source of inflation does not lie in wage increases. Much of the increase in money wages over the last decade has been necessary just to keep pace with inflation and prevent a fall in real income. And real wage rises have been quite modest in comparison to productivity increases. Money wages have effectively been forced up by inflationary pressures outside the labour market.

The ‘Tories’ lectures about the evils of inflationary pay rises do not extend to enquiring about the productivity of the likes of British Airways chairman Lord King, who awarded him a 117 per cent rise last year. The government’s hypocrisy is clearest in its benign attitude to other types of inflation. Nobody has mentioned the boom in ‘profit-taking’, whereby companies raise their prices more than the rising costs of production and take the difference. Meanwhile the inflation of share and property prices in recent years has been positively celebrated, since it has registered as increased profits in company balance sheets.

Many commentators have pointed to inconsistencies in the government’s arguments about wage inflation. They have accused the Tories of trying to cover up their own role in boosting inflation through the impact of high interest rates on mortgage payments and of a lower period on import prices. They cite the poll tax as another policy set to add to the cost of living, and conclude that wages are simply one inflationary pressure among many. While it is always legitimate to expose the lies of Tory ministers, such criticisms are inadequate.

### Profit pressure

Simply listing various instances of price increases does not explain the source of inflation. It reduces the debate to the tautological notion that inflation—raising prices—is caused by price rises. In fact the government’s critics repeat its approach, simply offering a broader set of indices of price rises. Within this, they concede that wage rates are a problem and that the health of the economy requires wage restraint.

Inflation can only be understood as a symptom of the general economic tendencies within the capitalist system—a system governed by the law of profitability. Inflationary pressures tend to emerge in the context of a growing crisis of profitability. These pressures do not result from an attempt by greedy workers to grab more wages, but from a bid by employers to boost flagging profits.

### Credit short-cuts

Over the past decade, the British capitalist class has had to face up to the stagnation of its industrial base. But it has not been in a position to engage in the large-scale restructuring of industry needed to transform productivity levels and revive profitability. Individual capitalists have less confidence in future industrial prosperity and are inclined to seek alternative means of maintaining profits. The short cuts which they have taken to make a profit, mainly based on the use of credit, have created the major inflationary pressures.

Easy credit conditions have enabled capitalists to sustain profit-taking practices. They have been able to push up the prices of, for example, retail goods and property, only because the massive extension of consumer credit and mortgage loans provided the new money necessary to match the inflationary increases. Credit also provided the conditions for a boom in the financial markets. Capitalists who want innovative new industrial capacity have been able to sustain profits through inflationary gains from buying and selling shares in existing assets.

### Dodging the issue

None of these profit-taking activities, however, confronts the fundamental weaknesses of the profit-making system. In fact, they reflect a lack of resolve for tackling the real economic problems. While individual capitalists can become very wealthy, the productive foundations of the system continue to stagnate. Inflationary credit expansion cannot work forever. For example, inflated share prices bear less and less relation to the real wealth-generating capacities of the productive assets which they represent. This has promoted greater volatility in the stock markets in recent months, with huge losses becoming as common as the rich pickings. Industrial and retail capitalists also find that, while revenues rise in the inflationary climate, so do costs. Firms can charge inflated prices, but this means that they are being charged inflated prices. The net gain is nil, or, as happens in reality, some capitalists benefit more, others less or not at all.

### The British disease

As the weakest of the major global economies, British industry is especially vulnerable to the incursions and roundabouts of international credit expansion. British capitalists rely on credit more than their rivals. Particularly over the past decade, British capitalists have made their money not from industrial production, but from credit-fuelled speculation in the share and financial markets, and by borrowing billions to buy up property and companies abroad.

At the same time as it is more dependent upon credit, however, Britain is less able to deal with the domestic inflation generated during the credit binge. Throughout the eighties UK inflation has been higher than in other major capitalist countries. Higher prices have led to a loss of international competitiveness with imports replacing British products and exports remaining relatively stagnant. The resulting multi-billion pound trade deficits and the threat of a run on the pound in the foreign exchange markets have contributed to the failure of the credit card trick that the Tories have tried to pass off as economic rejuvenation.
The fact that unit labour costs in Britain are rising faster than elsewhere does not indicate the rise of inflationary wage demands. It reflects the unwillingness of British capitalists to engage in the levels of industrial investment necessary to raise productivity at rates comparable to those elsewhere. Having relied on inflationary props rather than investment to keep the profit and loss accounts looking good, the employers and the government can hardly be surprised that workers have reacted to increases in the cost of living by demanding money wage rises sufficient to sustain existing living standards.

The Tory sermon about how wages should rise in line with productivity, which is growing at less than two per cent a year—amount to saying that workers should accept reduced living standards while producing more for their employers. With inflation edging towards eight per cent, a wage rise of anything less means working harder for less. Indeed, wage increases in double figures are about the rate needed to ensure that workers get some return for their increased productivity.

Inflation in Britain has been caused by capitalists attempting to take paper profits which their economy cannot back up with material wealth. The rising statistics should be seen as proof that capitalism cannot ensure the consistent growth of production. Those who blame wage rises for inflation and recession are saying that the future production of more wealth depends on the producer. The market is consuming less of it. That is irrational. A more rational anti-inflationary strategy would be to remove the profit motive from the economic equation, and establish a system in which the material demands of the whole of society become the motive for wealth creation.

Lifestyles of the rich and infamous

A rise, Sir Ralph?

Liz Bradshaw on British bosses' pay

Lord Hanson is Britain's most highly paid boss. Last year he awarded himself a 24 per cent rise, taking his salary to £1,534,000 a year. At the recent Hanson Trust annual meeting in London one shareholder asked why, as an ardent supporter of Mr Thatcher, he had disregarded his admonitions about pay increases. Another director rose, explaining that Hanson's 'modesty' prevented him from answering himself, and announced that Lord Hanson would find it possible to exceed his annual earnings by a substantial amount elsewhere. So, far from being overpaid, Hanson was really taking a salary cut out of loyalty to Queen and company.

Who wants them?

The argument that British bosses could earn a lot more if they defected to foreign competition is often used to defend their big salary increases. Lord King, chairman of British Airways, resorts to this defence when anybody raises the awkward issue of his 117 per cent rise (which, when added to his other salary as chairman of PKF Babcock, gives him a basic of £502,000 a year). But why should Hanson, King and Britain's other directors be coveted by big-paying foreign corporations? German and Japanese firms are sweeping all before them on the world markets, they seem unlikely to be desperate to discover the secret of Britain's £20 billion trade deficit. The fashionable management technique of recent years has been 'Japanisation', not 'The Spirit that built the British Empire'.

In any case, according to the lectures which the Tories give the rest of us, loyalty is no excuse for pay increases. A rise, we are told, can only be justified with reference to the company's performance. In which case, salary increases like King's 117 per cent are a little off the mark: the average British manufacturing firm increased productivity by about four per cent last year, and the average service sector company by less than one per cent. Other top British bosses boost their salaries even when their companies do badly.

At first glance it appears that Burton's chairman Sir Ralph Halpern took the retail group's poor performance on the chin. Halpern had his pay cut—by £97,000, leaving him with just £899,000 a year to scrape by on. Reading the fine print, however, it seems that Ralph hasn't been that heroic. His salary was supposed to be determined by a formula based on Burton's profits, which would have reduced his pay by considerably more than £97,000. So Sir Ralph simply ditched the formula.

Some directors don't bother with Halpern's figure-juggling. They just give themselves rises that fly in the face of disaster. Take TVS, the independent television company, and its chief executive, James Gatward. Profits may be down by nearly 50 per cent, but Gatward received a 112 per cent salary hike to £256,000. The losses were mainly due to TVS misguidedly purchasing MTM, the US television company, which lost millions last year. Why, then, did Gatward get such a big rise? Because, said Gatward, the board were aware that the MTM acquisition had brought increased pressure. Poor thing.

The fact that some of the biggest salary rises were in the finance and other service sectors, which have not been hit as first as the recession approaches, confirms that there is no connection between the health of a firm and that of the boss' bank balance. Indeed, management seems to float away into the sunset even if the company goes under. James Gulliver, Scotland's best-known tycoon, stands to survive another day even despite the collapse of Lowndes Queensway, the furniture company he bought with £450m worth of bad IOUs. But if the last-minute refinancing deal with the banks falls through, 5,000 people will lose their jobs. 'Wee Jimmy' (who coined the phrase 'money is the oboe') will be able to retire, as the Times puts it, 'in some comfort', with a handsome pay-off for going quietly.

Last November Cray Electronics admitted that it had been conniving the books with cowboy accountants. Price Waterhouse accountants went over the figures and swiftly sliced the company's profits by two-thirds. The directors are going to pay for this one, right? Wrong—they will get paid. The Cray board gets rid of the top managers, but the chief executive stays on an annual salary of £225,000 until mid-1991, and the finance director gets a pay-off of £125,000 plus an extra £40,000 to boost his pension.

On top of all this, Lawson cut the top tax rate from 60 to 40 per cent (giving Halpern an extra £5000 a week), and new share ownership schemes during a period of soaring market prices have allowed top directors to make fortunes (Hanson £5.3m). Meanwhile Lawson himself, architect of this orgy, has taken a £175,000 part-time job at Barclays. They have truly never had it so good.
With the world changing at a dizzying pace, it has never been more important to get to grips with trends and events. The place to do it is at Preparing for Power 1990, our annual seven-day summer school.

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As East Germans prepare to go to the polls, Frank Richards finds Eastern Europe still awaiting its revolution. The old Communist parties may have cracked, but the Stalinist states remain standing.

Who rules behind the wall?
The drama unfolding in Eastern Europe has been widely acclaimed as the dawn of a new era in world affairs. These changes are usually interpreted as a victory for freedom and democracy, and as a clear vindication of the Western way of life. Sometimes the enthusiasm of the media gives way to more sober insights about the danger posed by the emergence of irrational nationalist forces. And applause for change in East Germany is tempered by fear of reunification and the birth of a powerful Fourth Reich. But the general tone in which East European events are reported over here is one of euphoria.

Superficial interpretations of developments in Eastern Europe are quickly overtaken by events. On closer inspection, the changes that have taken place are far from self-evident. What are we to make, for example, of a pro-Western government in Poland with a prime minister who is a Catholic intellectual and a president who is a Stalinist army general? Who rules Romania after its bloody Christmas? Is there a common pattern to the changes from country to country, or are there divergent forces at play in Eastern Europe? Most importantly of all, how far-reaching have the changes been so far?

East European societies have long been waiting for upheaval to happen. It is difficult for people in the West to appreciate just how unpopular these Stalinist regimes were. Lacking any base of support at home, they depended on their existence upon the firepower of the Soviet military. For decades, it was an open secret that if the Soviet Union withdrew from the scene, the governments of Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia would crumble overnight.

Although Western observers often commented upon the unpopularity of the East European regimes, most were taken aback by the speed with which these regimes collapsed. In particular, many left-wing writers continually credited the Stalinist regimes with some positive features, and underestimated the bitter hostility in Eastern European societies. For example, the editor of Labour Focus on Europe, Gunter Memmen, wrote last year that the East German Communist Party, the SED, is 'not only a mass party, but one with considerable political roots in the East German masses' (No. 3, 1989). To some extent the right-wing media repeated this myth: right up to the fall of the old hardline ruler Erich Honecker in October 1989, Western observers tended to argue that, unlike in Poland or Hungary, the ruling bureaucracy in East Germany would survive the challenge from below.

Today, after the demise of Honecker's replacement, Erich Krenz, and the disintegration of the SED, it is fairly clear that the Eastern German bureaucracy was no less isolated than its counterparts in Poland or Bulgaria. It is also evident that Eastern European peoples despite all of the old Stalinist governments, yearn for change and need only the slightest encouragement to challenge the status quo. The reason why change had to wait until last year was the widespread fear that the Soviet military would stamp on any experiment. Once the Soviet leadership signalled its new hands-off policy towards Eastern Europe the local regimes could no longer carry on in the old way.

Since the beginning of last year, experts have tended to fall behind events. Initially they were sceptical about Gorbachev's undertaking to allow Eastern Europe to go its own way. When General Jaruzelski promised free elections in Poland last year, most observers believed he was lying as a manoeuvre to buy time. All the promises of reform in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany were first interpreted as cynical delaying tactics. Experts and observers have consistently lagged behind events because they expected these regimes to fight for their survival. Instead, contrary to expectations, after a little prodding the East European bureaucracies conceded one reform after another, even allowing their political opponents to assume important governmental offices.

Self-disbelief!

If this chain of events was unleashed by the new policy orientation of the Kremlin, it was facilitated by the willingness of these ruling Eastern European bureaucracies to make all the necessary concessions. Although at the start this was not widely understood, the East European bureaucracy had simply stopped believing in itself.

Gorbachev's hands-off policy underlined the isolation of the East European puppet states. In these new circumstances, the regimes were confronted with the challenge of continuing on their own. Many thinking Stalinists in Eastern Europe quickly concluded that this was a non-starter. Indeed in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia at least, most Communist Party members understood that their policies were directly responsible for the crisis facing their countries. The majority of bureaucrats had accepted that there could be no return to the old ways of their regimes. The debate was not about whether there should be reforms or whether the market should be introduced—these points were more or less accepted. The discussion within the bureaucracy
concerned how to bring these changes about with a minimum of disruption and instability.

The sight of hundreds of thousands demonstrating on the streets of Leipzig, Prague, Timisoara or Budapest lends weight to the view that popular protest has been primarily responsible for the present phase of political transformation in East Europe. The role of protest and street demonstrations should not be underestimated. The forcing of the pace of events in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, were all contingent upon the intervention of the masses on the streets. However, without detracting from the contribution of popular protest, it would be wrong to suggest that it provoked the present cycle of change in East Europe.

To anticipate one of our central arguments, it appears that the initial impetus behind the change in East Europe came from within the old regime itself. The realisation that it could no longer continue in the old way forced the Stalinist bureaucracy to adopt a survival strategy based on political and economic reforms. This process began in Poland and Hungary. The reforms implemented from above in those countries then stimulated mass protest first in East Germany, then Czechoslovakia and finally in Romania.

Despite militant popular resistance, the survival strategy of the old regime has proved relatively successful so far. In all but name, the institutions of Stalinist bureaucracy remain intact. We need to retain a measure of objectivity, otherwise the heroic actions of the Romanian masses can blind us to the fact that the country is still run by individuals with strong links to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The main initiators of political reform in Eastern Europe were the Stalinist rulers of Poland and Hungary. When these bureaucrats began to address the question of political reform back in 1988, their role was not threatened by opposition movements. Solidarity had been a threat to the Polish bureaucracy almost a decade earlier. But by 1988 this mass movement had turned into an organised pressure group which was not inclined to raise the stakes. Nor was there any direct challenge to the regime in Hungary. Since Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the Stalinist regime had never faced any major demonstrations of popular
popular protest through winning a measure of support for the bureaucracy.

In Poland, a carefully devised framework of gradual transition was put in operation in late 1988. In February the so-called round-table discussions involving the representatives of the Jaruzelski regime, Solidarity and the church were initiated. These tripartite discussions provided a controlled environment within which change could take place. By April there was agreement on the legalisation of Solidarity and on elections.

**Poles apart**

Jaruzelski and his colleagues probably underestimated the speed with which one concession gave way to demands for more. They were certainly shocked by the scale of the defeat of the Polish Communist Party in the June 1989 elections. The fast pace of change showed that, despite its reforming initiatives, the Polish bureaucracy had failed to win any credibility with the population. One part of its survival strategy—the attempt to renovate the image of the party—had flopped.

Nevertheless, despite the setback of the electoral defeat in June 1989, the Stalinist leadership pressed on. The bureaucrats could live with the demise of the party, so long as they remained in a position to manage the gradual transition of the political system. They were aided by the fact that Solidarity and the Catholic Church shared their objective of maintaining stability.

In July, with the aid of the Solidarity leadership, Jaruzelski was elected president. A week later Solidarity was invited to join a coalition government. After intense negotiations, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a top Solidarity personality, became the first non-Stalinist premier in Poland for 40 years. The new 24-member coalition government confirmed on 17 September contained only four Stalinists. Thus we have what appears at first sight to be a paradox: a pro-Western government headed by a Catholic intellectual presiding over the future of a state machine which retains its Stalinist character.

**From the top**

In Hungary, even more than in Poland, it is obvious that the regime itself was the initiator of change. The Hungarian Stalinists did not even have a Solidarity with which to negotiate. The so-called opposition consisted of isolated groups of intellectuals without a constituency. It can be argued that the main opposition movements, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Association of Free Democrats, were at least indirectly created by the bureaucracy itself, since it was only through the round-table talks with the regime that the Hungarian opposition emerged from national prominence. The Hungarian bureaucracy led by Imre Pozsgay carefully cultivated the main opposition personalities in an attempt to create a broad consensus supporting Pozsgay's initiatives.

Pozsgay then undertook a review of the Hungarian Communist Party. In October 1989, its name was changed to the Hungarian Socialist Party and the regime took every opportunity to advertise its conversion to respectable social democracy.

As in Poland, the attempt to give the Hungarian party a face-lift has not been too successful. The Communist Party lost a crucial referendum in November 1989 on the timing of the election for president and it has been defeated in every by-election so far. Nevertheless the regime is pressing ahead with its reforms and the first open general elections are scheduled for March 1990. It is not yet possible to give a verdict on the outcome of the bureaucracy's survival strategy. It is clear that individuals associated with the old regimes have not been able to use the reforms to boost their reputation. However, despite the many setbacks, the Stalinist state machine survives intact and political conflict has been contained through the mechanism of an institutionalised dialogue—the round-table discussions—with the opposition.

The pre-emptive actions of the Polish and Hungarian bureaucracies provide the background to the spectacular events and the intervention of the masses in Eastern Europe from August 1989 onwards. Until August the scenario was one of gradual step-by-step change. Then, the transformation suddenly begins to accelerate.

East Germany, supposed ally of the Eastern European states, was the first to feel the change. It is worth recalling that until October 1989, street protest in East Germany was sporadic and involved small numbers of people. However, the cumulative effect of changes in the Soviet Union and reforms in Hungary and Poland had a major impact on East Germany. After Gorbachev's visit to Berlin on 7 October, the mass demonstrations began.

'Nuff SED

The East German regime's response to mass protest did not follow along the lines of repression. In Leipzig and Dresden the local authorities offered dialogue. Soon, the old leadership of the SED resigned, travel restrictions were lifted and elections were promised. What took over after a year's hard work in Poland and Hungary was achieved in
six or eight weeks in Germany. In contrast to Hungary and Poland, political reform in East Germany was clearly a response to mass pressure. But the speed with which the Stalinist leadership ditched its old leaders and offered one concession after another indicated that it too had decided to secure its survival by changing with the times.

From East Germany the focus moved on to Czechoslovakia's velvet revolution. After the repression of students demonstrating in Prague on 17th November, the Czech bureaucracy had no more stomach for fighting. It followed the East German example and initiated a dialogue with the Civic Forum opposition. Without much ceremony the old leadership was purged, and new faces appeared from nowhere. The parliament voted to strip the Communist Party of its 'leading role' and on 10 December 1989, elected a pro-Western non-Communist government. Soon afterwards the prominent dissident, Vaclav Havel, was elected president. In a few weeks the face of public life in Czechoslovakia had been transformed.

And finally we come to Romania. Here there was a genuine popular uprising. In contrast to the experience elsewhere — from Hungary to Bulgaria — the leadership of the regime was not disposed to make concessions. Instead of opting for reforms, the Ceausescu clan decided to fight.

What Ceausescu and his relatives failed to understand was that the rest of the Romanian bureaucracy was attuned to developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe: at the first sign of resistance, most state officials would desert the old dictator. With the exception of the Securitate, the institutions of the state lined up against Ceausescu. While the fighting was still going on, individuals with strong links to the Stalinist regime constituted themselves as the Front for National Salvation, and assumed power.

**Romanian purge**

In a sense Romania provides the clearest illustration of our argument that political change and reform, even if accompanied by violent upheaval, do not necessarily mean the end of the Stalinist state.

In Romania, as elsewhere, there has been the usual change of personnel and even the disintegration of the old governing party. And yet Romania is run by a coalition of army officers and former Stalinist bureaucrats now preaching the virtues of democracy and freedom. So much has changed; and yet it seems that the main result of the popular revolt has been an old-fashioned purge of the political elite. Even if the interpretation of events outlined here proves too pessimistic, it is worth asking a few questions about the meaning of the term reform in the Eastern European context.

**Two ways out**

Reformers associated with East European Stalinist parties now recognise that the old system is doomed. It will either be overthrown through violent revolution or it will be reformed out of existence. To secure their survival through the difficult times ahead, most Stalinists prefer the option of reform.

The main objective of reform is to create the institutional framework for the restoration of the market and the introduction of capitalist social relations. Many bureaucrats positively welcome the market because they believe that their privileged access to resources will give them a head start in a capitalist-oriented economy. In Poland and Hungary many senior bureaucrats are already 'privatising' themselves and becoming entrepreneurs in anticipation of the changes. These individual Stalinists believe that through reforms they can transform themselves into a class that will benefit from the market. Other bureaucrats are not so sanguine about future prospects but instinctively feel the need to push through reform before the old system explodes in their faces. The current fashion for changing the name of Stalinist parties well expresses this mood. It expresses the hope that a change in name will make invisible those who rightly fear the yearning for vengeance that is never far below the surface of working-class life in Eastern Europe.

**Going steady**

The bureaucrats' narrow definition of reform is in many respects shared by the leaders of the opposition movements. They do disagree on one point. The intelligentsia and the petit bourgeois, which constitute the most prominent opposition forces, are bitterly opposed to the monopoly of influence that the Stalinist parties used to enjoy, and in some cases still do. Thus the opposition leaders want the most far-reaching measures directed against the Communist parties and are committed to separating these parties from the institutions of the state. In other respects, however, opposition groups like New Forum share the bureaucracy's interpretation of the meaning of reform. In particular they welcome the market and expect to be the main beneficiaries of such an economic system.
impression, especially on the left, that something like a political revolution is taking place there. Without a doubt there is a considerable potential for Eastern Europe to be entirely transformed. But despite all of the impressive mobilisations in Leipzig, Prague and Bucharest, the changes so far have been relatively superficial. Individual politicians have come and gone and parties have changed their names, but the old Stalinist state structures have remained intact.

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the relationship of the old Communist parties to the Stalinist system. It has often been suggested that where a Communist party loses its monopoly on political power and the constitution no longer upholds its leading role, then the Stalinist regime stands defeated. In fact, the importance of the role played by the East European Communist parties in propping up the Stalinist order has always been exaggerated by Western observers.

Affair of state

The Stalinist bureaucracy did not rely primarily on the party to enforce its rule, but on the machinery of the state. The parties acted as adjuncts of the state. The leading Stalinist bureaucrats can live without their party so long as they retain access to the machinery of the state. That is why the demise of the old Communist parties does not automatically mean the end of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Communist parties only provided the political facade for Stalinist regimes. The administrative and repressive arms of the state—the armed forces, secret police and civil service—provide the power. Thus examining what damage has been done to the old state, rather than the party, is the key to deciding how far real change has gone in Eastern Europe. Such an examination quickly makes clear the limits to the transformation process so far. The Stalinist states are largely intact, and even at the level of personnel there are some striking examples of continuity. Mihócs Nemeth was until recently a leading member of the ruling Hungarian Communist Party. After the party abolished itself, he joined the new Socialist Party and became prime minister of a caretaker government. Now he says he will stand for election as an independent. Through all these superficial alterations and label swaps, Nemeth and the state which he fronts have remained essentially unchanged.

The absence of qualitative change in Eastern Europe is to a considerable extent explained by the half-hearted attitude of the opposition movement. While the bureaucracy cannot handle popular protest it can manage and live with opposition movements like New Forum in East Germany or Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia. These movements, which represent the intelligentsia and the urban petty bourgeoisie, are always ready to cooperate with the state authorities in exchange for the promotion of their own interests. The nature of these groups makes them reluctant to force matters to a head. Their political programme is that of the lowest common denominator. There is no call for liberation or social transformation. In some cases, such as the Front for National Salvation in Romania, it is not even clear if they stand for anything distinct at all.

Despite a mutual dislike for each other, the bureaucracy and the liberal opposition are ready to collaborate. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, the old opposition now runs the government and has assumed responsibility for managing the existing social order. In undertaking this role the intelligentsia of Eastern Europe announces that it is more interested in winning a privileged relationship to the state than in changing society.

A matter of time

It is unlikely that the relationship of collaboration established between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the liberal intelligentsia can endure for too much longer. All those who are party to this arrangement face isolation and the loss of popular support. Half-hearted gestures are unlikely to deceive the masses for long. Thus movements like New Forum, Civic Forum and the Association of Free Democrats in Hungary are transitional ones. Once the limits of change within the existing framework become evident, these groups will lose their relevance. It is only a matter of time before the next cycle of protest breaks out.

As Eastern Europe edges towards the market, so the carefully worked out plans for reform are threatened by popular resistance and revolt. The new non-Communist regimes allow for the relaxation of repression and a few more civil rights. But the economic reforms necessary to introduce the market also threaten the popular resistance and revolt. Already sections of the Polish working class are beginning to rebel against the Solidarity movement. Other Eastern European countries are heading towards an explosion.

With the assistance of the liberal intelligentsia, the old bureaucracy has managed to survive in East Europe. But only just. We would not like to bet on the Stalinists surviving past the next cycle of social upheaval.
EAST AND WEST

For or against unity?

‘The German question’: an answer

It seems as if you cannot pick up a newspaper or magazine these days without finding a lengthy discussion of the implications of German unity. The implicit assumption behind most of the coverage is that a united Germany would constitute a problem for the rest of the world. A sense of fear about ‘the German question’ appears to influence left and right alike.

Until very recently it was possible to pretend that German reunification was a question for the future. Western diplomats and politicians self-consciously emphasised that not even the Germans were demanding unity in the here and now. Left-wing observers agreed. Writing of the East German people’s residual faith in socialism and distaste for the commercialism of the West, even after these same East Germans had danced on top of the broken Berlin Wall and began a mass migration through the gaps, Western observers concluded themselves with dubious opinion polls which apparently showed that the majority of the East Germans did not want anything to do with the so-called ‘Mercedes Benz culture’ of the West.

Of the moment

The truth is that reunification is a burning issue right now. Recent events confirm that East Germany is an artificial creation which cannot continue to exist for long. It is unconvincing in its present form because it lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the population. This absence of any popular support for the East German regime forced prime minister Hans Modrow to bring forward the elections to 18 March. German reunification will be the major issue behind that election.

It is a sign of the times that every party has now felt obliged to endorse the principle of German reunification. Even the Stalinists of the old Communist Party, who staked their existence on partition, now accept reunification as inevitable. And the New Forum group, which initially favoured the continuation of two sovereign German states, changed its position in January for fear that it would be swept away by the pro-reunification tide.

Many observers have sought to compare the widespread support for reunification in Germany with the rise of malevolent end-of-Weimar nationalism. The old Communist Party has encouraged this interpretation, constantly warning about the impending rise of fascism. This scaremongering is a ploy by Stalinist politicians who, lacking any...
challenge to American leadership of the Western world. This explains why, despite the efforts of some liberal political leaders in the old powers, from Washington through London to Moscow, are so distinctly unenthusiastic about German unity.

The certainties of the peace treaty are now threatened by a new global system which is still under construction. At the very least, the major players in the world system are going to their best to make sure that German reunification happens later rather than sooner.

Living Marxism wholeheartedly supports the end of the division of Germany. This attitude has nothing to do with a positive assessment of German national self-determination. Nor should it imply that unity is especially in the short run, likely to benefit the working class; indeed, West German capitalists are reaping the immediate benefits of the move towards reunification.

The main reason why we support reunification is that we recognise that the partition of Germany has tended artificially to freeze history. After the Second World War, the stability of both the capitalist and Stalinist worlds was founded upon the partition of Germany. Previously, the inability to integrate Germany into the world order had been one of the major sources of instability and conflict. Now the German question was finally contained by dividing the nation into two states.

Divided class

Partition did more than eliminate Germany as a threat to the world order. It also divided the European working class and prepared the way for the long Cold War. The Cold War proved to be a major asset for Western imperialism. Under the pretext of waging an international crusade against the totalitarian forces of Stalinism, Western powers were able to neutralise dissent at home. Anti-capitalist forces in the West could be attacked for wanting to turn their society into a Russian colony, and thus were easily discredited. The Stalinist system acted as a permanent reminder that change would lead to circumstances that were worse than the conditions which prevailed in the West. The Berlin Wall confirmed this view: the fact that people had to be bricked up in the East suggested that, if given a choice, anyone in their right mind would opt for Western capitalism.

The division of Germany and the Cold War thus created an environment where conservative views could dominate across the world. This division gave anti-communism a special appeal and force because it seemed to be based on reality. It didn’t matter that Eastern Europe was no more communist than the West; so long as the Stalinist system could be so portrayed as communism, it naturally fueled a right-wing reaction.

Anti-communism became so effective that even the West German establishment, which had been completely discredited through its links with Nazism, could regain a degree of legitimacy by promoting it. That is why the Bonn government turned anti-communism into state religion. The legitimacy of the West German state is based upon its claim to represent a positive alternative to the dangers of Stalinism. The division of the country has thus allowed the German capitalist class to construct a state that need not be embarrassed by the Nazi links of its elite.

German unity will eliminate the fiction that there exists a negative communist model in the East. It will also help to overcome the artificial division of the German working class. And unity will contribute to the demise of the international balance that has benefited only capitalism in the West and Stalinism in the East. These are good arguments for supporting unity.

Many leftists oppose German unity on the grounds that such a move would strengthen nationalism and create a power that would be a danger to world peace. This approach is fundamentally flawed. Nationalism is already strong in West Germany, as evidenced by the widespread hostility towards third world immigrants there. It is not clear why unity should further Western nationalism. What is clear is that if Germany remains divided and if nationalist ambitions are thwarted, then nationalism will increase. A divided nation will always be susceptible to nationalist ideology. All the more reason for removing partition.

The fear of German power is not entirely misplaced. A united Germany would inevitably become the strongest nation in Europe. But what is so special about German imperialism? Why should it be treated differently from British, French or American imperialism? In picking out Germany for special consideration there is a danger of whitewashing the imperialist tradition of our own rulers. Marxists living in Britain ought to be concerned with the weight of Thatcher more than that of Bonn.

A united Germany cannot pose any more of a problem for us than a declining and vicious Britain or an assertive and aggressive France. On the contrary, the process that leads towards a united Germany has the potential to undone history and to undermine the coherence and power of the entire capitalist world order.
EAST AND WEST

Economic reunification is under way

Deutschmark über alles?

Helen Simons finds capitalism crossing the wall

Whatever dates and conditions the politicians may set, in practice German reunification is already under way. Economic cooperation is a powerful magnet pulling East and West together.

Since the Berlin Wall began coming down, the governments in Bonn and East Berlin have been negotiating over a Vertragsgemeinschaft—a collection of economic, cultural, scientific and technical agreements between the two states. In the run-up to the March elections in the East, West German chancellor Helmut Kohl launched his bid to set up a currency union and promised a multi-billion deutschmark aid package. West German businessmen have already jumped the gun, and the scramble to get a commercial foothold within the GDR is well under way.

West German companies have proved far keener to move into the GDR than to follow their government's suggestion that they should invest in Poland or the Soviet Union. Eager employers explain that 'this is Germany, the workers are German, they speak the same language and they understand how we think'; in other words, these are skilled German workers who will do the job at cut-price rates. Even more attractive is the prospect of a unified Germany with an industrial base to take on the world.

Many major companies justify their move into the GDR by pointing out that they used to own extensive interests in the east before Germany was divided in 1945. Giants such as Daimler-Benz, Siemens, Volkswagen, Bayer, Hoechst and BASF had many plants throughout the old Germany. 'Middle Germany' (an area roughly corresponding to the GDR) was an important part of the pre-war German economy, home to the chemical and textile industries and many other industrial sectors. The western areas of Germany were dominated by heavy industry like steel production. This was a natural division of the economy since hard coal and water power were scarce in the east.

The two parts of the German economy had a complementary relationship, within which an effective division of labour had evolved. This tradition ensured that, even after partition, there remained a striving towards some form of economic cooperation. But throughout the post-war years, these economic relations were subject to the shifting political considerations of the Cold War. Both the East and West German regimes, and their respective Soviet and American backers, desired to maintain partition as a source of stability.

Hot and cold

Ironically, during these years East Germany was often under the most pressure to establish economic links, as the stagnation of the Soviet bloc created a pressing need for Western technology and aid. Yet to justify the existence of East Germany as an independent state, the Stalins had to denounce any steps towards reunification and keep their distance from the capitals. West. During the Cold War crisis which led to the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, East Berlin even tried to sever all economic links with Bonn—a dissonant move which plunged the East into grisals.

West Germany, meanwhile, voiced formal support for reunification, yet if anything used its economic relations with the East to endorse partition. Throughout the Cold War years, economic cooperation was threatened by the prospect of West German trade sanctions being imposed in response to any new political restrictions in the East. Bonn governments used this economic device to help bolster the legitimacy of the artificial West German state by emphasising the relative prosperity and freedom which capitalism Germany enjoyed compared to its 'communist' neighbour.

Today the changes in the East and the declining credibility of the Cold War have transformed the character of East-West economic relations. Now the talk is of reunification and one German economy. And Bonn is using its economic power, not to punish the East, but to bring it closer under the Western wing.

By the start of the eighties there were already signs that the inter-German relationship was starting to change. For the first time, the old Cold War assumptions which had shaped East-West German relations for the past three decades were being put to serious question.

In 1981 Cold War tensions had escalated once more, with the imposition of martial law in Poland after political unrest in the Gdansk shipyards, and the introduction of the US Cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe. The Reagan administration froze relations with Moscow and Washington, and again the USA tried to exert pressure on the East and pull its allies into line by imposing trade sanctions against the Warsaw Pact countries. The US-bombed had always complied with calls for Western solidarity against the Eastern bloc. But in 1981 the West Germans
refused to jump through the American hoop. Even at the height of the military crackdown in Poland, Bonn refused to cease the supply of technology to the East. The major Soviet-backed project of the day—the construction of the trans-Siberian gas pipeline—continued with West German support throughout the whole of this period.

The pipeline row reflected the shifting balance of power within both Cold War blocs. Within the Western camp, the economic decline of the USA had undermined its position of unquestioned authority. As America had slipped, so the FRG had re-emerged as an industrial power and a major player in the world economy. As such, the West Germans began to develop their own economic interests, which did not always correspond to the interests of the USA. Bonn was no longer willing to obey every command to back Washington against a mythical Soviet threat.

Things were also changing within the Eastern camp, as the Soviet Union suffered a more dramatic decline than the USA. The increasingly chronic economic crisis in the Soviet Union had a considerable impact on inter-German relations. Unable to manage its own economic affairs, the Soviet Union was in no position to subsidise its East European allies. The GDR thus became more dependent on the West for aid.

### Debt problems

At the start of the eighties East Germany's Western debt was estimated at $11 billion and rising. Ten years earlier it had been just $1 billion. The political unrest in the Polish shipyards added to East Berlin's problems. At first the East German leadership feared unrest might spread across the Polish border. Martial law ensured that Solidarity was contained, but for the GDR the resolution of the political crisis caused another economic headache. Stability in Poland was dependent upon economic aid being given. When the state could least afford it, the ruling bureaucrats in the GDR had to bail out the Polish government to save their own skins.

The final straw came in 1982, when the Soviet Union reduced oil shipments to the GDR by 10 per cent and raised oil prices at the same time. The GDR was thrown into a balance of payments crisis. In spite of the heightened Cold War tensions on the international stage, West Germany stepped in to keep the East afloat. When the GDR's creditworthiness was at rock bottom on the international markets, Franz Josef Strauss, leader of the right-wing Bavarian CSU, negotiated a DM1 billion loan with no strings attached that pulled the GDR back from the economic brink. Once the short-term balance of payments problems were alleviated, East Germany quickly set about introducing an austerity programme that the International Monetary Fund would have been proud of.

### Ein Volkswagen

The new mood of cooperation brought with it a plethora of financial ties and agreements that slowly pulled the two Germanies closer. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, travel restrictions between the two states had been eased. As early as 1990 Bonn agreed to pay DM2.5 billion for the electrification of five railway lines through the East to Berlin. A further DM1 billion was earmarked in the same year when Bonn agreed to pay for the construction of a soft coal plant near Leipzig. The GDR repaid these investments by supplying the West with electricity.

The Kohl administration has since extended the GDR's 'swing' credit limit considerably, handed out loans and aid worth billions, and committed its hi-tech resources to a joint environmental project in the East. More recently private capitalists have proved keen to develop their concerns in East Germany. The Volkswagen corporation, flagship of German capitalism, was the first major company to announce its plans for the East, signing an accord to build VW engines in Karl-Marx-Stadt for the Wartburg model. Since then most of the other West German manufacturing giants have moved Eastwards.

An estimated 7000 West German companies had a stake in the GDR last year. In the first eight months of 1989 alone, imports from the FRG to the GDR rose by 14 per cent while exports to the FRG rose by six per cent. This year the value of inter-German trade is likely to exceed DM15 billion (about £5 billion). The collapse of the Berlin Wall has once again transformed the inter-
German relationship, West German interests have shifted from establishing ties to the East to pursuing the explosive issue of reunification. Today West German capital is no longer satisfied with just trade and credit. Since November Bonn has been feeling its way tentatively towards an East-West German relationship that can form the basis for reunification.

Three issues are now of great concern to West German capitalism. They are key to the real integration of the two German economies. First, the FRG has forced the GDR to scrap its ban on joint economic ventures. West German companies can now hold a stake of up to 49% in East German enterprises. Mounting pressure from the West means that this percentage is likely to increase. As a result all the major manufacturers are now investing in the East. For example, Siemens, the West German electrical giant, is now forging an agreement with Robotron—the GDR's largest electronic company—to manufacture compact discs in Dresden for sale in the West.

Second, the Bonn government is taking responsibility for redeveloping East Germany's crumbling infrastructure. This promises to be a major undertaking. The gap between the two economies is still the most striking feature of any comparison. East German productivity is only 40% of its neighbours'. And the gap between East and West has widened in recent years. One estimate puts the cost of restructuring the East German economy at a quarter of a trillion dollars. There will be no easy or cheap road to a united German industrial powerhouse.

Bonn has begun the task of restructuring by agreeing to fund various projects, improving transport, communications and healthcare, backing construction and forging links between the two state police forces. West German interests seem to be everywhere in the East, launching a seven-point plan to rebuild half of the GDR's railways, while setting up a fund to restore the buildings of Dresden to the splendour they enjoyed before the RAF bombed them.

The final pressing concern for West German capital is the issue of export guarantees and currency convertibility. At present the ostmark (the East German currency) is not officially convertible into foreign currencies. This makes it hard for Western capitalists to repatriate their new Eastern profits.

Resolving the currency issue is becoming Bonn's immediate priority.

The present arrangement is unsustainable, as the threat of a currency crisis looms ever larger in East Germany. The GDR is now swimming in a surplus of marksm which can buy nothing, while the country is crying out for hard Western currency. The Western deutschmark already dominates the black market and is becoming key to large sectors of the GDR economy. This instability created by this sort of third world economics is no basis on which to start rebuilding a major industrial power.

Yet, far from putting the West Germans off the idea of reunification, the threat of chaos in the East is today drawing the two Germanies closer together. Western economists are now trying to resolve the crisis next door. In February, Kohl launched his initiative to create a currency union which would effectively extend the deutschmark into the East.

Any deal to create a common currency East and West would be highly significant. Through such measures of economic standardisation, Germany could become one to all intents and purposes long before the political map is finally and officially redrawn.

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**LIVING MARXISM MARCH 1990**
WHERE OSSIE MEETS WESSIE

Daniel Nassim reports from the old German capital on the hopes and fears prompted by the prospect of reunification.

The scaffolders, together with other construction workers on the same site, are already experiencing creeping reunification. The building they are putting up is a joint venture between the East German state and a West German company. If they do overtime they get paid half of their money in deutschmarks. When they moonlight for private individuals they ask to be paid in the West German currency.

Two young women shop assistants were equally straightforward about their desire for reunification. "We're not earning enough to match living standards in the West." Crossing the border to visit the other side brought home just how poor they are in comparison. "Like most people the shop assistants favour reunification even though they know the difficulties which the introduction of a market economy could bring. Unemployment is a particular concern.

East Berliners express these concerns as a fear of the "elbow society" (Ellenbogengesellschaft), a sort of "unspeakable face of capitalism". They seem acutely aware of the possibilities of unemployment, inflation and harder work. But if you've lived in the East then of course the West looks good," says Peter, a trendy young East Berliner.

Women are particularly concerned about the dangers the introduction of the market could hold. The government has played on their fears that creche facilities could be dismantled. Carola, who works as a film developer and has a four-year-old son, favours German unity but is emphatic that most women here want to work. Here you can do that. I never want to stay at home and look after the kid.

The majority of workers who are against reunification share the same concerns as those who are for it. Chris, a 36-year-old caretaker, knows the arguments about higher living standards. But he is more concerned about rising rents and inflation in general. He also does quite well out of moonlighting as a mechanical engineer in the West—mending goods belonging to people in the flats he looks after.

The striking thing is how working class people always weigh up economic factors to determine their position on reunification. I spoke to 25 workers, and all of them cited economic rather than political reasons for their view. There was no talk of the rights of Germans or the need to build one German nation.

No doubt nationalism lurks beneath the surface. Racism is certainly there. A Mozambican immigrant who was recently thrown out of a train and Vietnamese have been refused service in shops and restaurants. Yet the more stringent political forms of nationalism appear absent among most.

One group staunchly opposed to reunification is the intelligentsia. Jochen, a film maker, expresses a contempt for the workers who want to unite that is common among intellectuals. The workers have a choice between freedom [a reformed version of the Stalinst regime] and bananas. And they want bananas! He detests the popular desire for consumer goods. "I can live without a car!" Few ordinary East Berliners envy him that ability.

Berlin still bears the marks of a divided city. Before the war the city had a highly integrated transport system incorporating an underground (UBahn), an overground (S-Bahn), trains and buses. The division of the city means that the two halves of the same system run independently of each other. There are also two independent phone systems, which are virtually impossible to connect. But the dominant mood among Berliners, whatever their doubts, is to finish the job that was begun in November.

As their March elections approached, many people in East Berlin expressed a belief that the changes had not gone nearly far enough. "We haven't had a revolution," says Thomas, a toolmaker. "You can only have a revolution with guns."
March 1985: Gorbachev comes to power

Is he on the way out?

...and, asks Rob Knight, will it make any difference if he is?

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power five years ago this month amid promises of economic renewal. Today just about the only growth industry in the Soviet Union is the rumour machine speculating about how long he will last. Observers returning to the West report that their Soviet contacts give Gorbachev two, four, or six months at the outside. Gossip about alleged plots and manoeuvres keeps the Western press and governments occupied; a rumour that Gorbachev was about to resign as head of the Communist Party was enough to knock millions off American share prices at the end of January. Every major event is now interpreted from the point of view of whether it weakens or strengthens Gorbachev.

In a sense, this preoccupation with Gorbachev's career prospects is a diversion from the real issues. Gorbachev is one individual, albeit an important one. What happens to him is not the same as what happens to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev is part of a political leadership which represents the interests of the ruling Soviet bureaucracy. During the five years that he has run the Soviet Union, he has enjoyed the active support of his colleagues. Should he go, they will still push his policies. A look at the Gorbachev years reveals that perestroika has not been the personal crusade of one man, but the pragmatic response of the Soviet bureaucracy to its system's crisis.

Western hero

Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 11 March 1985. During his five years in power, his most remarkable achievement has been to achieve hero status in the West: he has been complimented by Thatcher, feted by Reagan and Bush, hailed as a visionary from Bonn to Pretoria. His predecessor Leonid Brezhnev was treated as a pariah after the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan; a decade on, Gorbachev even enjoys Western support for the military crackdown in Azerbaijan.

Gorbachev has bought his popularity with the capitalist world by making major concessions. The Kremlin has proclaimed the virtues of a market economy, adopted a hands-off policy towards Eastern Europe, and encouraged third world liberation movements to make peace with the Western powers.

One place where Gorbachev is a lot less popular is within the Soviet Union. His perestroika policy has failed to alleviate economic hardship, and he now risks being heckled on the rare occasions that he goes on his famous factory walkabouts. When Gorbachev visits a republic he is confronted with demands for independence. A recent opinion poll found that only 12 per cent of people in the Soviet Union think perestroika will succeed.

These attitudes suggest that we should not take the glowing Western image of the Soviet leader at face value. To get at what he really represents, it is worth examining some of the myths promulgated by the Western 'Gorbymaniacs' since March 1985. The economics of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and his appointment five years ago reflected a widespread recognition among the bureaucrats that things could no longer go on in the old way.

By 1985 the annual growth rate of the inefficient Soviet economy was just about zero. Six consecutive poor harvests had forced the Soviets to import 30m tonnes of grain a year from North America. And while the world economy went increasingly hi-tech, the Soviet Union had trouble turning out the most rudimentary computers. The economic future looked grim.

Meanwhile, opposition was stirring in the Eastern bloc. In 1981, the economic crisis in Poland led to mass strikes and the rise of Solidarity. The unrest forced the Polish regime to impose martial law and sent shock waves through the Kremlin. In the international arena, things looked just as bleak. In Afghanistan, the Red Army was bogged down in an unwinnable war that enjoyed no support at home, had incurred the wrath of the Western powers and had isolated the Soviet Union. Worse, the USA under Ronald Reagan had launched the New Cold War and another arms race. The end of détente dashed the Kremlin's hopes of negotiating arms cuts; by the early

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eighties Soviet defence spending had risen to nearly 20 per cent of national output, imposing another crippling burden on the economy.

The bureaucracy knew that something had to give. No changes were made while the half-dead Brezhnev ruled. But when Yuri Andropov succeeded him in 1982, a more open debate began. Andropov initiated tentative economic reforms, including the labour discipline and anti-alcohol campaigns that Gorbachev was to step up in his first year of office. But just when things began to move in 1984 Andropov died. The now-forgotten Konstantin Chernenko came and quickly went, and then Gorbachev took power.

Those who present Gorbachev as a radical visionary who cut through the stale old politburo forget that, at the crucial meeting which elected him leader, his strongest advocate was the arch-Stalinist, Andreei Gromyko. And it was Viktor Chebrikov, then head of the KGB, who tipped the vote in his favour. In short, Gorbachev was the bureaucracy’s man. He was not merely to be a protege of Andropov who had himself been KGB chief under Brezhnev. The Western powers’ favourite Soviet reformer owed his career to a man whom they reviled as a torturer and murderer.

**No young radical**

Until he became general secretary, nothing in Gorbachev’s career suggested that he was a radical reformer. All reports on his early working life emphasized his real talent as the consistent ability to support the majority view whenever conflicts arose in the bureaucracy. Mr Perestroika certainly had no proven success in managing the economy: he ran agriculture during that run of failed harvests. He was in charge of the combination of sycophancy and back-stabbing that is the prerequisite for career success in the Soviet bureaucracy.

Gorbachev has never been a committed ideologue of change. He is a pragmatist, a product and member of the bureaucracy who sees the need to change in order to survive but fears the consequences. The economic restructuring of perestroika is a pragmatic policy agreed upon by the Soviet leadership in a desperate bid to offset the collapse of their economy. Policies like ending the party’s total monopoly on power are pragmatic attempts to win a measure of popular support for the Stalinist system. The diplomatic offensive in international affairs is a pragmatic policy designed to win friends, ease tensions and thus allow the Soviets to cut defence spending while gaining access to Western aid and technology.

**Back off**

From the start it was clear that economic restructuring could only be successful at the expense of working class living standards. Yet whenever the working class has reacted against the effects of the reforms Gorbachev has backed off. The market-oriented cooperatives were, for example, the most dynamic, if still marginal, sector of the Soviet economy; but when workers protested against their high prices, the bureaucracy began to crack down on these enterprises. Such pragmatism has guaranteed the survival of perestroika so far, but it has also ensured that it had little impact.

The prospects for Gorbachev’s reform programme are bleak. Fear of social upheaval means that the main economic reforms have not been implemented. And the political liberalisation has led only to growing demands for more far-reaching change. The new difficulties which the regime faces have taken their toll, threatening the unity of the bureaucracy itself. Collectively, the bureaucracy wants change. But as individuals, the bureaucrats don’t want to lose out as a result of it. Thus the bureaucracy remains both the agent of Gorbachev’s reforms, and the barrier to their success; it has begun to fragment under the pressure.

With the aid of the Western media, Gorbachev has presented the tensions within the Soviet bureaucracy as a battle between himself, the beleaguered reformer, and entrenched Stalinists who oppose democracy and reform. For five years he has blamed conservative elements for the failures of perestroika, and initiated purges which Stalin would have been proud of at all levels of the party. This is largely a smokescreen. Far from being isolated, it would not have been possible for Gorbachev to make so many enemies and survive had he not, until now, retained the support of the majority of the top-level officials. Nor can the crisis of the system be blamed on minor individual bureaucrats; forever, all Gorbachev has now replaced many of the old-guard with his own men, yet the situation has deteriorated even further.

**Come back Brezhnev?**

After five years Gorbachev has run out of excuses. Perestroika remains a farce, the economy is facing a monumental crisis and the integrity of the Soviet Union is being questioned from Baku to Riga. Not only has Gorbachev failed to deliver, but many believe that he has made the situation worse. He is faced with the challenges of the stagnation of the Brezhnev era; yet those years look positively prosperous in comparison to today. It is always possible that Gorbachev will be scapegoated for the failure of his system, and replaced by another politburo member or even by an army general. That would mean a change of face, but not of policy. At present no section of the Soviet bureaucracy has come up with an alternative programme. As foreign minister Gennady Gerasimov told journalists when Gorbachev’s leadership was questioned during the fighting in Azerbaijan. There are no alternative leaders, there are no alternative policies.

The big issue is whether or when Gorbachev goes, but how far the bureaucracy is prepared to go to preserve its rule. Before too long the Soviet leadership will be confronted with the alternative of leaving the stage of history or trying to survive through repression. The bloodshed in Baku was a sample of the future of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. It would be a fitting irony if the man whom the West hailed as a champion of democracy were to be remembered for fighting a rearguard action to preserve the Stalinist system.
Joe Boatman reviews
Born on the Fourth of July, the latest
Vietnam epic, and
John Fitzpatrick
wonders when a filmmaker is going to
remember that
war's real victims
and victors

Born on the Fourth of July is
based on the autobiography of
paraplegic Vietnam veteran
Ron Kovic. He took his patriotism to
Vietnam and brought it back intact,
Despite the fact that he returned
wheelchair-bound and impotent. The
film is about his fight against his
disability and against the indifference
and hostility which he received back
home. His personal triumph and
reconciliation operates on a dramatic
level to redeem America too, not so
much on account of the war and what
they did to Vietnam, which so often is
a side issue, but for what they did to
their own veterans by way of suspicion,
denial and guilt.

America fought, America lost, but
God Bless America it's still got its
pride. It's not as bad as that sounds.
Tom Cruise proves himself a great
actor here, and Oliver Stone confirms
himself as a great director. Stone takes
us on a smoothly guided tour of our
corporal reactions allowing no time to
ask questions. Ron Kovic was born on
the Fourth of July, and a series of
skillfully manipulated childhood
episodes establish him as a short-to-be.
Stone delivers a sequence of
user-friendly key sentimental
moments that we identify as the culmination
of some bitter-sweet tale (an audience
accustomed to emotional impact
delivered in 30-second TV ads makes
easy work of it). He plays soldiers in
the mud, he salutes the veterans at the
Fourth of July Parade. He wins at
football and wins the girl's heart.
There's a flag on the lawn and
Kennedy on the TV: 'Ask not what
your country can do for you, ask
rather what you can do for your
country.' It's very effective.

All-American boy
Not only are his all-American roots
established but so too are the seeds of
future conflict. At the parade the
veterans wince at the firecrackers.
His mother's narrow-minded morality
(strong disapproval over a Playboy
map) fetters her difficulties in
coping with his later dilemma. Worst
of all, in the one scene of failure in a
high school wrestling match, both
his mother and his girl have
disappointment and disillusion.
The flag, the ultimate status symbol,
which he clings to and gives itself
over to. Stone is not at all at fault.

The Fourth of July is
the most satisfying film of 1989.
It is a story of a boy who
becomes a man. Tom Cruise is
The Boy, and he is magnificent.
His performance is a tour de force.
He captures the essence of a
despairing, disillusioned young man
who has lost his way but is
nevertheless determined to find his
way back. Cruise's performance is
powerful and moving, and he
brings a depth to his character
that is rarely seen in films of this
depth. The film is a poignant
remembrance of the sacrifices
made by American soldiers in the
Vietnam War, and it is a powerful
testament to the resilience of the
human spirit.

When the Fourth of July comes
around again, this time the
news shows anti-war
protestors burning the flag.
Kovic cries out in
frustration and
anguish that he's a
veteran and all
he wants is to be treated
like a

YANKEE DOODLE
DO-OR-DIE

When the Fourth of July comes
around again, this time the
news shows anti-war
protestors burning the flag.
Kovic cries out in
frustration and
anguish that he's a
veteran and all
he wants is to be treated
Like a

Bitter in defeat
Stone is relentless. The Fourth of
July, the Parade again, back home. He
wants to avenge the loss of his
comrades. His was a violent, angry
man who did not tolerate
insults. He was determined to
get his revenge. His vendetta
was

Colostomy overflow
First stop the field hospital, and we
get the bloody picture. The camera
that ran with him as a child and
danced with him at the grown, now
reverts from one patient to
another zooming in on their wounds
like a panic-stricken doctor who
doesn't know where to start. From
here Kovic's journey from degradation
through despair continues in a long
and intense incarceration at the Bronx
Veterans hospital. Here Kovic gets
his first taste of the ugly welcome home.
Understanding means the hospital is
rat-infested, the equipment doesn't
work and patients are left to watch
their colostomy bags overflow. Kovic's
battle to regain his legs is doomed.

The only way is up. He attends an
anti-war demonstration, this time as
an active participant: 'One, two, three;
four; we don't want your fucking
war.' The Veterans Against the War
try to get a hearing at a Republican
campaign. As Nixon's voice is heard
saying 'Let's give those who served in
Vietnam the honor and respect they
deserve', Kovic is immediately
wheelchair bound and tipped out by
security guards. Stone emphasizes the
second war being fought here with a
visual parallel: the rifle-wielding silhouettes
of GIs against the orange Vietnamese
sky are echoed by the baton-wielding
silhouettes of the police against a blue
city night-light; where a black GI had
carried a wounded Kovic away from
the firing line, a black protestor carries
a crippled Kovic out of reach of the
riot police. Restored to his chair
Kovic finds his voice: 'We're going to
take the ball back.'

It is a virtuosic epic from director
and actor. Punctuated by news items
and superbly orchestrated crowd
scenes we are swept along through the
life of Ron Kovic, and whether you see
this soldier as villain or victim, you
can see why America wants to forget
him behind him now. Kovic and Stone,
veterans both, are convinced the war
was a terrible mistake, and now they
want to make it good. They want to
join the healing process to which
much attention is now given. Casualties
of War ends with the reassurance
that 'the dream is over'. Born on
the Fourth of July never ends, with
Kovic approaching the podium at a
Democratic Party Convention. He makes
a peace sign and tells the press, 'maybe
we're home'. If only it were so easy.
HOLLYWOOD VETS VIETNAM

In 1945 Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, declared an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam, following the collapse of French and Japanese authority. The French were soon back, but did not survive their military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva conference of that year temporarily partitioned the country along the seventeenth parallel, and thereafter it was the Americans who directly propped up the corrupt regimes in the South, first headed by Ngo Dinh Diem and later by General Nguyen Van Thieu.

Two million troops

President Kennedy increased the involvement of the American military in the early sixties to cope with the newly formed National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. The US bombing started in 1964 and in 1965 US troops were routinely deployed in action. In all 2,150,000 Americans were sent to Vietnam, the highpoint being 1969 when 520,000 were over there. By April 1973 the last troops had departed, and in April 1975 the last Americans scrambled out of the country as the Communists took Saigon. According to American scholar Gabriel Kolko, the United States in Vietnam unleashed the greatest flood of firepower against a nation known to history. Between 1965 and 1972, even the underestimated US figures concede that 415,000 civilians and 800,000 'enemy' were killed in South Vietnam alone. Around 60,000 US troops were killed in the war as well. The mass bombing and destruction turned seven million into refugees. And the US bombing campaigns in neighbouring Cambodia killed over a million more.

Vet victory

Yet, for all their firepower, the Americans were defeated. The army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the People's Liberation Armed Forces, the army of the NLF in the South, combined to defeat the Americans and their staging, even though they were outnumbered four to one. Between 1965 and 1972 95 per cent of their attacks were by units smaller than 300 men. A rate exception was the famous Tet offensive of 1968, when they attacked every major city and 35 of 44 provincial capitals simultaneously, while 1000 communists in the capital Saigon held off 11,000 American and South Vietnamese troops for 17 days. It was a battle which broke America's resolve.

No Pontecorvo

Surely, somewhere in all this there is a film to be made about the Vietnames, But Vietnam still awaits its Gillo Pontecorvo. Welcome Home, In Country, Casualties of War, Born on the Fourth of July: the films still come thick and fast, and (after a long initial pause) but nobody seems to want to tell this astonishing, moving and world-historical story from the point of view of the real veterans and the real victors. I await with interest Oliver Stone's promised follow-up to Born on the Fourth of July, which he says will focus on the Vietnamese.

Many of the Hollywood films are honorable enough (drawing a veil over The Green Berets, and Rambo), and powerful too, although these have really improved on Michael Cimino's The Deer Hunter (1978) and Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1981) in documenting the depravity of soldiers diselected and snuffed out by a war they had no stake in, and the psychological burden carried by America in its wake. Good Morning, Vietnam deserves to be mentioned for introducing us to an era, and welcoming, past of irony.

Even the most liberal activists, however, such as Stone's earlier work Platoon, focus on the damage the war did to America and Americans. In that film the hero turns up the prevailing Hollywood attitude: We didn't fight the enemy. We fought ourselves. The enemy was us. "Well, yes old chap, I can see what you're getting at: but don't forget those B-52s dropped 27 tons of bombs every time they went out.

Celia

NOT SO FUNNY BUNNY

A disturbing new film opens in London on 16 March. Pat Ford talked to the director Ann Turner in Melbourne

Celia is an unusual film, an impressive debut feature from a young Australian director, Ann Turner. It is about a little girl growing up, or rather being propelled into adulthood by some disturbing events one long sunny summer in the suburbs of Melbourne in 1957. First, her pet rabbit Margeaux is shaved up with all the other pet rabbits in the city as part of a panicky response to the real threat posed by the wild rabbit invasion of the countryside. Secondly, the new neighbour, as well as having some friendly children for her to play with, turns out to be a commissar. When their politics are discovered the Australian version of McCarthyism causes the family considerable damage.

Like me, you may think all this sounds rather coy and contrived, and don't like films about children anyway: but if you go down to these woods today you're in for a big surprise. "Police are still young," Ann Turner told me, and if these nine-year-old Australians are anything to go by she is undoubtedly right. This film underlines the difference between innocence and ignorance. Celia may not know a lot but she is very carry on what she does know, and sheds a very knowing light on the unpredictable, duplicious world of adults, where rabbits are locked up as random, nice progressive people inexplicably rounded, policemen throw their weight around and sexual passions keep looking into view, a law unto themselves.

Turner got the idea from a newspaper report about the rabbit fiasco, it really happened. She saw the event as a 'near way' into other issues, like the anti-communism that flourished in Australia. There was a referendum in the early fifties to ban the Communist Party, make it illegal, and it was narrowly defeated. Then I discovered a friend of mine had been forced to leave Victoria in 1958 because her father had been working for the government in communications and they discovered he was a communist.

What Turner calls the 'sense scare' about communism is background. The film is about Celia coping with other children, with the rigours of her imagination and, of course, with adults. Neither does Turner make the mistake of lumping all adults together. How she copes at the end has been controversial in Australia. "It has deeply divided audiences. Conservative critics have called it immoral. One person at the Australian Film Commission (which partly financed the film) argued strongly for one of the key final scenes to be cut. He lost and the ending packs a real punch. As Turner puts it herself, when it comes down to a question of surviving, Celia quickly acquires everything she is quietly against in the rest of the film."

Turner admits by her decision, as she sees it, to leave things open. One of the reasons why a lot of films don't have any sort of ending is because of pressure from producers. Some people can't cope without a simple message to take away. Well that was absolutely deliberate. I didn't want people to feel unsettled. "In this she has certainly succeeded, and not just in the denouement, but by conjuring up throughout the film the strange world of childhood in an uneasily convincing way. Watch out for Celia."
Toby Banks reviews the Clockwork Orange phenomenon, and the new stage version at the Barbican

In 1965, back from the army, I heard an 80-year-old Cockney in a London pub say that somebody was "as queer as a clockwork orange." The " queer " did not mean homosexual, it meant mad. The phrase intrigued me with its unlikely fusion of demonic and surrealistic. For nearly 20 years I wanted to use it as the title of something. (Anthony Burgess, Warner Bros. Clockwork Orange press book, 1972)

Burgess got his opportunity when he wrote a novel about brainwashing. The orange came from James Joyce's Ulysses, where Stephen Dedalus refers to the world as an 'elate orange'. Burgess developed the metaphor he was using from the brainwashing of the big orange: 'A growth as organic as a fruit, capable of colour, fragrance and sweetness; to meddle with him, condition him, is to turn him into a mechanical creation.' His subject was the most hated and feared enemy of respectable society, the teenage hooligan, Alex, whose gang of Droogs' leads and rage for sheer fun. An authoritarian government pledged to deliver law and order sentences him to an aversion therapy called the Ludovico Technique. Alex is cured by the brutal treatment, but unwittingly becomes a cause celebre, as the state brainwashing provokes an outcry. The treatment is useless and Alex's free will restored; he can choose to be evil or not.

Clockwork cult

Little did Burgess know, when his clever little parable was published to favourable reviews in 1962 and quietly forgotten, that it would become his most famous work. Nor did he realise that his 'demonic and surrealistic' catchphrase would become a byword for juvenile delinquents and social malaise. A whole generation that had hardly heard of Ulysses knew all about A Clockwork Orange. Its unlikely cult status was delivered by Stanley Kubrick's notorious 1971 film, which looks over the careers of both Burgess and Kubrick this day.

The film portrayed hooliganism through the eyes of the hooligan. Alex was stylised and glamorous, and the adult world was caricatured and satirised. It was very funny, and hooligans loved it. The image of the Droogs was potent, their 'lock and load' so calculated it could have been concocted by a committee of admen and sociologists: a bit of skinhead (white trousers rolled up to reveal what the papers used to call 'breeches')—a touch of 'glam' (big false eyeshadow on one eye). Lastly, the masterstroke. Every fashion from togs to skinheads subverted a traditional form of dress. Alex's outfit was taffeta perfectly with that symbol of the British beat the bowler hat.

Concealed 'seen' images usually end up looking like Cliff Richard in Espresso Bongo. This was different, the Droogs looked like evil bastards and there was thought. The hysterical press reported copies of 'Clockwork crimes'. Gangs of kids stalked the streets sporting bowling hats and rolled-up brogues. I remember one seen once wrapping through the startled shoppers in Lewisham High Street. No doubt they looked a bit silly, but to an 11-year-old trying hard to look like Red Stewart in a school uniform, they were an impressive sight.

Character, he is the only real character; the others are ciphers. Phil Daniels as Alex pulls it off, and deserves praise. The others, even given their parts, are disappointing. The Droogs, Dim and Pete, sound more like school bullies from Tom Brown's Schooldays than street bulls. The set is good. In place of the film's sixty-six knots (and sets which resembled the Barbican complex), Richard Hudson has created an ingenuous series of locations from a construction resembling the inside of a gigantic oil drum. The music by U2's Edge is reminiscent of Copeland's Rumblefish, but none worse for that.

There are two basic elements to the story: the psychology of the hooligan, and the political satire. The first element is the most straightforward: as Burgess admits, it is very didactic. I remind only that the passing of time has transformed his nightmarish criminal agent Alex narrates the tale. In the book, the effect is to distance the reader from the gristy reality of the film. I'm not sure how the film and the stage play the audience sees what is happening, and the effect of Nadsat is to play hard and glamorous the criminal action. The worst thing in this is that Nadsat replaces the novel's message, and turns the violence into gratuitous titillation.

But the point is that Nadsat distances Alex as well as the reader, from his actions. He is both the subject (the evil-doer) and the narrator (the sensitive innocent commentator). He is the football hooligan who trots out sociological jargon as soon as a camera is pointed at him. In the film the scenes of violence were deliberately stylised, with tight choreographed and set to music. Thus we see Alex's way, as exhilarating and joyous. The stage play is the same. In Alex's words, we see 'some getting knifed and others doing the kneeling'. When the Droogs are doing the kneeling it is a flamboyant dance routine, with jumping and rambling like circus clowns. But when Alex himself is getting knifed, he puts up a pout to the police, these exciting gymnastics are replaced by a savage, nauseating realism. We are in Alex's world throughout.

To sustain this effect, we have to be persuaded to sympathise with Alex, as a charming and witty rapist and murderer, against his malcontents. Malcolm McDowell triumphed on the screen with a tour de force of devilish exuberance, delivered in an abrasive northern accent. Following this is like doing Hamlet after Olivier, Phil Daniels has never seen the film, and gives a less theatrical interpretation which enhances the contradictions and vulnerability of Alex's character. The film ends with Alex back to his evil self, set to resume tainting and hell-raising. The play restores the final chapter of the book, in which Alex lures of the Droog life and yearns for a wife and son. I saw left wondering why a 73-year-old has written the most successful 'youth' art of the last 20 years.

Clockwork Orange 2004, by Anthony Burgess, directed by Ron Daniels, is at the Barbican, London on various dates until 13 March

Ludovico against the old ultra-violence: Alex (Phil Daniels) undergoes the aversion therapy

The barrage of abuse forced Kubrick to withdraw the film, and keep it withdrawn in Britain ever since. This has only enhanced its cult status—and a lucrative trade in tawdry bootleg copies of the original video nasty. Addicts make pilgrimages to Paris. There have been rumours and denials about its reappearance, but I am reliably informed it will be released again this year.

Ron Daniels' RSC production (adapted by the director and Burgess himself) is essentially a one-man show. Alex is not just the central vision of the future into something closer to a contemporary satire. The scene where the minister for the interior arranges a photocall at the bedside of the hospitalized Alex has long since been outdone by Margaret Thatcher.

More interesting is the question of violence. There has been a lot of discussion about the role of Nadsat, the strange slang spoken by Alex and his Droogs. It is a hybrid of English and Russian, full of emotive and vivid phrasing ("toilettack", "ultra violence", "the old m-out"). In this archaic,
T he Roman practice of using bread and circuses to keep the people quiet is well known. But did you ever hear of Gaun Julins, who aspirated to be Roman governor of Egypt and put on extravagant games to buy popular support? He hired so many gladiators, however, that his political opponents accused him of maintaining a private mercenary army in Rome. They rushed in a law limiting the size of such gatherings and Gaun had to send his boys home.

Stories similar to this one abound, a palliative that nearly became a panic, about the simplest escape from entrapment turning into some kind of silent invasion, caught up frequently even today. The Greenspan, for instance, is based around a similar idea, and when Space Invaders first appeared it was advanced that the Japanese had produced these electronic devices as a way of sapping our intelligence and creativity, not to mention our small change — with a view to crippling our minds and our economy. All these stories kept coming into my mind while I was reading Sean Day-Lewis’s book One Day in the Life of Television.

This is the official report of an exercise carried out by the British Film Institute on 1 November last year. They asked people to record their feelings about that day’s television. They got 18,000 replies, including over 2,000 from within the industry. Sean Day-Lewis reproduces extracts from 90 of these and collates the results of the exercise.

The usefulness and timeliness of the project goes without saying. The material is well-organised and Day-Lewis’ connecting paragraphs are direct and witty funny. There are plenty of fascinating glimpses of the minds and habits of the programme-makers — for example, very few of them seem to watch TV, and Gordon Honeycombe calls Nicholas Witchell, Titchwell, Day Lewis’ plotting attack on both the liberal TV establishment and its authoritarian enemies is the first intelligent contribution to the great television debate that I have read.

End of book review.

In fact, television is too much a part of our lives now that the book is useful as a picture of the state of the nation. This is partly because the editor has found space for the voices of those on the margins — physical as well as political — the lighthouse keepers and the lighthouse keepers as well as the single parents and the sociopaths. The result is a cheery celebration of our island diversity, along the line of the old Dulux advert (may the walls of Fife have a long life, may the windows of Winchester shine).

In fact our mental state is revealed as less cosy and more alarming than a Dulux ad would suggest. Everyone in Britain seems to have bought the illusion of harmless, inoffensive, lighthouse keepers—seems to live in an england of view. Viewers write about TV the way a slimmer might write about food. The food analogy crops up time and again. Women who work in the home approach the box the way they do the fridge — grazing through the day — while men expect their favourite programmes to be on the table waiting for them when they come home. They lay them up and then they fall asleep. Nearly everyone thinks they consume too much TV and of too low a quality. Nature programmes are like greens — you always mean to have more of them and less of Coronation Street, but somehow it never works out.

There is a constant struggle to break or tame the habit, but most people feel themselves in the grip of a hopeless addiction. Mrs Bryant of Southampton would have time to relax, go out with the family, read a book if she could just beat the box. She’d never do it, she says, unless controlled help her by closing down two days a week. The guilt is of a religious intensity. In fact religious comes up as often as food. Rebecca Swinfen of London called watching Eastenders was like going to church in that it meant half an hour’s peace and quiet in the house. Mr Lindsay compared his relationship with the box to that of a furtive puritan with a hidden box of sweets.

You really feel the depth and force of this guilt when you reach the section on Neighbours. Here the damage is even more serious. Before this people struggle hard to justify the box, insisting that they can handle it, keep it from the children, keep it from the children with a bar of chocolate. The defence is the most obvious — they start bingeeing. Most people think Neighbours because it is crap. They love watching the sofa, the living room, the flannelette, the melodrama. It is the box of cream cakes after the weight-watchers’ meeting, the pig that shows two fingers up at the diet, the sexual sin you know you can be forgiven.

Why do people feel so bad about the box? Probably because they know intelligence like mice in the coils of great snakes. Paradoxically, this feeling of impotence comes over most strongly from people who confess to these and shun them at the box. This therapeutic sense of political activity is described most poignantly by Mrs Higginson of Glasgow who calls T.V. “the one thing that helps me through the day, the one thing that helps me through the day.” Or the box, often only on the political front, but it is provoked most strongly by Kibby. Nearly every entry that dealt with the silly and glib with vicious addict. One woman went so far as to switch off her box, but there is no reason why people who do watch television should watch in a passive way. Apart from the fact that so much television itself actually encourages them to do just that. In this context the guilt reflects a positive resistance to the demand for total compliance. I don’t think that the boxes come only or only from television. But from a society that values its citizens not for what they can do for but for what they can eat, watch and waste. Television is a medium that offers an exercise of extravagant entertainment, places orders at your feet which your friends and lovers could never rival, and which they would love to have in exchange for nothing. You are too busy to offer anything substantial. All it wants from you is your attention. For now.

It is worth remembering that Gaun Julins grew up as Julius Caesar I and the last thing he did before crossing the Rubicon was to go and inspect the gladiator school he had built in Ravenna.

An oft-repeated story: The programme-makers felt just as paralysed by doubts! Drowning in the Shallow End — a series I once watched in its entirety. Here is a case for a blocked writer as its central image. Programme about people with nothing to say, for people who have lost the art of conversation. The awful thing is, Oh God, don’t know how to say this. I feel so guilty, but I really quite like playing like that. I mean if it was good enough for Fellini, it should be good enough for me. After all I hardly ever watch the bloody thing. Only got it for the kids. And the nature programmes.

Sean Day Lewis, One Day in the Life of Television, Grafton books, £1.55.
Tom Wolfe meets Martin Amis

NEW REALISM AND NOVEL REALITY

Andrew Calcutt compares The Bonfire of the Vanities and London Fields in the light of Tom Wolfe's recent pronouncements about the modern novel.

There is a fair amount in these novels to put you off. They are chock-full of racial and sexual stereotypes: black baby mammas called Lilette, black criminals who learned to walk the 'pimp roll' before they could crawl, women whose legs are only there to be做成橙色, anti-working class. You bet. In London Fields, Martin Amis reduces the working class to an amalgam of darts-obsessed, wife-battering, child-abusing sentimentalists endlessly swinging from cans of 'Peculiar Brew' and bottles of 'Porr', while Tom Wolfe is so wary or contemptuous of working class people, especially of the female or black variety, that they are strictly a winning proposition in material he would be_slice of New York life, The Bonfire of the Vanities.

But before you deposit them in the circular file, remember that the prejudices of the author have not always got in the way of a good novel. So it is here, Wolfe especially has delivered a telling portrait of society, or a section of it, bucking under immense pressure. That pressure partly takes the form of the black and Hispanic population of New York insistently asserting itself. But it is on the ethnicity which divided and still divides the white Americans, the Jews, the Italians and the rest—that Wolfe is so good. Amis hasn't got the grasp, nor the same ambition, but he has a keen eye and a keen phrase for the meanness and squarishness of living in London now.

From the safety of his exclusive apartment on Park Avenue and his trading room on Wall Street, Wolfe's protagonist Sherman McCoy considers himself omnipotent, a Master of the Universe. But, cruising along in his Mercedes sports, he is only a wrong turn away from the other side of New York, the third world which was once the South Bronx. McCoy is in the passenger seat when his mistress Maria hits a black high school student, and runs. Press, 'boss' politicians, lawyers and black radicals all close in for a piece of the 'great white defender'.

Meanwhile in Amis's 'slum and plutocrat London', in the interloper of Empire, four characters are carrying out a predetermined ritual. There is Nicola Six, who is what Amis calls a 'murderess'—she who is destined to be murdered. Guy, the fall guy, darts champion Keith, who seems destined to be Nicola's murderer; and Sam, the author who begins London Fields by revealing what will happen to all four characters, including himself, and then sets off to tell the story in detail. Amis's characters are locked into an unchangeable plot, just as they are imprisoned in the unstable decline of late twentieth-century London.

If decline in the Western metropolis is a theme common to both authors, they have marked it different ways and at different times. The novels are champions—in Wolfe's case, self-proclaimed, in Amis's—by default—of two very different schools of writing. Fulfilling up the success of his novel, Wolfe recently published a Literary Manifesto for the new social novel. Its watchwords are realism and journalism. Wolfe made his name in the sixties, with Hunter Thompson and others, in forging a 'new journalism' which wasn't coy about combining investigative journalism, social commentary and creative writing. More than 20 years later, Wolfe is turning the tables by calling on fiction writers to reinvent the novel through the use of journalistic techniques.

Wolfe calls The Bonfire of the Vanities a novel of New York, in the sense that Zola had written novels of Paris. He then invokes the reality of the last 30 years for turning away from realism and towards abstraction, magic realism, radical disjuncture and other assorted forms of self-irony. He is tired of realism, argues Wolfe, is tired of life—and art. Fiction writers must stop treating the novel as a literary game and rediscover the real world. The novel really will be dead unless you get out there with notebooks in hand, commands Wolfe. If you writers are not prepared to get your hands dirty, modern fiction will be all washed up. Amis would pass this message in some respects only. London Fields is basically a dirty book, so that's alright, and it is not as labyrinthine as, say, Brogers. But he does play many of the literary games which Wolfe so despises. The use of a fourth protagonist in London Fields, who purports to be the 'author' of the book, allows Wolfe to play off art and reality like facing mirrors: 'always the simulacrum, never the real thing; that's art'; Nicola, the murderer: 'I am a male fantasy figure. So they (the readers) will think you [the author in the book, and Amis the author of the book] are just a sick, dreamer lunatoprole Keith (this life is an last forward or picture search) becomes Kutchkish. As if mocking Wolfe, Amis jokes that 'the novel is dead', and that the is a something that must be tackled. He ridicules the idea of the novel unfolding by giving a synopsis of the whole story in the first chapter. He makes jokes about literary jokes. When he comes to literary journalism, Amis is a star player.

Wolfe may have some good points about the interventionism and complacency of contemporary writing but he shouldn't wrap them up in this anti-novelist and the novel is true form for the novel. The introduction of realism into literature in the eighteenth century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett was the introduction of electricity into engineering. It was not just another device. The effect on the emotions of an everyday realism such as Richardson's is something that has been conceived of before. It was realism that created the 'absorbing' or 'grasping' quality that is so peculiar to the novel.

This is a very static view of literary form. The way in which Smollett, Richardson and Fielding developed the novel was the way in which literature kept up with a developing society. Society and the novel both developed further throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dominant author with a comprehensive vision presenting fully rounded, historically typical characters was the hallmark of classical realism. But well before the twentieth century dawned, Western writers were losing confidence in their own ability to describe things in such a way, and their novels began to reject the realistic mode. Admitting that they could no longer offer a coherent view of reality, novelists offered us spectres of a vision and even celebrated its fragmentation. The new form of the novel was again very much the product of its age.

In his own turn Wolfe is a child of his times, and his work proves it. He can spin his writing of the outward signs of degenerate modernism, but he cannot rid himself of the combination of uncertainty and self-consciousness which is its content. What Wolfe comes up with is a style which purportedly rejects artifice, but which in fact is an affected as the most overtly modernist, with the brand name detail and verbal dialogue (Giddens who, not to mention the newspaper report epilogue, which makes up the sub-realm of The Bonfire of the Vanities, are in fact most apt. Whether Wolfe realises it or not, to convey the obsessive insecurities of late twentieth-century society, the fact that his novel does not even try to depict the way in which so many sections of society experience the modern city, both reveals the limitations of any attempt to remake a classical realist novel and at the same time assists quite effectively the sense of isolation and paranoia it sets out to describe.

It is striking that Amis, with his tricky literary techniques, is far more successful in getting to grips with a wide range of Big City victims. He gets into modern feminism with the notebook wouldn't dare venture. Even as he is playing word games with his characters' names and saying with notions of authorship which he would have amused Flann O'Brien, he claims to be writing a true story, a documentary. It doesn't mean that his work is more entertaining or even successful in dealing with the forces at work in the Big City than Wolfe. He isn't. It shows that form considered in the abstract (Wolfe's new preocupation) is an unavoidable guide in these matters.

The context of The Bonfire of the Vanities is nervousness. The nervousness which is now reaching epidemic proportions in bourgeois circles, but which is never openly admitted. Business as usual chronicles the world's rulers, the Masters of the Universe, idently ignoring the charm beneath their feet. Wolfe has reproduced in fiction the real dissonance between the crisis of modern society and its confident self-image. This is what makes Bonfire of the Vanities such a striking novel.

• Martin Amis, London Fields, Jonathan Cape £12.95
• Tom Wolfe, The Bonfire of the Vanities, Picador £8.99

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The End of Nature?

The End Of Nature is a compelling read that explores the consequences of human activity on the environment. Bill McKibben's book is a stark reminder of the urgent need to address environmental issues before it's too late.

By changing the weather, we make every spot on Earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us.

McKibben is very pessimistic about the future. The only solution he sees is for there to be less people on Earth, consuming less, and ultimately abandoning humanity's ten thousand-year-long attempt to control 'nature'.

He concedes that these changes will take a few generations to achieve since the terrible truth is that most of us rather like the rat'. His only hope is that future ecological disasters might shake people up and force them to face the inescapable facts of what needs to be done.

So what does The End Of Nature represent? A scientific insight into the inevitable consequences of such trends as global warming, or another example of 'eco-hysteria' bordering on millenarism?

McKibben's book is similar in many respects to Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, written back in 1962, which painted an equally gloomy picture of how nature was being devastated by DDT in pesticides. Almost 30 years on, the world has comfortably survived that threat and Carson's theory looks laughably dated. In The End Of Nature, however, McKibben repeats Carson's mistakes; he exaggerates the problem, fails to see how the development of society enables it to tackle problems it created, and he has a misplaced reverence for the sanctity of nature.

"The salient characteristic of this new nature is its unpredictability," asserts McKibben, 'just as the salient feature of the old nature was its utter dependability.' This just doesn't stand up. Nature has never been static or utterly dependable. It has evolved through a myriad of constantly changing states and no doubt will continue to do so. For example, by all
Progress and survive

The advance of today's scientific and technological capabilities has not made catastrophe inevitable. On the contrary, it has raised the possibility of humanity influencing natural changes to its own benefit, or at least of living with the consequences of a major change such as an ice age. In this respect, McKibben's concern that we have ended the thing that has, at least in modern times, defined nature for us—its separation from human society—is misplaced. A defining feature of 'modern times' is that our knowledge of natural processes and our ability to use and control them have expanded in parallel—inevitably so, since knowledge of nature requires transformative action upon it.

McKibben's utopian solutions reflect his naive notion that human society could have developed and could continue to survive without simultaneously transforming its natural base. All his solutions suggest, are our own timeless natural attributes: ‘As birds have flight, we have the special gift of reason. And if we returned to the kind of relationship human beings had with nature ten thousand years ago we would still be young, and perhaps ready to revel in the wonderfulness that surrounds us. It is true that we have the capacity to reason because of the development of civilised society on the basis of technical progress. Ten thousand years ago there could be no conception of a God, in nature, since people were little more than savages, brutalised by the way that nature dominated their lives.

McKibben romanticises, even idealises, nature. He points out that nature is as much an idea as a fact. And in some way that idea is connected with God. He wants to be closer to nature, yet he recognises that nature is much more attractive to him than the unnatural fact, which among other things is a fact which only modern society makes possible. We like to camp, but for the weekend.

What binge?

So he looks at nature as an idea, or an ideal, an ideal in keeping with the laissez faire of the introspective Western middle classes. From the corner of a modern house in the Adirondack mountains in upstate New York, McKibben confesses that we are all guilty of living up to nature's expectations, that all of us in the first world, have participated in something of a binge, a half-century of unbelievable prosperity and ease.

Even ignoring the fact that his 1989 book, Walking on Water, makes a little different sitting here in the south of England, McKibben needn't cross the Atlantic for the alternative view: the ghosts of New York City show. The question is, would they be even better?

The most characteristic feature of modern capitalist society is stagnation, not unchecked growth. The vast majority of people in the Western world (not to mention the third) do not experience life as an organic binge, but as a constant struggle to secure the basics. To fulfill that aspiration, we need far more economic, growth and technological progress, not less.

The view McKibben expresses is very much akin to the romantic movement of two centuries ago, and in many ways the practical response to such views should also be the same. ChartaLux, a supporter of the environment in France, circa 1790, parli simpliciter: in conclusion, let us say that to regret the "good old days" one must not know what they were like.

However, it is too simple just to dismiss McKibben's romantic view of the past. His popular appeal is rooted in the widespread contemporary fear of ecosystem in the future. We realize that we are living in an environmental calamity! And is the only solution, as McKibben claims, to curtail economic growth, or even to regress? Let us address these questions with reference to global warming, which McKibben considers the greatest environmental problem facing humanity.

McKibben tends to exaggerate the problem compared with any rational investigation based on current knowledge. In addition, he imposes absolute limits on our ability to deal with global warming. From the observation that society as it is seems unable to solve the problem, McKibben concludes that this is how it must always be. What are the facts?

Hot potato

As a by-product of many modern industrial processes and forest clearing, society is increasing the amounts of various gases, from the burners and the furnaces which trap the warmth of the sun by preventing its total re-radiation from Earth into space. At present carbon dioxide is the main culprit, though in the future methane, which McKibben's estimates in 1989 as having been underestimated, be even better to correct. Imagine the debate that we now have about whether their inhabitants were 'genuine refugees' or just climate change.

A more advanced and rational society would be able to deal with these changes, if they occurred. The problem is not a potential global warming as such, but the limitations imposed on our ability to deal with it by the present social system. And, by the way, when we come to look at the problems thrown up by that system, global warming comes well behind such mass killers as malnutrition and disease.

The uncertain prospect of global warming in no way validates McKibben's yearning to turn the clock back to a mythical golden age of simple societies and limited contact with nature. If it does become a significant phenomenon, it will be one more incentive to advance to the greater mastery of nature which only an expanding planned economy would bring.

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

**ROMANIAN REVOLUTION?**

Contrary to Mick Hume's editorial (February 1990) *was a year of revolution in Eastern Europe*. The great changes were brought about by the actions of millions on the streets of every capital, and tyrants like Honecker and Ceausescu fell. That adds up to a revolution in my book. The fact that those involved did not follow the model of the 1917 Russian Revolution is not surprising, seeing as they believed they were revolting against communism.

You say that a revolution must involve more, a struggle to smash the state and create new institutions of power. That sounds good, but how realistic is it? It is easy for revolutionary purists to criticise those who took to the streets against repressive dictatorships for not going far enough. But surely our time would be better spent trying to emulate them; after all, we live in a country where you can't even mobilise a decent march against Margaret Thatcher, never mind overthrow her.

John Mason
London

**MUCH MORE CHAOS**

In editing my letter on Chaos theory (February) you made a bit of a slip. The line "Newtonian mechanics is "merely" the application of Schrodinger's equation iH=Ht" should have read "quantum mechanics is "merely" the application of Schrodinger's equation iH=Ht". This unfortunate slip makes me appear like a dickhead.

Gordon Guthrie
London

Gordon Guthrie's main point is that modern physics, in particular quantum theory and Chaos theory, represents a revolution compared with Newtonian mechanics. But even Albert Einstein, one of the originators of quantum theory, saw it as only the best available theory on the basis of Newtonian concepts: "No one must think", he wrote, "that Newton's great creation can be overturned in any real sense by this or any other theory."

Quantum theory is undoubtedly a very powerful computational tool, but the very fact that it is at the core, speculative, idealistic and inconsistent with other accepted physical theories (after more than 80 years of attempts to solve the problem) indicates a deficiency. Richard Feynman, Nobel prize winner, recommended that people stop trying to formalise the basis of the theory and just stick to using it. I think I can safely say that no one understands quantum mechanics."

This is why the article on Chaos that Guthrie found so offensive ("The science of despair", December 1989) referred to quantum as "partial speculative alternatives". When we turn to Chaos we see all the same points and more. Firstly, Chaos is a very rich a rejigging of classical mechanics and Newtonian concepts. Secondly, unlike quantum there is certainly no consensus that it should be accepted, even as a useful computational tool. And thirdly, the point that Guthrie missed: while Chaos may well capture the essence of some physical systems, its rise to popularity is based on speculation and is connected with the prevailing political climate. Check out December's issue of the *Face* to see how Chaos is used to justify pessimism about the future of mankind.

Julia McGar
Durham

Gordon Guthrie asks: "Is Living Marxism on the side of the dragons?" My answer is no. One of the great developments that came out of the Enlightenment was the development of science, not as some mystical alchemy, but as a study of the physical and natural world. And further—the Enlightenment introduced the idea that science should be open as well as simply descriptive, although in no sense should explanation be equated with some simplistic determinism.

Chaos theory takes a big step back from this development. It appears to find justification in abstracted patterns, and comfort in their recurrence at different scales and applications. In the wake of Chaos, Janos Balazs (quickly approving of Mandelbrot's experiment of plugging cotton-wool data through the computer, and draws the following conclusions:

Each particular price change was random and unpredictable. But the sequence of changes was not independent of scale, and for daily prices and monthly price changes matched perfectly. Incredibly, analysis showed consistent over a tumultuous 60-year period that saw two world wars and a depression.

So cotton-price variation (a man-made effect) becomes a certain pattern, even when the numbers are subjected to a particular analysis—but what to use? This pattern not only fails to reflect factors we might expect to be important (two world wars and a depression) but also demonstrates their very disappearance.

This is not science, but a retreat from the outside world to some mystical apparition. At this rate, I wouldn't be surprised to find a Chaos theorist rediscovering the Platonic numbers and having the gall to shout "Eureka!"

Mike Barry
London

One area in which Chaos theory shows great promise is in keeping our awareness of global environmental fluctuations. Here, a large number of different pressures combine to cause weather patterns to change. The rapidly, from a relatively predictable situation, through a 'chaotic' intermedial period, to settle into a quite new, but also stable situation. It is thought that a combination of environmental factors could have driven the Earth out of the last ice age in this manner and provoked the fear that human activity might force us into an 'unstable' chaotic period, after which the Earth's weather patterns will settle into an unknown, and possibly unstable, for us, climatic state.

Now consider the economy of a nation, subject to the abrupt and often violent forces provided by the capitalist marketplace, and lacking strategic planning. This economy truly behaves in a chaotic manner and prediction of future trends in economic development becomes fraught with problems.

In contrast, consider a well-regulated economy in which the health of the industrial base of the nation dictates the state of the market and the violent dominating influence of an unregulated market is removed. This system is now much more stable and, with this protection, can be kept on the 'trajectory' of Chaos theory where prediction is, to a reasonable degree, possible. Deviation into the chaotic realm of market conditions is controlled, and therefore guarded against, and everybody, particularly Marx, is kept happy.

Dr Stuart Green
Birmingham

**ARE YOU WHAT YOU WATCH?**

I always think Frank Cottrell-Boyce's articles on *TV fuch and funny* are a joy. But I do notice a slightly worrying tendency in the way you are suggesting an interest in the February edition he warns us that watching the militaristic *Thunderbirds* cartoon could be turning children into little men and women of violence. But no one needs *Thunderbirds* to teach them about survival and authoritarian attitudes—they are surrounded by them in everyday life. If they react to violence on television, it's only because it reflects a brutal reality of the sort Frank himself depicts so well in some of the grittier episodes of *Brooklyn* which he has written.

In suggesting that TV shapes people's behaviour, Frank is getting worryingly close to the arguments used by an old reactionary like Mary Whitehouse in support of censorship. Of course I am not lumping him in with her. But, contrary to what he says, there are misguided and uncritical consumers of video who will use programmes like *Thunderbirds* in support of their wrong-headed cause.

Kathy Savvas
Southampton

**MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I'M FROM CREWE...**

Mick Hume's "Confessions of a communist" (January) reduces the success of the GLC to "trimming tube maps". Is that the most positive comment you can make? I would not suggest that the GLC struck a mighty blow for socialism. But Ken Livingstone and the GLC did more than just put new coats and fill Londoners around left-wing radicalism than any party on the left.

The GLC's success which you scoff at was harked by its abolition, in the same way as your much-maligned non-parties are being stopped— and by the same dictator. Do not give more credibility to aid house than the GLC of 1981-86.

Roger Bromley
Crewes
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