

LIVING

MARXISM



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HOW THE WEST HAS

WLOST

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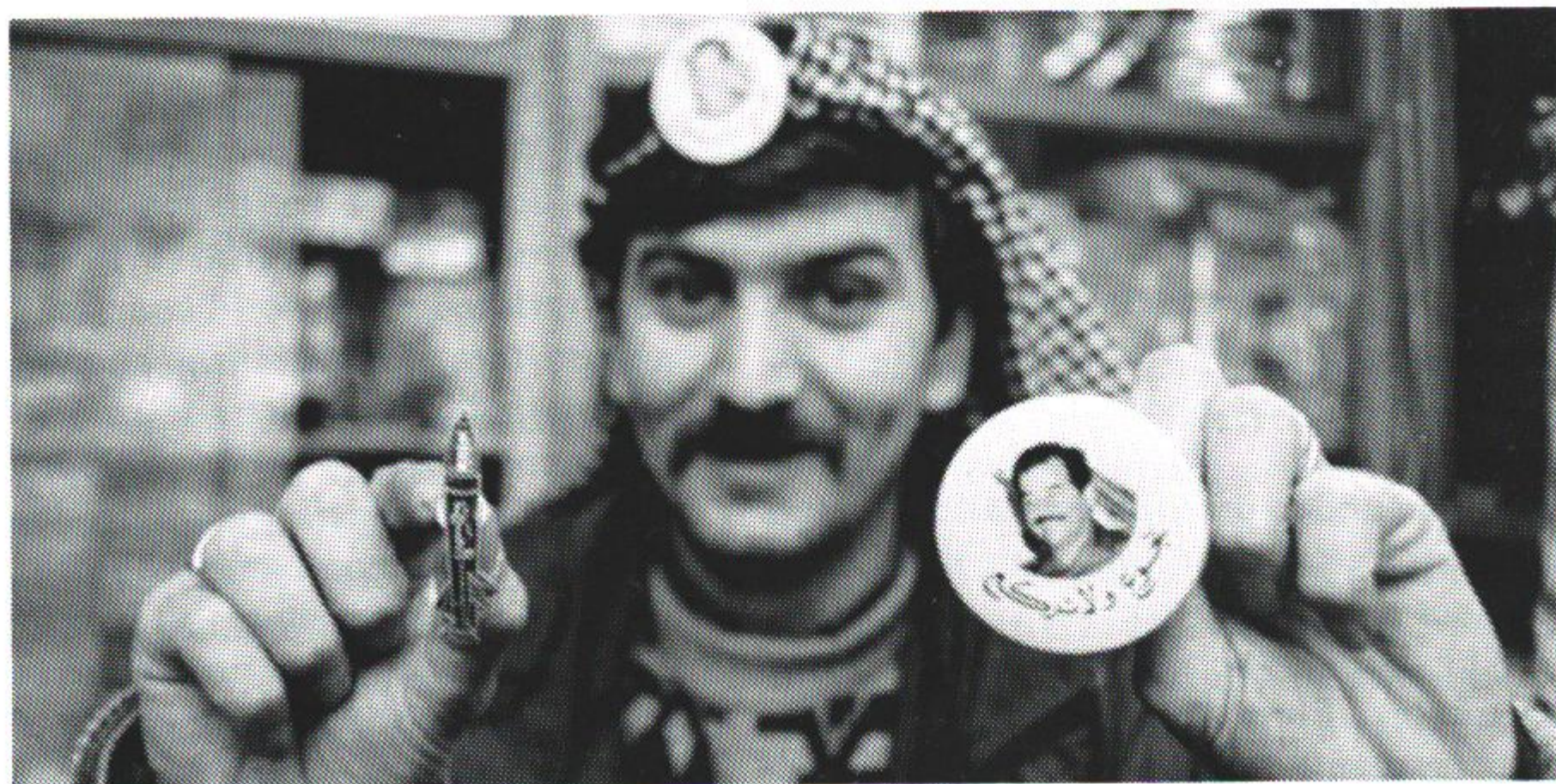
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British bulldogs

This issue of *Living Marxism* is given over to making the case against imperialism in the Middle East. There is no more important place to air these arguments than here in Britain, the most pro-war country in the West and perhaps beyond.

Swaggering about in battledress, the Tory government has used its role in the Gulf War to give a temporary boost to Britain's flagging status in Europe and the world. It is pleased with itself for teaching Johnny Arab a lesson, and even fancies its chances of getting British hands on some oil-wealth when the war is over.

It is a telling comment on British capitalism that the high-point of its recent history should be to act as America's assistant in bombing a third world country like Iraq into rubble. The British ruling class enjoys making war because it is no longer good for making anything else. The sooner it is defeated both at home and abroad, the better and more peaceful place the world will be.



Cover photo by Simon Norfolk: This artisan in Amman, Jordan, once made a memorial plaque for Mrs Thatcher. Now he makes Saddam Hussein badges and Scud missile brooches, best-sellers among the Palestinians and other Arabs who are naming their babies Saddam or Scud to show their feelings about the Gulf War

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**LIVING
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MARCH 1991 3

editorial

How the West has lost

As the first wave of bombers attacked Baghdad, and the Iraqis failed to hit back, one American commentator declared immediate victory and dubbed it 'the six minute war'. The world quickly discovered that he was an idiot. Mindless euphoria was soon replaced by the more sober observation that, despite its initial and apparently dramatic successes against Iraq, the US-led alliance would achieve victory only in the long run. But the reassessment has not yet gone far enough. The reality is that, despite its initial and apparently dramatic successes against Iraq, in the long run the US-led alliance has already lost.

The Gulf War really involves three struggles. First there is the immediate military conflict, between the US, British and allied forces on one hand, and the Iraqis on the other. This is the one that the Western

powers seem best placed to win. The success of 'the civilised world' will be measured in thousands of bombing missions flown, millions of tonnes of explosives dropped, and a body-count at which we can only wonder.

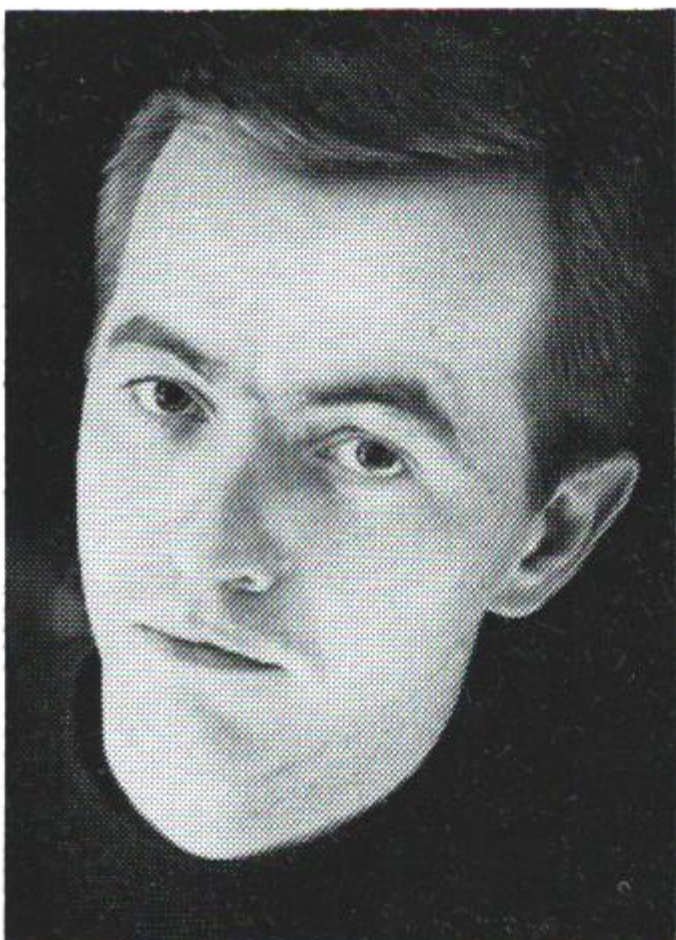
The Western attack on Iraq is an act of aggression carried out by the world's great powers against a relatively weak and impoverished third world country. It is the modern face of imperialism; and, in the age of laser-guided missiles and smart bombs, the consequences will be far bloodier than when the Victorians first introduced the peoples of other continents to the wonders of Western military technology. However long it takes the Western powers to win the military war, it is already certain that the impact upon the Iraqi people will be devastating.

The second war being fought today is an

imaginary one, staged in Hollywood style, in order to deny that the West has imperialist motives in the Gulf. To justify their invasion, the British and American governments (backed by all parts of the media) have packaged the Gulf War as a re-run of the Second World War—their most popular military campaign from the past. Which is why the US-led forces in the Gulf are continually referred to as 'the Allies', united in the pursuit of good, while Saddam Hussein has had to be nominated as the evil reincarnation of Adolf Hitler.

The West's propaganda case is a weak one. As examined elsewhere in this month's *Living Marxism*, it is impossible to sustain the argument that Saddam Hussein is any worse (or any better) a dictator than the Arab sheikhs and 'strongmen' who are counted among 'the Allies'. And the equation of a third world ruler like Saddam with Adolf Hitler was made to look ridiculous once the one-sided air battle began. After all, Nazi Germany invented the blitzkrieg; Saddam's Iraq, by contrast, has been blitzed.

Yet in the propaganda war, as in the military battle, the Western authorities have enjoyed early success. All of the mainstream media and politicians have adopted the language of the Second World War when discussing the Gulf. The powers that be in Washington and Whitehall can feel particularly pleased with the way in which former left-wing intellectuals, like Britain's Fred Halliday and Germany's Hans Magnus Enzensberger, have been converted into firm supporters of the 'Saddam = Hitler' school of war. So far this consensus has allowed the



editor
mick hume

imperialists to cloak the truth about their invasion of the Gulf behind Second World War black-out curtains, and to project the image of a united allied crusade to create a better world. But their success cannot last.

Getting the governments of the West to agree to use the same rhetoric in the heat of the battle is one thing. Getting them all to agree on the post-war aims of the campaign is another thing entirely. Behind their united front, each of the imperialist powers involved in the Gulf War has its own ambition to obtain spheres of influence in the region.

Already, the differences among 'the Allies' have been revealed as the US, French and other governments shift the goalposts when discussing what the war is meant to achieve. Once the initial fighting with Iraq is over, the scramble for the Middle East will begin in earnest. More and more the united, peace-loving allies will be forced to reveal themselves as rapacious imperialist rivals, seeking to carve up the wealth of the Earth among them. It is only a matter of time before the rhetorical re-run of the Second World War is drowned out by the sounds of the real battles being fought to decide who controls the modern world.

This brings us to the last of today's three conflicts, and ultimately the most important: the Western powers' political struggle to create a new and stable world order in their own image. It is the war behind the Gulf War. And it is one which the West had lost even as those first bombs burst on Baghdad.

As their retreat into the imagery of the Second World War suggests, the Americans and their allies are not facing up to the reality of the nineties. The bombastic pronouncements about the birth of their new world order which George Bush, John Major and the rest have made throughout the war, might sound impressive for the moment. Yet it is only a short while since these same Western statesmen were making equally impressive, equally bombastic promises about the triumph of liberal democracy and free enterprise in Eastern Europe; within months Eastern Europe was in the grip of reaction and austerity. They will be lucky if their promised new world order lasts even that long.

● They should succeed in blasting Iraq to defeat, but in the longer run the Gulf War will leave the Western powers with less, rather than more, of a grip over events around the globe. The third world has now achieved an unprecedented degree of unanimity in its hostility to the West. This is not, unfortunately, a mood shaped by anti-imperialist politics (the shenanigans of the Stalinists in the Kremlin having widely discredited such ideas). Instead, anti-

Western feeling in the third world, often expressed through Islam, reflects a more basic gut feeling. When countries like India, Pakistan, Malaysia and many others watch TV pictures of American B-52s crossing the world to destroy the bridges which are the arteries of Baghdad, their response is instinctive and the same: 'They could be bombing our cities next.'

Since the earliest days of colonialism, its victims have harboured bitter feelings against the imperialists. But the invasion of the Gulf has made these sentiments more intense than ever. The Gulf crisis has provided a new, international focus for traditional nationalist hostility to Western interference in third world affairs. The way in which the USA elevated the Gulf into the major global issue, and the immense scale of the military mobilisation involved, has encouraged third world nations to rally together against the West as a counterweight to the anti-Iraqi alliance.

Carpet-bombing conscript troops and cities is unlikely to turn the peoples of the third world into admirers of the Anglo-American way of life

Naturally enough, the anti-Western feeling is strongest in the Middle East, where Saddam Hussein has become a popular hero, especially among the Palestinians, and even such an Anglo-American stooge as King Hussein of Jordan has condemned the Gulf War. Elsewhere in the third world, the mood is not universal. But it has touched some surprising corners of the old colonial world; the British press was particularly shocked to report how even some middle class Hindus in India had set aside their hostility to Muslims and expressed support for Iraq.

These developments present serious obstacles to the consolidation of any new world order under Western control. They are obstacles which will not be overcome simply by achieving military victory over Iraq. Carpet-bombing conscript troops and heavily populated cities can turn the tide of a battle, but it is unlikely to turn the peoples of the third world into admirers of the Anglo-American way of life.

The Western powers' ability to command order and stability around the world is further impeded by their inability to speak with one voice or to act in unison. The

worsening relations between the USA and its allies, over issues like tariffs and trade, interest and exchange rates, have become the key feature of international politics, especially since the end of the Cold War removed the unifying force of anti-communism. Now these tensions are being made worse still, as the world economy slips from recession to a full-scale slump.

As we have argued in *Living Marxism* throughout, the local Kuwait-Iraq dispute only became a global crisis because the Americans chose it as the pretext around which to demonstrate their continued world leadership. By presenting an unexceptional Arab dictator (and former American ally) as an aggressor of Hitleresque proportions, they hoped to force their reluctant allies to unite behind US military power as the protector of the Free World.

Here, too, America's initial success in pulling together an alliance is soon likely to be overshadowed by failure. No sooner had

the Gulf War began than it became clear that the alliance existed only on paper: the French continued to pursue their own diplomacy, the British (who had recently expressed fears of a resurgent German militarism) attacked Germany for being 'a mouse', the Germans and Japanese equivocated about financing the Western war effort...and so it has continued on. When the post-war recriminations and rivalries take over, a major victim of the Gulf crisis looks likely to be the Western Alliance itself.

Much remains uncertain about what comes next in international relations. One thing for sure, however, is that the West will not give up its control over the world without a fight. The Gulf crisis is only the start of a new era of imperialism and militarism, in which the Western powers will be seeking to subjugate the third world and, as in the Gulf, to settle their disputes with each other by turning other people's countries into battlefields. If you want to see the future shape of American, British and Western foreign policy, forget the bombast about a peaceful new world order, and look at the bomb blasts which have reduced much of Iraq to rubble.

Letters

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

Taking sides on the Gulf

I write after seeing a TV report showing the charred and melted remains of Iraqi civilians being shovelled out of an air-raid shelter following a US bombing raid.

Horrible incidents like these seem to strengthen the argument put forward by Pat Roberts ('Anti-war? Not good enough!', February) that the peace movement should side with the Iraqis against the West. The TV report certainly strengthened my hostility to the military men in Whitehall and Washington. But we should not allow our revulsion to cloud our judgement of the issue. The question is—what is the best way to put a stop to the barbarities against Iraqi civilians? In my opinion, backing Iraq (which in real terms means backing the Iraqi leadership) is no better than backing the Pentagon.

However barbaric the war today, it's worth remembering that the Americans are only continuing a genocidal policy that began with Saddam Hussein. We do the Iraqi people no favours when we turn a blind eye to Saddam's atrocities (as the West did before): many Iraqis killed by the regime were also charred and melted, and gassed and tortured and beaten. Pat Roberts' point that 'neither side is particularly attractive' is an understatement on a par with the Western claim that there were no civilian casualties at the beginning of the war.

Obviously people in the peace movement are opposed to the West's war. But this should not mean taking sides with a military strongman who is just as likely to destroy the lives of Iraqi civilians if he stays in power. For the Iraqis, the very worst-case scenario would surely be a Western victory which devastates their country but leaves Saddam in control to continue the devastation he has carried out for a decade.

There must be a third way to resolve the crisis in favour of the victims of this horrible war. Saddam has to go, and the Americans, British, etc, forces must withdraw. Sanctions against Iraq, imposed by the international community—third world and first working together—seem equipped to resolve both problems. The fact that many third world leaders endorsed the UN resolutions in favour of sanctions suggests that there is a strong

constituency for this policy. So let's use our heads rather than our hearts to campaign for peace in the Middle East.

Sally Liebowicz Bristol

Is it worth continuing the anti-war protests when public opinion in this country seems to be in favour of British involvement? That is the question that all of us who are opposed to this disgraceful show of military might in the Gulf are confronted with. And the answer has to be yes, no matter how small a minority we are.

I know that as socialists we often criticise CND's position. But it seems to me that on this occasion the greatest vehicle for activating change is to rally round CND's protests. We should focus on two points in particular. First, Britain has said that it will not use nuclear weapons in line with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Why are these weapons in the Gulf? We must demand that they are withdrawn immediately. Second, John Major said that we must not appease dictators. What he did not mention is that Britain has already appeased Iraq for years with arms, trade and backing against Iran. These two arguments will mobilise opposition to the war and encourage a sane and peaceful approach to the problems in the Gulf.

James North London

The circumstances of the Gulf War have led me to buy your publication for the first time and whilst I agree with much of your editorial ('For what?', February), I feel that an analysis of the war should also give consideration to the role played by the other major imperialist world power, the Soviet Union, whose commitment to militarism is at least the equal of that of any of the other protagonists. Their use of the war to divert attention from the suppression of the Baltic states is the more cynical for the fact that an enlightened Soviet Union response could have prevented the war from starting.

I would also take issue with the conclusions drawn by Pat Roberts in his article on the Gulf War ('Anti-war? Not good enough!', February). Anti-war activists need take no further position beyond a total opposition to the waging of war under any circumstances. This principle is absolute and needs no reinforcement; to suggest that effective opposition to the Gulf

War can only be mounted by supporting Arab nationalism is a spurious argument. Neither side in the war gives a damn for the working classes and is perfectly prepared to see them killed pointlessly in large numbers. In such a situation the strongest political standpoint is also a moral one and the question of supporting the lesser of two evils is irrelevant. Nevertheless it is a great relief to see opinions voiced which aim to generate opposition to the mass of propaganda currently masquerading as news. I shall continue to support your magazine, whether pacifist or activist.

Simon Opie London

(Hair) Style wars

Let me congratulate JB Temple (letters, February) on his/her well-made point ('I don't like your hair, missus'). Ann Bradley should take a leaf from Don Milligan's book. Surely Marxists should be as dapper and stylish as he is, to show we are not yesterday's news or the old hippies and feminists portrayed by the capitalist press. As for Frank Cottrell-Boyce, perhaps he can have a new photo taken, after breakfast this time. And stop slagging off *Twin Peaks* please. So, come on Ann, how about a bit of a permanent revolution?

Sam Bagnall London

Look sharp and think on

Of all *Living Marxism's* achievements, surely none can compare with getting on the fourth shelf of the corner Cabin Paper Shop, *Coronation Street*. Maybe Rita is a closet revolutionary?

Mavis Wilton Leeds

Anti-Semitism under Stalinism

Your 'A-Z of the triumph of capitalism' (February), seemed to imply that with the collapse of Marxism in Eastern Europe anti-Semitism has suddenly arisen, somehow fostered by the emergence of capitalism. This seems to ignore some of the truths of the last 45 years.

In Poland the life of the Żyd (not Zhid) under the communists has not been free from

persecution. The Polish press was filled with examples of 'Zionist plots' against the Polish people. The communist apparatus instigated witch-hunts against Jews in the late fifties and the late sixties. In 1968, during one of these witch-hunts, Poland's Jewish population fell from about 30 000 to approximately 5000, the majority emigrating to Israel. Jewish advancement in jobs was retarded, preference being given to less qualified 'ethnic' Poles.

In the Soviet Union, where Jewish nationality is stamped on your internal passport, Jews

had difficulty gaining access to higher education and housing. During national service they were sent to construction battalions reserved for those of low intellectual capacity or political/religious unrelies. Much play was made of Trotsky's Jewishness during his denunciation, and even Lenin had a streak of anti-Semitism, spouting comments such as, 'Why is it that the only intelligent Russians are Jews?'

What the collapse of Marxism in the Soviet bloc has done is permitted the racist and

loony-toon elements of these societies to voice their bile, incubated by the communist regimes, to the Western media. It would be wrong to condemn the system (capitalism) which brought this cancer to light without at least investigating the system (communism) which was supposed to eliminate racism but instead promoted it.

Mark Dalewicz *Conservative Students Association, Wolverhampton Polytechnic*

Midnight in the century?

Phil Hearse (letters, February) poses the alternative of 'intervening in a real working class movement' to Frank Richards' emphasis on the need to develop revolutionary theory as well as giving it an organisational form in the process of reconstructing the working class as a political force in modern society ('Midnight in the century', December 1990). But what does Hearse's alternative amount to in practice? Where is this 'real working class movement'? How are we supposed to 'intervene' in it?

As Hearse remains significantly vague about the nature of his alternative, we can only get a clearer idea of what he means by looking at the kind of political activities he is engaged in. For the past decade and more Hearse has been closely associated with the radical left tradition that emerged in the late sixties around the now fragmented International Marxist Group. The remnants of this group can be found today in various factions inside Neil Kinnock's Labour Party and running campaigns, such as the current Committee to Stop War in the Gulf, on behalf of the labour bureaucracy. Not much sign here of the 'real working class' and even less of the 'Marxist politics' for which Hearse claims to be fighting.

In fact, while Hearse cheers on manifestations of working class resistance around the world, the tradition to which he belongs gave up on the working class as a revolutionary force years ago. In the sixties and seventies, radical groupings in this tradition turned their back on the apparently quiescent working classes of the advanced capitalist world and looked to third world liberation struggles as the key agency of revolutionary change. They looked too to radical youth and student protests, to black power movements, to women's liberation—anybody but the Western working class. When trade union disputes erupted in Britain in the seventies, British radicals rediscovered the labour movement, but only to reinforce the narrow militancy of the rank and file activists and bolster the influence of the labour bureaucracy. While workers went down to defeat, members of the IMG became spear carriers for Arthur Scargill, Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone—and now for Bruce Kent and Marjorie Thompson of CND!

Oblivious to the reality that the working class movement around the world no longer exists as a *political force*, Hearse tries to look on the bright side and consoles himself with

working to put Kinnock in Downing Street. Those who are serious about building a revolutionary movement in Britain have more important things to do.

Linda Ryan *London*

While disagreeing with Phil Hearse that a 'real working class movement' exists in Britain today (letters, February), I find it difficult to go along with Frank Richards' 'Midnight in the century' (December 1990). One of the problems which the left has always had is how to overcome isolation and address a working class audience.

It is not good enough for Frank Richards to throw up his hands in horror at the encroachment of right-wing ideas, and respond by reasserting Marxist principles. A critique of the present crisis of society is fine and necessary, but who are we talking to? How do we keep the lines open to those who are still prepared to listen?

To reach an audience, any audience, we have to connect with the experience of working people. In the conservative climate of today, openly Marxist ideas are more likely to repel than attract a potential audience. Take the response to the Gulf War. Here is an excellent opportunity to attract people to radical ideas. The CND-led anti-war movement may not be the anti-imperialist movement we would like, but it attracts anti-war people who might be alienated by a Marxist party. You would gain more by working within CND's orbit instead of putting off people with an anti-imperialist position. Telling people that they have to take sides with Iraq seems to me a prime example of cutting off your nose to spite your face.

There are real opportunities to build a radical opposition to the war if we adopt the right tactics. The fact that even a Tory like Ted Heath has started talking about 'new imperialism' means that public opinion will be more receptive to anti-war arguments than before. You should seize every chance to intervene in

this discussion, instead of painting yourself into a corner with an off-the-wall anti-imperialist position. Get stuck into every struggle as it arises—blind faith (from Phil Hearse) or a retreat to a Marxist bunker (from Frank Richards) will only lead the left into the wilderness.

Howard Thomas *Brighton*

Phil Hearse (letters, February) argues that Frank Richards ('Midnight in the century', December 1990) is too pessimistic about the mood of resignation and defeat, pointing out that there are still nine million trade unionists in Britain despite everything.

I'm one of those nine million, but my experience confirms Frank's analysis. My union is a skeleton which keeps the bureaucracy ticking over and doesn't even apologise for its lack of contact with the members beyond the deduction from the pay packet and the insurance brochure. Of course there is conflict. Workers and employers stand in an antagonistic relationship. But the fragmentation of the labour movement means workers who do fight experience real isolation—there is no sense of being part of a wider movement.

The left has always been keen to hang on to the official labour movement (this is what Phil means when he talks about a 'real working class movement'). To do otherwise, they argued, would be to render yourself irrelevant. Today, the problem they have is the irrelevance of the movement to the life and the experience of the working class. Like the saluting captain on the *Titanic*, Phil Hearse wants to ignore the fact that his ship has sunk.

The collapse of Labourism and Stalinism means that the working class does not define itself politically or organisationally at present. It is vital that our class, in the process of responding to new attacks, is reconstituted with a sense of itself and with a distinctive outlook on the world. *Living Marxism* has made a good start along this road.

Mick Spencer *Manchester*

As our recent letters pages indicate, 'Midnight in the century', the feature by Frank Richards published in the December issue of *Living Marxism*, has caused considerable controversy on the left. This is a debate which we would like to continue. So what's your view on the future for revolutionary politics in the nineties? Write to the address above.

In next month's *Living Marxism*, Frank Richards will reply to some of the criticisms raised so far. In the meantime, copies of the December issue are still available from the usual address (see inside back cover).

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THAT DOESN'T SUPPORT 'OUR BOYS'



Ann Bradley

Women in the Mother of Battles

The *Daily Telegraph* marked the news that an American woman soldier had been captured by the Iraqis with an article by Mary Kenny. Above the headline 'No place for women in the Mother of Battles' was a picture of Captain Joan Conley with a photograph of her daughter Stephanie 'pinned proudly to her American army helmet'. The article argued that women should not be sent on active service in the Gulf a, because their children need them at home, and b, because it undermines our civilised way of life.

'By sending women to the Gulf conflict as soldiers in the first place', claimed Kenny, 'we have betrayed one of the most elemental and civilising ideas of Western and Christian culture—which was that chivalric ideal that women and children should have preferential treatment and that women

standards, the spread of Aids, vandalism and the rising number of abortions. Earlier this year the president of the association of chief police officers, David Owen, argued that the problems of modern society have been caused because so many youth have grown up 'with inadequate supervision of the kind that used to be provided by a father's steadying hand'. I haven't heard anyone argue that British or American men should not be sent to the Gulf for fear of depriving their children of a 'steadying hand'. Curiously, suddenly paternal discipline appears optional and single mothers are heroines as long as they are 'army wives'.

The notion that women, as higher moral beings, need to be protected by our menfolk is as nauseating as it is dubious. I have never been able to accept that women have higher moral scruples than men. I cannot make any sense of the slogan

the flagwaving and talk about democracy, it is not a desire to defend the star-spangled banner or the Union Jack that inspires soldiers at the front to fight. It is surely a vision of home and family—a sense that they are defending all they hold dear from an alien threat.

After the Second World War Vera Lynn, the forces' sweetheart, claimed that her main role in the war was to remind the boys of what they were fighting for, 'the precious personal things rather than ideologies and theories'. Such was the War Office's awareness of the need for soldiers to believe that their loved ones were waiting for them, lonely and dependent, that they censored letters from wives which detailed their new jobs or active social life.

The real reason why women will be kept well out of the frontline is because a woman with a gun blasting the guts out of the enemy does not gel with the required image of the dutiful wife sitting at home. If a woman soldier is blown to bits it's a double blow to morale because she's not just another soldier, she's that type of human being a man should fight to defend—a woman. Even Israel, one of the few countries to conscript women into the military, has a policy to evacuate women soldiers straight away in the event of hostilities breaking out.

Of course there are those who argue that women should not be at the frontline because they are simply not up to the job. Brian Mitchell, a military writer, traces the decline of American power back to 1978 and the decision to integrate women into the military. He believes that women are 'less aggressive, less daring, less likely to suppress minor personal hurts and less aware of world affairs'. This says more about Mitchell than about women in the US military.

I suspect a trained woman at the front is much the same as a trained man at the front. I remember when the US marines invaded Grenada in 1983, much was made of the fact that two women soldiers broke down in tears and refused orders to drive on. The only difference is that we hear far less about the platoonloads of men who bottle out at the front. In any case the notion of brave men fighting while timid women wait at home is put into question by the recent raids on Baghdad. Fighting at the front is probably less hazardous than living round the corner from Saddam's bunker.

Women are as capable of waging war as men. Eamon de Valera, the Irish republican, once declared that in his experience of the war against the British in Ireland, 'women are at once the boldest and most unmanageable revolutionaries'. I do not hold with the notion that women are passive creatures whose nature makes them unsuitable candidates for combat. Nor am I against women fighting. The reason why I *am* against women going to fight in the Gulf is the same reason why I oppose men going to fight in the Gulf: they are fighting the wrong enemy for the wrong cause.

'I cannot make any sense of the slogan "take the toys from the boys"—as though war is the consequence of macho boisterousness rather than an act of politics'

should be respected as somehow higher human beings, morally, than the common run of men'.

I have no doubt that it is a bad idea to tear a mother away from her child to send her off to war. It probably does a child untold psychological harm to imagine mummy at the sharp end of a Scud missile. However, for that matter, I can't believe kids are indifferent to what happens to their father either. Yet the military psychologists don't seem very worried about that. Suddenly fathers are disposable.

Over the last few years the authorities in both Britain and America have been very keen to stress how much children need fathers. Single mothers have been blamed for declining educational

that has once again appeared on demonstrations: 'take the toys from the boys'—as though war is the consequence of macho boisterousness rather than an act of politics. Do people who think that war is due to an overproduction of testosterone really believe Margaret Thatcher to be a more compassionate, mature, 'higher human being, morally', than John Major? I think not.

But Mary Kenny's observation that women in uniform destroy the 'chivalric ideal' is a matter of genuine concern for the powers that be. I suspect it's a major reason why Britain is so slow to integrate women into the armed forces. The 'chivalric ideal' is central to the morale and motivation of the troops at the front. Despite all



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

What's so special about Saddam?

Is he a demon, or a run-of-the-mill Middle Eastern dictator? Over the next five pages, we look through some of the holes in the West's case for its war in the Gulf

The savage war against Iraq is necessary, we are assured, to deal with Saddam Hussein and end his occupation of Kuwait. But why have the USA, Britain and the rest of the Western powers developed this sudden concern about one third world dictator (Saddam) and his territorial dispute with another one (the Emir of Kuwait)? After all, similar individuals and invasions have never stirred the West into such a dramatic military response before.

We have no wish to give Saddam a character reference. But who can say that he is worse than the rulers whom the West has welcomed into its anti-Iraqi alliance? As the profiles we publish here graphically illustrate, the king of Saudi Arabia rules his country with at least as repressive a system as Saddam, the Turkish president's bloody colonial war against the Kurds matches that which Saddam has conducted against Iraqi Kurds, and the latest murderous assault by Syria's president in Lebanon took place at almost the same time as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Saddam stands alongside these regimes as a run-of-the-mill Middle Eastern dictator, of the sort which the Western powers have installed and supported throughout the century. Indeed for most of the past decade, Saddam has been well treated

by the Americans. They gave him the nod to invade the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran in 1980. And, it became clear in February, they gave him top secret military intelligence throughout the eight-year Iran-Iraq War.

Today, however, this erstwhile US ally and unexceptional dictator is singled out for Western wrath on a grand scale. We can make no sense of it by concentrating on the nature of the Iraqi regime. We need to look further afield, at the nature of the global system which has dominated the twentieth century: imperialism.

Conventional wisdom has it that imperialism ended when most of the colonies gained their independence. But imperialism is much more than an act of military occupation. It is a system which splits the world: between a handful of the most powerful capitalist states on one hand (normally called 'the West', although they include Japan), and the other more or less impoverished, backward countries on the other ('the third world').

For much of the post-1945 era the imperialists, led by the USA, have been able to maintain their domination over and exploitation of the third world through economic and political means, without resorting to direct military intervention. But they have always been prepared to turn to

gunboat diplomacy when they thought it necessary to teach the peoples of Asia, Africa or Latin America to be obedient. The West's war against Iraq is the latest lesson.

The conflict in the Gulf has highlighted the divisions which imperialism imposes. Despite the claims about Saddam's military strength, the war has exposed the stark contrast between the might of the imperialists and the vulnerability of a country like Iraq. Despite the scaremongering about how control of Kuwaiti oil would allow Saddam to hold the West to ransom, the Gulf crisis has shown how the imperialists can manipulate the entire world economy and strangle Iraq with sanctions. World opinion on the Gulf War has divided roughly along the lines drawn by imperialism, with the West backing the invasion while the sympathies of much of the third world are with the Iraqis.

The Western powers have no objection to invasions in principle. But Saddam's annexation of Kuwait posed a problem for imperialism. It threatened to destabilise the entire Gulf region, where a collection of illegitimate states largely created by Britain and France are ruled over by shaky and unpopular pro-Western regimes. It was to be expected that the Americans and the West would respond to this threat, probably by bringing their economic strength to bear on Iraq and extracting assurances from Saddam that he had no ambitions to make further mischief. Such measures would have been par for the course for imperialism, a reminder to an upstart third world regime of who's in charge.

However, the USA went much further in its response. It chose to elevate a local Gulf dispute into a global crisis, and launch an unprecedented military mobilisation. The reason why Washington took such extraordinary measures relates to another aspect of imperialism: the rivalries among the imperialists themselves.

Alongside the division of the world between the Western powers and the rest, imperialism involves the struggle among the powers to redivide the wealth of the world. At present that struggle centres on attempts by America, the leading imperialist nation of the modern era, to maintain its authority in conditions where its own economic strength is declining by comparison with Germany and Japan. The one area in which US leadership remains unchallenged is the military sphere. Thus the Americans are constantly looking for ways to militarise international relations, by creating conflict situations in which they can force their Western allies/rivals to support (and finance) the USA in its leading role as world policeman. This exercise has been harder for Washington since the end of the Cold War, which removed 'the red menace' as a threat against which it could demand that the West unite. The search for a substitute led the US authorities to target Saddam.

Even before the invasion of Kuwait, it appears that there were voices within the American military establishment suggesting that it might repay the USA to hype up the problem posed by Saddam. Back in May 1990, a white paper prepared by president Bush's top military advisers on the

national security council named Iraq and Saddam as 'the optimum contenders to replace the Warsaw Pact' as the justification for US militarism in the post-Cold War period. Whether or not the president heeded this advice is unclear. What is certain is that, once Saddam invaded Kuwait, Bush seized upon it as a pretext for demonstrating US power to the world and reactivating the Western Alliance by globalising the Gulf crisis.

Thus Saddam Hussein has come to be regarded as a threat of international standing, not because of his own shabby career as a small-time tyrant, but because of the immeasurably larger ambitions of US imperialism. Those perishing in the Gulf War are victims of the West's power games, which are yet again being played out at the expense of the peoples of the Middle East.

The demonisation of Saddam is designed to disguise the role of Western imperialism as the ultimate force for violence and oppression in the Gulf. The removal of the imperialists and their armies is the precondition for a just peace. A Western victory over Iraq, whether that country is run by Saddam, Satan, or Solomon, can only make things worse for the masses of the Middle East. Which is why anybody who supports the aspiration of the Arab and Islamic world for self-determination must side with the Iraqis against the US, British and other invaders. To do anything less is to allow imperialism a free hand in its attempt to dominate the region—and to perpetuate the Western-sponsored system which gives rise to the Saddams, sheikhs and sultans in the first place.

Free Kuwait?

The British authorities and their allies claim that their aim in the Gulf War is to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Yet freedom in Kuwait has never been a concern of British imperialists. As *Living Marxism* has argued from the start of the Gulf crisis, Kuwait is an artificial statelet carved out by British colonialists in the early years of the century. Ever since, Britain's concern has been to maintain Kuwait as a strategic and oil-rich outpost for the West. That has meant defending the repressive regime of the al-Sabah clan, and fighting off the repeated attempts to reunite Kuwait with Iraq—whether the Kuwaiti people wanted it or not. British governments have proved willing to use threats, assassinations and military invasions to protect the illegitimate Iraq-Kuwait border.

One forgotten episode in the sordid history of British involvement in the Gulf throws some interesting light on the government's present posturing about freedom for Kuwait. This was the crushing of the first Free Kuwait movement at the end of the 1930s—a movement of young Kuwaitis which sought to unite with Iraq, and then to free both territories from the grip of the British military. Here we reprint the account of these events given in an unpublished paper, 'Iraq and Kuwait: a history suppressed', written by Ralph Schoenman last autumn.

'Resistance to British designs on the Gulf became an Iraqi *cause célèbre* throughout the 1930s. The Iraqi press campaigned for the return to Iraqi sovereign control of the district of Kuwait and the restoration of Iraqi access to the Gulf.

The British political agent in Kuwait, Lieutenant-Colonel HRP Dickson (who would become the chief representative of the Kuwait Oil Company in 1936) wrote in his letters to the British political resident in the Gulf in 1933 that such was the fever of sentiment both in Iraq and the Kuwait district itself for reversion to Iraq, "residents of Kuwait had to be kept isolated, by force if need be", from contact with other Iraqis.

Faisal I [of Iraq] was succeeded by King Ghazi, who alarmed the British by his open call for the recovery of Kuwait. In 1932, Sheikh Ahmad al-Sabah [of Kuwait] visited Baghdad and met Ghazi, the two men agreeing that popular sentiment was running so high that ways had to be found to restore Iraqi sovereignty. Britain prevented Ghazi from travelling to Kuwait and the two men were not allowed to meet again.

Resistance to Britain spread throughout the country. In April 1938, the Iraqi minister of foreign affairs, Tawfi al-Suweidi, informed British ambassador Peterson in Baghdad:

"The Ottoman-British agreement of 1913 recognises Kuwait as a district under the jurisdiction of the province of Basra. Since sovereignty over Basra has been transferred from the Ottoman state to the Iraqi state, that sovereignty has to include Kuwait under the terms of the 1913 agreement. Iraq has not recognised any change in the status of Kuwait."

The government justifies its Gulf War by painting Saddam Hussein an uniquely evil dictator. But, asks Kirsten Cale, can you spot the difference between the 'Butcher of Baghdad' and Britain's Middle Eastern allies? Meet the 'Despot of Damascus', the 'Cut-throat of Cairo', the 'Torturer of Turkey', and other animals

An alliance of tyrants

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia

Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz, King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Holy Places, is the man whom the Western forces are supposed to be defending against Saddam's Iraq. Fahd rules his kingdom with the lash and the sword. Political parties, trade unions and demonstrations are banned, and gatherings are allowed only in the mosques (football matches have recently been outlawed). There are no elections, no judiciary and no freedom of speech. The Saudi press was hardly allowed to mention the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait until the US troops arrived in Riyadh. Since the

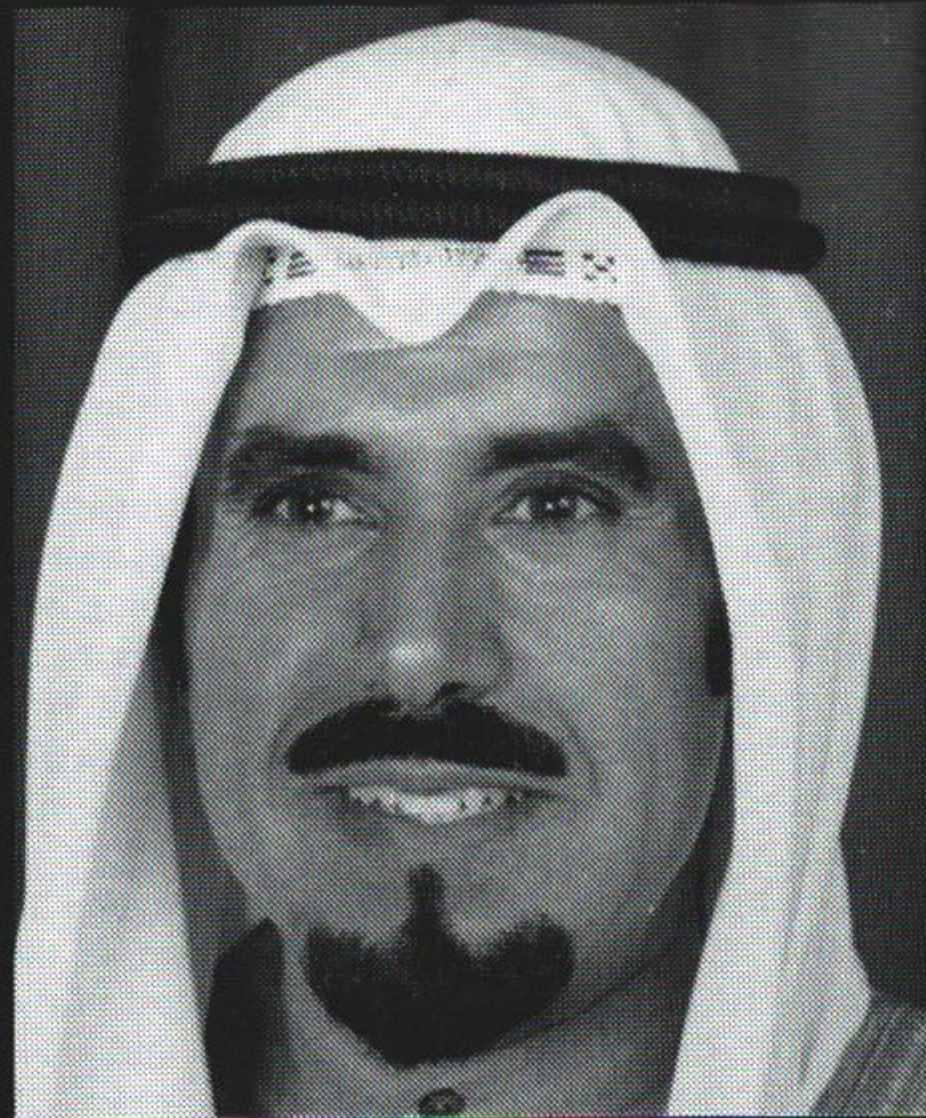
war began, the royal family has decreed violations of national security (such as possession of a large map of the kingdom) and 'rumour-mongering' punishable by mutilation or death.

Nobody knows how many political prisoners are held in Saudi jails; there were at least a hundred in 1989, mostly Shia Muslims from the oil-rich Eastern province. But jail is a soft option in Saudi. When pro-Iranian Shia militants took over the Great Mosque in 1979, French commandos were ordered to flood the basements and electrocute them by plunging high voltage

An alliance of tyrants



King Fahd



Sheikh al-Sabah



President Assad

'We stand together, a united coalition, built on one principle:

cables into the water. 'They floated out like kippers', said a witness.

Electricity is also put to good use in King Fahd's jails. Political prisoners are given electric shocks to their genitals, hung by their wrists, beaten and half-drowned to extract confessions. One 40-year old Shia woman was continuously tortured for three days until she died—for the crime of carrying a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini and a Shia prayer book.

King Fahd is worth £18 billion, second only to the Sultan of Brunei (£25 billion). He owns a three-storey Boeing 747 jet with vaulted ceilings and gold faucets, a £60m yacht guarded by Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, and a holiday cottage in Spain eight times the size of Buckingham Palace. The young Fahd was a lecherous sybarite who ate caviare by the kilo, lost £1m in the casinos of the French Riviera in a single weekend, and paid the wife of a Lebanese businessman £100 000 a year for sex. He allows his subjects no such indulgences. Adulterers are stoned to death, alcohol is banned: censors even black out photographs of alcohol from foreign publications, along with pictures of men with women and of ballet dancers. Women may not drive and are not allowed to travel without permission from a male family member.

Murderers and those who renounce Islam are beheaded, homosexuals stoned to death, minor offenders flogged, and doctors amputate the hands of petty thieves with surgical saws. A man recently convicted of helping to rob a petrol station received 800 public lashes and 10 years in jail.

The impoverished migrant workers in Saudi suffer the worst of Fahd's rule. Since the Kuwait invasion, hundreds of thousands of Yemenis have been interned, tortured and deported because the Yemeni government has refused to condemn Iraq. Thousands of Pakistanis and Egyptians have been trapped in the war zone because their Saudi employers refused to return their passports before leaving for long holidays in Switzerland and the USA. King Fahd is safely ensconced in a palace far behind American lines. He has not sent those trapped migrant workers gas masks.

In February the Emir's prime minister suggested that post-war Kuwait would be run under martial law

The Emir of Kuwait

Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah was the ruler forced to flee Kuwait by helicopter when the Iraqis arrived on 2 August last year. George Bush claims that he launched the massive Gulf invasion to restore the Emir's 'legitimate government'. In February the Emir's prime minister suggested that, after the successful conclusion of what Bush has called a 'war for democracy', Kuwait would be run by a junta of al-Sabah family members, probably under martial law.

Sheikh Jaber ruled one of the most sharply divided societies on Earth, where a minority of oil-rich Kuwaitis lorded it over foreign migrant workers treated like slave labour. The Emir's 1200-strong al-Sabah clan controlled everything: security, oil, information and defence, funded by the multi-billion dollar Kuwait Investment Office and the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation which they treated as royal bank accounts. The Emir tried to ensure the al-Sabah succession by marrying dozens of women (juggling marriages and divorces to conform to Koranic law, which stipulates a maximum of four wives at a time), fathering 70 sons and an unspecified number of daughters.

Only the top 60 000 Kuwaiti citizens were allowed to vote in elections to the powerless Kuwaiti parliament. Even that talking shop was suspended by the Emir in 1976, then again in 1986 when members dared to suggest that the minister of justice (an al-Sabah, of course) was involved in

a major financial scandal. Last year riot police armed with tear gas and batons broke up a 6000-strong pro-democracy meeting. The Emir darkly warned that he could not 'tolerate dissent'.

While full Kuwaiti citizens enjoyed one of the most lavish lifestyles on Earth, the guestworkers who made up two thirds of Kuwait's population and 80 per cent of the workforce were treated little better than slaves, prohibited from joining trade unions and denied all political rights. The Emir's weathermen even fiddled the temperature figures to avoid paying bonuses for working in extreme heat. There was no unemployment (other than the lotus-eating lifestyle of the Kuwaiti elite) because guestworkers were deported as soon as their contracts expired.

The Emir also persecuted the native Shia Muslim minority. During the Iran-Iraq War the press conducted witch-hunts against 'people who spoke in Arabic but whose hearts beat in Persian', and the police rounded up entire Shia families, including their Filipino maids. Last year, Amnesty reported that dozens of Shias had been imprisoned without trial and tortured. One Shia religious scholar was beaten and tortured with electric shocks to force him to confess to being the leader of the Kuwaiti Hizbollah.

Members of the ruling al-Sabah family are not above a bit of beating up themselves: remember the two female clan members convicted of whipping their Indian maid in London?



President Ozal

President Mubarak

**our opposition to aggression'
George Bush**

President Assad of Syria

Hafez al-Assad used to be a pariah in the West because of his Moscow connections and his self-image as a symbol of Arab nationalism—characteristics which he shared with his bitter rival, Saddam Hussein. But, since joining the anti-Saddam alliance, the Syrian dictator has become one of the West's good guys.

Assad has headed a ruthless regime in Syria for more than 20 years, and his forces have held part of Lebanon under military occupation for a decade. He runs 15 intelligence services, employing 50 000 people in Syria and Lebanon, to weed out opponents. Syrian jails hold 7500 political prisoners. Some members of the government which Assad overthrew in 1970 are still held in the notorious Mezza prison. Other political rivals have been killed; one was gunned down on the Champs-Élysée. Riyad al-Turk, general secretary of the Communist Political Bureau, has been tortured for the past nine years. Many of his bones have been broken, he can hardly hear or see, and he has been tortured to within an inch of his life at least half a dozen times.

Other tortures reported by Assad's former prisoners include electric shock treatment, beatings, partial drowning, being hung by the wrists, being flogged with metal cables while naked, having vertebrae crushed in a specially designed chair, having finger and toenails pulled

out. After the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood nearly killed Assad in a grenade attack in June 1980, two units of his Alawite Muslim Defence Regiment entered the Palmyra prison and massacred 500 Muslim Brothers in their cells.

Assad doesn't only commit his atrocities late at night behind prison walls, he also carries them out in broad daylight on the streets of Syria and Lebanon. In 1982, when the Muslim Brotherhood staged a rebellion in the northern city of Hama, the national guard under the command of Assad's brother shelled the city and slaughtered 20 000 inhabitants.

At the start of the Gulf crisis, thousands of east Syrians joined pro-Saddam demonstrations, some calling for merger with Iraq. Assad moved 50 000 troops into the region; dozens of demonstrators were killed in clashes with the army. Just a month later, while the West was condemning Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Assad launched another bloody offensive in Lebanon. Syrian forces cornered General Aoun's Christian forces in Beirut, shot and cut the throats of hundreds of his troops, and imposed another stooge government in north and central Lebanon. The worst thing the US air force dropped on Syria afterwards was George Bush, who welcomed Assad to the anti-Iraqi alliance.

Assad's national guard, commanded by his brother, shelled the Syrian city of Hama and slaughtered 20 000 inhabitants

Continued from page 11

This remarkable boldness of Iraqi functionaries who were, after all, under British military control, was made possible by the emergence of a mass movement among Kuwaiti youth defying British rule. The Free Kuwaiti Movement or the Group of Free Kuwaitis submitted a mass petition appealing to the Iraqi government to support their demand for the immediate reversion of Kuwait to Iraq.

The National Bloc was formed in Kuwait by the Free Kuwaiti Movement and it called upon Sheikh Ahmad al-Sabah to establish a legislative council representing the Free Kuwaitis. Fearing an open uprising the sheikh was forced to agree. The first meeting of the legislative council in 1938 passed a unanimous resolution demanding that Kuwait revert to Iraq.

Britain, alarmed but uncertain about the direct use of force, forced the sheikh to dissolve the legislative council and to hunt down, detain and execute its members. On 7 March 1939, the Free Kuwaitis sent a series of telegrams to King Ghazi appealing for Iraq's intervention against the sheikh and the British. Baghdad radio broadcast the appeal: "Our history supports the return of Kuwait to Iraq. We shall live and die under our own national sovereignty, under the Iraqi flag. Ghazi, help your brethren of Kuwait!"

On 10 March 1939, an uprising began against the ruling authority in Kuwait. The sheikh, with British arms and "advisers", crushed the uprising, killing and imprisoning most of the participants. King Ghazi made a public demand for the release of all detainees and warned the sheikh to cease all repressive measures against the Free Kuwaiti Movement. British ambassador Peterson summoned King Ghazi and warned him to cease public support for the Free Kuwaiti Movement and to abandon any claims to Kuwait. Ghazi refused. On 5 April 1939 he was found dead, universally believed to have been assassinated by British agents.'

Whose war crimes?

Today the Tories condemn Saddam Hussein as a war criminal for his use of chemical weapons against Kurds and Iranians, and his threat to use them against Western forces. Yet the first great champion of using chemical weapons in Iraq was Winston Churchill—and he is revered as a Tory war hero.

At the end of 1920, 17 000 British troops and 85 000 Indian troops were occupying what is now Iraq while Britain stole the region's oil-wealth. Churchill, as secretary of state for war and air, proposed that the area be policed on the cheap by a small ground force and aircraft armed with gas bombs. He even claimed that the chemical bombs would be 'a scientific expedient for saving lives', and declared himself 'strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilised tribes'.

In the end the RAF decided against the use of gas bombs for technical reasons and for fear of reprisals (meanwhile on the ground British

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President Ozal of Turkey

Turgut Ozal is praised in the West as the creator of a free-market, civilian-ruled Turkey. He was a firm admirer of Margaret Thatcher (it was mutual) and brought Turkey into the Western military alliance, Nato. His government is made up of relatives, generals and bent bankers. His cigar-smoking, whisky-slugging wife, Semra, has been accused of organising bribes and kick-backs on her husband's behalf. Having been prime minister since 1983, he tricked his way into the presidency last year in an election boycotted by opposition groups, while his Motherland Party slumped to seven per cent in opinion polls.

Amnesty reports that 250 000 people have been arrested and tortured for alleged political crimes

more have been murdered during the Gulf crisis. In September 1990, the entire population of Cizmeli village was imprisoned. One reported being tortured for three weeks with electric shocks, string around the testicles and burning cigarettes on the neck. The soles of his feet were slit with a razor and salt was rubbed in.

Zehra Bakir, a Kurdish woman, was arrested, gang-raped and tortured for 52 days by Ozal's police. For 15 hours she was repeatedly raped by her torturers: some made her sit on a bottle until blood poured from her anus. Others used their truncheons. They hung her from bars by one arm, and locked her up naked, in a cage in the middle of winter.

One Kurdish woman was gang-raped and tortured for 52 days by Ozal's police

in the last decade. The human rights association of Turkey goes further, claiming 650 000 were tortured between 1980 and 1986. Methods include the use of pressurised water hoses and electric cables on the genitals. Ten people were killed by their interrogators last year alone. The Turkish press is heavily censored and communist and religious parties are banned, as are demonstrations and trade unions.

Ozal's war against the Turkish Kurds in the south-eastern provinces matches Saddam's savagery against the Iraqi Kurds. Under Ozal, 2200 people have been killed in clashes between Kurdish guerrillas and government forces: scores

While Ozal has been feted in the West for his support during the Gulf crisis, he has been cracking down even harder at home. In January, troops armed with water cannon, bulldozers and bullets attacked thousands of miners during an anti-government strike. At least 32 demonstrators have been killed by riot police in the past few months. Scores of Kurds have been murdered in a new wave of repression in the provinces bordering Iraq. And a 16-year old schoolgirl was imprisoned for 75 days for the crime of pinning up an anti-war poster in a school corridor.

President Mubarak of Egypt

Muhammad Hosni Mubarak's Egypt is meant to be the democratic flagship of the Arab alliance against Iraq. But the regime is a one-man-and-six-generals dictatorship. Mubarak was a faceless vice-president under president Anwar Sadat, succeeding to office when Sadat was gunned down in 1981. Mubarak is still seen as a technocrat in a grey suit. But he's a technocrat with absolute power, propped up by a gang of hardmen and grafters known as 'Sadat's mafia'.

Elections are a sham. Three million dead people rose from the grave and voted for Mubarak's party, the NDP, at the last assembly polls. In 1989, police rounded up 1500 opposition party workers and imprisoned them until the election was over. Most parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the communists and Nasserite parties are banned anyway.

At least 8000 political prisoners rot in jail without charge or trial; 56 were shot or hanged in 1989. Since the Gulf crisis began, the regime has rounded up 300 people, all for allegedly assassinating a prominent politician in October. Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners is commonplace. Prisoners are given electric shocks to the nipples and genitals, sexually assaulted, threatened that they will be infected with Aids, and suspended by the wrists from barred police station windows. Torturers commonly use the 'bride', tying a prisoner to a cross and whipping them until the body is a mass of wounds. Other prisoners are thrown naked and blindfolded into a refrigerated room called the 'slaughterhouse', where they are doused with ice-cold water and given electric shocks which send them into convulsions.

Torturers tie prisoners to a cross and whip them until the body is a mass of wounds

General Sir Aylmer Haldane used gas shells to put down a revolt in Iraq during the summer of 1920). However, over the next 15 years Britain did seek to control Iraq through the bombing power of the RAF—a devastating tactic for which both Churchill and that other British war hero, TE Lawrence ('of Arabia') were keen to claim credit.

Iraqi civilians bore the brunt of the bombing. British observers noted that, although Iraqi villagers were unsporting enough to hide in caves when the RAF bombers called, their children had 'a passion for playing with dud bombs'. From then on, the 'duds' were fitted with long-delay fuses which exploded when the villagers returned home. On another occasion, the RAF noted that women and children hiding in a lake made 'a good target for machine guns'. When Iraq was made 'independent' in 1932, the RAF carried on as before, simply changing its name to Iraq Air Force. By the late thirties Britain was bombing Iraqi villages for non-payment of taxes. Before 1991, the last time the RAF bombed Baghdad was in May 1941, to crush an anti-British coup.

The RAF's current claim that ordinary Iraqis don't suffer thanks to 'precision bombing' is nothing new. In 1931, Marshal Sir John Slessor claimed that precision air-bombing had replaced 'chuck it and chance it' shelling—a particularly interesting claim given that the Bristol Fighter, the main RAF bomber in Iraq, didn't even have bomb sights!

Casualty figures were edited out of bombing reports. When it became clear that Iraqi women and children were being killed, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Philip Game suggested that, since Arabs considered women's status to be 'somewhere between a rifle and a cow', it didn't matter much. Lawrence of Arabia agreed that the Arabs would not be too upset, since 'the killed were as likely to be negligible women as really important men'. Marshal Lord Trenchard, 'father of the RAF', even suggested to the house of lords in his maiden speech that Arabs 'have no objection to being killed'.

The true objective of the RAF bombing then and now, was detailed in 1924 by the officer commanding 45 Squadron, Iraq:

'Where the Arab and the Kurd had just begun to realise that if they could stand a little noise, they could stand bombing, and still argue; they now knew that within 45 minutes a full-sized village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape.'

The officer's name was Arthur Harris. Twenty years later, 'Bomber' Harris used what he had learnt in Iraq to precision bomb 130 000 civilians and POWs to death in the German city of Dresden. He was not considered a war criminal either. Those responsible for the precision bombing of civilian shelters in Baghdad this time around have little to worry about. In Western eyes, only Churchill's 'uncivilised tribes' commit war crimes.

Andy Clarkson

Further reading:

- David E Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-39*, Manchester University Press, 1990, £35 hbk
- John E Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: The life of TE Lawrence*, Oxford University Press, 1990, £9.95 pbk

John Pilger

Censorship by omission

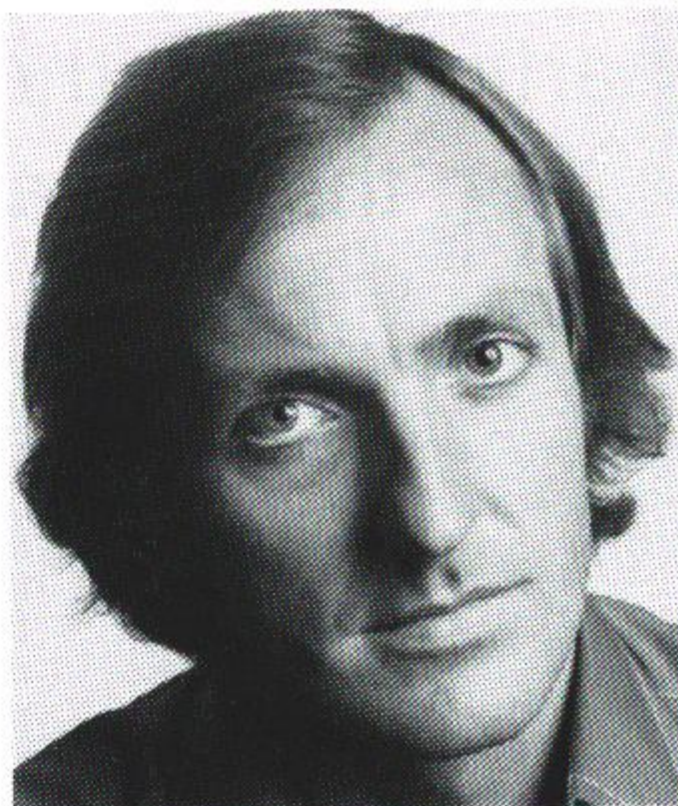
Award-winning journalist John Pilger spoke to Andrew Calcutt about the media at war

The media's most glaring omission is that the British people have been denied an understanding of the complexity of reasons behind the war and the war aims of the United States and its allies. We have been taken into the war with George Bush's words that "we are liberating Kuwait". It has got very little to do with liberating Kuwait, but everything to do with the United States demonstrating its power in the post-Cold War period. This is a colonial war minus the pith helmets and fought with Tomahawk missiles. This is the US saying to those who are more economically secure than itself, we are the world's one superpower and this is how we intend to oversee the affairs of the world.

'The present television coverage is not much more than an echo of the authorised view of the war. Television, being the primary source of information, has been obedient. It took up the first propaganda line of euphoria, of "phenomenal surgical air-strikes", and then it dutifully took up the second and contradictory line, that it is to be a long, hard war. Now a third line is emerging, a combination of the two. The truth, of course, has nothing to do with it. Television is not in any way offering a threat to these accredited views of the war; on the contrary, its role is to reinforce them.

'On television, this war is sounding more and more like the Vietnam War every day. All we are now waiting for is the tunnel and the light at the end of it, but no doubt that will come. It's important to understand the power of the myth that the media helped the United States lose the Vietnam War. Images of carnage were shown nightly on American television from about 1967-68. But the war went on for another eight years. Indeed, most of the killing and most of the casualties took place in that period, mostly Vietnamese dying due to American bombing. I recall an important survey by *Newsweek* magazine, which found that people got used to images of war, that is, images which were denied context and that did not in any way challenge the official propaganda—images that, as a result, encourage people to "back up our boys" rather than to protest against the war or to question its root.

'The Vietnam War was certainly never an unpopular war among the media. What was unpopular was that the Americans were losing, that they were fighting the war badly against an enemy that appeared to believe in its cause. That was what the media was protesting about. I met very few media people who were against the notion of knocking the hell out of Hanoi.



'We are bombarded with information, but from a restricted spectrum of "thinkable thought"'

'Echoing the official view of the war is par for the media course. The Falklands War was covered in this way, Ireland has been reported in this way, and so on. But the technology has changed. Satellite television gives the illusion that we are being given a great deal of information. Indeed, we are being bombarded with vast amounts of information, but it is from a restricted spectrum of accredited "thinkable thought". Most of the information is repetitive, useless or deliberately false.'

'The only difference today is that we can go over instantaneously to Saudi Arabia and watch reporters putting out pretty much the same line that they put out here. The technology has alerted the controllers of information, both military and civilian, to the imperative need to control the media. This has had the effect of getting rid of a type of journalist who was able to circumvent the system and report wars as truthfully as he/she could—the maverick journalist. One or two survive in difficult circumstances, like Robert Fisk.

'The best war correspondents were always mavericks, those who were prepared to defy the military authorities and go and find out for themselves. They were mainly newspaper reporters, and the technology now means they can never keep up with the story, they can never keep up with events because of the instantaneous nature of satellite television. In the Gulf, television and newspaper people can be corralled and controlled. They report from Saudi Arabia as if they are themselves prisoners of war held in Colditz Castle. The difference between present journalists and Colditz POWs was that the latter understood very well their duty to escape.

'There is an important difference in style between

the British and American coverage. In America there is a greater diversity of information. I think this is reflected in the ambivalence of the opinion polls over there. But of course it's a matter of degree. The Americans are less deferential than the British to the controllers of information. They don't take lip from the Pentagon spokesmen. British broadcasters tend to adopt a more old-boy relationship. So yes, it is more open in the United States. But in the long run, the framework is the same. If you step outside that framework, outside the mainstream, you're likely not to be heard at all. Or you are labelled a dissident—witness Noam Chomsky, still a lone voice.

'But inside the mainstream American media, censorship by omission—the most virulent form of censorship—is standard, just as it is here. For example, if you look back at the great triumph of American journalism, Watergate, what you see is that only two inexperienced reporters out of 500 in Washington at the time bothered to pursue the story. The others stayed away from it until it could be ignored no longer. The same was true of the secret bombing of Cambodia, the CIA's domestic spying programme and the Irangate scandals. By and large, the media protected Reagan, making him the "great communicator", and failed to scrutinise the evidence that pointed to George Bush's complicity.

'Generally speaking, that is how the events in the Gulf are being covered, and not covered. How many Americans know, for example, of the CIA's role in putting Hussein and his Baathist gang into power and keeping them there? That is a long way from headlines about "a moral crusade".'

Why is Britain pro-war?

Britain has won itself an international reputation as the most bellicose participant in the Gulf War.

Pat Roberts blames it on the unchallenged influence of the imperial tradition over here

Nowhere in the West, not even in the USA, is there such strong support for the war against Iraq as in Britain. Opinion polls indicate that more than 80 per cent of the population supports the war. Of course, opinion polls are misleading and 'support' is open to infinite interpretations. And it should be clear to anybody that there is a marked absence of genuine popular enthusiasm for the war. Nevertheless, all reservations and qualifications notwithstanding, the evidence available suggests that the government's campaign against Iraq enjoys widespread support in British society.

A different drum

Britain is different from other Western societies. There appears to be a greater acceptance of militaristic solutions than in, say, France or Italy. There is also a widespread assumption that Britain has the right to interfere by any means necessary in the affairs of other nations. The culture of militarism seems all-pervasive in British society. Elsewhere, the military is often portrayed as a necessary embarrassment that people have to put up with. Here, support for 'our boys' is obligatory. They are 'professional' and better than anyone else. British politicians confirm time and again their respect for the domestic agents of law and order when, after the count on election night, they thank the police before

anybody else. It's hard to imagine German politicians going through this act of self-abasement.

British militarism is so well established that it has risen above party politics. Consequently, the British establishment enjoys a unique consensus on the issue of the war. In other countries there are significant groups of mainstream politicians which oppose the Gulf adventure. Not in Britain. The Labour Party wholeheartedly supports the British invasion of the Middle East. Neil Kinnock's main concern in recent weeks has been to project an image of the helpful supporter of the military. The war is treated as a tragic but inevitable consequence of events beyond our control. It is not something to be politically questioned or to be opposed. As a result, the British government is able to project an image of national unity which other Western powers can only envy.

Britain is different in other ways. The peace movement is far smaller here than elsewhere, and less significant even than the movement in the United States. The British peace movement is also uniquely spineless and pathetic. It actively seeks to hide behind elderly church leaders and the main point its spokesmen seek to emphasise is that they are totally inoffensive. In every respect this peace movement is the mirror image of the powerful militaristic impulses that prevail in Britain.

Why is Britain so different? There are a lot of influences working in the same direction. For example, it just so happens that Britain is the only imperialist power that can unambiguously benefit from the war. Other powers are more ambivalent about military conflict. Even the USA, the nation most associated with this conflict, risks becoming isolated if the war drags on. A lot of Americans feel that this assertion of power could not only sharpen the conflicts that exist inside the Western Alliance but also cause the financial ruin of the USA. So although the Americans have a lot to gain they also have a lot to lose in this conflict.

Britain alone has nothing to lose in this war. It is useful to recall that not so long ago British foreign policy was in ruins. The so-called special relationship with the USA ceased to have any practical existence as Washington became far more concerned about forging links with more dynamic economies, primarily Germany and Japan. Britain was also isolated inside Europe and had all the hallmarks of an outsider. To make matters worse, the uninspiring performance of the economy continually exposed Britain's decline as a world power. Temporarily at least, the Gulf War has changed all this. The British authorities are now doing what they know best. While the war continues the effects of economic decline can be offset. Whereas Britain could be ignored in international debates over economic

ain so



the gulf war

issues, as a military power it has to be taken seriously. Thus the war gives coherence to British foreign policy. It will strengthen the relative position of British imperialism for some time to come. It will also help to obscure the relentless downward slide of British capitalism.

So British capitalism is having a good war. The establishment's instinctive understanding of the benefits of war goes some way towards explaining the specific British reaction to the Gulf crisis. But it does not explain everything. The specifically British response to this war finally becomes understandable when we consider the imperial legacy.

Imperialism lives

Arch-reactionary Peregrine Worsthorne of the *Sunday Telegraph* has been enthusing about Britain's imperial response to the Gulf crisis. The ironic thing is that he has almost got it right:

'Refusing to adapt, as Britain is accused of doing, can sometimes pay off, since the wheel of fortune comes full circle. Possibly Britain was in danger of clinging too long to outmoded imperial values. Thank God she did. For the civilised world will soon need them again as never before.' (11 September 1990)

If you ignore the self-flattery and the retrospective apology for the failure to adapt to new circumstances, what Worsthorne is saying is that Britain's imperial tradition lives on. In this respect he is right.

The British establishment has always self-consciously sought to perpetuate the imperial identity. It has even kept the poor old Commonwealth going just to demonstrate that the British connection still counted for something. In case you missed the point, the Queen does not address Britain but the entire British Commonwealth when she broadcasts her Christmas message. Or more accurately, the Christmas message to the British public always assumes the pretence that it is directed at a wider audience. We are not sure how many villages in India or Malaysia sit through the speech but that does not matter. What is important is that the British audience should believe that their monarch speaks to a lot of foreigners—and that they listen!

Of course there is more to the imperial tradition than Commonwealth conferences. The imperial tradition lives on and is still strong for the simple reason that it has never been challenged in Britain. There are a number of reasons for this.

History has been kind to Britain. Alone of all the Western powers, Britain has never experienced national humiliation. This is because it did not face disastrous military defeats like Germany and France. It never experienced traumatic colonial setbacks like France did in Algeria. It never went through a crisis of national confidence like America's 'Vietnam Syndrome'.

To be sure, Britain experienced setbacks and defeats. At the turn of the century the Boer War signified the beginning of the end of Pax Britannica. The loss of Singapore to the Japanese during the Second World War and the humiliation of Suez in the fifties exposed Whitehall's fragile hold over the Empire. But because these events could be characterised as setbacks rather than national humiliations, the British establishment has succeeded in limiting the damage caused by its defeats. This was a remarkable feat. For example, by any standard, the loss of Singapore was a far greater military defeat than anything which America suffered in Vietnam. And yet the British ruling class quickly repaired the damage. A few words were exchanged in anger in the letters pages of the newspapers, but there was no real public debate. Certainly there was no popular revulsion against the Empire. The predominant response was probably that of indifference. But the idea of the Empire survived intact.

One of the reasons why Singapore or Suez did not lead to a crisis in Britain was the absence of any significant anti-imperialist current in intellectual or political life here.

From the turn of the century, there were many British critics of imperialism. However, the liberal critics were not attacking imperialism as such, but particular policies identified with imperialism. In the inter-war years governments found it easy to neutralise these critics by adopting more 'progressive' imperialist policies. The gradual shift in terminology from 'Empire' to 'Commonwealth' reflects this trend. Many critics of the old-style imperialism were drawn into the colonial office in the thirties. By the end of the Second World War the British left was almost unanimous in its acceptance of Britain's imperial role around the world. The left's residual criticisms of imperialism were rhetorical and superficial, aimed entirely against the most extreme examples of colonial oppression. If British imperialism could be dressed up in diplomatic clothes and presented as a civilising or progressive mission, it was assured of left-wing support.

During the forties left-wing Labour politicians often expressed their admiration for aspects of imperialism. One was Harold Wilson, then a left-wing member of the Attlee government:

'No party can or should claim for itself the exclusive use of the title Imperialist, in the best sense of the word, though each party has the right to put to the country its own methods as to how Commonwealth economic development can best be achieved.' (*Daily Express*, 21 October 1949)

While the Labour government was fighting bloody colonial wars, a Labour left spokesman could uphold imperialism 'in the best sense of the word'. The imperial tradition was alive and well on all wings of the Labour Party.

Like Wilson, most left-wing activists were of the view that no action of a Labour government could be interpreted as imperialist in the worst sense of the word. They redefined imperialism to mean only the past actions of right-wing Tories. As one historian writes of the left's reaction to the Attlee government, they 'seem genuinely to have believed that what was "imperialism" when undertaken by a capitalist enterprise and a Tory government was "development" when undertaken by a public corporation under a Labour administration' (S Howe, 'Labour patriotism 1939-83', in R Samuel (ed), *Patriotism*, Vol 1, 1988).

Patriotic left

The equivocation of the left over the Empire expressed an intellectual orientation which was profoundly *patriotic* and *conservative*. Left-wing thinkers appropriated Britain's imperial legacy and tried to give it a radical conclusion. George Orwell personifies this trend. While criticising the absurdity of Empire he also expressed concern about its stagnation. He argued with passion that an 'intelligent socialist movement will use their patriotism, instead of merely insulting it' (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, 1941). This sentiment is still very much alive today. Only last year Christopher Hill, doyen of left-wing historians, wrote that 'the British Empire achieved many good things' (see *The Nation of Change and Novelty*).

The absence of an anti-imperialist intellectual tradition is particularly strong in the field of history. Even though there are many influential historians who call themselves Marxists or socialists there is no critical literature on the subject of British imperialism. The well-known

British history is above all that of Empire

historian, Paul Kennedy, has argued that the 'anti-nationalistic hand in historical writing has not been so noticeable in Britain, perhaps because it has had no national socialist past or is fighting no Vietnam War over which liberal/radical circles can become angry' ('The decline of nationalistic history in the West', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol8 (1), 1973).

Kennedy is right to conclude that anti-nationalist history is weak in Britain. But he is wrong to argue that this state of affairs is due to the absence of a Vietnam. British left-wing thinkers have had plenty of causes to get angry about. That they decided to ignore Britain's foreign adventures is a testimony to the strength of the imperial legacy.

Modern British atrocities in Malaya, Kenya, Ireland and countless other colonies have provoked the mildest of reactions. Substantial intellectual arguments directed against imperialism are more or less absent. To this day there is not one substantial radical text which provides a critique of imperial history. The patriotic school of British history remains unchallenged. Indeed the aspiration of left-wing historians seems to be to demonstrate

that they, rather than the conservatives, are the true patriots. Within this kind of intellectual climate it is not surprising that the imperial legacy remains intact.

The absence of a genuine anti-imperialist outlook in Britain is paralleled by the lack of anti-imperialist political action. Britain has fought most of its colonial wars without facing any domestic opposition. It survived the humiliation of Suez because nobody cared what imperialism did to a bunch of Arabs. It fought a bloody war in Aden in the sixties without facing a single mass demonstration. Opposition to the war in Ireland—the longest military engagement fought by Britain this century—is minimal. During the Falklands War, the left virtually collapsed. Its embarrassment at the prospect of appearing unpatriotic outweighed any hesitation it may have had about that imperial adventure.

No surprise

The absence of an anti-imperialist tradition explains why the imperial legacy has been able to survive and to come into its own once more around the Gulf War. This may come as a surprise to the many who thought that, with the end of the Empire,

British imperialism was no more. In fact all that happened was that the British establishment adopted a defensive posture. It stopped calling itself imperialist and assumed a moderate image. But it never once forgot that the imperial legacy was essential for the preservation of its own identity and authority. This is why the establishment has been prepared to spend money on Commonwealth jamborees, and why periodically it allows itself the luxury of a little Falklands adventure. It ostentatiously advertises its intention to stay indefinitely in Gibraltar to obscure its forced withdrawal from Hongkong.

Emotionally, intellectually and by force of habit, the British ruling class is always disposed towards an imperial response. British history is above all that of the Empire, which is what makes Britain special, and gives British institutions their uniquely patriotic and militaristic quality. That is why the British response to the Gulf is so different and why, even among a coalition of Western reactionaries and warmongers, Britain is very much in a class of its own.

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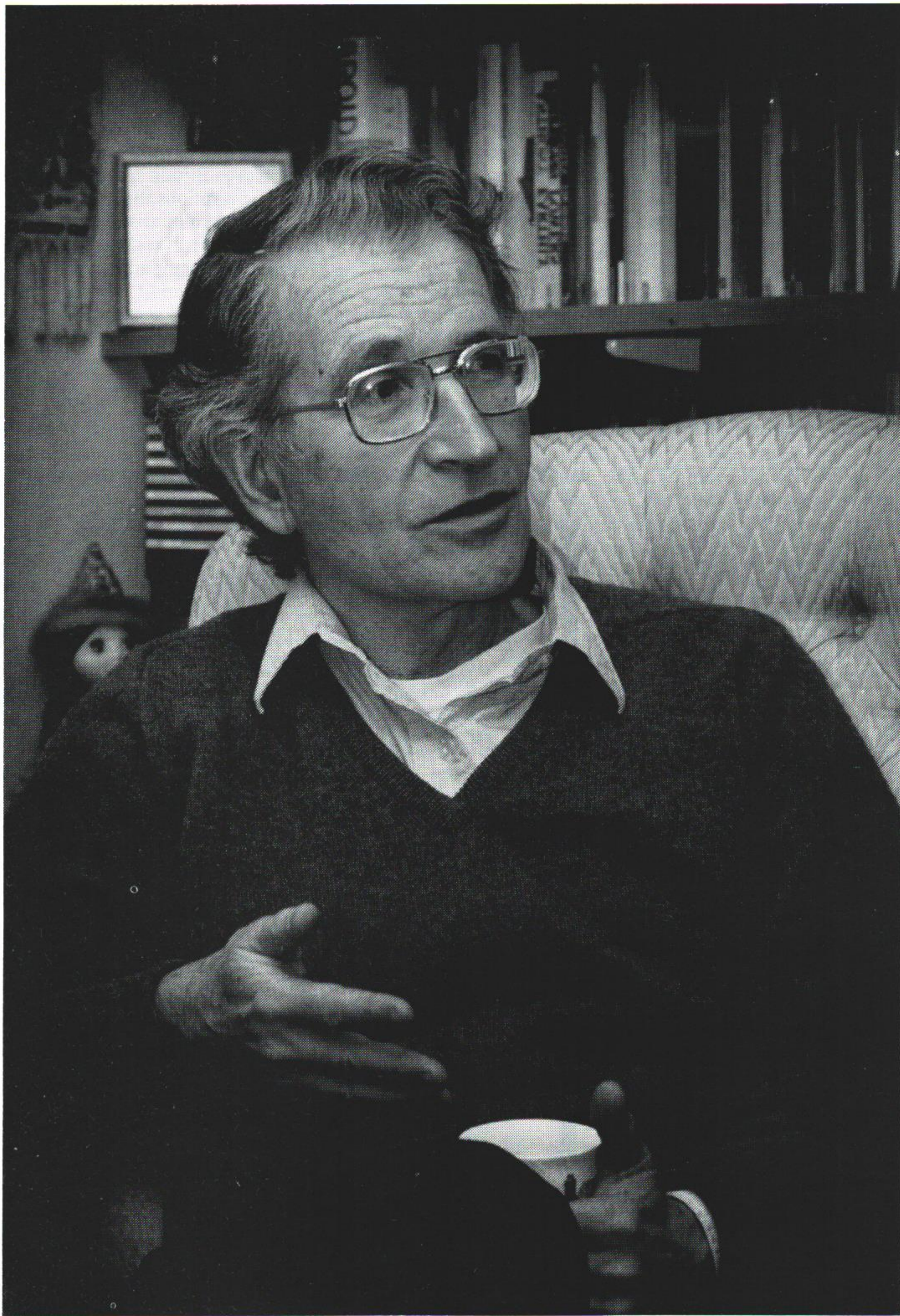
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'Now the the free w

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Daniel Nassim: What do you see as the most striking new features about America's intervention in the Gulf?

Noam Chomsky: One thing that's new in American foreign policy is that they are capable of deploying huge armies in the Gulf. And the reason they can do it now is that the Soviet deterrent has gone.

During the Cold War the Soviet Union was a regional power that used violence and terror around its borders, while the United States was carrying out violence and terrorism throughout the whole world. It is the first true global power in history. But it was to an extent deterred by the Soviet Union, because the Americans were often carrying out operations in areas where they did not have a large conventional force advantage. And that is dangerous if you run into a real adversary. What you would want to do is fight people who can't fight back. That's the way you become a war hero—you attack people who can't fight back.

But the trouble was the Russians could fight back. So they never got into a confrontation with the Russians because it was much too dangerous. Every confrontation in the world had a habit of escalating—especially in the Middle East. Every war, every Arab-Israeli war, or in Lebanon in 1958, carried with it the risk of superpower confrontation because they're just too close. For that reason there was always a limit on the use of American force. It was bad enough but it was limited because you had to ensure that you did not get into a confrontation with the Russians.

The Russians also gave economic support and sustenance to people the United States were trying to overthrow, like in Central America and Nicaragua. And that makes it harder to intervene. That's what's called 'Russian aggression' in the United States. If you buy Cuban sugar that's 'Russian aggression'.

Now the lid is off. The Russians are out of the game and you can do anything you want. There is free use

'Lid is off for use of force'

Professor Noam Chomsky has been one of the leading dissident voices in America during the Gulf crisis. Daniel Nassim asked him about his view of the war—and what comes next

of force. And this has been very well observed by American strategists. When the United States invaded Panama last year Elliot Abrams, who was in charge of Latin American policy for the Reagan administration, pointed out that this is a sort of historic event because it was the first time that the United States has been able to intervene without any concern whatsoever for the Soviet Union or the Soviet reaction in parts of the world.

That's one of the things you've seen in the Gulf that's new. The United States and Britain can put massive conventional forces in there and they can do anything they want because nobody can stop them. These are the two most violent powers on Earth today who are free to use their violence in any way they like and that's a change.

There are other changes. So, for example, this war and the Panama war are unique, at least since 1917, in that there is no pretence of it being a defence against the Russians. The pretence was always ludicrous but it was possible to construct when the United States invaded Grenada, for example, without people collapsing with laughter. But this time it can't even do that. That rhetorical structure has gone and new rhetorical structures are needed. In fact it's now openly conceded in the USA that the new enemy is the third world.

About March every year the White House presents to congress its propaganda, something called the National Strategic Strategy Report, which every year argues that we need an even bigger and more hi-tech military because we're facing an even greater bestiality than ever in history. Last year it was the same. But this time when they said they need a more hi-tech military it was because of the 'technological sophistication of third

world powers'. We need Star Wars because of the Middle East. They have to have the capacity to project force rapidly in the Middle East region and they said this is why we need the military crème de la crème—the first time they said it straight out, without talking about the Soviet threat.

So US foreign policy is different in the rhetorical framework and it's different in the freedom to use force.

Daniel Nassim: One result of the lessening of East-West tensions has been to bring the tensions between the Western powers themselves to the fore. How do you see the US resentment of Japanese and German 'foot-dragging' in relation to the Gulf?

Noam Chomsky: That's an interesting story. With America's economic decline, there has been a drift towards a kind of tripolar economic world. Out of this system comes a weakened United States, a strengthened Europe, Germany, and a strengthened Japan as an industrialised country.

Now as far as Germany and Japan 'foot-dragging'. The way it works in the United States is that there is a lot of Japan-bashing and very little German-bashing. And that is interesting because Japan's contributed more than Germany to the Gulf campaign, considerably more. And I think the reason for that is racism. You don't criticise the Germans because they are white, and blond, and blue-eyed. But the Japanese...

In the United States, they cannot recognise the fact that 'foot-dragging' means these countries just don't want the war. They're part of the world, and they want sanctions and diplomacy. Whereas the United

States and England are off the chart in the use of force. The fact of the matter is that Japan and Germany don't care very much if the United States disrupts its economy or not.

I think this gets right to the heart of the Gulf thing. England and the United States need economic support from the outside. And there are basically three sources of capital around. Number one is Germany, the other is Japan and neither of them is going to fall over themselves to help. And there's a third—petrodollars. If you can keep control of the petrodollars, investment income, that's a striking success.

In the fifties the capital from oil sales buttressed the British economy. By the 1970s it was the American economy. You don't in fact pay for the oil if you make sure that Kuwaiti investments run out of London and Saudi funds go into American banks. So the oil price rise since 1973 has been very beneficial to the United States and England economically, whereas Japan has had to pay more for oil imports. As soon as Japan could see what was happening they started to diversify energy; now they're right down to less than 60 per cent dependency on imported oil altogether, and a lot of that is not from the Gulf.

I think this helps to explain why it's the United States and Britain in the Gulf War and not anybody else. From Germany's point of view they would much rather Saddam Hussein influences oil production than Washington.

Daniel Nassim: As an outsider, what do you think about the role that Britain has played in the Gulf conflict?

Noam Chomsky: Britain has great illusions about its role in the world.



**Palestinians
in Jordan
demonstrate
in support
of Iraq**

A high US official in the Kennedy administration, Dean Acheson, was once discussing how the United States would penetrate the Common Market and he said, well, 'England will be our lieutenant—the fashionable word is "partner"'. England has these enduring illusions about 'partnership'. What they don't realise is that their counterparts over there see it as a lieutenant, and will call them partner.

Britain latched on to the United States in the Cold War, as a way of recovering its imperial glory. That's part of the reason it was dragging its feet about the Common Market, because of the 'special relationship' with the Americans. That special relationship is now a servant. If Britain will supply troops and so on then that's fine with the United States.

Daniel Nassim: To move the discussion on slightly, how do you assess the impact of the Gulf on the United States' changing relationship with Israel?

Noam Chomsky: I don't believe it is changing. In fact my prediction is that if things work out the way the United States is planning—a reasonably decisive victory, and the Arab governments controlling their own populations—then the US relationship with Israel will be strengthened.

That relationship is not based on any love of Jews. It's based on a strategic conception of Israel as a

mercenary state. England is a lieutenant but Israel is a mercenary. The United States is a big power. Other countries may hire terrorists, like they hire Abu Nidal or somebody, but the United States hires terrorist states. That's very different. The Iran-Contra hearings brought out a fraction of all this stuff, showing a fantastic international terrorist network in which the components were states, not people: Taiwan and Israel and Saudi Arabia, and Britain was helping by training mercenaries and stuff. In that system Israel is very useful.

In the Iran-Contra hearings one official described Israel as 'another federal agency'. If you want something done you can rely on it. And there is every reason to expect that relationship to strengthen. That is one reason why the United States is pretty much opposed to a settlement to the Palestine conflict. Over the past 20 years the United States is literally alone in blocking a political settlement to that conflict. Just take a look at the votes in the United Nations, the last one was 151 to three. The United States, Israel and Dominica—who probably had their debt paid or something. It's basically the United States and Israel against the world. That in some ways is why the United States is opposed to an international conference. Bring anybody to that international conference except the United States and Israel and there's going to be pressure for a political settlement

which the USA doesn't want.

Two issues have come up in talks about the Gulf that the United States has blocked. One is Israel and Palestine. The other is weapons of mass destruction—and it's even more interesting in a way. The last Iraqi offer that was made public by US officials was total withdrawal in return for UN security council commitments of an unspecified kind relating to Arab-Israeli relations and weapons of mass destruction. But the United States is opposed to a diplomatic settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and also opposed to a diplomatic settlement of the issue of weapons of mass destruction. And we know this has nothing to do with Iraq invading Kuwait last August. Last April, when Saddam Hussein was still George Bush's favourite friend, Saddam offered to destroy his own chemical weapons. It was not a secret offer, he told a bunch of US senators. And since we were still friends at the time we responded. The state department welcomed Saddam Hussein's offer on weapons, but didn't want it tied to other weapons issues. Meaning we want Israel to retain its nuclear weapons but we'd be happy for Iraq to get rid of its chemical weapons.

That's US policy. To control the force. We have as much force as we like and our clients have as much force as we like.

Daniel Nassim: I would accept that Israel has played the role of a mercenary for the USA. But now

'We have as much force as we like and our clients have as much force as we like'

that America is intervening directly in the Middle East, in alliance with Arab regimes, why do they need a pariah state to intervene on their behalf?

Noam Chomsky: I don't think that the United States wants to intervene directly. It's too costly and too dangerous. It's one of the lessons learnt by imperialists. You rule through an Arab façade. It's much more efficient to intervene indirectly in a country than to control it directly by force. Britain learnt that a long time ago. British policy towards Iraq and Syria in the 1920s was very clear. They concluded, rightly, that indirect rule through an Arab façade was the way to go.

The United States I don't think wants to keep troops in Saudi Arabia. It would just be too destructive. What you want is to keep the troops in Diego Garcia and in the Azores and have quick deployment facilities, and count on the local governments to control their own populations. Force is a last resort, not because the United States wants non-violence but because indirect rule is much more efficient.

The relationship between the United States and Israel and Saudi

Arabia is an interesting one. Saudi Arabia is theoretically at war with Israel but it's very theoretical. There is now documentation coming out that indicates that Israeli soldiers were probably fighting for Saudi Arabia in the early sixties. If we ever got the records I am convinced that they would show Israel and Saudi Arabia were at least passively cooperating during the 1967 War. Nasser's Egypt was a big threat to both of them then. And it's gone on since. In the Iran-Contra hearings it came out that the United States was sending arms to Iran through Israel, and Saudi Arabia was making the payments.

The traditional relationship in the Middle East in the past 30 or 40 years has been on tripartite lines between Saudi Arabia, Iran under the Shah and Israel. Saudi Arabia with its oil wealth needed the protection, and Israel and Iran protected the oil interests in Saudi Arabia from radical Arab nationalists. After the fall of the Shah, within a matter of months, the United States was sending arms to Iran via Israel.

Daniel Nassim: I'm not asking you to be a prophet, but what do you think

the Gulf War shows about the emerging trends in international relations?

Noam Chomsky: A lot depends on how it turns out. If this conservative view is correct—a reasonably decisive victory for US force with Arab populations under control—I think the United States and England will have established the role of force. They would advocate that because that is their strength rather than diplomacy. By now their strength is not primarily economic—although let's not exaggerate, the United States is still the richest country in the world with the strongest economy in the world. But its real strength is military—that is where it is supreme.

All the capitalist industrialised societies now understand the need to subdue the third world. You've got to have an enforcer and nobody is challenging the US role to be the enforcer. What the United States wants to achieve is a recognition of the importance of this role. And to get paid for it. So they want to be a mercenary state, too, the mercenary who rules while other people pay for the US interventions.

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Israel: still the chosen one?

Israel has acted as the West's sentinel in the Middle East for more than 40 years



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

At first sight Israel appears to have done well out of the Gulf War. In the run-up to the war relations between Washington and Jerusalem were at an all-time low. But Israeli 'restraint' following Scud missile attacks from Iraq won praise in America and across the West. The USA swiftly despatched Patriot anti-missile missiles and their crews to Israel. The *Washington Post* noted that 'a new pattern of mutual confidence is being woven between the United States and Israel' (21 January 1991).

Israel's image in the Western media underwent sudden and dramatic improvement. For more than three years of the intifada Israel has been depicted as Goliath to the Palestinian David. After the Gulf War began on 17 January Israel was once again presented as a weak embattled state threatened by hostile Arabs. Binyamin Netanyahu, the leather-

Daniel Nassim believes that a shift in US foreign policy poses a far bigger threat to Israel's future than any missile attacks from Iraq

jacket-and gasmask-wearing deputy foreign minister, has been hailed as Israel's 'first international media star since Moshe Dayan made the eye-patch a fashion statement' (*Washington Times*, 21 January 1991).

It all seems a long way from the events of October, when Israeli premier Yitzhak Shamir conceded that the USA was 'boiling mad' after the massacre of Palestinians in Jerusalem, and the Americans took the unprecedented step of backing a resolution critical of Israel at the United Nations. Even before the Gulf

crisis began US-Israeli relations had been strained by disputes over American aid to Israel, the settlement of Soviet Jews on the occupied West Bank, and whether UN troops should be allowed into the Israeli-occupied territories.

Many radical commentators interpret the US gestures of goodwill towards Israel as confirmation that the Zionist state will remain America's strongest, most important ally in the Middle East (see, for example, the interview with Noam Chomsky in this issue). Yet a closer examination of events suggests that,

despite appearances, Israel's position is more tenuous than ever before.

Take the despatch of US Patriot missiles to Israel. This move represents the reversal of the traditional relationship between Israel and the USA. Israel's traditional value to Washington has been as the local defender of US and Western interests in the Middle East. This time, however, it was a case of the Americans defending Israel against the Arab world.

The White House has never supported Israel out of any love for Jews. Washington pumped billions of dollars into Israel every year because it saw the Zionist state as a 'strategic asset'. The USA knew that Israel, as an artificial state built on the denial of Palestinian rights and totally dependent on Western patronage, would be a loyal ally. Israeli hostility to the Palestinians and any progressive movements in the region could be relied upon.

Implicit threat

Now that the USA is intervening directly in the Middle East, with its massive task force in the Gulf, that particular rationale for giving full-blooded support to Israel has gone. In the past Israel was a mercenary for the USA. Today the Western powers' intervention on their own behalf dwarfs Israel's military capabilities, and raises serious questions about Israel's future value to Western imperialism.

The highly publicised policy of 'Israeli restraint' over the Gulf conflict is a sure sign that things are changing in the Middle East. In the past Israel always seized the slightest excuse to lash out at its Arab neighbours. Indeed its response was often entirely out of proportion to the original attack. In March 1978, for example, some Israeli bus passengers were killed in a shoot-out between police and Palestinian guerrillas from Lebanon. Israel's response was to invade southern Lebanon killing 2500 civilians and causing 265 000 people to flee northwards.

Despite the claims of the Western media, Israel's new policy of restraint is a sign of its political weakness rather than its moral strength. Any restraint has been imposed by the USA. The Americans have given Israel incentives not to strike at Iraq, including Patriot missiles and extra aid. They have also taken military measures to prevent a large-scale Israeli attack on Iraq, refusing to divulge satellite intelligence on Iraqi targets, and withholding the codes which would identify Israeli planes as friendly to the allies. Underlying all these measures is the implicit threat

that the USA will punish Israel severely if it retaliates.

The primary motive behind US policy today is not a concern to defend Israelis from a few near-useless Scud missiles, but a desire to maintain the presence of Arab states in the anti-Iraq coalition. If Israel launched an attack there would be domestic pressure on countries such as Egypt, Syria and Morocco to desert the US-led coalition, leaving America and Britain dangerously exposed as imperialist invaders. In this respect American praise for Israeli restraint against Scud attacks can be seen as a *continuation* of the policy which led it to condemn the October massacre in Jerusalem. In both cases Washington's first concern was to keep the coalition together.

Behind the immediate concerns over the Gulf coalition is a more fundamental shift in US foreign policy. In the past the relationship with Israel was at the centre of US strategy in the Middle East. Even before the Gulf crisis erupted the focus of American Middle East policy was shifting much more towards the Arab regimes. The changing emphasis was made possible by the end of the Cold War, and the demise of the Soviet Union as a regional power. In the past Soviet backing gave Arab regimes more room to manoeuvre in their relations with the West. Today this room is no longer available. Syria, for example, was until recently one of the USSR's main clients in the Middle East. But the sharp reduction in Soviet backing made it more susceptible to American pressure to join the anti-Iraq coalition. The Soviet Union, itself desperate for Western economic backing, has put pressure on Arab regimes to reach an accommodation with the USA.

Pros and cons

These new circumstances have prompted the Americans to reassess the advantages and disadvantages of their relationship with Israel. Israel has been a staunchly reliable ally of imperialism. But it has also created enormous unrest and resentment against the West in the Arab world. Since the end of the Cold War the Israeli state has often been more of a liability than an asset. Israeli politicians are aware of the dangers of being dumped by Washington. Even after the dramatic upturn in US-Israeli relations, Labour MP Arye Eliav warned the *Jerusalem Post* that US strategists might conclude 'Israel has no more strategic importance for the West, owing to the collapse of Soviet power' (25 January 1991).

The subsequent suggestion from

James Baker, the US secretary of state, that the Palestine question might be linked to the Gulf conflict certainly rattled Israel. Although Baker's move was soon contradicted by the White House it could yet represent the shape of things to come. As the USA seeks to maximise its post-Gulf War influence over the Middle East, it may well be open to doing a deal with the Arab regimes at Israel's expense.

The USA is not about to drop Israel overnight. Reforging real political alliances is more difficult than redrawing lines on a map. The strength of anti-Western feeling stirred up among the Arab masses presents a serious barrier to the consolidation of a new US-led alliance. But for the first time since 1948 there is a possibility of the USA trying to control events in the Middle East without using Israel as a central pillar of its policy.

Unfortunately Israel's loss is unlikely to mean the Palestinians' gain. The aim of any switch in US policy would be to reorganise the West's domination over the Palestinian and Arab masses, not abolish it. Indeed the Western powers' real attitude to the Palestinians has been best illustrated by their recent warming of relations with Israel, at precisely the moment when the Israeli army was imposing the longest and harshest curfew on the West Bank and Gaza in the 24-year occupation, and launching its fiercest attacks for nine years on Palestinians in Lebanon.

Bound to suffer

In the coming months the Israelis will probably seek to polarise relations between themselves and the Arabs and Palestinians, to try to put pressure on the USA to reassert support for Israel. That Israel should pursue such a high-risk strategy is a sign of its desperation. Whatever the outcome of these manoeuvres the Palestinians are bound to suffer as a result.

The Gulf War is demonstrating that Western imperialism is the major force for violence and oppression in the Middle East. The state of Israel has been an agent of American policy, not the driving force behind it. As such, the long-term deterioration in US-Israeli relations is nothing for supporters of the Palestinian cause to get too excited about. Driving the USA and the rest of the Western powers out of the Middle East remains the precondition for Palestinian liberation.



Showing support for Kuwait, for British troops, for just about anybody except the Iraqi victims of imperialism

CND's alternative imperialism

The Gulf War,
argues Mike Freeman,
has revealed that
CND and parallel
campaigns in
other countries
are not in
fact peace
movements at all



PHOTO: Simon Norfolk

The onset of the Gulf War in January threw what is known as the British peace movement into disarray. After 40 000 marched in London the week before the start of the Western air bombardment, less than a tenth of that number turned out the following weekend. Even when the movement rallied its forces for a national protest on 2 February the numbers were still 50 per cent down on the pre-war figure. In the same early weeks of the war former opponents of the war, including the bulk of the parliamentary Labour Party, shifted into the pro-war camp. The rump of hard-left MPs opposed to the war dwindled from 55 to 34 within a week of the start of hostilities.

The onset of the war also exposed significant divergences in the peace movement internationally. Whereas in Britain opposition became more muted and smaller in scale, in Europe, most notably in Germany, but also in France, Italy and elsewhere, demonstrations grew even larger and more vocal. These differences reflected, not any substantial differences in outlook

among the radical/left/Green forces leading these protests, but the different responses to the war of governments and ruling elites in different European countries. Thus while the British establishment threw its full weight behind the American war effort creating a powerful pro-war consensus at home, in Germany and France ruling circles were much less enthusiastic supporters of military action, creating greater scope for the expression of popular distaste for the war.

The Gulf War has revealed that CND and parallel campaigns in other countries are not in fact peace movements at all. Indeed they are not even anti-war movements. They support the right of Western intervention in the Middle East while criticising the timing and conduct of the current offensive. They stand for the pursuit of their respective national interests in the Gulf by alternative, preferably non-military, means. They stand for an alternative imperialist policy of sanctions and diplomacy, not for outright opposition to Western imperialism.

Two sides

The war has deepened tensions in the anti-war movement. On the one side, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf attempt to limit opposition to the war to calls for the pursuit of the same objectives by other means. On the other side, the left-wing and international solidarity groups organised in the Hands Off the Middle East Committee (Home) demand the immediate withdrawal of Western forces and side with the Iraqi people against the USA and Britain. On the 2 February demonstration in London CND stewards invited the police forcibly to remove from the march supporters of the Home committee carrying a banner claiming 'Victory to Iraq'. Platform speakers denounced this anti-imperialist stand and smeared it as a CIA plot. In fact this position is the only one consistent with the aspiration for peace in the Middle East.

Militarism is inseparable from modern capitalism. Over the past century capitalism has developed into a global system of imperialism, one distinctive feature of which is the territorial division of the world between a small number of rich and powerful nations and a large number of relatively poor and weak countries. This imperialist order is characterised by uneven economic and social development, combining areas of great wealth and prosperity with regions of desperate poverty and backwardness, periods of hectic expansion and times of recession and

slump. The imperialist order is also characterised by a virtually permanent state of warfare. The twentieth century has alternated between episodes of global conflict featuring war among the major imperialist powers (the two world wars) and episodes of more localised conflict between imperialist powers and third world regimes or liberation movements. According to a recent report from the International Red Cross, since 1945 some 20m people have died in 105 wars and a further 60m have been uprooted. This was during what is widely celebrated as '40 years of peace'!

The requirement that every major capitalist nation—and every third world country aspiring to independence from imperialist domination—maintains a constant readiness for war has encouraged the emergence of an entire culture of militarism. In the USA and Britain, as in other advanced capitalist powers, the military sector commands a substantial share of national economic resources, employs millions of workers and has a major influence on political and social life. From *Bilko* to *Rambo* and *Top Gun*, from *'Allo 'Allo* and *Dad's Army* to *Who Dares Wins*, popular culture celebrates past wars and prepares for future engagements.

The Gulf War is a dramatic confirmation of the capitalist system's inherent drive towards war at the very moment when many hoped that the end of the Cold War offered the prospect of a new global harmony, peace and disarmament. Within scarcely a year public debate has shifted from the scope of the 'peace dividend' (the supposed saving from scaling down Western preparations for war with the Soviet Union) to discussion of the domestic costs of the Gulf War and the West's permanent occupation of the Gulf.

Living Marxism's attitude flows from our assessment of the Gulf War as a conflict between Western imperialism and a third world country. We repudiate the specious propaganda justifications advanced by the West for its invasion of the Gulf, such as the demonisation of Saddam Hussein, and support Iraq against the USA and Britain. In this conflict, the character of the Iraqi regime and the personality of its leader are quite irrelevant. The victory of imperialism over Iraq can only prolong Western exploitation of the resources of the region and the oppression of its people. On the other hand, the defeat of imperialism would create more favourable conditions for the peoples of the Arab world to take the future of their countries—and the fate of their

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corrupt and despotic rulers—into their own hands. Peace in the Gulf thus demands the defeat of the USA and Britain and the victory of Iraq. This anti-imperialist position reflects the aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East and provides a coherent basis on which to build an anti-war movement in Britain.

From the start of the Gulf crisis CND has evaded the crucial link between militarism and imperialism. Thus in a major national newspaper advertisement back in August it identified the origin of the problem as the 'crisis of a world gone mad':

'It would be easy to believe that the world *has* gone mad. The presence of nuclear and chemical weapons in the Gulf makes for a deadly and dangerous situation. But it needn't be this way.' (*Guardian*, 24 August 1990)

The advert continued to elaborate CND's alternative way—through United Nations sanctions and diplomacy and through measures to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. This alternative policy was broadly the same as that put forward by the Labour leadership in the early months of the crisis.

CND's emphasis on the irrationality of the Western build-up to war in the Gulf was a convenient evasion of the entirely rational, from the point of view of the capitalist system, connection between imperialism and militarism. Its presentation of an alternative non-military strategy through which the USA and Britain could pursue their objectives in the Gulf endorsed the principle of Western intervention and accepted the justifications offered by Bush and Major and the warmongering media. CND agreed that the problem was Saddam Hussein, it disagreed only about the best means of disarming him and containing the Iraqi military machine.

In its criticism of aspects of British militarism while broadly endorsing the wider legitimacy of British imperialist objectives, CND follows a long tradition of equivocal British pacifism. As George Orwell observed, 'Scratch the average pacifist and you find a jingo'. The roots of this outlook can be found in what CND historian James Hinton has called the 'imperialist pacifism' of the Victorian era (see *Protests and Visions*, 1989). Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the onset of the First World War in 1914, the British Empire enjoyed a period of prolonged stability and avoided major military conflicts, especially in Europe. Britain's enormous economic

power, combined with the unchallenged supremacy of the Royal Navy, enabled it to bestride the world without, in general, recourse to force. The result was that, as Hinton puts it, 'the Pax Britannica bequeathed a legacy of "imperialist pacifism"': 'Where other nineteenth-century nationalisms found their deepest meaning in war, the supreme power exercised by the British in the world enabled them to link their national identity above all to peace.'

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the defence of British imperial interests demanded increasing coercion in the colonies and rearmament against the rising threat from Germany and other rivals. The British ruling class in general and the Liberal Party in particular shifted away from imperialist pacifism towards imperialist militarism. However, what Hinton describes as 'the comforting illusion' that 'Britain's destiny was to serve the universal interests of mankind' proved more durable; it 'continued to be fostered by twentieth-century pacifists long after the establishment had abandoned it'.

Britain's right

In campaigns against the Boer War, during the First World War and in the build-up towards the second, radical Liberal and, increasingly, Labour opponents of the militarist policies of the British government kept up the old tradition. Though all these movements attracted fundamentalist religious pacifists these were always a minority; their mainstream supporters upheld 'imperialist pacifism' or alternative imperialist strategies to maintain British interests. They advocated various forms of institutionalised international diplomacy (culminating in the inter-war League of Nations) and economic sanctions, as non-militarist ways of resolving inter-state disputes. Most of the early socialist movement adopted the alternative imperialist approach of radical Liberalism wholesale.

It is important to note that the anti-war alternative strategies took Britain's economic and military power for granted. The prospects for British diplomacy did not rest on the skills of the upper-class twits at the conference table, but on the gunboat diplomacy of the navy on the high seas. Many opponents of Britain's war against Germany in 1914 regarded the navy as a progressive force in the world. They generally accepted Britain's coercion of the colonies: that was regarded as imperial policing, a civilising mission, not military barbarism. The scope for

sanctions depended on Britain's economic strength as a major capitalist power and if economic sanctions failed, the ultimate sanction of military force was always in reserve.

It is also worth noting that the onset of serious hostilities generally led to a collapse, or at least a major decline, in alternative imperialist anti-war campaigning. The most familiar example of such a disintegration is that of the socialist movement, which had long fully endorsed imperialist pacifism, in August 1914. Movements which strongly identified with the progressive mission of their own nation states, abroad as well as at home, inevitably rallied to defend them against their enemies when the shooting started. Imperialist pacifism turned rapidly into national chauvinism with catastrophic consequences. Retreating before a wave of war fever, many former peace campaigners shifted their focus from opposing the war to opposing particular consequences of it, such as wider conscription, food price rises, etc. Some gave up campaigning to stop the war in favour of discussing the framework of the post-war order. Others ended up backing the call for a 'knockout blow' against Germany as a way of hastening the peace. Thus the alternative imperialist approach, far from providing a coherent basis for a stand against the war, became a slippery slope leading from the anti-war to the pro-war camp.

While alternative imperialism revealed an alarming tendency to turn into the real thing, its supporters maintained a consistent hostility to genuine anti-imperialism. Thus during the First World War, peace campaigners staunchly opposed Marxists who pointed to the Russian Revolution as a dramatic example of how to achieve 'Peace, bread and land', in the Bolsheviks' famous slogan, through overthrowing the capitalist system. In Britain the moderate socialist peace campaigner HN Brailsford emphasised that the aim should not be to overthrow capitalism, but to 'check the worst possible consequences of a capitalistic foreign policy, and, if possible, turn it to some partial good'. An undying faith in the possibility of turning the foreign policy of British imperialism to 'some partial good' persists in the British peace movement to this day.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament provides a link between the imperialist pacifism of the past and the alternative imperialist response to the Gulf War. Launched in 1958 after an influential article in the *New Statesman* by the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the playwright JB Priestley, CND

As George Orwell observed, 'Scratch the average pacifist and you find a jingo'

The Hands Off the Middle East Committee has carried the torch for peace with justice



brought together the Labour left and the radical intelligentsia. For Russell and Priestley, opposition to nuclear weapons was based on 'moral revulsion, fear of attack and a pride in the British system of parliamentary democracy' (see R Taylor and C Pritchard, *The Protest Makers*, 1980). They regarded the campaign as 'the last fling of those who wanted to see Britain occupying world power status: if Britain could no longer rule by force, then surely she might exert moral and cultural, and therefore political, influence'. Patriotic, moralistic and narrowly anti-nuclear, CND brought imperialist pacifism into the 1960s.

Founding CND member Michael

Foot, later Labour's leader in its pro-war stand against Argentina and today a loyal supporter of Kinnock's backing for Western barbarism in the Gulf, summed up the elements of the new campaign:

'Suddenly, in CND, national pride and disgruntlement, scarcely less than intelligent alarm about the bomb, found notable expression in the limpid beauty of Bertrand Russell's English, in the humanity of JB Priestley and in the invective of John Osborne, in the release which many of the young described as "a new kind of politics".' (*Aneurin Bevan*, Vol2, 1973)

CND called for Britain to renounce nuclear weapons as a means of enhancing British national prestige in the world.

From the start CND was never a peace movement. With its narrow focus on nuclear weapons, it ignored Britain's continuing membership of Nato, its vast arsenals of conventional weaponry and never contested its right to use them to enforce its interests. In the second phase of CND in the early eighties the campaign revived to protest against the installation of US cruise missiles in Britain. In response to establishment claims that CND's policy would leave Britain defenceless against enemy attack, prominent CND figures set about devising 'alternative defence' policies. In 1980 one leading CND adviser argued that 'a break with nuclear weapons and the Atlantic alliance would mean either larger and more expensive regular forces, or alternatively a greater degree of popular mobilisation, which is surely the direction in which the left ought to press' (*New Statesman*, 24 October 1980). Before long the 'peace movement' was backing both these militaristic options.

By 1983, when Labour was under great media pressure during the election because of its links with CND, the peace movement was increasingly desperate to prove its patriotic commitment:

'But CND is *not* asking for Britain alone to have no military defences at all....There are several non-nuclear policies we could follow. We *could* simply decide to scrap nuclear weapons and make no other changes. We'd make a straight saving and still be mightily armed.' (CND, 'Nuclear disarmament starts here', 1983)

The retreat continued. In its support for the demand for a 'freeze' on current nuclear stockpiles in 1983 CND effectively accepted the

maintenance of the Polaris nuclear system in the hope that the government would reject cruise and Trident. In other words, CND had abandoned even its anti-nuclear stand. In 1987 Neil Kinnock was once again under electoral pressure to repudiate his CND past. Hence he proposed to cancel Trident and to spend the money on more warships and fighter aircraft, while CND campaigners like Peter Tatchell stumped the country advocating new forms of conscription and 'defensive' weaponry.

When confronted with British involvement in war CND has pursued a consistent policy of sitting on the fence. Its most notorious evasion concerns the war in Ireland which it has studiously ignored from the start. It is striking that within two days of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Bruce Kent was ready to declare CND's condemnation of Saddam Hussein and its support for Kuwait's spurious national rights (*Guardian*, 4 August 1990). After more than 20 years CND has yet to declare its support for Ireland's legitimate right to national self-determination and to condemn Britain's military occupation. The difference of course is simple. Supporting the Emir of Kuwait means taking sides with Britain against Iraq; supporting Irish freedom means taking sides against British imperialism, inconceivable for the loyal peace movement.

'Not enemies'

In response to the Falklands War, CND and its Labour left allies called for an end to the war and for United Nations negotiations. However, it was at pains to make clear that 'we are campaigning for the end of hostilities; we are not supporters of Argentina or enemies of Britain' (see M Freeman, 'Malvinas are Argentina's', *Revolutionary Communist Pamphlets*, 1982). At a time when a major British task force was steaming for the South Atlantic, CND's equivocation amounted to acquiescence to British imperialism. In practice CND called in the police to remove anti-imperialists from anti-war marches and effectively demobilised opposition to a real war in favour of mobilising continuing mass protests against the threat of nuclear war in the future.

CND's response to the Gulf crisis was consistent with its past record. In the early discussions of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf CND representatives blocked left-wing proposals that the campaign slogan should be 'US/British troops out of the Gulf'. Prominent CND officials issued an open letter announcing that such slogans had

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'nothing to do with the demonstration' called by the committee in September. Instead CND proposed 'No war—for a peaceful settlement'. At a time when Western forces were already en route for the Gulf this refusal to call for their withdrawal simply avoided the central issue of Western intervention.

However, CND's alternative imperialist approach to the Gulf War is not simply evasive. Like such positions in the past it has an inherent tendency to erode resistance to the war and to encourage an inexorable slippage from opposition to support for British militarism. This slippage is most apparent in the Labour Party which moved en masse from support for CND's position of sanctions and diplomacy to supporting military intervention once battle was joined. Kinnock's shift was quite logical: if you support imperialist objectives, why quibble about the methods of achieving them?

Nor was it surprising to find Joan Ruddock, CND chair from 1981 to 1985, refusing to join the small group of MPs voting against the war. As her soft-left colleague Clare Short explained, 'now war has started it is useless to keep on railing about what

might have been achieved.... We have to try to use whatever influence we can muster to bring the war to an end with a minimum of casualties' (*New Statesman & Society*, 1 February 1991). When Western forces have just completed two weeks of carpet-bombing Iraq it is difficult to see how supporting Western militarism could help to minimise casualties, unless these supporters of 'our boys' have joined the rest of the British establishment in no longer considering Iraqi fatalities and injuries.

When Labour's national executive voted overwhelmingly in January for the disarming of Iraq's military machine and for a UN conference on the Palestinians, another former CND activist Robin Cook hailed the resolution: 'Unlike the government which simply has war aims, it sets out our peace aims.' The contribution of the peace movement to the British war effort is now apparent: the cause of peace now includes the destruction of Iraq! For Cook, as for any Victorian imperialist, the right of Britain to decide the appropriate regime for Iraq (or for the Palestinians), to appoint and remove its rulers, to dictate the weapons it should be allowed to possess—all this

goes without question. For more than a century this sort of imperialist pacifism has legitimised Western militarism and undermined potential anti-war sentiment at home.

On a number of smaller issues CND has also played into the hands of the pro-war propagandists. By focusing on Saddam Hussein's potential to acquire nuclear weapons (non-existent according to Swedish experts), CND has strengthened the notion that Western intervention is justified to pre-empt this danger. Its emphasis on the environmental dangers of the war has helped the USA to make the Gulf oil slick (probably caused by US bombing) the pretext for further bombing raids on Iraq and Kuwait. Its continuing preoccupation with Iraq's supposed chemical warfare potential can only serve to legitimise even more Western bombing—perhaps even the use of nuclear weapons if the West's land war goes wrong. The irony of all this is that the forces with the real nuclear capacity and with vast chemical warfare potential, and a track record of using both—those of the West—are ignored by CND.

Hands off the Middle East For US and British defeat

The Hands Off the Middle East Committee calls on all those who want to see peace in the Gulf to support its work in opposing all Western intervention in the region
Phone (071) 375 2697 or write c/o BM WAR,
London WC1N 3XX

March 1916—the introduction of conscription

War against war

Jill Gordon on the lessons of the struggle against conscription in the First World War

On 2 March 1916 the Military Service Act came into force, allowing for forcible conscription into the British army. It became the focus for wide-scale popular resistance to the war effort. The struggle against conscription and militarism in the First World War provides some useful pointers for the peace movement today.

The British government was forced to introduce conscription in 1916 because of the failure of the voluntary recruitment campaign. By the summer of 1915 the number of new volunteers had dipped so low that the cabinet began to panic. Britain was committed to a major military offensive in France and Flanders the following year. The Military Service Act made all unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41 eligible for army service. They would be called up as and when required, depending on the importance of their jobs to the war effort. When even this did not produce the required number of recruits, parliament finally introduced in May 1916 universal military service for all men up to the age of 41.

In May 1916 the Anti-Conscription Council was formed. Sixteen thousand conscientious objectors registered their opposition to war and were harshly disciplined and persecuted. Seventy are believed to have died in prison or military detention centres. Some even faced the death penalty. The most serious obstacle to government plans, however, came not from individual conscientious objectors, but from mass working class resistance.

'Industrial peace'

The leadership of the labour movement had dropped its opposition to the war almost as soon as the fighting began. 'Union leaders', notes one labour historian, 'in common with their Labour Party colleagues and the majority of the old Socialist International [abandoned]...their repeated pre-war pledges to prevent war or to end it by revolutionary means if it did break out' (A Hutt, *British Trade Unionism—A Short History*, 1975, pp69-70). In March 1915 trade union bosses declared an 'industrial peace' for the duration of the war, becoming partners with the government in smoothing the flow of workers into the war machine.

Rank and file workers however took a very different view of the war and of conscription. On 2 August 1914, even before war had been declared, there were huge anti-war demonstrations in Trafalgar Square and across the country. Demonstrators adopted resolutions which called on 'workers [to] stand together for peace! Combine and conquer the militarist enemy and the self-seeking imperialist, today once and for all....Down with war!'. In Scotland anti-war meetings were held every day of the week. Liverpool trades council denounced conscription as 'the master stroke of capitalism, backed up by landlordism, and bolstered and supported by war material mongers' (quoted in A Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File—Trades Councils in Britain 1900-40*, 1977, p62). By the end of the summer of 1915, notes

Clinton, 'all trades councils were unanimous in their opposition to conscription. This view was shared by every other working class organisation'.

Working class anger was particularly roused by the way that employers seized on the war as an opportunity to enforce new attacks on conditions and living standards. Employers imposed longer hours and resisted pay claims. The Munitions Act of 1915 brought about virtual 'industrial conscription'. It allowed for the prosecution of workers for poor timekeeping and other minor misdemeanours. A worker could not leave one job for another without first obtaining the permission of his employer. A ministry of munitions report in 1915 saw that the act would 'furnish the employers with a machine which would shatter to its foundations the whole fabric of trade union liberties and

'We socialists, who believe that the only war worth fighting for is the class war against robbery and slavery for the workers, do not mean to lay down our lives for British or any other capitalism'
John MacLean

customs' (quoted in J Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, 1973, p127). As a result of this clampdown a wave of unrest and unofficial strikes broke out. Clydeside in Scotland became the focus for the most militant opposition to war and conscription.

Even before the war, 'there had been carried out for a number of years [on Clydeside] an intense anti-war and anti-militarist propaganda which continually exposed the intrigues of the British government', wrote Willie Gallacher, one of the leading Clydeside activists (*Revolt on the Clyde*, 1978 edition). The revolutionary John MacLean, an inspirational influence on the Clyde Workers Committee, argued that 'we socialists, who believe that the only war worth fighting for is the class war against robbery and slavery for the workers, do not mean to lay down our lives for British or any other

capitalism'. He added that 'they had not better try to enlist us, for we will prove more dangerous with arms than without them' (quoted in N Milton (ed), *John MacLean: In the Rapids of Revolution*, 1972). Such agitation paved the way for wide-scale working class opposition to the war. When the minister of munitions David Lloyd George agreed to meet the Clyde Workers Committee in 1915, Gallacher reports how he was told in no uncertain terms that 'it was a war for trade and territory...a war carried on for the purposes of imperialism. We were not supporting any such war'.

The Workers Committee agitated against the war, against conscription, against 'dilution'—the replacement of skilled workers by unskilled ones as part of the attempt to lower wages—and against the employers' attacks on conditions and living standards. There were widespread strikes, not just on the Clyde but in places such as Barrow, Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham. Throughout, anti-war agitators linked the fight to defend working class rights with the struggle against imperialism and war. 'The attack upon engineering workers', wrote one leading activist, JT Murphy, 'was described as part of the universal attempt of capitalism to hold the workers in subjection. The war was denounced as an imperialist war for robbing workers and not a war for their liberation' (*Preparing for Power*, 1934, p102). The connection between the war and the attack on the working class at home was perhaps made most famously by the Glasgow rent strikes, organised by militant women.

Deported from Clydeside

The government responded by hammering the leadership of the anti-war movement, particularly on the Clyde. The leaders were arrested and jailed. Shop stewards were deported from Clydeside. Through its campaign of repression, the government managed to subdue working class resistance. But it could not destroy opposition to conscription and war. Right up to the end of the war there was wide-scale agitation against conscription. In 1918, for example, when the government attempted to bring in the Manpower Bill which removed exemptions from conscription, there was renewed opposition on the Clyde and elsewhere.

The strength of the anti-war agitation in the First World War lay in the widespread recognition that the war was an imperialist conflict fought, in John MacLean's words, for the benefit of 'the class which has robbed, ruled, despised and imprisoned us'. Militant workers recognised that the interests of the working class lay in taking sides against the British establishment and in opposing the war effort. The lesson for the anti-war movement today is that, to be effective, it must first popularise the argument that our class interests are implacably opposed to those of the Western imperialists, and that we need to take sides against them. Winning that argument is the precondition for organising effective resistance to the war drive.

Operation racism

Tanks at Heathrow:
domestic militarism
targets Muslims

The wave of wartime attacks on Arabs and other Muslims in Britain, says Andrew Calcutt, exposes the connection between racism and 'respectable' British patriotism

John Major and his government have won praise for pursuing a Gulf policy based on patriotism without jingoism. But for Iraqis, other Arabs and indeed any Muslims living in Britain, the distinction is academic. The Gulf War has brought an increase in racist sentiment and attacks. Major might want to distance himself from this aspect of the conflict. But it is a direct consequence of the culture of nationalism and militarism engendered by the war cabinet and backed by its Labour Party shadow.

Racism is only a more intense form of British nationalism. When the authorities target a foreign people as a threat to 'the British way of life', the backlash follows inevitably. Backed by the roar of RAF Jaguars, the Tory government justifies its invasion of the Gulf on the basis that Britain is the standard-bearer of civilised values. It follows that Britain's enemies in the Middle East must be inferior, subject peoples. And subjects must be subjugated: this is the white man's burden. So when 'war tightens the sinews of a nation' (Peter McKay in London's *Evening Standard*, 23 January), the patriotic muscle is bound to be brought to bear on Muslims in Britain. There was no need for Major to make a separate declaration of war on the home front, when British and Western forces had already commenced hostilities against the Arab and Muslim world.

State policy at home has created the framework for the upturn in racism. The government, the army, the police, and that informal arm of the state, the media, have combined in a bid to create a 'Blitz Spirit' of national unity against the alien menace. This has given the thumbs-up to any thug in east London, Bradford or Glasgow who fancies himself as Tommy Atkins in mufti.

Troops, tanks and armed police officers guard Britain's airports. Codenamed Brave Defender, their operation is classified as military aid to the civil power—the same category as operations in Northern Ireland. A national terrorism committee is coordinating undercover police work. 'The public

should be vigilant', declared David Owen, president of the chief police officers' association; 'we are in a war situation...everyone should be aware about suspicious packages or strangers'.

The home office is treating all Arabs as 'suspicious strangers'. Iraqi nationals are no longer allowed to enter Britain, and all 6000 already here must register with the police. Since September 1990, the home office has served deportation orders on 176 Arab people on grounds of 'national security'. In January alone, 101 Iraqis, 12 Palestinians and one Lebanese were arrested and detained pending deportation; 20 more were deported. Others have been declared prisoners of war and taken to Rolleston Camp on Salisbury Plain. The security forces described the arrests and deportations as 'a very useful pre-emptive strike'. The military metaphor was entirely appropriate.

In Glasgow, seven plainclothes police broke into a hall of residence and arrested two Iraqi students at gunpoint. One officer said he was acting in accordance with 'emergency war powers' which allow for the detention of anyone accused of fraternising or sympathising with subversives. Similar operations took place on campuses in Edinburgh, Swansea, Aberystwyth, Leeds, Bradford, Nottingham and London.

Major assured MPs that measures such as detention and deportation would only be used against proven terrorists and known agents of the Baathist regime. Yet arrests have been made at random. 'The interests of national security', applied under the terms of the 1971 Immigration Act, include the arrest and detention of anyone connected with the Middle East.

At least one of the students seized in Scotland is a Kurd living in exile from Saddam's Iraq. Whereas the British authorities would have it that all students in receipt of an Iraqi government grant must be supporters of the regime, an Iraqi domiciled in London reported that many students have used their studies abroad as a one-way ticket out of Iraq: 'They go underground after completing their PhD.

This is quite common. And it's people like this who are now being interned—indiscriminately. It is a way of drumming into British people that Arabs are hook-nosed bastards and they are all terrorists.'

Iraqis in detention are worried about their families, often left with no means of support. Detainees have been shuttled between Pentonville prison, London, and HMP Full Sutton, Humberside. In a portakabin in the Pentonville compound sits an 'independent panel' adjudicating on appeals against detention and deportation. 'If you appeal', says one internee, 'they clear your cell and take your luggage so it's straight to the airport afterwards'. Appellants are not allowed a lawyer during cross-examination, nor even allowed to hear the alleged evidence against them. 'This kind of court', says a friend of one internee, 'gives kangaroos a bad name'.

Many employers have taken their lead from the home office. Some, including a major oil company, have phoned the Commission for Racial Equality for advice on how to sack all Iraqis without contravening the Race Relations Act. Section 42 of the act cites 'national security' as grounds for dismissal. Public sector managers are just as chauvinist. A support worker reports housing officials asking about Iraqi refugees: 'Now we are at war, do we have to pay them housing benefit?'

Anti-Arab racism has trickled down from the corridors of Whitehall, through personnel departments and council offices, and on to the streets and shopping malls of Britain. Unofficial acts of war already include the firebombing of mosques in Birmingham, Chorley, Burnley, Batley, Norwich and Woking, and Asians being attacked with knives, air-rifles and other symbols of British civilisation. And this is only the beginning, as the war brings British nationalism out in its true, blood-red colours.

Additional reporting by Ben Brack and Carol Taggart

'Jihad' against Bradford Muslims

Bradford in West Yorkshire is a city at war.
Kenan Malik reports



PHOTO: Kenan Malik

'The more they say to me "Get out of this country, you support Saddam Hussein", the more I support Saddam Hussein 100 per cent.' Fiaz is a quietly spoken 19-year old, a student at Bradford College. It would be hard to caricature him as a wild-eyed religious fanatic. Yet the Gulf War has turned Fiaz into a staunch supporter of Saddam Hussein. This view finds a ready echo within Britain's Muslim community, and

nowhere more so than in Bradford.

It is some 18 months since I was last in Bradford. Then, the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* bitterly divided the city between black and white. Today that division is wider than ever, and the mood of the city is that much uglier. Not a single Muslim I met backed the Western war drive; few whites opposed the war. If the Rushdie affair provided a focus for the Muslim community to vent its anger

against a racist society, the Gulf War has become the pretext for a racist crusade against Asians. 'If they want a jihad, let them have it', wrote *Sunday Telegraph* commentator Peregrine Worsthorne about Muslims. In Bradford the anti-Muslim 'jihad' is already under way. From verbal abuse to physical attacks, Bradford racists have taken advantage of the Gulf War to launch a new onslaught on the black community.

the gulf war

Shortly after war commenced, the local paper, the *Telegraph and Argus* published an editorial entitled 'All the way to Baghdad', urging the West not to stop short of the total destruction of Iraq. The letters page has become a soapbox for local racists. 'Muslims have a choice', declared one correspondent. 'They have to decide which side they are on—Britain or Iraq. If they support Saddam Hussein they should go and join him in Baghdad. And if they won't go we should make them.'

It is a view that is echoed in local pubs and clubs. 'They're either British or they're not', said one drinker in Manningham Labour Club. 'It's up to them. They've got to decide which side they're on. And if they don't like it here, they can get out.'

The authorities have led the way in targeting the black community. At the start of the war, police swooped on Bradford University, arrested seven Iraqi students and interned them at Full Sutton, the top security prison near York. When a local imam declared his support for Saddam Hussein on television, he found the police on his doorstep. They had come to check his passport.

Factory brawls

Unofficial racists have not been slow to learn from the government's campaign of harassment. Intimidation of Asians is now an everyday affair. 'We were coming back from work on Saturday night', said Ali who works part-time at the Odeon cinema, 'and there were these people coming out of the pub. They weren't drunk or anything. But they kept shouting at us, "You're Saddam Hussein's people. Get back to Iraq. Get back to your country". As far as they are concerned if your skin is coloured brown then you're Iraqi and you support Saddam Hussein'.

Intimidation is not confined simply to verbal abuse. The Medina Majid Mosque in Batley has been firebombed twice since the start of the Gulf crisis. Racists petrol-bombed a house belonging to an Asian family in the Westtown district of Dewsbury. The almost-completed Westtown Mosque has been vandalised, causing tens of thousands of pounds' worth of damage. In the week that war broke out racists set alight four cars belonging to Asians on the Hilltop estate in Heckmondwike, near Dewsbury. Local schools have become battlegrounds. In one incident, white youths from St John Fisher School near Dewsbury laid siege to the predominantly Asian Batley High School.

Most ominously, the tensions have spilled over into local workplaces. At

TA Firth, a textile factory in Heckmondwike, a mass brawl broke out on the factory floor. One of the workers, who refused to be named, explained what happened. 'It's been pretty bad since August. But once the war started, all hell seemed to break loose. The white workers spat at us, carried Union Jacks and started calling us traitors. The whole thing just exploded. Now management says we're not allowed to talk about the Gulf. But what difference will that make? We weren't talking to each other even before this.'

Another local workplace, the Fox biscuit factory, has also been the scene of fights between black and white workers. Such workplace battles have not been seen in the area since the early seventies. Even in council offices feelings are running high. Khalid works in the Equal Opportunity Unit at Kirklees council. 'Even here Asian workers are facing harassment', he noted. 'Ever since the government started rounding up Iraqi people in this country all Muslims have been threatened.'

The intensity of hostility has created a climate of fear inside the Asian community, and stirred fierce resentment among the youth. What most terrifies community leaders is the possibility of young Asians fighting back. 'What we're worried about', said Mohammed Saddique of the Bradford-based Muslim Youth in Britain, 'is the youth taking matters into their own hands. It could draw the whole community into conflict. We're trying to persuade the police to deal with the problem'.

'Racism is always there'

In an effort to contain the resentment inside the Asian community, religious leaders have adopted a more militant stance towards the Gulf War. The newly-formed Supreme Council of British Muslims expressed its 'outrage' at the 'savagely, destructive war being waged by the United States, Britain and their allies against the Muslims of Iraq'. Such rhetoric, however, is unlikely to ease the frustrations of local black youth. The Gulf War has not caused the anti-Muslim backlash. Rather the Gulf War is the latest and most sharply defined focus for racism. As in the Rushdie affair, it is racism that has shaped the response of both black and white communities to the Gulf War.

'Racism is always there', said Afia who attends Park Lane in Leeds, 'and whenever anything happens between the Western powers and the Middle Eastern or Asian people, the racists come out'. 'Our parents came to this country in the fifties and sixties', added Ali, 'to work in the

factories and do their dirty work. And now we've actually achieved something, we've gained respect because we've businesses, restaurants, shops—so now they want to get rid of us. The Gulf War is just an excuse to do this. It's just not on'.

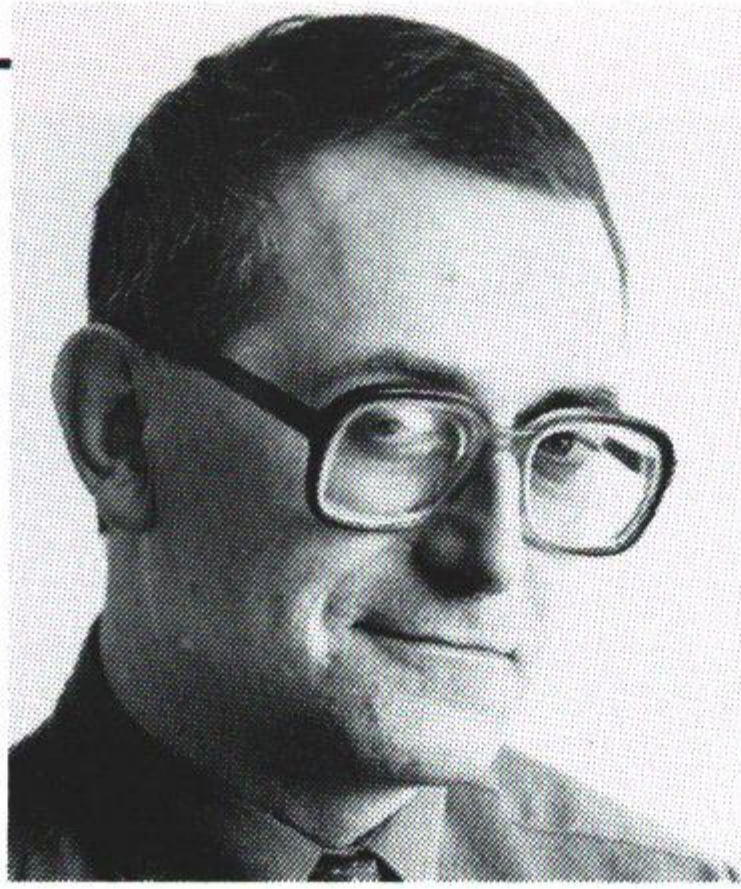
The experience of racism in Britain has ensured the backing of many Muslims for Iraq. 'The abuse you get makes you really angry', said Ali. 'It makes sure you support Saddam Hussein.' Afia put it slightly differently. 'I tried to explain to people that I didn't support Saddam Hussein and I didn't support the Americans. And they say "Where do you stand?". They say "There's no two ways about it. You support him or you support Britain". In the end you might as well say you support Saddam Hussein because they all think you do anyway.'

According to the British press the Muslim support for Iraq is motivated by religious fanaticism. Certainly most Muslims, especially older ones, are horrified at the thought of the desecration of their holy shrines. Few second generation Muslims born and brought up in Britain, however, consider the Gulf War to be at root a religious conflict. 'Saddam Hussein says it's a holy war', said Fiaz. 'The media in this country says it's a holy war. But it's not about religion. It's about greed, because they want to keep the oil.' They all scoff at the idea that America is fighting tyranny or standing up to aggression. 'Why didn't Britain and America go into Tiananmen Square?', asks Ali.

Fiaz, like most Muslims, sees the Gulf War as the latest episode in a history of Western attacks on the third world. 'They took over India. They split up Pakistan and Bangladesh in the civil war. They split up lots of different countries. Now they're trying to do this to Iraq as well. Britain and America are trying to intervene in every situation they can find. They're too nosy. They should just leave things to themselves.'

For Fiaz, Ali and Afia, there has been little choice about which side to back in the Gulf War. They support Saddam and Iraq, not because they are fanatics or fundamentalists, but because of their bitter experience of British racism. 'When I was young', recalls Fiaz, 'I grew up with racists. Now I think they will always be here. There will always be racism in England'. It is that sense of oppression which forms the common bond across the Muslim world and ensures that every missile and bomb that falls on Baghdad is felt in Bradford too.

'As far as they are concerned if your skin is brown then you're Iraqi and you support Saddam Hussein'



Don Milligan

From Somewhere Over the Rainbow to Sir Ian

recently saw *Return to Oz*. It had its moments but it was not a patch on the real *Wizard*. Dorothy just blown in from the Mid-West. The Munchkins munchkinning. The Ruby Slippers. The Lion trembling with fear, the brainless Scarecrow, and the Tin Man who wants to get a heart. Just the idea of the Yellow Brick Road, a causeway of hopes and dreams, is enough to carry them all along. No matter what the Wicked Witch of the West tries to do, the Lion will be brave, the Scarecrow brainy, the Tin Man full of heart, and Dorothy will get back to Kansas. At the Emerald City the Scarecrow gets a Diploma, the Tin Man gets a Testimonial, the Lion gets a Medal, and Dorothy gets whisked from Technicolor into black-and-white reality murmuring: 'There's no place like Home.'

It's a curious fable, but it has had gay men in America and elsewhere declaring themselves 'The Friends of Dorothy' since 1940. What succeeded was the ludicrous completion of a heroic exploit, an epic journey, an enterprise of mythic significance, by a homely girl with a cool head and

ironic understanding of the absurd, the ludicrous, the pompous? The lines delivered with still, icy expressions as if every word were malodorous? Obviously the further degeneration—the exquisite bathos of exchanging the Yellow Brick Road and the Emerald City for the garden party and Buckingham Palace—has passed this gang of epigones by.

We all know that 'honest' and 'dignified' are words used by the Wicked Witch of the West. They mean 'definitely not camp', 'good enough to be straight', 'will always put the national interest before sectional advantage and personal gain'. I'm certain that Sir Ian deserves these epithets. But you'd think all these 'creative people' (his friends after all) would be able to tart them up a bit. At least make them sound like accolades. But no, 'honest' and 'dignified' it had to be.

In similar vein the *Guardian's* Nicholas de Jongh described the defence of Sir Ian by these luminaries as 'one of the most remarkable examples of gay solidarity in the arts' since 1967! Again, this entirely mirthless lack of proportion. Leaping to

Privately, Stonewall deals with this problem by not allowing homosexuals to join its charmed circle until they've been vetted by the vetting committee. Stonewall is desperate to ensure that the 'abnormal' and the 'marginal' are kept out. In its concern for form, rather than content, Stonewall has got more in common with the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes than it has with an authentic bourgeois association.

It's so sad; the whole thing is based entirely on a misconception. Because the Stonewall diners see the bourgeoisie conducting business informally in clubs on St James' and at dinner tables in private homes they imagine they can do the same! Sir Ian and his friends obviously think that power and influence stem from a sense of propriety, good food and good conversation. They evidently believe that they can impress the powers that be with good set-dressing. The truth is, of course, that the bourgeoisie can wield influence as if it were simply an extension of good manners *because it already has power*. This ersatz gay 'establishment' will be readily identified for what it is: a powerless bunch of queers trying to join the club. 'Dignity', 'honesty' and poise of the sort exemplified by Sir Ian, and advocated by his fellow diners, will not, I fear, pull the wool over the eyes of the *real* establishment. They'll be seen coming from a mile off. Of course they'll be knighted, promoted and quoted whenever the bigwigs find it suitable; they'll also be brushed casually aside whenever the authorities want to smash the lives, faces and bodies of the homosexual rank and file.

Time was when homosexual dramatists used to feast with panthers. Now they dine with chief constables—or want to. It's a bit of a come-down. It's so shaming to think that our public figures are such spineless wimps; such a bunch of worthless worthies. Even Elton spends all his time, like some latter-day Noel Coward, sucking up to the royals. In their *bland* attempt to exorcise the ghost of Joe Orton or Kenneth Williams the Stonewall artistes have left us with Julian Clary. Well? He's alright...I suppose. But he's not exactly got the substance or wit of his predecessors.

Not to worry, this gruesome attempt to replace our camp profile with 'dignity' and worthy gravity is bound to fail because it completely misses the point—it adds nothing to the fight against oppression. Lesbians and gay men are denied equal rights because they are homosexuals, *not* because they are silly. No homosexual was ever oppressed for being silly, undignified or even irresponsible. So I anticipate, sooner or later, a renaissance of dreadful dykes and garish gays. But I'm afraid the old camp is gone for good. The sad truth is that grass is growing between the Yellow Bricks of the Road. Tumbleweed is lazily bumping through the Emerald City and the Ruby Slippers have been lost forever. Dorothy is not going to save us, not even in the form of Betty Windsor. We will have to forgo those dreams, and plan instead for a final showdown.

'Time was when homosexual dramatists used to feast with panthers. Now they dine with chief constables—or want to'

plain good sense. It was the bathos that appealed. To be delivered from misfortune and oppression by a heroine called: Dorothy! Not Hera, Hebe, Helen or Diana, but Dorothy! Not an ethereal beauty from Elysium but a farm girl from Kansas. It appealed to the ironic; to the reality of being unbelievable. It was camp.

I thought about all this rather sadly when I heard that the gay actor and campaigner Ian McKellen had accepted a knighthood and become 'Sir' Ian McKellen. Gay film-maker Derek Jarman attacked him for accepting the knighthood and the row continues to rumble on. A host of homosexual luminaries rushed to Sir Ian's defence. They think that Sir Ian's knighthood is 'inspiring', and, curiously, that Sir Ian is remarkably 'honest' and 'dignified'. This is said with a perfectly straight face, and all done in the best possible taste! The fact that a bunch of lesbians and gay men should say such things is astonishing; that it should be comedians, comedienne, theatre people, artists and artistes is almost unbelievable. Whatever happened to that famed homosexual wit? That

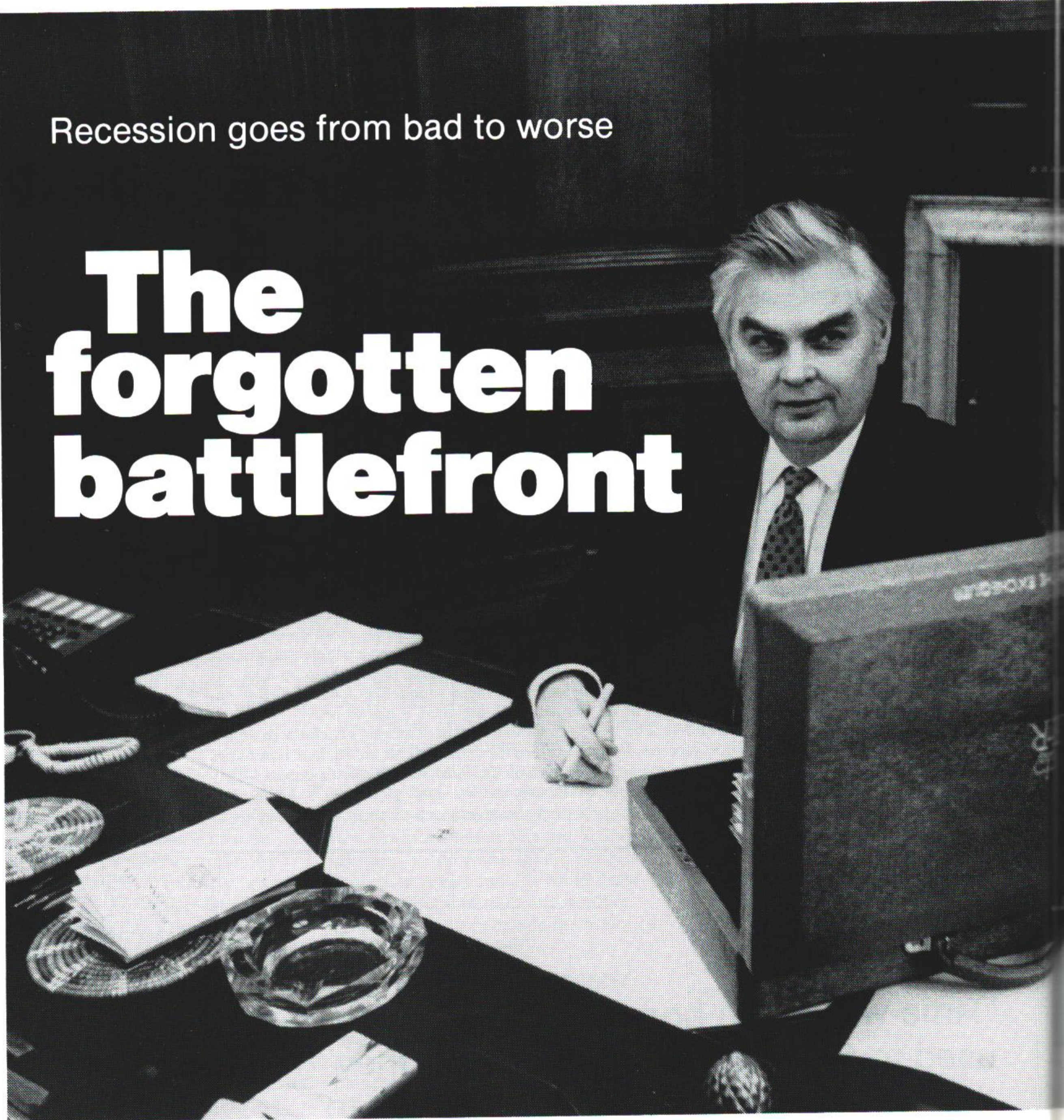
the defence of somebody...anybody...who has consented to bend the knee to Elizabeth R can hardly be described as 'remarkable solidarity'. Wouldn't 'crawling', 'sycophancy', perhaps even 'toadying', be more apt? And how can siding with the establishment against a radical film-maker be described as 'gay solidarity'?

All this po-faced rectitude is the product of complex tactical discussions and advice concocted at Sir Ian's Stonewall. Stonewall is not a particular place, it's an idea. It's a round of dinners, drinks parties and informal consultations between well-heeled homosexuals and junior members of the establishment. It is hoped that they will be able to groom a steady supply of well-behaved candidates for official committees and delegations; it also supplies nomination lists of homosexuals it considers suitable for the magistracy and other positions of responsibility.

It is engaged in the struggle to 'demarginalise' homosexuals. This is yet another code word. It means 'normalise'. It means defending homosexuals by asserting their normality.

Recession goes from bad to worse

The forgotten battlefront



If it wasn't for the Gulf War, Tony Kennedy reminds us, the decimation of the British economy would be the story of the year

It is traditional for the chancellor to disappear from public view in the run-up to the budget. Even so the present incumbent at 11 Downing Street seems to have gone to ground early. Almost three months in the job, by late February Norman Lamont had still to make a significant statement on the economy. While the seriousness of Britain's recession is daily reflected in mass redundancies, industrial collapse and balance-sheet busting interest rates,

the man who will have to rise to deliver the budget speech on 19 March remains virtually anonymous.

Lamont has maintained a low profile thanks to the Gulf War, which has generally kept the economy, even one sliding into slump, off the front pages. With the eyes of the world on General Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf, his silent namesake at the treasury has been able to sit tight amid the ruins. If it were not for the war, the recession would be the big

story of the year. Away from the public gaze, the British economy is being reduced to rubble.

Economic output in Britain is estimated to be falling at an annual rate of nearly four per cent—roughly equal to the rate of growth in Germany. Many companies are going bust and thousands are losing their jobs. One source states that 24 442 companies went out of business in 1990—a record and a 35 per cent increase over 1989. Everybody agrees that 1991 will be even worse.

Until recently commentators took comfort from the fact that most of the high-profile corporate failures involved empire-builders that came to prominence only during the Thatcher years: Next, Saatchi & Saatchi, Sock Shop, Coloroll and others. Yet it is now becoming clear that the rot runs

Who's that sitting in the chancellor's seat?

much deeper. Lewis's, Britain's fourth largest high-street retail chain, had to close its doors in January after 135 years' trading, when its lines of credit were cut off. BET, one of Britain's foremost conglomerates, suffered a slump in share prices in February, and even British Airways has cut 7000 jobs. There is a growing acceptance that many illustrious names in the roll-call of British capitalism will end up at the receivers before the recession runs its course.

Breaking the banks

Britain's banks have long had a reputation for being immune to the problems that seem to afflict industry. Yet last year the two largest banks, National Westminster and Barclays, were each forced to put aside around £1 billion to cover bad debts, mostly loans to businesses that have gone bust. Nat West is also unlikely to see any of the \$100m-plus it advanced to the bankrupted US gambling tycoon Donald Trump. When even the bankers are in trouble, it is a sure sign of a serious recession.

These trends have exposed the eighties boasts about the 'Big Bang' and 'global banking', with huge institutions providing a comprehensive range of financial services. The major British banks went on a spending spree, buying up smaller operations to ensure a stake in everything from mortgage loans and share management to specialised consultancy. It was a flop. Nat West is now lumbered with a loss-making arm in America. Barclays, Midland and TSB are trying to offload the businesses they picked up in the eighties—in every case at huge losses. For Midland the strain of the headlong rush towards globalisation means that it will probably not be able to survive in its present form.

The banking crisis shows how the present recession is already wider than the recession of the early eighties. Then, manufacturing bore the brunt of the collapse; now the crisis is evident right across the economy.

According to Tory wisdom there was a major investment boom in the eighties, which means that British business is in far better shape to weather a recession today than it was a decade ago. This is another myth of the 'economic miracle' school. First, new investment was concentrated in the financial, property and distribution sectors. There was no rise in the total stock of capital in the vital manufacturing sector. Second, during the supposed investment boom of the late eighties, less and less of the funds available to firms were used for productive investment.

In 1985 over 60 per cent of funds available to companies (after paying taxes, interest, etc) went into new capital investment. But by 1989 this figure had fallen to 46.5 per cent. Instead of investment, much of the money went into speculation on the share and currency markets, as capitalists sought to make a quick profit to compensate for the uncompetitive state of their own enterprises; buying shares in other companies absorbed 18.3 per cent of total corporate funds in 1989, compared to 7.5 per cent in 1986.

Companies also doled out huge dividends to shareholders. In 1985 11.8 per cent of the gross trading profits of industrial and commercial companies went in dividend payments. In 1989 the figure had risen to 27.1 per cent. Since profit levels were not sufficient to finance such largesse and a viable level of investment, companies borrowed billions from the banks. Bank loans accounted for 37.6 per cent of identified sources of company funds in 1989, compared to just 16.8 per cent in 1986.

The captains of industry and enterprise were leading companies headlong into a financial crisis, running up huge debts while pouring the money into raids on the stock market or siphoning it off to family, friends and pension funds as dividend payouts. Reality has now caught up with British capitalists, as the borrowing rebounds. They showed in the eighties that they are not up to the job. Even with things in their favour—a quiescent labour movement, an enormous flow of easy credit—they lacked the conviction to invest in their own system. Instead they decided on an extravagant, brief and costly jamboree. They are unlikely to have any serious answers to the present crisis.

No safety net

In the past, Britain has been able to use international factors to help ease its economic problems at home. In the eighties particularly, the City of London and the financial sector kept British capitalism afloat by taking advantage of the international credit boom. London became a main centre for organising the movement of money and other financial assets around the world, creaming off a percentage for handling other people's wealth. The problem for business leaders and policy-makers in Britain today is that the global economy no longer offers a secure escape route from recession.

The world economy which aided British capitalism was one centred on policy coordination and cooperation among the major powers. For

example, the willingness of Japan and Germany to bail out the ailing US economy over the past few years greatly increased the global flow of credit and provided some rich pickings for the money men in the City. Today, however, international cooperation is much closer to breaking down. Germany and Japan are less and less willing or able to carry the burden of supporting a world economy headed by a declining, debt-ridden America. This is bad news for British capitalism.

At the beginning of February, the growing divergence of economic policy among the major powers became clear when interest rates were cut in America but raised in Germany. As a result, Britain was squeezed from both sides: the cut in US rates led to a fall in the value of the dollar, making British exports to America more expensive and less competitive, while the rise in German rates meant that, despite growing pressure from British capitalists to slash interest rates here, Lamont's first cut only shaved off half of one per cent.

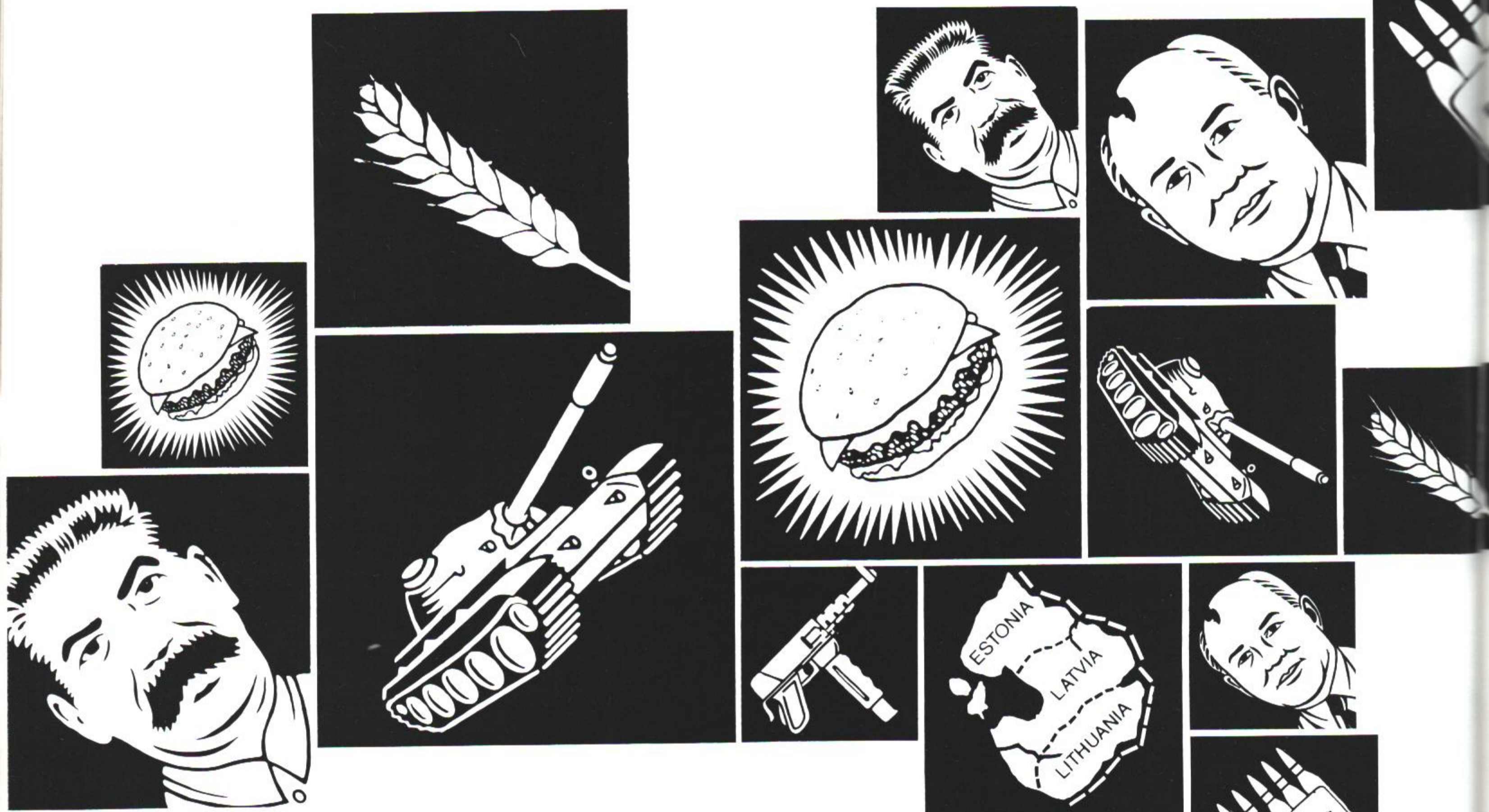
In the short term, Britain's role in the Gulf War may well increase its international prestige and have some useful economic spin-offs. But this cannot delay the inevitable for long. It will soon become clear that the more divided, tension-ridden international order of the nineties gives Britain little scope to use the world economy to pull itself out of recession.

Return of the ERM

Such is the panic around the recession that British membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, so recently demanded by the experts to help solve the problems facing the economy, is now being blamed for causing the crisis. The Tories' decision to enter the ERM was almost universally acclaimed. But the pound quickly fell to the bottom of its permitted range in the ERM, keeping interest rates high. Now, as the bankruptcy and unemployment figures rocket, yesterday's champions of the ERM are increasingly ready to sacrifice it and the sterling exchange rate to the cause of lower interest rates.

The debate about the recession, the posturing and inconsistency on all sides, confirms that the crisis now engulfing Britain is out of the capitalists' control. Lower interest rates are the latest in a long line of panaceas put forward by people who cannot admit that the problem lies not with the ERM or any other incidental factor, but in the failure of their beloved market economy itself.

PHOTO: Simon Norfolk



Crackdown in the Soviet Union

This is perestroika

Mikhail Gorbachev's dictatorial measures do not mean that he has abandoned glasnost and perestroika, says Rob Knight, because the reforms were never about democratisation in the first place

Mikhail Gorbachev has quickly fallen from favour with many Western liberals. The military crackdown in the Baltic states, the concentration of new legal powers in the Soviet president's hands, and the faltering progress of economic reforms have all prompted accusations that Gorbachev has given up on glasnost and perestroika. Western commentators now speculate on whether the new Soviet reformers have finally been defeated by the old-fashioned hardliners in the Kremlin.

These reactions betray a basic misunderstanding of what Gorbachev's reforms were all about in the first place. In the first issue of *Living Marxism*, when the rest of the world was suffering from 'Gorbymania', we put forward a much more critical assessment of his reform programme ('Revolutions don't come from above', *Living Marxism*, November 1988). We pointed out that glasnost and perestroika were essentially a survival strategy for the Stalinist bureaucracy. Gorbachev's reforms were designed

to rescue the decrepit Soviet system, while maintaining the power and privileges of the nomenklatura. By the second half of the 1980s, the ruling Soviet bureaucrats were convinced of the need to take harsh economic measures to restore the market and avoid them and their system going down together. This is where glasnost came in. Gorbachev introduced limited measures of political liberalisation to win popular backing for unpalatable economic reforms. By opening up the media, relaxing censorship, allowing multi-



ILLUSTRATION: ATB

candidate elections, and so on, he hoped to give his regime a degree of legitimacy.

This liberalisation stopped far short of any real transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the people. There is a world of difference between liberalisation and democratisation. Gorbachev's position as representative of the unelected bureaucracy meant that he could never have considered introducing genuine democratic reforms. Thus, while people can now read critical articles about government ministers, they are still not allowed to vote them out of office. All of the top national government posts remain unelected. The same old bureaucratic elite runs industry, agriculture, the police, the army and the KGB.

Dictators all

From the start Gorbachev's reforms were designed to perpetuate the rule of the bureaucracy. It is ridiculous for commentators today to talk about the impending reimposition of dictatorship. From Stalin to Gorbachev, the Soviet elite has never relinquished its dictatorship over society. For a few years it has tried to present a liberal face in order to facilitate economic reform at home and political support abroad. But nobody should have been fooled into believing that the bureaucracy was ever interested in delivering popular democracy.

Against this background, it is possible to see that the current crackdown is simply an adaptation of the reform programme of the eighties to the more critical conditions of the nineties. It is an attempt by the bureaucracy to reassert control over a system which is even more out of control than it was when the reforms began six years ago. In fact, the chaos which threatens to engulf society today is a direct consequence of the reforms implemented by Gorbachev. Over the past few years there has been a limited decentralisation of control over the economy, intended to encourage more initiative at a local level and help to overcome the long-term stagnation of the economy.

Falling apart

However, the decentralisation of control from the central elite to local bureaucrats has led to a seemingly unstoppable process of fragmentation. As central, regional and local bureaucrats compete for control over scarce resources, the centralised command economy has begun to fall apart. In an attempt to preserve their own positions, bureaucrats have embarked on

desperate survival strategies. Some have set out to create a popular base for themselves by opposing the central government and distancing themselves from the Communist Party.

This trend is clearest in the national republics, where there has been an explosion of support for nationalist movements which are more often than not orchestrated by local state bureaucrats. The same process is apparent in Russia, where Boris Yeltsin, Anatolii Sobchak and Gavrili Popov have created regional power bases for themselves, the latter two in Leningrad and Moscow where they hold the position of mayor. What are commonly presented in the media as struggles for independence and democracy are in reality power struggles between cliques of bureaucrats, nationalists and careerist politicians fighting for survival.

The sordid character of these struggles is becoming more obvious, as those bureaucrats and politicians fighting for greater local control are themselves being challenged by lower-ranking local politicians eager to jump on the bandwagon. So Lithuanian nationalist leaders who have been trumpeting the cause of self-determination have said that it should not be available to others—such as the inhabitants of the Vilnius region, almost 80 per cent of whom are ethnic Poles, who want greater local autonomy. It is the same story in Russia. Boris Yeltsin has made a name for himself championing the rights of the republics against the centre. But he has taken a hard line against the many autonomous republics and *oblasts* (regions) within the Russian federation which have declared themselves sovereign.

What the West wanted

Fragmentation has led to increasing economic and political chaos, which has in turn resulted in panic throughout the ranks of the bureaucracy. It was in response to fears that it might lose control altogether that the nomenklatura gave Gorbachev greater powers to impose order on society. This increase in presidential power has received considerable support even from liberal members of the urban intelligentsia. For example, leading reformer Sergei Stankevich said that it was regrettable but necessary: 'Democrats must finally realise that authoritarian rule is bad, but absence of power is even worse. Hence they have to support stronger executive power, though with certain conditions.' (*Moscow News*, 6 January 1991)

This move to restore order does not represent a turn away from the

market. In fact it is an attempt to create the conditions for successful market reform, by disciplining society and stifling dissent. Gorbachev also knows that drastic measures are the precondition for getting help from the West. At present the West is not prepared to invest the billions necessary to modernise the Soviet economy, because the bureaucracy has not attacked jobs and living standards in a way that would make investment profitable for foreign investors. Gorbachev's attempt to reassert central control using the repressive machinery of the state is a step towards carrying through such measures.

There may be a few unreformed Stalinists who think that a crackdown represents a return to the past. But the elite of the party, the bureaucracy, the army and the KGB know that there is no way back. They appreciate that the restoration of order is the prerequisite for further economic reform. The use of force is what is required if the bureaucracy is to pursue perestroika in today's conditions. The phrase on everybody's lips today is 'authoritarian modernisation'.

Just when commentators here were writing off Gorbachev's commitment to reform, he shocked everybody by introducing a draconian confiscation of roubles in January. Under the guise of a crackdown against black marketeers, excess money is being eradicated from the system. This measure is the first step towards making the rouble convertible: a step which pro-market economists have been urging for years. To ensure that there was minimum resistance to what amounts to grand theft by the state, Gorbachev ordered the army on to the streets.

While shedding crocodile tears for the victims of the Kremlin, Western capitalist leaders are urging the bureaucracy to inflict even more pain on the people of the Soviet Union. An editorial in the *Economist* at the end of last year showed which way the wind is blowing in the West, when it supported tough presidential rule as a means of smashing resistance to serious economic reform: 'It may be that a push from the president, backed where necessary by the army to ensure vital supplies or to break politically motivated strikes, is the only way to get things going...[It] might, just might, be the Soviet Union's turn for what could be called the Pinochet approach to liberal economics.' (22 December 1990) Western leaders have demanded more perestroika: the Soviet people are getting it.



All Played Out is a long way from the normal bland ghost written *World Cup Diary*. The only comparable book is Hunter Davies' (no relation) excellent account of a season spent with Tottenham Hotspur in the early seventies, *The Glory Game*.

Author Pete Davies has been described as a 'punk journalist' (ie, 'not one of us') by the press hacks, but he laughs at this, pointing to his age (31) and baby son in defence. 'It's a fan's book', he says, but with the important difference that he had extensive access to the England team camp ('it was absolutely fucking brilliant'), and was able to win the trust of the players, at a time when player-press relations were at an all-time low, culminating in the notorious player boycott during the World Cup finals in Italy.

Football journalists have been known to use the word exclusive rather loosely, and it is not a word Davies would be likely to use. But *All Played Out* is just that, and a genuine inside story to boot. No wonder its publication ruffled a few feathers in the press pack, whose own shortcomings are not exactly glossed over in its pages. Even before it was published, the *Sunday Times* had done a hatchet job, claiming Davies had betrayed the trust of his interviewees and badmouthed the England set-up.

None of this harmed the book's chances, of course. But there is no truth in the press smears. The only player Davies has spoken to

Inside England's World Cup

All played out?

There aren't many good books about football, but *All Played Out*, Pete Davies' highly personal account of following the England football team before and during the World Cup, is one of them. Toby Banks asked Davies what he learned from his privileged access to the players, the administration, the press and the fans

about the book is Gary Lineker, who liked it, and the only complaints have come from sports journalists shown in an unflattering light: 'You'd think the book was about *them!* I find it amusing that they think they can write what the hell they like about other people—"The noble fourth estate putting public figures under scrutiny". But when they get it—outrage, and above all incredible jealousy. In the end, I don't give a toss what they think.'

Ironically, the book is well balanced. Of course, it's a bit odd to think of avuncular, bumbling Bobby Robson saying 'fuck', or referring to Terry Fenwick as 'an arsehole' (hear, hear). But while the book may cause embarrassment in the Football Association headquarters at Lancaster Gate, nobody could claim it is unfair, or that they were tricked into talking. Davies was given almost total access, and he wrote what he saw, warts and all.

Not surprisingly, most of the warts turn out to carry press cards, or official FA accreditation. Of the Football Association, Davies is scathing: 'If they were in competitive industry, they'd have been out of business years ago.' Anyone who heard the deafening boos with which the crowd greeted the FA officials at last year's Cup Final will know what he means. They are summed up by 78-year old Dick Wragg, who claimed to be in sole charge of England's World Cup campaign, but was sent home after collapsing. He is all for 'mixed' teams: 'The dark fellows who come into the England team, they're tremendously well-behaved, they really are.'

The subject of the football establishment is central to one of the book's recurring images: that English football, and England itself, are 'all played out'. Plenty of people have fallen down badly, trying to relate football to society in general, so why did Davies feel the need to try? 'A lot's been made of this, as if it's a great "theme" of the book, but it's more of an aside, actually. But football is a major part of our culture and there are attitudes within it, just as there are in other realms of social and industrial life, that are quintessentially English and give us problems compared to other countries. Stuffy adherence to antiquated ways of running things, refusal to train and educate people, is a different manifestation of the same problem you find in football. Playing a rigid 4-4-2 system is one way of being pigheadedly backward and English.'

Football has always been seen as a symbol of national prowess. When it suits politicians and other self-appointed guardians of the national spirit, football has been a handy tool, as Harold Wilson knew well. At other times the failures of the national team are half-consciously associated with the state of the nation. The dramatic decline of the England side in the seventies seemed to echo the cry 'The country's going to the dogs'. But in reality, of course, things aren't so simple: 'In the book I've tried to emphasise that it's really down to 22 players, and they don't represent anything except themselves. What is representative of England is the whole circus that accompanies them—the FA, the fans, the press, etc.'

Another recurring motif is 'Planet Football', a phrase coined to describe the unreal world of Italia '90—the total media, commercial and sporting event (in that order). As Davies says, 'Planet Football' is just a convenient tag, but one aspect of it rings very true: the idea of an 'alternative geography', with football as its esperanto. Like a lot of kids, I assembled my picture of the world by cobbling together

images of stadiums, clubs and colours: Belgrade is Red Star to me, and will remain so long after the club is renamed Sony Belgrade. Grasshoppers come from Switzerland. Germans are people who sound Klaxons and sing the same dirge through the whole game. Italians throw smoke bombs and fireworks, and so on. Then there's the 'official' football geography national curriculum, as taught by sports writers and TV commentators: German teams are machines; Latins are clever but spiteful, and they play-act, spit and grab your balls.

On the positive side, football is a genuine international language. The words 'Bobby Charlton' still inspire a warm welcome from people over 40 almost anywhere in the world (why, I don't know). Davies has fond memories of playing football in the Andes. Then there's the excitement of being a travelling fan, living on your wits, with maybe a bit of danger, but not too much.

'At Bologna railway station I met a fan called Alan who was travelling on an interrail pass', recalls Davies. 'Between games he'd see where the night train was heading, kip on the train and wake up in Vienna, wander round and go back again overnight. He was using football to see places he'd never have gone to otherwise. And you meet loads of people like him, who go on about things like travelling through Germany on the way to the Poland game, just as the wall was about to come down. Of course, some go with a totally aggressive, closed mind and they are very depressing. But most people are quite inquisitive, and try to pick up a bit of the language. Football provides a kind of itinerary.'

A fan's life

'You meet people all the time, often from previous trips. There's a roaming camaraderie. You've always got something to talk about—football—and you start from there. You'll take the piss out of someone who's a bit dodgy, who can speak Italian, but you'll be as pleased as punch because next time you'll know what food to order. Backpackers all claim to be solitary souls, but what do they do? All congregate in the same bloody hotel. Football fans are a bit more honest. They don't pretend to be on their own, they're all pretending to be among x thousand people.'

During the World Cup the combined attentions of the paramilitary police and the British press hacks induced a state of paranoia among England fans, who were herded into camps like prisoners of war and battered repeatedly. Petty harassment reached new depths when one fan was told to unpick the letters spelling his club's name from his flag. 'The sharpest people get out of trouble', says Davies, 'only the brick-headed minority fail to understand that you're safer in a group of three or five than a mob of 200'. Some are evil, more are just a bit thick (one of their more bizarre pastimes is the shirtless chest-butting contest, performed after a skinful of beer). And of course it's all meat and drink to the journalists, who get both angles: hooligan animals and our lads beaten by wop police thugs.

The siege mentality in the team hotel was down to the press alone. Before the team had even arrived in Italy, they had been dubbed 'World Cup Wallies'. After the first match, the *Sun* urged Margaret Thatcher to call them home in disgrace. The players read the papers only because 'you can't falsify the cricket scores'. Everything else was suspect. There

has long been a negative press attitude to English football, from Brian Glanville's snobbish obsession with all things Italian to the general hammering of the national side. Or, as *Today's* chief sports writer put it: 'Robson's a cunt. I hope they don't qualify.'

'There are definitely some of them who wanted England to go home after the first round, but they tend to be the sports writers not the football writers. These guys go to the Commonwealth Games in Auckland, some golf tournament in Tokyo or wherever, think, "Oh, it's the World Cup next", slag off England and go off to the Formula One in Mexico...

'Some of the vitriol I heard expressed privately about Robson was just amazing. You think, "Why do you hate this man so much? What has he done to you—cut up your dog?". And as well as these guys there are the news reporters, who don't give a toss what they write, who make up the Hostess Isabella stories [a scandal involving England players and a fictitious 'lady of easy virtue']. I tried to show that there are different journalists doing different jobs, and that by and large football writers, while not necessarily the most attractive of men, usually have a fair enough point of view, and good luck to them. It's not a job I'd want.'

We got on to the subject of the players, whom Davies set out to portray as real three-dimensional characters. He says they are a lot cleverer than they are made out to be. The stock phrases and clichés they come out with are a conscious defence mechanism. Lineker said that he was asked all day who would win the World Cup and he gave whatever answer the interviewer wanted. Like most players, he studiously avoids controversy. So is the *Independent*-reading, Spanish-speaking, 8-O' levels, never-been-booked, diplomatic, clean-cut Lineker being groomed to be the next Bob Wilson, or is there more to him?

'He's an exceptional individual. He could be the exceptional footballer that he is, be captain of England and be completely thick. But it so happens he's also a very bright and reasonable person. I admire him and like him a lot, he talks a lot of sense. He is incredibly resilient—the pressure doesn't seem to get to him the way it does to others. Not that the others are thick. I particularly liked Chris Waddle, he's got a lot to say for himself. A lot of them have.'

The Glory Game was about the first generation of football 'stars'. The maximum wage had only been abolished a few years previously, and most footballers before them thought they had done pretty well if they ended their career with enough money to open a newsagent or a pub. George Best changed all that, with his nightclub and boutique, sponsorship deals and glamorous 'birds'. But even tearaway George couldn't live in the space-age house he'd had custom-built in a salubrious Manchester suburb. His contract stated that until he married he had to live with a club landlady in her Salford council house. Extraordinary restrictions were accepted by players. And although the rewards were getting bigger, the football retained a very old-fashioned parochial outlook. In 1970, when Alf Ramsey took his world champions to Mexico to defend their title, he took a freezer lorry full of Findus food and plenty of Daddy's Sauce.

Things have changed. In Italia '90 the Daddy's Sauce was hardly touched, and the players ate the new traditional footballer's food—pasta. The players look more normal today, and they expect more freedom. 'It's a

living

very weird life, but today it is understood that footballers are popular entertainers, and young players see nothing surprising about stardom. People handle it better because it isn't new any more. Then again, there are people who had the talent to be internationals but never got near it because they couldn't hack it. Remember that the ones at the top are the ones who can handle pressure, keep a sense of humour and a perspective on things in this absurd cauldron.'

The press pine for the good old days (no doubt exaggerated in the memory) of whoring and boozing around the world with international teams. In the sixties players drank heavily as part of the job (Jimmy Greaves recalls epic binges with Bobby Moore and the rest). Physically the game is more demanding today, and the days when players could work off a hangover in training are long gone. Yet although drinking is much rarer now, the press give it more attention. 'Players understand their position as public figures better, and realise they can't go out and booze. Some players feel the pressure—John Barnes described loss of form as being like writer's block. People in every walk of life have drink problems, marriage problems, or can't keep their hands off women, and nobody cares. But players are under scrutiny.'

There is still a lot of conformity (the golf, the card schools and Luther Vandross tapes on the team bus), but the conservative image is slightly misleading. The obsession with golf is because most other activities—motorbikes, skiing, table-tennis in flip-flops—are banned for safety reasons. 'The thing to bear in mind is that when they're not together in a squad they are their own people. They have friends in the game, but not to the extent you'd imagine. A lot of them never see each other except at work, which is the time the public is aware of them. I never spoke to Tony Dorigo because he was always reading—some people like to be apart. The England squad wasn't cliquey, which surprised me.'

There is also an appealing side to being in a team: watch the bald heads and beer guts wobbling around in Sunday leagues up and down the country and you'll see how much people want to be a part of it. As long as you fit in, there's a certain anonymity that is reassuring; awkward questions aren't asked of you. As Paul Gascoigne said, nobody in the England squad is above anyone else (I wonder if things have changed since the night of tears?). At this level the sense of common purpose is all-consuming.

'Sometimes it shut me out like a wall', says Davies. 'It was a shared private experience of being a member of that squad. You could never have that unless you were one of them. I don't know if I'd call it attractive, but it was certainly impressive. With the scrutiny they're under, conformity is at a premium. For six weeks of the World Cup it's a very constricted life, they are concentrating so hard on the games. Imagine the relief when they drive off in their cars from Luton airport when it's all over.'

Pete Davies, *All Played Out: The Full Story of Italia '90*, Heinemann, £14.99 hbk



The 'Godfather': James Brown is to dance music what Al Pacino is to mob movies

Cool jazz and hot funk

Only a fad, dad?

Is jazz-dance really taking off or is it just a PR-man's passing fancy? Jimmy Simpson hovers on the edge of the dancefloor

Everybody's been hyping it up. From *GQ* to *ID*, all the pundits are talking about the jazz-dance scene in London clubs like The Fez (Paddington), Prohibition (West End), the Jazz Café (Camden) and Red Eye (Lewisham). Gilles Peterson, the former Jazz-FM DJ who was sacked in January for broadcasting an anti-war message, has launched the Talking Loud record label, and Peterson protégés like jazz-rappers Galliano and The Young Disciples are being sold as the best new entrants on the British music scene. But should we believe the hype?

What is jazz-dance, anyway? Imagine you're a DJ whose posse likes dancing to Godfather of Soul James Brown one minute and jazz trumpeter Miles Davis the next. One night you sample some Davis licks and mix them into a James Brown rhythm track. The mix is well received, especially by a group of rappers and musicians in the audience who, inspired by the crossover, lock themselves in a rehearsal studio until they come out with a new musical hybrid combining the inventiveness of cool jazz with the intensity of hot funk. Legend has it that the birth of jazz-dance was something

like that. But creating a genuinely new music involves more than putting together two tried and tested formats. If jazz-dance is to be more than a novelty, its proponents will have to absorb the impressive musical achievements of the likes of James Brown and Miles Davis into a new synthesis.

Back in the fifties, James 'Butane' Brown fused rhythm and blues, big band swing and 'sanctified' gospel, and set the mix against New Orleans-style off-beat drumming—the same rhythm which was to provide the backdrop for Jamaican bluebeat and ska. Brown's stage performances from this period are some of the most sensual and theatrical events in music history. His audience rapport, captured on *Live At the Harlem Apollo* (1962), was legendary. Then in 1965 he released 'Papa's got a brand new bag'. The new bag was funk. The self-proclaimed 'Mr Superbad' used what he calls 'the James Brown Anticipation... it's a now-ness' to create a new sound, unprecedented in its intensity.

In the late sixties and seventies, with tracks like 'Say it loud I'm black and I'm proud', Brown came to symbolise the new assertive-

ness among young blacks in America. 'James helped to show us we was black—not Negro' says musician and DJ Afrika Bambaataa in *Living In America: The Soul Saga of James Brown* by Cynthia Rose. Brown also gained renown as a hardnosed businessman jealously guarding the rights to 'my rhythms', even if those rhythms were sometimes created by uncredited bandleaders and musicians such as Maceo Parker and Fred Wesley.

In 1970 Brown was led away from his home in shackles after litigation over allegedly unpaid back taxes. He is currently serving a six-year jail sentence following a car chase in 1988. Brown's prison governors recently allowed him to perform for American soldiers confined to barracks over Christmas because of the Gulf crisis. It may be the mid-nineties before he gets the chance to perform in public again.

Forty years of funk

In her excellent book, Cynthia Rose describes Brown as 'the right-now black man, who embraced everything his colour could betoken'. She also points out that he 'piloted where soul had never gone [before]—into the parlour of Uncle Sam's snow-white middle class'. Without Brown, David Byrne would probably be writing chamber music instead of leading the Talking Heads. On this side of the Atlantic, the Mods were the first to move their feet to the James Brown beat. It was still going strong in the mid-eighties, when rare groove ravers embraced Brown's seventies output. Out of the rare groove scene emerged notable nineties names like Soul II Soul. For nearly 40 years, dance music and 'jamesbrown' have been all but synonymous.

What Brown is to dance, Miles Davis is to cool. While alto-saxophonist Charlie Parker was the manic genius of bebop jazz, Davis' 1949 album 'The birth of the cool', with arrangements by Gil Evans, initiated an equally influential laid-back approach in which every note was carefully positioned in the musical canvas. In 1955, Davis went on to form a group with saxophonist John Coltrane which 'made me and him a legend' (Davis). Ten years later, Davis used young and upcoming musicians like pianist Herbie Hancock and drummer Tony Williams to update his sound. Influenced by James Brown and Jimi Hendrix, Davis went on to incorporate electronics into his music, culminating in the use of 'wah wah trumpet'. But of all Davis' styles, it is the cool sound of more than 40 years ago which is making waves today.

Recently found to be holding \$46 000 in his prison cell, Brown is the ultimate survivor. Davis is also a fighter. In his autobiography, recently published in paperback, he boasts, 'a lot of people tell me I think like a boxer and I probably do'. Davis' style of playing is an affectionate punch into the sensibilities of the listener, and his immaculate appearance was always contrived to create an aura of invincibility. Two great survivors. It remains to be seen whether anyone on the London jazz-dance scene has the creativity needed to synthesise their respective contributions to music and society.

Cynthia Rose, *Living in America: The Soul Saga of James Brown*, Serpent's Tail, £6.99 pbk
Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography*, Picador, £6.99 pbk

The Colour of Memory

Brixton beatniks

Geoff Dyer talked to Andrew Calcutt about his highly acclaimed novel, *The Colour of Memory*

'The narrator says the book is like an album of snaps, and there is a home movie feel to it. The life depicted, although it's a bit grim, it's a real celebration of what for a while had qualities of arcadia.' Sipping herbal tea in a minimally furnished south London flat, Geoff Dyer is describing his very well received novel, *The Colour of Memory*. Set in Brixton in the eighties, it is a fond memorial to what Dyer calls 'that community of low-income radicals who moved in just after the first lot of riots'.

Dyer's leading characters describe themselves as *homo skiver*. 'My dole had been running smoothly for years', reports the (unnamed) narrator. Eating vegetarian lasagne and seeing 'the midnight rat' (getting drunk) are their main occupations, along with smoking grass, looking good in secondhand suits and listening to Coltrane, Miles Davis and Mahler. The narrator is virtually a spectator in his own life: the only time he makes a move is when events fall on top of him.

If all this sounds unbearably airy-fairy—relax. Dyer redeems his characters by recognising, and making them recognise, their own lack of substance. Gently he mocks them for buying a trumpet and never learning how to play it, for looking like writers instead of getting down to writing, and for turning the local greasy spoon into a vegetarian café where a working knowledge of Kerouac novels is mandatory. Here is a set of characters who count for nothing in the outside world, and they know it. Willingness to accept their own insignificance is what makes them interesting.

'It's a self-enclosed little group', Dyer explained. 'They are marginal, unenfranchised, but they share a sense of belonging to each other. It's a way of living that can only last as long as everybody in the group is reinforcing everyone else's creative idleness and vague aspirations. But it only takes one person to get an exhibition or something, and then everybody starts feeling discontented. Alternatively, if nothing happens, you tend to get a sort of drongoisation of the group.'

'One of the strongest things in the book is the sense of time running out. When I moved into Brixton it was the real fag-end of seventies counter-culture, which in itself was a version of the sixties thing. For all sorts of reasons, it's not as easy to live that way of life any longer, most obviously because of changes in DSS legislation.

And there's a whole lot more pressure to get involved in the mortgage and the magazine culture—two mutually reinforcing things. It's much more difficult to live the kind of life where you're not really involved in jobs and careers.'

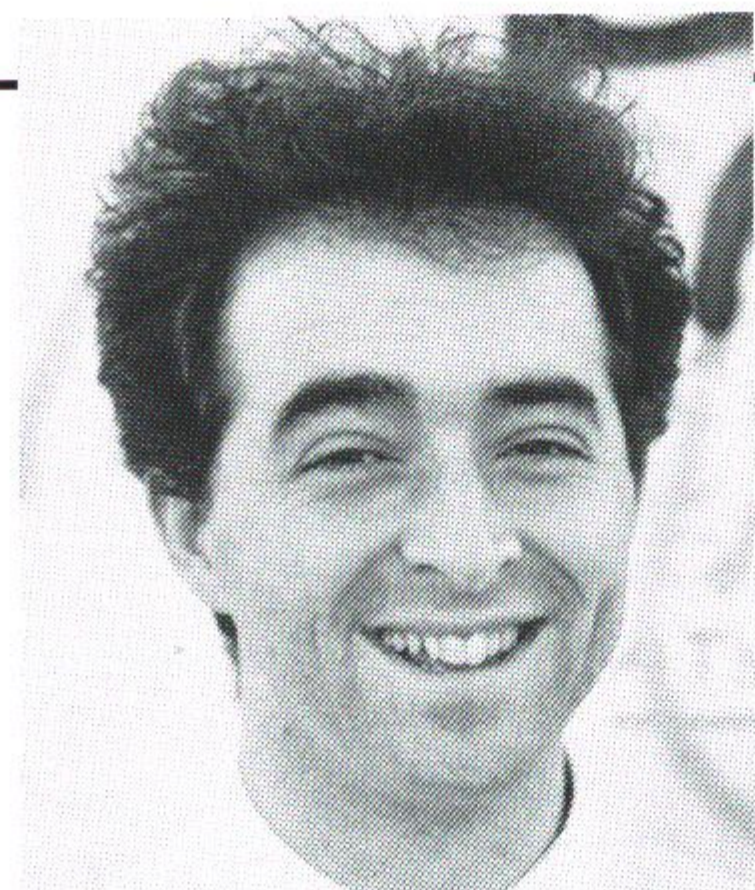
A number of reviewers have compared *The Colour of Memory* to Colin MacInnes' seminal youth-culture novel *Absolute Beginners*, set against the Notting Hill riots of 1958. But whereas MacInnes' characters are imbued with a sense of new possibilities opening up in Swinging London, Dyer's crew seem resigned to the curtain coming down on their youthful bohemia.

Some critics have panned Dyer and his characters for their apparent obsession with lifestyle. Indeed it is tempting to have a go at garret radicals who never do anything more radical than fiddle the electricity meter. In his defence, Dyer says that he set out to describe what happens to youthful radicalism when, he believes, 'for people of our age a viable form of political opposition wasn't any longer available after the collapse of the GLC and the miners' strike'.

'Lacking that kind of thing, you tend to fall back on lifestyle or cultural opposition. It is an absurd—no, unusual—idea of what constitutes politics. But during my adult life—I'm 32—each vote has seemed futile, and the last two times you were voting for a party that you don't have any faith in. So I was attempting to explain why it wasn't likely that people like me and my friends could any longer be on the left in the way that John Berger was in the fifties. But we weren't in any way swaying to the right.' This process of depoliticisation is one of Dyer's most interesting themes.

He is now keen to get away from his old stomping ground: 'The book has slammed the door on that world for me.' At present he is living in New Orleans, after a spell in New York where he wrote *But Beautiful*, which he describes as 'imaginative criticism—fictional scenes which are also a commentary on jazz music and musicians... it's neither one thing nor the other. I like books like that'. Dyer hopes his writing will range as widely as his mentor John Berger's. 'It's not what you know', he concludes. 'It's what your enthusiasm gives you the capacity to discover.'

Geoff Dyer, *The Colour of Memory*, Vintage, £4.99 pbk
But Beautiful will be published in June by Jonathan Cape



Frank Cottrell-Boyce on TV

Faking dreams for the camera

At first I thought it was just my luck that had just run out. Then I realised that it was National Economic Depression. What brought this home to me was the new Bacardi advert: the one that shows a picture of a palm-fringed beach at sunset under the heading, 'Wigan—after you've been drinking Bacardi'. Now I've seen alcohol adverts that have offered their products as sexual accessories or short-cuts to sophistication or proofs of masculinity. I have never seen before one that has explicitly said drink enough of this and you'll hallucinate. Bacardi—you won't know where you are. Oblivion for the price of a bottle. Times must be very bad indeed.

Dreams and wishes are always big during economic downturns. If you can't drink them true you can always write in to *Jim'll Fix It* (BBC1). After all these years, the conventions of this programme have become pretty settled. I don't suppose anyone writes in saying, Dear Jim, give me a car/a job/a million dollars, or an expert and insatiable sexual partner any more. This week half the programme was given over to Joanne (aged about 12) who wanted to ride in a stagecoach and be stopped by a highwayman. Any dream will do as long as it is televisual (or involves a clapped-out celebrity, preferably Cliff).

As we watched Joanne climb on board in her crinoline and act shocked when the robber appeared it occurred to me that what we were watching was a short drama made on location with a single portable camera. This means that every action had to be gone through at least three times—once for a mastershot of all the characters, and then once each for the reactions of the two major players. In other words, Jim really fixed it for Joanne to stand around in the cold half the day waiting for her take. The first time Joanne saw anything like her fantasy was when it was all over and she sat back and watched it on TV.

Now this is something that fascinates me. I once spent a day on a cliff-top in northern Majorca that afforded incredible views of the Formentor peninsula. Every 10 minutes a hire car would pull up. This would always contain an English couple—you knew they were English because he had socks on with his open-toed sandals. They would park. He would get out, walk to the end of the cliff, whip out his video camera and scan the horizon with it while she lit up in the car. Then they would drive away, the whole manoeuvre having taken maybe five minutes.

It happened about 15 times in a couple of hours. Whatever was going on here, it was clear that the record of these holidays would differ significantly from the experience; indeed that some part of the holiday was being given over solely to fabricating a record that would not be understood or appreciated until later when it came out on video. Like Joanne, their dream did not actually come true but they could fake it for the cameras.

In *Stars in their Eyes* (ITV), faking it for the cameras became an exhilarating celebration of the

star potential of all humanity. Ordinary-looking people would come on and stand next to the diabolically cheery Leslie Crowther. They would walk through a puff of smoke and come back not just transformed but transfigured. Race, class and bodily barriers evaporated in the dry ice. A podgy white fishwife from Fleetwood became a convincing, smouldering Eartha Kitt. A Filipino martial arts expert became a sexually explosive Tom Jones. A *Coronation Street* extra blossomed into a full-blown Shirley Bassey.

Here of course, the fantasy was self-fulfilling as they acted out their dream of being loved by an audience in front of an audience who loved them for it. Like Joanne and the holiday couples, though, they thought that their dreams had come

brides seemed to sum up the place of women in our society.

Of course, there are people who *deserve* to be on Beadle. People who own their own camcorders and use them to record the unveiling of their latest hi-tech toy on their wide, conifer-fringed lawns. The riders of mini-scrambler bikes, the players with remote-control model aircraft, and so on. Then there is a strange sub-group of people who send in footage of themselves doing quite inconsequential things that go horribly wrong. I suppose it is funny when someone drops a chimney pot off the roof and knocks down the ladder. But who thought it was a good idea to film someone repointing the roof in the first place? These examples reek of the set-up. And this is perhaps the saddest thing of

And this is perhaps the saddest thing of all—the thought that there are people out there who actively wish to be on TV with Jeremy Beadle...

true if they saw them appearing to be true on TV. This should not be that surprising—after all it's from TV that we get a lot of the imagery in which we express our desires. The advantage of the home camcorder is that it allows you to draw your own face on to the surface of the dream machine.

This is what makes *You've Been Framed* (ITV) the most poignant programme on TV at the moment. The show is put together from bits of people's home videos. The bits that show people making idiots of themselves. If you think about the kind of occasions on which people hire video cameras—weddings, first communions, the last night of the local amdram musical, the final of the Sunday league cup—then you'll understand the pathos. This is a catalogue of the big moments that degenerated into farce.

This week there was a special pageant of fainting bridegrooms. We saw no fewer than 12 men dropping at the altar rails. With its subtext of emotional immaturity and inability to hold liquor, it was a savage indictment of Britain's ineffectual manhood. The sick, resigned faces of the mortified

all—the thought that there are people out there who actively wish to be on TV with Jeremy Beadle, who will in fact risk spinal injury to make that wish come true.

There is one TV dream that keeps coming back to me these days. It appears towards the beginning of Kurt Vonnegut's great novel *Slaughterhouse Five* when Billy Pilgrim, unstuck in time, wanders downstairs to turn on the TV. They are showing a war movie—*The Longest Day* or something like that. And Billy, himself a survivor of the fire-bombing of Dresden, watches fascinated as the film starts to run backwards. Huge bombers reverse over the blazing city, sucking up the fire into their bellies and sealing it harmlessly into metal canisters. They land backwards on American airfields where the canisters are removed and disassembled into their useful components, while the pilots return first to college, then to high school and finally to kindergarten. And then there is no more war. May all your wishes be granted and all your dreams come true.

the marxist review of books

Britain's bellicose intervention in the Gulf conflict is a deliberate attempt to offset its decline as a leading capitalist power. As war and recession revive the discussion about British decline, **Phil Murphy** surveys some recent contributions to a debate which started more than a century ago

What is the British disease?

Books discussed in this article include Corelli Barnett, *The Audit of War*, Macmillan, £17.95 hbk; Bruce Collins and Keith Robbins (eds), *British Culture and Economic Decline*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £6.99 pbk; Bernard Elbaum and William Lazonick, *The Decline of the British Economy*, Oxford University Press, £27.50 hbk, £9.95 pbk; Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (eds), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700, Vol2: 1860 to the 1970s*, Cambridge University Press, £40 hbk, £15.95 pbk; Alan Sked, *Britain's Decline: Problems and Perspectives*, Basil Blackwell, £3.75 pbk; Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*, Penguin, £5.99 pbk

Ever since the Great Depression of the 1870s, Britain's decline as a world power has preoccupied the ruling class. As early as the 1867 Paris Fair, it was evident that Britain was starting to fall behind in industrial design. A decade or so later, Britain was clearly losing ground to its competitors, the USA and Germany. In 1887, the president of the Economic Science and Statistical Section read an address to the British Association which caught the general mood: 'Many contend that not only are we not progressing but that we are absolutely going back in the world.' (Quoted in C Wilson, 'Economy and society in late Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, No18, 1965) Since then economic crisis seems to have become part and parcel of the British way of life, fuelling a discussion about the cause of this decline among historians and economists, politicians and editors, industrialists and bankers.

Only during a few brief periods when Britain's economic performance improved slightly has the debate faded. At the tail end of the post-war boom in the late 1960s, for example, authors such as McCloskey and Floud argued that British decline was a myth. They contested the considerable evidence of decline by arguing that, because Britain was the first industrial nation, it was inevitable that there would be signs of *relative* slippage as other nations began to catch up. (There are clear parallels here with Joseph Nye's rejoinder to Paul Kennedy in the current debate about American decline.)

This viewpoint soon lost its popularity with the re-emergence of recessionary tendencies at the start of the 1980s. However, a recent collection of essays edited by Bruce Collins and Keith Robbins, *British Culture and Economic Decline* (1990), expresses a similar sentiment, spawned this time by a belief in the Thatcherite economic miracle. The authors question the chronology and scale of decline:

'If we take the entire period from 1850 to 1980 it would seem difficult to apply *tout court* the term "decline" in the case of the British economy as a whole. We may think of certain specific shortcomings and failures in particular areas but we can also point to successes in others.' (p7)

Unfortunately, the editors do not provide a list of these successes. More importantly, this collection has become dated very quickly. The pace of developments over the past two years has removed the temporary and superficial basis for this complacency. We are back to the norm of an underlying recognition of decline informing all the major discussion in British society, from the debate about European integration to the debate about Britain's role in the world.

Britain's enthusiastic military intervention in the Gulf War is a sure sign that establishment concern about British decline is more intense than ever. Britain has a lot to lose as a result of the end of the Cold War. As sidekick to the USA in the post-war system of Western military and political alliances, Britain enjoyed a status in the world which was no longer justified by its economic weight. One major consequence of the end of the post-war political order is the threatened breakdown of international economic cooperation, which will seriously undermine Britain's role as a provider of financial services. This is already exposing the economic weakness of British capitalism as invisible earnings begin to dwindle.

The British government's bellicose posturing in the Gulf is motivated by a desire to slow down the demise of the old world order for as long as possible. But the strain which this enterprise has already put on the military and the treasury only serves to underline the diminishing possibilities for pursuing this strategy in the future. In fact, this assertion of British power may yet end up exposing its underlying economic weakness which the military adventure was meant to conceal.

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The concern engendered by the end of the Cold War status quo has been exacerbated by the mounting evidence that the British economic recession will be deep and enduring. The number of company failures, the pace and scale of rising unemployment and the renewal of government foreign borrowing have removed any lingering faith in the economic miracle trumpeted a few years ago. A recession as bad as anything experienced since the Second World War is now on the cards.

The alarm bells are ringing once again about national decline. Almost daily, media reports contrast British economic failures with the success stories of Germany and Japan. In one area after another Britain's deficiencies are described: technological innovation, industrial design, training, skills, education, research and development.

It is hardly surprising that the academic debate about the origins of Britain's decline has been given a new lease of life. The dominant school of thought on the British disease has blamed the deficiencies of the British ruling class for the decline of a once great nation. This view has united contributions from across the political spectrum. It was the underlying assumption beneath the Thatcherite crusade to rekindle the spirit of enterprise. This approach blames the chronic lack of independence of British industrialists on their historical subservience to the landed aristocracy. Apparently this subservience has resulted in a peculiar conservatism and complacency in the upper echelons of British manufacturing industry and ensured the dominance of the City.

Within this general approach to the subject there have been two main trends. There are those who emphasise cultural deficiencies, such as Martin Wiener in his 1981 book *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*. Others identify broader institutional problems and deficiencies at the socio-economic level, including Bernard Elbaum and William Lazonick in their 1986 book *The Decline of the British Economy* and Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson in a series of articles in the journal *New Left Review* over the past 25 years.

Wiener's thesis stressed the ascendancy inside the British ruling class of an aristocratic affinity for classical education over a more down-to-earth bourgeois concern with technical education. He illustrates this with reference to the high status accorded to public schools such as Eton, Rugby and Winchester and to the Oxbridge universities, as opposed to grammar schools, technical colleges, polytechnics and redbrick universities. Wiener argues that this education system produced good administrators, officers, diplomats and civil servants for the Empire, but poor leaders of industry.

According to Wiener, another symptom of the same trend was the triumph of rural over urban values. Apparently, a deeply imbued nostalgia for rural life led businessmen to buy landed estates to realise their aspirations to become part of the gentry, at the expense of investment in industry. Also, in contrast to other leading capitalist countries, Wiener contends that Britain has never been a proper meritocracy; the strength of snobbery means that promotion is based much more on who you know than what you know, to the detriment of scientific entrepreneurial values.

In his *Audit of War* (1986) Corelli Barnett approaches the Second World War from the same perspective. He describes the way in which the gentlemanly amateurism of the British ruling class undermined not just the war effort, but also the reconstruction that took place after the war. This was undertaken much more successfully in Germany and Japan than in England. Barnett attacks a tendency towards what he calls 'New Jerusalemism'; he says that during the war members of the British cultural elite were busy working out how to transform Britain into a green and pleasant land after the war, instead of fighting the war or trying to remedy the industrial defects which had hindered British economic performance in the past.

In emphasising the appeal of tradition and the peculiar continuity of institutions in Britain—expressed in the role of the monarchy, the house of lords and the Church of England—the Wiener-Barnett thesis identifies the problem as the failure of the bourgeois revolution in England. It was too bloodless, not enough heads rolled and it was too much of a compromise between the old and new ruling classes. The feudal aristocracy was never properly dealt with and its backwardness has infected the bourgeois cultural outlook ever since.

This thesis continues to be influential. An industrial designer recently complained that industry was losing out by not making use of the available talent: 'We have a cultural problem (compared to France and Germany) with design and engineering because these jobs are foolishly considered to have little prestige.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 13 January 1991) Indeed, throughout the eighties many of these assumptions influenced government policy. In 1985, the education secretary Keith Joseph warned British universities 'to be concerned with attitudes to the world outside higher education, and in particular to industry and commerce, and to beware of "anti-business" snobbery. The entrepreneurial spirit is essential for the maintenance and improvement of employment' (quoted in *British Culture and Economic Decline*, p3). These sentiments are expressed today in demands for more resources for technical education and training.

The excessively subjective character of the Wiener/Barnett thesis has worried some contributors to the debate. Many regard it as too simplistic to explain 120 years of decline as the result of a collective attitude problem. According to Alan Sked, most comparative research reveals that there is nothing unique about anti-industrialism among British intellectuals: the Americans and Germans harbour the same prejudices (*Britain's Decline: Problems and Perspectives*, 1987). Sked also disputes Wiener's counterposition of industrial and rural values. He points to the fusion of landed and industrial interests from an early stage in the development of capitalism.

Others have supplemented the cultural thesis by introducing institutional and socio-economic factors. Elbaum and Lazonick, for example, agree that there is something to the cultural approach but question whether it is the entire story. They argue that Britain's decline derives not from peculiar cultural values and entrepreneurial incompetence but from 'a matrix of rigid institutional structures that reinforced these values and obstructed individualistic as well as collective economic efforts at economic renovation'. Some of the more significant of these structures include educational, industrial relations and financial institutions. The authors blame politicians for failing to deal with these institutional barriers to progress.

Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson took this approach further in their articles in *New Left Review*. They argued that the consistently aristocratic character of the ruling class was a consequence of the preponderance of the interests of land and commerce in Britain. This is illustrated by the close and controlling links between the City, the treasury and the Empire. The distinctiveness of this approach is that it goes beyond the cultural approach to incorporate economic factors. The most important feature of their thesis is the emphasis on the early and continued dominance of financial interests over industry. Their argument is that the low industrial investment which underpins economic decline arises from the fact that industry has always been a poor relation of the banks and the financial sector.

Nairn and Anderson give a reasonably fair description of some of what has happened over the past 120 years. For example, discussing the structure of the British economy in the late nineteenth century, they correctly characterise industry as being low-tech, low capital investment and small scale, and dependent on internally generated funds and a low-skilled workforce. Meanwhile, the business of the City primarily revolved around foreign trade and capital export rather than domestic industry. The City failed to finance the necessary modernisation of industry and fell prey to the affliction known as 'short termism': going for short-term, often speculative gain, instead of waiting for a long-term return on real productive investment.

Nairn and Anderson illustrate their notion of the dominance of the City over industry by looking at a series of conflicts between the two sectors in which City interests always seemed to prevail: the 40-year controversy over tariff reform and the delay in introducing protectionism until 1932; the return to the gold standard in 1925 at a level which many manufacturers rejected as so high that it would impair industrial competitiveness; the global role for sterling after 1945 and the defence of its value at high levels which benefited the City at the expense of business.

Although they have more going for them than the exponents of cultural exceptionalism, Nairn and Anderson nevertheless fail to provide a convincing explanation for Britain's decline. They tend to

present some of the symptoms of British decline as its causes. For example, the British economy's early extensive relationship with the world economy was not a cause of underinvestment at home, but a consequence of the fact that conditions for domestic investment were already inhospitable. Capital export abroad was the result of domestic stagnation, not its cause.

They are also too mechanistic in making such hard and fast distinctions between the financial and industrial sectors. A characteristic feature of the structure of the capitalist economy in Britain and other more advanced nations from the late nineteenth century was the fusion of banking and industrial capital into *finance capital*. Problems encountered in making adequate profits from production brought the two sectors into a closer symbiotic relationship: industry became more reliant on the input from the financial sector and itself went into financial-type operations to make money; meanwhile, the financial sector's closer links with industry encouraged a keener interest in industrial matters.

The peculiarity of the British economy was that the parasitic features of financial activities came to the fore earlier than elsewhere because industry was much weaker. Instead of focusing on the domination of commercial or banking interests, Nairn and

adopted or rejected depending on the predilections of the capitalist class. At a certain stage in the evolution of the capitalist system, these measures become essential to prevent the profit-making process grinding to a halt. Debates arose which influenced the pace of implementation of these measures, such as Joseph Chamberlain's call for tariff reform at the turn of the century. But in the end, the survival of the system dictated the course of development.

The great outflow of capital from Britain in the closing decades of the nineteenth century revealed that the capitalist class could no longer make an adequate return on investment at home. The large accumulation of capital tied up in relatively backward levels of technology could not in normal circumstances be written off. But this was a barrier to introducing new technology, with the result that Britain was soon displaced as world leader in industries like iron and steel, machine building and chemicals by the younger, more dynamic economies of America and Germany. This was not because of a shortage of capital: it was because of the limits to the profitable expansion of older industries with new investments. As a result, British capital tended to be exported abroad. Between 1910 and 1913, more than 75 per cent of the money raised by the issue of shares and bonds went overseas.

The British disease is not a result of the subjective deficiencies of its ruling elite. It is a consequence of the more advanced features of capitalist decay in Britain

Anderson would have been better employed explaining the emergence of this special form of finance capital in Britain. One consequence of this development was that the service sector took over from manufacturing earlier than elsewhere.

All theses of decline which blame the deficiencies of the ruling class inevitably reduce the problem to subjective failures: failures of businessmen, financiers, politicians or educationalists. They tend to view capitalist policy as the outcome of conscious but mistaken planning, an incapacity to resolve institutional difficulties or of cultural backwardness. But capitalist policy is much more the cumulative result of individual capitalists responding to the exigencies of the system over which they preside. The behaviour of individual capitalists is ultimately dictated by the needs of the profit system.

The British disease is not a result of the subjective deficiencies of its ruling elite. It is a consequence of the relatively more advanced features of capitalist decay in Britain. This trend towards stagnation, which is expressed fundamentally in declining profitability, is inherent in the nature of capitalist production. It cannot be arrested by capitalists acting either individually or collectively through the mechanism of the state. The capitalist system of production produces its own barriers to the further development of industry, science, technology and progress.

Britain was the first country to industrialise and establish capitalist production. It was also the first capitalist nation to come up against the barriers of falling profitability, hence the Great Depression of the late nineteenth century. Capitalist stagnation was expressed in the steady decline in Britain's share of world production after 1870. Britain was also the first country to adopt new forms of operation to offset this slowdown in production. In contrast to the period of classical free competition, extraordinary measures such as capital export and the development of finance capital became necessary features for the survival of the capitalist system.

The more sophisticated theories of economic decline describe these phenomena. But they are not policy options, which could be

The shift towards the service sector, and in particular financial services, from this time is also a consequence of the tendency towards stagnation in the sphere of productive activity. In addition to the proceeds from overseas investment, the profits obtained from providing services to the rest of the world (invisible earnings) have kept British capitalism afloat. This was not just important in what is regarded as the heyday of British imperialism around the turn of the century. The shortlived British economic recovery of the 1980s was based not on any durable revival of the manufacturing sector, but on the further rapid growth of overseas investment and the expansion of City-based operations.

The typical British capitalist was not transformed from being an entrepreneur running productive industry into a financier of overseas activity as a result of some peculiar cultural malaise, nor as a result of the narrow concerns of the financial sector. British institutions did not cause this transformation: they were moulded to suit the needs of a British capitalist system which had become increasingly parasitic in character.

Nor have British politicians been complacent about decline. All post-war British governments have grappled with the problems of decline, although they have employed different strategies. What unites them all is their failure to reverse the decay of the British economy, from Harold Wilson's white heat of the technological revolution to Margaret Thatcher's monetarist economic miracle. The problems of British capitalism are too entrenched to be susceptible to quick-fix solutions.

The decline of British capitalism is the result of inherent tendencies towards stagnation and decay within the capitalist system. These tendencies are naturally most advanced in the more mature economies, which become progressively less able to compete with the more dynamic developing nations. Over the decades, the British establishment has become adept at managing the decline of its own system. But it can do nothing to reverse it.

For some time now there has been an accelerating trend towards relativism in social theory. **James Heartfield** surveys some of the recent literature dealing with this trend from apparently differing perspectives and shows what they all have in common

Vive la differance (sic)?

Books discussed in this article include Raoul Mortley (ed), *French Philosophers in Conversation*, Routledge, £25 hbk, £7.99 pbk; Sean Sayers and Peter Osborne (eds), *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philosophy Reader*, Routledge, £35 hbk, £10.99 pbk; Kate Soper, *Troubled Pleasures: Writings on Politics, Gender and Hedonism*, Verso, £32.95 hbk, £10.95 pbk; Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, Verso, £9.95 pbk

The world of academia is currently preoccupied with a growing trend towards relativism in social theory. French in origin, postmodernism and deconstruction theory are catching on in most universities and colleges. These theories reject the all-encompassing worldviews of both the right and the left, the apologists for capitalism and the advocates of revolution, in the name of a celebration of difference, and its irreducibility to one single theory. All the books discussed here deal with this trend with varying degrees of enthusiasm. However, despite disagreements, for instance between the originator of the theory, Jacques Derrida, and his outright opponents on the left like Kate Soper, a common approach on such issues as feminism, ecology and politics ties them together.

French Philosophers in Conversation is the most readable of the four books under review. It features the father of deconstructionism, Jacques Derrida, as well as Emmanuel Levinas, who popularised the work of the German thinker Martin Heidegger, held to be Derrida's main influence, in short interviews. Also included are Luce Irigaray and Michele LeDoeuff, who are known in this country for their critical work on gender relations. The interviews give an insight into the way French deconstruction drew upon the earlier tradition of German irrationalism.

Heidegger's search for a concept of being (*Sein*) that is not an abstract one, but one intimately linked to place, led him to propose that we should talk of being-there (*Dasein*) instead. Levinas explains with an anti-German joke: 'Dasein never wonders whether, by being *da*, "there" it's taking somebody else's place! As we know, Germany has always had its *Dasein*.' (p19) Interestingly, Derrida announces that he is currently working on the question of nationality in philosophy. Perhaps now with the war in the Gulf we should speak of French and British *Dasein*.

Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy is a collection of articles from the quarterly journal *Radical Philosophy*. It lacks the derring-do of the French, being more careful and even-handed in its style. Subdivided into three sections on feminism, socialism and nature, it features some strong essays: Sean Sayers' attack on analytic Marxism, which explains the inadequacy of formal logic to social theory (although Sayers does tend to follow Frederick Engels' mistake of extending dialectical logic beyond society into the treatment of nature); Chris Arthur's scholarly exposition on the German idealist GWF Hegel's treatment of women; Ross Poole's careful demonstration of the way that the philosophy of the market has to draw both on the abstract morality of the German idealist Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism—the accountant's morality of estimating the greatest good for the greatest number. The collection is critical of those 'espousing uncritically the latest French fashions' (p2).

In *Troubled Pleasures*, Kate Soper, a contributor to *Radical Philosophy* and the *New Left Review*, defends 'a philosophical realism which rejects the "aestheticism" associated with structuralism and poststructuralism: the disposition...to see "art" or "language" or "discourse" or "text" as constituting the primary realm' (p9). Instead, she proposes a humanist socialism inspired by the English historian and peace campaigner EP Thompson, that draws on feminism and Green politics.

Her essays have an easygoing but earnest style, rather like a vicar's sermons, but they tend to assume agreement on points that are not argued but instead presented as self-evident. At one point Soper asserts that 'more people have been murdered on the streets of New York in the last 15 years than died in the Vietnam War' (p67). Pentagon estimates put the number killed in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973 at between 768 000 and 1 305 000—meaning that about one in every eight New Yorkers has been murdered since 1975 according to Soper's calculation (figures taken from Gabriel Kolko's *Vietnam: Anatomy of a War*, 1987).

In *Late Marxism*, Fredric Jameson reworks the theory of the late Theodor Adorno, a key figure in the Frankfurt School of 'critical theory'. Adorno, he believes, is a better guide to postmodern times than the postmodernists, because he deals with similar problems without ever losing his critical stance—a 'late Marxism' for the period of what Jameson calls 'late capitalism'.

While Jameson is more sensitive to the wider political influences on theory than most of these authors, his book is painfully flawed by a determination to match his subject matter's style of presentation: 'No "arguments" of the traditional kind that lead to truth climaxes; the text will become one infinite [sic] variation in which everything is recapitulated at every moment; closure will finally be achieved when all the possible variations have been exhausted.' (p62) Like his model, Jameson succeeds in giving us some good aphorisms but lacks any structure to his argument. This makes all but the last section, which deals with the political circumstances of postmodernism, painfully obscure.

Despite the variety of positions and purposes here, there is an underlying tendency to push a variety of radical positions in such a way as to relativise traditional certainties. But more than just challenging the traditional viewpoint, these writers all succeed to a greater or lesser degree in denigrating the possibility of any kind of social project, whether conservative or revolutionary. The goals of feminism, of ecology and of a traditional socialism, generally thought to be progressive, are pursued in such a way as to render social transformation unattractive, if not impossible. Let's look at these in turn.

The discussion of feminism here resolves into the conflict between 'difference feminism' and a feminism that aims for sexual equality. 'Difference feminism', in Soper's shorthand, takes the qualities associated with the genders, male and female, and challenges the virtue of the former. So presented with the associations woman = passive, natural, intuitive, emotive and man = active, cultural, logical, cognitive, difference feminism challenges the assumed superiority of the male qualities over the female. Male logic and culture, having engendered a growth of inhuman technologies and militarism, are not the virtues they were originally thought to be and ought to give way to female virtues.

So, for example, the eighteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft is criticised for framing her *Vindication of the Rights of*

Woman in the mould of Enlightenment emancipation, so that 'idealised humanity appears as a rational, plain-speaking bourgeois man' (Jean Grimshaw quoting Cora Kaplan in *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy*, p11). Pauline Johnson explains that for a postmodern feminism, 'any radical dissatisfaction with the repressive conventions of a patriarchal femininity is...lost to a pluralistic "recognition" of the legitimate specificity of the various modes of a gendered social existence' (*Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy*, p120).

There are two associated problems with the approach of difference feminism. First, on a practical level, it can only celebrate the terms of women's oppression. Repeating the sixties rejoinder to the women's movement—'Yes, women are equal, but different'—difference feminism is in consequence just as much of an excuse for women's subordinate position in society. Second, on a theoretical level, difference feminism is a Trojan horse for relativism. Jacques Derrida endorses the challenge to male 'logocentrism', seeing a link between the celebration of female difference and his project of deconstructing the rigid hierarchies of unitary theory (*French Philosophers*, p104). Derrida writes 'différance' to give the term an active ending. The practical and theoretical sides of this problem are linked: in so far as this view spurns the commensurability of human experience contained in the idea of equality, it is unable to form the basis of a common challenge to oppression.

arguments. Benton argues that Marx was a potential Green when he wrote his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and only later came to be obsessed with dominating nature through technology. Benton accuses Marx of dualism for wanting man to be both a part of nature, and also in conflict with nature at the same time. This is not dualism on Marx's part, but an attempt to explain the dynamic relationship between man and nature. By extending technical control over nature through industry, mankind develops a 'second nature' of an historically created culture. Remove the spur of technology and you remove the dynamic towards historical change. Benton's extensive bibliography would gain by the addition of Alfred Schmidt's *Marx and Nature* (1971).

Kate Soper demonstrates the socially regressive consequences of a Green rejection of technology. She cites Green thinking as evidence that there is still hope for socialism, or at least social responsibility, the two being synonymous in her reading. She writes that she can 'envisage a future in which we have a democratically elected government with a mandate to implement an "anti-growth—reduced-work—sober-consumption" programme and such measures of planning as would be needed to preserve the environment' (p66). So can I. It might not have a mandate to, but John Major's government has certainly spurned growth for recession, reduced work by raising unemployment and cut consumption by raising interest rates and holding down wages.

These narrow and pessimistic conclusions demonstrate the dilemma facing the radical intelligentsia. Having derided traditional certainties, they find they have none to put in their place

For Marxists the concept of totality, of the interconnectedness of phenomena, is a precondition for examining them in their specificity—as particular aspects of a social whole. The specific oppression of women in capitalist society arises from its need for the workforce to be reared, fed and cared for: the reproduction of labour-power. This is a task capitalism exacts unpaid from women. This approach retains a command of what is unique to women's oppression, without rejecting the possibility of a society-wide challenge to it.

Of our authors however even Kate Soper, a critic of the postmodernist approach, gives ground to difference feminism. She recalls her initial irritation at the mysticism shown by women peace campaigners at Greenham Common. They sought to invoke the ancient matriarchal power of the 'rainbow dragon' against the missile base. This offends her sense of rationalism, something that she does not want to abandon to men. At the same time 'there is a measure of truth in the standard explanation of the "pacifist" tendencies of women—namely that as those who conceive and give birth to life, and who have been almost exclusively responsible for the care of the young, women are bound to deplore anything that tends to the violent destruction of life' (p170). Here the difference celebrated is that of childcare and the cost is a concession to its mystification.

Ecological or Green arguments are already less important than the few months ago when these books were being written. They are still arguments that are thought of as being radical rather than conservative. But here it becomes clear that the Green point of view undermines the potential for change in so far as it rejects the motor for that change. The growth of technology has only recently been widely questioned. In Val Plumwood's *Radical Philosophy* essay, 'Women, humanity and nature', the critique of rationality, the critique of masculinity and 'the critique of human domination of nature, human chauvinism, speciesism' all converge. Difference feminism and the rejection of rationality rest on the rejection of technology as discrimination against nature.

While Plumwood's rejection of technology is at least clear, Ted Benton in the *Radical Philosophy* reader presents more subtle

Without a sense of either the dynamic towards change, or the universality of the social question, most of these writers exhibit primitive political aspirations. Soper's political goals are expressed in terms of ethics or moral obligation. In the *Radical Philosophy* reader, Roger Harris takes a stand against contemporary relativism. He ridicules the 'conventional rhetoric of "conscience"' usually directed 'to make heroes out of scabs, while those devoted to a just cause are implicitly disparaged as a "mob" in the grip of nothing more than "bad faith"' (p186). Despite his personal rejection of the current trend he can only look backwards to an alliance of 'socialist political parties, trade unions, feminist, environmental, etc, movements' (p205). The 'etc' speaks volumes. It tells us that Harris is building a movement in his head as surely as if he had added 'and Uncle Tom Cobbley and all'.

Fredric Jameson shows the most astute grasp of contemporary political life. He uses an aphorism of Adorno's to explain the effects of depoliticisation: 'Not only theory, but also its absence, becomes a material force when it grips the masses.' (p40, from G Adey and D Frisby (eds), *The Positivist Debate in German Sociology*, 1976, p84) However, even Jameson lacks the bearings for a positive projection of social change. Granting that his subject's outlook is too pessimistic to play a positive role, he embraces his pessimism as at least allowing a critical perspective on the times: 'Adorno was a doubtful ally when there were still powerful and oppositional currents from which his temperamental and cantankerous quietism could distract the uncommitted reader. Now that for the moment those currents are themselves quiescent, his bile is a joyous counterpoison and a corrosive poison to apply to the surface of "what is".' (p249)

These narrow and pessimistic conclusions demonstrate the dilemma facing the radical intelligentsia. Having derided traditional certainties, they find they have none to put in their place. Presented with the conclusions of their own project of relativism, they balk but remain bound to the trajectory of that project. The concepts of totality, of technological growth and of social transformation are anathema to academia, but bread and butter to Marxists.

●



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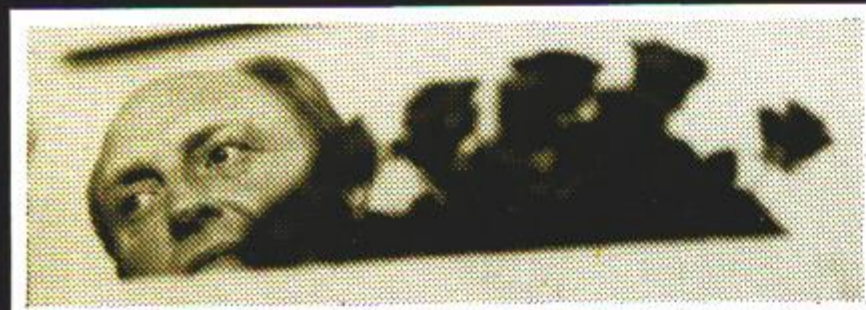
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