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# LM107

The mag ITN wants to gag

# Free Speech Wars

WHY THE  
RIGHT TO  
SAY, WRITE,  
LISTEN TO,  
READ AND  
WATCH  
WHAT  
WE WANT  
SHOULD  
BE THE  
BIG CAUSE  
OF '98

**FOOD  
FIGHTS**

'Let kids eat cake – and chips and chocolate' says anorexia expert  
What's wrong with beef on the bone and modified genes in soya beans?



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the  
**TRUTH**  
is in  
here

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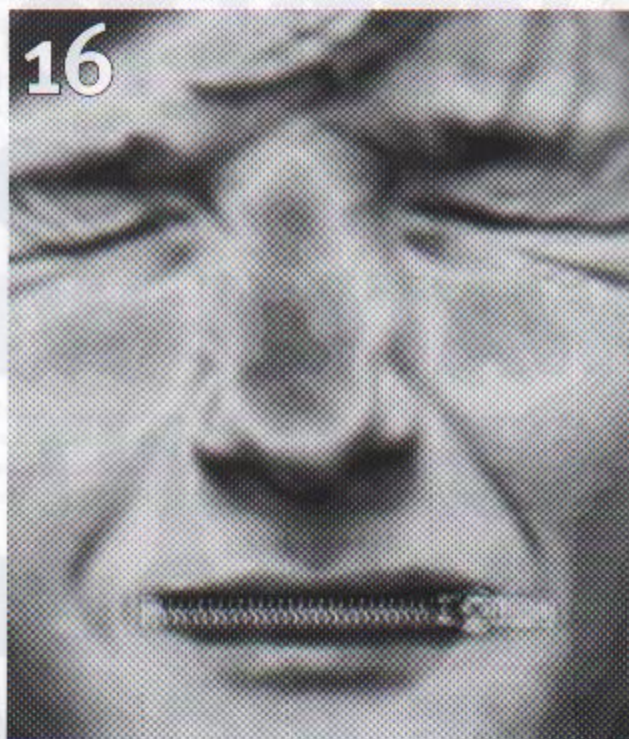
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# Free Speech Wars

Friday 27 February—Sunday 1 March at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

A three-day international festival of talks, debates, screenings and events organised by the ICA and LM magazine in association with Waterstone's



## AN APPEAL IN DEFENCE OF FREE SPEECH

Launched by LM publishers Helene Guldborg and Claire Fox in response to ITN's use of libel writs against the magazine, the Free Speech appeal has already won impressive support. See centre pages

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# MICK HUME

Editor



# WHY THE RIGHT TO SAY, WRITE, LISTEN TO, READ AND WATCH WHAT WE WANT SHOULD BE THE BIG CAUSE OF '98

I BELIEVE IN FREE SPEECH, UNCONDITIONALLY.

There is no word that should be banned, no book that should be burned, no film that should be censored, no disc that should be blacklisted, no website that should be blocked, no opinion that should be outlawed, no joke that should go uncracked.

There can be no such thing as semi-free speech, free speech lite or free-speech-for-me-but-not-for-you. We either have free speech, warts and for all, or we do not. And I want the full Monty.

I am not an advocate of going soft on the views of racists, misogynists, or Liverpool supporters. I have no truck with the wallyish notion that everybody is entitled to have their opinions taken seriously.

In fact, one of the worst things about our uncertain age is that never has so much ignorant and superstitious nonsense been spouted by so many, about everything from alien abduction to the deification of Princess Di. It is especially ironic that the open, unregulated Internet, which we are compelled to defend in today's free speech wars, should be full of the execrable files.

So, yes, we all need a finely-tuned bull detector these days, and, once detected, we need a readiness to hammer, ridicule or simply

## THE SUPPORT FOR REFLECTS THE OF

ignore those responsible, as required. What we do not need are the bans, regulations or calls for 'restraint' that would deny us the right to judge what is right and wrong for ourselves.

Standing up for free speech really has little to do with the value (or lack of it) that we ascribe to particular words. It is ultimately, as James Heartfield explains at length elsewhere in this issue of *LM*, about the worth we attach to humanity. It is about how we see ourselves and others. And it is about who is to have control over what we can do or think.

The demand for unfettered free speech says that we should act, and expect to be treated, as rational, intelligent adults capable of thinking and deciding for ourselves—not as incompetent children who need substitute parents to protect us from rude words and naughty pictures.

# OUR FIGHT FOR FREE SPEECH GOES ONLINE

[www.informinc.co.uk/LM-vs-ITN/](http://www.informinc.co.uk/LM-vs-ITN/)



It says that we are self-confident and relaxed enough to believe that issues can be settled through open debate and a clash of views, without the need for knee-jerk bans or over-sensitive codes of practice.

If we come across opinions we object to, let us trust ourselves to confront and puncture them before the court of public opinion, instead of recoiling in horror and squealing like Victorian virgins about being offended. If we are faced with lies about history, let us back our ability to gather the evidence and expose them in the open, rather than try to gag the liars with the law, as if we were the ones with something to hide.

The demand for freedom of speech, then, is about what we think of people rather than about mere words. The danger today is that free speech is under threat because of a significant shift in the way that we see ourselves and each other.

In the not-too-distant past, it was the case that most people felt they could rely on each other more than they could trust the state. That sense of solidarity, based less on naive idealism than on an understanding of real common interests, meant relatively few were inclined to call on the authorities to intervene in public affairs with bans and restrictions. Free speech

themselves. The answer lies in the wider mood of society, an atmosphere which Frank Furedi describes in this month's *LM* as one where 'stranger danger' and institutionalised mistrust shape many human relationships.

Against that background, the fight for free speech is about the kind of society in which we have to live. That is why the right to say, write, listen to, read and watch what we want should be the big cause of '98. The problem is that, in the unusual political climate of today, too few of us even recognise that our right to free speech is being undermined.

The attacks rarely come in the form of old-fashioned, easy-to-spot bans imposed by right-wing authorities. Instead, the threat to freedom more often comes from the 'left'—the radical/feminist wings of the New Labour establishment. Conservatives may once have associated freedom of speech with 'woolly minded liberals', but they are now about as rare as woolly-backed mammoths. The former liberals staffing the New Labour machine are among the foremost advocates of restricting free expression.

In Blair's New Britain, censorship is never an act of state repression. It is always something worthy, supported from the bottom upwards: say, a humane measure to protect society's

a strict code of emotional correctness. On any issue, this code dictates that there is only one correct line to be toed in public debate—cry for Di, cheer for Louise, boo the smokers—and woe betide anybody who attempts to do otherwise by thinking for themselves.

Blaspheming against the creed of 'Thou shalt not say that' is an unforgivable sin in the late 1990s. In this quasi-religious atmosphere, dissenters can expect to be treated not as people with a different point of view to be debated, but as heretics to be witch-hunted.

That is what has happened to us at *LM* magazine, since we published an article in February 1997 criticising ITN's award-winning reports from a Bosnian camp. Instead of engaging in an open discussion about the facts, ITN sought to silence us with libel writs and gagging orders. ITN editor-in-chief Richard Tait has declared that the case is an issue of 'Good against Evil', while one of his main supporters, Ed Vulliamy of the *Guardian/ObsERVER*, has accused *LM* of harbouring 'diabolical' motives.

It seems that those of us who stray from what is now considered the morally/emotionally correct line are no longer simply raising an alternative argument to be contested; we are doing the Devil's work, and must be burnt at the stake.

## RESTRICTING FREE SPEECH BADLY TARNISHED SELF-IMAGE HUMANITY TODAY

held sway as an expression of public faith in the human potential.

Now things are quite different. The old communities and connections have broken down, society is fragmented, and people no longer tend to trust one another in the same way. As a consequence, many are much more likely to turn to a third party—the government, the courts, the council, the standards and complaints commissions—to step in and protect them from other people. The way in which the case for restricting free speech has gained ground reflects the badly tarnished self-image of humanity today.

The answer as to why so many battles are now being fought over free speech issues, on everything from privacy laws to Prodigy lyrics, cannot be found in the detail of these debates

victims from harassment and abuse; or a concession to the complaints of minorities (religious, racial, social or sexual) against 'offensive' material. The end result is the same as traditional censorship—the removal of the right to free speech—but the means mystify the ends.

These new calls for restraint and respect have also been widely internalised, so that self-censorship has become a habit. In which case, who needs the old banning orders and official secrets? Instead we are all operating under an informal regime of 'YOU cannot say THAT', where it is understood that anything which strays outside the narrow consensus of the mainstream is increasingly unlikely to get a hearing.

A new system of what might be called moral censorship is now in operation, built around

WITCH-HUNT OR NO, *LM* MAGAZINE REMAINS committed to an uncompromising stand in support of free speech. We should be able to say 'that', whatever it may be, without the endorsement of any policemen of the public good. We are prepared to take responsibility for what we say, without the intervention of any ethical watchdogs. And we trust the independence and intelligence of our audience, without the need for third parties to protect their sensibilities.

It is because we attach such importance to these matters that we are co-hosting the Free Speech Wars festival at the ICA (27 February to 1 March), which will debate how far free speech should go on a wide range of issues (see p16 for details). It is also why, a year on, we are still fighting the libel case against a multi-million pound news corporation which is seeking to buy immunity from criticism through the courts.

The legal process has demonstrated that free speech can be an expensive business. But I trust you to put your money where our mouth is. ●

## GENDER-BENDING

Wendy Earle ('Why try to make boys more like girls?', December/January) confuses the counteracting of gender stereotypes with the counteracting of gender identification. Of course young girls and boys identify with their gender. The important issue is that they do not grow up to believe that only restricted behaviour is appropriate for their gender.

I am one of those parents who Wendy Earle takes to task. As my daughter grew up I continually and persistently challenged the stereotypes of female behaviour that were presented to her. When reading the Famous Five as bedtime stories I even went so far as to teach myself to reverse the names of the main characters so that Anne became the leader and Julian the wimp! When my daughter was able to read these stories for herself she was justifiably angry at the deception but I venture to suggest that her ability to express such an opinion was in part due to her learning from me that this was acceptable behaviour.

My daughter now dresses, moves, speaks and carries herself through the world like a young woman. She truly identifies with her gender. What she is not is a wimp. She chooses to express her own strong opinions with confidence in both male and female company. At her age I had still to wait for the feminist movement of the seventies to teach me that it was OK to do this.

The traditional characteristics which set men and women apart in society do not originate entirely from natural differences but also develop from the social conditioning which segregates children according to their sex-roles from birth. The aim of those who challenge this is not to form little girls in the image and likeness of boys or vice versa but to recognise the possibilities every individual is born with, independently of sex or gender.

**JENNY PAYNE**

London E8

## 'DOING POLITICS' IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Brendan O'Neill's interpretation ('Look Who's Talking', November) of how sufficiency of consensus operates in the multi-party peace

negotiations is *wrong*. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition does not have the power he suggests it has. We do not have a veto on the process unlike either of the larger Unionist and Nationalist parties. Parties do have to seek our support for the overall vote since we are one of eight parties who are required to reach a majority. We believe it is good for democracy to build 'consensus' in such a way. It is also good for the negotiations that we do not need unanimity for such a vote—hence the word 'sufficient'. The need to build sufficient consensus in a conflict situation is something we support but, more importantly, it actually works.

The Women's Coalition did not decrease its vote in the general election; it stood three candidates (compared to 70 in the Forum election) and tripled its vote in one constituency, doubled it in the other, and increased it by 50 per cent in the third. The Women's Coalition also achieved 1.03 per cent of the vote in the Forum elections, not 0.7 per cent. This was a considerable achievement (7731 votes) given that it was formed only six weeks prior to election day.

In any society coming out of conflict it is important to see that democracy can work using various types of representation. Much of the debate on new forms of 'doing politics' centres on this very issue. It appears that Mr O'Neill is not acquainted with the idea of a 'participatory' democracy—one that incorporates civic society alongside electoral representation. When we stood for election our poster ran with the slogan 'Wave Goodbye To Dinosaurs'. It would seem that Mr O'Neill is happier amongst the dinosaurs than joining the new voices heading into the twenty-first century.

**MONICA McWILLIAMS**

Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, Belfast

## THE POINT OF FREE SPEECH

It is Frank Wainwright (letters, December/January) who has missed the point about the censoring of Chris Brand, not Jennie Bristow ('Free speech branded', September).

Brand may well be 'intellectually sub-standard', as Wainwright suggests, but now that his book has been withdrawn, we are in no position to judge for ourselves. The point of free speech is not to give airtime to a handful of cranks, but to enable the majority to make up their own minds about who is cranky and who is not.

**NEIL TURNER**

Stockport

## THE CASE FOR KIDS

Ann Bradley sees 'the case for kids' (October) from her own middle class perspective. The idea that working class women, ie, the vast majority, do not have the enthusiasm for a family is absurd. Most still have children in their twenties and certainly would not pontificate about 'teach[ing] them to value the qualities they value and fight for the goals they feel are worth fighting for'. That kind of thought process is for the middle classes.

Generally, people do not want kids because like myself they do not want to be tied down and have to make the sacrifices that parenting involves. It is not because they feel a lack of confidence but rather because they value their freedom, and often parenthood is not practical due to financial circumstances.

It could also be argued that people have kids to conform and show off to society, and to indulge themselves. My sisters are two cases in point. They never stop talking about their bloody kids. Finally, it seems strange to put such an article under the title 'Taboos', as it is not likely that many people would be offended by it. Come off it, you are making something out of nothing here.

**RICHARD**

Leeds University

The real reason why an increasing number of people are becoming childless by choice is that, in many ways quite rightly, they feel that the responsibilities of parenthood are increasing while the power to exercise these responsibilities effectively is decreasing. Unfortunately, it may be that it is precisely those people having

fewer children who view the responsibilities of parenthood really seriously—and perhaps it is those individuals who might otherwise have made the best parents?

**BRUCE LLOYD**

London NW6

## LOUISE AND ME

With the appeal court judgement pending on ex-nanny Louise Woodward, I have been comparing my own experience with the responses to her murder trial in October. When I heard the original 'guilty' verdict I felt a lump in my throat. Like Louise, at 19 I took a gap year before university. Like her, I went abroad. In my case this was to prove that I was an adult who could go it alone. I was reminded of this when so many people were saying that Louise was just a child.

The media were at pains to point out that Louise was completely inexperienced and terribly overworked, as though this vindicated her even if she had committed the crime. No doubt she was required to work hard—nannying is not known as an easy job. But it is a bit rich to talk about this 19-year old (legally entitled to vote and to marry without parental consent) as though she were seven. Of course, in Louise's position I too would do everything I could to get off the hook; the interesting thing is that it is not she who is presenting herself as incapable of responsibility, but everyone else.

It seems to me that we need to be a bit clearer about the distinction between adulthood and childhood. If at 19 you take on the responsibility of a job, you should be held to account for what you do. Perhaps Louise should not have been found guilty of murder, but if we just forgave her on account of her age what would this say about our expectations? That a young adult cannot be trusted to look after a baby? That this sort of incident is to be expected if you overwork your nannies? I hope not!

Luckily, events such as the death of Matthew Eappen are rare, and a lot of 19-year olds will spend their gap years competently looking after children in a foreign country. But if we want them to continue acting

like adults who can be trusted with children and babies, then we must treat them as such.

**EMILY CARTER**

London

### OFF TARGET ON SHOOTERS

Re-reading James Heartfield's mainly excellent article on freedom ('Who made freedom a dirty word?', June), I notice that when he writes 'Sportsman's Alliance candidates stood on a platform of the freedom to own firearms. But in the centre and on the left, nobody was talking about freedom—except to denounce it', he implies that there is something right-wing about the shooting sports. This is an example of the very trend James is warning us against: they defend freedom, therefore they must be reactionary nutters, therefore freedom is a dirty word. As a lifelong lefty who shoots in two clubs with ordinary punters, I strongly disagree.

**PAUL WILLIAMS**

London SE11

### CAN I HAVE MY BALLS BACK, PLEASE?

I hear that Harry Enfield is so disappointed with New Labour that he has asked for his £1000 donation to be returned. Perhaps this is the start not of Tony Blair's 'giving age', but of a period of taking back some of those valuable qualities—*independence, self-respect*—which New Labour would deny us.

**MARTIN DICKSON**

Norwich

### BIG DOME SMALL MINDS

Having lived and worked in Britain since 1991, I never thought I would have a good word to say about Peter Mandelson—and I still do not; but all the petty-minded criticism of the Millennium Dome has almost endeared him to me.

First there were the utilitarians, who complained that the Dome serves no useful purpose and urged that its budget should be redirected towards a more worthy cause. I suspect that their hidden agenda is *Back to Rationing!* Strangely enough, many of those who

pursued this line have spent years calling for more public arts funding on the fairly reasonable grounds that society must have the means to describe itself—an argument which is not heard enough in the States and which would be equally applicable to the Dome itself.

Next came the old chestnut of toys-for-the-boys: the Dome is a penis extension and it has to be a big one because the men involved in the project are worried about their small dicks. This is interpreting the world according to the obsessions of childhood and early adolescence. It is not the architects of the Dome who are infantile, but those of their critics who insist on seeing everything as a continuation of life in the romper room.

And now British patriots are objecting to the Dome because Japanese companies have been invited to invest in it. Even the people who would like to think that Britain is great are opposed to the biggest architectural initiative that has been seen in this country for a very long time. So here I am, in New Britain, on the brink of a new millennium, beset on all sides by the sort of small-mindedness that, I have to say, befits a nation of shopkeepers. Pardon me for being so blunt, but this is one Yank who cannot wait to go home.

**GREG PHIPPS** (born in Chicago)

Paddington, London

### YOU SAW IT HERE FIRST

Your Signs of the Times column (December/January) notes that the invitation to the seventeenth birthday party given by the 'fun-loving' home secretary for his son Will, contained the instruction 'no drink or drugs'. This could have served as a vital clue to those trying to identify the unnamed minister whose son was accused of drug-dealing in the run-up to Christmas. Since it must have been written back in November, it prompts me to marvel once again at the prescience of *LM's* far-sighted writers. If only they could apply the same foreknowledge to the 2.30 at Doncaster, *LM* might find itself on the same financial footing as ITN.

**MYSTIC MAG**

Coventry



## The what's NOT on guide

**SMACKED:** 'Cruddy, sad and pathetic' was the verdict of New Labour MP Barry Gardiner on the poster campaign for the Prodigy's single 'Smack My Bitch Up'. Backed by 15 New Labour MPs including Stephen Twigg and Oonagh King of the class of '97, Gardiner introduced an early day motion in the Commons calling on record company XL to withdraw the posters. Gardiner, who claimed he acted after his 10-year old daughter asked 'Daddy, what does that mean?', insisted 'I'm no prude. I bought "Je t'aime" 20 years ago'. What was that you were saying about sad and pathetic? **SAWN-OFF:** The video to accompany 'Temper Temper', the single from drum'n'bassman Goldie, was re-edited after the BBC, ITV and MTV banned the original for 'excessive violence'. The offending sequence shows an enraged Goldie threatening Noel Gallagher with a chainsaw (funny, we thought that was what the media wanted somebody to do to the 'loveable' Manc moptop). Further alterations were imposed by the Independent Television Commission because the video broke its ban on high-speed strobe images.

**PURITANICAL:** James Ferman, director of the British Board of Film Classification, was slammed by home secretary Jack Straw for certifying two porn videos (American import *Batbabe* and British-made *Ladies Behaving Badly*) with the new category Restricted 18. Ferman responded by accusing Straw of 'playing to the puritanical vote'. Coming from the censor-in-chief who has been happily cutting films and videos for nearly a quarter of a century under the watchful eye of the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Michael Howard, there could surely be no higher testimony to the narrow-mindedness of Straw's New Labour. **ABSOLUTELY NOT:** After Michael Kennedy and pop-singer-turned-politician Sonny Bono died in skiing accidents, Absolut Vodka withdrew the advert which mentioned a ski resort and depicted a bottle of the Swedish hard stuff encased in plaster. **INFANTILE:** An American psychologist warned mums and dads not to let their children go into Santa's grotto because separation from their parents might traumatise infants under 18 months, while older ones would be confused by suddenly being told to talk to a stranger. British charity Kidscape advised parents to avoid any such eventuality by going in to see Santa with their children and sitting on his other knee. **THUMBING HIS NOSE FLUTE:** Paul Gascoigne of Glasgow Rangers was fined two weeks' wages (approx £40 000) and forced to apologise after he stood in front of Celtic fans at the New Year Old Firm derby and imitated a flute player in an Orange marching band—a gesture now interpreted as 'incitement to riot'. Gazza's appalling imitation of a fit footballer in training for the World Cup finals went unpunished.

A live version of the What's Not On Guide will be on at the *LM/ICA* Free Speech festival, 28 February to 1 March 1998.

## WE WELCOME READERS' VIEWS AND CRITICISMS

Write to The Editor, *LM*, BM InformInc, London WC1N 3XX  
fax (0171) 278 9844.

Letters may be edited for clarity and length

# WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

*Worried about whether your priest is a pervert or your doctor's a dirty old man? Welcome to the world of 'stranger danger', says Frank Furedi*

**W**e all know that you cannot trust politicians and second hand car dealers. But what happens when you cannot have faith in your doctor, teacher or even your priest or psychotherapist?

Today we live in an era of institutionalised mistrust. Not a day goes by without another sordid tale of some professional abusing the trust that has been placed in him or her.

One day we hear stories about Catholic priests exposed for abusing young children. The next day reports filter through about a doctor accused of harassing patients in his surgery, or a gynaecologist taking liberties in the examination room. Attention then shifts to the case of a university professor charged with indecently assaulting two of his female students, while an army sergeant is accused of bullying young recruits in his charge.

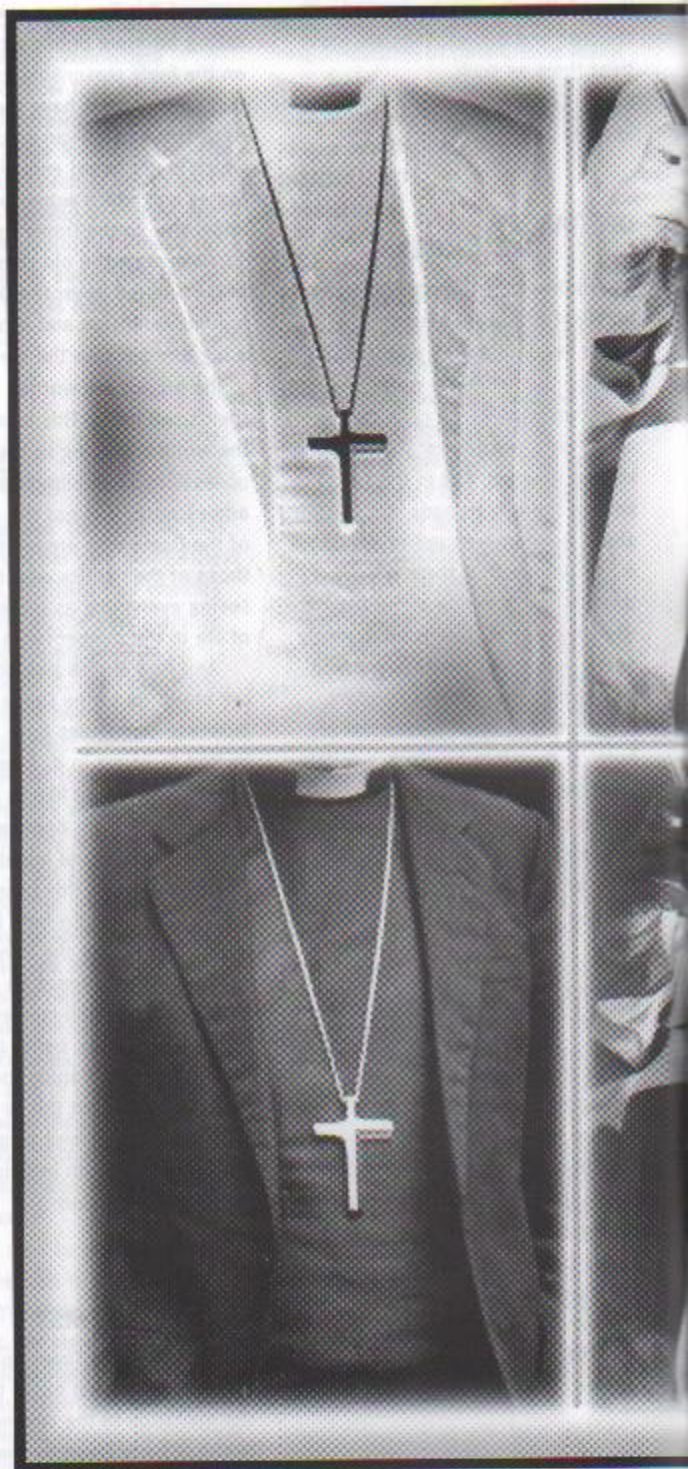
And if you are traumatised by your experience at the hands of these professionals, it seems you should be careful of seeking professional help for the problem. Not even counsellors can claim to be above suspicion. It was recently reported that unscrupulous employers have used the company's free counselling services to spy on their staff. Meanwhile, the British Psychological Society indicates that there has been a rising tide of sexual abuse claims made against its members.

The theme of abuse has become one of the most distinctive features of contemporary culture. If abusers wearing dog collars are now seen to prey on unsuspecting parishioners, the question that comes to mind is 'who can you trust?'

The expectation of abuse now informs many kinds of human relationship. Consequently, people tend to regard others with the kind of suspicion that would have been rare not so very long ago. Parents wonder whether the nursery workers looking after their children can be trusted. In schools, children with bruises are apt to arouse the suspicion of teachers about what their parents have been doing. For their part, parents wonder whether the cuddling of their children by teachers is entirely innocent. Such mistrust also extends to relatives and neighbours.

Mistrust has transformed our world, into a world of strangers. And strangers have become equated with danger. In a world of 'stranger-danger', children as young as three and four, who have been 'sensitised' to be 'aware', are growing up with the principle of mistrust deeply embedded in their imagination. No wonder that, in the run-up to Christmas 1997, the shopping mall Santas reported that many toddlers were terrified when told to sit on a strange man's knee and accept a gift in the grotto.

This climate of suspicion has created a culture where Neighbourhood Watch literally means watching your neighbours. Professionals have been in the forefront of advocating new methods of surveillance. Last summer, a top forensic dentist urged members of the British Dental Association to look for signs of abuse while examining the mouths of young patients. Hospital security has emerged as a central issue for health professionals. Such concern extends from protecting new-born babies from potential kidnappers, to keeping an electronic eye out for hospital staff deliberately hurting their patients or parents deliberately hurting their children in hospital.



At a recent meeting of the British Psychological Society, one clinical psychologist proposed that consultations with therapists should be taped to protect the safety of the patients. 'There is no logical reason why patients should not have the right to hold their own video or audio tape cassette to take to and from therapy sessions', argued David Pilgrim.

Institutions and professional associations have responded to the erosion of their moral authority by enacting new codes of conduct for their members. The military, the medical and legal professions, higher education, parliament, the church, even the scouting movement have all been forced to take steps to regulate and police the conduct of their members.

The main aim of the new codes of practice is to maintain or restore trust in the institutions concerned. Documents published recently by the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches all express anxiety about the effect of negative publicity on the loyalty of their members. 'Healing the





ILLUSTRATION: ICE

Wound of Child Sexual Abuse: A Church Response', published by the Catholic Church, warns that unless decisive action is taken 'members will cease to attend any services, others may move away'. The same point is echoed by the Methodist Church in its 'Report on Sexual Harassment and Abuse', which concludes that firm steps should be taken to prevent the loss of 'credibility and authority in the eyes of the world'. Otherwise the church 'may also begin to lose members'.

The new codes of conduct drawn up by the churches seek to establish and formalise boundaries between what is considered appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. They warn priests and vicars against over-involvement, physical contact and displays of affection. Their focus is on situations to be avoided. Visiting somebody alone at home late at night is discouraged. Ministers are advised to pay attention to the 'atmosphere of the place of meeting'.

These codes of conduct parallel the approach now routinely adopted by other professions, perhaps most strikingly in the university sector. Some university lecturers and doctors now keep their door open during one to one consultations. Others regularly keep written records of such encounters to protect themselves from any future complaints.

It could be argued that the practices institutionalised by new codes of conduct are sensible and long overdue. But whatever the merits or otherwise of such precautions, they are unlikely to restore trust. Indeed so far as the spread of mistrust in our society is concerned, they are more likely to make matters worse. People who enter pastoral or professional relationships with a presentiment of mistrust, expecting to be abused in some way or another, are more likely to have their worst suspicions confirmed.

The explosion of harassment and abuse litigation in the USA indicates that the attempt to codify appropriate forms of human behaviour actually feeds mistrust. Something changes when mistrust becomes institutionalised. Take the example of the Church of England's 'Code of Ministerial Practice'.

The code provides instructions on the minutiae of correct behaviour. It urges the clergymen not to meet young women late at night, not to drink while working and not to sit too close to parishioners when offering solace or advice. The code warns priests to use 'appropriate bodily posture'. It also offers useful tips on the 'arrangement of lighting and furniture' and about where to sit when visited by a parishioner.

It all sounds very sensitive and ethical. But this code, with its anticipation of clerical misbehaviour, really represents an acknowledgement of moral defeat. By treating vicars as potential abusers in advance, the Church of England has all but acknowledged that it has no claim to unquestioned moral authority, that its ministers cannot be seen as any better than the basest groper. The very meaning of a pastoral relationship becomes redefined when the parishioner's dealings with the priest are regulated through a bureaucratic code based on the supposition of mistrust.

And what happens to the doctor-patient relationship, when the therapeutic session is recorded on camera? An interaction that is monitored involves a range of complex calculations that bear less and less on the problems of the individuals directly involved. A session in the surgery can easily become less about sorting out the patient's health problems and more to do with making sure that the new rules of doctor-patient etiquette are not infringed. It is questionable whether these new arrangements will reduce instances of abuse of power. They will most certainly help to create a climate where creative interaction between the parties will be eliminated by a made-to-order formula.

The attempt to minimise painful experience through a careful regulation of professional practices is having damaging consequences. It means that the expectation that things will turn out for the worse is allowed to set the norm for our daily encounters. The problems such regulations raise may well be worse than those which they were designed to solve.

Human beings need somebody to trust. If not the politicians, then our spiritual leaders. If not the priests then the therapists and counsellors. And if even they are not above suspicion, we are left with the most destructive of conclusions—that we can trust nobody, and consequently we cannot even trust ourselves.

Frank Furedi is a sociologist at the University of Kent at Canterbury, and the author of *The Culture of Fear*, published by Cassell

# A RISK-FREE ENVIRONMENT IS BAD FOR OUR HEALTH

says Roger Bate, director of science watchdog the European Science and Environment Forum

**T**hese days the surest sign that a society is affluent is its susceptibility to scares. By every objective measure, such as infant mortality and life expectancy, the British are healthier today and exposed to fewer and lesser hazards than ever in our history. Yet, because we live longer and have more leisure time, we have the luxury of contemplating those remaining hazards.

Environmental organisations and health groups have fed on this concern to promote a particular interpretation of the EU Treaty of Rome's precautionary principle. This is a proposition that technologies and products should not be permitted until we know they pose no danger. The principle has become the categorical imperative of the new health and environmental fascists: thou shalt not tolerate even the risk of a risk.

A UK government review of the dangers from breast implants is due to be completed soon, at about the same time as a review of passive smoking. These reviews were motivated by surveys and precautionary rhetoric, from health lobbies including the Cancer Research Campaign, designed to alarm people about silicone implants and cigarettes.

According to the editor of the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*, Marcia Angell, the public has problems 'in thinking in terms of probabilities, or in acknowledging the possibility of coincidence'. Research, she says, has consistently failed to find a link between silicone and disease. Yet, women who have implants get sick, but, in a typical study, 'the implant group was no more likely to develop connective tissue disease than the group without implants'. Nevertheless, the public is willing to believe the media's simplified exaggerations. For example, in the USA jurors have sided with plaintiffs, and have put Dow Corning, a company producing gel implants, out of business. Now, if Dow Corning was producing defective products,

of course it should be sued and potentially bankrupted, but on such flimsy evidence thousands of jobs have been lost.

For women who have had mastectomies there will probably be less chance of corrective surgery, because few companies would take up the poisoned chalice and try to develop and improve silicone gel implants after the destruction of Dow Corning. Baroness Jay, in charge of the implant review, should think about these women

a press release from minister Tessa Jowell, announcing that these 'shocking figures' had reaffirmed the government's commitment to 'tobacco control'. Segregation of smoking in pubs was immediately announced, and banning sales to under-18s soon followed. Further actions are likely, and, if the Wald figure is accurate, would be supportable. However, the figure is extremely misleading.

According to Robert Nilsson, a senior toxicologist at the Swedish



**WARNING  
HAZCHEM**

before succumbing to the urge to ban.

The picture with tobacco is even worse. A central argument behind designs to extend tobacco regulation is that smoking harms non-smokers. There would be wide support, from me included, for this regulation, if passive smoking were shown to be harmful and not just a nuisance. However, until that evidence is presented, the loss of freedom to the one in three people who smoke would be unacceptable.

The review of passive smoking being undertaken by the UK government is relying heavily on the work of professor Nicholas Wald from the Royal London School of Medicine. Wald and his colleagues recently published a paper in the *British Medical Journal* on the impact of passive smoking on lung cancer rates. They estimated that there was an increased risk of 24 per cent. The report was accompanied by

National Chemicals Inspectorate and Professor of Toxicology at Stockholm University, the paper performs a 'statistical trick'. He says that there are so many biases in Wald's analysis that the alleged elevated risk figure is meaningless. For example, Wald relies on data from the memories of spouses as to how much their former (dead) partners used to smoke. Recall survey bias is often considerable (potentially far higher than the 24 per cent estimate of increased risk) but is not even mentioned by the authors. Nilsson also explains that Wald pooled studies, which were not comparable, to increase the sample size, and hence exaggerated the statistical significance of his results. His most stinging criticism, however, is left for the *BMJ* editorial board, whom he insists must be 'innocent of epidemiology' ever to have published the paper in its existing form.



Nevertheless, like breast implant damage, the media now believes in cancer-causing passive smoking. Consequently, the public accepts it as fact, and focus group responses (the backbone of New Labour policymaking) are broadly in favour of banning smoking in public places and in work environments. An ill-conceived combination of precautionary approach and media hype has led to this unwarranted state of affairs.

Precautionary action not based on sound scientific data could lead to product bans in other areas. For what starts with silicon

However, it should be remembered that DDT was cheap to produce and replaced older arsenic-based pesticides which were fatal to humans and toxic to the environment. It also rid large parts of Africa and Asia of mosquito-borne diseases like malaria and typhus. DDT now lays unused in less developed countries due to the adoption of the Western perception of risk, while the World Health Organisation reports that malaria is killing nearly three million people a year world-wide. Importantly, the effects of DDT have been reversible: otter and eagle populations have recovered. And, as we learn more, so products become more benign. The replacements for DDT were far less harmful to the environment.

According to Bruce Ames, Professor of Biochemistry at Berkeley University of California, without pesticides there would be pressure to cultivate more land, potentially reducing biodiversity and, crucially, food would be much more expensive. A poor diet (low in pesticide-protected fruits and vegetables) is a far greater and more immediate health hazard than ingesting pesticide residues ever could be, and the poor would suffer most from dearer fresh produce. Ames concludes that



perceived dangers from pesticides. Yet they seem reluctant to acknowledge this silver lining to the biotech cloud.

The public, on the other hand, has proved willing to acknowledge this trade-off. In a recent study, Richard Braun, Professor of Microbiology at the University of Berne, Switzerland, showed that Swiss public acceptance for genetically modified maize was very low until it was pointed out that less pesticides would be used on modified maize than on conventional maize. Once the unknown risks of genetic manipulation were compared with the perceived risks of pesticide use, the public was happier to accept the new technology along with the possibility of irreversible harm, rather than pay a high price for not having that technology.

Of course new technologies bring new hazards, but they also usually replace older technologies which were more harmful. Filter-tip low-tar cigarettes, are far less harmful than their predecessors. Toxic arsenic pesticides were replaced by non-toxic DDT, which was replaced by more environment-friendly pesticides—and now genetic resistant plants are slowly making even these pesticides redundant. A precautionary principle that balances costs and benefits is fine, but one that is a principle of immobility and technological stagnation is a real risk. ●

## The risk from **USING PESTICIDES** is far lower than the risk from not using them

and tobacco may swiftly move to alcohol, fatty foods, sexual practices or other favourite pastimes—fast cars perhaps.

In the environmental field a good illustration of the precautionary principle at work is the debate on pesticides. Many environmentalists point out that the adverse effects of a pesticide like DDT did not emerge until years after it was first used. Although not harmful to humans it accumulated up the food chain until it killed carnivorous predators such as otters and eagles. Because we did not foresee this problem, they argue, we should ban today's pesticides whose effects tomorrow we also cannot predict. Indeed, Danish officials, under constant lobbying from Denmark's powerful environmental movement, are discussing the possibility of banning all pesticides.

'the risk from using pesticides is far lower than the risk from not using them'.

This balancing act cuts no ice with the environmentalists. All that appears to matter to them is whether a substance or technology may do harm. The campaign against genetic research for the bio-food markets bears these hallmarks. According to the Green precautionary position, foods such as melons and maize genetically modified to resist pests may have indefinable and irreversible consequences on ecosystems. Most scientists accept that there is a tiny risk of altered genes reaching the environment, and that a tiny percentage of these could be harmful. However, genetically altered crops need less pesticide as they are resistant to many pests. So advances in biotechnology should please environmentalists for reducing the

Roger Bate is the editor of *What Risk?: Science, Politics and Public Health*, published by Butterworth Heinemann



# TABOOS

*Silicone implants: what's all the fuss about, asks Jo Sedley*

## MAKING MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLE HILLS

**H**ere is a 1990s paradox. Mattel, the makers of the ever-popular plastic Barbie doll, are planning to give her a more 'realistic' figure: in other words, a smaller chest. Meanwhile real-life girlies such as Pamela Anderson Lee, Melinda Messenger and Paula Yates are going under the knife to give themselves an altogether less 'realistic' shape, with larger-than-life silicone boobs. Why?

An estimated two million women in the UK and the USA have undergone breast augmentation surgery. Many do it to feel more confident about and satisfied with their appearance. For some, breast enlargement can also be an astute financial move. There is gold in them there hills, and it is more than likely that once somebody like Pandora Peaks has made her mega bucks revealing her mega bust she will have the implants removed.

For the first time it is possible to get bigger, reasonably lifelike breasts. The operation costs around £4000, you can be back at home on the same day, the bruising goes after a few weeks and in the majority of cases all you are left with is a hairline scar under the breast. For women not altogether content with 'what God gave them', it all seems too good to be true.

But all is not well in silicone valley. As the popularity of breast augmentation grows, so do the fears of possible medical problems. For every picture of a smiling Melinda Messenger there seems to be a story of a woman whose health has been ruined by silicone implants. Elaine Coomber, from the Breast Implant Support Group, told me that she started suffering serious side effects just three years after she received her implants in 1976. Her health problems

include crippling pain and swelling in the arms and joints, partial blindness, dizziness and fatigue.

Silicone implants have been accused of causing a wide range of health disorders: cancer, urinary problems, swallowing difficulties and even smaller children at birth. The most widely publicised health risk to date links silicone to connective tissue diseases (CTD) including rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus, and also autoimmune diseases. These pathological problems are reported to occur when the silicone gel contents leak into the surrounding tissue and into the bloodstream and lymph nodes. Leaking occurs due to small amounts seeping through the silicone shell (bleeding) or to a larger extent due to a rupture.

A recent review in the *Lancet* medical journal about the prevalence of ruptures claimed that 'the proportion of patients who could expect to have both implants intact was 89 per cent after eight years and 51 per cent by 12 years, but only five per cent after 20 years'. (Lori Brown *et al*, 22 November 1997). The review described how silicone is thought to migrate to various parts of the body including the chest, ribs, upper arm, biceps, elbow and hand. This would

back up Elaine Coomber's story of having lumps of silicone removed from her neck and arm.

As a result of the growing concern about the side effects of breast implants, some women who have already had the op are beginning to panic. The extent of these fears is summed up by Jenny Jones, an American TV chat show host with breast implants: 'Not a day goes by that I don't wonder how my exposure to silicone is affecting my health. With every ache, every pain, the question arises: Is it the silicone?'

In the USA, silicone survivors' support groups successfully lobbied the US government Food and Drug Administration for a ban on silicone gel implants for breast augmentation operations, which came into force in April 1992. They have also successfully sued the silicone implant manufacturers for compensation, obtaining over \$4.25 billion in pay-outs. In the UK, New Labour health minister Baroness Jay is leading an inquiry into the safety of silicone, with special emphasis on the feelings and stories of the silicone support groups.

Silicone's days, it seems, are numbered and for the small-chested women who desperately want a larger bosom, the future looks bleak. But how scientific is the basis for a ban on silicone implants?

For all the furore about silicone, thorough and extensive scientific research—23 studies to date—have, on the whole, found no proof that breast implants lead to illness. A report of the

PHOTO: DAVID CHAPMAN

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SHIEN

## Breast behaviour

Barbie Girl: 'Life in Plastic... It's Fantastic.'

Barbie Girl:  
'Life in Plastic...  
It's Fantastic.'

largest study to date in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* stated that: 'The major contribution of this and other observational analytical studies has been to exclude large risks of connective tissue diseases following breast implants.' (Hennekens *et al*, 28 February 1996). This study did find a small risk, but the authors admitted that this finding was dubious due to the high chance of the overemphasis of symptoms and over reporting by affected women.

The high rupture rates of breast implants that were quoted in the *Lancet* review last year have been questioned by other experts who point out that these figures were taken from a highly selective sample—women who wanted their implants removed. Other studies have found much lower rupture rates of five per cent (letters, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 10 October 1996). ▶



## Some would rather have us settling for what we have been 'given'

◀ In fact, the weight of scientific and medical evidence has been ignored, especially in America. As Dr Deborah Del De Junco puts it, 'despite the remarkable agreement showing little to no increased risk of the established CTDs the breast implant controversy has gained its own inexorable momentum' (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, 28 May 1997). Marcia Angell, editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* argues that 'there are many individual stories of CTD developing after the placement of breast implants but these reports alone are not enough. Anecdotes do not constitute evidence that the implants caused the disease' (*Science on Trial: The Clash of Medical Evidence and the Law in the Breast Implant Case*, 1996).

When the evidence that silicone implants can be harmful is so scant, how has the campaign against silicone implants gathered enough momentum to bring about a ban? One important reason, it seems to me, is that the exaggerated medical fears about silicone provide a convenient means of support for those who really object to implants on moral grounds: they simply believe that it is ethically wrong for women to enlarge their breasts. Not everybody appreciates the 'man made' curves of a Pamela Anderson Lee or Melinda Messenger. Feminist campaigners in particular have led the way in condemning supermodels, fashion magazines and plastic surgeons for perpetuating an 'ideal' image of beautiful women, and have insisted that women should learn to be content with 'the way they are'. In opting for artificially bigger breasts, they argue, women are giving in to pressure and conforming to a stereotyped image of the big-boobed sex object, created by a male-dominated society.

In her influential book *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf compares the effects of boosting your boobs to the eighteenth century procedure of clitoridectomy. To her, women are not making autonomous choices about ways to improve their looks, they are being pressurised into surgery: 'modern surgeons claim they make women feel better, and that, no doubt, is true; Victorian middle class women had so internalised the idea of their sexuality as diseased that the gynaecologists [removing the clitoris] were "answering their prayers."' In other words, society forces women to mutilate themselves for the benefit of men, and plastic surgeons, far

from responding to women's choices, are simply playing their role in perpetuating the 'beauty myth'.

There is now often an assumption that women are being manipulated into self-mutilation by the selfish will of men. Early last year, rumours that the bad boy of British football, Paul Gascoigne, had insisted his wife have breast enlargements were met with outrage by women's health groups. This gave the campaigners an opportunity to get the entire Rangers team (not normally seen as a feminist stronghold) to sign footballs to raise money for the anti-silicone implants campaign. But can women's decisions to increase their cup size so easily be put down to the whims of bullying men? In 1996 alone, 5000 women in the UK had the breast augmentation operation—surely 5000 men were not responsible. Meanwhile, Sheryl Gascoigne's part in the decision to go ahead with the operation was ignored. (Given her new media career, it seems unlikely she will be handing the implants back to Gazza as part of their divorce settlement.) It was more convenient to believe that this was another example of uncaring men forcing their partners to have their breasts cut open.

Other commentators offer different takes on the 'irrationality' of women who have breast implants. Jojo Moyes, a journalist on the *Independent*, interprets the whole thing as some sort of terrible leftover from the eighties philosophy of style over content. 'Women who have had implants don't want to hear about potential side effects in the future: they want to feel better about themselves now', she writes, condemning the 'terrible mistakes' made by women who have gone for the operation. 'They don't care if it feels a bit different; they just care that it should look perfect. If they lose a bit of sensation, have trouble breast feeding or suffer the odd sleepless night from fear, isn't that a small price to pay?' (16 September 1997) Moyes may not blame men for women's decisions, but she echoes the dim view of women's

abilities to make reasonable life choices of their own.

In fact, there are many rational reasons why a woman might want silicone implants, just as there are many reasons why people feel inadequate: too fat, too thin, too small or too tall. Whatever your preference, real bosoms or bigger artificial ones, women should be allowed to have access to whatever technology is available. Some would rather have us settling for what we have been 'given'. But why should women have to settle for anything less than what they think is best for them?

There is no denying that there can be side effects to breast implants, like a hardening of the breast tissue. There are also women who are suffering from painful conditions. Whether these conditions are directly caused by silicone remains to be proven. Elaine Coomber has been recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. It is uncertain whether this alone has been the cause of her health problems, or whether the problems were also related to the breast implants. Further scientific research to find real evidence continues. A useful move by all those concerned about the medical side effects of silicone would be to present women thinking about having the 'op' with as much scientific fact and evidence as possible and let them decide after weighing up the pros and cons. This would at least credit them with the intelligence to make up their own minds about their own future.

What is not useful is having the discussion on silicone turned into an emotional and irrational panic. Nor is it positive to portray women like Sheryl Gascoigne as poor, helpless victims dominated by their husbands. This can only encourage the authorities to treat women as fragile and naive little flowers, unable to choose for themselves whether to go ahead with breast enlargements or not. Governments can then take it upon themselves to decide for us, as they have done in the USA, Canada and Australia where the use of silicone gel implants is banned whether women want them or not. Such 'victories' only reinforce the view that women are vulnerable weaklings living in fear of male disapproval, and in need of protection by big brother of the breast implant police.

I have to admit that reports that Dolly Parton has decided to have six different implants, each one increasing in size, sound bizarre and ridiculous, and in some cases it has seemed that the bigger the enhanced cup size, the smaller the natural talent. But then again we can't all sing and dance. ●



ANN BRADLEY

# Breast behaviour in the House



When I was 14, the predictable surge of sex hormones resulted in what seemed like an overnight bosom. Not for me those charmingly neat little adolescent bee-stings that graced the chests of my friends. I mushroomed from a 34A bra to a 36DD in the course of a school term.

This was a source of much ribaldry among the boys in my class, especially as I was a bit of a tomboy with a reputation for being a mean goalie. One of my sharpest schoolday memories is the humiliation at discovering that one class wag with a sense of humour in inverse proportion to his imagination had started a 'find the dwarf competition'. The intention was that if I stood sideways and

their chests as if weighing melons', has been widely reported in the broadsheet press and has even featured in a TV documentary on Westminster women. 'They do it on purpose. It's just another tactic in the battle and they will use anything, and men have always done that, when they feel threatened by women', explains Jane Griffiths, the new Labour MP for Reading East.

But if 'the lads' have always been prone to such bad behaviour, why are the women MPs making such an issue of it now? The fact that there are more women on the floor of the House may make ribald comments more likely but you would expect the women to feel strength in numbers. Why do they not simply

And heaven knows, they need some way to sustain the myth that the New Labour MPs are doing anything to promote the interests of women.

The myth that women in parliament represent the interests of their women constituents has never been more transparent. The overwhelming majority of Blair's babes voted with the government to slash single parent benefit—a move that will further impoverish some of the most vulnerable women in the country. The intervention of New Labour women in response to proposals to restrict disability benefits has been either unreported or non-existent.

Yet their complaints about sexual innuendo have featured in the pages of the *New York Times*. It would be comforting to think that the swollen ranks of Labour women could be relied upon to spearhead the campaign to keep contraception free, in the face of recent suggestions that a prescription charge should be introduced—but I wouldn't bank on it. The women who are so offended by unconstructed men are far too intimidated to defy their party's whips.

In the week that Clare Short and her colleagues went public on the disgraceful behaviour of men in 'the House', I was amused to read an account by Labour veteran, Gwyneth Dunwoody. She was telling of her intervention in the debates on abortion law reform in the 1960s and revelled in anecdotes of how she, and her colleagues, would heckle and jeer their opponents and use any tactic they could think of to put them off their stride. To her, the end—legal abortion—justified the means. Perhaps in the 1960s Dunwoody's opponents were more gentlemanly, or perhaps she was sufficiently committed to a cause not to care. Perhaps Blair's babes should simply toughen up and start denouncing their colleagues for their policy decisions. But then, of course, they can't do that because these New Labour women really do find remarks about breasts more offensive than attacks on the poor.

## The overwhelming majority of Blair's babes voted to cut one-parent benefit

a small person could be found to stand under my tits we could block the goalmouth entirely. Hilarious, or what? My nickname, which had—for some long forgotten reason—been Jock, changed to Buster, Melons or Chesty.

So, on one level I can quite understand the irritation felt by the new female MPs faced by benches of their male colleagues, who seem to have been infected for life by that particular public school humour which means that any mention or sight of breasts—even concealed under clothes—is a cue for 'bad behaviour'. Blair's babes' distress that women members rising to speak are greeted by male colleagues 'with hands cupped in front of

develop a quick line of riposte. Any heavy-breasted 14 year old will be able to suggest some appropriate counter retorts to unwelcome remarks. Perhaps a verbal harassment advisory committee could be established to help those women MPs who are unable to think of their own response.

The New Labour women would like us to think that their protests are an indication that they will not tolerate any slight towards women. The House, we are supposed to believe, is being transformed from an old-fashioned boys club which defended the interests of men into a women-friendly 'inclusive' environment which takes women's concerns seriously.

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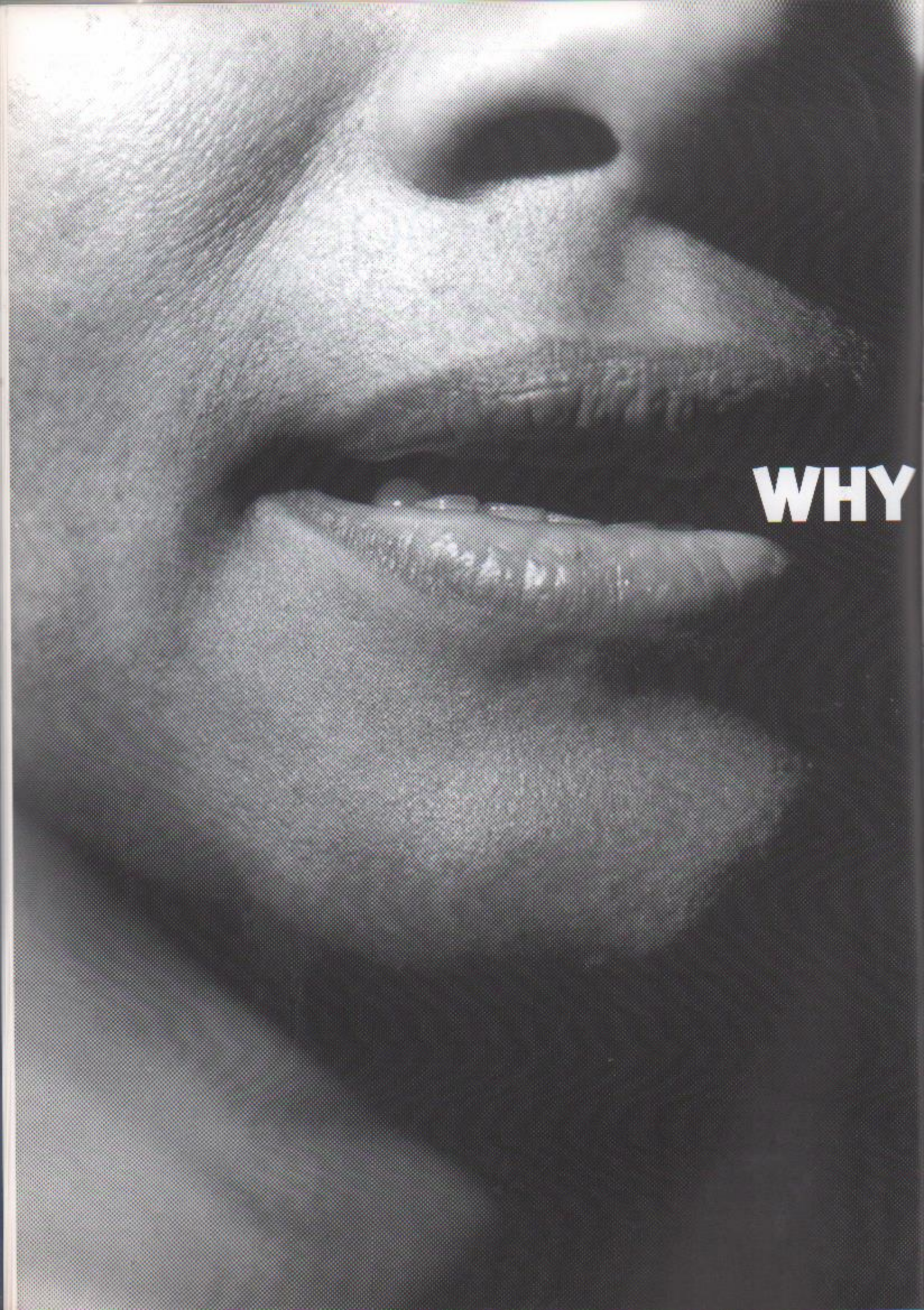
Privacy laws and paparazzi, Prodigy lyrics and pictures of Myra Hindley, smoking on the screen and porn on the Net; in the late nineties are the calls for bans and restraints the inevitable consequence of a media free-for-all?

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Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words will never hurt you. Or will they? Freedom of speech rests on the idea that in themselves, words can never be a bad thing. As long as we are all free to judge for ourselves the importance of what is being said, then words should never be banned.

Speech is privileged in modern democracies. There is no other kind of action which is almost unregulated. 'Almost' because conservatives have always sought to undermine this important right, with special laws against obscenity, sedition and defamation. But the censors have had to contend with the opposition of civil libertarians, who insist that there should be no restrictions on freedom of speech.

The comparatively liberal attitude towards free speech depends on an important intuition, contained in the children's doggerel 'words will never hurt you'. As long as there is freedom of discussion and debate, and the opportunity exists to challenge and rebut false or mistaken ideas, then only good can come of words.

More recently, though, the principle that words can never hurt you has come under attack. Some say words can hurt—

speech separable from conduct and from the consequences that come in conduct's wake, there is no such speech and therefore nothing for the first amendment to protect.' Fish is saying that all speech, unless it is just unimportant (like 'Hyde Park Corner or a call-in talk show'), has consequences. And if it has consequences then it should be regulated, like any other activity. The argument that 'words will never hurt you' is wrong, Fish thinks, because it does not take words seriously.

Fish's argument sounds persuasive, but actually it is absurd. The argument that 'words can never hurt you' does not imply that words are without consequence, or that they are unimportant. After all, if words are not serious then why would we even bother defending them?

The point is that it is not words that hurt you, or help you. It is the people who act on those words. And those people are free to give them the weight that they deserve. Words are serious, not because they have any direct effect in their own right, but because words, and the ideas contained in them, are all we have to weigh up our own decisions, their likely effects, and our own responsibilities.

One American critic complained about Catharine Mackinnon's argument that porn leads inexorably to rape, that her mind is 'one long slippery slope'. He meant that Mackinnon slipped effortlessly from words to their consequences without seeing any distinction between them. It is worth asking, what is the distinction between words and their effects? What are the steps that Mackinnon has chiselled away at to create a slippery slope between pornography and rape?

We are. We people, with minds of our own, with the ability to judge between a good idea and a bad one, we are the distinction between words and their consequences. Words have consequences only if we choose to give them consequences. It is not the words themselves that cause things to happen, but our estimation of the value, and truth, of those words.

Mackinnon uses the example of the attack dog given the command 'kill'. It is true that any court of law would convict a man who set his dog on somebody else, because a dog can be a weapon, just like a knife or a gun. But if the same man said 'kill the niggers' and somebody else then did so, he could not be convicted of murder. Why? Because men are not attack dogs. Tell your dog to kill, and it has no choice in the matter. Tell somebody else they should kill and the case is quite different. Between your words and the act stands another, free human being, with a mind of his own, an ability to judge between right and wrong, and a responsibility to face up to his own actions.

Neither Mackinnon nor Fish understand the meaning of freedom of speech. They do not understand that making speech free says nothing in itself about the worth, or lack of it, of any words, sentences or ideas. In making speech free it is not words that are elevated to a high moral status. It is people. Freedom of speech is often misunderstood to be a gift to every crackpot orator or demagogue with an axe to grind. But the truth is the opposite. The people who are really empowered by free speech are not the speakers, but the audience. Free speech puts a premium on the decision-making ability of each of us to weigh up all the arguments and draw our own conclusions. Far from assisting prejudice, free speech exposes prejudice to its most demanding test: contradiction, debate and rebuttal, or even more exacting, ridicule and indifference.

Neither Fish nor Mackinnon understand free speech because the very idea that you should trust other people is alien to them. To Mackinnon, men are 'attack dogs'. She discounts the idea that people can judge for themselves by challenging 'try arguing with an orgasm', and saying 'a stiff prick turns the mind to shit'. It is ironic that this feminist should so faithfully reproduce the excuse of every third rate sex-offender—'I just couldn't help myself'. Her desire to restrict free expression arises from her innate distrust of her fellow men.

# HATE SPEECH?

*Words can never hurt you, but banning them always will, says James Heartfield*

'hate speech' like nigger, cunt, queer, spastic—and that these words should be restricted. This time the fiercest opponents of free speech are not old-fashioned conservatives. They are feminist authors and academics, radical lawyers and journalists.

The central claim of today's critics of free speech is that words do hurt groups such as women, black people, homosexuals and the disabled. Name-calling is not something that you can shrug off, it is argued, when you are already disadvantaged in society. Words that incite people to racial violence, words that put women 'in their place', words that project harmful stereotypes of lesbians and gays, or of the disabled—these words are not only words, they are oppressive and vicious. Free speech, they say, should never become a license for racism, sexism or any other kind of oppression.

According to feminist lawyer Catharine Mackinnon words, and images, hurt. She wants to revoke the first amendment to the US Constitution which guarantees freedom of expression. Mackinnon is concerned with pornography. She says that pornography is rape, literally. She means that pornographic photographs are coerced sexual acts, but also that pornography leads people to commit rape, as surely as the command 'kill' leads an attack dog to kill. As Mackinnon argues it, there is no separation between the 'command'—in this case pornographic material that portrays women as objects of men's domination—and the act, the act of domination itself.

The first amendment to the American Constitution is one of the clearest expressions of freedom of speech. It is unequivocal: 'Congress shall make no law...abridging freedom of speech.' As a consequence, the first amendment has been an important symbolic barrier to restrictions upon free speech. It has also become the main target of those in the USA who believe that speech should be restricted. Other countries have had important debates about free speech, but none has seen the battle-lines drawn so clearly.

American cultural critic Stanley Fish has been in the forefront of the argument to restrict free speech. His book *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech* is subtitled 'and it's a good thing too'. The book is required reading for Britain's New Labour MPs, who cite it more often than they read it, to support their case for restricting free speech.

Stanley Fish argues that the first amendment is defunct. 'Insofar as the point of the first amendment is to identify

New Hampshire, 1942). The idea is that people are easily provoked to breach the peace by inflammatory insults. Even Britain's law against incitement to racial violence is less people-friendly than it at first appears. It was passed in the belief that, unlike the supposedly enlightened authorities, 'ordinary people' were ignorant enough to be susceptible to the appeal of agitators of the far-right.

There is a continuity between today's opponents of free speech and the conservative tradition on censorship.

There is also an important difference, however.

Nobody argues today that freedom of speech should be restricted in order to defend the privileged orders. Instead, the argument is that free speech must be curbed in order to defend the weak and the defenceless.

The new arguments for banning 'hate speech' and 'offensive' words indicate a real shift in the way that people think that racial, sexual and other insults can best be challenged. Today it is generally held that other people are unreliable allies in the struggle against abusive behaviour. Instead, state regulation is looked to as the best defence against oppression.

It is interesting to compare our modern sensibilities with those of the American colonists who drafted the first amendment to the US Constitution enshrining free speech. Those early pioneers

looked on the state with considerable distrust, and on each other as potential allies in the struggle for justice. Their common experience of challenging the oppressive rule of the British, nurtured in them a healthy distrust of the state, and a correspondingly positive attitude to one another. That attitude is expressed in the first amendment through the premium it places on the people and the restraint it places upon the state.

Today things are moving in the opposite direction. Our attitudes to each other are infected with a powerful sense of distrust. The danger we perceive comes not from an oppressive state, but from the implicit violence and disrespect we expect from our fellow men and women. Respect for the state itself is not high. But the broad distrust we have for government is outweighed by our fears of each other. It is a modern irony that the state is unpopular in general, but not so distrusted that we are prevented from calling for ever greater state regulation of everyday life.

New moves to introduce censorship laws on harassment,

#### Stanley

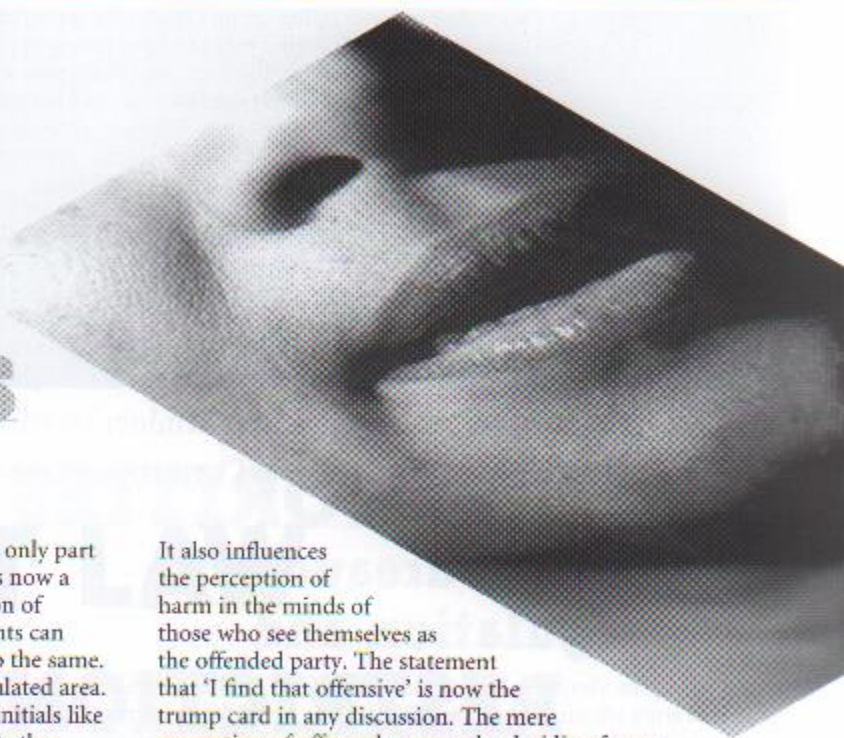
Fish is equally disdainful of the idea that people are the best judge of right and wrong. An unsung hero of free speech, professor Cushing Strout is traduced in the afterword to Fish's essay for wanting to 'shift the responsibility for approving or disapproving to the free choice of free individuals'. Fish cites this argument as if it were beneath his dignity to answer it, saying only that 'minds are not free' because 'the outcome of deliberation cannot help being influenced by whatever notions are current in the culture'. It is a mark of how far things have gone that Fish thinks free will is just a joke, and that it is self evident that we are just automatons acting at the behest of our culture. Quite why Stanley Fish thinks that the censors would not be influenced by the cultural norms that they defend remains a mystery.

At bottom these critics of free speech are making a judgement about their fellow men and women. If you hold the idea that men are just slaves of their genitalia, or that people are slaves to their culture then clearly it would be absurd to permit freedom of expression. But conversely, if you believe that people are capable of rationality and responsibility then freedom of expression makes perfect sense.

In some respects, the modern case for censorship echoes traditional conservative arguments about sedition and incitement. Conservatives were always preoccupied with a fear of the mob. Ancient restrictions on freedom of speech reflect the concern that radicals could inflame the mob with seditious propaganda. That prejudice combined a disdain for the real grievances and concerns of the mass of people, with an instinct to 'round-up the ring leaders'.

The more contemporary versions of the case against free speech share the old elites' disdain for the masses. Past laws that today's critics of free speech appeal to are generally versions of this reactionary fear of the 'irrational mob'. Such, for example, is the famous US court ruling that speech which incites violence is not really speech at all, but 'fighting words', and so unprotected by the first amendment (*Chaplinsky v*

# A greater sensitivity to INSULT casts us all in the role of COMPLAINERS



A Holocaust revisionism, incitement and privacy are only part of the story. Alongside the legal framework there is now a much greater quasi-legal, or bureaucratic regulation of speech. College campus codes regulate what students can say to each other, workplace codes of behaviour do the same. Not surprisingly the media is the most heavily regulated area. A proliferation of parastatal bodies with ominous initials like the ITC, BSC, BBFC, ASA and PCC exist to regulate the newspapers and television programmes.

All of these institutions are able to present themselves as 'complaint-driven'. Rather than just descending from on high like the Lord Chancellor censoring the theatre, they respond to complaints from members of the public. In practice, of course, such complaints are carefully solicited and orchestrated, according to the preoccupations of the relevant authority. Leeds University's Code of Conduct forbids harassment, adding that 'harassment shall be defined by the victim'. The official rulings against television programmes, newspaper articles and advertisements are always made in the name of some offended viewer. In fact the numbers of these complaints are pitifully low compared with the viewing and circulation figures of the articles and programmes concerned. No matter. It is the voice of complaint that is empowered by these bodies.

Complaint gives these institutions the authority to act.

The effect on public discussion has rightly been described as 'chilling'. When everybody is looking over their shoulder to see who they might be offending, caution imbues every public statement. In this climate direct bans are largely unnecessary. Instead everybody gets their own little censor installed inside their heads as self-censorship becomes the order of the day.

There are so many things that just cannot be said that direct censorship only comes into play as a weapon of last resort.

This insidious kind of censorship is not only an influence on what is said.

It also influences the perception of harm in the minds of those who see themselves as the offended party. The statement that 'I find that offensive' is now the trump card in any discussion. The mere perception of offence becomes the deciding factor. This is a process that encourages us to define ourselves as easily offended and to revel in our sensitivity to insult.

A greater sensitivity to insult casts us all in the role of complainers. Instead of seeing debate as an opportunity to state your case, nowadays the routine response to every controversy is the demand for a ban on offensive ideas. And, rather than attacking the roots of social problems, all eyes are on the attendant language. Images and words are invested with a magical power over us.

The story is told of the primitive people who had a mortal fear of their photograph being taken. In this, possibly apocryphal, tale these aboriginals thought that having your image taken was the same thing as having your soul taken from you. To those with a less grounded sense of personality, control of the image is confused with control over the man, and his circumstances. More remarkable is that we today should be returning to this primitive state, where control over somebody's image, over the label attached to them, is seen as equivalent to control over them in fact.

The opponents of free speech argue that this freedom only helps the rich and powerful. It is a mockery, they say, to talk about freedom of speech when the means of communication, the press and television are in the hands of a few powerful men. How can you say that a single mother has the same right to free speech as Rupert Murdoch? There is an important point here. Equal rights before the law do not mean equal access to the media. To be free to do something is quite different from having the means to do it.

The difference between Rupert Murdoch and a single mother is not enshrined in the law. There is no act or regulation that says Murdoch is allowed to say what he likes, but she is not. There is no need for such a law. The difference is entirely situated in the social inequality wherein the newspaper magnate's ownership of the means of communication gives him a bigger voice.

The fallacy is that inequalities of social power can be redressed by restricting freedom of speech. Censorship will never balance the power of a Murdoch or of CNN's Ted Turner, no matter how well-intentioned it is. It is an underestimation of the power of the wealthy to think that rules and regulations will restrict their room to manoeuvre. On the contrary, any such restrictions will only be turned to their advantage, as an army of lawyers gets to work to reinterpret the rules.

According to the pressure group Liberty, the law against harassment, brought in on the pretext of protecting women from persecution by stalkers, has been used principally against protesters. The Advertising Standards Authority has used regulations, designed to stop wealthy political parties from buying airtime, to prevent the charity Christian Aid from calling for the cancellation of Third World debt in the TV ad break.

In the libel case brought by ITN against this magazine, the multimillion pound news corporation shamelessly plays the role of the hurt victim, demanding redress. The fact that ITN has the resources to give its answer to *LM*'s criticisms before an audience of millions is conveniently forgotten. In fact they would prefer to try to silence us out of sight

of the public, under the censorship-for-hire that is Britain's libel laws.

Legal and institutional restrictions on freedom of speech are not a challenge to inequality, but an additional resource to the rich and powerful. Men like the late Sir James Goldsmith have no qualms about boasting that their wealth gives them the power of the courts to silence their opponents.

Elite minorities revel in bureaucratic regulation and restriction. They are constantly trying to disguise the power that they have over others. A new law of privacy, for instance, could only serve to keep the rest of us from knowing what they are up to. By contrast, the harsh light of free speech can expose all the hidden levers of power and privilege, the better that we can take action against them.

Freedom of speech is actually the best weapon we have against the power of the minority that lord it over the rest of society. It is not easy to get through the press and television monopolies, but the audience of ordinary people is a better potential resource than all the complaints commissions and good conduct tribunals put together.

Unlike the great and the good who sit on the official 'watchdog' bodies and enforce the codes of conduct, the people who make up the Great British Public have no vested interests or hidden motives. Nor should anybody who is confident of the justice of their cause fear the judgement of their equals. If your argument is right and you are prepared to fight for it, your chances of achieving justice must be better in a free and open debate with Joe Public than in a private hearing before Lady Muck.

## ELITE MINORITIES revel in bureaucratic regulation and RESTRICTION



### BROUGHT TO BOOK

by Helene Guldberg

**P**aladin Press, based in Colorado USA, is currently being sued for aiding and abetting murder because of the contents of one of its books, *Hitman: A Technical Manual for Independent Contractors*. The book, published in 1983, describes in graphic detail how to commit contract murders.

James Perry bought *Hitman* in 1992. That same year Perry was hired by Lawrence Horn to kill his wife and quadriplegic son. Perry committed the contract killings in 1993, but was quickly caught, convicted, and is now on death row in Maryland. The twist in the tail of this story is that it is not only Perry and Horn who are to be held responsible for the murders, but the publishers of *Hitman* as well.

Lawyers representing the families of the victims claim

that Perry followed 22 of the recommendations contained in *Hitman* to the letter—including shooting two of his victims through the eyes (who would have thought a murder manual was necessary in order to appreciate that shooting somebody through the eyes was a foolproof way of killing them!). Paladin Press and its president, Peder Lund, are being sued for conspiring to commit murder, aiding and abetting murder, and negligence in making this type of information available to the public. The publishers may be forced to pay substantial damages.

As Peder Lund told me, "This is an archetypal example of the nanny government approach. Instead of having people assume responsibility for their own actions, society and government instead look for scapegoats."

Although Paladin Press recognises that some people may misuse some types of information it argues that 'suppressing books isn't the answer. We happen to subscribe to the quaint notion that you punish the people who break the laws and let the rest of us law-abiding citizens decide for ourselves what we read, see, believe, or say'.

A verdict against Paladin Press would have a chilling effect on press freedom. This has been recognised by some of America's most eminent newspapers and broadcasters: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the ABC network have filed *amicus* briefs supporting Peder Lund.

Three appeal court judges have, however, not been persuaded. They found it 'breathtaking' that the national media should defend Paladin,

arguing that material that directly aids and abets criminal activity cannot enjoy the protection of the first amendment. In a unanimous ruling the appeal court ruled that *Hit Man* was in some way responsible, thereby reversing a lower court decision. Peder Lund has vowed to fight the case all the way to the US Supreme Court.

If Paladin Press loses it would set a dangerous precedent. It is not hard to imagine the effect the threat of similar legal action might have on other publishers, writers and journalists. There is no clear-cut boundary between a murder manual and a descriptive account in a factual or fictional book. Could the publishers of mystery novels, real-life crime stories, or indeed any printed word that could be misused by another person to carry out a criminal act, be sued for damages? In these litigious times, a victory for the plaintiff would have a suffocating effect on press freedom, hitting the entire publishing industry and film and television too.

For more information:  
[www.paladin-press.com](http://www.paladin-press.com)



English libel law has now officially been found guilty of violating human rights reports Helen Searls, legal coordinator of LM's defence against ITN's libel writs

## A REPUGNANT LAW

**A**t a time when New Labour has taken to preaching to the rest of the world about the sanctity of human rights, it was fun to see the government getting a taste of its own medicine. English libel law has now been officially judged as repugnant and a violation of human rights. In a strangely under-reported case, a US court has decreed that 'the principles of English libel law fail to measure up to the basic human rights standards and are repugnant to public policy and the constitutional ideal of free speech' (*Times*, 2 December 1997).

The US Maryland State Appeals Court reached this conclusion after it was asked to enforce an English libel award made by a UK court (and upheld by the House of Lords) against a US citizen. This was meant to be a routine request, since US courts regularly enforce British judgements. In this instance, however, the US court refused to cooperate with the UK court. Such is the repugnance of English libel law, the defendant was told that the damages award of \$416 000 would not be upheld in America.

So what is it about English libel law that makes it so repugnant not just to those, like us at *LM*, who face crippling libel actions, but even to the US judiciary? It does not take a legal genius to see that the law of defamation in Britain is a blatant violation of all the principles of natural justice.

For instance, one of the first tenets of our legal system is that we are all equal in the eyes of the law. Obviously this principle does not always hold true in practice, but in libel law there is not even the pretence of any kind of equality between the rich and the rest.

Libel law is a law for the super-rich. Parliament decided long ago that there should be no legal aid in libel actions. Journalists who publish truthful accusations against the rich and powerful, but who do not have access to six figure sums in their bank accounts, have little prospect of successfully defending themselves against a libel action in court. As a result most defendants settle actions in the early stages of a legal proceeding rather than run the risk of

mounting legal bills. Since settlement always incorporates an undertaking never to repeat the alleged libel, the rich can routinely issue libel writs to silence their critics.

Libel law also violates another basic principle of justice—that the defendant is meant to be innocent until proven guilty. In libel cases the burden of proof is the other way around. The defendant is assumed to be guilty of defamation unless he can prove his innocence. And so long as the plaintiff can prove that the alleged libel was published to a third party, the plaintiff does not even have to prove that he has suffered any real damage, since damage is assumed by the court. As leading lawyer Mark Stephens of Stephens-Innocent has commented, this is 'the one inexplicable exception to our rules of judicial process' and it weights the odds heavily in the plaintiff's favour.

Plaintiffs win about 90 per cent of all libel cases that get to court. When one considers that defendants only contest the tiny percentage of cases in which they feel they have a reasonably good chance of winning, it is clear that this is an extremely one-sided fight.

Added to these unappealing odds, the defendant may also have to weigh up the additional price that has to be paid for pleading truth or justification as a defence. If the defendant pleads truth as their defence and then fails to prove their case in court, the jury is allowed to award the plaintiff additional damages. The defendant is deemed to have aggravated the damage to the plaintiff by continuing to claim the alleged libel to be true throughout the trial. Perversely then, in a libel case a vigorous defence can make things worse for the defendant.

Mind you this assumes that the defendant has the luxury of a trial by jury—another basic assumption of our legal system. In recent high profile cases like the *McLibel* trial and Jonathan Aitken's action against the *Guardian*, plaintiffs have successfully demanded that the judge dispense with a jury before the case is even heard. Worryingly judges now deem many libel cases to be too complex for ordinary mortals to understand. Why this should be is unclear. The

Aitken case seemed relatively simple to me. It all boiled down to who paid the Paris Ritz hotel bill, hardly a matter to tax the greatest legal minds in the land.

But despite these failings, what is truly repugnant about English libel law is the manner in which it enables individuals to hire the courts for personal gain and at the same time undermine the public interest in full and frank debate. It is this aspect of the law that really stuck in the craw of the Maryland Court judges. The US court reviewed the case and held that the two published pieces which had been branded libellous over here should simply have been seen as 'rhetorical hyperbole' and part of 'vigorous public debate'. In their view, the English libel law in general and this judgement in particular ignored the right to free speech—a fundamental right that guarantees the free flow of ideas and opinions on matters of public concern.

In English libel law there is no such thing as a public interest defence. It is no defence in the English courts to claim that an allegedly libellous article raised an important matter of public interest and therefore deserves full and frank public discussion. Libel law deems that it is more important for a man to defend his reputation, than for society as a whole to uncover the truth through thorough public enquiry. In America, by contrast, where a public interest defence does exist, it would have been impossible either for McDonalds or ITN to sue their critics for libel.

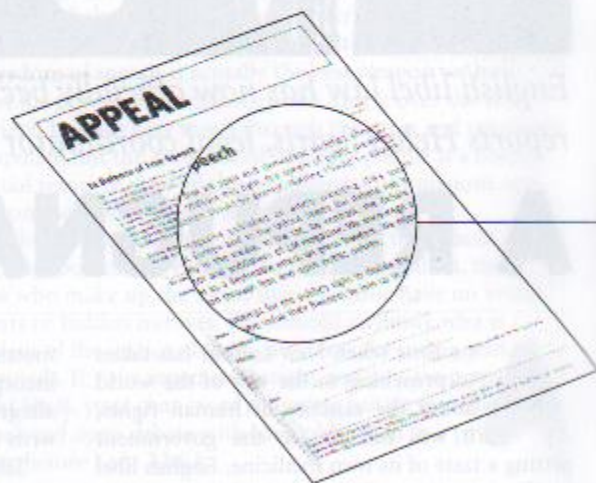
Given that the libel law has now been deemed to be so repulsive to human rights, will our human rights champions in the New Labour government be looking to reform the repugnant legislation? Don't hold your breath. In a letter dated 4 December 1997, Ms Jenny Foote of the Law Reform Branch of the Lord Chancellor's Department told me that they were 'unaware of any widespread demand for reform of the Act and there are currently no plans to do so'. It seems when it comes to human rights and due process the British government follows the maxim 'Do as I say, not as I do'.

# FREE SPEECH

*LM* magazine is being sued for libel by ITN, in a case which threatens to bankrupt the magazine and also raises wider issues about the use of the libel law to censor criticism. As the publishers of *LM*, we have launched an Appeal in Defence of Free Speech. It has already won support from many prominent writers, journalists, academics and other respected individuals.

This is only the start; we will be building more support for the appeal until the case is won.

*Helene Guldberg & Claire Fox*



*Signatories so far include:*

*Blake Morrison*

*Doris Lessing*

*William Boyd*

*Matthew Parris*

*Patrick Hughes*

*Paul Theroux*

*Richard Hoggart*

*Colm Toibin*

*Michael Holroyd*

*Fay Weldon*

*Professor Johan Galtung*

*Rasheed Araeen*

*Auberon Waugh*

*Professor*

**'Journalists—of all people—should never use the libel laws to attack each other. If you've nothing to hide then debate, argue, challenge, refute and the truth will out. Shame on ITN'**

**'Censorship, the suppression of debate and dissent, and the management of news are all insults to our intelligence and not only unnecessary but do violence to a free society.'**

**'Journalists who specialise in criticism, should not see themselves above criticism. The "offending article" is responsible, well considered, and makes points ITN would do better to consider than to try to censor'**

**'Let a million flowers bloom. No one and no organisation has a monopoly of the truth. Only free dialogue will enable us to begin to approach it.'**



# ECH APPEAL

## IN DEFENCE OF FREE SPEECH

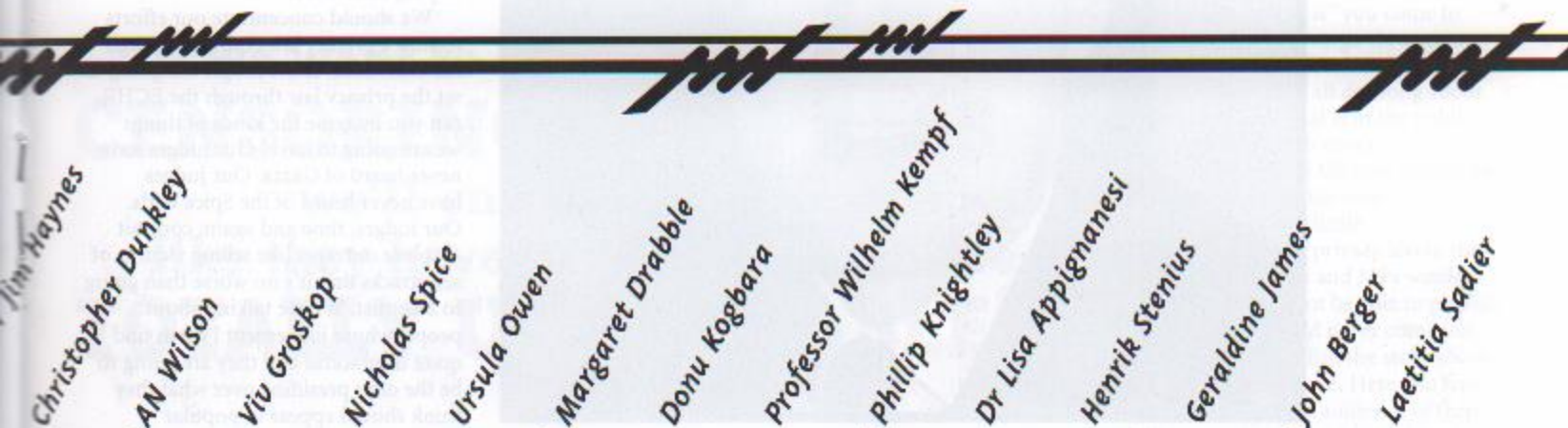
We, the undersigned, believe that all open and democratic societies should acknowledge the public's right to read critical and dissenting views. Without this right, the sphere of public debate and expression is dangerously narrowed. No public figure or organisation should be exempt. Nothing should be above criticism.

In February 1997 *LM* magazine published an article criticising ITN's award-winning footage from Trnopolje camp in Bosnia. Throughout Europe and in the United States the debate has become a matter of public interest and has been discussed widely in the media. In the UK, by contrast, the debate has

been stifled because ITN issued a libel writ against the editor and publishers of *LM* magazine.

We encourage others to join us in condemning ITN's decision to act in this manner as a deplorable attack on press freedom. We reject the threat of costly libel action and call on ITN to defend its position through free and open public debate.

ITN has displayed contempt for the public's right to decide the relative merits of two sides of an important argument. We call on all those who value their freedom to join us in demanding the right to make up our own minds.



Jim Haynes

Christopher Dunkley

AN Wilson

Viv Groskop

Nicholas Spice

Ursula Owen

Margaret Drabble

Donu Kogbara

Professor Wilhelm Kempf

Phillip Knightley

Dr Lisa Appignanesi

Henrik Stenius

Geraldine James

John Berger

Laetitia Sadler

**'Journalists have many outlets for getting back at one another without the pathetic use of lawyers. *LM* magazine is a small concern and doesn't deserve to be clobbered by the big boys of ITN. And besides *LM* were right!'**

**'A disturbing case, which exposes the danger of media coverage and media consensus'**

**'A case of historical importance. A win for ITN will be a blow to free speech'**

**'In solidarity'**

Support the **LM** libel appeal, the **OFF THE FENCE FUND**.  
Send donations to BM Off the Fence, London WC1N 3XX  
Make cheques payable to: Off The Fence Fund

# 'CERTAIN JUDGES CAN'T

Mirror editor Piers Morgan told Tessa Mayes why he is against a privacy law



PHOTO: THE MIRROR

to create one, he will create one that protects politicians. He won't give a stuff about the man on the street.

I feel very worried about the ECHR because [Lord Chancellor] Derry Irvine has never made any secret of wanting a privacy law. He has his own reasons because his own private life was in the newspapers. I just think that these laws should not be determined by people who have either an axe to grind or a vested interest in producing a privacy law. They should be produced by independent bodies if you are going to do it at all. But what is the point of a privacy law? What are people hoping to achieve?

We should concentrate our efforts to stop a privacy law coming through the back door. If the judges are going to set the privacy law through the ECHR, can you imagine the kinds of things we are going to have? Our judges have never heard of Gaza. Our judges have never heard of the Spice Girls. Our judges, time and again, commit absolute outrages like telling victims of sex attacks that it's no worse than going to a dentist. We are talking about people whose judgement I often find quite disgraceful and they are going to be the ones presiding over what they think should appear in popular newspapers? Why on Earth should judges who don't read newspapers like mine dictate what I think is right for my readers?

I can tell you that judges are champing at the bit to implement a privacy law through the back door. I know that from QCs I have spoken to. There are certain judges who can't wait to give us a kicking, and tell us how to run our newspapers, and that is totally outrageous and must be stopped. Tony Blair has said repeatedly that he doesn't want a privacy law, and yet he is not doing anything at the moment to prevent the ECHR implementing one through the back door and I think he needs to.

The press are implementing strict codes on privacy even before a law has been drafted. The press have never been under more stringent regulations and we have volunteered to make them more stringent since the death of Princess Diana, even though as time goes on the involvement of the press

Privacy laws are for the rich and powerful to protect themselves. They do not and are not intended to protect the man in the street, but protect those who have the most to hide.

If you ask the Press Complaints Commission—who now get thousands more complaints than they ever did before because of the awareness that they exist—they tell you that the public complain about accuracy and taste. They hardly ever complain about invasions of privacy. It is almost entirely a complaint made by the rich and powerful, and almost entirely then by people who are lying through their back teeth.

I just do not believe that newspapers invade the privacy—in an unwarranted manner—of ordinary people in the street. And when it does happen, they do have the redress of going to the Press Complaints Commission. I promise you, as an editor, the last

thing you want to do is have to admit you invaded somebody's privacy in an unwarranted manner.

I think the press, in fact, are behaving in a far more responsible way now than they were five years ago. If anything the case for a privacy law is going away.

Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger was suggesting that we should do a deal with the government and take some form of privacy law, because otherwise we would have the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) imposed. [The ECHR contains an article on privacy which judges could interpret as a new law against press 'intrusion'.] Rusbridger argues we should do a deal because he wants to concentrate on libel law reform and a Freedom of Information Act. I kept arguing with him, "Look, you cannot allow a government to dictate a privacy law because they will tailor it to their own needs". If a politician is allowed

# 'WAIT TO GIVE US A KICKING'

in the accident looks more and more remote. We have acknowledged public opinion on that.

There were clearly some methods used by the paparazzi which have been getting out of hand, and although it now looks like they weren't directly involved in the Diana crash, they could have been because of their antics. What we are saying is that there are sections of our business which need to be cleaned up and that's what we are doing. I think the press are behaving far better than they ever have and that's the great irony of this latest charge for a privacy law.

interests the public, but what is in the public interest.

I would not give up any press freedom. We've already given up too much in my view. Our readers are great arbiters of good taste and decency. If they don't like something they stop buying the paper. If we want to start censoring the press and restricting freedom of expression by bringing in privacy laws, we'll end up with newspapers like they have in France which are totally unreadable. Nobody reads them. They might as well pack up and go home. More people per head

froth with a bit of news stuck in between. I know because I've read them all. People keep telling me about the halcyon days. They never existed. It was always the cheeky, naughty tabloid. Now we have 108 pages—five times as much.

People who lead the calls for privacy laws and are most vocal about the antics of the tabloids have never taken a risk in their lives. They have never tried to publish a dangerous story in their lives. They are people who sit at the back of the bar and they moan and they whinge and they castigate people like me who are actually at the sharp end of it, doing it every day. And what I say to these people is "you come to a newspaper, and you go through it every day, and you see how easy it is to make those calls all day long about what is not and what is in the public interest". It is much easier to sit at the back of the bar and say how disgusting the tabloids are all the time. It is ridiculous and futile.

If you enforce a privacy law in the way that the judges and MPs would like it you would not be able to publish anything. We would never come out. You could not publish the story about Earl Spencer's divorce. Here you have a man who used his audience of three billion people to castigate and humiliate the press. He claimed that we were the bottom end of the moral spectrum. Here is a man who had 12 affairs in five months while his wife was in a clinic. Surely the public are entitled to know that before they draw any opinions from Earl Spencer on the morality of the press? The privacy law would stop you publishing it.

We should campaign to make sure Tony Blair realises that is likely to happen, and get the government to stop it by excluding the press from the law. Simple as that.

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**TOTALLY UNREADABLE'**

People who are calling for it don't know what they are talking about.

The more pompous arrogant idiots in our business think that they are totally above using paparazzi photography, invading people's private lives and all the rest of it. The truth is every paper does it. Almost every story that we carry every day invades somebody's life some way. It's a fact of life. You cannot write about people without invading private lives. The question then is: is there a legitimate reason for publishing this information?

For the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* to pretend that in some way they are above all that, just look at their papers today. Look at the number of stories that have directly affected somebody's private life and you will see the rank hypocrisy. I am not hypocritical about it. I openly accept that we do this every day but I also justify it on the grounds that we do so in the public interest. Not what

buy a newspaper in Britain than anywhere else in the world, with the exception I think of Japan. They do so because they love what they buy.

The snobby intelligentsia who read the broadsheets and draw their own conclusions about newspapers refer to us as the gutter press. We are not the gutter. We are the most popular press in this country, and it is just, frankly, insulting. The people of this country read tabloid newspapers. The *Mirror* is read by seven million people a day, the *Sun* is read by 12 million. The *Guardian* is read by under a million, the *Daily Telegraph* is read by maybe a million-and-a-half.

There is as much investigative journalism happening now as there was 10 years ago. People go on about the great old *Daily Mirror* with its great campaigning investigative journalism. Go and get the great *Daily Mirror* 10, 20, 30 years ago. It's a load of old crap. The paper used to be 28 pages of complete

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*Anorexia expert Dr Dee Dawson told Jennie Bristow why we should not deprive children of fatty foods*

## LET THEM EAT CAKE— AND CRISPS, CHIPS AND CHOCOLATE

'Chocolate and chips are nice, everybody likes them. Carrot and celery sticks aren't.' These may not sound like profound remarks from a specialist in eating disorders, yet they were enough to catapult Dr Dee Dawson into the headlines last November and spark off another debate about what food children should be eating.

Dr Dawson is the medical director of the Rhodes Farm clinic in north London, a 32-bed unit that deals with six to 16 year olds in the advanced stages of anorexia nervosa. On 27 November she addressed the Girls' Schools Association conference with a speech on how to prevent the growth of anorexia among schoolchildren. Her recommendations included weighing

girls on a regular basis to spot weight decline and shooting Rosemary Conley of *Hip and Thigh Diet* fame. But in a time when we are increasingly obsessed by the food that we eat and the need to consume healthily, it was not surprising



that her less extreme proposal to feed kids on high fat foods attracted the most attention.

So apart from being 'nice', what is so good about crisps, chips and chocolate? 'There is no evidence to show that if you allow children to eat crisps and chips and chocolate that they are going to have any higher incidence of coronary heart disease than children who have had so-called healthy diets', she argues. 'In fact, so-called healthy diets are usually so low in fat that they haven't enough fat.'

'One thing that annoys me is that whenever there is any mention of low fat diets nobody ever says, "but there is a minimum amount of fat that you must eat".' Dr Dawson says 20 per cent of a balanced diet should consist of fat,

and a diet with 30 per cent fat is 'absolutely fine'. 'So why would you try to stop children eating crisps and chips and things, because where would they get their fat from if you start cutting that out? You are going to have to feed them fat in some other way. It's ludicrous.'

But surely those who think it is better to feed their children 'healthy' food rather than allow them to gorge themselves on junk food are being sensible? Not really, says Dr Dawson. 'Of course children shouldn't eat chips and chocolate all the time; obviously they have to have balanced meals. But these are provided by their parents and by the school. Outside those meals, if they are hungry then it doesn't matter how they make up the rest of the calories, because they're going to be burning it off.'

In any case, the growing concern about children having an 'unhealthy' diet is misplaced, when you consider that children today are healthier and better nourished than ever before. 'Children have grown two centimetres, I think, on average over the last 20 or 30 years. We have not got a problem. We have not got a major problem with child obesity: about four per cent, that's not a lot. Why do we suddenly now decide that we are going to stop children eating the foods that they like?'

Good question. If there is no scientific evidence that a low-fat diet is good for children, and a fair chance that it can actually harm them, where did we get the idea that we should cut out the crisps and force-feed kids low-fat yoghurts? Dr Dawson does not know. What she does know is that adults are increasingly obsessed with their own diets, and are imposing these obsessions on children—with often disastrous consequences.

'We are very confused about our diet', she sighs. 'Teachers don't know, doctors don't know, kids don't know, parents don't know whether kids should be eating less or more, whether adults should be drinking alcohol, whether margarine is good or bad. Every day you read in the paper that something you read yesterday was out, is in, and now it's something else. It changes like the wind.' Staff at Rhodes Farm give their teenage patients buttered bread, and the girls are terrified because all their lives they have been told that butter is bad for them.

The role played by government in heightening confusion about what kinds of food are 'best' for us has not gone unnoticed by Dr Dawson. She is scathing about the 'healthy lifestyles' philosophy promoted by the previous government's 'Health of the Nation' report, which encourages a low fat

diet from the age of seven without any recommendations as to a minimum intake of fat. She is also opposed to proposals considered by the Labour government to restrict the sale of 'junk food' in school canteens and the sale of certain high fat and high sugar foods in tuck shops and vending machines. She objects to government 'nannying our children in this way'. 'Checking people's lunchboxes: it's almost like communism', she scoffs. Well, it certainly is all too New Labour.

Sitting in the bright, colourful kitchen at Rhodes Farm clinic, it is easy to see why Dr Dawson is so passionate about the need to 'stop making children feel guilty about the food they eat'. The teenage girls sitting around chatting about pop groups seem little different to any others their age: bright eyed, lively and beautiful. But these are the girls who have almost completed their treatment and are going home for Christmas. Alongside them the newer patients have hollow eyes and jutting bones. Engaging in the daily task of encouraging these children to be less nervous about food would be enough to make anybody angry about the way in which up-tight adults in a health-obsessed nation pass their paranoia on to the young, when living longer and healthier lives should be the least of children's worries.

Although Dr Dawson's concerns have been shaped by her proximity to

is significant. Self-starvation could only happen in circumstances where food is plentiful: 'I don't think you use food as a weapon when you have brothers and sisters who do not have enough to eat.' The obsession with eating 'healthily' that grips our well-fed society compounds the notion that controlling the kind of food you eat can give you more control over your life. Dr Dawson's concern is that this unhealthy obsession may cause cases of anorexia to increase among children who are already disturbed.

Because she is preoccupied with those young people who react to their problems in the most extreme ways, it is perhaps understandable that Dr Dawson tends to overplay the extent to which media images of the thin and beautiful pose a danger to young people's general self-image. It is one thing to note that society views slimness as desirable, and that a disturbed child who seeks to deal with her problems through 'perfecting' her body image may see this goal as obtainable through self-starvation. It is another to argue, as Dr Dawson does, that fashion magazines are promoting a dangerous message through their use of skinny models: if four per cent of children are obese and only one per cent anorexic, clearly the images themselves are not all-powerful. Dr Dawson's suggestions that schoolchildren should be routinely weighed to spot early signs of anorexia also carry the risk of compounding the

## 'STOP MAKING children feel guilty about the FOOD THEY EAT'

anorexic children, she is not trying to scare people into believing that depriving children of crisps and chocolate will cause them to develop anorexia. This disorder currently affects only one per cent of schoolchildren, and develops from so complex a range of problems that it is unlikely to affect the majority of well-balanced, happy children.

Dr Dawson stresses that self-starvation is only one of the many ways in which psychologically disturbed children respond to their problems. 'These children could have chosen to steal, to mug old ladies, to play truant, not to do any school work at all. Instead they have chosen not to eat.' But the very fact that they can 'choose food as a weapon'

paranoia that already exists among many parents and schools about the welfare of children in their care: the same paranoia that has encouraged the desire to feed children those 'healthy' foods that turn out to be bad for them.

But despite this, Dr Dawson's call for a more relaxed attitude to children's diets is one that should apply to all children, whether they are in danger of developing anorexia or not. All she is really saying is that parents should feed their children the kind of balanced diet they would do anyway if governments and so-called professionals would stop panicking them. Meanwhile kids should eat the kind of things kids have always eaten, for no other reason than that they like them. 'It's just common sense', she says. 'Isn't it?'



PHOTOS: DAVE CHAPMAN

# FUTURES

Why has the government ignored its own scientific advisors and given in to environmentalist scaremongering about genetically modified foodstuffs? Tony Gilland reports

## GENES, GREENS AND SOYA BEANS

**G**lobally, an area the size of Switzerland and Austria combined is under crops which have been genetically modified (GM). This is the beginning of what is being called a 'food revolution', one which the United Nations expects to be complete within 10 years. For the industrialists and scientists involved, the prospect is for cheaper, pest-resistant crops such as soya, more nutritious and tasty varieties of meats, vegetables and fruits, and plants which produce medicines. In the future, crops which need hardly any water or fertiliser are envisaged as a solution to food shortages.

Others find genetically modified foodstuffs hard to swallow. Greenpeace, the Consumers' Association and the *Guardian* newspaper have all recently voiced their fears for the future of food in the hands of genetic scientists. In a series of articles at the end of last year, with headlines such as 'Food: the £250 billion gamble—Big firms rush for profits and power despite warnings' and 'Fears over "killer crops"—Call for three year ban on genetically modified plants', the *Guardian* suggested that multinational corporations could push governments into licensing potentially unsafe products, so allowing the food magnates to foist them onto unsuspecting consumers. The *Guardian* compared the American-led 'food revolution' to the arrival of the Bomb, and, just in case we had not made the link ourselves, the paper raised the spectre of another BSE-type threat in the food chain.

Until recently, the New Labour government had seemed sympathetic to the companies which want to develop the new crops. As recently as 27 November, on a BBC *First Sight* programme, Jeff Rooker, Minister for Food Safety, seemed quite happy with the regulatory controls in place to deal with GM foods, and comfortable with the decision to grant a licence for a number of novel crops, which have been grown in the

USA for the past three years, to be grown in the UK starting in 1998.

Since then, however, genetically modified food has suddenly stuck in the government's throat. The government decided to delay issuing the licences, expressing fears that Whitehall had 'underestimated the dangers of the new food revolution' (*Guardian*, 16 December 1997). At the same time, a Cabinet sub-committee approved a White Paper, setting up a new Food Standards Agency with a remit for a tougher licensing system to cover GM foods.

Has the food minister seen sense and moved to avert a potential catastrophe? Or have the environmental lobby, consumer groups and the *Guardian* stoked up an irrational panic which, fuelled by official fears of another BSE fiasco, has helped to slow the introduction of innovations that could benefit us all?

### Build a better bean

Agrochemical corporations like US-based Monsanto, famous for its genetically modified soya bean, and UK-based Zeneca, responsible for GM tomato puree, create GM products by copying a gene from one organism and inserting it into another, in order to give it enhanced properties. For instance, Monsanto has developed the 'Roundup Ready Soya Bean' containing a gene from a bacterium which makes it resistant to Monsanto's own Roundup herbicide. This enables farmers to use less toxic herbicides to kill weeds without damaging the crop. Genetic modification can also protect plants from insects and diseases which currently cause substantial damage. In the near future vegetables with enhanced nutritional qualities, such as increased vitamin content, are expected to be on supermarket shelves.

Only the most luddite of Greens reject all GM foods; there have as yet been no major campaigns to get the Co-op's vegetarian cheese, which

contains a GM enzyme, off the shelves. Yet the public discussion is dominated by problem-mongering, as the concerned groups raise fears that the new products will restrict consumer choice and endanger safety standards. So what are the facts?

Consider the argument about consumer choice. The *Guardian* and the Consumers' Association are certainly correct to say that it is increasingly difficult to avoid eating food containing genetically modified organisms. For example, 60 per cent of processed foods contain soya beans and about 25 per cent of the US soya bean harvest now consists of genetically modified beans mixed up with ordinary beans. Given that the USA is the main producer of soya beans, most of us will soon be consuming GM organisms, whether we know it—or like it—or not.

It is odd, however, to call this a restriction on consumer choice. Nobody complained of a restriction on consumer choice when the light bulb replaced the gas lamp, or the car took over from the horse and carriage, because these products were seen as a good thing, a means of advancing the well-being of society. And why single out GM foods for special labelling with consumer information? Should we label all of our other foods as products of 8000 years of selective breeding?

If genetic modification produces cheaper and higher quality new food products, then it has to be good for consumers. But is it safe? The consensus view of scientists, supported by many years of trouble-free experience with genetically modified products, is that GM foods in general pose no special risks. The government's own Advisory Committee on Novel Food Processes goes further. Its recent report argues that GM foods are actually safer than conventional foods. With deliberate genetic modification, we have a clearer picture of the genetic



The Vegetable Gardener,  
Giuseppe Arcimboldo,  
1590 (look at it upside  
down)

alterations underlying changes in the crops than we do if the changes are brought about by other methods. Additionally, the regulatory regime for GM crops is tighter than that for other food products. The government's advisory committee is also clear that the environmentalists' favourite complaint—that once GM plants are released they pose a permanent threat because they cannot be recalled—is just a scare: in practice most crops, whether they have been genetically modified or not, do not survive in the wild. This is particularly true of most cereals.

Yet the government has chosen to ignore its own scientific advisors and instead give in to the unsubstantiated fears others have raised about genetic modification. In the language of the consumer groups, this climbdown is justified as an exercise in listening to public concern.

In their 1997 report 'Gene Cuisine', the Consumers' Association notes that 'consumers have many concerns about genetically modified foods that are currently not addressed by the regulations controlling their approval and marketing'. Consumers' Association research

published in 1996 found that 44 per cent of people had concerns about GM foods. The two biggest concerns, which feature prominently in the CA's own statements were 'it is interfering with nature' and 'concern about long term consequences'.

Scientists and regulators quite reasonably argue that the public's views must be taken into account. Groups like the Consumers' Association, however, go further and argue that public perceptions should influence government decisions on licensing. But the fact that consumers express concerns about the safety of products or unnatural processes does not necessarily mean that they are dangerous. Given the preoccupation with safety in modern society, and with food safety in particular, coupled with a widespread lack of trust in politicians and scientists, many of the concerns raised by consumers are unsurprising. But that is not to say that concerns about GM food are well-founded. And the fact that they are not well-founded should surely lead to a campaign to change public opinion, rather than a demand to take account of it in the regulatory process.

### Spineless obsession

The Consumers' Association and the *Guardian* should not be allowed to get away with posing as the high-minded defenders of the public interest in this debate. They have their own agenda, promoted by highlighting the views of environmentalists rather than majority scientific opinion. The fact that the Consumers' Association gives a high profile to the views of one group of consumers—the 44 per cent surveyed who expressed concerns about genetic modification—further suggests bias. After all, what about the views of the other, unconcerned, 56 per cent, never mind those of us who are keen to see more GM foods in our shopping trolleys?

Unfortunately, the environmentally influenced message of caution is one which government is predisposed to listen to today. New Labour, in banning beef on the bone, has clearly demonstrated its readiness to go along with the most ridiculous scares. Applied to genetically modified foods, the effect of this spineless obsession with risk-aversion is to slow down the speed of innovation and the improvements to our welfare which would follow.

But the delay to the introduction of particular products is only part of the problem. In the end, it seems likely that, as the UN says, commercial pressures will make the genetic revolution unstoppable in agriculture as in other areas. The broader problem is that, in the name of listening to public opinion, an irrational, cautious and anti-innovation culture is being imported into the decision-making process. ●

*The paralysis and dementia that result from Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease make it cruelly appropriate to British society in the 'nervous nineties', says Dr Michael Fitzpatrick*

## NO BACKBONE IN BEEF CRISIS

**T**he evolution of the crisis about the possible transmission of Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (CJD) from cattle infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy ('mad cow disease') reveals some of the characteristic features of the malaise of modern Britain.

In his announcement in early December of a ban on sales of beef 'on the bone' agriculture minister Jack Cunningham made a telling admission. 'The first priority of this government', he proclaimed, 'is the protection of the consumer'.

It is now generally accepted that the relationship between society and the state should no longer be one between citizens and politicians, but one between consumers and regulators. The shift is significant. Citizens are active and independent agents, traditionally highly suspicious of state incursions into their activities. Consumers are passive and vulnerable, generally looking to some external agency to protect their interests. Citizens often act collectively, consumers are society at its most atomised; symbolically, citizens are male, consumers female.

The government's identification with the cause of the consumer allows

it to act in a paternalistic and authoritarian way, protecting the humble shopper and policing the mighty producers and retailers. It also, however, reveals the weakness of government today, that it has no higher claim on the respect of the people than its capacity to regulate the marketplace. Given the inevitable difficulty of enforcing such regulations, this is also a high risk strategy.

In the past, the first priority of government was to run the country, and its ministers claimed legitimacy as representatives of the interests of the whole of society. No doubt, the agriculture minister was keen to emphasise his commitment to consumer interests because of his department's longstanding identification with the interests of the producers—the farmers and the food industry. Yet whereas ministers once attempted to stand above such sectional concerns, they are now so insecure that they take sides in disputes in which they would once have stood aloof.

The decline of governmental authority is linked to the contradictory plight of science in modern society. On the one hand, the probable identification of 'new variant' CJD (in 23 cases so far in Britain) as the

result of the same infectious agent as that causing the epidemic of BSE in cattle in the late 1980s was the result of impressive laboratory studies. Though the key question of the mode of transmission of this agent from cattle to humans remains obscure, these researches have provided a major stimulus to further investigations.

On the other hand, it seems that the further they get away from their labs the more the scientists are affected by the prevailing climate of irrationality. The discourse on 'risk assessment' that emerged from the December meetings of Seac (the official spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee) and government ministers revealed the scale of this problem.

The committee heard preliminary reports of a trial in which cattle were fed 'extreme amounts of diseased brain homogenate—a good three-ounces-plus of neat BSE-positive brain gush', according to the account leaked to Emily Green of the *New Statesman* (12 December 1997). The researchers detected infectivity in the now notorious dorsal root ganglia (tiny knots of nerve tissue close to the spinal cord) in one cow of 36 months, but not in one of 30 months. Now, as all cattle entering the human food chain must be slaughtered before 30 months, the risk of infection being present (even in these extreme circumstances) is very low.

To be precise, the report submitted by Seac to the government estimated that in 1997 some six infected animals might get through, and in 1998 possibly three (out of around 2.2 million cattle slaughtered). The experts noted that 'in the worst year in the past the figure was many thousand times greater'. 'Using a series of pessimistic assumptions' they concluded that there was a 95 per cent chance of no cases and a five per cent chance of one case of CJD arising as a result of this exposure in 1998. This calculation—based on a single unpublished, unconfirmed, non-peer reviewed study—led to the government's December ban on beef on the bone. ▶

## CARCASSES IN CYBERSPACE

by Dave Chandler

ENTERING THE BUTCHER'S shop in Otley market square, I recognised Tony Middlemiss from the photo on his website. When he finished cutting up a sheep's carcass, we went up to his flat above the shop and chatted in his computer room. This is where Middlemiss

combines his two interests— butchery and the Net—in opposition to the encroachment of 'veggies' and the 'nanny state'.

His website ([www.dalesnet.co.uk/middy.htm](http://www.dalesnet.co.uk/middy.htm)), which undercuts health scares about meat and promotes meat-eating as part of a healthy diet.

He gleans most of his information from the USA, with tasty cuts from LM-online. The site is a favourite among digital carnivores; it also attracts hate-e-mail from 30-40 vegetarians each week.

Middlemiss is the sort of North Yorkshireman to whom Southerners are synonymous with lily-livered vegetarianism. 'If you hang a carcass in your shop window south of Sheffield', he insists, 'you're liable to get a brick through your window';

but in Otley 'people are much more down to Earth', with 'professional types' and even '*Guardian* readers' opposed to the ban on beef on the bone.

IN FACT THE beat-the-ban rush to buy was as evident down South as it was in Otley, where customers bought entire sirloins while muttering under their breath about the nonsense of banning meat with a 1 in 4 million health risk.



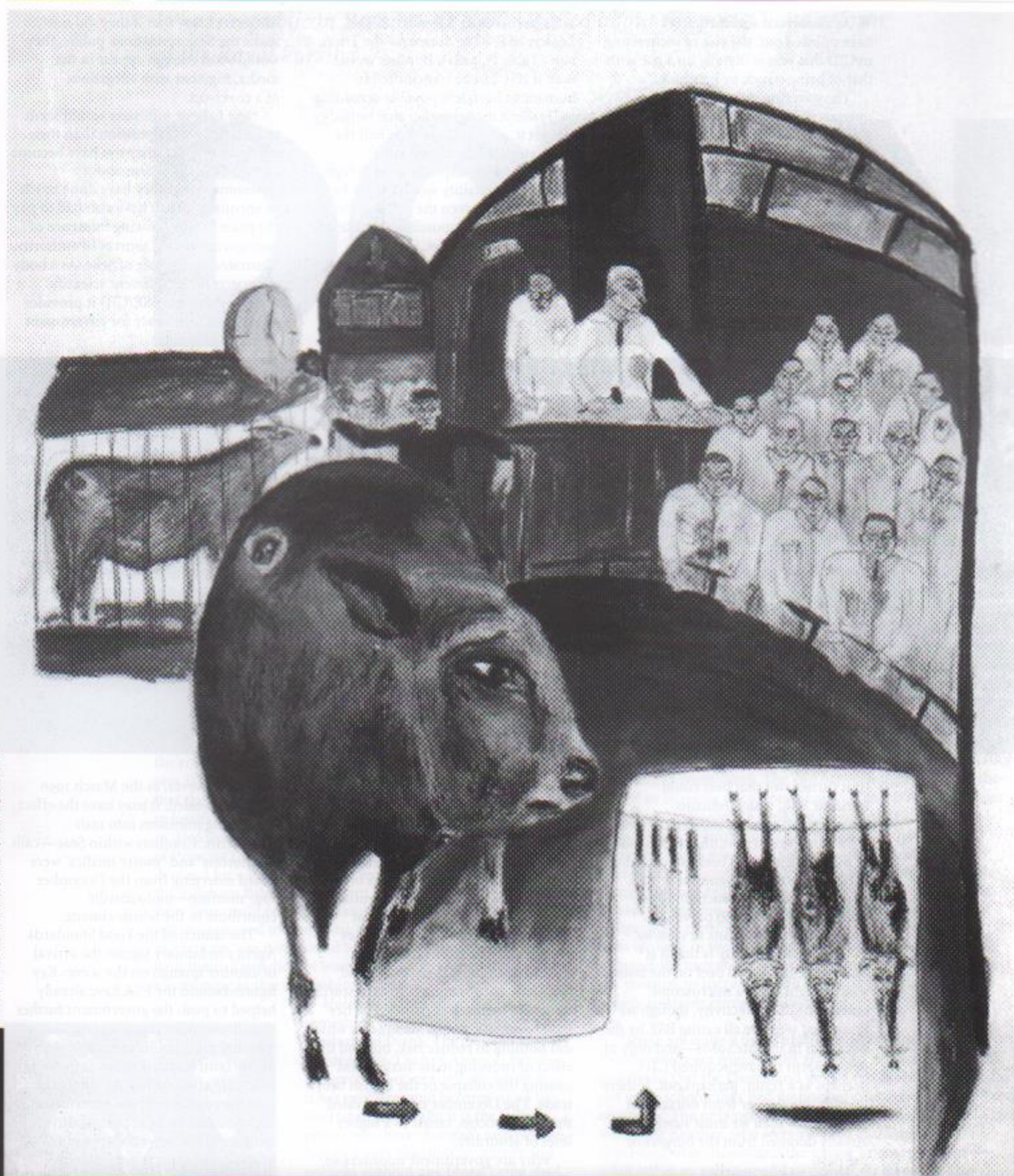


ILLUSTRATION: CATIE MARRE, AGRIETE JANSSEN, SIKSOLVEDEN

Middlemiss' beef against the ban is that 'it is taking away our freedom of choice. They should put the facts before the public and let them make up their own minds'. But the facts are as scarce as meat on the bone. 'Countries

such as Israel have more CJD than Britain but no BSE', observes Middlemiss. This goes against the presumed link between BSE and CJD, but never gets mentioned because, according to Middlemiss, British writers 'are a bit like

sheep'—easily worried and all headed in the same direction.

Middlemiss boasts of eating soft-boiled eggs, drinking untreated milk and never taking a day off sick. He says his doctor only knows who he is because she

is a regular customer. Some customers have been in the shop to ask about black market beef on the bone, but Middlemiss told me that the fines are too heavy for him to risk it. Well he would say that, wouldn't he?

◀ As numerous commentators have pointed out, the risk of contracting nvCJD this year is literally on a par with that of being struck by lightning.

The government's grotesque overreaction in December recalled the last major mad cow panic in March 1996, when ministers first officially admitted the possibility of a link between BSE in cattle and CJD in humans and tightened up food safety regulations. As I argued at the time, these measures had no public health value, as regulations had long been in place to prevent infected beef from entering the human food chain. The problem

34.44 million (see S Dealler, *Lethal Legacy: BSE—The Search for the Truth*, 1996, Table 15, p282). In other words, even if BSE can be transmitted to humans in beef, it is possible according to Dealler's model, either that nobody will get it, or that more than half the population will be wiped out.

The sensible response to such high levels of uncertainty would surely be to conclude that, given the existing level of knowledge, it is impossible to make any useful projections. Yet, instead of consigning his tables to the bin, Dealler rushes to publish, driven by a vision of celebrity and headlines proclaiming 'Top Doc says 34 million might die'.

Ministers knew that if they did not make the Seac revelations public, they would soon enough appear in the media, together with allegations of a cover-up.

New Labour ministers would seem to be in a stronger position than their predecessors. Yet, they too have become victims of the cynicism about government that they have done much to encourage. They have also had to pay the price for the growing influence of non-governmental sources of authority, illustrated by the role of Seac. As a body of experts in the different scientific fields involved in BSE/CJD it provides a source of legitimacy for government

## HARD TO STOMACH

by Neil Haidar

It is very confusing. In the same week that the minister for agriculture announced the beef on the bone ban, Channel 4 showed a repeat of Sophie Grigson's *Meat Course*, extolling the benefits in terms of both flavour and texture of cooking beef on the bone. The precipitous implementation of the ban makes even less sense almost two years after the height of the BSE panic, when we are told that British beef is now safer to eat than it has been for years.

Add the beef on the bone panic to the scares over salmonella in eggs and poultry, listeria in cheese, E.coli in cooked meat and BSE itself, and it would seem that food is now bad for our health. Even vegetarians are at risk. (The BBC recently alerted us to the dangers of re-heating leftover rice—a practice I have mysteriously survived since childhood.) I know I am not the only one to have had my fill of all this.

Information, labelling and the enforcement of good hygiene in the area of food production are quite appetising, but a diet of scaremongering and prohibition is more than I can stomach.

Beef on the bone is a minority interest and is more likely to be found at the top end of the market. And it is this that makes me really mad. To gain a better understanding of how good quality meat is produced, I spent a couple of

days with my local butcher. He selects his grass-fed meat on the hoof from local farms. The beasts are then transported and held in a stress-free environment before being despatched humanely in a small abattoir at the back of the shop. The carcass is then hung at a carefully monitored temperature for several weeks and butchered with great skill.

All this extra care and attention means that the product costs more, but it also tastes infinitely better. Instead of introducing a killjoy ban on beef on the bone, a far more sensible option for the secretary of state for agriculture would have been to insist that all meat is produced in this flavour-enhancing manner.

Neil Haidar is a chef

(if it turned out that beef could transmit BSE, which remains unconfirmed) was, as indicated in the December Seac report, that thousands of infected cattle had been processed between the first recognition of BSE in 1986 and the introduction of the 'specified offals' ban to prevent its transmission to humans in 1988/89.

The situation today is that it is against the law to sell beef on the bone, which might carry a microscopic amount of BSE infectivity, though we know that we were all eating BSE by the bucketful in the late 1980s—and only 23 people seem to have acquired CJD, perhaps as a result, perhaps not. If there is really any danger from dorsal root ganglia now then we must surely be all already doomed from the burgers of the past.

The problem with risk assessment is that it seems devoid of common sense. For example, microbiologist Dr Stephen Dealler, a leading promoter of the mad cow panic and now a member of Seac, has calculated how many people in Britain may have eaten more than what he reckons is a potentially infective dose of BSE. The numbers vary, according to different variables, between zero and

The role of Seac shows how the scientists and the government interact to amplify the insecurities of both sides—with disastrous consequences for society. When in 1996, after some years of dismissing suggestions of a link between BSE and CJD, the scientists first noted a handful of cases that raised this as a real possibility, they were understandably rattled. But, instead of calming them down and discreetly encouraging further research, ministers themselves panicked. They made dramatic public statements which did nothing to reduce risk, but had the effect of inducing mass anxiety and causing the collapse of the British beef trade. The December events revealed the same process, raised to a higher level of absurdity.

Why are government ministers so inclined to overreact to an issue like mad cow disease? The crisis emerged in the dying days of a demoralised Conservative regime, which was always on the defensive, sensitive to allegations of complacency and 'sleaze'. One manifestation of the declining solidarity of the old elite was the inevitability of bad news being leaked to an increasingly anti-Tory press.

policy. However, as the March 1996 debacle revealed, it may have the effect of pushing ministers into rash statements. Conflicts within Seac—calls of 'morons' and 'snotty medics' were heard emerging from the December 1997 meeting—undoubtedly contribute to the febrile climate.

The launch of the Food Standards Agency in January signals the arrival of another quango on the scene. Key figures behind the FSA have already helped to push the government further than it originally intended to go in announcing a public judicial inquiry under Lord Justice Phillips into the BSE/CJD affair. While such agencies take the pressure off the government, they also reduce its accountability—enhancing the power of appointed officials and experts over elected representatives.

'It's not the cows that are mad, it's the people' declared an exasperated Tory minister surveying the devastation of British agriculture after the events of March 1996. The evolution of the mad cow crisis confirms that the source of this madness lies, not in beef, but in the loss of nerve of the British establishment.

Why is republican Brendan O'Neill worried about the post-Diana reform of the Royal Family?

# DOWN WITH 'THE PEOPLE'S MONARCHY'

Over the last few months we have seen what I call the Dianafication of the monarchy, an attempt by the Royal Family to become more attuned to public opinion. On the Queen and Prince Philip's golden wedding anniversary in November we saw the Queen walking openly from Westminster Abbey to Downing Street, smiling a lot more than she usually does, chatting with people, playing with balloons, kissing her 49 year-old son in public for the first time in his 49 years. There is obviously an attempt by the royals to emulate the personal touch that was Diana's trademark.

Anthony Holden, author of two best-selling biographies of Prince Charles and the hugely successful *Tarnished Crown: Crisis in the House of Windsor*, has followed the fortunes of the royals for over 20 years. 'I have seen a number of changes', says Holden. 'But I think this is the first time in its history that the monarchy has been put under such pressure to justify itself.'

Holden identifies the death and the funeral of Princess Diana as the events which triggered the demand for a People's Monarchy: 'The crowds outside Buckingham Palace were decent salt-of-the-earth, humane Brits who could not understand why their head of state, who is supposed to symbolise their emotions and aspirations, was not around to share the moment with them. They did not want to see their monarchy functioning in this old-fashioned way.'

Holden believes there has been something of a 'polite revolution' since the death of Diana. The demand of what Holden calls 'Diana's Army' is for the monarchy to open itself up, admit that it has problems and become more like the rest of us. 'Really it is the British people who have changed', says Holden, 'but in a very British way, quietly and politely, without any blood being shed. There are still those who would like the Windsors to remain aloof, remote, dignified and non-emotional. But the people themselves have become a new, young, Blairish lot. It is the people who have changed and the institutions which have to catch up.'

This has been a common cry since the death of Diana. First we had the

People's Princess, as dreamt up by the New Labour press office; then there was the People's Funeral, where Earl Spencer delivered his passionate oration against the stiff upper lip; then came the People's Prime Minister, with Tony Blair evoking Diana's 'caring and sharing' values at the Labour Party conference; and later still there was the People's Palace, following rumours that Kensington Palace would open its doors to the homeless and the sick. Now we have the People's Monarchy, with the Queen being forced to change her ways after a 45-year reign. It is widely accepted today that Britain's traditional institutions must emulate The People if they are to survive. So what will have to change about the monarchy?

'If you ask people what they think about the Royal Family they are likely to say "They should be more like me"', says leading psychologist Oliver James. 'People think the monarchy should be more open just as the general population has become more open. The gap between the royals and the rest of us in terms of our personal lives and how we conduct ourselves has become a problem. The idea of a People's Monarchy is, I think, an attempt to narrow that gap.'

James, best known for making Peter Mandelson cry on television, is the author of *Britain on the Couch*, in which he brings together evolutionary psychology, studies of animal behaviour and research into psychopharmacology to paint a depressing picture of a society where 'we are unhappier than we were in the 1950s—despite being richer'. According to James the monarchy is like a dysfunctional family, where the pressure to succeed and to be perfect has turned out a fairly unstable group of individuals:

'There are quite a lot of problems within the Royal Family which are wonderfully symbolic. Look at the kind of childhood that the Queen and the Queen Mum had: they did not go to school, they had no normal connection with the rest of society. The only people who really mattered in their lives were their nannies, who were very old-fashioned and depriving, who encouraged the young princesses to develop a full self at an early age and to deny their instincts. This means that the older generation of royals have some very severe problems.'

But it is the younger generation of royals, James argues, who embody the problems of modern society more broadly: 'The rise in aspirations in the 1990s has spawned all kinds of problems: depression, violence, drug abuse, relationship difficulties and so on. I think these problems are reflected in the younger royals, most conspicuously in the form of ▶





◀ divorce and eating disorders. And of course, both Diana and Fergie were depressed and took Prozac, which is what a great number of women do today.'

James sees the tradition of the stiff upper lip as the means by which the royals have denied their problems and maintained the facade of an exemplary close-knit family. What he thinks is needed today is a monarchy which can be more open about its problems and admit that it is going through what many other families in Britain are going through. In other words, the monarchy should cease pretending to be the 'perfect family', and should instead become a mirror image of our own depravity. What James and others seem to be arguing is that the monarchy should reflect our own inability to cope with relationships, depression and life in general. But what does it say about society when even the head of state is encouraged to wallow in her own failure and inadequacy?

'The problem is you can only have a "Diana monarchy" if you have a monarch who is a celebrity or at least a bit sensational', says constitutional historian professor David Starkey. 'But do we really want a head of state or a consort like Diana who was reported as having her head stuck down the lavatory one minute and having an upper colonic lavage the next? Is that really an appropriate image? I don't think we are going to get the Queen talking openly about her battle with thrush, although it's hard to know; news is breaking all the time.'

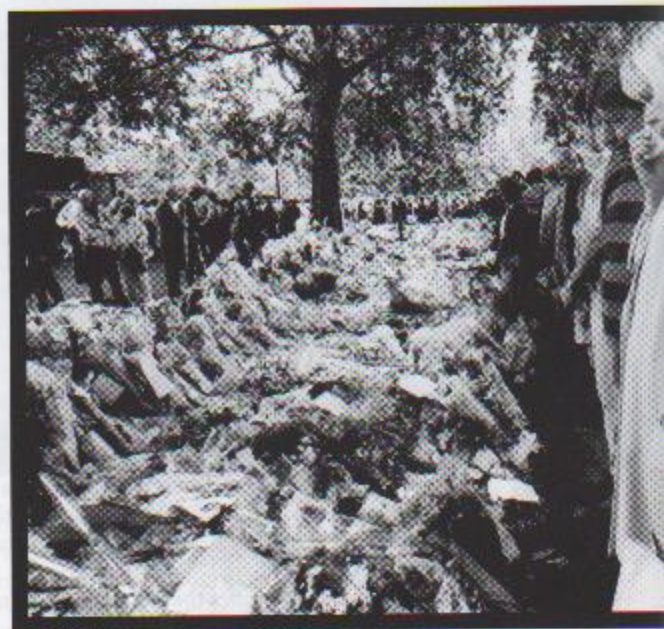
Starkey sees the move towards a People's Monarchy as a sign that 'Diana's values' are gaining a hold. 'What we are seeing at the moment is not the discovering of the People's Monarchy, but an attempted reinterpretation of it. A reinterpretation which will work for the Britain of Tony Blair rather than the Britain of Stanley Baldwin. Diana's values are taking over amongst a certain section of the population, with people talking about how we have become an Oprah Winfrey society, and to a certain extent we have.'

But Starkey also sees a contradiction in the Blair approach to the monarchy: 'If you look at Blair's speech at the Queen's golden wedding anniversary celebrations, he went out of his way to endorse the traditional values of the House of Windsor, the values of duty and service. The problem is he also goes out of his way to endorse Diana, who was of course the absolute antithesis of those values: she was all about self-expression, emotionalism and all of that. And it is jolly difficult to have both sets of values.'

In other words, there is Blair the Brown-nose who, like all Labour prime ministers before him, is the Queen's loyal and respectful servant. And there is Blair the Moderniser, who is keen to adopt the post-Diana values of 'caring and sharing'.

Royalist professor David Starkey may cling to the hope that Blair the Brown-nose will win through and keep the traditional monarchy intact, but in reality Blair the Moderniser has already won hands down. The royals' moves to appear more open provide an early but powerful sign that Blair's pact with the spirit of Diana is stronger than the traditional monarchy itself.

In the past the Royal Family maintained a formal distinction between their public and private lives. There was the public Imperial Family, head of the 'family of nations' which make up the Commonwealth; and there was the private Royal Family, as captured in the 1960s fireside photos. But in Blair's post-Diana Britain there is an increasing erosion of the distinction between public and private—as journalist Peter Stanford has observed, 'we are now truly a therapy nation' (*Independent on Sunday*, 4 January 1998), one where those who grieve in private or keep their feelings to themselves are seen as dysfunctional, while those who wear their hearts on their sleeves are praised for being 'in touch'. This was clear around Diana's funeral where the Queen and Prince Charles were criticised for their stiff upper lip and emotional restraint,



while Earl Spencer and the Great British Public were praised for letting it all hang out in uncontrollable displays of emotion.

In many ways the language of therapy is becoming the language of government, with Blair and his new elite as the psychoanalysts to a nation of 'damaged goods'. The title of Oliver James' book, *Britain on the Couch* sums up the state of the nation today. According to Sinead O'Connor, 'People liked Diana because she admitted that she'd slashed herself and made herself puke, that she was just as fucked up as us. I admire her for showing the Royal Family what they could have been, what they should have been' (*Vox*, February 1998). So that is what we need today: a head of state who is not afraid to puke in public.

'This is quite ridiculous', says Brian Sewell, celebrated snob and infamous art critic at the *Evening Standard*. 'The monarchy should set an example for us, it should not try to emulate us. You know, this Danish monarchy thing of riding your bicycle to go and buy a cabbage seems to me to be rather self-defeating and damned dull.' In fact, Sewell is the only person I have spoken to who argues that the monarchy is not extravagant enough: 'It is really so vulgar, so suburban to have your own aeroplane: any businessman can have that. It is even more vulgar to have your own train and your own boat: that

is the sort of thing grocers used to be able to do 50 years ago. The monarchy must spend its money more extravagantly than that, by funding the arts or architecture or something.'

According to Sewell the idea that the monarchy should be more like other people is 'horrific'. He would rather see a monarchy which sets an example—especially in his own field: 'Only a Royal Family can set an example of real extravagant, beautiful, aesthetic patronage, and they haven't done a bloody thing for 150 years. In a sense they have been a People's Monarchy ever since Queen Victoria was re-constituted, if you will excuse the phrase, at the end of the last century.'

Arguing that the monarchy should set an example of excellence for people to aspire to is not likely to go down very well today, where psychologists like Oliver James tell us that ambition and aspiration lead to depression and violence, and where excellence is derided as elitist. 'But I', says Sewell, 'am starting a campaign for the revival of respect for the word elite. If you have an elite standard for people to aspire to, then everything gets better. People criticise public schools in the same way they criticise the monarchy. The way to kill off public schools is to make every comprehensive as good



opera or a tourist attraction: it is a powerful symbol of an anti-democratic state, a sovereign power over and above the people.

If I had my way we would have neither a traditional monarchy nor a People's Monarchy, but a Republic, where power rests with the people and their directly elected representatives, and where there would be no room for Kings, Queens, dictators or spin-doctors. The problem is that never has a Republic been less likely than in post-Diana Britain. A Republic is premised on the idea that society is made up of intelligent and confident adults who are capable of making important decisions. Britain AD (After Diana) is premised on the idea that we are all losers in need of therapy and Prozac. And as Edward Pearce points out, 'only adults deserve a Republic'.

'Republic: I like the sound of that word', said John Wayne's Davy Crockett in *The Alamo*. 'It means people can live free, talk free, go or come, buy or sell, be drunk or sober, however they choose. Some words give you a feeling. Republic is one of those words.' By contrast New Britain is a place where, according to Oliver James, a large proportion of the population is 'dispirited, disappointed and angry', where at least one-third of adults could be diagnosed as having some form of 'psychiatric morbidity', and where it is estimated that 'perhaps 20 million people' need some kind of psychological intervention.

The discussion around the People's Monarchy reveals what The People in Blair's vision of Britain really are: a collection of atomised individuals, looked upon as losers who need a helping hand from self-appointed psychotherapists; people who would be better represented by a self-obsessed Princess who slashed herself with a razor and made herself puke (and then told us all about it), than by a Queen who prefers to keep her problems to herself.

In his book *Britain on the Couch* Oliver James suggests that our mentally ill society would benefit from an even wider use of Prozac. I was half-joking when I asked James if he thought any of the royals would benefit from such treatment: 'Well, of course, Diana and Fergie took Prozac, and I think Prince Philip would also benefit from a course of the drug, and maybe Prince Charles. Yes, I think Charles could also gain from using anti-depressants.'

When even the Royal Family, once the object of servility and respect, can be forced to succumb to the politics of emotion and can be told to sort their lives out with the aid of therapy and pills, what hope is there for the rest of us?



'Only adults  
**DESERVE**  
a Republic'

as them. There will then be no demand for public schools, except from the idiot sons of the aristocracy who are uneducatable anyway. Everything else will be as good as Eton and Harrow. Think of the Royal Family playing that kind of role: urging people, forcing people to get better'.

Of course we can all laugh at Sewell's outdated snobbery, but his defence of the idea that people can improve themselves makes a refreshing change from listening to Blairites telling us we have become a nation of compulsive losers.

Personally I could not care less whether the Queen appears on daytime television to talk about thrush or sails around the world in a luxury yacht. My problem with the monarchy is not that it is too extravagant or that it is made up of rotten personalities, but that it is an insult to our intelligence and a barrier to democracy.

Consider the recent exclusion of Sinn Fein MPs Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness from the House of Commons. Despite being elected by nearly 50 000 people, Adams and McGuinness will not be allowed into parliament because they refuse to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen. Such a brazen attack on the democratic process serves as a timely reminder that the monarchy is more than just a dysfunctional family, an overrated soap

# alt.culture . pop

Signs  
of the  
times

*'We're proud of what we did'*

Sarah Dawics, captain of the University Challenge team from New Hall, Cambridge, which scored 35 points, the lowest-ever score. Here's to non-elitist education.

*'Do not iron clothes on body'*

Instructions enclosed with Rowenta irons, as revealed in a New Scientist survey. Other product advice they found included: **'Do not try to stop chain with hands' from a Swedish manufacturer of chainsaws; 'kills all insects—warning: harmful to bee' from an insect spray; 'product will be hot after heating' from a Marks and Spencers pudding; Sainsbury's peanuts ('Contains nuts'); airline peanuts ('Instructions: open packet, eat contents); and finally, a bottle of flavoured milk marked: 'After opening, keep upright.'**

# 'I BELIEVE IN FREEDOM, BUT THEN AGAIN, HOW MUCH?'

Tony Wilson, Manchester's 'Mr Music', spoke to Andrew Calcutt about free speech, drugs and rock'n'roll

As befits the man who signed the Happy Mondays, Tony Wilson has no time for the new pop philosophy of moderation in all things. 'I think self-restraint is deeply unhealthy', declares the motormouth guru of the 'Manchester' scene (personal cv: Factory Records, Hacienda club, Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays and much more). 'And I can't imagine it being part of youth culture—this wonderful thing which has been in existence since the fifties is essentially Oedipal, the great big negative of saying "no" to your father, "no" to authority. I hope it will go on being Oedipal, and one of the great ways of being Oedipal is excess and the rest of it.'

Anthony H Wilson has had a hand in most of the music controversies of the past 20 years, ever since his seminal show *So It Goes* spat the Sex Pistols onto the TV screen for the first time. So, as it goes, what does he think of the growing demand for 'socially responsible lyrics', now being made by 'Drugs Czar' Keith Hellawell and other members of the great and the good on both sides of the Atlantic?

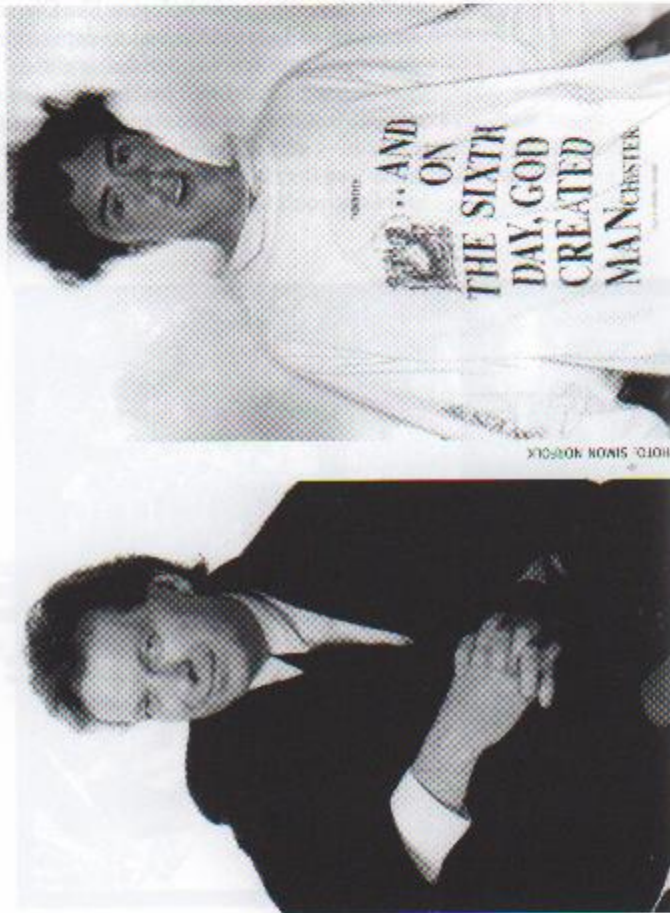


PHOTO: SIMON MORGAN

PHOTO: FACTORY RECORDS

going on holiday in Ibiza and finding a new way to behave. The mid-period of the cultural cycle has been Britpop, which is all right, but the centrality of the UK is based on the last explosion, the working class dance explosion.'

So is the music scene now too nice to be interesting? 'Basically the British music industry is quite happy in the late nineties. I judge how things are by how much retail floorspace is given over to music at Woolworths. It was decreasing in the early nineties; with Seattle happening, the American industry got totally into its own music, Europeans were selling their own home product, and computer games were going to wipe us out. Now there is a degree of buoyancy, but we are in the dying embers of a cycle. *Top of the Pops* today looks like it did in 85-86 and 73-4. It's the calm before the storm, which will come in two, two-and-a-half years.'

Those could prove prophetic words from a music magnate who has always had his finger on (or near, anyway) the cultural pulse, re-inventing his business more times than

'We safeguard our copyright very carefully in all cases, particularly when it concerns a children's property such as the Teletubbies.'

A BBC spokesman explains its attitude to the Belfast trader who produced a t-shirt depicting a Teletubby in military gear, brandishing a rifle under the slogan 'Trotaidh Ar La Lá'

'The buggy will only do Bmph top whack and I couldn't believe it when the police stopped me.'

Sam Hammond, 72, who was charged with driving a battery-powered invalid scooter on the pavement while over the alcohol limit.

If you thought the 'None for the Road' Christmas drink-drive campaign was bad, don't visit Turkey. In Ankara, motorists have been ordered to carry body bags in their cars.

Meanwhile, Ashford residents with criminal records received Christmas cards from the local police, with the greeting 'Thinking of you'. A spokesman said: 'We have an array of tactics to target criminals and this is just another way of letting them know we are watching them.'

'Socially responsible lyrics? That's a fabulous issue which exposes an individual like me as a complete hypocrite—and that's what I'm going to find interesting about the free speech debate at the ICA.'

'For example, I don't have a problem if The Prodigy want to say "Smack my bitch up". I think they are making themselves look stupid, but nevertheless, they can say it. But then again, if anything goes, what are you going to do about anti-Semitic lyrics or homophobic lyrics?'

'I once ran a hypothetical at the music convention in the City, asking people what they would do if one of their bands delivered an album with intensely homophobic lyrics. Keith Blackhurst of Deconstruction, believing in free speech, said allow the album to go out. I'm not sure I would be as liberal. I think I would personally say, maybe you have the right to go and do it but this is my record label, and I'm sorry I just do not want to put it out.'

'At the moment I am working in America with my band the Space Monkeys and inter-scope, the great gangsta rap label which had to be divorced from Warner Bros whose stock was going down because of the connection. In all honesty I am glad I have not had to face this question. I believe in freedom but then again, how much? Drugs is a different issue. You do them to yourself. The rock'n'roll tradition is that you can be allowed to say anything about what you do to yourself. And that's something I do believe.'

Wilson's own bands have come under fire from the purity police on occasion, as when some music press hysterics tried to call New Order 'Nazis', or when the Happy Mondays were accused of homophobia. 'Once upon a time Bez used the word "fag" in an interview—the way a working class kid who hangs out with gay people talks about them; and the hero of the working class Steven Wells [of the NME] used that to try to destroy the Happy

Richard Branson. 'I always tell the story of how we were successful with New Order in 87, and I said to our people, I think there will be a revolution round the corner and while we are doing very well let's not forget to look out for it. While I was saying this, from the band we had signed a year-and-a-half before just because they had that mark of Cain about them, two of them were round the back of a dingy pub in Manchester selling little white tablets they had got from America, and one of them was standing in the middle of the stage of the Hacienda waving his arms in the air—on his own. The revolution that was to come was already happening under our feet, and quite rightly, we shouldn't see it. If you can see history coming it's going to be no fun. Mr Fukuyama, please note.'

**Tony Wilson** will be appearing at the LM/ICA Free Speech Festival at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 27 February to 1 March 1998

Mondays. At the time we knew there was a hatchet job on the way, and we thought it was going to be "They've calmed down, they're driving BMWs and they've got children". Nathan [McCough, Mondays' manager] and I were relieved when we saw it. So we did nothing. Looking back on it, I should have taken a one page advert in the next week's NME with Shaun Ryder kissing a man, which Shaun would have, y'know, no problem.

'Maybe it was PC arriving early, or something that is still there, the backlash against working class bands as the kind of people who steal the stereo out of your car. And now we are in middle class rockland, I like The Verve, I like Radiohead, but it's student rock, it's nice.'

Wilson admits to being 'middle class' himself, but he has always been attracted to rough trade in music. 'The idea of Britain being cool in the nineties is based on the dance revolution which came from working class people



## alt.culture.type

*The author of clubland novel Deadmeat has got reason to be full of himself, says Theresa Clifford*

# Q IS FOR QUOTABLE

I set the template for others to follow. I wanted to break the mould of the traditional novel and of the publishing world. I wanted to be in control of my own intellectual property and show others that they could be in control too.' Q, no relation to James Bond's techno-boffin, is a young black writer with a lot to say for himself. But he can back up the hype more than most.

Q wrote, typeset, designed and published his first novel, *Deadmeat*, hawked

it outside nightclubs from the back of his car, and then sold it on to an established publisher (Sceptre). He contributed to the acclaimed clubland anthology *Disco Biscuits*, cut a CD called *Fever*, and now, with a website already linked to his first book, he is experimenting with multi-media. All of which suggests that this twenty-something Londoner is by no means as daft as his trademark wooden sunglasses would suggest.

Q claims to be the first writer to market his book like a record. This claim is disputed, but there is certainly a musical element in his writing. *Deadmeat* has song loops. I wanted to write dialogue that sings, that reflects the rhythms of the street. Although there is much talk of 'coming down' and 'the end of rave', Q maintains that the music which inspired him is going from strength to strength. He is equally enthusiastic about the internet—an enthusiasm that has helped make him a sought-after commentator on the future of the novel, which, he insists, 'must be multimedia'.

Refusing to succumb to 'information overload', Q embraces the digital technology which has allowed me to market my own intellectual property and be in control of my own destiny. This is the deeper meaning of my book: don't be *Deadmeat*, make your own

destiny'. His own experience of the benefits of hi-tech has set Q against 'appropriate technology' for the Third World and its proponents: 'Those that push "appropriate" technology in Africa are ignorant and racist. Without hi-tech, people in Africa are condemned to be little more than peasants. "Appropriate technology" says to them that the West will be their master.'

But Q is not totally hung up about racism. 'I don't make a big thing about my colour', he explains, 'because I didn't have anything to do with it. I'm not into "identity politics". My colour was encoded before I was born and I don't define myself by it. If my colour causes a problem, it's a challenge to overcome that problem. Technology and the Net have helped me to do that, after all the Net is colour blind—it gives you an international audience and frees you from your national location.'

Negotiating a film deal, Q has been struck by the conservatism of the industry: 'There are innovations such as digital cameras which I want to incorporate into the film version of *Deadmeat*, but they want to make it into a straight thriller about young blacks. If the film world doesn't get what I mean, I'll make the film myself.' At least Q sounds like he means it—too rare a thing in these days of indulgent self-doubt and irritating understatement.

## Signs of the times

Bangor City has been reprimanded and fined £100 for remarks in its club programme, which contained a criticism of Caersws fans who taunted followers of Rhyl with shouts of 'Scousers!' a reference to the north Wales club's tradition of fielding players from Liverpool.

**'We abhor racism in any form', ran the piece, 'especially when it comes from a group of inbred sheep \*\*\*\*\*'.**

**'Let's face it—[Oasis] are a cheap copy of the Beatles and so juvenile. All this business about "offering people out"—well, I'm outside the Capital Radio studios just after 10am every weekday if they want to show how tough they are.'**

Fighting talk from Tony Blackburn. Sadly the challenge is only extended to members of the band.

**'There are teams where you have got players who, from a distance, look almost identical, and of**

The real violence of Francis Bacon's pictures, currently on display in a rare retrospective at London's Hayward gallery, lies not so much in the depiction of grappling,

convulsive figures as in what they imply: the dreadful sense that this is all there is—being without becoming. The violence Bacon does to his subjects is to wrench them from

narrative, cut them off from tradition and strip them from any kind of social context. These are human beings without humanity, their bodies rendered into monstrous meat.

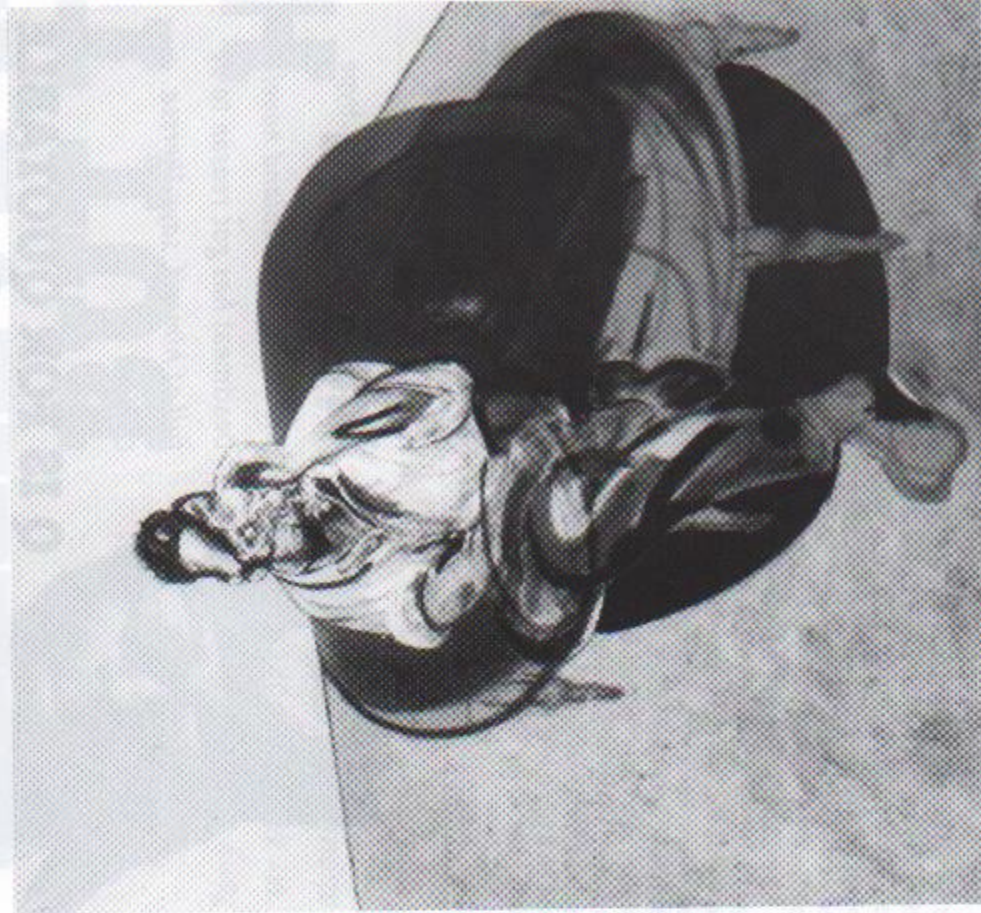
Bacon's figures haunt eerily institutionalised settings, decked out like real rooms as if to mock the security which they deny. Bare electric lightbulbs banish privacy and shade alike. Set against the harsh planes of abstract colour which cut and thrust across the canvas, these spaces show the ephemerality and contingency of their occupants.

When shadows intrude they ooze from the figures themselves. A face as blank as an animal's stare is devoured by its own likeness. Light switches look like panic buttons, and arrows point and poke at scenes of humiliation. Escape is denied, and so is subjectivity. The violence of Bacon's vision extends even to the paint itself, and the way he uses its materiality as if to obliterate the substance of what it represents.

Bacon, who died in 1992, was a master of his medium; but a master without a coherent method. He invited chance into his working process, and strove for nervous effect regardless of the means employed. His work and his way of working both deny the possibility of progression or transcendence. Like Goya's depiction of a skeletal corpse which rises from the grave to scrawl *Nada* [nothing] on its own tombstone, Bacon is all about the impossibility of tomorrow. There is only the raw impact of the nervous impulse, and the sense of ourselves as the prying eye of an authority which violates both the observed and the observer. ●

**Martin Hughes**

Francis Bacon: The Human Body, 5 February to 5 April 1998, Hayward Gallery, London, phone (0171) 928 3144



PORTRAIT OF LUCIAN FREUD (ON ORANGE COUCH), FRANCIS BACON, 1961

# NOW

When is it OK to be offensive?

asks American comedian

Steven Alan Green

Why do audiences still get upset with some comedians when they go overboard? Everything they say is 'just a joke', right? 'Oh no', some might say, 'that's not funny', or 'there are some things which shouldn't be made fun of'; or the classic response when there has been a national tragedy, 'it's too early for that type of joke'.

Too early? I'm sorry, is there a proper time to tell offensive, tasteless jokes? If so, when? Is it after eleven in the am? The news of Diana's demise reached me at 5am. I had three one-liners on the subject by 5.08am. And who says it is now time? The real problem with waiting for subjects to be okayed by whomever is that by the time it is okay, it is too late to be really funny.

The late Sam Kinison, the over-the-edge comic who started out in Texas back in the early eighties, was bleeped on his first appearance on America's *Saturday Night Live*. His joke was (in essence): the reason crack cocaine use is dramatically up is because the federal government has been spraying the marijuana in Mexico with paraquat. Then he'd yell, 'You want to stop crack use? Stop spraying our pot!'.

It was a simple joke which highlighted very dramatically the government's lopsided drug policy. Sam was not advocating drug use, necessarily. He was simply saying that the government was out of touch. Well, he got clipped. The ironic thing was that all it did was turn him into the biggest comedy martyr America has seen since Lenny Bruce. The following week Lorne Michael (legendary producer of *Saturday Night Live* and such film stuff as *Wayne's World*) made Sam guest host.

# BACON THE BUTCHER



# DAN TROUBLE

It is not well in the world of comic books. Marvel, publisher of *Spiderman* and the *X-Men*, has been on the point of bringing in the receivers. DC Comics are trying yet another reincarnation of Superman, this time as two separate heroes (Red and Blue Superman). And Desperate Dan, Britain's last comic cowboy, received his P45 towards the end of 1997, only to be brought back 'by popular demand'.

In each instance, publishers have cited difficulties in making characters relevant to the current era. There is nothing new in killing off characters whose face does not fit the times: Marvel's Silver Surfer hit that cosmic wave when hippiedom went on the wane; the *Beano's* Lord Snooty hung up his top hat after John Major talked about the classless society; and the *Dandy's* pyrotechnics expert, Bing Bang Benny, lit his last fuse in the seventies when the IRA's bombing campaign put an entirely different gloss on his activities.

What is new, however, is that today's writers, artists and publishers are uncertain as to how to replace the characters they have got rid of. They do not seem to be able to get a clear line on the contemporary context. Making jokes and creating heroes would be a helluva lot easier if there was not so much confusion about what to laugh at or look up to.

More so than at any other time, our favourite characters have been re-examined and found wanting. Some pundits decided there was too much violence in kids' comics, and the thwack 'em and whack 'em rate has been scaled down accordingly. The *Bash Street Kids*, who fought off retirement in 1994, are no longer under threat from teacher's

For the record, Sam died in a car wreck. The driver of the other car was probably on crack.

Kinison's chief rival at the time was a comedian named Andrew 'Dice' Clay. 'Dice' was a character concocted by a formerly fat Jewish kid from Sheephead Bay, Brooklyn, who adopted a 'Fonzi' look and mixed it with the camp confidence of Stallone and Pacino. Dice's 15 minutes ended when he refused to apologise for a remark he made about Aids victims: 'Get a job, buttslammer. Find something you like other than the Hershey Highway.' His crowd loved it, though it was always difficult to tell who his crowd really was. Were they people who knew he was taking the piss out of a pinhead character, or were they simply pinheaded followers who saw no irony at all in what he was saying.

Anyhow, Andrew had a last chance press conference. But rather than explaining it was just a joke, he chose to stay in character and berate the press for being so stupid. His wings were clipped. He supposedly lost a movie deal, nobody with any pull would touch him. He eventually recovered somewhat, but by then he had lost his steam. Kinison, mangled in the carnage of early death myth, fared much better. Body work is always cheaper than a good press agent.

I too have experienced the wrath of the PC police. I usually open my act with a satirical song which has as its chorus 'Faggots are everywhere, they live around the block. Faggots are everywhere, they want to suck my cock'. Most people, including many gay people, know that I am taking the piss out of homophobia, that I am speaking the mind of the bigot on purpose. However, I have to admit that the shock element also works for me. And those most often shocked are the politically correct, the timid. On more than one occasion, this piece has cost me work. I have been labelled as homophobic by some. Sure, I could argue that this is not really how I feel, or that the joke contains a contradiction. If faggots are 'everywhere', I must be one too. But I choose the easier route: they can all go and suck my cock!

Sometimes you have a so-called bad guy speak on stage what everybody secretly believes. But you have to be careful. Some things are so dangerous even the audience does not want to know it knows.

Steven Alan Green will be performing and speaking at the Free Speech Festival



Richard Sedley is a graphic artist

courses, with more black players coming into the game, they would not mind me saying that that can be very confusing' John Molson, with what he would no doubt call a 'talking point'. Yes, but is it good for the game, Moty?

Meanwhile, Deurche BA, a subsidiary of British Airways, has hired a radio DJ to teach its staff how to tell jokes and engage in banter. 'We're not forcing them to be funny', said communications executive Anja Janke.

'When the gasman came in his van we thought he was going to take away all the meters. When he told us he was only taking one, I said I am not standing for that so we decided to lock him up'

Betty Nicholls, one of seven pensioners at Romley House, Essex, who kidnapped a British Gas worker in protest at continuing bills, following their conversion to electricity

'If I don't get a place in heaven, I'll want to know why. I've done my best'

Bernard Manning

DR MIKE FITZPATRICK

# New Labour New NHS?



The White Paper 'The New NHS' published in December offers a characteristically New Labour programme for healthcare. With a subtitle in the form of an e-mail address—modern.dependable—'The New NHS' offers to cut red tape (what red tape?) and set up a 24 hours a day helpline. A foreword by Tony Blair sets the tone. Lots of short sentences. Sentences without verbs. Efficiency and quality. Fairness and partnership. And so on. And on.

The striking difference between the 1989 White Paper 'Working for Patients' that launched the Conservative internal market reforms (introducing hospital trusts and GP fundholding) and the New Labour document is the public response. Whereas the Tory White Paper provoked a storm of protest from the medical profession, opposition MPs and the media, New Labour's was quietly received. Even leading fundholding GPs and Tory MPs could scarcely raise a protest.

Perhaps as a result of the lack of controversy, the new White Paper's claims that the internal market was to be abolished and GP fundholding replaced have been taken at face value. 'In fact', as LSE social policy experts Howard Glennerster and Julian LeGrand pointed out, 'the key elements of the old internal market will be retained' and the proposed GP-led commissioning amounts to 'the ultimate extension of fundholding' (*Guardian*, 10 December 1997).

The key element in the new plans—a central role for 'primary care groups' of GPs in commissioning healthcare services for local populations of about 100 000 people—marked the triumph of the 'locality commissioning' model which has emerged in parallel with fundholding over the past five years. Whereas GP fundholding became established in rural and suburban areas, various forms of commissioning services through collectively held budgets developed in inner-city areas, with encouragement from the Labour Party. The new White Paper in practice proposes to consolidate the reforms introduced by the previous government.

The general approval of New Labour's plans for the NHS reflects the development of a new consensus around the concept of a 'primary care-led NHS', officially sanctioned in a report from the new NHS executive in 1994 ('Developing NHS Purchasing and GP Fundholding: Towards a Primary Care-led NHS'). This document pursued the logic of the internal market reforms by further encouraging the initiative of GPs in both rationing services to patients and in imposing a degree of market discipline on their hospital colleagues:

'The aim is for decisions about purchasing and providing healthcare to be taken as close to the patient as possible by GPs working closely with patients through primary healthcare teams.' (p5)

'The New NHS' is even more explicit:

'For the first time in the history of the NHS, the government will align clinical and financial responsibility to give all the professionals who make prescribing and referring decisions the opportunity to make financial decisions in the best interests of their patients.' (p9)

The White Paper continues on the familiar themes of 'cost effectiveness' and 'tough choices'. It calls for 'big gains in quality and big gains in efficiency', emphasising that 'the two go together' in a 'modern and dependable healthcare system that will once again lead the world. A new NHS for a new century'.

It does not however detail the wider context created by the new government's pre-election endorsement of Tory public spending projections, which mean a drastic squeeze on health resources over the next two years. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, this will be 'more stringent than anything the Conservatives managed in their 18 years in power'.

Though 'The New NHS' recommends a retreat from the fragmentation produced by the full rigours of market forces unleashed by small scale fundholding,

it proposes to retain and strengthen the operation of commercial principles. Furthermore, by making participation by GPs in primary care groups compulsory and by introducing stricter mechanisms of monitoring and control, the new scheme has a distinctly authoritarian dynamic. As two health policy analysts noted in an editorial in the *British Medical Journal*, 'the proposals amount to three main things: softening the harsher edges of the internal market by increasing collaboration and openness; involving all general practitioners in commissioning/purchasing; and strengthening central control over the quality of, and access to, clinical care' (27 December).

It is remarkable that the concept of a primary care-led NHS should have become established—apparently without question—in such a short period of time. Whereas the authority of the hospital in the post-war NHS was based on its remarkable clinical achievements over the preceding 300 years, what has ever been achieved in general practice? It seems that the rising prestige of the GP is based partly on the general disillusionment with hospital medicine, partly on the contribution of primary healthcare to the new modes of regulating behaviour (diet, exercise, smoking, drinking, safe sex, etc) and partly because of GPs' role as gatekeepers to NHS resources.

The paradox of the White Paper is that at a time when GPs are complaining of unprecedented levels of stress and hardship, phoning help lines, taking early retirement and facing a recruitment crisis, New Labour plans to give them a central role in enforcing a new regime of austerity in the NHS. Can they do it? No doubt many are willing and have been working away in locality commissioning groups and other pilot projects anticipating the events of the past 12 months. Whether the proposed restructuring can be achieved within the allocated budgets seems doubtful. That the consequence will be a reduced quality of healthcare for many seems inevitable.

A new NHS? Certainly. Progress? Not.

# READING

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Sinn Fein is fast becoming the New Labour of Northern Ireland, writes BRENDAN O'NEILL

### WHEN GERRY MET TONY

#### PROVOS: THE IRA AND SINN FEIN

Peter Taylor,  
Bloomsbury,  
£16.99 hbk

#### MAN OF WAR, MAN OF PEACE?: THE UNAUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY OF GERRY ADAMS

David Sharrock and Mark Devenport, Macmillan,  
£16.99 hbk

#### PEACE OR WAR?: UNDERSTANDING THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Chris Gilligan and Jon Tonge (eds)  
Ashgate, £35 hbk

#### AN IRISH VOICE: THE QUEST FOR PEACE

Gerry Adams,  
Roberts Rinehart,  
\$14.95 pbk

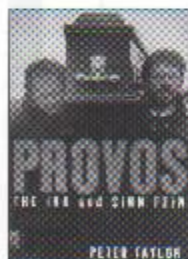
THE SINN FEIN LEADERSHIP HAS MADE A remarkable journey over the past five years—from the nationalist ghettos of Northern Ireland to the parlours of the White House, from smoke-filled rooms in West Belfast to the smoke-free offices of 10 Downing Street. Gerry Adams and his entourage now rub shoulders with world statesmen such as Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela. Forget Ian Paisley's increasingly paranoid rantings about a 'terrorist threat': today's Sinn Fein is more New Labour than Old IRA. The Blair-Adams summit at the end of last year was a symbolic meeting of minds, British prime minister and Sinn Fein president greeting each other on first name terms and engaging in friendly conversation.

Many commentators, including some of those under review, welcome the peace process and the inclusion of Sinn Fein in the all-party talks, but underestimate the change which has taken place within republican thinking. Many suggest that the republican movement has simply put a new spin on an old story and remains committed to the goal of a United Ireland and to armed struggle. But the truth is that the political trajectory which Sinn Fein has followed over the past 20 years has successfully transformed it into a radically new organisation. Far from posing a violent threat to

the peace process, Sinn Fein stands at the entrance to the corridors of power, set to play the role of gendarme in the government of Northern Ireland.

In his book *Provos*, veteran Northern Ireland reporter Peter Taylor perceptively notes that Sinn Fein started on the road to constitutional politics long before there was talk of a peace process. It was during the hunger strike of 1981 that Sinn Fein first made moves towards electoral politics. 'The hunger strike is a watershed in the history of the republican movement', writes Taylor. 'Although the deaths of 10 men made it clear to the British government that the IRA was determined to see its "struggle" through to the end, regardless of the cost, its real historical significance lies in the election of Bobby Sands and Owen Carron to Westminster. Their victories laid the foundation for the political base that Gerry Adams knew had to be built if the "struggle" were to progress.'

The election of Adams as president of Sinn Fein two years later was another important moment for the republican movement. Adams was regarded as an ardent moderniser who wanted to transform Sinn Fein from newspaper sellers on street corners in the shadow of the IRA into a formidable political party which could challenge the constitutional nationalists of the SDLP. 'Gerry Adams' triumph was crowned on 13 November 1983 ►



## FOR THE FIRST TIME THE MODERN REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT WAS RECOGNISING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE SOUTHERN IRISH GOVERNMENT—AND BY IMPLICATION THE PARTITION OF IRELAND

◀ when he was elected president in succession to Ruairi O Bradaigh', writes Taylor. 'For the old Southern leadership, the writing was on the walls of Belfast and Derry as Adams, McGuinness and those around them gradually began jettisoning much of what they regarded as historical baggage which they now felt hindered, not advanced, the cause.' (p283)

In the ensuing years Adams initiated important changes at two republican conferences. The first was the Ard Fheis of October 1986 where Sinn Fein voted to abandon the policy of abstentionism in relation to the Twenty-Six Counties, meaning that republicans elected in the Irish Republic could now take their seats in the Dail (Irish parliament). For the first time the modern republican movement was recognising the legitimacy of the Southern Irish government—and by implication the partition of Ireland that brought that government into being. The second important conference was the Ard Fheis of February 1992 at which Sinn Fein adopted the document 'Towards a Lasting Peace' and embarked on the current peace process. The new policy document marked a significant step forward for Sinn Fein as it attempted to redefine the conflict in Northern Ireland, away from being one between British imperialism and Irish liberation, and towards one between Unionism and nationalism: a culture clash which could be resolved with 'parity of esteem' between those two communities rather than a British withdrawal. Sinn Fein began to describe the British government not as the problem in Ireland, but as part of the potential solution.

The development of modern republican politics from 1981 to the present day shows that Sinn Fein's involvement in the current peace process is not the result of some sudden expediency. The republican movement's current position as a mainstream party with the ear of the British, Irish and American governments is the result of its own political trajectory. Over the last 20 years, since the onset of the military impasse in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has been heading towards the peace process.

In the 1990s that process was speeded up as a result of broader changes in the international political landscape. 'The world had been undergoing change', writes Taylor. 'On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, heralding the end of the Cold War era. There was movement towards resolving the seemingly intractable conflicts in the Middle East and South Africa.' (p315) The end of the Cold War had a demoralising effect on national liberation movements, all of which were forced to abandon their struggles and accept compromising settlements. New Sinn Fein is a result of its own political trajectory, while also reflecting a global trend.

Peter Taylor convincingly traces the assimilation of Sinn Fein into the political process in the 1990s, culminating in the IRA ceasefire of 1994 and the party's

acceptance into all-party talks in 1997. But Taylor concludes that the threat of violence still lurks behind today's republican movement. This reflects a common misperception about the relationship between the republican movement and physical force. In the early 1980s the IRA was clearly the most powerful wing of the republican movement, with Sinn Fein little more than a small group of activists. But the development of Sinn Fein into an almost respectable political party means that physical force has become redundant. By the early 1990s, the new Sinn Fein had become the most powerful wing of the republican movement and violence became a tactical barrier to the further push towards mainstream politics. The winding down of armed struggle was the final prerequisite for Sinn Fein's full involvement in the peace process.

MANY COMMENTATORS WILL POINT TO GERRY Adams' longevity as leader of the republican movement as evidence that the party has changed little and remains committed to its age-old principles. This is the premise of David Sharrock and Mark Devenport's unauthorised biography, *Man of War, Man of Peace?*. The biography begins with the failed IRA activities of Adams' father, Gerry senior and ends with Gerry junior waiting to take his rightful place as a negotiator at the historic all-party talks, implying a consistency in the movement's priorities and principles. In between we are treated to Adams' well-rehearsed life story: from civil rights activist to IRA commander, from prisoner of war to leader of Sinn Fein. Sharrock and Devenport ascribe a consistent approach to the republican movement:

'[Adams] urges that he should not be left alone in the negotiating room, but should be backed up by a militant campaign of street protests. After the 1997 ceasefire he said that "side by side with the demands for talks, nationalists should mobilise and agitate".' (p465)

The clear implication is that Adams is continuing the struggle for Irish independence by different means. In reality Sinn Fein party policy is no longer directed by the grassroots desire for independence, but by the need for respectability at the all-party talks. Like the other main parties in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein's primary responsibility today is to the peace process itself. Far from threatening stability by 'having its guns under the talks table', Sinn Fein is now a fully-fledged party of the peace process, a qualitatively different organisation from the one Gerry Adams senior joined in the 1940s.

Gerry Adams' current thinking is best gauged from his new book *An Irish Voice: The Quest for Peace*, published in America. The book is a compilation of columns written by Adams for the American newspaper *The Irish Voice* between 1993 and the present day, and



## THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT HAS DEMOBILISED ITS BASE OF POPULAR SUPPORT IN FAVOUR OF DEVELOPING NEW POLITICAL ALLIANCES WITH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND BILL CLINTON

offers a unique insight into the thinking of the republican movement's most prominent leader. More than anything the book illustrates the increasing influence that Bill Clinton and the American establishment are having on Ireland's republican movement. It is significant that Adams should have a weekly column outlining republican strategy at such an important time in an Irish-American newspaper, widely read by Clintonites in the White House.

Sinn Fein party policy is increasingly being directed towards the Clinton administration at the expense of traditional grassroots democracy. Gerry Adams candidly admitted in 1995 that when he heard the IRA was about (temporarily) to end its ceasefire he phoned the White House (he now has a direct line) instead of going to talk to his supporters (p203).

It is clear that Sinn Fein has become a respectable political party in recent years—but at a price. The republican movement has demobilised its base of popular support in favour of developing new political alliances with the British government and Bill Clinton. It is ironic that at the same time as the republican movement became publicly more reliant on its supporters by moving into electoral politics, it started to cut itself off from its political base in the nationalist working class.

In his contribution to *Peace or War?: Understanding the Peace Process in Northern Ireland*, Mark Ryan traces Sinn Fein's assimilation into mainstream politics. According to Ryan, Sinn Fein's acceptance of the 'politics of identity' and its accommodation to community politics has sounded the death-knell for traditional republicanism. While many writers and commentators are keen to point out that behind New Sinn Fein lurks Old IRA, the reality is that, in accepting its marginal position within Irish society as the representative of a minority within a minority, the republican movement has given up on the struggle for Irish independence. Ryan points to a richly symbolic handshake between Mary Robinson and Gerry Adams in 1993 which illustrated this fact:

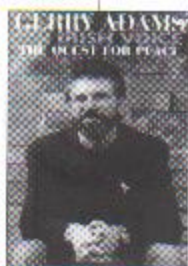
'Adams was received by the Irish president, an illegitimate title according to traditional republican doctrine, not as the head of a movement committed to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland, but as one humble West Belfast community representative among 30 others. In conferring a handshake on Adams, Robinson was indicating to the wider republican movement that in return for dropping the broader claim to national leadership and accepting community status, Sinn Fein could at last become a part of the mainstream.' (p82)

Only by ditching its claim to be the centre of Irish politics, as the custodian of Irish sovereignty entrusted

in it by the Dail of 1921, and by accepting its real status as a minority constitutional party has Sinn Fein been embraced into the mainstream. The irony is that now Sinn Fein is returning to the centre of Irish politics, but as a centre party of the peace process, not as the party which will overthrow British rule in Ireland.

Ryan's incisive chapter appears in a book which takes a critical look at different aspects of the peace process. Editors Chris Gilligan and Jon Tonge have done an excellent job in bringing together articles which raise important questions about recent developments in Anglo-Irish affairs. Gilligan's own chapter 'Peace or pacification process?: A brief critique of the peace process' challenges the repressive nature of the current 'peace' in Northern Ireland which has been achieved through the 'pacification of the population'. 'It is likely to make the last quarter of a century appear positively liberating by comparison', writes Gilligan. Also noteworthy is Kevin Rooney's exposé of the idea that education can be a panacea for Northern Ireland's sectarian ills, and Jon Tonge's contribution on 'The origins and development of the peace process'.

'An Ireland without traditional republicanism is difficult to imagine', concludes Mark Ryan. 'Yet that is what we will have to get used to in the years to come.' Today, Sinn Fein can claim to be one of the most important peace process parties. Republicans have a genuine link with the most historic political tradition in Ireland and at the same time have adapted to the new politics of identity and community in a way that no other Irish party has. It is the combination of these two factors which makes Sinn Fein an attractive candidate to fill a void in Irish politics.



LIKE NEW LABOUR, SINN FEIN HAS TURNED away from its traditional base of support and is now set to turn the strong arm of repression against its own electorate. Republicans have already joined in a debate about updating the RUC and making the police force more acceptable to nationalists. In its submission to Strands One and Two of the peace talks (10 November 1997), Sinn Fein writes: 'A new police service which is representative of the society it serves should be created.' The new police force should, according to republicans, 'reflect a civilian ethos' and give 'equal prominence to nationalist symbols'.

Such concern for the reputation of the forces of law and order is a long way from the days when the Royal Ulster Constabulary were greeted with a *Sieg Heil* from nationalist protesters. And who should serve in this police force? 'Participation in the former armed conflict should not debar applicants from recruitment to a new policing service', writes Sinn Fein. Republicans clearly see no contradiction in former opponents of British rule taking on a role in policing the New Northern Ireland. ►

◀ Such discussions will confer on Northern Ireland's paramilitary police force a legitimacy it has not enjoyed for 30 years.

Sinn Fein is also at the forefront of making the Parades Commission palatable to nationalists in the Six Counties. The Parades Commission presents itself as protecting the two communities from offence and intimidation, while getting on with its real job of outlawing dissident politics, undermining the right to protest and telling people how to behave (see 'Mo Mowlam's marching orders', *LM*, December 1997/January 1998). By standing up for the right of residents to 'live in peace and security' Sinn Fein has paved the way for this attack on the right to free assembly by the security forces.

The modern republican movement emerged in response to the British state's violent repression of civil rights protests in the late sixties. Now Sinn Fein loudly supports a British state commission which decides who can and cannot march. Gerry Adams and his cronies are second only to Tony Blair in using the new vacuous language of 'rights' ('the right to live in peace', 'the right to privacy', 'the right to be consulted') to undermine civil liberties in the here and now. What Sinn Fein is demanding today are not rights at all, but protection. The movement that once fought for independence now calls on the British state to protect it from the extremists.

And it was only five years ago that the symbolic handshake between Adams and Mary Robinson took place. Today Mary McAleese, a nationalist from West Belfast, can be elected president of Ireland with Sinn Fein's backing. McAleese states her aim to be the creation of 'an island where difference is celebrated with joyful curiosity and generous respect and where in the words of John Hewitt, "each may grasp his neighbour's hand"'. No wonder Sinn Fein supported McAleese's candidature. Their aim is also the creation of an inclusive, pluralist agreed Ireland, where every culture is cherished and respected: an Ireland where the need to reach agreement and celebrate diversity takes precedence over independence and the protection of political rights.

'Inequality and social exclusion are the enemies of peace', Sinn Fein has told the all-party talks. 'We need a partnership, based on equality, which will empower and improve the quality of life of citizens by being open, inclusive and democratic.' Far from posing a threat to stability, Sinn Fein uses the Blairite language of inclusion and empowerment to put the case for a new form of ruling Northern Ireland more effectively than any other party. With the Unionist parties in disarray and the nationalist SDLP increasingly looking like it has exhausted its political programme, Sinn Fein could yet prove to be New Labour's most useful ally in Ireland. ●

## READ ON READ ON READ ON READ ON READ ON

### STAYING SANE: HOW TO MAKE YOUR MIND WORK FOR YOU

Dr Raj Persaud, *Metro Books*, £17.99 pbk

Dr Raj Persaud, one of the youngest doctors ever appointed as Consultant Psychiatrist at the prestigious Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals, is a man with a vision. 'Think of this book as the mental equivalent of regular diet and healthy exercise', he urges. 'So let's get into shape. Stop worrying and beating yourself up, face your fears, select sensible, dependable friends, and acquire charm, poise and grace for social occasions. Take time out to engage in a little "pleasant activity" training, or consider the Fourteen Fundamentals programme to long-term happiness: (1) Keep Busy... (5) Lower Your Expectations...'

Persaud's well-balanced world would shudder at the idea that dicing with distress may be worth it: going with the 'wrong' friends rather than a safer but duller selection, or pursuing a driving ambition to the edge of distraction. His cognitive cogniscenti lead a square life, loyal to the comforts of home, a steady job, and a little spiritual conviction, which points to the problem with health promotion, physical and mental—its star rises precisely as more challenging, worldly ideas about what we might do with our good health wane. (As he says himself in a memorable sentence, 'anti-boredom strategies would seem more urgent than ever before'.)

Thankfully, a mental work-out is not all that he offers. Read this book for its blow-by-blow demolition of the merits of the counselling culture. As befits an author urging us to take responsibility for our mental state, he calls on society to overcome its dependency on the priests of the modern age. What sort of people become counsellors?, he asks. Answer: sadists and masochists, the socially inhibited, and the rigidly intellectual. He warns against the 'clandestine conspiracy to extend indefinitely the boundaries of mental illness so that anyone suffering from life's problems needs expert intervention'. Counselling detaches us from the world, inviting us on a personal quest for mental contentedness that owes nothing to our relations with the rest of society.

Persaud is also strong on tackling the fatalism which cites genes or aspects of our past, such as traumatic events, as masters of our present. He would certainly applaud yachtsman Tony Bullimore who, waving aside insistent invitations to trauma counselling following a harrowing three days in his upturned boat, went for a pint instead. The book, however, gives succour to one of today's terrible ailments, the preoccupation with personal health by the personally healthy. I'd be nuts wholly to commend it. ●

Ian Pegg

‘a fierce and trenchant pamphlet...Hume makes a devastating attack on the “journalism of attachment”, especially as applied to the war in Bosnia’

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