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The Communist Party and Marxism Today

Gone, but not forgiven

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and its house journal, Marxism Today, both folded at the end of 1991, lying and rewriting history to the last.

As the Communist Party, at its November congress, dissolved itself into something called the Democratic Left, attention focused on the 'revelation' that the Soviet Union had continued making secret payments to the British party right into the 1980s. This, everybody now said, explained everything that was wrong with the CPGB.

'If only we had known about the Moscow gold', said editor Martin Jacques in the final edition of Marxism Today. Other leading members, and leading ex-members like Sarah Benton in the Guardian, agreed that they would never have got involved had they known the shocking truth.

This is a cover-up. All the fuss about 'the rumpled trouser trauma' has distracted attention from what was truly wrong with the Communist Party of Great Britain. We do not know which Communist Party members knew what about how much money. We don't much care. The problem with the CPGB was not the backhander that it received from over there. The problem was the corrupt politics which the CPGB produced over here.

Talk of what was wrong with Communist Party policy traditionally centres on the old guard, the 'hardliners' who supported Stalin's tanks which crushed the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. The subsequent generation of CPGB leaders, the 'Euro-communists' like Jacques and Benton, tend to get off the hook. As in the recent row about Moscow gold, they are allowed to depict themselves as hapless victims of the Stalinist past. Yet in terms of their destructive effect on the cause of left-wing politics in Britain, the policies put forward by these people were at least as bad as those of the old 'tankies'.

Just about every policy formulated by the Communist Party over the past 20 years has been a disaster. Take, for example, a high point of the CPGB's modern influence: the Alternative Economic Strategy, developed in the early seventies as a scheme to help the state to plan the capitalist economy. When the CPGB strategy was put into practice by the last Labour government, it was revealed as a way of 'planning' income controls which imposed the biggest cuts in working class living standards since the Second World War.

The public disenchantment with Labour which followed this implementation of CPGB policy helped to get Margaret Thatcher's Tories elected in 1979. The Communist Party and Marxism Today were
always proud to point out that they had been the first to identify the phenomenon of ‘Thatcherism’; they were rather more reticent about discussing the modest role of their own ideas in assisting the politics of Thatcherism to triumph in the first place.

Nor did the CPGB’s problems stop at specific party policies. The broad political principles which the Eurocommunists imported into the British left from their academic discussion circles have done great harm. They have taught that militant working class action is unacceptably ‘macho’; that struggles against various forms of capitalist oppression are ‘autonomous’ from one another; that the ‘diversity’ of individual experience is more important than the common experience of class exploitation. In an era where the state became increasingly aggressive and centralised in its attacks upon the working class and oppressed groups, these middle class prejudices put about by the soft left have helped only to disorient and divide the resistance.

The Communist Party of Great Britain has proved quite capable of discrediting communism in Britain and undermining its own credibility without any help from the fixers in the Kremlin. When the party wound itself up in November, membership had sunk to an all-time low and the majority of those who remained were aged between 50 and 70. This suggests that, far from dragging a strong ship down, the old-timers were the only ones who kept the leaky hulk afloat for so long.

The obituary writers’ discussion of the CPGB has also reinforced another objectionable myth. Everybody seems to agree that, while the party had been held back by the past, in the eighties its magazine *Marxism Today* produced something fresh and dynamic, and created new interest in left-wing ideas. In fact, *Marxism Today* did as much as any Stalinist hack to discredit Marxism. It did nothing to create a new alternative to capitalism. Indeed, it attracted the interest of the mainstream media by doing just the opposite: endorsing entirely conventional ideas under a masthead of Marxism.

Introducing the final issue of *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques writes with typical modesty of the magazine being ‘so open, so unpredictable, so exciting, so dangerous’. So what were some of the exciting and dangerous ideas promoted by *Marxism Today*?

Back in 1981, it pioneered the policy of giving sympathetic interviews to the spokesmen for sectarian Loyalist murder gangs from Northern Ireland. More recently, in 1991, it took the revolutionary step of endorsing the Tories’ market-oriented reform of the NHS. In between times, it came up with such exciting ideas as voting for the SDP-Liberal Alliance, and championing the cause of the individual citizen—an idea so dangerous that it can be found in the manifesto of unpredictable, exciting John Major.

Jacques’ ‘open...dangerous’ journal proved itself open to taking on just about any old intellectual rubbish from the right, and dangerous to just about everybody except the capitalist class. No wonder its final edition could feature such warm tributes from various Tory politicians and other members of the British establishment.

*When right-wing politicians and newspapers praised Marxism Today for being “innovative” in the eighties, what they meant was that the magazine was making the Tories look good. Conservatives became fond of pointing out that “even Marxism Today” had recognised the importance of some aspect of government philosophy, or had treated a Tory MP as a serious interview subject. Such endorsements from the “thinking left” helped the Tories to present their crude capitalist policies as creative thinking, and to pass off somebody like Edwina Currie as a significant figure with deep things to say.*

The leading lights of the Communist Party of Great Britain and *Marxism Today* have spent their political lives exposing Marxism to ridicule and stamping on revolutionary politics. Now their final act is to declare that Marxism has become ridiculous and revolution impossible, as if none of this ever had anything to do with them. Stalinism may be dead; but the Stalinist school of falsification appears set to live on in the rump Democratic Left.

The right-wing media had a bit of fun with the end of the CPGB, scoffing about the death of communism and ‘Marxism Yesterday’. But the spokespersons of British capitalism will come to miss the Communist Party. It has done them sterling service as part of a domesticated left that could be relied upon to discredit anti-capitalism and endorse moderation.

The collapse of Stalinism internationally has already confronted the rulers of the Western world with more new problems than solutions. And even though Stalinism is always relatively weak here, the British establishment has lost a force for stability in the CPGB. For that same reason, we do not mourn the passing of the Communist Party and its publications.

The CPGB should certainly be buried as a corpse that belongs to the past. But Marxism is a living force for the present. Whatever these people may claim, our Marxism has never had anything to do with repeating dry dogma from the nineteenth century. It is the most modern of theories, since it seeks to create a better future for humanity, free from the restrictions of capitalist society. It is the theory of social revolution.

‘Who will now take up the baton of Marxism Today?’ some media commentators have asked. We can promise them one thing: it will not be *Living Marxism*. Our magazine exists to provide a sorely-needed critique of contemporary capitalism, not to rehash the tired ideas of the right. Our aim is not merely to interpret the world, but to change it.

Those seeking a simple illustration of the difference between us and them need look no further than the last page of the last issue of *Marxism Today*, where they will find a celebrity questionnaire of the sort now carried by various newspapers. This time the questions have been answered by ‘Karl Marx’, a philosopher, as the editors imagine he would be today (ie, a wally like them).

Asked ‘Who do you most respect?’, this imaginary Marx answers ‘Martin Jacques’, whom he apparently admires for interviewing Tory politicians. The real Karl Marx, a revolutionary rather than a philosopher, was once given a similar questionnaire by his daughters. It asked him who his hero was. Marx replied that it was Spartacus, whom he admired for leading a revolt of slaves against the Roman empire.
**The Aids debate**

In 'The truth about the Aids panic' (December) Tessa Myers could have gone even further in attacking the myth that HIV/AIDS is spreading like wildfire among heterosexuals in the UK. For example, in 1980 in Scotland, a survey of 98 per cent of newborn babies produced some stunning results. In Glasgow, 16,000 were tested and none were found to be HIV positive. So much for the idea that women are contracting HIV through heterosexual intercourse and passing it on to their children.

The article could also have contrasted the widespread but fraudulent confusion of Aids figures from the UK and the third world. There is undeniably an Aids epidemic of tragic proportions among heterosexuals in Africa. But what can that tell us about the likely spread in Britain, where conditions are completely different? After all, diarrhoea is one of the major causes of death in the third world. That does not mean that stomach bugs are about to kill thousands in the UK. The important thing now is to get more exposures of the Aids panic with a resolute campaign for gay rights. Don't let the Sun monopolise the case against the scaremongers!

Graham Lewis

The truth about the Aids panic's cries from misleading statements to lies. It is irresponsible to lead people to believe that Aids is not a serious threat to anyone, whatever their sexuality. The World Health Organisation, a body independent of the UK Conservative government, predicts that up to 40m people worldwide will be HIV positive by the end of this decade. That number will continue to grow and people will continue dying, unless a cure is found. It is crucial to score a cheap political point to say otherwise.

Nobody has used the Aids tragedy to promote a return to traditional family values. At least five years before the government launched its first Aids awareness campaign, support groups throughout the country were organising their own. AIDS and support groups are not agents of the Conservative Party: they have a genuine aim to save lives. There is no moralising about marriage, monogamy or a return to a traditional lifestyle.

Nor has the Conservative government manipulated free-minded journalists, advertising agencies and Aids charities into a moral crusade. A cynical conspiracy does not exist. It may be true that some Conservative ministers long for a return to traditional lifestyles, but that is not their main aim. They appreciate the danger Aids poses to all of us, including readers of Living Marxism. Don't lie of ignorance.

Daniel Johnson

**Pavarotti, Presley and karaoke**

In his article on Luciano Pavarotti ('Don't blame Big Lucy', November), Mark Reilly makes a number of erroneous assertions about the decline of opera and the operatic singing tradition.

Firstly, it was the coming of rock n' roll in the 1950s, not (as Mr Reilly claims) 'the homogenising effect of the market', which has contributed most to the declining number of great opera singers since that time. For any teenager born after 1950 who was spunky enough to want to perform music in front of an audience, Elvis Presley and his innumerable followers were much more potent role models than any operatic singer could ever be.

Secondly, even in 'boring old England' young people sing today as much as they did in the past. The current popularity of karaoke bars is evidence enough! (Mr Reilly presumably doesn't frequent such places. Has he never stood on the terraces at a football match? Or seen a live band in a pub?) In an age when many of teenagers with a few hundred quid and a few months' practice can put a garage band together and get gigs, the years of hard effort to develop a proper singing voice must seem like so much time down the drain.

Thirdly, Mr Reilly's assertion that Britain has produced 'next to nothing' in opera is absolute garbage. It really is embarrassing to see such a display of blase ignorance in a serious Marxist journal. For the record, the operas of Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippell and Harrison Birtwistle are recognised as masterpieces — modern masterpieces too, not just sterile reincarnations of the nineteenth century Italian tradition whose passing Mr Reilly mourns. The works of these and other postwar/contemporary composers are testimony to the continued vitality of opera composition as a modern art form.

Jimmy Miller

**Bernard Manning: no laughing matter**

So Bernard Manning can tell a joke! (Toby Banks, 'True Blue', December). He's been a comic for 30 years. I should think he would be able to.

He may not be the author, but he is the mouthpiece for the most backward ideological trends amongst the white working class. Trends which, if they had been examined, would have made an interesting article. You chose instead to present him in his own terms, such is your high-minded contempt for popular culture as a battleground for ideas.

Lenin said 'ideas become a material force when taken up by the masses'. Even reactionary ideas, as Toby Banks would have discovered to his painful cost, if he had stood outside Manning's club and tried to sell the magazine to his audience after Manning had spent an hour inflaming his bigotry. 'Toby Banks' attitude to Manning's racism, homophobia and sexism is deplorable. I am shocked that a magazine like Living Marxism chose to print this rubbish. It is an attitude that sits uneasily with Living Marxism's links with Workers Against Racism and its recently-published anti-racist charter, that I have agreed to circulate amongst alternative comedians.

Can I suggest someone forces Toby Banks to read the WAR charter? Then ask him if he still finds Bernard Manning funny.

Bob Boyle

**What is the point of Toby Banks?**

This is a question I have been asking myself each time I read one of his rambling, subjective and apolitical contributions. Then your December issue goes and gives me a double dose. His advocacy of Bernard Manning is like the reprieve of the infantile leftist posturing of the late, lamented 'Personal Column', which argued the case for such 'working class' cultural icons as the Sun and boxing.

If this type of posturing is supposed to demonstrate how reckless of convention these comrades are, how 'hard' they are, and how muscular their communism — then it fails miserably. I'm surprised that the more mature elements in the party haven't pulled up these young twerps for their stupid inverse snobbery. It's only another form of workism after all.

Y Leslie Tadmordon
On the box

Frank Cotrell-Boyce's article 'Cash and Chaos' (December) purports to demystify the ITV franchise auction. I think he does the opposite. First, he says the TV companies were bidding for the 'freedom' to make the programmes they want without having to sell their ideas to someone else. Second, he says the motivation behind the government's broadcasting legislation was 'I hate those bastards... Unleash the market forces, and points to documentaries like Death on the Rock, which angered the government.

For the makers of TV programmes, the issue is not freedom but, in the words of Lord Thomson, 'a licence to print money'. The programmes are little more than a means to make a profit, primarily by selling audiences to advertisers.

For the government, the deregulation of broadcasting is part of the wider attempt to make a political virtue of unleashing the market forces on anything from water supplies to prisons. The farcical character of the franchise auction is testimony to the government's problems in making such exercises look like a credible economic strategy.

Frank Cotrell-Boyce is correct to point to the 'blandness' effect that intensifies commercial pressures are likely to have on programmes. However, perhaps more significant is the way that recent broadcasting legislation has tightened up control over programme material—witness the 'due impartiality' clause, and new watchdogs like ITC and BSC.

Harsher market imperatives and tighter legal constraints contribute to the general climate of censorship and conformity. Obviously things are more difficult for journalists wanting to make critical and investigative programmes. But I remain dubious about Cotrell-Boyce's suggestion that we should call for a debate on the kind of TV we want. This argument smacks of the cultural politics of some on the left who look to Channel 4 to change the world, rather than taking the responsibility on themselves.

Phil Hammond London

War—what is it good for?

Gemma Forrest's article on the reshaping of the US war machine was a sobering explanation of what was behind the rhetoric of the 'peace dividend' (Behind Bush's missile cuts', November). I am, however, still perplexed about the reasons for the restructuring of Uncle Sam's offence/defence systems. Can it really be, as Forrest suggests, that the economic slump in the US is the driving force behind it? During the recession of the early eighties, the US increased its defence spending.

From Forrest's economic analysis it could be argued that fiscal problems result in reductions in defence spending. In fact, the reverse has recently been the case. Take the Gulf War, where the US elevated the Iraq/Kuwait territorial dispute into a war of international dimensions. This could have been expensive for the US, though the Gulf states, Japan and Germany eventually footed the bill. But regardless of the cost, the war was successful in temporarily bolstering America's ability to play a hegemonic role in the post-Stalinist world order.

Alan Densley London

A nose job?

Can I just give a bit of advice to poor Carrie Bloom (Sex, morality and videotape, December)? So Dr Sianway's video wasn't 'radical' enough for you, Carrie. It 'unfortunately wasn't based on loveless copulation. And yet you were 'intrigued' when you heard that if you put your finger high enough into a vagina, you'd feel something that feels like the tip of your nose—the cavern.

Carrie, love, can I ask you to do something for me? Will you watch the video again and try this one out for yourself? It won't take long.

You know, it's all very well wanting to be a bit 'radical'in your sex life. Perhaps you even see yourself as a bit of a 'swinger', I don't know. But Carrie love, you have to learn to walk before you can run. So will you do that for me, darling, will you?

C Rainer London

Viva diddley-dee!

I write about an article pertaining to 'Irish music' (Hugh Cartier, 'I-Irish bands', December). The author (and I use the term loosely) seems to credit the current wave of interest to the New Musical Express. I also smiled at his comments on Irish bands with one or no Irish members. Does he have the same cynicism about Cajun bands with no blacks or Cajun, blues bands with no blacks or electronic bands with no Germans?

The claim that the Irish have no interest in their music is utter nonsense. There may be people whose lives are geared to financial reward and whose idea of relaxing after a hard day at the office is to listen to 'music' composed entirely on keyboards like the ones they use at work—metronomic and ordered like their daily lives. But there are plenty more interested in the music that is their culture.

I'd rather have 'diddley-dee' than the endless thumping of a synthesised bass drum, the very thought of which gives me a headache. Viva Irish music! And long may it reign.

Andrew Kelly Nottingham

Sanctions: a disastrous strategy

According to Deepak Shah (letters, November), the sports boycott was not designed to bring down apartheid but only to register moral outrage at the South African state. Moves Dube's article 'Don't get caught out' (September) expressly stated that there was no such intention. Shah missed the point of the article. Dube showed that the strategy of calling for sports boycotts or economic sanctions is not only ludicrous but dangerous as well.

The boycott strategy is ludicrous because it demands that Western capitalism removes apartheid from capitalist South Africa—does Shah really think that the West has anything progressive to offer South Africa's black working class? And the strategy is dangerous because it confirms the moral authority of the West and justifies its influence over a future South African settlement between the state and the black working class.

The formal legal face of apartheid has gone. But the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Shah and I all know that the position of the black working class has changed for the worse. Nonetheless, the West is now able to talk about a 'post-apartheid' society and are rewarding De Klerk's efforts by dismantling sanctions.

The point, therefore, is that sanctions and boycotts have done nothing to advance the cause of black workers, they have given the West a role in the future of South Africa. Meanwhile, the job of fighting apartheid and the South African state has gone largely untouched.

Geraldine Harrisristol

We welcome readers' views and criticisms. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to The Editor, Living Marxism, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or fax them on (071) 377 0346
With the media once more full of stories about sectarian revenge killings in Ireland, Vicky Rowan exposes the old lie that the conflict there is a sectarian feud—and points to some new dangers facing the Irish republican movement.

As the body count rose during 1991, reaching 86 by the end of November, the portrayal of the Irish war as a cycle of 'tit-for-tat' murders became ever more frequent in the British media. In particular, two consecutive nights of violence—on 13 and 14 November—were presented as evidence of a new round of sectarian reprisals. The British government subsequently used these events as the justification for sending in 300 more soldiers, recruiting another 440 officers to the paramilitary Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and calling up Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) part-timers for the first time since 1988.

Openly sectarian
On the night of Thursday 14 November, the Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) claimed responsibility for killing three men: Fergus Magee, Desie Rogers and John Lavery, ambushed and shot dead on their way home from work in Lurgan, County Armagh. In an open admission of its sectarianism, the UVF announced that Magee and Rogers had been deliberately targeted as Catholics, but that it regretted mistakenly killing the third man who was a Protestant.

These blatantly sectarian attacks were reprisals for a series of assassinations carried out the previous night by the IRA. In an incident in South Belfast, which the media gloated over because a baby was injured, William Kingsberry and Samuel McArthur were shot dead. One hour later, across town in the Balligillan area of North Belfast, the IRA killed two other men, coal merchants Stephen Lynn and his brother Kenneth.

Although these killings were widely publicised as the random murders of Protestants, the four men who died were in fact members and associates of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), responsible for the deaths of Catholic civilians. The military-style funerals that followed, customary for members of Loyalist paramilitary groups, proved that these were not the victims of random anti-Protestant attacks. Yet both nights of violence were described by the British media in the same way—as motivated by irrational religious hatred and the desire for revenge.

No Protestant-haters
Look beyond the headlines and it becomes clear that the IRA are no sectarian gang of Protestant-haters. The IRA targets the British security forces as a colonial army of occupation in Northern Ireland. Loyalist groups such as the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)—a name used by the legal Ulster Defence Association to claim responsibility for murders—support the British presence and seek to terrorise the Catholic, nationalist community from which the IRA draws its support. The IRA have therefore declared that they regard such Loyalists as legitimate targets; but that their priority remains attacking British military personnel and installations.

A full review of IRA operations in that same month of November would demonstrate that the republican movement tries to practise what it preaches. IRA attacks included the bombing of a military hospital in Belfast, the attempted bombing of a British military band in St Albans, and a mortar attack on a two-car RUC patrol in Fermanagh. The pattern of IRA attacks against such military targets contrasts with the upsurge in anti-Catholic violence by Loyalist paramilitaries, and contradicts the view that the Irish War is an endless round of 'tit-for-tat' sectarian killings.

Divisive union
While the republican movement frequently stresses that its struggle is non-religious and directed at the British state, the issue of religion remains central to Loyalist ideology. The anti-Catholic outpourings of Unionist politicians such as Ian Paisley, and the 'Kill all Taigs' (Catholics) graffiti found in the Protestant Shankill Road area of Belfast, suggest that Loyalism is defined by its hatred towards all Catholics. However, this outlook is not simply the result of warped minds. It is the instinctive response of Loyalists to those who threaten the union between Britain and Northern Ireland—and with it, the privileged status of the Protestants of Ulster.

Through partition in 1921, the British government divided the Irish nation by carving out six north-eastern counties as a province of the 'United Kingdom'. The borders of Northern Ireland were gerrymandered to ensure that Protestants predominated—thereby turning Ireland's religious minority into an artificial majority community within the six counties. And to ensure that this majority remained loyal to the Crown, the British authorities oversaw the creation of a system of social, economic and political privileges for Protestants in...
Northern Ireland.

The privileged relationship between the British state and the Protestants has been the real basis of the communal divide in Northern Ireland ever since. Loyalist sectarianism is a product not of religious fervour but of the sectarian system over which Britain presides. Although the form of the marginal advantages which the Protestants enjoy has changed down the years, the fact remains that Catholics are treated as second class citizens. Both state and private employers discriminate against Catholics. Unemployment in some Catholic areas stands at 70 per cent - twice that of the poorest Protestant communities. British commentators point to the higher proportion of Catholics employed in the public sector these days as proof that discrimination is a thing of the past.

But closer inspection confirms that the Catholics are concentrated in the lowest-grade, worst-paid positions.

The consequence of this sectarian system is that any perceived threat to the union with Britain becomes a threat to the status and very identity of the Protestant community. Because of their links with the wider Irish nation, all of the half million Catholics within Northern Ireland are viewed as such a threat by Loyalists.

The classic British view of the Irish War, from London's Evening Standard.

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THE IRISH

FEATURING THE IRA, INLA, UDA, PFE, UDA, et al.

'tit-for-tat'
This gives Loyalism its bitterly anti-Catholic focus, and explains the longstanding tendency for Protestant paramilitaries to carry out random sectarian killings.

The modern IRA emerged after 1969 as the defender of the Catholic nationalist tradition, against Loyalist terrorism and the British armed forces. The IRA's struggle is inherently anti-sectarian, since it is directed against the sectarian state of Northern Ireland. Certainly, the majority of IRA victims are Protestants. But that is because the local security forces are almost exclusively staffed by Protestants—a strong indication of the partisan nature of the state.

One in 10 Protestant males is a member of either the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the Ulster Defence Regiment. The UDR, like its predecessor, the 'B Specials', has been widely criticised for its record of sectarianism. Much has been made of the plan to merge the regiment with the Royal Irish Rangers, and create a new Royal Irish Regiment as a non-sectarian replacement. However, a British spokesman has recently admitted that the proportion of Catholics in the new regiment will be approximately one per cent.

**Propaganda theme**

The myth of 'tit-for-tat' killings in Northern Ireland, the idea that Loyalists and republicans are engaged in a religious feud, has been a constant theme of British propaganda for more than 20 years. Its aim is to distort the facts: that the British presence in Ireland is responsible for the war, and to present the British authorities as a neutral barrier between the warring factions.

The prominence given to the 'tit-for-tat' explanation of the Irish War today reflects the extent to which the British government has the upper hand.

The British authorities now have renewed confidence to promote themselves as reluctant peace-makers in Ireland. This confidence comes from their success in putting both political and physical pressure on the republican movement. The British authorities have raised the political stakes and undermined the isolation of the republican movement by promoting 'normal' politics through the Brooke talks, which excluded Sinn Fein on the basis of their support for the IRA. The British forces have relentlessly exerted physical pressure by targeting known republicans for harassment and shoot-to-kill operations, designed to deter other nationalists from joining the struggle.

Britain has pursued this dual containment strategy to great effect since signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. The consequence has been to push the republican movement back to the margins of Irish politics, relying on their core support in the nationalist areas of Belfast and Derry and along the Border. The recent upsurge in Loyalist murders, and the pressure that places on the IRA to respond, must be seen in the context of Britain's containment strategy which has left the republican movement more on the defensive than at any time for a decade.

**Target Sinn Fein**

The current high profile of Loyalist groups such as the UFF and UVF comes at a time when many Unionists have lost faith in the mainstream politicians of the Democratic and Official Unionist parties, as they too have been marginalised by the Anglo-Irish talks process. Their present campaign of violence fits into the traditional pattern of Loyalists taking out their frustrations on any convenient Catholic.

There is also, however, a new dimension to the Loyalist campaign: the targeted assassination of activists in the republican movement. In 1991, Loyalist paramilitaries killed four members of Sinn Fein, including two councillors—Eddie Fullerton and Bernard O'Hagan. Such uncharacteristic accuracy suggests more than simple collusion between the British security forces and the Loyalists. This kind of operations involve Loyalist killers venturing into hostile nationalist areas and require a high level of military skill; all of which suggests that, if the assassins are not themselves members of the RUC or UDR, they are directed by the British security forces.

**Laying a trap**

The targeted attacks against Sinn Feiners fit well with Britain's strategy to contain the IRA. The British authorities are also happy to sponsor an upsurge in random terror which can deflect the republican movement from attacking Crown installations and personnel.

These developments present new problems for the republican movement. They raise the possibility that the IRA will be forced to concentrate more effort on responding to Loyalist violence rather than initiating attacks against the British state. In a situation where the IRA is already on the defensive, such a response would give the British government more scope to present its role as that of a neutral arbiter in a communal feud.

Whitehall's current strategy amounts to laying a trap for the republican movement. The potential dangers facing the republican movement can be gauged by looking at the success of a similar strategy pursued by the governing National Party in South Africa.

Around the world president FW De Klerk's reforms have been welcomed as a progressive step away from apartheid. 'Black-on-black' violence and tribalism are seen as the new problems facing South Africa, as open conflict between the black masses and the state has been transformed into inter-communal strife.

The National Party has pursued a twin-track strategy to defuse black resistance in this way: putting political pressure on the ANC to renounce the armed struggle and negotiate a peaceful settlement, and fomenting divisions within the black population by sponsoring chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha movement.

The South African government has now succeeded in selling itself to the world as a force for peace in the 'black-on-black' violence which it encouraged—even Nelson Mandela has appealed to De Klerk to intervene in the civil war. With the anti-apartheid movement on the defensive, feuding between Inkatha and the ANC has assumed a dynamic of its own. As a result, the liberation movement has been disoriented and the South African state has been restored to respectable nation status.

**Britain to blame**

So far, this scenario remains no more than a warning to the republican movement. The IRA have not responded to Britain's attempt at 'divide and rule' by indulging in retaliatory sectarian killings. Indeed, the IRA has publicly condemned sectarian attacks against Protestants carried out by fringe republican elements like the Irish People's Liberation Organisation.

Nevertheless, dangers remain. The British state's success in containing the republican struggle gives greater scope for the myth of 'tit-for-tat' to become accepted as common sense in Ireland, and especially in Britain. The consequence will be to reinforce the British state's image as peace-keeper in Ireland, and to undermine further measures of militarisation like the sending of extra troops at the end of 1991. These developments make it all the more important for opponents of the Irish War to demonstrate that the British authorities are responsible for the bloodshed.
Animal crackers

Books on animals often tell you more about the people who write and buy them than about the animals themselves. Jack Richer's much-pluged 'Your Talking Cat' certainly does.

You can't have missed it. Throughout December, the 'neck no cat country can afford to be without' was advertised twice a week in almost every national daily paper. A
t. Though the ad was a joke. 'Your cat is talking to you,' it reads. 'Listen... your cat is telling you how much she loves you. Watch... the special friend who shares your life has so much to say to you about his feelings and needs... if only you knew what to look for.'

Cats, according to the author, are complex creatures with 'a sophisticated command of communication.' He claims that there are 19 different ways cats say 'meow,' plus 'inarticulate body language.' 'Your Talking Cat' gives answers to such fascinating mysteries of feline behaviour' as these:

Why your cat rubs you to show affection... and how best to show her yours.

Why your cat circles in your lap before settling down.

Why your cat always seems to come over when you're reading or doing paperwork.

Why your cat doesn't like to be stared at.'

Jack even provides a 'Cat Talk' illustrated chart of feline facial expressions and tail positions.

The book, 84 pages of study-filled prose, semi-literate nonsense, tells you that Jack Richer is either a local icon or a very shrewd businessman.

The distributor claims it's selling faster than they can restock. I believe them—I had to wait three weeks for my copy—and at $3.99 a throw it's making somebody a lot of money.

You might imagine that the kind of people who buy this rubbish are lonely souls, who, having nobody to care about in love, devote their attention to their little Tabbie, Tuffy, or Felix. You can understand why it happens. If you've been neglected by people, animals seem pretty dependable. Providing you keep them well-fed and comfortable they'll stick around. They don't nag, criticise or challenge you. But neither do they love you. A cat sits on your lap because your lap's warm and soft. It nuzzles against your leg because it does that you provide a positive response—a rub behind the ears, a pat on the head. Animals are driven by instinct. There are no loving, no scheming or manipulating thoughts in their heads just learned responses.

Cats cannot show love or affection because they cannot feel love or affection. Emotions are particular to humanity. They are a quality of feeling that our species has developed at a particular stage of its biological evolution and cultural development. It's a curious phenomenon that, having developed the human capacity for sentiment, some of us feel the need to project it onto other parts of the world in which we live. We interpret the actions of animals, and project 'human motivation' on to them.

If it were just the friendly and lonely who looked at animals in this way I could understand it, but everybody seems to be at it. Has anyone ever constructed a study to determine whether animals call each other by name?, asks one of those people who write to the Guardian's 'Question and Answer' column. It seems reasonable to suppose that they, no less than ourselves, need to be able to get one another's attention on an individual basis. But if you think about it, why is this a reasonable supposition? Do animals want to discuss philosophy with each other, sort out their domestic arrangements for the weekend, perhaps make an arrangement to meet for a drink under the oak tree on Friday night?

On primetime TV, David Attenborough recently remained perfectly straight-faced as he described how sea lions 'rape', how some birds 'marry for life' and how chimpanzees are 'proof positive' of human nature.

I may not be fashionable, but I admit I'm a 'scientific'. I believe that human nature is the same and that the human animal is the rest of the animal kingdom. I believe that even when our thoughts and emotions are at their basest, they are more developed than those of more beasts. I resent the David Attenboroughs of this world because I think they devalue human emotion and human action. Even the most debased and brutal rapist is a hundred times more sophisticated than the hormone-driven instinc of a bull sealen.

When people project human characteristics on to animals, they are doing what children do at play. Children attribute human qualities to all kinds of inanimate objects. A doll or teddy bear becomes a confidant who understands them better than their own mother or father. To a child, the most inanimate objects assume personalities.

A friend's daughter refuses to throw away her old chipped egg-cup, in case she hurt its feelings. A neighbour's son once wrapped the dead, discarded Christmas tree in a blanket to save it from freezing on a January night. When I was three, I used to cry when I saw broken windows; I thought the houses had been injured. I grew out of it.

I'm sorry, Jack. Trying to establish a meaningful conversation with your cat is about as sensible as trying to communicate with your spiderplant on your table. People are people, beasts are beasts. It worries me that so many people seem to find it hard to see the difference.
Immigration controls cause racism

The government's Asylum Bill is the cutting edge of the new racism in Britain. Ironically, it is being presented as a measure that will prevent racism—by keeping immigrants out. Kirsten Cale exposes the racist logic behind the Tory legislation
More than 1500 marched past Downing Street, the houses of parliament and the home office demanding an end to all Immigration controls, on a demonstration organised by Workers Against Racism in November.

Immigration controls deny? and the inherently racist character of the laws becomes clear. Last year's refugee figures for Britain reinforce the point - almost all European asylum-seekers were allowed to settle in this country, but 90 per cent of black African refugees were turned away.

Immigration controls are not only racist because they restrict access to third world people. They are also used to police black communities within Britain, and play a central role in the creation of a racist climate at home.

The immigration laws provide the legal framework for racial oppression in this country. They brand black people as second class citizens before they have even set foot on British soil. The circumstances in which third world people are brought into the country are a constant reminder that immigrants are here on sufferance, not as a matter of right. That blacks are repeatedly forced to prove their 'legality' in hospitals, police cells and dock offices further reinforces the view that they have a different status than whites in British society.

The conventional view is that immigrants cause racism in Britain. For example, Baker argued that the Asylum Bill was necessary because an unrestricted flow of refugees would promote the growth of fascism. By this mendacious argument, the authorities absolve themselves from responsibility for racism, while presenting an apparently sympathetic and humanitarian case for tighter restrictions on immigration. But immigrants don't create racism.

Rather, immigration controls institutionalise racism within British society.

British is best

Immigrants cannot carry racial prejudice into Britain, like duty-free cigarettes. The hostility to foreigners must already be here, ready to be activated by each renewed focus on immigration. The notion that 'British is best' and that foreigners are inferior exercises a pervasive influence over politics and society in this country. And immigration controls play an important part in codifying this day-to-day chauvinism by stamping blacks as second class. These underlying chauvinist sentiments are brought to the surface every time immigration is turned into a major political issue.

The close connection between immigration controls and racism in Britain has been clearly established over the past 30 years. On several occasions since the fifties, the Conservative Party has orchestrated immigration scares and imposed tighter restrictions in an attempt to...
There are no shortages of resources in Britain—just an irrational economic system that won't put those resources to use unless it makes a profit.
resources to fulfil our most basic needs. The scapegoating of immigrants is a crude attempt to disguise the responsibility of the economic system for the problems of society.

Race and nation

The debate around the Asylum Bill indicates that such racist arguments are now assuming a new prominence in British politics. Back in 1976, Margaret Thatcher made her infamous 'swamp' speech to mobilise the racist vote. In 1991, her successor is using the issue of asylum in a bid to activate support in the run-up to the general election. The Conservatives are unlikely to run a campaign with the slogan 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour', as their candidate did in Smethwick in 1964. But the signs all point towards a more active promotion of the politics of race and nation in the months ahead.

'There is nobody in British politics who denounces racism more than John Major', claimed a senior Tory MP in the Asylum Bill debate, according to the Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1991. But Major's government has launched a racist bill designed to criminalise refugees and create an increasingly chauvinist climate within Britain. Party leaders like Major and Baker can useudge-nudge code words like 'bogus asylum-seekers' and 'economic refugees' to pursue their race war, safe in the knowledge that backbenchers like Ian Lawrence will make things clear.

'Scrongers and cheats'

During the parliamentary debate in which Baker claimed that the Asylum Bill was 'in no way racist', Tory MP David Evans made an open appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment: 'Why should this country be the world's dumping ground for asylum-seekers?' (Daily Telegraph, 14 November 1991) While the frontbench racists promote their Asylum Bill as a sensible and 'coloured' piece of legislation, the backbench bigots will spell out the bill's message that asylum-seekers are scroungers and cheats.

The Asylum Bill looks like being the initial focus for a new racist offensive. The first victims of the more openly chauvinist climate will be immigrants and black communities within Britain. But the rise of reactionary ideas about race to the top of the political agenda must be a matter of pressing concern to us all. Campaigning against the Asylum Bill is a first step in challenging the newly respectable racism of the nineties.
Nazis are not the problem

Anti-racists in Britain are warning of the threat of resurgent Nazism in Germany. Angela Hughes thinks that the focus on German fascism is a dangerous diversion from confronting home-grown British racism.

All of a sudden our television screens are full of images of goose-stepping, swastika-wearing neo-Nazis. In the wake of a spate of attacks on immigrants and refugees in Germany, in Britain the idea is gaining ground that fascism is once again on the rise in the former Third Reich.

Both right and left in British politics emphasise the threat of the new Nazis. Top Tories such as Norman Tebbit and Nigel Lawson have warned of the growth of European fascism, especially in Germany. Left-wing and anti-racist groups have denounced the activities of the German far right and organised pickets of the German embassy in London.

In ascribing the resurgence of racism in Germany to the activities of Nazis, British anti-racists are focusing on the wrong problem. It is true that neo-Nazi groups in Germany have been seriously overestimated.

Some estimates claim that there are 40,000 followers of the fascist parties in Germany. But they were conspicuous by their absence on 9 November 1991, when the neo-Nazis held marches to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1938 Kristallnacht (Night of Shattering Glass) pogrom against the Jews and the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall. A mass demonstration of strength was predicted; only a few hundred fascists turned up on the day.

German neo-Nazi leaders had bragged of unleashing violence on the scale of Kristallnacht, when mobs of fascists destroyed Jewish shops and synagogues and murdered or deported 20,000 Jews. In the event, even the scattered fragments of the German left managed to mobilise far larger numbers for their counter-demonstrations against racism.

The influence of the fascist parties has also been grossly exaggerated. Despite their involvement in attacks on foreigners, they are not responsible for creating the racist atmosphere which has encouraged ordinary people to regard immigrants as a threat to the German way of life.

The racist backlash in Germany is the result of a systematic campaign by the government which targets immigrants as a problem. For sometime, the authorities have been complaining loudly about refugees flooding into Germany at the rate of 30,000 a month. There has been a heated debate about the need to tighten up Germany's liberal asylum laws in order to make it harder for foreigners to enter the country.

Until recently, the debate centred on the liberal post-Nazi constitution, which stipulates that those seeking asylum should be granted refuge in Germany. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's ruling Christian Democrats (CDU) demanded that the constitution be changed in order to limit the number of asylum-seekers. In November, however, the CDU suddenly dropped its demand for constitutional change, suggesting that the number of asylum applicants could be reduced under existing laws and new EC provisions.

Respectable racists

This sudden switch by the CDU suggested that its vigorous campaign for constitutional change had been little more than a political device for creating an anti-immigrant climate. Its success in doing so rendered a change in the constitution superfluous. In addition, the government has also been successful in creating a greater sense of German national identity through a discussion about who is and who isn't a German.
The British left picket the German embassy: a diversion from fighting racism here.

The government began a debate about how to impose a stricter definition of who is a German in order to disqualify the many thousands of potential refugees from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union who are claiming German ancestry to gain entry to the country. The impact of these discussions has been to create a greater sense of German nationalism in a country whose Nazi past has long acted as a barrier to cohering an aggressive national identity.

The narrow focus in Britain on the violence of a minority of German fascists obscures the far more important influence of the respectable racists in the German establishment. Immigration is being used as a political football by mainstream parties for their own cynical purposes. A new racist consensus which legitimises attacks on foreigners is the result.

They're all at it

In this sense, Germany has a lot in common with Britain. Here too the government party is manipulating the immigration issue for its own political advantage. The Tories are currently pushing through parliament the Asylum Bill, which will make it well-nigh impossible for refugees to enter the country.

The opposition parties might disagree about the details of the Tory legislation. But they all agree that there should be strict limits on the numbers of immigrants allowed into the country. The idea that foreigners are a drain on scarce resources and a source of competition for jobs, housing and other amenities is upheld by all political parties.

As in Germany, the political focus on immigration in Britain is creating a climate of hostility towards foreigners and encouraging attacks on immigrants. There is nothing exceptional about the politicisation of the race issue in Germany. In fact, this trend is common to all European countries, where immigration is now at the top of the political agenda.

British is best?

The British focus on the revival of fascism in Germany is a serious problem. It diverts attention from the racist consensus among political parties in this country, and obscures the need to challenge racism at home. It also strengthens the idea that Britain is more civilised than its Continental neighbours by suggesting that racism and fascism are foreign diseases.

These sort of 'British is best' sentiments are extremely dangerous. They help to strengthen further the nationalist consensus which dominates British society. Such popular nationalism cannot be used to promote anti-racism. Far from it: the notion of British superiority provides the political basis for chauvinist hostility towards foreigners in this country.

Anti-racists in Britain who focus on the threat of fascism in Germany are not only avoiding the issue at home. By endorsing a pro-British and anti-German perspective, they are also conceding crucial ground to the nationalist right over here. As recent statements from Tories like Lawson and Tebbit show, there is no contradiction between protesting against German fascism and supporting the government's anti-immigrant measures in Britain.

Anti-German chauvinism has a long pedigree as a key component of British nationalism. British popular culture survives on a diet of anti-German humour. A week does not pass without the media taking a swipe at the Germans and what they did in the war. The British left has often been happy to endorse the anti-German prejudices promoted by the establishment around the Second World War. It has failed to see that such narrow anti-fascism is really just a radical version of British chauvinism.

Perverse

The left's natural inclination to take sides with Britain against Germany now manifests itself in a campaign against fascism in Europe. At a time when the British government is launching a new crackdown on refugees and immigrants through its Asylum Bill, the left's anti-German initiatives are perverse.

Anti-racists in Britain who have demonstrated outside the German embassy would be far better employed building a campaign against the new anti-immigrant legislation over here, and organizing pickets of the home office. It is time the British left woke up to the fact that British racism is just as pernicious as the German variety— and began to do something about it.

Thanks to Natalia Heym.
‘Anyone on Broadwater Farm is guilty’

The convictions of the three men jailed for killing PC Keith Blakelock on Broadwater Farm have finally been quashed. But, says Kenan Malik, the authorities which set up the Tottenham Three in the first place have been able to turn the debate about the case around and put black people in the frame once more.

convicted of murdering PC Keith Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm riot of October 1985. In November, the police were finally forced to admit that they had made up the evidence against the three men. The clearing of the Tottenham Three is long overdue (though it should be remembered that, while Braithwaite and Ragip are now free, Silcott is still in prison as a result of another disputed murder conviction).

The exposure of the Tottenham Three frame-up has further undermined public confidence in the police. Following the collapse of the cases against the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Maguire Seven, and the disbanding of the West Midlands serious crimes squad, this latest exposure of police corruption has strengthened the view that the police force is an incompetent bunch of liars and thugs. The undermining of the myth of police integrity creates potentially explosive problems for the authorities. 'It will be a catastrophe for the country,' noted Daily Telegraph deputy editor Charles Moore, 'if people come to see the police as a very powerful, unfriendly vested interest and it will undercut the Tory standing on law and order' (29 November 1991).

Yet while the litany of police wrongdoing has certainly entrenched public cynicism about the force, it has so far had no practical repercussions. In the absence of any active opposition movement mounting a wider challenge to the authorities, police corruption has simply come to be accepted as an unpleasant fact of life. In this passive political climate, the press and politicians have enjoyed considerable scope to turn the arguments about the Tottenham Three around, and to focus attention back on to their favourable law and order stands: black criminality.

The debate which followed the admission that the three had been framed was less about the responsibility of the authorities for the frame-up than about the supposed 'conspiracy of silence' on Broadwater Farm which was said to have protected the real killers. When PC Blakelock’s widow declared, after the case collapsed, that everybody who was present on the estate when her husband died was guilty, she set the tone for the media coverage.

Once more, the aim has been to scapegoat Broadwater Farm.

PC Keith Blakelock was butchered by a mob,' argued an editorial in the Daily Telegraph. 'If Silcott did not lead that murderous gang, who did?' It concluded that 'justice hasn't been done' with the release of the Tottenham Three: 'It won't be until the guilty have been punished.' (26 November 1991) The Independent demanded that 'The people who have been so vociferous in their defence of Mr Silcott and those found guilty alongside him...should now devote similar efforts in aiding the authorities in seeking the killers.' (28 November 1991).

'You should be grateful that we have let you out,' was the message from the press to the Tottenham Three. 'But people like you are guilty and we demand that you help us stick some more behind bars.'

Even prominent supporters of the campaign to release the Tottenham Three lent substance to such arguments. On the day that Silcott’s conviction was quashed, Labour’s Tottenham MP, Bernie Grant, appeared on television and spent far more time appealing to Broadwater Farm residents to shop the killers than did criticizing the police. Such defensiveness among anti-racists helped the authorities to wriggle off the hook, and to blame the residents of Broadwater Farm for both the violence on the Farm and for the incarceration of the Tottenham Three.

The real blame for both the violence on the night of the riot and for the framing of the Tottenham Three...
after the tottenham three

The case has collapsed but the criminalisation of a community continues

Three lies with the police, the courts and the media who conspired to criminalise a whole generation of black youth.

The Broadwater Farm riot of October 1985 followed the death of Cynthia Jarrett, a black mother of 10 who was found dead during a police raid on her flat. It was the last straw for a community which had suffered sustained police harassment. When riot police invaded the estate to pre-empt a response to her death, Broadwater Farm exploded in anger and Britain witnessed the fiercest night of street fighting in recent times. In the course of the fighting, PC Blacklock was killed (for more details on the events leading to the riot see K Thompson, Under Siege, 1988).

Occupying army

The riot unleashed a torrent of racist fury directed at Broadwater Farm. The police organised an onslaught against the estate to exact revenge for Blacklock’s death. An independent inquiry later discovered that in the two months following the riot there was never an occasion when there was less than a thousand police on the Farm. In the week following the riot there were 9165 police officers on the estate, including armed teams and surveillance helicopters. It is an exaggeration to say that the police occupied Broadwater Farm like an invading army. Then they set out to put the black community in the frame.

In the six months following the riot, police raided 271 flats—one third of all those on the estate. Not three, but 369 people were arrested—10 of all residents on the Farm. Three-quarters of these were black. Virtually every black male between the ages of 15 and 25 was picked up. Most of those arrested were held in isolation and denied access to solicitors. Many were bailed, beaten and threatened until they "confessed".

White youths were arrested, then told they could go free if they would cooperate with the police in getting the "niggers". Jason Hill, a white 13-year-old at the time, was pressured into confessing to murder and naming Blacklock as another killer. "I would have confessed to anything", said Hill recently, recounting the experience of being interrogated. "I would even have confessed to being the Yorkshire Ripper."

The problem goes much further than the actions of a bent copper tampering with notes. The entire system of British justice criminalised Broadwater Farm, convicted Blacklock and Blackwate of being black, and threw in lapses of Turkish-Cypriot descent, for good measure.

Trial by tabloid

The logic of this argument is that trials should be dispensed with altogether and the entire black community should be interned, since "anyone is guilty".

The police have already begun knocking doors on the Farm. During the last 12 months the police have arrested 369 people—10 of all residents on the Farm. Three-quarters of these were black. Virtually every black male between the ages of 15 and 25 was picked up. Most of those arrested were held in isolation and denied access to solicitors. Many were bailed, beaten and threatened until they "confessed".

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And finally among the list of guilty parties we come to the media. Today the papers behave as if they knew the Tottenham Three were innocent all along. Five years ago, however, at the time of the trial, the press orchestrated a huge campaign of vilification and racist abuse, targeting Broadwater Farm and Winston Blacklock in particular.

Bloodthirsty reports of the violence were printed alongside statements such as: "The Beast of Tottenham! He is a monster!"

Blacklock had a case to prove.

Silcott was pardoned across the pages of the tabloid press like a caged animal. He was "The face of evil", the "macabre monster", the "fiend", the "beast", the "Godfather", the "Tyrian" or simply the "savage".

The Star even printed a photograph of the riot supposedly showing "The Beast of Broadwater Farm moving in for the kill... led by an animal called Winston Silcott". Long before Silcott faced the Old Bailey jury, he had been tried and convicted by the press. As William Silcott said, "They have crucified my son."

Still guilty

The framing of the Tottenham Three did not result from a breakdown in the British legal system. Rather, the fit-up was an accurate reflection of what British justice means for the black community in a place like Broadwater Farm: police violence, arbitrary arrest, trial by tabloid and convictions without evidence. Yet, after the overturning of the Blacklock verdict, the idea of institutionalised racism has hardly been mentioned.

The case has collapsed but the criminalisation of a community has continued. The message of the debate surrounding the Tottenham Three has been that the guilty ones were the people of Broadwater Farm. As Blacklock’s widow put it, "anyone on Broadwater Farm who turned out that night was guilty."
Waite for God

Upon Terry Waite's release it was revealed that a select band of British journalists had been allowed access to his cell during his captivity. Thanks to their instant dispatches, we were familiar with the details of Terry's ordeal even before his famous size 14s stepped out at RAF Lyneham. We knew that his Bible never left him and that he drew inspiration from the Book of Common Prayer, which he had memorized by the age of 16. We knew that at night he heard the clacking of gun breeches and the frantic scuttling of all kinds of nocturnal creatures that he never saw but only heard and felt. We knew that he had been 'forced to eat spaghetti' and had waited 'Ok so, oh no!'

A shy gap in the picture could be filled with what was already known about him. He was the son of a policeman, and at the age of four demanded to be taken to church. At 16, he joined the Grenadier Guards but resigned because he was allergic to the uniform. He joined the Church Army instead. When he went to Uganda he wore a bullet-proof vest and carried a copy of Rupert Bear's Birthday: Well. Friends remembered his schoolboy humour and spoke affectionately of how he 'always laughed at his own feeble jokes.' Once these pieces are put together, we have a pretty good idea of the kind of man this gentle giant really was.

My own investigation supports this picture of a typically British hero. For I too was in Beijing, which I have written about in my book on the Chinese - America whose future, as I write, remains uncertain. For obvious reasons I cannot reveal my identity. In the course of our conversation, 'Mr X' told me of how he had been kept in a small cell for almost a year; while various other hostages came and went. When asked about harassment from a plaque inscribed with a motivational verse entitled 'Don't Quit,' seen by an anonymous wall-walker in the Pentagon.

The days crawled by. Then one day, the door opened and into the cramped room stumbled a huge bearded man, clutching a Bible. 'Terry Waite,' he bowed, offering his hand and bringing his head on high, 'I've come to have a prayer meeting!' From that moment, the cell reverbated with the sound of hymns, Bible reading and the roar of Terry laughing. When I suggested that they listen to the radio, Terry grabbed it excitedly and insisted they listen to the BBC World Service. It was hell-recalled X. 'After 14 hours of singing, praying, and the Points on Faith programme, we would finally get our meal. Terry would go into a tantrum when they couldn't get the Alphabetti Spaghetti he was used to. Eventually we would have to force him to eat it. Next he would demand a Rupert Bear story - the guards said he wouldn't sleep until he got one. Then he'd always want 'just one more.' Eventually he'd drift off and I'd sit in the corner while he spread out across the floor. I'd stare at the John Bunyan postcard he stuck over my Starbird calendar, and say to myself: 'My word, Bunyan, you're a lucky fellow. You've got a window and a table, and you've never heard of Terry Waite.'

I quote these bitter words in full not out of any wish to give them the dignity of print but to illustrate the difference between British and other hostages. It is a theme widely discussed, but the Mirror put it best, as it so often does, on its front page: 'My God - You can tell he's British.'

The free-born Briton finds any form of incarceration abhorrent. Yet, like the noble lion, he retains a powerful dignity, refusing to kowtow to his captors. He may stubbornly refuse to cooperate. Then again, he may endure their abuse with a quiet stoicism. Or again, he may take his tormentors by laughing at his troubles. John McCarthy stood with quiet dignity when he agreed to the press on his release. Jackie Macdonald looked brilliantly about leaving his wife, the air hostess, Terry Waite, as the Mirror said, 'came home in triumph like a grand old British bulldog,' and thrilled the nation with the greatest oratory since Churchill.

Had the world's most famous Christian been debased by his ordeal? Not a bit of it. One glance was all. Paul Johnson needed to give the all-clear: 'What strikes one most about Waite, what is in its way most amazing, is that he has emerged so singularly free of the moral slime of captivity, incarceration degrades and demeans the captive, turns good men into sad, the wicked into beasts. Still, Johnson was right to be conciliatory. After all, as the Star's Richard Littlejohn reminded us, 'no one could have blamed him if his immediate reaction on setting foot on British soil had been to buy a gun and start shooting at anything in a tea towel.'

So, as Waite's barrel chest filled with his first breath of sweet English air, we waited for signs of bluster. But we witnessed instead a display of animal grace. Out of strength came sweetness, as the Bible says, The Star shouldered its burden, and the lion's head was bowed down'. His lion-heart sent a thousand years of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing through his veins. The National Grid faced the greatest power surge since the Royal Wedding; as thousands of small businesses fazed their good wishes (on headed notepaper) to the Star.

Then came the moment that we will tell our grandchildren about; the kind of impromptu brilliance that sets us apart from other races. Britain's Soldier of God drew himself up to his full six foot seven inches. Joy Bridger, who saw the John Bunyan card, 'wrest all squiggly inside.' Farmers laid down their ploughs. Factories emptied. School children filed silently into playgrounds. And as if by some magical flick of the switch, the country ground to a halt. Fifty million people joined in Terry as he broke into a chorus of 'My Old Dutch' which echoed down the centuries. The slumbering lion of England awoke and the world took note.

What next for Britain's Tower of Strength? For now he will be shadowed by RAF psychiatrist Wing Commander Gordon Turnbull, who will keep in the next room, decide what he watches on TV, and who he sees. This will help Terry adjust to life in 1990s Britain. The doctor will dress in the same clothes, mimic his movements and speak in the same pitch of voice 'to make him feel more at ease.'

In the longer term, a career in showbiz beckons. By the time you read this, the Hostage Aid single 'My Old Dutch' will be number one and, according to London agent Michael Lomas, there is also a film on the cards, with retired police chief and messenger of God Sir James Anderton a front-runner for the title role. Surely the day cannot be far off when, in the words of the Star, 'Brits around the globe will be able to pay the proud compliment to any deserving companion: He's as British as Terry Waite!' Or Sir Terry, perhaps.

Not bad for a humble CIA man from Blackheath.

Toby Banks

At 16, he joined the Grenadier Guards but resigned because he was allergic to the uniform.
from cpgb to democratic left

Let's not have a party

At a Special Congress in London in November, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) renamed itself 'Democratic Left'. A copy of one delegate's report-back came Andrew Calcutt's way.

"Comrades, or should I say, members of the asymmetric, federalist, open culture of common purpose through a celebration of diversity which is the Democratic Left, we did it!" We grasped the nettle, we transformed ourselves in readiness for New Times. Our new name prefuses our broadband, empowering and enabling project of reaching out with humility and confidence towards facilitative, participative subsidiarity. We are newly equipped to meet the crisis of representative space. Our message is clear.

"First, let me inform you that the executive committee (EC) was shocked by recent revelations concerning a transfer of funds from the Soviet Union to the CPGB. General secretary Nina Temple said she would have never joined the party if she had known about the secret funds. Delegates to the Special Congress shared Nina's feelings of hurt and betrayal. And I take this opportunity to scotch the rumour that the revelations printed in the Sunday Times were a set-up by the EC in an attempt to discredit further the name of the CPGBs and add to the attractions of the name-change. That kind of Stalinist manoeuvre has no place in the Democratic Left. I say that in all frankness and honesty, as someone with a proud record of silent protest against the CPGB's support for the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956."

"Delegates to the Special Congress recognised that the biggest intact error, and a rupture with past and(di)mocratic practices, could take the best of our tradition forward with integrity. That is why we voted for the new name, which showed that 54 per cent of respondents wanted 'communist' to be retained in the title, while Democratic Left was rejected as a first choice by 80 per cent of those voting. A backward element has alleged that many delegates to the Special Congress were 'hand-picked by the EC'. Comrades should understand that it is part of the leadership's function to contact members who have been near a branch for years, take them to meetings to elect delegates, and tell them who to vote for. This is what we mean by extending democracy, and there is no place in the Democratic Left for anyone unable to recognise this.

Lethal caterpillars

'The moths and grums of a minority must not be allowed to detract from the stimulating character of Congress debate. A forward-looking comrade asked: "Does anyone describe our new party? It's like calling a butterfly a flying caterpillar". A Scottish dihard replied: "caterpillars are a much more lethal menace than butterflies which look pretty and represent nothing". We all ignored the delegate who declared: "ultimately the name doesn't matter. I am a writer and I've just finished a short story without naming the leading character". The overwhelming majority agreed with the comrade who declared: "butterflies cross-fertilising flowers is an appropriate image for what we are going to do in the Democratic Left. I have already bonded with the new name". This is the kind of creative Marxism which will help us in networking among invisible social movements."

"I was deeply moved when Nina Temple announced the constitution of the Democratic Left is the declaration of a new political identity. You may ask, "what kind of identity? What does the Democratic Left stand for?" Comrades will keep in mind the need to free ourselves from the Marxist petrolisation. I'm sure the editor of the official journal, now retitled New Times, was correct when he explained that "the paper has really not had a party line and this prefigures what this Left is all about". Another delegate was thinking in the right direction—or rather, plurality of diverse directions recognising the three nations within Britain equally—when he explained how "Teesside CP has been successful over the last decade inasmuch as we were not recognised as a party, although we ended up more isolated than before". His contribution exemplified the exciting future that lies in store for the Democratic Left.

"Congress was not without moments of tension. When chairperson Marian Darke reminded me that many comrades were using Boots special offer tickets which committed them to travelling home on particular trains, an irate visitor to Congress drew attention to the boycott of Roots in protest against the sale of animal-tested products by the tad company. There was also some animosity concerning the distribution to delegates of City of involving with feminist currents and celebrating the rich diversity of people from different cultures. Already we are harvesting the fruits of our pluralistic vision. At the Special Congress, only 12 out of 210 delegates described themselves as while male delegates comprised only just over 75 per cent of the total."

Old dogs

"Some old hands have suggested our party is too long in the tooth to meet the demands of New Times. It is true that 22.4 per cent of delegates were pensioners, and many more members may decide to take up the proposal for joint membership with Age Concern. But let nobody call these comrades stalists. They retain the flexibility which over the past 40 years has allowed them to reject such old-fashioned dogmas as working-class revolution, the leading role of the party and much more. Indeed, the overwhelming vote in favour of the new constitution of the Democratic Left, with only one vote against and two abstentions, shows that old dogs can learn new tricks, especially when the EC shows them how.

"The Democratic Left is a newborn baby struggling on the proud record of the CPGB. We will create a culture of equity and sustainability, based on empowerment through postal ballots and the dream of Global Wages, towards diverse alliances which are democratic, humane and green. No one must repeat the scandalous remark made by one member, that "this is just a bad dream". NB: all comrades should try to attend the first of our open forums entitled 'Hegemony and Easter'!"

Well we can't sing the internationale, can we?
The chattering class struggle

A thousand people went to the Charter 88/Independent conference, 'Towards a Written Constitution', in Manchester in November. Afterwards, one of them spoke to Andrew Calcutt.

My dear, it was such an inspiring weekend. My first workshop was about capitalism and democracy, with a loud red-faced man saying how democratic the market is, and a delicate-looking chap with flowing white hair saying that if we want democracy we should challenge capitalism, although we need a free market for things like book-publishing. A slightly confused person mentioned Aristotle and the exchange of collective piles of fruit. A lady at the back said how glad she was that Victorian industrialists retired to the country and didn't carry on with their ghastly factories. She thought Lord Salisbury and the landed chaps had the kind of alternative values we need. I couldn't agree more. We would all be better off with fewer cars, more horses, and less of baskets of fruit for the sick. Finally the white-haired man, rather sweet really, said that advertising persuade us to want things we maybe don't want, just as slaves were conditioned not to want freedom. How true! We have far too many clothes, far too much junk food. Our real needs are clean streets and clean air.

We were promised a speech from the man who used to edit the Marxist Quagmire that's closing down, but he didn't appear. I did enjoy the workshop which was moderated—a more interesting word than 'chairing', don't you think?—by Will Hutton, the Guardian's economics editor. He was very concerned about industrial clusters. Then there was Geoff Mulgan, a sort of tinted-in-Soho young man who advises the Labour Party. He wanted to transform the company from an institution whose members are stockholders to an institution whose members work for it and invest in their lives in it. An embittered young man muttered something about too many dead miners and construction workers having invested their lives in the company already. Cynicism of that kind is quite uncalled for I feel.

That's fighting talk where I come from.

Analytically retentive borrowing

Another speaker was a delightful poppet called Hilary Wainwright, who reminded me of the little one in The Two Ronnies, but said some very serious things. I was so pleased when she said 'human enlightenment came from the experience of the war and realisation of everyone's contribution'. I've always thought that the Second World War was one of the most obvious bits of British history. It would be so good if we could go back to that sense of community. I'm afraid I couldn't quite follow dear Hilary when she talked about regional banks and analytically retentive borrowing—she said herself she was going on too long. If I see her again I must ask where she bought her lovely rainbow wastecloth.

Those trade union chaps were thankfully thin on the ground. At Labour conferences, they always struck me as rather forbidding. Someone said once we are all citizens we will be able to trust each other, and it seemed to me everyone present was already a citizen one could trust. One could feel at ease at the Charter 88 conference, without worrying, so to speak, about what was happening to the silver teaspoons.

Adolescent screaming

At luncheon time a coach party drove into Manchester for a Vigil for Democracy. Standing around in Albert Square for half an hour, really. An over-enthusiastic Green person tried to make us chant 'What do we want—democracy? When do we want it—now?' Most of us, I feel, regard shouting and screaming as rather adolescent.

The climax of the conference was the plenary session on Saturday afternoon. The moderator was Geoffrey Robertson QC. I found him slightly unctionous—I couldn't help thinking he was a mixture of Nigel Lawson and that awful Bob Monkhouse. Whenever he appears on television I wonder whether the lowest form of human life is a Tory voter from a humble background. Are such people still naturally surprised by things? Despite his oily manner, Mr Robertson did say some quite poetic things. He said our British constitution would be the 'flesh made word' (pace St John the Divine), and should be 'inspiring, capable of being learned by people in all generations of schoolchildren's Stirring stuff.

Ordinary professionals

Whoops! I forgot to say that the point of Saturday afternoon was to hear from four people who have drafted model constitutions. First was John MacDonald QC, who did the Liberal Democrats' We, The People. Why are we here instead of trying to get into Twickenham? he began. 'We are angry because we have been so badly governed.' Mr MacDonald was very keen on equal access before the courts. As he pointed out, 'if you are a multinational or you are on supplementary benefit, you may not be able to get to Twickenham'.

He said that the Liberal Democrats' document is a fair guide to the thoughts of Labour's constitutionalists.

'Next speaker was the legal writer was Frank Vinter, a rather stern man from the Thatcher's Economic Affairs office. He said we should be more like the Americans. What a joke! At least Tony Benn doesn't go for that sort of thing. Dear Tony, still wearing the same cardigan and smoking the same pipe. He spoke with enthusiasm about getting the culture of obdurate servitude... Didn't care for his ideas about 'all social advances coming from the bottom', but I still can't help admiring him. I always think of him as a sort of mirror image of Sir Keith Joseph, who was certainly someone just as Tony Benn is wildly left but both men are indefatigable British democrats.

English russet apples

Then the chair of Charter 88 read out the Manchester Declaration: 'We the undersigned, gathered here in Manchester, are convinced of the urgent need to apply British traditions of liberty and tolerance to our own system of government. Having considered, and how strange it is that the nation which led so many peoples into the realm of democracy has denied that privilege to its own people. Unfortunately, the declaration was rather too long when dear Anthony Barnett (I always think of him as our Woody Allen) got to the end. there was a bit of an anti-climax. More silence and shuffling of feet than rapturous applause. One woman even said she found it impossible to get excited about the idea! And that odiously cynical young man asked what protection America's Bill of Rights had afforded black sharecroppers.

Four of us travelled back on the train together. We shared some quite Russet apples, and talked about lawyers we know. I said I thought most judges try hard really—they say those awful things about how the Birmingham Six would be better off hanged, it's just like rugby players letting off steam after a hard game. One of those football persons asked if we would mind making less noise because he was trying to sleep. Really! And they call this a free country.'
Two years after the end of the Cold War, a new East-West frontier is being drawn across Europe. The conflict in Yugoslavia has become the focus of a major propaganda offensive by the European right, which has elevated it into an historic battle between Western civilisation and Eastern barbarism.

Joan Phillips looks behind the myths being promoted about the war between Serbia and Croatia, and reveals the right's real agenda.

Twof tribes go to war. For anybody in Britain, following the conflict in Yugoslavia, this is the message being transmitted by the media. The war between Serbia and Croatia is depicted as a tribal bloodbath, the inevitable result of conflicting ethnic identities with deep historical roots. This is just one of the myths being manufactured in the West about the war between Serbia and Croatia. The underlying cause of the conflict has been buried beneath a mountain of propaganda.

Two tribes?
If we are to believe the media version of events, Serbs and Croats are separate races: two ethnic groups, which speak different languages, have separate confessional histories, adhere to different values and embrace conflicting cultures. According to this interpretation, Serbs and Croats are destined by their genes and their histories to hate one another. What we are apparently witnessing is the enactment of an ancient blood feud, a war of revenge between two antithetical peoples.

Roger Boyes, Eastern Europe correspondent for The Times, described the conflict as a war between warrior tribes: 'Fighting is at the heart of the relationship between Croats and their Serb neighbours.'
conflict is rooted in the antagonism between two conflicting ethnic identities is spurious. In fact, what we have in Yugoslavia is the invention of ethnic difference by Croatian nationalists who want to justify their claim to independent nationhood, and by Western commentators who want to justify their support for the Croatian cause.

One language

For example, Croats describe in detail the linguistic superiority of Croatian over Serbian, and insist that they are two languages. In fact, there is only one language: Serbo-Croatian. Serbs and Croats may use different scripts (Latin and Cyrillic), but their spoken language is about as different in dialect as a Yorkshire and a Lancashire accent. In recent years, however, Croats have been busy inventing new words and pronunciations. These days when Serbs travel from Belgrade to Zagreb, they find that they cannot make themselves understood or understand what is being said.

This invention of ethnic difference is a relatively recent phenomenon. Not all that long ago, most people in Yugoslavia would have identified themselves as Yugoslav, not Croatian or Serbian. Although they didn’t belong to the same state until the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918, most Serbs and Croats have regarded themselves as having a common language and culture since the Vienna Agreement of 1650. The present conflict has nothing to do with age-old ethnic enmities. As we shall see, it is very much a consequence of contemporary realities.

A second myth promoted by the media coverage of the Yugoslav conflict is the idea that this is a battle between democracy and communism. On one side stands Croatia, democratic, pluralist and influenced by the Western tradition. On the other side stands Serbia, communist, centralist and influenced by the Eastern tradition. Franjo Tudjman, the Croatian president, was given a platform in the European to broadcast this lie: ‘We are not just different peoples but different civilisations. The struggle here is the same that has been going on in Eastern Europe for the past three years: democracy against communism.’ (18 August 1991)

Democracy v dictatorship?

The same lie has been pursued in the editorial pages of the British media. The Independent put the case for Western intervention in the conflict by presenting it as a straight fight between democracy and dictatorship:

‘The Cold War is over. Communism is everywhere discredited. One of its last redoubts is in the Serbian leadership.... Their assault represents a clash between unreconstructed, Brezhnevic communism and democracy. Europe cannot stand by and watch the two most Westernized and prosperous republics being destroyed by an army whose leaders are essentially totalitarian.’ (4 July 1991)

In fact, both figureheads in the current conflict, Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, are old Stalinists playing the nationalist card. Both are former high-ranking members of the Communist Party. Franjo Tudjman fought with Tito’s partisans in the Second World War, graduated to chief of cadre policy in the Yugoslav People’s Army and in 1961 became the country’s youngest general. Slobodan Milosevic joined the Communist Party, rose through its ranks and took over the Serbian League of Communists in 1987.

In terms of their politics, there is little to separate the two. Both have denounced communism, embraced the market and championed nationalism in order to secure a base of popular support in their respective republics. The only difference between them is that Tudjman is boss.
Two images of the barbarian East, past and present: a German propaganda poster depicting bloodthirsty, communist Neanderthals (1919); an independent cartoon showing a Serbian general wreaking death and destruction (1991)

of Croatia, a republic which has a good chance of making it in the new market economy, while Milosevic is the boss of Serbia, a republic which is being left behind in an economic limbo. Tudjman's nationalism is that of the top dog, Milosevic's that of the underdog. Western commentators who suggest that the conflict is between democratic Croatia and communist Serbia are deliberately muddying the waters.

Western coverage of the fighting inside Yugoslavia has reinforced the invented distinction between Croats and Serbs. Each side has accused the other of committing sectarian atrocities, and no doubt both have plenty of blood on their hands. But Western observers have largely turned a blind eye to Serbian provocations, while taking every opportunity to condemn the Serbs. At the start of December, for example, a carefully leaked report from the European Community monitors inside Yugoslavia branded the Serbian-dominated federal army as a cowardly band of terrorists wantonly killing civilians. The attacks on Serbs inside Croatia did not warrant a mention.

Hidden agenda

Why are these myths being churned out for popular consumption? They have certainly not found their way into the newspapers by accident. In fact, they are part of a hidden agenda being pursued by right-wing Western newspapers and politicians. The aim of this hidden agenda is to suggest that the Yugoslav conflict is a Frontier War between Western civilisation and Eastern barbarism.

The very idea of a Frontier War hinges on a distinction of the West and the East as distinct entities. In this propaganda offensive, Croatia stands for all that is good about the West and Serbia represents all that is bad about the East. Croatia is presented as Western Christian, democratic, prosperous and cultured. Serbia is depicted as Eastern Orthodox, communist, impoverished and backward.

The West is good...

In other words, Croatia is a civilizational frontier between West and East. In this definition, it is clear that the West and Christendom are one and the same thing, as are the East and heathendom. It is taken as given that Western Christianity is a good thing, and everything which falls outside it does not meet the standards of civilised society.

In order to sustain the Western right's argument, it is necessary to present a highly selective and revisionist interpretation of Yugoslavia's past. Today, Croatia's identification with Western Christianity is being promoted as a measure of its civilised values and enlightened tradition. Nobody has pointed out that during the Second World War, the Catholic Church in Croatia (backed by the Vatican) played a prominent role in the barbarous genocide against Serbs, Jews and Gypsies under the fascist Ustashe régime of Ante Pavelic.

According to Western propaganda, the current conflict goes back centuries. The battle line being drawn in modern-day Yugoslavia is said to be the same as the old frontier that once divided the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires. Yugoslavia is supposedly splitting along an old axis that separated Christendom and heathendom, Romanist and Byzantine civilisation and barbarism.

This interpretation requires a character assassination of the Serbs. The implication is that the Serbs have never shrugged off the legacy of centuries of rule under the Turkish yoke. They are dismissed as having a Byzantine mentality, whatever that is, while the Croats received the benefits of European civilisation as part of the Hapsburg empire. The weight of Western commentary is increasingly to present the Serbs as Ottoman savages who are importing their Balkan feuds into the heart of Europe.

Barbarian hordes

The demonisation of the Serbs reached its apotheosis in coverage of the siege of Dubrovnik: 'Like the barbarian hordes advancing on Rome', ranted the Daily Telegraph, 'the federal forces have abandoned all restraint, forfeiting any right to be termed more than a lawless mob' (13 November 1991).

Even Prince Charles was roped in to do battle in defence of the Croats. He duly excoriated the Serbs for their disembowelling of the city: 'In the midst of our short lives on this Earth it [Dubrovnik] represents the form of bricks and mortar those intangible values, principles and aspirations which have made Europe
what it is. (Daily Telegraph, 13 November 1991)

The tabloids indulged their penchant for drawing parallels between every dictator under the sun, merging the civil character traits of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to achieve the composite despot 'Slobosaddam'. Meanwhile, the Guardian gave a platform to Oxford history professor and reactionary Norman Stone to demand the restoration of the Nuremberg tribunal and the indictment of Serbian leaders for war crimes (13 November 1991).

A fascist cause
Croatia has become the cause of the European right. Margaret Thatcher has launched a personal crusade on its behalf, touring European capitals to drum up support. She has even gone on record saying that Britain and the West should have armed Croatia and taken a harder line against Serbia. Her stand has struck a chord with reactionaries throughout the continent, who have seized on the civil war as an opportunity to start rewriting the history of the Second World War (see page 29). Fascists and right-wing opportunists from all over Europe are flocking to the side of Croatia, some joining up to fight as mercenaries against the Serbs.

The high-profile propaganda war focused on Yugoslavia has got nothing to do with a concern for the victims of the conflict. The Yugoslav events are being manipulated by the European right for its own wider political ends. By presenting the Yugoslav conflict as a Frontier War, the right is attempting to redefine and reinvigorate the idea of Western civilisation. Its campaign against Serbia is designed to promote the superiority of Western civilisation and values by counterposing them to Eastern barbarism and backwardness. The message is that Serbia represents a threat against which the Western world must defend itself.

Serbia non grata
Spelling this out in the Independent, Peter Jenkins asked whether there was any place for Serbia in the civilised world:

'Europe was supposed to be a war-free zone, a haven of civilisation: it was for the lesser tribes of Africa and Asia to engage in murderous civil wars, for Arabs to show inhumanity to Arabs... When we weep for Europe, are we so sure that Serbs are quite a part of the Europe we have in mind? There were two Europes for many centuries before the Cold War was thought of. Western Christendom, Catholic and baroque, and Eastern Orthodox Europe which, in the Balkans, merged into the Ottoman Empire and the world of Islam. Subconsciously, we may regard the conflict in Yugoslavia as belonging more to the third world than our own.' (12 November 1991)

There we have it. The Serbs are a race apart, on the same level as the 'lesser tribes' of the third world. And, really, we cannot allow such people ever to be part of Europe.

Behind the headlines in this propaganda war, the debate is about who is and who isn't part of the West. Many European commentators say that it is easy to envisage the reincorporation of Croatia into the Christendom of which it was for centuries a part. But they could never consider the Serbs, or for that matter, the Bulgarians and Romanians, to be part of the West.

Just two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the old East-West divide, the West is resurrecting the very old, nineteenth-century idea of the East. A new line is being drawn across Europe, separating East and West along the ancient fault line separating Rome from Byzantium. The East is once again becoming a code word for backwardness and barbarism.

Eastern 'other'
The recreation of an Eastern 'other' is very much a response to the fears and insecurities generated by the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union has robbed the Western powers of their old ideological enemy, the communist threat, against which they could both cohere themselves and mobilise support for the status quo. For the past two years, they have been looking around for a new enemy against which they can bolster their authority, and so make the Western way of life look good at a time when it doesn't have much to offer except recession and austerity.

It is in this context that the right
is erecting a New Frontier to replace the old Iron Curtain, and the idea of the backward East is gaining currency alongside the demonisation of the third world and immigrants. It is likely that this theme will be pursued with ever increasing vigour in relation to Eastern Europe as time goes on. The depiction of Eastern Europe as an unenlightened backwater is becoming a central component of the right's quest to forge a new identity for itself and a new legitimacy for Western capitalism.

**EXCUSES, EXCUSES**

There is an additional rationale behind the idea of the backward East. It provides the perfect excuse for the failure of capitalism to deliver on its promises of prosperity and democracy in Eastern Europe. The perception of the backward East has the advantage of holding Eastern Europe itself responsible for the failure of the market. The social crisis engendered by rising unemployment and high living costs东方 could be blamed on the backwardness of its people and culture.

This is the biggest lie now being spread in the West about the Yugoslav conflict: the idea that the country is being torn apart by primitive people incapable of running their affairs in a civilised fashion. The reality is that Yugoslavia is being torn apart by the impact of the market. Capitalism is to blame for fomenting the divisions which have exploded into civil war between Croatia and Serbia.

The war in Yugoslavia is a direct consequence of the differential impact of the market on the six republics and two provinces that made up the Yugoslav federation. The opening up of Yugoslavia to the world economy over many years has exacerbated the country's uneven regional economic development, and contributed to the fragmentation of the Yugoslav federation.

**Yugoslavia divides**

For the richer republics of Slovenia and Croatia to the north, the extension of market relations throughout the 1980s brought prosperity and stronger links with the world economy. For the poorer regions of Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro to the south, the market has little to offer. Worse, it has acted as a spur to their richer northern neighbours to demand more control over their own resources and an end to the system of subsidies to the south.

The growth of nationalism, and the trend towards the break-up of Yugoslavia, took off first in the more privileged republics of Slovenia and Croatia. It was the regional Stalinst officials in Slovenia and Croatia who first began to make nationalist noises in the seventies, and who, in the eighties, threatened to secede unless they got their way. These bureaucrats sought to secure their futures by grabbing what they could of the opportunities provided by the market.

The rise of Slobodan Milosevic and his brand of Serbian nationalism was a response to the increasing assertiveness of Slovenia and Croatia. In Serbia, Milosevic appealed to the widespread economic discontent and popular resentment against the richer northern republics, and channelled it into a nationalist perspective.

**Rich v poor**

In reality, what we have in Yugoslavia today is a civil war between rich and poor, presented as a war between civilisation and barbarism. The West's propaganda offensive obscures the real cause of the conflict—the divisions opened up by the impact of the market—and instead blames the violence on the warmongering mentality of the Serbs.

If the European right's offensive continues to its logical conclusion, Serbia will be wiped off the map of Europe, or at least relegated to a backwater of the continent known as the East. Far from opposing this, many on the European left advocate such a policy themselves. Support for Croatian independence is a popular cause on the left generally. Some radicals say it should be enforced through the barrel of a gun, issuing strident calls for the British government to deal with Serbia in the same way that it dealt with the Libyans and Iraqis.

**'Bomb Serbia'**

Labour MP Ken Livingstone declared that the only way to stop Slobodan Milosevic was to use Nato's overwhelming airpower. We should issue an ultimatum to Serbia to withdraw within days. If this is ignored we should then destroy the Serbian air force from the air and any Serbian units operating outside Serbia.' (Sun. 13 November 1991)

Professor David Marsland, writing in the liberal New Statesman & Society, was just as forthright. Appealing to the radical patriotic tradition of the British left, Marsland argued that once again it was Britain's 'unique responsibility to stand up and fight for freedom'. He stated that Britain should recognise the independence of Croatia unconditionally; establish a military alliance with Croatia; and present Serbia with an ultimatum: accept a ceasefire and withdraw or face war with Britain. The alternative was boldly stated: 'If not, British aircraft flying from Cyprus and Austria could destroy the Serbian air force and fleet in one day. Tanks and military formations could then be wiped out at leisure from the air with little difficulty.' (1 November 1991)

At the moment, the last vestige in Europe is that there should be some sort of United Nations intervention in the conflict. Some Western powers (Germany, in particular) are more enthusiastic than others (Britain, for example) about how far to go. This simply reflects the fact that they have different interests at stake. Germany is keen to use the conflict to assert its leading role in the European arena; conscious of Germany's growing assertiveness, Britain has adopted a more cautious approach.

**Partisan policy**

However, despite the conflict of interests among the Western powers, all of them are pursuing a partisan, pro-Croatia and anti-Serbia policy. This was illustrated at the start of December by the EC decision to lift economic sanctions against Croatia and other republics, while renewing them against Serbia and its ally Montenegro. It is also clear that if the UN does intervene in Yugoslavia, its troops will not be there to play a neutral, peace-keeping role. UN intervention means the effective partition of the country, and a recognition of Croatian sovereignty.

Serbia is being set up, if not for a shooting war then at least for pariah status. The demonstration of Slobodan Milosevic, and the Serbian people in general, requires an unequivocal response. It is not necessary to be a supporter of Slobodan Milosevic to be an opponent of Western intervention in Yugoslavia, whether in the shape of economic sanctions or military strikes, whether led by the United Nations or the European Community.

**No Western solution**

The West has no solutions to the conflict in Yugoslavia. Indeed, it has assiduously promoted the extension of the market, which is responsible for accelerating the fragmentation of the country along regional lines. Now, the Western right is seeking to exploit the resulting chaos to its own advantage by setting up Serbia as a bogeyman against which to mobilise support for the idea of Western civilisation. Any further intervention by the Western powers in this conflict can only hasten the disintegration of Yugoslavia and turn the Balkans into a bloodbath for the people who live there.
Erasing the past

In Croatia, the history of the Second World War is being rewritten and the wartime fascist Ustasha regime is being rehabilitated, to the delight of the European right. Joan Phillips reports

Meanwhile, the figures for the wartime genocide committed by the Ustasha are being disputed by rival sets of historians and politicians. Zagreb historian, Ivo Goldstein, disputes the death toll at Jasenovac. Belgrade written say at least 700,000 died there. Goldstein, whose grandparents were murdered in Jasenovac, says the total figure was a tenth of that.

Tudjman himself has been at the forefront of rewriting the Second World War book, Historical Wastelands: Historical Truth, an apology for the Holocaust, stating that for the Jews, 'genocidal violence is a natural phenomenon, in line with the human-social and mythological divine nature.' In previous speeches, Tudjman has said that the murder of tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies was carried out by a handful of Croats; and that Jasenovac was largely operated by Jewish torturers, who used their power to rob and murder Serb and Gypsy prisoners.

Some Croatian revisionists have suggested that many of the killings were in fact carried out by the Croats. A second witness, another member of a Jewish community in Zagreb and a police officer of the ministry of information there, alleges that the Serbs exterminated the Jews of Serbia during the Second World War.

Blaming the communists

The aim of this propaganda exercise is to minimise the crimes of the Ustasha; to suggest that they were a justifiable response to the communist threat; and to recast the Ustasha as heroes who fought with the fascists. The implication is that the Ustasha were merely patriotic Croats, fighting to defend their nation against communist subversion.

This revisionist project has a wider significance outside of Yugoslavia. It has been seized upon by sections of the European right who have long sought an opportunity to start rewriting the history of the Second World War. Since the Second World War, the barbarism of the fascist era and the Holocaust has posed a major problem of credibility for the European far-right. Now the right has seen its chance to erase the past. The conflict in Yugoslavia is being used as a surrogate for rewriting the history of the Second World War. By equating the Serbs with communism and barbarism and the Croats with democracy and civilisation today, the right is suggesting that the actions of the Croatian fascists in the past were a legitimate response to the threat of communism represented by the partisans.

From this perspective, those who fought with the Ustasha were patriotic Croats who wanted to protect the fatherland against Bolshevism, just as those fighting on the Croatian side today are defenders of the Western way of life against Eastern barbarism. If this propaganda campaign continues unchallenged, and is allowed to establish itself as a new interpretation of the Second World War, it will lend a new legitimacy to the politics of the right.

On taking power, the Ustasha issued decrees banning the Serbian Cyrillic script, closing down Orthodox schools and forcing Serbs, Jews and Gypsies to wear armbands. In June 1941, the Ustasha education minister stated the government's policy towards the Serbs: convert a third, expel a third and kill a third. By then the Ustasha had already killed an estimated 180,000 Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. But that was only the beginning.

The atrocities committed by the Ustasha were described by British army officer Sir Philip Maclean in his book, Divided Barricades:

The massacres began in earnest at the end of June 1941 and continued through the summer, growing in scope and intensity until in August the terror reached its height. The whole of Bosnia ran with blood. Bands of Ustasha roamed the countryside with knives, batons and machine guns, slaughtering Serbian men, women and children, desecrating Serbian churches, murdering Serbian priests, laying waste Serbian villages, Croatian capital Zagreb, buildings were draped with the once banned black and red and white flag of the Ustasha, while bookshops and street stalls began to dispense rewritten histories of the old civil war. Maps of Greater Croatia, bearing a photograph of Ante Pavelic in fascist uniform, went on sale in Zagreb's main square. Graffiti declaring ‘NDH—God is with Croatia’ appeared on walls in Zagreb's centre and suburbs.

Tudjman fought with Tito's partisans against the Ustasha. But his government has been quietly burying the past. One of Tudjman's first acts after being elected president was to rename the Square for the Victims of Fascism in Zagreb as the Square of the Croatian Kings. His government's illustrated booklet on the historical glories of the republic gives three brief sentences of its six-page overview to the Ustasha state and makes no mention of the atrocities committed in its name. Now there are suggestions that the memorial museum at the Jasenovac camp outside Zagreb may be closed for 'lack of funds'.

Adolf Hitler and Ante Pavelic shake hands on the creation of a fascist Greater Croatia
Burying Tito

These days nobody seems to have a good word to say for Yugoslavia's former leader Marshal Tito. Andy Clarkson looks at how Western leaders have forsaken their favourite 'communist'.

For years Marshal Tito, Yugoslavia's post-war leader, was feared in the West as the symbol of a united Yugoslavia and a critic of the Soviet Union. Now he is being castigated as a 'communist tyrant' who imposed totalitarian rule and a forced union on Serbs and Croats. According to the Financial Times' Eastern European expert, Judy Dempsey, Tito's Yugoslav communists brutally suppressed Croatian and Serbian statehood, but in the name of 'Yugoslavism' after 1945 (22 November 1991).

Serbs condemn Tito as a Croat who designed federal structures to contain their national aspirations, Croats blame Tito for the existence of Serb communities in their republic. According to one Croatian militant, 'Tito deliberately tried to mix up the races by putting the Serbs over here' (Daily Telegraph, 4 July 1991). In reality, Serbs lived in Croatia long before Tito was born. But today the former ruler is being held responsible for all of Yugoslavia's problems.

Tito then and now

The attacks on Tito are an attempt to blame communism for the crisis in Yugoslavia. Making this accusation stick involves rewriting history so as to play down the West's close relationship with Tito during and after the Second World War. In 1941, Germany occupied Yugoslavia and created a puppet Croatian state. The two main anti-German groups were the monarchist Serbian Chetniks, led by General Draza Mihailovic, and the pro-Soviet partisans, led by Josip Broz, commonly known as Tito. The Hitlean Croatian regime could not cope and, by 1943, the Yugoslav resistance was holding down 25 German divisions. Even so, the movement was seriously split because the Chetniks preferred to fight the partisans rather than the Germans.

British allies

The British wanted to step up aid to the Yugoslavs so as to draw more German divisions away from France. In September 1943, Winston Churchill sent Tito MP and SAS Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean to assess the capabilities of Tito's partisans. When Maclean confirmed that the Chetnik guerrillas were fighting Tito rather than the Axis, Churchill sent the partisan leader letters that made it clear he regarded him [Tito] as an ally and as such promised him all possible help (F Maclean, Eastern Approaches, p418).

Churchill even suggested to the house of commons in February 1944 that Tito's movement was more nationalist than communist. The communist element had the honour of being the bigamous, but as the movement increased in strength and numbers, a modifying concept and unifying process has taken place and national conceptions have supervened. (Quoted in G Kalko, The Politics of War, p.133) During the war, unlike today, Yugoslav nationalism was viewed in a positive light by the British authorities.

Nowadays right-wingers like Margaret Thatcher and Norman Stone extol the virtues of Croatian nationalism. During the war, however, the British establishment had little time for the concept of Croatian independence. Indeed, the British right has spent much of the past 40 years criticising Yugoslav experts like Maclean, for not encouraging Churchill to back the fiercely anti-Croatian Chetniks against Tito.

Titism is OK

To the mandarins of the British foreign office, Tito might have been a 'communist', but they believed he was their communist. The Americans were cooler towards him, preferring to work with Mihailovic's Chetniks. However, when Tito broke from Stalin in 1948 at the start of the Cold War, everything changed.

In March 1949, CIA director Walter Bedell Smith commented that 'The Russians fear Titism above all else. The United States does not fear communism if it is not controlled by Moscow and not committed to aggression' (quoted in H. Gaddis, The Long Peace, p.161). The Americans began to supply Yugoslavia with loans, grants and food aid. In October 1956, during the Hungarian uprising, US secretary of state John Foster Dulles told president Eisenhower that 'our policy of backing Tito was paying off in terms of an increasing desire on the part of the satellites for independence from Moscow' (The Long Peace, p.168).

During the sixties and seventies, Yugoslavia became the West's showcase for private enterprise within Stalinist Eastern Europe. Hundreds of millions of dollars from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank poured in. The foreign tourist trade became increasingly important for the economy and small businesses expanded under the cover of 'self-management enterprises' and 'worker's cooperatives'.

After the Cold War

In June 1966, Yugoslavia became the first Stalinist country to conclude an agreement with the Vatican, when Tito signed a deal with the Pope to exchange religious properties. The same Pope, Paul VI, had been a sympathiser with Croatian fascism during the Second World War. Like other Western leaders, he became a fan of Tito's '_tolerance attitude toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War'.

Not less than 147 foreign dignitaries attended Tito's funeral in May 1990 to pay their last respects. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher was there to praise him as a 'great fighter, a fearless leader and a courageous statesman'. He created modern Yugoslavia... His efforts, like Yugoslavia's independence, are recognised worldwide'. West German chancellor Helmut Schmiedt also paid tribute to Tito as a 'fighter for his country's independence'.

Today the Cold War is over and, as examined elsewhere in this issue of Living Marxism, the expansion of the market economy has brought prosperous, pro-Western Croats into conflict with Serbia. In these changed circumstances, Titoism re-enters the repertoire of 'Yugoslavia's independence' which once pleased, and calls on the West to support Croatia's attempt to break up Tito's federal state. Likewise, the only fighters for independence whom Schniedt's successors in the German government support in Yugoslavia today are the Croatian secessionists. As the interests of the Western right have changed, so has its interpretation of history, and its judgement of Marshal Tito.
Don’t mention the war?

Rob Knight writes from Frankfurt on attempts to clean up Germany’s forgotten past

In the middle of Frankfurt there is a Jewish cemetery. It has high walls and a tiny iron gate, which is kept permanently locked. I have yet to find any other evidence of Frankfurt’s once-thriving Jewish community. Educated young Germans knew that there used to be a large Jewish community in the city and that it no longer there. But they don’t know where the Jewish areas used to be, and they don’t know the details of what happened to Frankfurt Jews. Neither, for that matter, do most of them know what their own parents and grandparents did during the Nazi period.

Such vagueness about Germany’s recent past is typical. It seems particularly odd to a British person brought up on a solid diet of Second World War propaganda. Germans are puzzled when I explain that as a child I read hundreds of war comics which celebrated the virtues of the British Tommy and the wickedness of the German “squadrone”. It was in there, also, that I learned my first words of German, although “Erdgenu Schweihscheid”, “Go to Himmel” and “Actung, Spielle” have limited usefulness today.

Historical hot potato

It is an oddly odd experience for Germans who, when they come over and watch British TV, discover that there appears to be a war going on between Britain and Germany. When it is explained to them that Britain is a country with no future, which has to find soil in the past, they understand. Particularly if they have to spend time on the London Underground or negotiating other parts of Britain’s crumbling infrastructure.

So to a British person of my generation it seems very strange that the past is so opaque here in Germany. It is not that the past has left no mark. Come out of the main railway station in Cologne, walk in any direction for half an hour, and you will pass only a handful of buildings that are more than 40 years old. But there are no monuments or plaques to explain what happened. It looks as if some crazed town planner ran amok with a bulldozer. The role of the Lancaster bomber is given no credit.

Occasionally I see something which brings the past into stark relief. In a little village on the Rhine, one of many which exist now for the tourist trade alone, I came across a wall plaque. It explained how, on 9 November 1938, the synagogue which stood on that spot was burnt down. That was Anschluss day, the night when Jewish shops, homes and synagogues were destroyed throughout Germany. The fact that it had also happened in this tiny village brought home just how systematic this terror had been.

The terrible experience of Nazism and the trauma of defeat in the war means that the recent past is an historical hot potato. The whole modern German history is so sensitive that all banknotes are illustrated with pictures of Germans from the Middle Ages. Nobody knows who they are, which is a great advantage. Even somebody as long dead as the nineteenth-century statesman

Bismarck has been too controversial for the current, because of his association with German nationalism.

After the war there was a conspiracy of silence about what had happened. Eventually a liberal consensus emerged and came to dominate. Blame for the past was shared out among the entire German population, thus letting big business, which had funded and encouraged Hitler, off the hook. German children were taught little of the detail about what had happened. Instead, they were told that they had to be ‘tolerant’ and non-aggressive, to prevent any recurrence of the terrible past. They were taught that the problem was caused by fascism, and that everybody should be against fascism. But what fascism was and where it came from were left unexplained.

Clean up

Consequently the past was never confronted, only covered in a treacly kind of liberal pacifism which pervaded German society for a long time. German nationalism in particular was seen as a bad thing. This was not too much of a problem for the postwar West German authorities. Germany had to rehabilitate, and it did so under the aegis of the USA. German politicians could mouth platitudes about peace and democracy from behind the guns of the American armed forces. Meanwhile Germany’s economy grew from strength to strength, until it reached the point where it was not only dominant in Europe, but was starting to rival its US ‘protector’.

Now a great change is taking place in German society. Massive shifts in international politics, brought about by the decline of the USA and the end of the Cold War, have pushed Germany into the limelight on the world stage. Germany’s political and diplomatic influence is coming closer to its economic strength. In boxing parlance, Germany is starting to punch its weight in the world.

The German authorities are now trying to win popular support for their new global status. Germany’s past is being cleaned up. There is a stream of books, newspaper articles and TV programmes trying to rewrite history. Increasingly, the Nazis are being presented as German patriots who were threatened by communism and went a little too far in their reaction. At the same time, Germany is giving itself a new role as the defender of civilisation amid the ruins of Eastern Europe today, so lending legitimacy to German expansionism in the region. Through rewriting the past and seeing the present-day expansion in a positive light, German nationalism is being given a clean bill of health.

New expansionism

What remains of the German left cannot cope with this new development because it has never escaped from the old myths about Germany’s past. It believes that the main danger is a resurgence of Nazism. It does not recognise German nationalism as dangerous unless it comes dressed in a brown shirt and swastika. When German nationalism instead adorns itself in the flag of freedom, the left accepts it as a force for progress. So the left has recently been obsessed with a handful of neo-Nazis, leaving German capitalism free to pursue its new adventures in the Balkans.

German society is very vulnerable to this new form of expansionism. There is little or no opposition to Germany’s encouragement of the civil war in Yugoslavia. German support for Croatian independence is taken as a self-evident truth. All of this makes opposing German imperialism a pressing task within Germany. It will involve challenging both the attempt to rewrite history, and the assumption that German capitalism can be a force for good in the East.
One day the economic statistics seem to show the recession getting worse; the next, economists claim that new figures prove the upturn has arrived. Phil Murphy cuts through the expert waffle, and points to some hard evidence of a deep slump.

Mark Twain's view of the value of official figures—there are lies, damned lies and statistics—has often been applied to the inaccuracy of economists. Economic 'experts' have traditionally been treated with the same derision as weather forecasters—although, as with the weathermen, this doesn't stop people listening to them.

In the current recession, however, the value of the fine words emanating from the economics profession has reached a new low. The gap between what economists and journalists say about the state of the economy and the reality of the economic situation is wider than ever.

Most of us would expect government spokesmen to lie about the recession and talk up the economy for electoral reasons. Over the past year, Tory chancellor Norman Lamont's insistence, first that there was no recession, and then that the recovery had begun, would have convinced few people if he had not been a sole voice crying in the economic wilderness.

But Lamont has not been alone. Most supposedly non-partisan professional economists have joined him in presenting every minor statistical variation as evidence of something real—usually as proof of a real upturn. The result has been to create widespread confusion about whether the British economy is going up, going down, or bumping along the bottom.

The problem with economists today is that their work has less and less to do with what is happening in the economy. The economics profession has so degenerated that most experts now believe that little or nothing can be done to influence the workings of the real economy. They observe that government policies, from manipulating interest rates to cutting taxes, have little effect. This brilliant discovery has led many economists to retreat from economic analysis into narrow impressionism. They ignore the broad picture and emphasise the 'deep significance' of the latest marginal change in output or inflation figures. Even more characteristic of today is the tendency to abandon economics altogether, and focus on the feelings of consumers or businessmen as reflected in 'confidence' surveys.

Economists have become preoccupied with debating the import of the latest statistic. For example, is the 6.3 per cent rise in national output in the third quarter of 1991, as a result of an upturn in North Sea oil sales, more or less important than the continued decline in the manufacturing sector? How does the latest small increase in consumer confidence balance a small monthly fall in retail sales? How does a drop in headline inflation sit alongside an upward shift in factory gate prices?

Such debate can go on forever because it is meaningless. The issues discussed are of even more marginal significance than the statistics to which they refer. To be charitable to the economists, it is an extreme case of not seeing the wood for the trees.

Those who wish to know the true state of the British economy should ignore the non-debates among the economic experts, and take a look instead at the underlying economic fundamentals. These confirm that whatever precise stage of the recession we are at, the British economy is in ruins. The prospects for any significant upturn are circumscribed by the depth and breadth of the slump.

The British economy resumed its long-term decline during the 1960s. Over the past two decades extraordinary developments, like the massive expansion of credit and the boom in City-based financial speculation, have kept British capitalism afloat and allowed it to survive the recessions of the early seventies and early eighties. However, most of these measures have been insubstantial and short-term. Their ability to pull the British economy out of its current slump is in serious question.
It is worth spelling out the significance of some of the basic indicators which the statisticians don't like to talk about.

**Profitability** Company profits in Britain are now slumping again. But even at their eights' peak, profitability rates never regained the levels seen before the British crisis started in the early seventies.

Things are even worse than the publicly announced profit figures suggest. For example, in 1989 Maxwell Communications Corporation (MCC) reported falling but still respectable profits of £150m. However, an analysis of MCC's profit figures reveals that the company made almost nothing from its supposed line of business, publishing and broadcasting. Instead, more than half of its profits came from foreign exchange dealing and a lot of the rest from other gambles on the property and financial markets. Since the death of its founder, it has become clear that many of Maxwell's speculative assets are just handfuls of paper; the 'profitable' corporation is worthless. Scratch the surface of the figures from many other British companies, and you will find a similar picture of low industrial profitability alongside high-risk financial ventures.

**Investment** With low industrial profitability, British capitalists have neither the real resources nor the incentives to make substantial investments at home. Business fixed investment has fallen 15 per cent over the past year and will fall farther. This alone rules out any significant recovery. A more important indicator of British economic weakness is the fact that manufacturing investment as a share of national output has fallen by one-third since 1979. And the underlying trends are even worse than the headline figures suggest. Capital has shifted away from productive investment, towards parasitical speculation. During the 1980s the share of investment categorised as 'fixed capital spending' went down from over 70 to about 30 per cent. The share that went into speculative takeover activity rose from less than 10 to 30 per cent at the end of the decade.

**Manufacturing competitiveness** Without real investment, Britain's international competitiveness continues to fall. From the late 1950s to the present there has been a steady deterioration in Britain's manufactures trade balance, from a surplus equal to about nine per cent of national output to a deficit of about three per cent. Recessions are supposed to provide a respite from the widening trade gap, as the pace of import growth slows. This time, however, Britain's industrial base is too weak even to supply the needs of a stagnant home market. So imports continue to flood in, and Britain faces the rare prospect of a combined recession and balance of payments crisis.

The consequence is that British capital becomes more and more indebted to the rest of the world. With the good fortune of North Sea oil and the City's financial earnings from abroad, the crunch has so far been postponed. But profitable oil reserves are expected to run down during the nineties, and the City is facing stiff competition from rival financial centres in Frankfurt, New York and Tokyo, all fighting for a bigger share of the global financial cake. The recently expressed fears of a sterling crash are certainly well-founded; but they cannot be explained by the economists' obsession with the last quarter's trade figures.

**Public Sector Borrowing Requirement** After more than a decade of Tory rhetoric about 'taking the state out of the economy', government borrowing is back up to the level of the last recession. Remove the short-term proceeds from privatisation and the sale of government land and buildings (a new phenomenon from the eighties), and real state spending is higher still. In other words, the survival of British capitalism is now more dependent on government support than it has ever been.

This is a sure sign of British economic decay. It is also a reminder that, since state intervention is already such a prominent feature of economic life, more government spending will not play any significant role in stimulating an economic upturn. On top of this, such a high level of state spending, funded by borrowing, opens the way for a renewed inflationary surge in the years to come. This trend reveals the economists' detailed picking over the tiny shifts in the highest monthly inflation figures as a waste of breath and paper, which serves only to mystify what is really going on in the economy. And what is really going on is an historic slump.
Mike Freeman believes that the lack of dynamism in pre-election British politics reflects far more than the dullness of the party leaders.

'The election, far from being the climax of a long drawn-out contest between visionary convictions, looks like being a struggle between two sorts of failure.' (Hugo Young, 'Beware the vibe of gloom. Guardian, 3 December 1991)

Over the past 12 months, the polls have revealed a remarkably even contest between John Major and Neil Kinnock as they stoke it out towards the general election. However, the inability of either of the major parties to generate any internal dynamic or to inspire any enthusiasm in the wider electorate cannot be entirely attributed to the personal inadequacies of their leaders. The stasis of British politics reflects the uneasy balance between the major classes in Britain, and indeed throughout the capitalist world.

Two Gallup polls in December showed a definite Tory lead after 12 months of disasters confirmed Labour's inability to consolidate its advantage. The necessity to postpone the election until next year revealed the government's weakness and its lack of success in coping with the recession, despite Norman Lamont's frequent forecasts of light at the end of the tunnel. The reluctant departure of Margaret Thatcher from the leadership left its legacy of bitterness and rancour which has repeatedly returned to haunt her successor, most notably over the Maastricht negotiations. Meanwhile Major's team have abandoned the poll tax, but have opted to follow through Thatcher's unpopular policies in relation to health and education. As if they had not problems enough, Major's colleagues— notably Baker, Lamont, Lilley, Waldegrave—have created a few more through their ineptitude, creating an impression of a lack of clear and decisive leadership.

Labour's inability to capitalise on the Tories' difficulties, and the apparently consistent support of 40 per cent of the electorate for the Conservative Party have led to a renewed emphasis on the personalities of the party leaders. Some commentators have launched a 'Kinnock must go' drive, while others have discovered the charismatic powers of Major's Mr Nice image. In fact, there are much wider issues at stake here: the stagnation of British politics is not unique, but part of a wider pattern affecting the advanced capitalist world.

Dual crisis
The distinctive feature of the current conjuncture is the paralysis of both major classes in society. The capitalist class is incapacitated by the global slump and the problems of the post-Cold War world order. The working class has experienced the disintegration of its traditional trade union and political organisations. At present the advantage lies with the capitalists who are fairly confident about imposing their will more directly on the rather atomised and apathetic masses. Yet, the capitalists' evident inability to overcome the problems of deepening slump and rising international rivalries limits the scope for any long-term equilibrium. The emergence of new forms of working class resistance and new forms of organisation is inevitable. The crisis of ruling class politics is evident throughout the advanced capitalist world. In the USA, until a few months ago, President George Bush, the mighty conqueror of Kuwait, anticipated an easy ride to a second term of office. Now the glory of the Gulf War has evaporated in the heat of the domestic recession and he is threatened from within his own party by racist reactionaries like David Duke and Pat Buchanan, and by a Democratic Party which has revived solely in response to the problems of the Republicans. Problems of growing poverty, drug abuse and incipient racial warfare create a pervasive pessimism in American society. Even on the international stage Bush is discovering that bullying third world countries like Iraq or Libya does not have the cohesive effect that anti-Soviet propaganda provided throughout the Cold War. The unpogologic attitude of Japan to the recent fiftieth anniversary of its
attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor reflects the growing challenge from the East to the USA's global hegemony.

It is little more than a year since Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats triumphed in the first elections in a unified Germany. Now Kohl's party presides over the economic and social tensions resulting from unity.

Throughout Europe, far-right, anti-immigrant, racist and anti-Semitic movements are gaining influence; they have made national and local electoral breakthroughs in Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Italy, France and Germany. These movements have helped to divide and weaken mainstream centre-right movements as well as putting social democratic parties on the defensive.

The fact that in virtually every Western country—and in Japan—conservative parties are riven by splits and scandals reflects a wider incapacity of the capitalist elite to come to terms with the problems of recession and the post-Cold War realignments in international relations. The tendency towards European intervention in the civil war in Yugoslavia illustrates the way in which the Western powers will inexorably be drawn in to the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that is resulting from the impact of market forces.

In Britain the debate over Maastricht well exposes the insecurities of the establishment. Throughout the postwar period Britain has been aloof from Europe and maintained its traditional alliances with the USA and the Commonwealth. Over the years, the USA has declined in importance, Britain has been squeezed out of many of its Commonwealth markets by more efficient competitors, and trade with Europe has increased. Yet, while Fortress Europe provides the only option for enfeebled British capitalism, a substantial body of establishment opinion fears the loss of British national identity in a closer European union. Hence Europe has become a renewed issue of debate, largely within the Conservative Party, where it has become the focus for a range of internal conflicts which arise largely from the exhaustion of the party's programme for dealing with Britain's long-term decline.

For nearly a decade—up to 1987—Thatcher's policies of privatisation and union-bashing seemed to be successful. Yet just when things became difficult in the late eighties, the programme appeared increasingly irrelevant. Though Thatcher had tamed the unions, her encouragement of market forces failed to revive British capitalism. When the government continued to pursue the same policies, privatising gas and water and promoting the market in health and education, these policies appeared irrational and provocative. The result has been both to provoke conflict within the party and to alienate many of its traditional middle-class supporters. While the welfare professionals recoil in disgust at various packages of 'reforms', the recession, with rising unemployment, interest rates and mortgage repossessions has undermined support among the electorally crucial 'C2s', the skilled working class.

Deficient machine

Though the Labour Party has proved unable to establish a convincing lead over the Tories during 1991, it has greatly improved its standing on any of its election performances in the 1980s. However, it owes this advance largely to the problems of the government, particularly to the poll tax debacle and the handling of the economy.

The continual media focus on the deficiencies of Neil Kinnock obscures the much more important deficiencies of the whole Labour machine. It has moved away from its roots in the trade union bureaucracy and repudiated its links with the working class but has yet to discover any distinctive identity or programme to replace the state socialism which has defined Labour in the twentieth century.

Labour offerings

The pre-Christmas expulsion of the Militant-supporting MPs, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields, was yet another Labour offering intended to demonstrate its respectability to the British establishment. This seems unlikely to impress voters who had not noticed any revolutionary threat to the British way of life emanating from this duff pair, despite nearly a decade in office. Yet it indicates how far the Labour leadership has gone in destroying the influence of the left.

The result is, as one long-suffering member wrote to the Guardian in December, a 'party effectively dead at its roots'. In the past, the left provided a link between the working class and the party, a link that has now been severed.

Furthermore, the left provided a source of ideas, energy, and dynamism for the Labour Party that it now sadly lacks. Indeed, for decades the Communist Party fulfilled this function from outside Labour, in recent years providing it with the 'alternative economic strategy' that guided Labour in the seventies and the theory of 'Thatcherism' that offered an apologetic explanation of Labour's defeat in the eighties. It also provided, at least up to the mid-seventies, an organisational network capable of mobilising a substantial layer of working class activists around the policies of the labour bureaucracy. The ensuing disillusionment of workers with the experience of Labour both in government and in opposition paved the way for Thatcher's victories and for the subsequent fragmentation of the labour movement.

Just as everywhere conservative parties are in disarray, so, too, social democratic movements have lost momentum and direction. Recent events in Eastern Europe have not only destroyed Stalinists; they have also reflected discredit on social democracy, with which the Stalinists fellow-travelled organisationally and politically for more than half a century.
Rap is the medium through which a generation of young Americans has come to express its alienation from the traditional values of US society, argues Emmanuel Oliver.

In his influential book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom expresses a popular conservative fear when he berates the post-war years as a loss of a moral symbol of America's national identity: 'The bad conscience killed off the one continuing bit of popular culture that celebrated the national story – the western.' For Bloom, popular identification with the western was symbolic of a national belief in the efficacy of the American Dream. The basic message of the western was that America society had triumphed over hardship against all the odds, and such success was possible for all American citizens.

The simple one-dimensional character of John Wayne and the lurching Lone Ranger (where would the Ranger be without Tonto?) epitomised the clean cut, honest national values which many Americans once believed in. Today, these characters are figures of fun and can only be aired at obscure times (John Wayne makes a lot of midweek television appearances after two in the morning). So whatever happened to the American Dream, and what, if anything, has replaced the western as a defining expression of the public mood?

If Bloom is interested in national stories, he need look no further than David Toop's appropriately titled *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop*. This is an extensively updated and expanded edition of Toop's 1984 chronicle of the rise of rap as the most dynamic form of popular culture over the past 10 years. From De La Soul's daisy age to the black politicking of *The Jungle Brothers*, X-Clan, Public Enemy and Queen Latifah, from NWA's obscenity trials to the gangster rap of Ice-T, Ice Cube and the Boo-Ya Tribe, Toop guides us through the past few years to rap's controversial present.

End of a myth

Although Toop does not say this, one of the most important aspects of rap is that it articulates the failure of the American Dream. This goes not only for a large number of Afro-Americans, but for other ethnic groups and for many young whites too. Hence the growth of the Samoan rappers of LA, the Cuban rappers of Miami, the Jewish rappers of New York, and of course white rappers such as Vanilla Ice and Marky Marx (who left New Kids on the Block before they became famous). Toop talks of Vietnamese-American teenagers forming gangs and expressing themselves in the language of rap. He points to groups like the Young Black Teenagers (four white males in fact), 3rd Base and a plethora of other white groups whose cultural identity is with the lifestyle and attitude of rap.

This is a relatively recent development. It is unprecedented in the history of America that immigrant communities should adopt the culture of the ghetto as their own. In the past, successive waves of immigrants aspire to be part of the American Dream: they wrapped themselves in the Stars and Stripes, learned the rules of baseball and embraced the all-American way. Equally unprecedented is the way in which sections of white American society have come to identify with the music, fashion, lifestyle and attitude of the ghetto.

It must be truly worrying for a conservative like Allan Bloom that the culture of the black ghetto has become the point of reference not only for black youth, but for a significant section of white American youth too. Their cultural rejection of the values of middle America in favour of the amorality and cynicism of urban ghetto life must be a source of discomfort and angst for the WASP elite.

Of course, the right would have us believe that American values have always been under attack. The McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950s helped to create an anti-communist pro-American consensus in the background was a concern about the popularity of 'race music' among white teenagers.

But what happened in the fifties was something altogether different from what is happening today. True, American youth might have been beguiled by black music, but in the context of an overwhelming acceptance of the American way, middle class America believed in itself and so did significant sections of working class America. The USA was the world's number one power. Its undisputed economic dominance gave credibility to national symbols such as John Wayne.

Degradation USA

Today, US society has difficulty making any guarantees, even to middle class, middle America. Just about the only thing which the USA of the nineties shares with the confident nation of the fifties is real wage levels, which have now fallen back to their lowest point since 1965. It is hardly surprising that, with the erosion of the certainties of the 1960s and the end of a stable economic existence, many of the symbols of the past have fallen by the wayside.

For young Americans who have grown up over the past 20 years, the material and moral power of America must be painfully obvious. Not committed to anything in particular, the fragmented existence of many has been expressed through the medium of rap, with all its anger, humour and seemingly insoluble contradictions.

Rap expresses all the contradictions of the ghetto: the desire to make money as epitomised by EPMD (Eric and Parrish Make Dollars); the assertion of a black separatist identity as in X-Clan's exhortations towards black nationalism; a rejection of mainstream American values as articulated by Public Enemy's lyrical assaults on most American institutions, the Forth of July included.

Of all the contradictions, music as politics is the most wearisome. The problem is not so much the attempt to get a political message across in a musical form, but the content of the message itself. A good example is Boogie Down Production's 'Stop the Violence campaign, which was a response to symptoms rather than causes.

The black ghetto, the product of US capitalism's failure to integrate black Americans into the American Dream, is a violent place. Life is considered cheap by the authorities, and on the ground life is cheap. Decades of depression and repression have produced a vicious cycle of desperation, despair, drugs and death.

In this context, worthy calls to stop the violence will not be heard by the ghetto youth for whom rap is a way of life. Worse, they can only reinforce the notion of black on black violence being the chief problem facing the urban black community. The problem is not the violence of the ghetto, but a society which has nothing to offer black youth except degradation and repression.

If rap expresses the contradictions of the ghetto, Washington's propaganda blames the existence of the ghetto on blacks themselves.
Today, the debate is focused around the notion of the underclass (which, in the USA, is a codeword for blacks), a race apart from normal civilised Americans. The underclass discussion explains everything from black crime to black unemployment, from black drug abuse to the high incidence of Aids in the black community as an expression of black people's inability to follow the American way. In short, it explains and justifies the existence of the ghetto.

As the music of the 'underclass', rap has been dragged on to the political stage and used as a device by the establishment to define American values in counterposition to an enemy within. Tone Loc's bestselling 1989 'Wild Thing' was blamed for giving birth to 'wilding' (packs of young black males on an orgy of violence, rape and murder). 2 Live Crew had their album As Nasty as they Wanna Be banned on the grounds that it violated community standards'. Public Enemy are accused of promoting black power and undermining the American way of life. New Jack City, a film inspired by rap and starring rapper Ice-T, has been accused of encouraging gang violence.

For the US authorities, hip hop has served as a titillating hook on which to hang their ideological offensive against the black underclass. However, the fact that rap has entered into the homes of many white Americans shows the extent of the problem facing the US elite. It shows that despite the criminalisation of rap and its exponents, a growing minority of black and white youth has given up on the American Dream. Even the nihilism of the ghetto sounds better to them than the empty promises of a decaying society. We will never again see the likes of John Wayne riding tall and off into the sunset.

Rap legend, NWA: shooting down the American Dream

David Troop, Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop, Serpent's Tail, £10.99 pbk
A manifesto of mediocrity

Promoted as a magazine which takes a new intellectual look at mass culture, the Modern Review stunned John Fitzpatrick with its John Major-like greyness

If you have any doubts about the poverty of ideas, the lack of purpose and the sheer exhaustion of imagination in contemporary populism, you should read the founding editorial of the recently launched the Modern Review. It took three people to write this nonsense—Cosmo Landesman, Karl Maton and Toby Young—but whether they did it en collaboration or in the William Burroughs cut-and-paste mode is not easy to tell.

The modern men set out a truly scandalous manifesto. Their review is to deal with mass or popular culture. Their main argument is that mass culture shouldn't be put on a pedestal—but it shouldn't be dismissed out of hand either. Oh yes, as John Major would say.

Er...

This staggering proposition comes after two pages of dithering. They say mass culture has 'finally become respectable', but also that it has 'become far too respectable'. Oh yes! They say it is not being taken seriously in the universities, but also that there are good reasons for not taking popular culture too seriously. Oh yes! They think that it is 'not the fashionable thing to say, and that this decline in the pursuit of the popular is pleasant to many people who feel that mass culture is starting to lose its appeal'.

The high point of the discussion is marked by a nauseating thrust: 'Just because something is popular doesn't mean it's good, but it doesn't mean it's bad either. We are told that such ingenuous arguments are superficial anyway. Mass culture doesn't meet this kind of defence, the pleasure in which is nothing to be ashamed of. What is the difference they might be thinking of? It is hard to believe that this article got published. I think it probably occurred early on to the editors that they didn't have an original idea or an ounce of wit between them. So, in the absence of anything else to say, they decided to carry a bit of favour by boasting that the Left and the media have lost the battle for the popular by rubbish [sic] intellectuals.'

Alan Bloom

The poor dear! I think that there is such a thing as the Left (represented they think by Susan Sontag, Richard Hoggart, Hanif Kureishi, Jeanette Winterson and Martin Amis). Even worse, they still think it fashionable to beat the left in this instance for its assault on 'the warring Promissory of postmodernism'. I'd always thought that the old left which was wontonly promiscuous and that the PoMo crew were all into celibacy and chastity. Apparently not. This time, it's not the Living Kristol or the Alan Blooms we have to worry about but—surprisingly—the Left. The truth is that it was indeed Alan Bloom et al (and he would not doubt see the incorrect spelling of his name as a vindication) who were behind the offensive mounted over the past year against the likes of PoMo and PC. The fragments of the left have merely been scrambling about in response. In this, as in many things, these three are behind the times.

Imagine saying that artists who compromise their vision by making it more commercial are now being called 'sell-outs'. I haven't heard anyone being accused of selling out since Bob Dylan went electric.

Oh to be a philistine

The editorial ends with a gratuitous attack upon intellectuals. This has little connection with what has come before, and even less to its supposed target, Salman Rushdie. It is closely related, however, to the attack upon intellectuals in Burchill's centrepiece review of Jon Savage's England's Dreaming and Bushell's attack on the 'middle class Left'. In fact, Burchill mounts an explicit defence of what she calls our 'philistinism'. In what reaches us from the ridiculous Tory party political broadcast about how all is well in the land of hope and glory, Burchill proclaims that 'Little England is worth dying for. Why? Because the hedonistic and supremely stubbornly individualistic English have a sense of humour, a culture of rebellion and creativity second to none in the world' and 'MAKING GREAT POP RECORDS' (her capital).

Class bonding

She recycles (remember, nothing new in the Modern Review) the old petit-bourgeois fantasy of the common bond between those who prole and the toffs. Pure, Upstairs, Downstairs. For her, it's only the middle class meddles in the 'nerds', the 'intellectuals' (a filthy business), the 'politicians', people like Tony Blair who spoil things by running the place down. Don't they realise, she says, that it's better than France and Japan after all, haven't we produced Ray Davies and Morrissey, and the much-maligned Radio One! We've got a specifically English genius! It would be funny if it weren't so pathetic.

It says something about our times that a review devoted to describing and celebrating
popular culture could be launched from such a barren perspective. Burchill says she is one of the "especially interesting little English types." She is actually typical of a pale, pinched and mean little English type: suspicious of foreigners, terrified of ideas, grateful for small mercies and submissive before a 'good kicking', like the one she says was delivered to the country by Mrs. Thatcher. She is so desperate to belong that she has frantically constructed her own English tradition out of pop and punk and tacked it, as a youth version, onto the tail of the official myth—England as a bastion of tolerance, pragmatism, humour, anti-extremism, saviour of the world from fascism (shades of her Stalinist sympathies here) and from itself generally. She calls this sick joke 'our cultural identity'. If she and her friends really want to die in defense of it, I hope nobody stands in their way when the time comes.

Under the title logo on the back of the Review is the quotation, "Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds"—Emerson. This could be the editors' desperate request for interesting articles to be submitted, but as it lies next to the subscription form it is more likely their boast about the quality of the existing material. I'm not sure whether this Emerson is the guy who used to play with Lake and Palmer (more great English popsters), or that Waldo from America who had some seriously wacky ideas about mystical nature and whatnot.

Mind you Waldo did give us some good advice; "The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted the spoons."

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**Situationist Monkees?**

Toby Banks on England's Dreaming and the punk phenomenon

For a phenomenon that lasted barely 18 months, the first sight of which were enjoyed by only a few hundred oddballs, punk had extraordinary far-reaching consequences. Its influence can be seen and heard today in advertising, graphic design, fashion, publishing and yes, even music (some of those realities really could play). Jon Savage's England's Dreaming is subtitled Sex Pistols and Punk Rock, but he could have added Twentieth Century Avant-Garde, Modern Alternative Thinkers and the Breakdown of the Postwar Consensus. No, wait, I mean it's good.

Sitting pop music in a 'social context' has been the ruin of many a poor boy, but Savage has come up with a real tour de force. He submits every conceivable aspect of punk to a thorough but entertaining inspection, interwoven with the story of Malcolm McLaren, opportunist creator of the Sex Pistols and single-minded maker of legends.

**Hated hippy consensus**

I've heard of boys who want to be train robbers, but nerer one who wanted to be Larry Parnes. Yet this spiky showbiz impresario, with his roster of fabricated English pop phobes like Billy Fury, held a strange fascination for McLaren. After a few restless years playing with the identity of a shop in the King's Road, he hit upon the scam of assembling an anti-pop group through which he, the Svengali figure in the wings, could subvert the hated hippy consensus which dominated the rock industry and clanged the lines of communication.

The Sex Pistols were to be a sort of situationist Monkees, dressed to evoke the candelabral hooliganism of the London mob (neonotics who combined a love of art with a habit of burning down theatres and burning up proprietors whose plays disappointed them). The rest of the story is as well known as how John met Paul, George and Ringo. But Savage takes as critical a view of it all as such an old punk can. The 'I was there' tales are kept in check through the device of quoting from his own diary of the time, which captures well the stifling atmosphere of mid-seventies London. Stagnation, decline, repressed sexuality, xenophobia—in its more heroic moments punk held up a mirror to the nation, at a time when a desperate attempt was being made to cling on to the threadbare old myths. We hated older people, says Scussies, 'always harping on about Hitler, we showed him', and that smug pride.

**'Punish the punks'**

The hysterical reaction to punk owed more to the jittery mood of the establishment than to McLaren's dubious media manipulation. It's amazing to recall how the Sex Pistols were witch-hunted by press, politicians, police and patriotic citizens—Punish the punks' (the Mirror). Things reached an almost surreal level when the charts were rigged to keep God Save the Queen off the number one slot during Jubilee Week.

After that it was downhill all the way. The contradiction between punk's arty roots and its street kids rhetoric tore it apart once it became a 'youth movement' and the real football terrace boys caught on. Before long, a crude 'dope queue rock' tag was tied tight around punk's neck, and any bunch of tossers could cut their hair, call themselves 'The Pist Flaps' and sign a record deal.

Many of those original punks who managed to stay alive, sans and out of prison ended up working in advertising and business in the eighties. The current recession has put most of them back where they started—on the dole, and very bored. But they're not singing about it anymore.

Jon Savage, England's Dreaming, Faber & Faber, £17.95 hbk
Now that the dust has settled, Alan Harding ponders what the Booker Prize tells us about the state of the modern novel.

The first Booker Prize was awarded in 1969, but its claim to be Britain's top fiction award dates from 1931, when the prize was won by Salaman Rushdie for *Midnight's Children*. This novel and William Golding's *Rites of Passage* are the only winners of real substance. The winning author in 1991, Ben Okri, received a first prize of £20,000—worth a few drinks—but this is not what it is all about. Selling books is big business, but it is also a tough business. Profit margins are cut to the bone. The way around this is a long print run. Medical text books and coffee table art books may qualify for this, but no publisher is going to take a risk on a novel unless it makes the Booker shortlist. Even this may not be enough. On 24 November, one month after the publication, the only winner, The *Famished Road*, was in the *Sunday Times* fiction bestseller list. The raison d'être of the Booker is the needs of the industry, not the quality of the novel.

Diners' club

Those for whom the evening of the presentation is the high point of the year or the lowest circle of hell are a small and self-reflexive group. Roddy Doyle, a north Dublin schoolteacher, was shortlisted for *The Van*, but is not a member of the London literary scene. For him, attending the shindig was a bizarre experience but it did give him the advantage of detached observation. He noted that everyone at the dinner appeared to know each other. He was wrong on one count. The Indian writer, Rohinton Mistry, who is president in Canada, sat bolted to his chair like a rabbit transfixed in the glare of car headlights.

Meanwhile, perhaps the most power-dressed PRs in the Western world prowled and circled, making sure the product was being marketed and that their man was being seen by the right people at the right table. After all, this year's shortlistee is next year's Booker judge. So it goes.

All this is a necessary if thankless task for the armoured infantry of the book trade because the secret is already out. The rows of photographers—cameras flashing and popping—who surrounded Ben Okri long before the official announcement of the winner indicated either that he had replaced Paul Gascogne on the road to Lazio or that he was anointed one.

Far too long

It seems to me that the frenzy, desperation and hype are in inverse proportion to the quality of the novels on offer. None of the 1991 batch are awful, but it is difficult to describe any of them as anything other than mediocre. For the most part they are far too long for what they have got to say. And what they have got to say does seem to have been said by someone else—more compellingly and more succinctly.

As a snapshot of novel writing in Britain and the Commonwealth, the Booker shortlist presents a sorry picture. Of the six on the shortlist last year, only Martin Amis is English. There are two Irish writers and three from the Commonwealth: one African, one Indian and one from Hong Kong. This is an accurate reflection of the paucity of imaginative writing in Britain. But the quality of the others does not do justice to the creativity of recent writing from those who come to English as an acquired language or with the uniquely

acquired insight of Irish writing.

Of all the books, I found William Trevor's *Reading Turgenev* the most irritating. It has been praised for its sensitivity and control. For me, it was a novel on auto pilot. Trevor has mined the narrow seam of the hidebound nature of Irish small town life and the emptiness it induces to exhaustion. The prose is polished but precious. It moves without variety or variation in tone. It left me with nothing more than the sense of having completed a sentimental homily.

Energy and wit

By contrast, Roddy Doyle's concluding third story in the saga of the Rabbitte family is raucous, rough and inventive. It Alan Parker's *The Commitments* is anything to go by, there is another fine screenplay waiting for any director who can handle the energy and wit that Doyle translates from the streets of north Dublin. The dialogue in *The Van* is great, but that's all there is.

The contributions from the Commonwealth all weigh in as heavyweights on word count but little else. Martin Amis's *Such a Long Journey*, set in Bombay at the time of the foundation of Bangladesh, is the story of an ordinary man living in extraordinary times. The themes are large. The execution is impressive but bland.

The *Redundancy of Courage* is by an author, Timothy Mo, who has been shortlisted for the Booker three times now. It is the best read in the straightforward sense of holding you with the story line. That being said, you would be better off with a j es Carre or a Delight. And if you want to go all the way with ambiguity of motives, guilt and redemption, there are quite a few Graham Greene novels to turn to. You won't even lose the exotic location.

The winner was Ben Okri. The *Famished Road* has been described as a 'magical realism' work, but this label has become an excuse rather than a description. It is kitchen sink magical realism. There is nothing of the surreal wit of Marquez, only the gaudy colours of a child's colouring book. There is nothing of the achingly intense of Toni Morrison, just the assertion that in a world where the human suffering is reflected and may be resolved.

Amis a hit

My winner would have been Martin Amis's *The Information*—and not just because the book is short! Indeed the single conceit on which the book is structured—that of running a human life backwards—could have been executed even more sharply. Not because it is fresh. Amis acknowledges Levi and vonnegut in his afterword. The *Vonnegut of Slaughterhouse Five, God Bless You Mr. Rosewater* and the *Sinners of Titian* came quickly to my mind. But Amis is sharper and takes more risks.

Of all the authors, Amis probably does not need the money nor the imprimatur of the Booker in order to be marketed. He is of the literary world in a special sense because he is his "bad boy". For the moment he succeeds by not winning the Booker. But his nastiness is horseshit. After this cleft of sledge I've gone back to an author they wouldn't even allow to wait on table at the Guildhall ceremony. Derek Raymond's *I was Dora Suarez*. Now that is nasty but good.
Grow up

In the wake of the festive season, let us pause a while and consider the children and more especially, childhood. Arrested mental development has always had its fans—people with Garfield's huskies in their Fiat's windows, people who talk to their cats and so on. But suddenly, it's being intellectualised. It's a new trendy thing. Does this mean that the value of the exercise depends on whether the child inside you is the Boy Jesus or Bart Simpson?

What it leads to in TV terms is the elevation of old plots to cult status, as millions of thirty-somethings sit down to the television film "Thunderbirds" (BBC2) back catalogue, the high viewing figures of which can only be explained in terms of mass regression therapy. Soon Channel 4 is to cash in on this by repeating "The Magic Roundabout". The generation's generation is avoiding facing up to ageing by sticking to the hipster-style of their teenage years: the present one seeks refuge in the safety of the childhood (the child inside you) and is easily transformed. The more perfect poetic expression of the idea is "Peter Pan", now filmed as "Hook" by—obviously—Stephen Spielberg and starring Robin Williams, the man who did get in touch with the child inside and was transformed into a hipster-like, wise-eyed Krankie. Let him be a lesson to you.

Americans, like the British, have a fear of growing up, but they try to avoid not only emotional maturity and responsibility but also the physical effects of ageing. The most extreme expression of this is of course Michael Jackson. Jackson's generation and his most recent video stars his very own Wendy—the Ideal of Childhood—McCauley Cukin, the venusian star of "Home Alone" and Uncle Buck. Cukin and Jackson between them turn up the thinking behind his desire for a second childhood.

In the film, mentioned, the raging-child is innocent and vulnerable but also resourceful and virtuous. When Uncle Buck remarks on his ability to notice detail, he retorts, 'I'm a kid, that's my job.' This refers to the myth that kids have a moral perspicacity which becomes dulled in adulthood. This is what Jesus was getting at when he said, "You must be as little children. You ought to notice this." If McCauley was such a peripatetic genius why did he agree to be in the remake of "Cinema Paradiso" alongside the human turkey, Bruce Willis?

The Jackson video kicks off with another aspect of the Ideal Child when Cukin sets up a pair of huge speakers in the front room, plugs in his music centre and says, "Eat this, Dad." The child as unattainable consumer, the dull-eyed kid who disappears in school and grunts, "Feed Me!" in the oven chips ad. This is the essence of the Tortoise, of course, but it is also there in the honey-grabbing Winnie the Pooh. Since Jackson's key market is around this age, it is easy to see why he places such a premium on the child buyer.

But Black and White does explore other aspects of childhood. There is a long sequence in which MoJo dances with lots of people in different national costumes, the Soviet Union being represented in these troubled times by Chezidek's hoo-ha and down in front of the Kremlin. The message is basically: We are the world (we are the children)—a message of Spanners-like idocy or touching purity, depending on whether you have a child inside you or not.

World cultures are reduced to crouching up, much as they are when Donald Duck goes to the pyramid fragrances, etc. The imperialist aspect of this is obvious in both cases. Black and White the tradition of the ballet and the Steppes are replaced by one with one with the Moonies and the Deeply Infants. After this comes an extraordinary passage in which a Black Panther (another potent political image) turns into MoJo, who then goes out to a kind of Ellis Street and starts to smash up cars, gloves and his own oven.

It was Prince doing it, it would be alarming. In MoJo's hands it looks like the tantrum of a five-year-old. There is no music in the air, so it looks like a start. The famous Jackson puppet dance has been encased in a kind of quadrille and a black and white display, one dimension of the most bizarre of all, he keeps stopping to do a funny little nimble gesture with his teeth while screwing up his eyes.

If the spirit of dance has brought out the animal in Jack, then the animal is in some other than Vincent, the myopic Gopher from "Deputy Dawg." It is fascinating that where lesser stars (George Michael and Kylie) try to broaden their appeal by going for credibility, virtually and sexually, Jackson—who was mature, sexy and unalterably creditable at the age of eight—has been trying to move downmarket by turning himself into a cartoon character with a Mickey Mouse voice and the jerky articulation of Pinocchio. The video ends with a glimpse of Bart.

It is interesting that the precursors of Jackson mentioned here—Winnie the Pooh, Christopher Robin and Peter Pan—are all products of the nascent late 1920s. They offered a release from the fear of war and depression. One of the most important aspects of the Jackson-Cukin partnership is its association with money. If you really want to be childlike and carefree, get rich. Nothing makes you feel older than debt. I speak as one who knows.

Jackson in particular stands as an example of massively successful marketing. He brings hope in the middle of the recession, the feeling that you can sell anything if you try. He also embodies the exhilarating freedom that wealth brings you. He can't only buy what he wants (Hammes and oven toaster). He can be whom he wants. Stories abound about Jackson's elaborate disguises. He has changed colour, nose, shape. The Black and White video contains a wonderful sequence in which people of various nationalities, sizes and sizes blur into each other. It is a celebration of the fact that identity can be multiple. We can all reinvent ourselves.

This section leaves us by partly because it runs counter to the whole culture of the rest of the video.

The 'thinking' behind all the child inside's trick is that identity is stable and determined—find the child and you have the key to yourself. The thrill of Jackson is the very opposite; it is the thrill of constant change. Of course, it is easy to talk like this if you've got a surgeon and an unlimited budget but you don't have to be a millionaire to junk the child inside. One of my heroes is the turn-of-the-century burglar Simon Morrison. He had different nicknames depending on who he was. They were, variously, the Australian, the Frenchman and the Russian.

While I've been writing this, all of my children have found their way up to my office. One has been worried for days that he will be the victim of a wrongful arrest by the police. Another wants his breakfast but will have to wait until I post this out. Another tries to engage me in polite conversation while jumping up and down. I have just told him to 'grow up.' Let me say the same to you for '92. Be foolish, be happy, grow up.
STALINISM IN CRISIS

ROBERT KNIGHT

This book explores the causes and implications of the collapse of Stalinism in both East and West.
Separate chapters focus on developments in the Soviet Union, China, the third world, Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

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The end of liberalism

Books discussed in this article include:
Allan Bloom, Simon & Schuster, £8.99 pbk;
The Fatal Conclave: The Errors of Socialism
FA Hayek, (Ed WW Bartley III), Routledge,
£30 hbk, £9.99 pbk; Three Rival Versions of
Moral Enquiry, Alasdair MacIntyre,
Duckworth, £12.95 pbk

These three authors were once liberal, or in Alasdair MacIntyre's case radical, opponents of conservatism. All defended reason against what they saw as the prejudices of the age. Today, by contrast, all three fear the corrosive effect of sceptical criticism upon tradition. All three favour tradition over reason (at best seeing the latter as a product of the former) as the only basis of a good society.

The personal trajectories of Allan Bloom, Friedrich Hayek and Alasdair MacIntyre—the transition from a liberal or radical point of view to a conservative one—represent more than the views of three academics. The shift from liberalism to reaction is the expression of capitalism's economic decline relative to its earlier progressive stage. But the ease with which democratic rights are circumvented expresses the capitalists' confidence relative to their opponents.

When, in the last century, capitalism had the economic capacity to take the whole of society forwards, however conflict-ridden that process was, it still tended to extend political liberties. Unable to sustain the economic basis of consensus this century, it resorted to political reaction starting with the enslavement of the colonies and ending with fascism and war in Europe.

But the consequences of reaction, the widespread association of capitalism with fascism, and the rise in popularity of the Stalinist social system, put capitalism on the defensive. In the postwar era, when Hayek, MacIntyre and Bloom out their political teeth, capitalism was trying to pass itself off as liberal once again. Its ideologists proclaimed the 'end of ideology': the end of the ideologies of fascism and Stalinism, that is, the end of the ideology of liberal capitalism.

Now that the threat of Stalinism has been proved to be no threat at all, the reactionary trajectory of capitalism in decline has been resumed, or, more precisely, been made explicit once again, and postwar liberals are turning into conservatives. However, as these three demonstrate by their conflicting ideas of what tradition is, rebuilding conservatism might be necessary to save capitalism but, as we shall see, conservatism also contradicts capitalism's claim to promote democracy and freedom.

Where Bloom, Hayek and MacIntyre diverge is in their understanding of what tradition is and, in particular, its relationship to liberalism: how do you accommodate the fact that the system that you are trying to conserve began life as an attack on established tradition and privilege, as an extension of reason and democracy?

Allan Bloom's response is to try to make liberalism a part of tradition—the tradition of the Enlightenment. He defended the 'great books' of Western civilisation in the debate about what American universities should teach their students. But in doing so, he made the revolutionary programmes of John Locke and Niccolo Machiavelli into museum pieces for the aggrandisement of the established order.

Friedrich Hayek, the most confident of these three, simply assumes that liberal thinkers are traditionalists. In the process he misrepresents them, as well as rewriting his past endorsement of the rhetoric of liberal tradition. Alasdair MacIntyre, the most consistently conservative here, sees liberalism as the beginning of the end of a sincere moral tradition, and seeks a return to pre-capitalist thinking.

In Allan Bloom's Giants and Dwarves we are treated both to the intellectual development that led up to his 1988 hit, The Closing of the American Mind, and the fall-out from the book's attack on the 'relativism' taught in American universities (See The Battle of the Books, Living Marxism, June 1991). With The Closing of the American Mind, Bloom warned that the teaching of other cultures is equivalent to Western civilisation denigrated the latter, undermining students' faith in liberal democracies. Replying to his critics, Bloom is scathing of their insults, though one might think they gave as good as they got, and seeks to paint his opponents as iniquitous fascists.

The impact of Bloom's attack on the campus left suggests that, in fact he has unleashed the 'fascists' upon American students. Bolstered by The Closing of the American Mind, right wingers have abused students in the hope of being tried under the college Codes of Conduct which Bloom identified as an incitement to free speech. 'My parents own your people' was how one of Bloom's less attractive readers, Douglas Hans from Brown University, sought to...
In Hayek, socialism seems to have expanded its meaning beyond all ordinary usage of the term until it is virtually synonymous with reason itself.
For conservatives, reason must give way to tradition. Enquiry must give way to faith. The hope for equality must give way to submission.

For Alasdair MacIntyre, by contrast, it is the abstract morality of liberalism that undermines moral certainty. MacIntyre was a left winger in the sixties, writing for the New Rezoner, a forerunner of the New Left Review. Since then his rejection of liberal capitalism, inspired (albeit eccentrically) by his reading of Marx, has changed into a morally conservative critique of liberalism. His book After Virtue (1981) was hailed by conservatives for its attack on moral relativism, or, as he called it, 'euthimism'. In Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry, he returns to the theme by comparing the relative merits of Catholic Thomism, Nietzschean Genealogy and the liberal Encyclopaedists.

MacIntyre's book gains by the discipline of his 10 Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh in 1988, comparing favourably with his Byzantine book of that year Whole Justice? Which Rationality? Its extensive exposition of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas—MacIntyre's traditions' (p228). The problem is that MacIntyre knows that to establish a sure moral tradition is to challenge liberal—represented here by the ninth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica—not to reaffirm it: 'The ghosts of the Ninth Edition haunt the contemporary academy. They need to be exorcised.' (p171)

For supporters of progress, the problem of the reaction expressed in these three books is all too clear. Reason must give way to tradition. Enquiry must give way to faith. The hope for equality must give way to submission. The problem for contemporary conservatism is that it must undermine not only the moral justification of existing society—human progress—but also its claim to uphold even the formal freedoms of the capitalist system such as freedom of thought and freedom before the law. In its own way, conservatism is in revolt.
Peers, Queers and Commons:
The Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the Present
by Stephen Jeffery-Poulter
Routledge, £9.99 pbk

Stephen Jeffery-Poulter has written a concise and thorough history of the treatment of homosexuality by the British parliamentary system and press, particularly focusing on the postwar period when it began to be discussed more openly.

The single determining feature of the campaign for homosexual rights has been the abandonment of any attempt to relate the issue to a working class audience. For this reason, words like 'struggle' and 'movement' are misnomers when applied to postwar gay politics. What we have, instead, are isolated lobby groups congregating around different sections of the establishment as the establishment itself has adapted to keep a grip on society's sexual practices.

Jeffery-Poulter notes the problems facing the authorities in the early fifties as they encountered barriers to regaining the strict prewar regulation of Britain's sexual activities. While police arrests for 'indecency' between males was at an all-time high, the intrusion of the state into the bedroom caused its own problems. The establishment's response, which led to what is hailed by gay activists as a victory for homonorms, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, was influenced not by riots or struggle but by limits to the state clampedown itself—not least the embarrassment of members of the establishment being dragged before the courts as in the Lord Mountagu trial of 1953.

A strong political and moral consensus on sexual practices enabled the state to update its method of regulation at its own careful pace, while maintaining a tight framework of oppression. The fact that the state itself was able to define what was and wasn't acceptable sexual behaviour meant that homosexuality was never criminalised. The 1967 Act did not liberalise gay men; it simply redrew the boundaries of what was considered acceptable behaviour.

In the eighties, this unchallenged consensus, combined with the arrival of AIDS, gave the Thatcher government one of its few successes in changing public attitudes. Jeffery-Poulter acknowledges the effect of the Aids panic in allowing the government to target those who define themselves as homosexual. But he still inclines towards a 'too little, too late' view in response to the Aids panic, taking much of the government's safe sex campaign at face value.

Despite this, he finishes the chapter on the Aids panic with a favourable review of a pamphlet on the subject written by contributors to Living Marxism (Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and Don Milligan, The Truth About the Aids Panic, Junius 1987). Contrary to what is implied by Jeffery-Poulter, the pamphlet was aimed not at gay activists as such, but at all those who needed to be convinced that taking an unequivocal stand on homosexual rights is the only fitting response to the government-sponsored moral panic about Aids.

Craig Barton

Shoot the Women First
by Eileen MacDonald
Fourth Estate, £14.99 hbk

'Sexual motives apart...why do women, who have so little to gain and so much to lose, ever become guerrillas?' (p240) Despite the best efforts of the 'female terrorists' interviewed in Shoot the Women First, its author, investigative journalist Eileen MacDonald, succeeds in submerging their political motives by asking a series of questions designed to reveal some other explanation for their involvement in political violence. Did they lose their mothers at an early age? Did they do it for the love of a man? Or were they unable to have children?

Having stated her contempt for commentators who attribute women's behaviour to their sexuality (they're all lesbians) or their looks (they're all ugly), MacDonald goes on to create her very own myth. The 'cause', she claims, has become a 'surrogate child' for these women, 'one for whom the may have sacrificed authentic maternal feelings, that must be protected at all costs' (p237).

Women active in national liberation movements such as the Irish Republican Army and the Poice Liberation Organisation are asked about their 'emotions and feelings about violence' alongside women who were in the Red Brigades and other European terrorist groups in the seventies. MacDonald certainly leaves us in no doubt about her own feelings on this score. No interview is complete without a cautionary warning about the evil of violence lest the reader be seduced by the arguments of these articulate women. MacDonald admits to being more scared of the IRA women than any others, no doubt because she feels them to be a threat to the British state with which she identifies.

For those of us with less distaste for the violence of the oppressed, these interviews are compulsive reading. The women describe how involvement in a political struggle has given them a taste of the power that they would never experience as mothers and housewives. If we refuse to put political motives aside, and consider that national liberation and an end to oppression are goals worth fighting for, it would seem that MacDonald's maxim of 'little to gain and so much to lose' just doesn't make sense.

Fiona Fister

Shortlisted

On Liberty and Other Essays, John Stuart Mill, Oxford University Press, £5.99 pbk

First published in 1859, On Liberty remains the classic liberal statement on the relation between the individual and society. Since the French Revolution, bourgeois political theorists have grappled with the urgent problem of how the proposition towards Liberty, Equality and Fraternity cannot be realised in a society dictated by the capitalist market. Their response has been to counterpose liberty and equality. The argument runs that if the state imposes equality then individuals cannot be free. If individuals are free, then inequality will result. Within this arbitrary framework, the liberal solution put forward by Mill is for individual freedom tempered by responsible society.

The concepts of liberty and equality cannot, however, be understood as a trade-off between an abstract individual and society. The categories are meaningless outside the context of the struggle between classes in society and the prevailing property relations.

It is not surprising that Mill obscures this point. For him capitalism was the only way to organise society. In his lifetime (1806-1873) the key social question was the emergence and threat of the working class. Mill's defence of individual liberty for an elite and his denigration of mass democracy reflected the recognition that the working class is the gravedigger of capitalism.

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