

# The Retreat From Liberty

Michael  
Moorcock

A provocative thesis.

On the slippery road to 1984, we are witnessing an unprecedented erosion of liberties in England and in the sophisticated nations overall.

Michael Moorcock feels strongly that the radical gains of the Sixties are now being eroded and that the issues espoused by liberals today are generally meaningless. Anger against the establishment is being channelled into the Falklands factor, anti-nuclear marches and demonstrations and causes like "Animal Liberation" while, in fact, human rights are everywhere threatened.

Liberty is being whittled away and we must all wake up to the possibility of a new political dark age as desperate times provide us with simplistic answers. 1984 might just yet start in 1984. A cry from the heart?



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A BEE IN BONNET BOOK





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## *Michael Moorcock*

Michael Moorcock has carved an awesome reputation for himself as one of Britain's major imaginative writers. A prolific and popular output in the fields of fantasy and science-fiction was crowned by the Guardian Award for Fiction for **The Condition of Muzak**. Other recent major novels include **Gloriana**, **The Brothel in Rosenstrasse** and **Byzantium Endures**. A keen anarchist sympathiser, Michael Moorcock lives in London.





Michael McConnell

The Retreat From Liberty

The Erosion of Democracy in Today's America

Free Press



Michael Moorcock

**The Retreat From Liberty**  
The Erosion of Democracy in Today's Britain



A Bee in Bonnet Book

from



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## The Retreat From Liberty

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*"I think we can take a little bit of pride in being of British stock. You know, what we fought for – freedom and justice, which are two sides of the same coin. We had total faith in your readiness to stand by everything we believed in, and we also had total faith in the courage, bravery, and skill of our armed forces. These things together brought us all a famous victory. In the end, everyone knew you were British and wanted to remain British. Throughout it all, you remained totally loyal."*

Mrs Thatcher's speech to the people of Port Stanley,  
January 9th 1983

## *Introduction*

IN THIS ESSAY I've chosen to take a straightforward polemical line. I do not intend to support my arguments with much in the way of statistics or cases simply because my experience as a pamphleteer demonstrated that anything can be proved or disproved by the appropriate choice of data. I'd rather leave my arguments plain so that they can be seen for what they are. Some people will find them too emphatic, others will miss the irony and some will see the whole as a joke. Some will see why I prefer to write novels where a selection of events are allowed to speak for themselves. It might seem unfair that I've picked on Mrs Thatcher as a symbol of everything I dislike in present day politics. It could be argued that I've imposed a character upon her (she's very similar, in my eyes, to my own Miss Brunner of the Cornelius stories); but she serves nicely in that role and if there were someone better I'd certainly have used them instead.

It might seem unrealistic of me to mourn the present decline of democracy in this country when it so obviously results from malignant economic forces affecting the whole world. One does not always have to swim with the tide and sometimes a determination to swim against it produces a surprisingly good result. I believe that Tories of Mrs Thatcher's persuasion unconsciously welcome our present circumstances as a splendid



excuse to exercise their power-fantasies, to recreate a past in which they feel more at ease, to suppress a working class which made them deeply uncomfortable. Whatever their rationales, I believe they are at root desperately nostalgic and would like to return British society to something resembling the pre-Macmillan fifties or preferably to the mythical pre-1914 Golden Age they all yearn for (witness so many of their references). Needless to say they frequently appear as comic figures in the eyes of the rest of the world because their dreams dictate actions and statements which bear no resemblance to observable reality.

Palmerston's policies were based on the certain knowledge that Britain was the greatest power in the world. To hear Thatcher, Whitelaw or Pym offer public statements frequently resembling Palmerston's serves only as a reminder of how far we are removed from the days of our Imperial strength and how deeply we deceive ourselves when we indulge our nationalistic fantasies.

Since this country voted Mrs Thatcher to government in 1979 we have witnessed a deliberate attack on our democratic institutions and a rapid retreat from reality best symbolised by our celebration of the Royal Wedding, the Falklands War and the Royal Baby, though perhaps we should date this retreat from 1977 when the Royal Jubilee seemed to highlight a deep nostalgic longing in the majority of the British public for a return to the certainties of an idealised past. Mrs Thatcher is frequently praised for having the hard-headed simple-mindedness of a grocer's daughter. Certainly her economics seem simplistic enough, but otherwise I think she is living as rich a fantasy life as was ever granted a little suburban princess. Sometimes it looks as if Shirley Temple is running the country on the lines of a Kipling story adapted by John Ford: Wee Willie Winkie becomes the little girl who is able to twist an old badger like C. Aubrey Smith round her cute but determined little finger.

When a threatened middle-class and a disenchanted working

class put the Tories into government they effectively left the great cities, where the majority of us live, without a franchise. For many years I have believed, as someone who is naturally at home in a city, that our future lies with the cities and that the best solutions to our problems are to be found in them. Green-belt commuters can hardly be expected to feel the urgency or summon the specific kinds of courage and integrity necessary to confront these problems realistically. When the inner cities (whose local councils were already subject to increased centralised authority) no longer had a voice in the affairs of this country and consequently lost their power, they expressed themselves initially in violence and lately in sullen depression. Such an ebb in morale, making people prey to all fresh coercion and control, is exactly what the reactionary welcomes: the working class militant, the radical intellectual, the renegade bourgeois, are at least temporarily tamed. This advantage is followed up with a threat to physical security coming in the form of a warning that if the boat is rocked any further worse unemployment, worse police control, worse poverty will automatically follow.

Pre-Thatcher Britain was not Weimar Germany and Thatcher's Little England is not the Third Reich, but parallels clearly exist. The authoritarian personality is inclined to place heavy emphasis on Order when in reality it has only the limited imagination to visualise a kind of sublime Tidying Up. The effect is that, while the *apparent* Chaos is halted, the various channels of possibility which operate in a less restricted social climate are blocked even as conventional solutions are patently seen to fail.

In my view the reactionary Left is quite as capable of stifling possibilities as the reactionary Right: each has its own mythical antiquity, its own heroic role-models, its own familiar songs of self-praise. Each is divorced from actuality but determined to impose its dream, however ludicrously ill-fitted, upon our world. Since monetarism allows for rather a lot of abstraction it is



therefore possible for those in power to manipulate money in order to get a temporary effect which will 'prove' the logic of their system. Again Nazi Germany offers a good example. Although the War gave the Third Reich an extended lease of life, Nazism was only good for about ten years before necessity would have forced it to alter its economic policies.

In the Soviet Union the real economy is the black economy which, because officially non-existent, officially cannot be controlled. Anybody living an ordinary life in Britain today must have some understanding of how widespread a factor of our day-to-day existence our own black economy has become. There are, of course, no statistics. This means that the gulf between official figures and real figures is widening the whole time: the main example of schizoid fantasy dictating the government's most fundamental policies. And a general example is Tory talk of 'autonomy' while actually increasing the powers of central government.

One simple method of controlling inflation and strengthening a national economy is, so many believe, to allow unemployment to rise to the point where the purchase of foreign goods is impossible for the majority of people. This means that heavy import tariffs need not be imposed (with the risk of retaliatory tariffs on our own goods). Theoretically industry can 'streamline' by cutting labour costs and keeping wages down since workers remain anxious to retain their jobs and therefore are unwilling to demand so much in the way of wage-increases or job-security. The fact is that too many employers use this situation as an excuse to increase their paper profits without any attempt to improve production. Meanwhile the displaced work-force concentrates its efforts on getting as much for nothing as it possibly can. This seems to have surprised Mrs Thatcher who also, incidentally, made it possible (in 1979) for people to maintain foreign bank accounts by lifting the controls which had made it far more difficult to 'hide' money.

Apparently she removed exchange controls with the co-operation of Geoffrey Howe but without any consultation with her own Cabinet, let alone economists.

The stockbrokers, playing with abstractions in their rural and semi-rural retreats where they spend the greatest part of their lives, found that the woman who notoriously refused to listen to their advice had not actually played them false at all. She had encouraged a situation whereby profits could continue to be made without anyone actually having to manufacture more or better goods. Investors, having no incentive to put money into new plant or new ideas, were enabled to maintain their dividends by traditional means. In other words the Tories had found a formula where we could avoid the responsibilities and dangers of relatively minor radical changes in our way of life and stay exactly where we were. Few people willingly initiate new solutions to their problems though they frequently prove themselves astonishingly resourceful when forced to.

The conservative politician encourages caution and neophobia partly because that is the reflection of the politician's own temperamental bias, partly because it allows the exercise of greater control over the electorate. The conservative always seeks solutions, however inappropriate, from the familiar past, no matter how they may merely recreate familiar problems. Indeed, it's safe to say the conservative positively welcomes the familiar problem, simply because it is recognisable. I don't believe anyone but a lunatic ever wants change for its own sake. I do believe that new solutions are the only ones currently open to us.

In the following chapters I propose to deal with some of the main forms of sixties and seventies radicalism which for a while seemed to offer the hope of genuine change and genuine improvement. I am not a believer in Utopianism and am even uncertain what 'perfectability' means. I do believe that a just and genuinely democratic society is a vital society. The arguments of



so-called radicalism (which I, of course, believe to be no more than ordinary common-sense) with their emphasis on equal rights for all is the only logic (if not the only rhetoric) which will save us from our common predicament.

I've been involved in politics for the better part of my life, being first attracted to the anarchist movement of the fifties and involving myself with CND and anti-racist activities in Notting Hill (where Mosley made his last bid for parliament in 1959). I joined the Labour Party in the belief that it was possible to achieve change through traditional party politics. For a while (during the so-called 'Liberal Revival') I worked at Liberal Party Headquarters, as an editor and leaflet-writer, since I believed that the radical noises then being made by young Liberals like David Steele were genuinely libertarian in nature. Another spell of membership in the Labour Party and I returned to my original position as an anarchist where I was able to express both my own coherent political views while also speaking to fellow anarchists as an opponent of terrorism. For some years I have been a supporter of the Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review and its wide variety of publications. The Review and the Press's other publications are available from Refrac Publications, BCM Refract, London WC1N 3XX.

Michael Moorcock,  
London,  
January 1983

## I

### *The Retreat From Liberalism*

THERE WAS A fashion for radicalism in the sixties which Tom Wolfe characterised as 'Radical Chic' and which reached its ultimate, I suppose, in the naming of clothing boutiques after glamorised guerilla or terrorist heroes. Che Guevara of Kensington still exists as a memorial to this vogue. For a while it was fashionable to remark how the traditional ruling elite had been toppled by the 'young meteors' (mainly, it appeared, dress designers and commercial photographers) who were unashamed of their provincial and/or working-class origins. It was said that to get on in London, particularly in the media professions, one had to have as broad and aggressive a Cockney or Yorkshire accent as possible.

People became ashamed to admit they had been educated beyond the age of 15 and even more ashamed if it had been at a public school and Oxbridge. I knew a journalist, working for the same 'underground' newspaper as me, who disappeared for long stretches at a time and refused to say where he had been. It later emerged that he was sneaking away to Sussex University where he was doing an English degree. Upper class Londoners spoke with some pride of their sons and daughters being admitted to large comprehensive schools. Anthony Wedgwood Benn refused to become Lord Stansgate on the death of his father, gradually



became Anthony Benn, then Tony Benn until the joke was that if he ever achieved the premiership he would have to become Prime Minister Tone.

Benn made his decision on principle but was by no means disapproved of at the time. Even the Tory Party was suddenly full of Jims and Bills and Teds. We had, it was claimed, become a classless society. Yet there seemed to be as many dynasties in the Labour Party as there were petit-bourgeois MPs in the Tory Party, and as much land remained in private ownership as always. The merchant banks continued to finance and therefore control the 'young meteors'.

Meanwhile we were subjected to an enormous amount of working-class nostalgia, principally from television. The fortunes of downstairs maids in 1900 or Tyneside union-leaders of the twenties became of crucial interest to millions while advertisements for beer and bread promoted, in soft-focus, the celebration of the decencies to be found in industrial slums. Cockney, Geordie and Lancashire slang replaced the RADA and BBC voices of the fifties and taught those who had forgotten (or who had never known) how acceptably to colour their language. The slogans and rhetoric of the new American radicals like Hoffman and Rubin quickly became familiar in the mouths of Old Etonians and young Glaswegians who shared a mutual ambition to emulate Mick Jagger or John Lennon.

When the Beatles received their OBEs this was regarded by the young as a significant recognition of the dynamic and powerful new force in Western society. Classless youth would sweep away the moribund institutions of previous generations and ring in a Golden Age where war, injustice and outdated morality were banished forever. The prophets of this movement were angry visionaries like Bob Dylan who supplied many of the key phrases of the era: Your Sons and Daughters Are Beyond Your Command, The Times They Are A-Changing, Don't Follow

Leaders, The Answer is Blowin' in the Wind. We were taught that electronics would turn the world into one Global Village, that the Personal was Political, Black was Beautiful and that above all We Should Overcome. Our millenium was anticipated by a huge spectrum of people from the Acid Heads (to whom Tim Leary was an infallible demagogue) to the Urban Guerillas who wished to relive in the cities the exploits of Fidel Castro in the jungle.

For a while there seemed to be more radical heroes and heroines than there was wall-space to stick their pictures – old ones, new ones, recently-deceased ones. Whole industries developed to exploit this phenomenon. The sixties were the years of the mass demonstration and the rock festival, of enormous idealistic enthusiasm amongst the young and a renewal of optimism amongst an older generation. Investigative journalism became a profession in itself and corruption, cynicism, hypocrisy in public life was exposed daily. The rich and powerful were no longer able, it seemed, to control the media. In Paris, London, Chicago, Rome and Tokyo vast, predominantly peaceful mobs demonstrated against every form of political injustice, every inequality and most often when the violence came it emanated not from the demonstrators but from the authorities. There were 'sieges', 'massacres' and 'confrontations'; there were sit-ins and hunger-strikes. It seemed that there was no Cause, however serious or however silly, which could not command at least ten thousand supporters. In some minds the legalising of Dope, Abortion and Homosexuality were of equal and crucial importance. To some, sexual repression was the greatest single cause of universal disharmony (to judge by their publications 'unrepressed' sexuality took some astonishingly bizarre forms).

By the late sixties and early seventies many of the sanest movements had achieved what seemed to be a great deal. Sexual Equality was an accepted principle in several countries and in some had become Law. Racial Equality shared the same



recognition. Homosexual acts between consenting adults were no longer illegal in most Western Democracies and if we were homosexual we were invited to Come Out of the Closet. Some were so thrilled by this liberation they could hardly pause from trying one sexual role after another in an orgy of 'self-discovery'. There was a wealth of books in which we were encouraged to discover our identities as individuals. Everybody was a Star. To many the progress towards the Age of Aquarius seemed inevitable and uncheckable. The Old Guard was in retreat. The Fall of Nixon was seen as the final victory for Justice and Sanity. It was common for newspapers to describe ours as the Affluent Society and to say that the main problem we faced in the future was the Problem of Leisure. How were we going to spend our new wealth and all our free time?

The inevitability of this Utopia was taken for granted by seasoned politicians and journalists quite as much as by flower children. Even after 1974 (the Oil Crisis, the Three Day Week and so on) we continued to envision a world in which the main crises were those of conscience (how to feed the Third World), the exercise of our new-found liberties, simple problems of management (automation etc). And yet the Sixties and Seventies were as much years of tragedy as they were of hope. Cuban missiles, Kennedy, Vietnam, Six Day War, Czechoslovakia, Chinese Cultural Revolution, Kent State, Ireland. Brutality was apparent in almost every aspect of our lives. By selection we can look back and find both a better world and a worse one. It's hard to say if the euphoria of the 'Swinging Sixties' was any less foolish than our current nationalistic opium dreams.

All that was better, in my view, was that large numbers supported the views of people agitating for equality and justice on behalf of women, blacks and a whole variety of sexual and racial minorities. A huge percentage was ready to accept that, for instance, the white male majority was exploiting, brutalising and

patronising other men and women. At that time masses of us were prepared to change ourselves and change a social system which permitted so much injustice. It could be said they were persuaded fairly easily to this view because *the economic system itself no longer survived by means of these injustices*. Apparently all that is now at stake is the self-image, the egos, the status of those who insist that the injustices simply do not exist or that the economic structure would crumble if they were done away with. This is a clear sign of genuine social decay.

The affluence of the sixties, where for the first time young people had enough financial power to be regarded as important to the market (and enough political power for the Labour Party to turn them into voters at 18), when life became much easier for the majority of people living in the Western democracies, was of course the chief reason for the idealistic mass movements and the sympathy they received. Because it felt financially secure the majority took at very least a tolerant view of these movements. Only extremist bigots (whose psychological make-up requires at least one scapegoat or enemy since they must somehow justify their insanity) chose to insist on the evils of sexual liberation or racial equality. (Feminism was perhaps a different matter, since men felt doubly threatened, but I intend to deal with that later).

Most liberal reforms do take place in an improved or changed economic climate – whether they relate to anti-slavery or to abortion. If the climate appears to worsen, people's attention swings away from general ideals to particular survival. Countries tend to get euphoric when the money's coming in and spend generously (social services, the arts, poorer nations) until they realise they've blown too much, whereupon they start to talk of making 'necessary economies'.

The hungover sailor moans he knew how it was foolish to bet heavily at poker, give a hand-out to a beggar, buy that hideous piece of local art. The nation recalls how it 'knew' its



overspending would lead to disaster, but had good-heartedly allowed itself to be cajoled into spending anyway. The fact that the sailor had the wad, that it gave him pleasure to spend it, made him feel big to help someone and thus reinforce his already existing feelings of superiority, is forgotten. For a while he insists on leaving his pay with the purser. The same smiling street-beggar to whom he was at first so generous now becomes a nuisance, a burden, an object of disgust.

Patronage of any kind is untrustworthy. State patronage, although more ambiguous, is the least trustworthy of all. It can create a highly-baffled public which one day is taught it has a right to State money and next day is told it has a duty to be self-sufficient. Such conflicting imperatives would turn one of Pavlov's dogs irredeemably neurotic. In the case of the public, it has the effect of weakening judgement and morale, since in the main we all require normal social approval.

During the sixties we were educated to the idea of certain 'rights'. Old people refusing supplementary benefits out of pride were informed how they were justified in claiming; there was no degradation in joining the dole queue because one was only claiming on one's own insurance. Citizens Advice Bureaus and Law Centres were set-up to help people who believed they had no hope of their legal and social claims being heard. All this is the appropriate logic of a democratic Welfare State where the better off help support the poorer. Such a secure society should ideally enjoy a high morale and be psychologically equipped to cope with any vicissitude. However, while we were learning about our 'rights' we were, first under Macmillan but then under Wilson's Socialists, being encouraged towards 'pragmatic', competitive materialistic attitudes which were seen as the secret of, for instance, Sweden's or America's economic success.

We entered the age of the whizz-kid, the financial genius, the asset-stripper, the property-speculator. It became fashionable,

even heroic, to make a fortune in some service industry or by stock-manipulation and, moreover, to display the wealth when it was accumulated. This 'new aristocracy', these 'young meteors', copied the life-styles of rock-and-roll stars. Their expensive pads were decorated in a bizarre mixture of 'Playboy-Hippy' – a touch of Harrods furnishings at their most expensive and vulgar, a touch of Oriental and Art Nouveau colour, a wealth of electronic gadgetry, from super stereos to light-screens, (for we were also entering the Technological Age). The old status-symbols were there – Rolls Royces, big houses, with pools, in the Home Counties, expensively tailored suits and shirts – but the new symbols were derived from James Bond films, from the *Man from Uncle* television series. Flashy display systems and pouting blondes were almost indistinguishable in what they represented. If you acquired one (it was suggested, and frequently proved) you automatically acquired the other.

It was also fashionable for these successful people to look as much like Mick Jagger or Jean Shrimpton as possible. The hip capitalist modified his language to suit the mood of the times, smoked dope, filled his Porsche with Liberty's fabrics and quadrophonic 8-track. He spent his evenings at discotheques, run like expensive private clubs. Sex became casual, experimental, exotic. With 'young meteors' for models the upwardly mobile abandoned their apprenticeships, their university and polytechnic places, their accountancy positions, their future in the family shop, to become 'business managers' to budding rock-stars, A&R men for record companies, club-owners, boutique-financiers, ad men, film-producers, hair-dressers, light-show organisers, anything which reflected or promised the glamour of the 'free' lifestyle, where drugs, sex and money formed a single, heady equation. Beads, long-hair, elaborately-embroidered kaftans, loud rock-and-roll came to symbolise not 'rebellion' but economic power, social success, full



acceptance. An older generation had not been so eager to copy and win the approval of its children since the 1920s.

Even in 1965 it seemed obvious we were on the same old treadmill. I wrote a book, *The Final Programme*, displaying a deep scepticism of what was going on. The book – or at least its hero, Jerry Cornelius – was taken as a model by the very same young men whose euphoria and ambitions it satirised. They detected no irony. They saw Jerry as just what they wanted to be: a kind of hipper James Bond. It was probably inevitable that this process was completed in 1973 when the film version was directed by a man originally involved in the first *Avengers* TV series.

In *The Final Programme* Jerry was courted by eager businessmen of an older generation anxious to enjoy some of the 'liberated' sex they felt they were missing. This particular aspect of the sixties, the lifting of censorship, the search for sexual identity, the possibility of casual sexual intercourse (primarily the result of 'The Pill'), was so quickly taken over and turned into capital that Tin Pan Alley's take-over of the alternative music business seemed almost slow in comparison.

In both cases the liberalism of the times was swiftly exploited by efficiently materialistic 'young meteors' using the language of the alternate society to their own advantage. Wilson's rhetoric of Competition and Materialism helped them formulate and justify a business cunning which became a virtue, for in contrast to flower power idealism it was both 'practical' and 'pragmatic'. The pursuit of money was a remarkable feature of sixties Britain and it was not surprising that labour, in the shape of the Trades Unions, should demand a larger share of the apparent wealth. Wilson, in particular, had encouraged us to get rich. We were an Affluent Society, after all.

When it shortly became evident most of our prosperity was chimerical, Wilson dropped his celebration of capitalistic success

and tried to call on the ideals of national responsibility, of mutuality, which his logic had earlier attacked. When the unions became 'unmanageable', he actually referred sentimentally to the Spirit of Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. He seemed surprised when the working-class effectively told him what he could do with his new-found idealism. The Welfare State was short of money and of supporters by this time; the emphasis was on a Free Economy.

Wilson's next attempt to check a reflationary policy which had turned into runaway inflation was to go back nearly two-hundred years to Rousseau and the Social Contract. Wilson's particular version seemed to the unions about as fair as the contracts which fast-talking 'young meteors' (their energy supplemented now by amphetamines and cocaine) waved under the noses of 'underground' bands which proliferated but found it difficult to conduct their own business affairs while rehearsing and performing.

In the rock industry virtually the whole story was contained in the rise and fall of the Beatles' Apple Corps. The first time I visited Apple was shortly after it had started. I'd been invited to see Derek Taylor, who was then managing the company. I'd been told Apple wanted to help support the magazine I was running. As we walked up the stairs, the apple-green carpet had already been worn by the feet of thousands of applicants trying to get the Beatles to fund anything, from a record to greet the Martians when they landed, to a shop selling North American Indian Crafts. The two main public rooms were set up as an ante-room, where the petitioners waited to be summoned, and an inner room where the more favoured applicants were admitted. This second room contained Derek in his tall peacock wicker chair, some office staff, and, around the edges, uncomfortable-looking young men and women who were waiting to present their cases. The whole thing seemed a bit distasteful and I began by saying I had



no wish to take the Beatles' money, that in my opinion they had a right to keep what they had earned and if they continued to hand it out so lavishly they could wind up broke. I sold some advertising space to the record company, stepped on George Harrison's foot, apologised and left. The image of so many birds of prey dressed up like birds of paradise remained with me and it was the most direct experience I had had up to that time of the eager greed which surrounds successful and idealistic musicians. From the world of finance came the likes of Alan Klein who was more successful but no less rapacious than the young hippies whose sandals and moccasins had worn down the carpet.

Very soon Apple had run out of money, the Beatles were temporarily near-bankrupt, their idealism was held in question by music papers and tabloids alike. Financial managers were called in to 'rationalise' the operation and then the group broke up in a mood of acrimony which was for a while forthrightly and publicly vicious.

The Beatles had discovered that their own generosity wasn't shared by those who surrounded them. For a while their disillusion seemed complete. They had discovered that if one hands out patronage, with whatever good intentions, one is forced to accept certain consequences and responsibilities. These unfortunately tend to become clear only after the damage has been done. There was a well-meant attempt at private patronage which went sour. In my view State patronage has gone quite as sour, partly because the line between what is a 'right' and what is not has become badly confused in recent years. Moreover a Welfare State can only work properly (as in Sweden) if it is properly funded.

By continuing to use standard methods of deflation and reflation (i.e. by manipulating the flow of money) any government finds it virtually impossible to raise sufficient taxes necessary to revitalise, for instance, the National Health system and other crucial social services. The Tory answer is to 'privatise'

(I think that's the word they use) as much as possible, dismantling our hard-won social services.

State patronage is very little better, in effect, than private charity. The present system, it can be argued, produces a cynical and demoralised population unable to exercise its brains or its bodies in anything but coaxing a few more pounds out of the Social Security or smashing a few beer bottles on Saturday night in Lime Street or Kings Cross Road. It is hard to focus frustration and anger when told there is no hope. Political action begins to seem impossible, particularly when the experience of sixties radicals has been to witness the corruption and destruction of most of its ideals.

In Britain and America the political heroes and heroines of the sixties and seventies have in the main renounced their goals and settled for an easier life and easier targets, not to mention easier pickings in the various media. Most who allowed themselves to become demagogues – Greer, Hoffman, Newton, for instance – have lost touch with whatever it was first angered them. They were never particularly coherent, being more romantic than practical. By 'betraying' their movements they have encouraged the current generation to develop a deeper suspicion of the cult of personality than the would-be urban guerillas and flower children who, very often, are now the parents. Boys and girls have divided into a greater number of rival tribes than ever; punks, heavy metal kids, rockabillys, new romantics, skinheads and so on.

But without figureheads, without political catch-phrases, without political goals, however hazy, the youngsters who go directly from school to Giro-cheque often have little to do but use their talents and their energy in manipulating their patron, their 'State'. They are no more or less cynical than their parents. They are capable of just as much idealism and altruism. They are, if anything, a little more realistic and knowing because their experience has been rather more depressing. If there are more



thieves amongst them, it is because thievery is gradually becoming one of the few acceptable means of achieving status in a society where the gap between well-to-do and badly-off becomes more wretchedly obvious with every passing month.

The employed continue to enjoy a relatively high standard of living. The unemployed are forced to give up small luxuries and do without goods by which, in the sixties and seventies, they learned to measure their status. Those fortunate enough to find a place in the black economy sometimes continue to claim their Giro, their 'right', while providing services and goods which go unrecorded and untaxed. Consequently those who might once have made a direct attack on injustice, demonstrated their anger against the State, or sought to improve their conditions through legal reform, are conditioned to behave as disenfranchised people have always behaved. At worst they become sly, cunning, treacherous and learn how to whine in such a way that the patron, the master, will feel such contempt for them he will pay little attention to their activities. They also learn to display 'innocence' and mouth virtuous phrases which reassure the patron they are still under control. This is what could be happening here, to the proletariat of the United Kingdom. One has to ask this question: *If the State is paying, what is the State buying?* I believe that it is buying our liberty, our quiescence, our power to change things for the better.

It certainly suits the authoritarian personality, whether calling itself Tory, Socialist, Liberal or SDP, to have a public which seems easily manipulated. It suits police, social workers, Social Security officers; it even suits doctors and lawyers. By paying a subsistence unemployment benefit while encouraging people to feel guilty about receiving it and *outside the law* if they supplement it, they produce a public which cannot make much of a fuss, which is anxious to let sleeping dogs lie. This is the system which operates so efficiently (in a slightly different guise, where

subsistence-level wages produce apparent full employment) in the Soviet Union. It's how the Soviet masses have been controlled for years, how the blacks were controlled in the South, and how women have been controlled in almost every society throughout history. It is a society based on lies, deceit, hypocrisy; and when the truth becomes so thoroughly obscured then our judgement both as individuals and as groups also becomes obscure. We spend far too much time determining what is truth and what fiction (as in Nazi Germany or Stalin's Russia) and gossip, half-truths, speculation exhausts our energies. We do not yet live in a police state. With luck, we shall never live in a police state. The example of the police state is worth remembering, however, for we are experiencing some of its phenomena in a modified form. If we allow ourselves to be persuaded of the need for Strong Government, for Law and Order, we become ready to let what few democratic reforms were achieved in the sixties and seventies be ignored, reversed or abolished.

I believe that the spectre of real Liberty is a frightening one to many people who were glad of an excuse to baulk when we seemed on the verge of change. The chance isn't completely lost, of course, because human history is not a simple progression and its logic is complex, frequently difficult to analyse. Yet it is useless to rely on the pendulum theory of history (which, anyway, is ridiculously simplistic and doesn't really describe the process of social change) and expect a swing 'back'.

I once wrote that nothing invented is ever 'lost'; similarly, nothing conceived of, nothing which has been reasoned, is ever forgotten. What radicals do today might be useful to future generations even if resisted by the present one. (This is my argument for taking a position which many believe both extremist and faintly ridiculous. Yet those who have rejected Marx have discovered Proudhon and Kropotkin and other anarchist-socialist theorists whose ideas were for so long discounted). The



only 'defeat', in the final analysis, is if one allows oneself to become lazy and cynical about the possibilities of democratic reform.

The pattern of revolutions up to now has tended to show one ambitious class superceding a previous ruling elite. Uncertain of the consequences of genuine social change, nervous of the 'Chaos' manifested through the incoherent euphoria and destructiveness of the mob, leaders of revolutions fall back on the methods of their predecessors in an effort to restore the rule of 'Law'. This happened in slightly different ways in England, America, France, Russia and China, and became the recognisable pattern of violent revolution. It was almost impossible to argue with any conviction that the overthrow of tyranny was worth the bloodshed of so that the overthrow of tyranny was worth the bloodshed of so many innocents, since one authoritarian system was merely replaced by another. Yet even the evolutionary theory, on which most idealistic systems (including the Soviet Union's and China's) are based, seems to be questionable in the light of current reaction. That this reaction is world-wide (with a few apparent exceptions) is far from being a consolation. Even though the insane religiosity and nationalism of Iran is mirrored in the revivalism and isolationism of Reagan's America I still believe it is humanly possible to make moral decisions in direct defiance of the *zeitgeist* (whatever that may actually be). By making them it is possible to alter the nature of one's times, perhaps even halt or reverse a tendency.

Such moral decisions, of course require a kind of courage lacking in today's blustering Tories or maundering Socialists. It requires the courage to risk an end to compromise, not in the sense of bellicose Tories crying for the destruction of the 'Argies', nor for a 'get tough' policy with the Common Market and/or the Warsaw Pact countries, not even for a unilateral decision to give up nuclear arms. We need more internationalism, not less; more recognition of mutual dependency and the need for a rational

(rather than a reactionary) facing of our problems. There is otherwise a danger that we could go too far down the road to full-scale authoritarian government and, like the Soviet Union, begin to see that system as the only 'safe' one.

A disenfranchised population becomes an untrustworthy population, since it loses the habit of making its own decisions. The majority become childish in hundreds of ways, looking to the State as a parent, complaining without displaying a willingness to any form of self-determination. The more liberty one has, the more individual responsibility is required of one to make rational, well-considered decisions in the context of one's social and personal life. Most of us are educated to think we are not capable of this when, in fact, most of us are thoroughly capable but simply lack either the circumstances or the determination to test ourselves. An authoritarian, paternalistic State encourages us in this belief, by its actions as well as by its rhetoric. By its very nature it creates a morally enfeebled, child-like population. This population in turn 'proves' its inability to control its own fate and consequently 'proves' the need for the paternalism which created it in the first place. There is no fundamental difference between Tory and Socialist paternalism. It can be argued that most parliamentary politicians unconsciously provide substance to their own identities by reiterating amongst themselves the idea of a careless, unthinking, 'untrustworthy', ill-educated public which demands 'rights' while refusing its social responsibilities. Imperialism begins at home.

To my mind the chief argument at present concerns the means by which we dismantle a paternalistic structure which to some degree is the direct and unintentional result of the ideals which created the Welfare State. But we cannot do this by resorting to a different form of paternalism.

Current Tory thinking is merely along the lines of 'stricter' paternalism. The police are allowed greater powers; the ruling



elite is allowed greater 'flexibility' and the mass of the population is, in turn, subjected to greater restriction. The confidence with which the police bring prosecutions in the areas of 'victimless' crime is a case in point. Raids on pornographic book-shops, utilising a re-interpreted Obscene Publications Act, have resulted in an increased number of prosecutions (see Appendix, *The Erosion of Liberalism*) which in turn have led to a significant increase in prison sentences for those found guilty (of that old bugbear, the tendency 'to deprave and corrupt'). These raids, in 1982, became more widespread (under exactly the same Act, incidentally) and extended to political bookshops as well as shops selling underground comics and books about drugs (all of which, incidentally, warn against the dangers of abusing those drugs).

Those who join the police are usually of a temperamental type inclined to authoritarianism; conservative and often reactionary and abnormally fearful of political opposition to the *status quo*. Their tendency to attack this opposition in whatever form it takes has to be checked, both by the law and by their own governing bodies. What a Tory government encourages, perhaps without even realising it, is greater confidence amongst the worst police officers in exercising their prejudices (note recent reports about racism at Hendon Police College) and if they are supported by the Home Office and the Courts (who allow the cases to be tried and also impose equally biased sentences) this confidence can easily expand into many of the so-called 'sensitive' areas where the police are already held in suspicion, if they are not actively hated. The result can be that while the overall nation is not evidently a police state, miniature police states come to exist in specific areas and here the tyranny might affect the individuals in that area as badly as any to be found, say, in Fascist Spain or present-day Argentina.

Again the result is a population with an above-average number of people involved in some form of crime and therefore anxious

not to draw attention to itself. The situation becomes much like that described at the end of the 19th century in Arthur Morrison's *Child of the Jago*, where political activists of any persuasion in East London are regarded by the majority of the population as trouble-makers simply because they bring unwanted focus to the district, even though they are frequently there because they are trying to persuade people to demand justice for themselves. Unwelcome as they often are, these do-gooders often do good.

I witnessed the immigration to Notting Hill of what seemed like thousands of political activists and social workers in the sixties and emotionally I experienced a common resentment of these 'outsiders'. The fact was, however, that they succeeded to an important extent in helping North Kensington (whose slums were the worst in England at that time) to stand up for itself and develop a fairly coherent political identity. Black and Irish people, traditionally unwilling to accept the responsibility of voting, gradually came to see themselves as self-determining adults (rather than as children of the paternalistic and mysterious authoritarian State whose representatives, even doctors and dentists sometimes, were to be avoided at all costs). For a while popular morale in North Kensington ran very high indeed and the unity with which blacks, whites, hippies and 'straights' resisted efforts to impose authority on the district (Kensington and Chelsea Council is notoriously right-wing, the safest Tory borough in London) was remarkable.

It's worth noting here that the first 'riot' to take place at Carnival time in Notting Hill was probably a result of the council's nervousness at the festival's growing popularity. They wanted to ban or contain the Carnival, but when this move was resisted they sent out disclaimer notices to all rate-payers in the area saying they anticipated violence. While they were calling in extra police (from the middle-class London suburbs) they could not guarantee violence would not break out. On the first day of



the Carnival I found my own street blocked. The friend who was returning my car had been stopped at the corner by several young and uncertain constables. As I went to vouch for him, an Inspector emerged. He did not know the area, he was extremely edgy and admitted to me he had no idea what to expect. "We've been told to anticipate trouble," he said by way of apology, "but we don't know where from or when it will happen." After that encounter I decided to go out of town for the day. By the evening the police had panicked and a full-scale 'police riot' was taking place. The only people successfully keeping order were the stylish black dudes in their mid-twenties who were to Notting Hill what the High Mobsmen were to the Jago. Frequently these young men would hold back teenagers from counter-attacking and at one point a friend of mine sat in a predominantly black café while a line of policemen banged their truncheons on their riot shields by way of challenge. Inside, he said, everyone kept their cool and ignored the police. It was like Rourke's Drift in reverse. The blacks maintained their apparent insouciance while the natives outside tried to break their nerve with displays of aggression.

Perhaps as a result of this experience, Notting Hill never had another riot to match that first one. The next year I witnessed gangs of French and Italian youths moving towards the district, evidently hoping for a fresh demonstration of rioting. I saw them throwing things at the police and further violence did break out but this time the police had better control of themselves. By the following year there seemed a determination on all sides to make sure the Carnival was as peaceful as it had always previously been and the police returned to their policy of maintaining a low profile and behaving in an otherwise good-humoured way, as, indeed they were doing in Trafalgar Square on New Year's Eve 1982, when two young women were crushed to death. Next day the police were criticised for not controlling the crowd better. I was in the middle of that crowd and was impressed, as were my friends

from France and America, by the humane and self-controlled behaviour of police constables. On this level, at least, the police themselves know that less exertion of authority actually produces an atmosphere of good-will and mutuality. It seems a shame they cannot extend this lesson into other areas of duty. My suspicions are, at present, that the next step the authorities may take will be simply to ban street festivities along with street demonstrations. Thus the police will find themselves in the less ambiguous role of dealing with criminals rather than exercising crowd-control . . .

Encouraged to believe that violence and social chaos is the natural result of political radicalism people are unlikely to make much of an outcry if some Prevention of Public Disorder Act were to extend the real political powers of the authorities in the near future. (Witness the relative tolerance for recent 'panic' shootings by police.) We can only hope that our retreat from liberty will not be too far or too fast. We should always, however, be prepared for the worst. I wonder how many of the inhabitants of Lorenzo the Magnificent's Florence could have anticipated the swift decline of that liberal city-state into the appalling tyranny of Savanorola's autocracy. Political change, particularly if the basic structure permits it – and paternalism certainly permits it – can often be very sudden. The very people assuring us of our fundamental liberties and the impossibility of our being subjected to dictatorship often still mouth the same comforting words as they are carried off to the concentration camps.

To dismantle the paternalistic structure without losing the benefits of achievements of the Welfare State means a necessary increase in real democracy (by decentralising the bureaucracies). This in turn requires a population prepared to accept liberty and its attendant responsibilities. Paternalistic socialism (essentially parliamentary Labour Party socialism) may frequently be more benign than at other times (usually depending on the economic condition of the State) but is easily modified to the policies of



paternalistic conservatism: they are in essence the same thing. Whether a more democratic form of socialism is offered by the SDP/Liberal alliance we cannot tell, but I suspect that it, too, is not essentially different enough to be significant, for it primarily represents an equivocal middle-class.

I would be more convinced by a political movement consisting of a relatively equal number of women, blacks and others who have effectively lost their franchise. I see few long-term gains to be made from petitioning a State so deeply-rooted in paternalistic thinking. Any new political movement would have to have a pretty coherent democratic philosophy if it were to achieve what in my view needs to be achieved and effectively dismantle the existing system, replacing it with something which has a better chance of surviving and expanding to exploit for instance, a technology which, more than ever before, allows us both to anticipate problems and to control our environment more sanely and more effectively.

Those petitioners who attempt to change the sentiments of the State in the matter of nuclear arms, or the culling of baby seals, or who share the confused aims of Animal Liberation, may well support a worthy cause, but it seems to me that their energies would be better directed elsewhere if they want real change. I suspect that they do not. When I worked for the Liberal Party in the early Sixties it was at the time of the so-called Liberal Revival. I believe I witnessed, during that period, a deliberate refusal of power on the part of the Liberals. It seemed they might, after all, have to take action rather than merely affect the role of sane, moderate people begging the larger parties to show decent restraint. I have never seen so much money thrown away or so many opportunities let go. I do not say the same applies to the present-day alliance, but the nervousness displayed by Jo Grimond and his fellows in 1962 was impressive! Too many of our current quasi-political movements seem to be the same. They

wish to criticise without actually having to take the responsibility of real political power. This probably helps them express their anxieties or satisfy their consciences, but it's otherwise pretty meaningless.

If the women who demonstrated at Greenham were to demonstrate in the cause of feminism, or simply against the current methods of dealing with rape cases, or against media treatment of lesbians, or against anything else where real anger, real opposition, real social disapproval might be turned against them, I might be more convinced of their wish for genuine social change. As it is I believe that ecology freaks, beast lovers and Mothers for Peace are operating in sentimental areas which are essentially 'safe', currently acceptable to almost everyone, and therefore all but meaningless in any real political sense. This is a retreat from liberty, indeed, and perhaps the most comical aspect of the whole awful charade.



2

## *The Retreat From Internationalism*

THE Global Village was never a very attractive idea to someone like me, who looked forward with some excitement to the idea of the Global Metropolis in all its intricate variety, neither was I much struck by the bland 'family of Man' pop-songs which seemed to proliferate in the sixties and early seventies, since they seemed to express a great deal of empty sentiment and visualised a world where everyone was brought together by a mutual taste for Coke; but if anything ever threatened to make me into a racist I suppose it was disco and funk. To see the cultural inheritors of Leadbelly and Bessie Smith turn into grinning automatons eager for middle-class approval was almost more than I could take. But we were entering a phase, at least here and in America, where being ethnic was the rage.

I saw one movie in the US whose actual title I can't recall but which seemed to bear all the trademarks of this new industry and which I called *Being Italian*. There appeared to be no actual plot but everyone in it was being extremely Italian. Every sentence seemed to begin with the exclamation 'Hey!' and there was considerable movement of the male characters' forearms, while their upper arms seemed glued to their torsos. We had *Being Black*, *Being Jewish*, *Being Puerto Rican* and if we didn't know how to behave by then we shouldn't have claimed the role in the

first place. British television, rather than films, gave us *Being Jewish*, too, and also *Being Cockney*, *Being Glaswegian*, *Being Yorkshire*, *Being Irish* and *Being Jamaican*. We never had *Being Pakistani*, presumably because most Pakistanis were still that. What characterised the majority of these features was their lack of story-line. They were essentially teaching aids. I suppose it was fair enough. We'd had years of *Being British* and *Being American* which displayed characteristics and a morality which was foreign to the majority of us much as we somehow felt we should be more like Trevor Howard, John Wayne or Grace Kelly. We were being told, as 'ethnic minorities' that it was okay to be the way we were or, indeed, if we had forgotten, how our parents or grandparents had been. We were grubbing for Roots anywhere we could, in an effort to establish our identities. Unfortunately it was a message somewhat at odds with that of the Universal Family in which everyone wore clean jeans and piled into already-moving and recently-waxed sports cars.

Nationalism or tribalism is the traditional means by which morale is raised in an effort to gain increased military or economic status. It seems probable that the American Black Power movement was the first to begin the trend after the relative failure of less radical groups to affect any real change in the attitude of the white majority. It was an important and effective blow against white complacency and white paternalism.

The Panthers and the Muslims had charismatic leaders and heroes who were, like Mohammed Ali, already established in the popular consciousness. The race riots in Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles were a display of strength which made it impossible for any opposition to dismiss or reduce the claims and threats of the men in shades, black berets and leather jackets who with weapons in hand posed in considerable style and flatly rejected any suggestion of assimilation.

Their rhetoric was challenging and confident. *Look Out*,



Whitey, Black Power's Gonna Get Your Mother. They made capital out of almost everything, turning white fears to their advantage. They sported new Afro and natural haircuts and adopted the clothing of black Africa. When Martin Luther King was assassinated the movement gained increased impetus, attracting previously moderate elements from the Civil Rights movements. Blacks were no longer told they were as good as anyone else. They believed black culture was superior to any other and the media frequently confirmed this. Employing relatively little violence (compared to their threats) they succeeded in turning whitey from a condescending father to a nervous, would-be brother-in-law. That this effect was limited chiefly to the large cities of the North and West and scarcely touched a far less malleable South, while also diminishing the power of black women, did not diminish the Black Power movement's considerable success.

It was a success which other movements became anxious to emulate, from the urban-guerilla Weathermen to the Indians. Even feminists borrowed black propaganda techniques and employed them with a fair amount of success. But otherwise these movements did not enjoy a fraction of Black Power's genuine impact on the attitudes of blacks and whites throughout the world. The reasons were fairly obvious. The blacks were numerous, had demonstrated their capacity for organisation and violence, had a firm place in popular culture, possessed self-confident authority and, moreover, had approval from a considerable percentage of younger whites who even envied their charisma and sought to emulate them. They did not petition the State; they declared war on it. Even the arrest and trial of the movement's leaders added to their authority. They were a genuinely radical force and respected for their courage and the risks they were willing to take.

It can be argued that a nation's vitality can be measured by the extent to which it is willing to take risks, both on a personal and a

public level. Israel was respected even in the Soviet Union for her daring and effective handling of the Six Day War. It isn't in us not to admire Robin Hood when he walks defiantly into King John's feast hall with a royal stag slung over his shoulders, dumps the beast on the table, delivers an impudent speech and escapes with a score of men-at-arms in pursuit. We quickly come to respect the *successful* risk-taker.

Parliamentary politicians command very little real admiration because it is almost implicit that they do not take risks. Their policies and their legislation must necessarily obey the logic of compromise. In England this was most graphically displayed by the Labour Party's setting up the machinery of the Welfare State, after 1946 but failing to take control of the City of London. The City's continuing power over the country's finances was a contradiction of the socialist legislation. It seems that it takes an 'extremist' to produce even a minimal change in society.

Amongst the Black Power leaders, who had shown admirable self-respect and courage at the beginning, when perhaps they had little to lose, there began to appear signs of compromise and a tendency to retreat from their more extreme positions as they realised their power was not notional; it was genuine and it therefore demanded genuine responsibility and forethought concerning its use. Confused and ill-prepared for their success the majority of leaders backed away from this real power, just as Zapata and Villa had done during the Mexican Revolution. American and British Blacks retreated to the traditional safety of religious cults. The impetus of the movement was to some extent lost, though it had made definite gains. The flight of many leading Panthers from the responsibilities of liberty became increasingly obvious and depressing. They had, however, achieved what most revolutions of the past achieved. They had blazed a trail for the black middle-class and produced a channel through which the ambitious and upwardly-mobile working-class



elements could proceed. Perhaps the most startling single example of this change was to be found in the South (admittedly the traditionally more liberal South), in Atlanta which now possesses a successful black middle-class capable of supplying and electing its own representatives to government. The implicit nostalgia and romanticism of nationalism in this case had its traditional effect.

Faced with uncertainty the tendency of any tribe or nation is to fall back on nostalgia and romantic mythology, to find its 'roots', to examine its origins, to re-establish its sense of identity, its right to survive and to fight for its goals. In the case of the Black Power movement this traditional means had appropriate success, partly because the market economy needed or, at least, could use a previously financially repressed section of the community. Similarly we can anticipate some similar movement amongst the rapidly increasing Hispanic Americans who have tended to take over the economic positions previously occupied by blacks and who have the added advantage of their own language and recent cultural antecedents to hand if required.

At present 'liberal' elements in the dominant power structure have taken to encouraging this and other ethnic groups to maintain their own culture and language, so that many schools in the USA no longer demand English as a first language but are prepared to teach Mexican children in Spanish and even Vietnamese in their native language. The result is that fewer children leave their ghettos, remaining confined to a very limited choice of jobs, none of them (with the possible exception of teaching and social work) in the middle-class professions.

A year or two back I lived for some time in the Los Angeles suburb of Venice, which is heavily black and Mexican. Although there is a certain amount of rivalry between the Baptist blacks and the Catholic chicanos, and a certain amount of gang warfare goes on (most of it display), this area is mainly free of racial tensions

and the few whites who live there are usually accepted. Indeed the district is unusual to some extent in that it appears to have, like Notting Hill, a class rather than a racial identity. What was most remarkable about Venice, however, was the fact that in order to communicate, most of the black kids have learned some Spanish while retaining their own two versions of English (common to most black people in ghettos), the private and the public. But the Spanish kids (with radio and TV stations of their own) appear to have made little attempt to learn English. As I've remarked elsewhere, all this seems perfectly fair, since California was Spanish-speaking until it was incorporated into the North American empire. That irony aside it seems significant that the means by which black nationalism achieved its goals within the USA – through emphasis on ethnic roots – has apparently been turned, with all due protestations of good-will and appropriate sentimentality, to the advantage of the ruling caste.

By encouraging Hispanics to retain their language and culture this caste more effectively confines them and maintains, during times of economic depression, a cheap, easily identifiable labour force lacking any immediate means of improving its position and consequently far more liable to manipulation, repression and the many other forms of familiar injustice. The culture remains, as the black culture remained until it decided to do something about it, essentially childish, unquestioningly accepting the conditions of paternalism, even promoting them as virtues (since they are also supported by the Catholic church). *Being Mexican*, if it was made at all, was made in Spanish with no sub-titles.

This discovery of tribal and national identities enjoyed a vogue in the seventies which seems, at last, to be dying out. Someone wearing a T-shirt in Little Italy proclaiming 'I'm Proud to Be an Italian American' somehow lacks the weight and significance of *Black is Beautiful*, let alone *Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers*. Given the number of politicians of Italian origin in the North East



of America alone, not to mention the real and mythical influence of the Mafia, one can't see much in the way of a radical statement there. Being Jewish in, for instance, New York, is not exactly a social stigma and if your parents were Irish you're welcome in anybody's parlour (unless it's in Harlem). Viva Zapata.

In spite of an increase in tribalism, both crucial and modish, it was common in the sixties and seventies to remark that the chief hope for the future was for nations to understand that they had more in common now than ever before. We were all passengers on Spaceship Earth. The child starving in India was our responsibility. Hardly a Christmas card that came through the letterbox was free from a greeting of peace in at least twenty-seven languages (some of the alphabets indistinguishable to the casual eye). The common-sense of pooling the world's resources was casual currency in public houses. For a while it even shared equal time with the weather and the lateness of the No. 52 at the Notting Hill bus stop (rivalling a traditional complaint around Portobello Road that on a Saturday you couldn't get on a 52, even when it arrived, because it was full of bloody Germans).

Having failed to accept a place in the original European Economic Community, when we might have gained real influence and respect, we eventually joined up in 1971. For a while our new metric currency made it difficult to judge just how rapidly our staple foods rose in price. Heath and Wilson had been convinced Europeans, but our timing and our method of joining had a distinct air of desperation about it. The nationalistic rhetoric (Britain was needed to offer leadership to the EEC and so on) used to convince a doubtful public (who up to then had been told we should never turn our backs on the Commonwealth) was ludicrous. A few French and German jaws must have dropped as this comically dignified tramp, who had seen rather better days, arrived on the doorstep to assure the Community he was now prepared to accept the position of King.

Although a few nods were made to the ideal of internationalism – the United States of Europe (one of Sir Oswald Mosley's dreams, incidentally) and so on – it was glaringly obvious that, having failed to revive the British economy either by calling on the Spirit of Dunkirk or by devaluing the pound, Harold Wilson hoped we should be able to continue as we were without any significantly radical changes in our social structure. The British people were encouraged to think, on some level at least, not that we were becoming a partner in a community with significant interests and history in common but that we were giving up one Empire for another. We now enjoyed the spectacle of certain Euro-MPs approaching their colleagues in Brussels with the air of Sanders of the River about to deliver a piece of fatherly advice to a group of cowed village elders who had offended the Great King Across The Water by letting their cows graze in the land of the Umbuti.

Trying to retain their own peculiar mixture of romance, special knowledge and fascinated condescension with which they had regarded exotic African and Oriental peoples of the Empire, some members of the Foreign Office sought comfort in the same attitudes extended to the Flemings and the Walloons, but without much success. They were a little disturbed at finding themselves on equal terms with European nationals to whom they had displayed humorous tolerance or outright disgust for a good many years. They were also upset by the rather frosty looks they received from New Zealanders, whose butter seemed to have lost its main market.

The few idealistic 'Europeans' who had consistently agitated for joining the EEC, who were on friendly terms with people from other member countries, spent a good deal of time apologising for British chauvinism and arguing that we weren't yet quite used to it all. Charles de Gaulle, a popular figure of fun in wartime Britain, had been left out of too many conferences by Churchill



and Co. to feel particularly welcoming to Wilson's delegations. He was determined to make the British see sense while making it evident that he wasn't too happy about us rowing in at such a late date. The popular British reaction to this was to revive the memory of Agincourt.

We witnessed the somewhat paradoxical situation of nationalism being used as a morale-raiser as we joined a union whose goal was to reduce the level of national sovereignty to that exercised by American States and which, in the eyes of many, was the first positive step in the direction of World Government. If some internationalists did not think very highly of a centralised World Government, at least it seemed old hatchets were to be buried, old rivalries and misconceptions forgotten. Best of all it was hoped the narrow chauvinism of member nations might disappear.

Many thought it already a feature of EEC countries that people were genuinely beginning to think of themselves first as Europeans and only second as Germans, Italians and so on. The experience of wartime mainland Europe had encouraged people towards a more realistic view of the world. An insane form of nationalism had been one of the chief reasons for the conflict. The British people, however, entered the Common Market in a far less reconciled mood and their attitudes were further confused by Wilson's tacit (and sometimes overt) assurances that we were about to assume 'the leadership of Europe'. The rationale was that we could bring all the British virtues (most of them equally mythological and common to almost every other nation's self-image) of tolerance and fair-play to our less privileged partners. Thus we should somehow take the *moral* leadership of the EEC. What actually happened is that we sent our soccer hooligans to several unsuspecting European countries where they insisted on calling their hosts 'krauts', 'frogs', 'wops' and 'dagoes' and proceeded to destroy as much local property as possible.

Meanwhile our political leaders expressed shocked dismay at the unwillingness of Brussels to allow us to exploit the Market to our advantage while offering very little in exchange. It is still taking the likes of Margaret Thatcher time to understand that by entering the EEC we did not somehow carve ourselves out a slice of Africa or China (our normal expedient in previous centuries when times got hard) and that the benighted foreigners of Munich, Turin and Lyons are not showing any particular gratitude or enthusiasm for Britain's offer of moral leadership. Indeed, they are about as puzzled, amused or resentful as any African tribe or Indian principality offered the same deal in the 19th Century. The difference is that the Europeans have no incentive to placate or admit defeat to Britain.

Under Margaret Thatcher's premiership, partly through her encouragement and partly through circumstance, isolationist chauvinism has markedly increased, just as it has, in slightly different forms, under Reagan in the States or Khomeini in Iran. Previously a retreat into nationalism worked to help a country re-unite, form ranks, focus its efforts, and advance, just as it helped the Black Power movement in the sixties and seventies. The difference, however, is that without a broader view, an acceptance of the complex system of interdependence which now exists elsewhere, we are not strengthening ourselves by this means. We are in fact weakening our position in the world both morally and financially. Everyone is feeling the pinch. We should therefore be moving towards greater international co-operation. If the Soviet Union seems to understand this, at present, with its own internal problem of Slavic nationalism and consequent anti-Semitism (not to mention anti-Tatarism), then surely we should be making the same efforts as they appear to be making under Andropov. Instead we have seen a wave of self-satisfied, chauvinistic, jingoistic, near-barbaric revival of tribal rituals which up to now many had thought extinct, or at least well on the way to limbo.



In the 16th Century, largely because of bad planning on Philip's part and weather-conditions highly favourable to us, we were able to defeat the Spanish Armada. In the 19th Century, with the help of several other European countries, we defeated Napoleon. In the 20th Century, thanks to superior industrial organisation (a centralised system far more sophisticated than Hitler's) and better planes, we defeated the Luftwaffe. All three would-be invaders, had they been successful, would have changed this country's self-view within the space of a generation, for that is what generally happens in defeat. Without the resources of our Empire and of North America, we could not have resisted Hitler's planned invasion. Indeed, if he had attacked Britain rather than the Soviet Union, he would almost certainly have won. Without diminishing the courage of a beleaguered people it is obvious we showed no special virtue in our conduct of World War II. We were as guilty of as many failures of nerve, failures of judgement, calculated cynicism and brutal carelessness in regard to the fate of smaller nations as anyone else. The only difference was that, because of decisions not in any way directly involved with us, Britain was successful where Denmark and Norway, for instance, were not.

I know from experience that this point of view is regarded as an outrageous heresy in the pubs of Newcastle, Leeds, London and Portsmouth. To maintain it is to stand a fair chance of being physically attacked. Therefore, I reason, there must be something profoundly important about the opposite view (that the British won by an exercise of virtues not possessed by foreigners). Only a firmly-reasoned feminist argument can get the strong men of the *Albion* or the *Lion and Unicorn* to feel so thoroughly threatened. They will insist on the essential decency, tolerance and good humour of the British race even if it means knocking your teeth down your throat until you agree.

If one should persist in a loud attack on the Royal Family and a

criticism of the Falklands fiasco, one might as well write off the rest of the evening and possibly the rest of the week while one recovers from one's injuries. My wife, who is American, once made the mistake, during a conversation, of suggesting to my mother that the Queen, with all her wealth, did not give a damn what happened to the average person in this country. She was shocked by my mother's reaction. Later I had to explain that in her native South, where her parents are solid Baptists, it would be the same as proclaiming that God was a pimp and lived in Harlem. Britain is frequently declared to be the most godless nation of the West. In fact in Britain the embodiment of Church and State are just that. The Holy Family and the Royal Family have marked characteristics in common.

On many issues the British are as decent, tolerant and good-humoured as anyone. But I shall never forget the evening England had defeated West Germany for the World Cup. I was out for a drink. Everyone was celebrating the victory. The crowds were jubilant. People were hugging one another and grinning. Groups of people danced through the streets chanting 'We Won The Cup!'. It was a nice feeling of good-will and celebration. Towards the end of the evening I was sitting in a Beer and Cider vault somewhere near Hammersmith and noticed that three very shy young West German soldiers were standing in a corner drinking and grinning and enjoying the fun. Before closing time the crowd, by now pretty drunk, recognised the uniforms and moved towards the lads. Within minutes the chants of 'We Won The Cup' turned to a stamping, swaying shout of 'We Won The War' and the soldiers were completely hidden by the crowd. When the barman called Closing Time I was glad to leave. I never saw what happened to the West Germans.

Such fundamental chauvinism seems essential to the identities of many British people. I suppose I should not have been surprised by the almost universal celebration of the Queen's



Jubilee in 1977 when most of those I understood to be radicals expressed a hitherto unsuspected willingness to decorate their windows with Union Jacks and join in the street parties and other celebrations. I was encouraged to agree that the monarchy was, after all, only an emblem. A distaste for the institution had little to do with the real political issues of the day. I did eventually make a concession. I put a Union Jack in the window as background for some anarchist slogan or other (probably Rot All Rulers) and went off for a picnic in the grounds of Hever Castle which, like most 20th century dream palaces such as Hearst's San Simeon, had always fascinated me. Socially I would prefer to be able to admit that my friends are probably right, but I find that I can't. I believe the monarchy in this country is a far more crucial ingredient of an unjust society than it superficially seems.

Friends will argue that the Queen and her family are merely emblematic, that they have no real political authority and therefore are not an important part of Britain's power structure. It's better to have a permanent but impotent figurehead, they reason, than to elect, say, a President whose ambitions might seriously affect our political lives.

While it is true that the Queen is an emblematic Head of State who cannot, and who probably has no desire to, exercise any direct control over government, it is worth questioning whether her existence as an emblem is not in itself a continuing check on real (and in my mind crucially important) social changes in this country. For instance, a standard response to the arguments of feminists is that we are, after all, living in a country whose leading figures are both women. What is that, the argument will sometimes continue, but a matriarchy? Moreover the Royal Family offers us a continuing sense of social stability and permanence which other countries lack. If we *feel* more secure we are less likely to institute the more extreme forms of tyranny which exist in other countries. And so on.

Everyone really wants a king and queen, says the Lancashire sailor driving us to the station at the time of the Royal Wedding. He turns to my wife: "Look how the Royal Family's greeted in your country. Don't tell me they wouldn't have a king if they had the chance." My wife's polite rejoinder is that her country fought for some while to rid itself of one of the Queen's German ancestors and might think twice before it called the republican experiment off. The sailor grins to himself confidently. A little later, having complained about the Pakistanis beginning to 'infest' Preston, he declares that we must defend the Falklands 'because they're British' and as soon as that's done we should invade Argentina and 'teach them a lesson'. He's expressing views which are not at all uncommon in the towns of North Lancashire and I'm not about to start an argument since he's driving. The last time I did that in a cab it was in New York when I volunteered the opinion that Israel had gone too far in bombing the Baghdad nuclear power plant. The driver refused to let me out of the cab while he screamed at me for what seemed half-an-hour about my pro-Nazi sympathies. Traffic was accumulating all around us, it was a very hot day, but he was oblivious to everything save his sudden hatred of me. It reminded me of a few years before in America when even to suggest on TV news that Arabs or Palestinians had a case was almost as likely to generate enormous public outrage as getting up in a Texas truck-stop and shouting 'Fuck America'.

The emblematic Royal Family – middle-class, interested in sports, decently tolerant, coping rationally with its problems and possessing an element of self-sacrifice where social duties are concerned – is not very far removed from the popular fictions of Mrs Miniver, Mrs Dale's Diary or a whole variety of TV serials. It supports and embodies the popular sentimentality disguising the actual greed, rapacity, selfishness and viciousness by which the middle-class family is maintained. It celebrates and promotes an ideal of Home, Family and Motherhood; it exploits, it



condescends, it patronises and it minimises the self-image of those who frequently most admire it (an older generation of Jamaicans, for instance). Like the Tory Party it maintains the myth that most people are at root good-hearted and contented and that only a small percentage of trouble-makers are to blame for any tensions within society. It feels sorry for the poor, but believes them to be in the main rather shiftless and childish. It gives enormous reinforcement to the middle-class conspiracy suggesting that anyone who displays open anger or fear is 'unreasonable', 'ill-mannered', 'hysterical', 'disturbed', 'unbalanced' or possibly merely 'foreign'. If none (or all) of these things, they are professional agitators in the pay of alien political forces, brainwashing our 'youth' (or just our 'coloureds') so that they commit foolish acts of civil disobedience.

The armed forces and the police are always seen to be doing a difficult and sometimes thankless job involving great self-sacrifice. Public acknowledgement of their sterling work is not expected. They, at any rate, know they are performing frequently unpleasant and unpopular duties with dignity and honour. Any one of the Queen's speeches at Christmas time will incorporate most of these notions. By such logic criticism is dismissed, argument ignored, disapproval (and the conservative personality must always have approval, even if it has to be coaxed from the throats of those it is throttling) reduced to the ravings of fools, madmen and villains.

The monarch is in fact the perfect emblem of the paternalistic State. The Queen is indeed a figurehead. A wife and mother, admired for her fortitude and stamina, she lacks any real power. Her husband and sons are thoroughly 'masculine' (forces, driving, flying, polo-playing etc.) and active. Her daughter rides and is sometimes regarded with a touch of suspicion as a tomboy. But she's made of the right stuff underneath. And anyway, her

sister-in-law, Princess 'Di', compensates for any failings Anne might possess, for she is thoroughly feminine.

Recently, when a poor lunatic gained entrance to Buckingham Palace, it was revealed that the Queen 'slept alone'. Immediately the popular press called upon her, in those rough, matey, cajoling tones they used towards women who have stepped out of line, to go back to 'cuddling up' with her husband. For a few days there was, in fact, just a bit of picture-shake, as there was later when Princess Diana's behaviour after her pregnancy suggested she was under more than a little mental strain and apparently suffering from anorexia nervosa (a condition familiar in 'feminine' women, as, indeed, is constipation). All the wonderful publicity, which had done so much to improve public morale and its faith in the stability of the Royal Family, seemed threatened. Surely the effort involved in standing Prince Charles on a box for the official portraits so that he looked a good head taller than Lady Diana (and the English mock Reagan for his Hollywood experience) was not to prove worthless? But these are familiar problems which constantly face the fictioneers of the Palace. While we all know it's a virtue to be tall and British, it's something very close to a vice to be short and foreign (like, for instance, the Queen's uncuddled husband). The huge element of fiction involved in all this seems to be readily ignored by almost everyone. The Royal Family is there to support the majority's traditional image of itself and its nation. Anyone or anything questioning the 'truth' of that image is ignored, mocked, rejected or, at a pinch, attacked and/or imprisoned. To my mind the comic aspects of the whole conspiracy, in which that huge, healthy princess was put into a ludicrously unsuitable 'fairy tale' costume for her wedding, can't quite make up for the simple fact that it is all based on a series of lies, obfuscations and highly-edited accounts of actual events. To manufacture the appropriate image, to deal with, for instance the unavoidable shortness of the



entire Royal Family, Palace press-people simply resort to movie tricks, to faking photos. To make Prince Charles taller they shrink the woman and expand the man. The man must always seem dominant. Why? The fiction-mongers obviously know what they're doing. (Meanwhile we make jokes about Trotsky's or Stalin's absence from Soviet photos and congratulate ourselves on our superior British love of the truth.).

These lies only remain potent because they both obscure and reinforce the injustices of white male middle-class dominance. In a society which congratulates itself on its democratic institutions, this image of decency and humanity is a fiction. The monarch is the embodiment of the paternalistic State. I doubt very much if our social stability would be any worse than say West Germany's if the entire expensive, gaudy and faintly vulgar clapboard concoction were done away with forever.

If we are to become 'realistic' about our situation (as Margaret Thatcher frequently demands) we must accept Britain's position as a small unit in the whole international picture. We must destroy the fiction of our Imperial past and of our virtuous present.

I was in France when the Falklands crisis peaked. There was no question that people there were sympathetic to the fears of Falklanders threatened by the Argentinian dictatorship. Nobody had sympathy for the Argentinian action. But Margaret Thatcher's pouring of so much expensive transportation, machinery and weaponry, not to mention so many young lives, into what soon became an obviously old-fashioned imperialistic (and vote-catching) cause, took people's breath away on the Continent. Travelling in Europe at that point, I was frequently asked by puzzled Europeans how the British tax-payer was responding to seeing millions upon millions of pounds, which the country could ill-afford, being spent on re-invading a land-area of little strategic or economic value. How did British parents feel

about their sons' lives being lost on such a pointless operation? It was impossible to explain rationally to young Germans or Frenchmen, who had long-since given up thinking of their countries as Great Powers and now saw themselves as part of a European whole, how deeply entrenched in useless, possibly even damaging, ritual and tradition the British public were.

On my return to England I read that Margaret Thatcher felt betrayed by the United States' failure to support Britain's refusal to negotiate with Argentina. America had supported us in our defence of the Falkland Islands but was now, according to the tabloids, doing an about face and criticising our policies. Argentina had initially committed an act of military aggression which broke all the tacit and actual agreements of International Law and had been condemned in the United Nations. But Britain, who had originally seized the territory from Argentina in the first place, was now refusing to take the dispute to International arbitration. Given Britain's previous insistence to other countries on the principle and value of such arbitration, it was not America who acted hypocritically, but Britain. America had already risked her own interests in South America, by supporting Britain, but she had here acted on a clear principle. Britain's principles seemed unclear, to say the least.

Margaret Thatcher didn't mind. She had, with a mixture of jingoism, racism, imperialism and the most astonishing rhetoric of sentimentality and empty emotionalism, won a clear advantage in the looming elections which, up to then, had looked a trifle dodgy for the Conservatives. They had singularly failed to keep their election assurances and with determined monetarist policies had succeeded in dismantling social services, reducing both the standard of living and the morale of the majority of the British people put another couple of million out of work spent rather more on circuses than they had on bread and set the country on a path to becoming the distinct Two Nations which Disraeli, whose



reforms had once saved the Tories from potential extinction, had described more than a hundred years before.

The gap between rich and poor continues to grow. One does not need statistics to see this. A short walk through the streets of London displays it in a hundred different ways. Ten years ago it was by no means as easy to observe the inequalities, even though statistically the shift of wealth from capital to labour, which had gone on through the better part of this century, had begun to be reversed under a nominally Socialist government. The rich are now getting visibly richer and the poor visibly poorer.

A patriarch judges his status according to the number of children he has. In the last ten years our paternalistic governments have succeeded in creating an internal empire of children whose antics sometimes make the Great White Mother angry but upon whom she looks with benign tolerance and even love. It is easy to love that which in no way threatens you. It's sometimes harder to love the truth.

Frustrated by a failure to achieve genuine power a Jamaican buys a big alsatian. A woman has a baby. A white man builds an empire wherever the opportunity arises. It can be as small as a family or, potentially, as big as the world. The test of power remains the same, however: how well does one train to obedience those whom we control?

In a nominal democracy political power can prove a chimera, but personal power can easily establish a tyranny. Paternalism's survival can be said to depend heavily on the ideal of the family. The ideal of the family is embodied in the Queen, her husband and her children and grandchildren. The existence of a monarchy helps support the great lies of nationalism which in turn obscure the existence of our actual problems but enable us more easily to shift the blame onto a variety of other nations or races.

The paternalistic state can find itself employing methods which only serve to support its own existence as a political structure but

which have no practical function either in economic or humanistic terms. By reinforcing this structure, our governments continue to protect themselves while doing actual damage to the country's chances of economic recovery. By increasing the fantasy quotient in political life (and recent jingoistic nationalism does just that) it allows a more successful and elaborate avoidance of reality. This, again, is actual decadence.

In our hasty retreat from internationalism into increasingly extreme forms of nationalism we are also retreating from the pragmatic (let alone idealistic) logic which led us to join the Common Market. Because there is now a distinct contradiction in what we say and how we act (incidentally, a definition of madness in an individual) something must sooner or later give under the strain.

If, as I suspect, there is a move to 'go it alone' and withdraw from Europe, I would guess our future as a nation is grimmer than most, for by an accumulation of self-deception, deceit, hypocrisy and cynical lies we are steadily losing the good will of our traditional friends in the English-speaking world and our allies elsewhere, while having little to offer if bargaining for fresh alliances. I would make a plea for greater honesty in British politics not on abstract moral grounds but on grounds of straightforward practicality. The more lies we tell, the worse off we shall be.

The paternalistic state, if it does not want to reveal its full strength, since it relies on our sentiment and trust in order to manipulate us most successfully, must in fact resort to more and more deceit in order to maintain our faith in it. Only as a last resort, when words fail to achieve the desired result, need it raise its fist to threaten us. Then, at least, we are granted a glimpse of the reality.

The image presented to us of 'The Nation' is a fabrication. Its elements are distorted facts and invented fictions. As England discovered the power of nationalism in the 16th Century, and broke away from Rome, it very quickly began to invent an idealised past, a pantheon of heroes who, amongst other things, could



replace the Catholic saints. During that century almost all the Arthurian 'relics' now scattered across Britain were made – Round Tables, Excaliburs, Thrones and so on – while in the hands of Shakespeare our national virtues were described, shaped, made into the stuff of epics.

Yet even as we went about painting the sets and tailoring the costumes for our new roles there was already a growing number of people who saw any theatre as evil and who perceived, in the idolatry of monarchs, something not far removed from the Popery their class had helped to banish. Within less than fifty years from the death of Elizabeth, the Puritans had succeeded in executing the monarch and instituting the Revolution. This was to result in a period of relative, but nonetheless miserable, tyranny until, in desperation, Charles Stuart was recalled from exile and asked to take his father's place on the throne. Upon King Charles the Second's ascension the theatre was restored to its vital place in English culture.

The argument for the restoration of monarchs, which has been used in different countries since the 17th Century and before that, of course, in Rome, is that people need emblems, glamorous fictions, myths and heroes, in order to focus their energies. If this is true, one can, I suppose, only argue for a more judicious choice of emblems. Kings and Socialists make effective allies in the maintenance of the paternalistic state, as we can see from the recent experience of Spain, which has moved almost effortlessly from modified Fascism to modified Socialism.

The struggle between modern Capitalism and modern Communism remains characteristically a struggle between nations rather than between ideologies. The ideologies, in practice at any rate, are merely the rhetoric disguising the unjust actualities.

All modern governments remain paternalistic. The logic built into such systems continues to keep fifty percent of the world (its women) in the position of being permanently threatened by

arbitrary decisions on the part of a ruling elite. Absolute political power may not be possible in a modern Western democracy, with its system of checks and balances, but absolute personal power is commonplace everywhere.

Real political power is always personal power. One narrow-minded grocer's daughter, with her entire personality dependent on maintaining the *status quo* through, where necessary, the manipulation of a predominantly male Cabinet and Parliament, no more makes a matriarchy than one politically impotent Queen.

It is difficult to see how we can have a truly international society until we find an alternative to paternalism. The existing sentimental phrases are suspect enough: The International Brotherhood, The Family of Man and so on. It is doubtless true, as many conservatives have always maintained, that 'human nature' does not change. It will always be possible to prove this contention while we continue to perpetuate the myths of nationalism with all the sophisticated inventiveness of the human mind. By this means we perpetuate the evils of paternalism which automatically produce most of the vices we identify in 'human nature'. It could be that we shall forever be locked in this vicious circle. If that is the case the best we can do for ourselves is to reject sentimentality and hypocrisy and admit the fundamental injustices upon which British society, not to mention most others, is firmly based. That, at least, might help us survive the coming decades.



3

## *The Retreat From Feminism*

TWO, four, six, eight, how do you know your wife is straight? chanted the marching lesbian feminists with neat and telling wit. This wit was one of the things which characterised the slogans of the women's movement in the sixties and seventies and helped achieve a great sense of unity amongst women of quite disparate backgrounds.

A sense of humour was not always evident in new converts whose enthusiasm for repeating virtually the whole canon of feminist thinking at every party or meal they came to began to be dreaded by the most dedicated, but more seasoned, militant. But as the canon was absorbed, this died away. It was certainly no worse than having to listen to Jerry Rubin's recent discovery of doctrinaire socialism, which was new to him, but a bit over-familiar to almost everybody else. The women's movement had some fine speakers and writers and I think it's fair to say that it was the first fresh political force ever to be distinctly American. Where elsewhere the Black Panthers and the Weathermen had failed to develop a suitable political philosophy and in looking to European models adopted the devalued currency of Communism, thus confusing rather than clarifying their aims, the majority of feminists rejected the old political remedies and slogans and began to invent their own. Indeed, it's fair to say that

when women allied themselves with established parties (as so many did with the Socialists in this country) they were already compromising their position and robbing themselves of effect. If Socialism supported the Women's Movement why didn't it have women representatives? The existing 'radical' alternatives of Europe did not have much in the way of counterparts in America, thanks, among other things, to Senator McCarthy (who in this respect might be said to have done the women's movement a favour) and therefore the initial impetus of American feminists was not checked.

Within a few years the American movement had created an entire range of clear-sighted analysis and found its goals, as well as its slogans. I don't remember who first came up with the telling 'The Personal is Political'. I like to think it was Kate Millett, largely because I admire her courage and independence as well as her writing and I hope it wasn't Germaine Greer, who I think is a fool. Those brilliant American thinkers provided those of us who had a rough idea something was wrong with a logic and a rhetoric we had previously lacked. As Simone de Beauvoir recently said, they inspired feminists throughout the Western world. It's fair to say that without them, we should almost certainly not have even the new half-baked bits of liberal legislation we currently possess in this country. That this impetus failed to achieve the ratification of the ERA in the U.S. and has bogged down in division, confusion and incoherence at the present time in Britain is not proof of the movement's failings but proof of the determination with which those who possess power will cling to it at all costs. The male sex has rallied and retaliated and, as always, it has had help from women. In some cases it has even been able to draw ammunition from feminists themselves, usually those whose writings are going through a fresh phase of re-assessment. Erin Pizzey's terrible and foolish 'chemical imbalance' theory of women who 'goad' men to beat them is positively wicked.



Germaine Greer's 'What's So Bad About Rape?' argument is simply crass and shows that her rise in the media has removed her entirely from any familiar reality.

As Margaret Thatcher led her happy band of brothers to victory, many feminists in this country already anticipated the blow which was about to be struck against the movement. We had our first woman Prime Minister, indeed the first woman Premier of the West (if you don't count Golda Meir). Admittedly she looked more like Phyllis Schlafly than Betty Friedan and, indeed, was ideologically somewhat to the right of Schlafly (who is a kind of super-Mary Whitehouse in America, four-square against feminism, abortion and so on); admittedly she did not seem very bright and made even the depressive Heath seem like Bertrand Russell in comparison, but she was a woman who had succeeded in scoring the top job. As an emblem, she could offer some inspiration, surely, to our young women?

The fact is, of course, that M. Thatcher is no more a useful feminist model than H.R.H. If the Queen is the well-meaning middle-class mum, then Mrs Thatcher is the sharp-tongued school-marm, the nagging wife, the shrewish secretary of the local women's institute. She's no Maid of Orleans, no matter how hard her publicity team tries to present her in this light.

We men recognise her type: it must be placated whenever possible. But luckily she never actually questions the power-structure, so we're all right at base. Should she attempt to seize our real power, we are in the position of turning not only all our male strength against her, but calling on the resentment of our women allies as well. Everyone knows that Good Old Maggie could turn into That Old Ratbag overnight, so why shouldn't they indulge her? She flatters us and frightens us and we refer fondly to her (as Denis does) as 'The Boss'. Perhaps unconsciously she, too, understands how easily her power could be taken from her. She's an excellent figurehead doing Right-

wing Tory dirty-work all over the place, and the Right-wing Tories know that if she no longer suits them they have established machinery for turning her into a laughing stock. She's not even Catherine the Great, as far as real and lasting power goes. She is from the same pattern as generations of petit bourgeois little girls who address their collections of dolls in the same slightly peeved tones with which Our Maggie addresses her Cabinet.

Our Maggie? What does 'Our' mean really? It's a neat little possessive pronoun denoting affection, certainly, but it is also used to diminish. Should the Chinese get a bit awkward about her monumental tactlessness in Peking (where she seemed to be entirely ignorant of the British-inspired Opium Wars and Gordon's march on Peking, and referred to our old association much as if she thought that at some time in the past China had agreed to provide the West with laundries and restaurants in return for our enlightenment and moral leadership) her undiplomatic effect could be diminished: 'Well, that's just Our Maggie'.

The suggestion is that Mrs Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of England, is at root as safe a piece of property as the hard-faced Vicar's wife who hands out the prizes and delivers the admonitions at the Village Fete. The men can divorce themselves from her most outrageous actions while taking advantage of them at the same time. It is possible to do this with a fierce dog or, in Harold Wilson's case, with a deputy who is a drunk.

A woman like Margaret Thatcher has a useful duality since she can, with little effort, be made a heroine or a clown. By submitting to the publicity machine's demands, she has allowed herself to become a fictitious character. But she suffers the misfortunes as well as the fortunes of a cheap novel's heroine. She can, for instance, be arbitrarily written out. She can be used to move the plot in a variety of directions, depending on the script-writer's whims. This might make her behave 'out of character',



but since the character wasn't really hers in the first place, it's easy enough to change. The element of fiction one allows in one's life is inclined to dictate the degree to which one has control over one's own destiny. The less fiction, the easier it is. The more fiction – well, it's a tangled web...

What Margaret Thatcher represents is fundamentally opposed to feminism. She is a representative of the most reactionary and defensive forces of male chauvinism. She is *Their Maggie*. As long as she keeps on doing their dirty-work and allows them an hour or two for golf a day, she'll be okay.

Hell might have no fury like a woman scorned, but what Woman and the Devil often have in common is that they are ultimately in the power of the Grand Patriarch. If He so decides He can step in and call the whole experiment off. The exorcised Demon scares us, screaming in the confines of the pentangle, but we know we are safe so long as we close ranks and hold steady. The betrayed woman shouts her threats and reveals what secrets she believes she possesses (for this has been her 'power') but the men have already made certain that the facts have been obscured and her words discounted: she's been neutralised before she knows it. Her ego has been flattered for as long as has been necessary to cover oneself against any actual knowledge she might have. The woman's experience, in fact, is often the experience of manipulative politicians who are so frequently hoist with their own petard you'd think they'd give it up.

I do not necessarily believe this image is the 'real' Margaret Thatcher. She could well be both more powerful and less stupid than she seems. As a model, however, she functions as a classic manipulative woman, acknowledging the superiority of men while satisfying her own ego with thoughts that she is capable of applying leverage to this superior sex and proving herself by this means some sort of quasi-male. After all, Ronald Reagan bestowed on Mrs Thatcher his greatest possible praise a little

while ago when he said that her vote-catching visit to the Falklands made her 'the best man in England'. A system where women seek to control male power by means of cajoling, threatening or deceiving them is neither an honourable system nor a particularly efficient one (since so much time is wasted) and it is certainly not, as many men like to claim, effectively a matriarchy.

A matriarchy is a society where women have direct political control. Outside of mythology, no such system seems to have existed and it seems to me that feminists who use the methods of nationalism and re-invent the past to find models could be misguided. I would rather see people working for a matriarchy tomorrow than groping through the Celtic twilight for confirmation that one Boadicea somehow makes a nation. To idolise women as deities is not the same thing as acknowledging their identities as ordinary human beings. Being Mother of the Universe cannot offer much consolation while Father is always in evidence somewhere, even if he spends most evenings at the pub. There are at least two standard methods of dehumanising and thus making impotent a threatening reality. One can turn it, as men are inclined to do, into an abstraction (or supernatural power), or one can characterise it as sub-human and therefore beneath contempt. If it proves irritating, it can be controlled and possibly eradicated. To see this process at work in recent society one needs look no further than Nazi Germany, where women and Jews were reduced to these roles very swiftly.

Margaret Thatcher functions perfectly well as an element of male mythology as she flatters, cajols and wags a firm, matronly finger at her 'little boys' (like other heroines such as Elizabeth I or Catherine the Great, who also used the currency of sex as cynically as any courtesan). She's not Shirley Williams who is a type of English intellectual far more honest, far more direct, yet who presents an equally confused image to the girl looking for



models in the political world. Mrs Williams' way of dressing, her body language and sometimes her rhetoric indicate that while she is not threatening women, she is not really threatening men either. Feeling guilty, in some ways, for desiring genuine power, English women present this somewhat 'batty' image of themselves. It is an image displayed almost daily, for instance, in the pages of *The Guardian*.

I find a similar display evident in Tony Benn who doubtless has some trouble reconciling his upper class experience with his working class loyalties and who frequently, even as he speaks with the greatest passion, reveals by dress and gesture the fact that he can never be absolutely certain of his own motives. This is to describe his dilemma, not question his sincerity. The English have a habit of equating human vanity with inhuman ambition and are capable, therefore, of feeling enormous guilt if they send a shirt to the dry-cleaners or allow themselves to feel concern about whether one cuff is secured by a button or a paper-clip.

English girls, particularly of the middle-classes, seem to be issued with constantly conflicting instructions on this matter. They must be clean and tidy and 'look nice', but if they show too much concern over whether their socks match they are disapproved of and told not to be vain. This produces the classic British stereotype which so puzzles and amuses the rest of the world. A less self-conscious class and culture which merely confines itself to educating little girls to the virtues of 'femininity' at least does not produce quite such a number of incoherent images for the confusion of future generations.

Perhaps this specific image is what has helped make the Women's Movement in England less dynamic and perhaps rather less coherent than the American movement which has provided all feminists with the greater part of their political logic and rhetoric.

More than any of the other modern movements which gained

strength in the sixties, feminism has an enormous wealth of books which re-examine issues and search for new methods of achieving and applying political power. We have Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (first published in English in 1953) as something of a cornerstone. Amongst the American books which have most influenced the movement were the works of Margaret Mead, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*. A somewhat flashier, but also influential, book by the British-based Australian Germaine Greer was *The Female Eunuch*. One of the most influential British books is Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate*, but I think it's safe to say that all feminist literature written today reflects the important ideas developed during the sixties and seventies by Americans. These women were frequently active leaders in the radical political movements of the time and their names are specifically associated with what has become known as 'Women's Liberation'.

The separation of that mass movement into factions was possibly inevitable, but in America at least a great many women were united in their work for the National Organization for Women (NOW) which was focussed chiefly on a campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. In England the impetus of the movement seemed checked. Abortion was legal (though there were those who sought to make it illegal again) and in many instances it had become technically illegal to practise discrimination against women in the matter of jobs and pay. The injustices persisted nonetheless, because the government put insufficient financial or moral muscle into the pursuit of equal pay and opportunities. Any complaints often took a year or more to be heard (an experience shared by those who brought their grievances to the Race Relations Board). This was not surprising, but it had a demoralising effect and helped produce the



fragmentation evident in letters to the excellent magazine *Spare Rib*, where the old debate about should Radical Lesbian Separatists ally themselves with heterosexual feminists, and if so in what causes and to what extent, is still to be found. Some of these groups begin to seem more like retreating stragglers than advancing armies and bear all the characteristics of sects which not only lack power but have come to regard political power or the pursuit of it as 'masculine' and therefore 'evil'. By characterising power in this way, they manage to avoid the question of why they have not achieved it and why they no longer see its achievement, in any active sense, as one of their goals.

Not all groups, of course, have descended into Moon Worship and other forms of mysticism, not all have accepted the sentimental myths of Motherhood as a rationale for backing off from direct (and today, pretty frightening) confrontation with the patriarchal State. In common with the mood of the times (which has seen a general retreat into Born Again Christianity and other forms of mysticism as well as many subtler conventional anodynes traditionally used by those of us who are either defeated in our ambitions or persuaded that those ambitions were never what we should have wanted in the first place) many former radicals have found the going too rough. One can mourn the fact, without failing to sympathise with the individuals.

Yet the Women's Movement remains the largest and best of all the radical movements. Where it has not allowed itself to be distorted by alliance with conventional, paternalistic political parties, it provides our greatest single hope of democratic change. It has much in common with the best anarchist thought and in general is humane and realistic almost in direct contrast to the actions and views of most alternative political movements. It is a movement which is not based on the needs of one particular class or race. Ideologically it is at its most effective and its moral best when it rejects the language and logic of, say, Marxism and

refuses the methods of paternalistic capitalism. Ideally, if it can maintain itself, it offers the prospect of a sane, just and progressive society with a moral foundation far superior to anything which has existed up to now.

The effect of the feminist movement has been considerable over the past twenty years. If it has led some of us to re-examine our roles and our motives in the light of its findings, it has already done as much as Marxism ever did in the thirties. If it has given us room to examine politics from a psychological and sexual perspective as well as from an economic perspective it has achieved far more than Marxism ever promised. Feminism is not the product of one individual and a small group of disciples. It has its modern roots in Wollstonecraft and Mill, certainly, but it has changed and developed so rapidly since, say, 1950 that it is the accumulated findings and theories of hundreds of individuals. This, in itself, makes it remarkable. This, also, could be its strategic weakness, since so many shades of opinion exist – and are encouraged to exist – within the Women's Movement.

Much of the power won by women has proved to be notional rather than actual. The injustices, the fears, the brutalities, the inequalities, continue to exist.

Rape, recently an issue in the newspapers when a whole series of cases received treatment by judges which to say the least suggested they regarded the offence as a petty crime, still remains a matter of outrage, yet is consistently minimised by a male-dominated police and judiciary, as well as by men in general and, it now seems, by Germaine Greer in particular. Usually the crime is only taken seriously when it happens to a relative or woman-friend and even then men frequently have a tendency to blame the woman, most generally for 'being stupid' or leading a life-style likely to 'encourage' rape.

There's evidence that some rapists are actually stimulated by rejection to attack (just like wife-batterers) and that an important



element in the act of rape can be hatred and fury at the woman's self-confidence or composure. This may be connected with the frequency with which the Queen, Princess Margaret or Jackie Kennedy occur in male sexual-domination fantasies. The image of the promiscuous high-stepping dolly-bird promoted during the sixties in innumerable films (and still promoted in the form of a 'liberated lady' in the pornographic or 'glamour' magazines) has probably also made its contribution to whatever kind of dreadful dreams occupy the rapist's mind while it might also have added to his loathing of the self-contained and uncompliant female an extra dimension where he could believe that she is giving her favours to everyone but him.

In modern society rape is never an act of simple lust. It is always an act of selfish violence, frequently an act of vengeance against the woman who refuses to say 'Yes'. Other acts of psychological, sexual and physical violence – particularly all the appalling forms of domestic rape – are also given additional rationale by the magazines which promote what they call 'sexual liberation' (perhaps the worst corruption of sixties idealism) by which they appear to mean nothing more than the granting of licence to all male power/sex fantasies and to those women who, for whatever reason, wish to participate in those fantasies. When Sarah Maitland writes cheerfully *as a feminist* about attending an Ann Summers 'peckerwear' party, where private homes are devoted to the sale of so-called marital aids, and argues that those who promote and manufacture open-front knickers and penis-shaped dildos are no more exploiting women than the makers of dungarees (*City Limits*, December 1982) one begins to wonder if many declared feminists are any more credible than self-proclaimed 'libertarian' policemen.

I believe that there is, if nothing else, a loss of political perspective when a Women Against Rape demonstration can command only a fraction of the numbers willing to go to

Greenham Common to protest against the siting of nuclear arms in this country (a pseudo-political action in my view). The chances of success in this arena are pretty negligible, while the penalties if arrested are nothing compared to the social approval, whereas concerted pressure of the same intensity directed against the police and courts, or indeed against Parliament, might at least impress more men of the need for urgent re-organisation of investigative methods and the means by which rapists are brought to justice, tried and punished. It might also show that there are plenty of voices to express disapproval of rapists and those who refuse to punish them with sufficient severity. Perhaps some fierce threat to male sexuality would be necessary before the crime of rape was regarded at least on a level with other serious crimes of violence. A good many of these crimes are, as is well-known, never prosecuted through lack of proper departments in many police stations, yet a large number of them are committed at knife-point or accompanied by threats to murder the victim. Sometimes the victim is, indeed, murdered – usually a child or teenager – and only then does public emotion begin to reach an appropriate degree of outrage.

Mothers for Peace... What right-minded person could be upset by that neat combination of emotive words. Where Mrs Thatcher uses the word 'British' to denote implicit virtue, and Ronald Reagan uses the word 'man' in the same way, middle-class women use the word 'mother'. More frequently nowadays they say they've decided to 'become a *mum*' (using that particular self-approving inflection which has only just come into general usage) adding sometimes 'before it's too late'. Too late for what? The child they bear while saying how afraid they are that World War III is just around the corner? Too late before they are called upon to demonstrate self-reliance? Too late to 'fulfil' their natural wish for motherhood? More likely their desire is for real power, if only for a while, over at least one other human being. Morally, it



appears a bit smelly, given the overall social ambience. Another little entry on the SS pay-roll and *mum* draws her child benefit until the child is old enough to claim unemployment pay. Yet the paternalistic State continues to celebrate and honour *mum*-hood and *The Sun* treats us to approvingly sentimental pictures of the Royal *Mum* with the Royal *Babe*, as well as the Queen *Mum*, not to mention the *Mum*-queen herself. Who's keeping *mum*?

Thus social approval of our self-indulgent insanity is thoroughly reinforced. Our action has mythological as well as social respectability. It gives us a moral context within which we can both attack the world and ask for its mercy. "I'm the mother of two children under five," says the woman phoning the Gas Board to get them to come to mend her heater.

Women have babies to win status, power and 'security' (a hold over a man or money from the State). But why does our impoverished paternalistic society want women to have more babies? Why have women again been told they are 'needed at home'? It can't be for completely economic reasons. It is the dominant sex re-asserting its traditional means of control and the means by which it re-inflates its ego (or 'morale'), along with nationalism, racism and so on. This is understandable, if disgusting. What is if not baffling at least very depressing is that so many women (declared feminists amongst them) are buying this miserable form of servitude when they have the means of avoiding it. More than that, thanks to an almost complete lack of pressure on men to use contraception so that they are even less responsible than they were before 'the Pill', men are fathering babies without being aware of it until 'too late'.

To make yourself pregnant while deliberately deceiving the man about your intentions is the equivalent, ran a popular argument of last year, of a man raping a woman. It isn't, of course. The act of rape is violent, direct, terrifying and inescapable. The unexpectant father always has the option (if not

always the social approval or emotional motive) of walking away from the child and its mother.

Silly young girls, without hope of jobs, are becoming pregnant all over the place. Nobody seems to be campaigning to stop them, to show disapproval. Silly middle-class *mums*, who ought to know better, smile with a mixture of self-deprecation, contentment, and the expectation of universal approval as they stroke the fronts of their bulging dungarees.

Why aren't feminists – who have a political logic to cope with this very phenomenon – doing more to show their disapproval, particularly of their fallen sisters? Can the answer merely be, in such a faction-fraught movement, that it has become established cant to show 'solidarity' with women, no matter how cheerfully they betray almost everything the real political movement of the sixties and seventies stood for? Or is *everyone* packing a secret bag and getting ready to jump in the lifeboat and leave the ship of feminism to founder as they row themselves, singing and cheering, back to the island safety of Nurseryana or the mainland of sweet Maternity? Who would harm a Mother? Who has the authority to accuse her? What monster would dare point an angry finger at *mum*'s swollen belly? Or refuse a state pension to Mother and Child. It would be tantamount to earning for oneself the social prestige of King Herod. Indeed, as the deification of The Family continues, it might become positively unsafe to express criticism. It is already close to a serious heresy in many quarters.

Now *mum* has her little area of personal power (but not for always – see *The Dialectic of Sex*) she is in a position to apply leverage on Dad who 'can't know' what she's going through and is pretty rotten bastard if he objects to almost anything. She can ask him for whatever he can afford, probably more.

The male equivalent of this sort of manipulation, incidentally, is usually to pose as a child and is learned from women. To 'get round' a woman he will present himself as a powerless child.



Unlike most women, however, he always has the option of direct power. Witness the anger of the husband who, in failing to charm his wife to do what he wants, turns on her and batters her (a common syndrome) whereupon the tendency of authority is to placate him and appeal to him to 'show more restraint'. This is imperialism in miniature.

The patriarchal hierarchy is re-established, but it still likes to be liked by those it oppresses, so it retains some form, at least, of its paternalistic 'benign' social structure to look after *mum* and pay off the Mob. What is it buying?

In the case of women it is buying silence and calm, I suspect, as well as dissipating the power of a labour force it can no longer, by Law, directly exploit. Equal pay, employers argue, means that it's impossible for them to employ women and stay in business. The new laws of the affluent sixties and seventies can't be abolished that easily, so the easiest thing to do is to neutralise them by holding back funds from the bodies supposed to administer them, by making as many women as possible potentially unemployable and the rest grateful for what they can get. The working class is controlled in this way now, as are blacks and women in general. Tory voters and National Fronters must be sighing with relief all over the place. The menace is at least checked, if not contained forever. The next logical step is to silence dissent.

Maybe it won't be so safe, in a few years, to demonstrate for peace at Greenham Common\*. I wonder how many *mums* and their teddy-bears and children will be there then.

\*I'm not 'against' CND. I'm against the refusal of the majority of CND demonstrators to turn their energy towards immediate social issues, particularly those about which the Women's Movement feels strongly – i.e. common crimes of violence against women. The Bomb remains a dangerous abstract – a serious possibility. Rape goes on daily. A society is more likely to amend its rape-case procedures than it is to give up its weapons, though I'd grant both problems are part of the same syndrome.

## 4

### *The Retreat From Individualism*

POWER To The People and To Thine Own Self Be True were two of the most-used catch-phrases of the previous two decades and the idea of independence within society was more fully-explored than at any other time. Again feminism provided many of the insights, but so did anarchist humanism, as the relationship of the free individual to the body politic, its responsibilities and capacity for self-determination, were discussed, often in admittedly naive or simplistic jargon in the many 'underground' papers of the time.

Hoffman and Rubin and the Situationists, the Angry Brigade and Noam Chomsky; Stuart Christie, Albert Meltzer, Nicolas Walter (then with cancer and supporting the unpopular cause of voluntary euthanasia). Heroes ranged from mystics like Hesse, to the more extremely individualistic Stirner (*The Ego and Its Own*) and Bob Dylan sang on – *Don't Follow Leaders* – while William Burroughs pursued his inspired solipsistic vision of a world in which almost everything was a drug, everyone out to seduce you and the act of sex was one individual attempting to occupy the body of another. There was a revival of interest in anarchism and its slogans ('Neither Master Nor Slave' or W.K. Clifford's fine 'There is one thing more wicked in the world than the desire to command, and that is the will to obey') and a welcome



republishing of books from the twenties where clear-sighted English feminists, like Stella Browne (who refused 'to accept the ameliorative welfare, the neutrality of the state') and theorists like Voline or Berkman provided readers with what was usually then called a 'socialist alternative' to Marxism.

In fiction and a little later, in films, young individualists were constantly cut down by the forces of conformity until the genre was so thoroughly established the only tension lay in guessing at which freewheelin' point (and whether on bike, car, plane or boat) the young hippy would meet his inevitable end. He was never safe, whether he was riding his motor-cycle through the Deep South or running a hydroponics station in Interplanetary Space. He could even be a real-life martyr like Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix or Janis Joplin, brought low not by self-indulgence but by a materialistic, uncaring world which could not tolerate their 'freedom' and needed them as victims. The pantheon of martyrs had all known the consequences, the mythology ran, but chose the Path of Individualism nonetheless.

Rock music, in fact, promoted this romantic case even more thoroughly, deriving subject matter from its own recent, but highly-coloured, past and we had rafts of songs about how tough and sad it was to be a popular music star, while 'Rock and Roll' itself almost achieved personality and martyrdom in songs like 'American Pie', It was enough as I discovered in my own stage performances, to walk out, raise one's fist and shout 'Freedom' to get a whole audience cheering. Easy work in those days, if you wanted it...

The quest for individuality became strongly allied to the idea of 'self-expression'. To seek one's means of self-expression became virtuous in itself and persists in the logic of kids on the dole in particular. Some of them insist that the few jobs offered don't allow them any room for expansion as individuals, a concept foreign to the experience of those of us who got our jobs at

fourteen or fifteen because we had no option but to earn our couple of quid a week, though we were also the generation which felt that every individual had a creative soul and argued for a system wherein all these budding artists and craftsmen should be allowed the opportunity of expressing themselves.

When a little of this idea was put into practice through the relatively large grants permitted the arts after Labour's first victory of the sixties we soon saw the results and some of us changed our minds. Jack Lambert of *The Sunday Times* suggested many people receiving Arts Council funds were what a previous century had called 'artistic', though we were all artists now. Andy Warhol in New York persisted with this notion. Everybody, even the Empire State building, was a star.

The excesses and follies of this campaign for personal liberty received a great deal of publicity which fueled the conservative campaigns, including the more lunatic movements of Mary Whitehouse, the Right to Lifers and the Festival of Light, and, misinterpreted by young people, frequently led to all sorts of tragedy, particularly in the areas of drug-taking. This could cause a reaction leading people to all kinds of even more bizarre forms of slavery. They became either straightforwardly religious (Divine Light, Children of God and so on) or sought some sort of comfort in the quasi-scientific cults of Scientology, EST and so on, since they were not yet ready to accept the conventional alternatives which were, if anything, somewhat less authoritarian in nature.

Throwing themselves into these movements as thoroughly as ex-Catholics threw themselves into Communism in the thirties, giving up all independence (and frequently all their money) these seekers after knowledge did their best to speak the private gobbledegook of Hubbard, Erhardt and Moon and to cope more readily with the outside world. Such invented languages only increase the element of abstraction, of course, and make the few people who use it even more thoroughly divorced from the



realities around them, which helps the leaderships prove their cases and draws the extremely-affected members more and more deeply into the 'secret life' of the cult. By imposing a quasi-scientific, quasi-religious language on a complex world, these cults gain apparent authority, since we are all conditioned to accept the languages of science and psychoanalysis as somehow being more 'accurate' than our ordinary, day-to-day language. As these private languages do not really describe the world and have not derived from anything but a loony's ramblings, accuracy of description is actually severely reduced, which means that reality must be further distorted and simplified to accommodate the language, which is, of course, sacrosanct. It all works a treat, therefore, for the Reverend Moon and Co..

The Born Again Christian movement, with its familiar characteristics of revivalism, encouraged more young people to fall back on the attitudes of their parents. All this was part of the general swing to the Right which, we're told, is the normal reaction to a swing to the Left. The radicals themselves were 'growing up' (i.e. entering a shrinking job market) and a great many of them cut their hair, exchanged their Indian skirts for conventional slacks, and looked back with tolerant nostalgia to the time when they were young and foolish. Most of these people reacted with distaste to the 'punk' phenomenon when youthful dandyism in turn reacted against the expensive fashions of late-hippiedom and cultivated an 'ugly and cheap' image similar to, though much wittier than, the beatnik dandies of the fifties.

We establish our independence, our individualism, by adopting costumes more likely to outrage the rest of society. That these costumes swiftly become formalised, consume more and more of the wearer's time (ever thought how long it takes to get a Mohawk looking right?), attention and eventually money, and actually represents a tribal rather than a personal identity, often takes some time to sink in; whereupon a new fashion is invented. I

remember wearing Brylcreemed hair, a blazer, tie and flannels to attend anarchist meetings in the 50s, just because I didn't want to wear the current bohemian uniforms. At other times, of course, I'd wear 'beatnik' clothes to a Church Fete.

Fashion can be important. A fashion for radicalism brought in some reforms; the current fashion for conservatism could menace every liberty we gained. I would rather see young women claiming to be feminists and presenting themselves to the world as feminists than denying the role simply because their mothers' words don't always go with their mothers' actions.

The British in particular seem conditioned against protesting on their own behalf. They must protest 'for' something, usually a section of society or a principle or their children (is this the secret of Greenham Common) or the Third World. Because of this conditioning women in particular find it hard to justify 'selfish' (i.e. personal) complaints and have an elaborate system of euphemism to explain their likes and dislikes (the dog gets nervous, the child needs peace and quiet, the husband wouldn't like it) and this has the effect of confusing motive as well as inhibiting self-interested action. It also, of course, means that responsibility need never be taken for one's own actions (*I did it for you/them*) and that genuine acts of altruism are hard to distinguish from genuinely selfish acts. Frequently an enormous structure of fictions must be erected before the individual can justify acting on its own behalf (i.e. any opposition must be characterised as thoroughly wicked and the past re-written to accommodate this fiction – if it is a fiction – so that every previous action of the opposition is re-interpreted in the worst possible light) and this frequently has the affect of immediately obscuring the problem (*But that's not true. That's not what you said at the time etc.*). Mythical heroes become mythical villains almost overnight.

Feminism in particular attempted to educate women out of this syndrome but it's a lesson everyone should learn. Again, the



syndrome mitigates against efficiency. Energy is dissipated in endless quarrels over what is 'true' and what is 'false' to the point that action can become either much less clearly-motivated or completely impossible.

Ideally, the quest for individualism should enable us to operate more efficiently in the world and decrease the general chaos babbling around us from every source. This is not really the same thing as the need for self-expression or even 'self-discovery', both of which are inclined to extremes of narcissism and solipsism which do not seem to me healthy. The political idea of individualism is simple: we have the right to seek what we want in the world so long as we do not commit real crimes against others. Obviously we must seek self-knowledge if only to work out our goals and needs.

So many bad self-discovery books were published in the seventies that Tom Wolfe coined the term 'Me-ism' to describe their effect.

"I'm looking for the real me." That search has about as much point, in isolation, as Peer Gynt peeling layer upon layer of skins to find the 'real' onion. Our personalities are the sum of a thousand different influences. The person looking for the real them is usually describing an unwillingness to take any action of their own devising.

By aiming for personal independence, we have to accept personal responsibility for our actions. This requires a clearly-considered moral base and an ability to predict and accept consequences.

The threat of nuclear war is implicit in the mood of nationalism and chauvinism to be found in many countries; in the tendency to blame other people for our present difficulties. The Arabs, who took control of their own oil production and decided to make the most of their revenues while they could, became regular villains in these scenarios. In Britain our Common Market partners are frequently described as being 'unreasonable'. America 'betrays'

us. In the sixties it became a matter of rote to blame 'the unions' for all our troubles.

This ridiculous state of affairs resulted in a meaningless struggle for a larger slice of what turned out to be an already-eaten cake. We now have villainous 'dole defrauders' (a vast, almost wholly mythical army of men and women whose sole interest is to milk the State of its hand-outs while secretly making a fortune in the building trade). It's true too many people spend too much of their time trying to squeeze extra and sometimes illegal benefits from the State, but the great number of people getting Giro-cheques remain the honestly unemployed and the old. People are depressed or angered by their condition. Most prefer to work for a wage frequently little higher than their Social Security money because by this means they retain their own judgement, their self-respect. The alternative means of maintaining one's ego, in the conditions of a paternalistic state, can indeed involve outwitting the authorities, sometimes unselfconsciously, sometimes with bullshit justifications. *These are the conditions of the paternalistic state.* A self-directed individual refusing the dubious benefits of paternalism can avoid these conditions only by taking the risk of real independence. Even so, they are not by any means invulnerable to the pressures and uncertainties which befall everyone else.

The real or imagined 'enemies' of our various nations have encouraged us, as I've said, towards nationalism and chauvinism of several kinds and they have also led us, it seems, to fall back on conventional institutions which stress either American 'togetherness' or English 'social coherence'. Fewer people these days like to stress their individualism. Far more young men find they feel comfortable in the kind of three-piece suit worn by their fathers. It's probably no coincidence that women's fashions derive from the forties and fifties. For several reasons (chiefly economic no doubt) recruitment to the Armed Forces is high and



more people are joining the police. More people are entering into conventional marriages and the nostalgia of cobbled Northern streets has been replaced by *Brideshead Revisited* and a fascination with and imitation of the manners and customs of a pre-War upper-class, much of this promoted by a middle- and upper-class which a few years ago scarcely had the confidence to put on its headscarves and cravats anywhere north of Dorking.

By inventing enemies the ruling caste draws attention away from its own shortcomings, its own failure to keep its election promises, indeed, its own rapacity. This is sometimes cynically done but often, because this is the way we are trained to justify ourselves, it is done quite unconsciously. I'm sure many Tories sincerely believe the unions are bringing this country to its knees, that black immigration is draining Britain of her lifeblood and that dole defrauders are ruining our economy.

There seems to me to be an increased tendency, perhaps following Mrs Thatcher's example, to blame others for our misfortunes. At some time the Prime Minister has accused every section of the British working class, almost every British ally, of 'betrayal' (i.e. that they acted according to their own principles and self-interest) and genuinely seems incapable of understanding, say, that British interests are not at the heart of French policy. This is simple-minded and perhaps a bit dangerous. It is inclined to increase xenophobia. She seems incapable of considering the consequences (unless they're electoral) of her actions. She shows nothing but outrage when those consequences don't suit her. One can wonder when she'll reach the megalomaniacal level of Adolf Hitler who is reputed to have said, as he washed down the cyanide: "Alas, the German people are not worthy of me." Certainly her recent speech to the Falklands, which was otherwise pretty empty of content, had a bit of that ring about it and her uneasy relationship with her Cabinet, which she tends to think guilty of plotting against her if

it doesn't agree with her is another example of her impatience with the principles of democracy.

The public, to her, are 'Our People' (that is, average middle-class Conservative voters). She apparently has confidence only in those who reflect her bizarre self-image. Even when she discusses the case for Tory individualism she is actually talking about those people who offer her their full consent. This, in turn, makes a nonsense of any anti-paternalistic claims of the Right. They are merely arguing for their own form of hierarchy which, as it happens, has this fundamentally unprincipled woman at its head. Her solipsistic bigotry, in which the country, herself and national wish-fulfilment fantasies are identified as the same thing, suggest she's incapable of any sort of sound judgement. That her little boys are prepared to shore up her fantasy says more about the notorious psychological problems of Tory politicians than it does about their political acumen or their financial motives. It's quite a horrifying syndrome seen in this light. Indeed, it's pretty horrifying in any light. But then repression, in almost every form, is, I suppose, the name of the game.

The ideal of responsible individualism (which is reflected in Tory rationales if not in practice) now seems almost forgotten. Like many movements of the sixties and seventies it has been corrupted and bastardised, reduced to a handful of meaningless phrases used to justify whatever doubtful action someone wishes to take. That movement towards individualism offered, through a mixture of methods (including the uncertain benefits of LSD or Mescaline), self-knowledge, self-respect and, consequently, self-direction. These qualities, by implication, offer a means both of assessing consequences and of accepting responsibility. One neither acts on 'behalf' of another individual, nor in the name of a 'cause', nor for 'Our People' until one has carefully considered one's own self-interest and where it accords with social responsibility.

This sounds rather abstract when put so baldly, but it is in



effect probably not much more, in the long-run, than what people used to call 'enlightened self-interest'. It does mean, however, that one can try to persuade others to support a general movement but one has no right to attack them, on moral grounds, should they choose to refuse. There again, those who refuse must also assess the likely consequences of their decision and be prepared to accept them and deal with them independently when they arise. Which is not to imply that they are wrong, either in their decision or in their assessment.

According to the principles of self-directed individualism no political group (in the broad definition) has any right to do anything more than attempt to demonstrate its case and it is morally wrong, under any circumstances, to employ direct or indirect force (by threats of violence or by manipulative means so common to small socialist groups, for instance) to make others alter their views. Essentially these are also the principles of a democratic state. In reality the 'checks and balances' built into the paternalistic system can frequently be utilised by one group in order to exercise tyranny over another.

The chief reason for telling lies (whether by complicated self-deception or in a spirit of straightforward cynicism or a mixture of both) is to achieve or maintain power without recourse to physical violence, or the threat of physical violence; to keep social approval. The effect of lying, however, tends to confuse judgement, making it increasingly necessary to seek 'confirmation' of one's lies by imposition. When this happens we can observe the classic psychopathic political leader in action.

As in other spheres, the most optimistic signs of a continuation of the quest for individual liberty are currently to be found within the feminist movement, which slips less often than other movements into manipulative trickery (perhaps because they recognise these as the familiar procedures of powerless women). This is not to confuse the moral base of the movement with those

quasi-feminists who substitute self-involvement (another familiar characteristic of powerless women) for self-discovery and self-determination.

With the anarchist movement presently reduced to a handful of serious thinkers and perhaps no more than a few hundred romantic people (most of whom are male) only feminism provides an established moral and philosophical alternative basis on which to examine and conduct one's independent life, whether one is male or female. Yet those feminists allying themselves with conventional political parties (and consequently finding themselves mixed up, in spite of their principles, with manipulative in-fighting) and those who go to Greenham but do not go to a Women's Campaign for Jobs rally, might be dissipating their energy at a time when the Women's Movement most needs it to survive. Similarly, the tendency towards factionalism is disturbing. Whether or not there is any point in petitioning a paternalistic, patriarchal state is a question which people have to decide for themselves. But, having decided, they might wonder what's happening to the local Women's Refuge while they're camping outside the nuclear wire and proclaiming their fears for the future.

Daily tyranny exists throughout the world and women are its chief victims, both psychologically and physically. In Britain police powers of arrest threaten an increasing number of blacks (most likely to be found guilty if brought to trial and therefore good for police statistics) in Britain. Yet this ongoing tyranny is nothing compared to the fears of the woman threatened with all the machinery of domestic, patriarchal terror, with the knowledge that if she leaves the home she may then become subject to a variety of new threats and acts of violence; for she exists in a state which, constitutionally, exercises a bias against her.

In contradiction of the principles of individual liberty the self-deceiving, self-righteous male will maintain that he acts for



the benefit of all (particularly women) and that he is protecting society by his actions. All this means, of course, is that he is protecting his own interests (or what he sees as his own interests).

The retreat from individualism means that fewer of us are now likely to acknowledge our own right to independence and liberty than in previous years and therefore are less likely to accept another's rights. This means to feminists that more men are joining together in elitist male enclaves and developing a new and more sophisticated rationale to maintain their power.

The London-based middle-class liberal might not yet have observed this increase in the power shift, partly because he is actually part of the elite and enjoying at least some of its benefits and comforts, partly because it's possible to find confirmation of almost any illusion in London if you stay in the right places. But in the real cities, where most of us are born and die, there is ample evidence of intolerance, brutalisation, a return to primitive tribalism and self-righteous greed, corruption and rapacity which the right-wing theorist chooses to dismiss as 'human nature' when it is actually no more than a condition of human life for the majority of the world's peoples.

It is a condition reflected in the unthinking, selfish, rapacious attitudes of Mrs Thatcher's 'people'. Since it exists between the other classes, the petite-bourgeoisie has always managed to combine the worst human traits. It frequently appears to have no moral attitudes at all, merely a collection of cosy consensual lies with which it justifies its greedy actions. This element has now become the rotten backbone of Britain. Its sentimental lies are the antithesis of individualism and are likely to result in an increase of illusory power which, almost by definition, is the chief characteristic of a genuinely decadent society.

In non-aligned feminism alone, at present, lies a real hope of encouraging an increase in realistic and humane social attitudes. Through the principles of feminism we could discover the

salvation of our society not from a possible nuclear strike but from the existing jingoistic chauvinists of all kinds whose self-deceiving lies threaten to lead us along to road to an even more terrifying kind of destruction: both personal and political.



5

## *The Quest For The Perfect Lie*

THIS essay has no claim to much originality or profundity. It is essentially a piece of journalism written in response to a publisher's offer to rant if I felt I had something to say. I haven't covered every aspect of the ideas I've raised and would not expect to be able to do so in this form. I know that I've occasionally let my rhetoric exaggerate some points and that elsewhere I've only sketchily outlined my arguments. As an anarchist I cannot fail to identify with the objectives of the feminist movement and as a supporter of peaceful political action I applaud the movement's methods.

I am a member of a privileged class, in that at present I have a market for what I produce and, when publishers actually choose to pay me, a decent financial reward for my work. As a man I am also privileged to belong to the overall power-structure so that my personal crises are more frequently crises of conscience rather than, as with many women's, crises of despair and terror. I currently possess options, in other words, which the greater part of human society does not. So, indeed, it's easy for me to speak of self-direction and self-motivation, since these things are not only necessary to an ambitious writer but the search for them is pretty implicit to the nature of the work and the kind of life which I consequently lead. I can promote my ideals through my novels

and lend support to political movements which seem to me to be of a fundamentally humanist disposition (chief amongst them being feminism) and I can attempt to lead a moral life which is not at odds with those ideals (an attempt which is frequently spectacularly unsuccessful).

It is impossible to allow oneself much room for complacency when you are a privileged member of an unjust society and I should make it clear that none of my judgements, criticisms, rallying cries are made in the belief that I am any better able to perceive society than many, many others of considerably different political persuasions. However, I have been glad of the opportunity to present some insights and cases and to record my support for specific causes, my suspicion of existing institutions, my strong dislike of those currently holding political power in this country.

Currently it seems to me there are far too many liberals looking for a means of copping out of their original positions; too many radicals looking for a means of re-adjusting their goals so they are not called upon to take the kind of action which, in the sixties and seventies, would have received considerably more general support than at present. In order to do this those people are forced to go through far more complex gyrations than the bourgeoisie they oppose. Because they have not quite the same habits of self-deception they find it more difficult to accept the sentimental lies by which the patriarchal authoritarian state maintains itself and justifies its actions. This leaves some feminists with 'motherhood' or even a rather more generalised 'humanism'; it leaves anarchists with 'tolerance' and the tending of one's own garden; it leaves socialists with a broader number of choices, including the old idea of 'solidarity', United Front and so on, by which they often mean the giving up of certain ideals in order to achieve political power. They have at present no perfect lie, no rationalisation that cannot be questioned, though there are some very good ones about.



As people grow older they become less able to set themselves in opposition to society at large. There are several obvious reasons for this. If the system of radical thought they believe in has the same elements of authoritarianism built into it as the society they are living in, it is relatively easy to make use of the rationalisations frequently presented by those already operating within the system. The most common, of course, is the 'working from within' rationale, which presumes that it is possible to accept and apply power without being affected by the implications of these actions. It's a pity that people feel called upon to justify their decisions by means of a complicated process of self-deception. If they merely stated that their needs or capacities had changed they would at least be able to retain better judgement. Yet we maintain a society in which action of most kinds must be justified, by means of a debased form of Christian logic whereby, I suppose, if Christ died for us we must therefore die for someone else. We must forever claim that we act on someone else's behalf.

In a recent *Spare Rib* (No. 127) is a report about how the Klu Klux Klan has conferred the privilege of full membership on women: "They believe the women's movement directly contradicts God's purpose and that one of the main reasons for the state of the world is that mothers are going out to work. Klan ladies take part in cross-burning ceremonies on equal-footing with men and train in paramilitary groups. But the women Nancy Shulins spoke to denied that the Klan was a violent organisation, or that they hated anyone. They claimed that it was for their children's sake that they joined, and to give them a sense of accomplishment." Elsewhere in the same issue Roisin Boyd reports from Greenham Common: 'And incredibly, after being roughly shifted by the military police, some women shouted back "Don't you realise we're doing it for you"...' Such self-sacrifice! This kind of thinking is surely Christian in origin and that's why I find it hard to take seriously those women who describe

themselves as Christian feminists, which strikes me as a contradiction in terms. I know that I have no business judging people, since we all attempt to compromise with the institutions of our past before we come to believe that compromise is impossible. Equally we are inclined to return to that position of compromise when we decide that there is nothing to be achieved by adopting an 'extreme' position. But I cannot help believe that Christian Peace is one of the sweetest lies of all since to be a true Christian means to 'accept responsibility and action' as well as the comforts of the Church. Having virtually no formal religious background I have a poor idea of the attractions of religion. Its moral demands seem a lot more to do with accepting its authority than in establishing a just society. But here's the 'lie of difficulty' which suggests that the retreat is not a retreat at all, but an enormous struggle which only the best of us can win. Thus, singing gospel harmonies, we receive not only our reward in Heaven but also our Medals of Honour to show we have achieved something far more important than an improved wage or better living conditions.

We're surrounded by so many illusory promises, political lies, attempts to manipulate us and even persuade us to give up our lives to support Mrs Thatcher's vote-catching vision of the universe. The only effective weapon of defence we have is the truth. Unfortunately the radical personality also tends towards romanticism and there are so many shades of illusion in romance that we're forever coming across a fresh opportunity to make idiots of ourselves while Mrs Thatcher and Co. continue concocting their own fantasies and lead us stoutly towards the mirage of National Greatness which hides the actuality of national decadence. Utopianism can be the biggest cop-out of all, no matter what form our Utopia takes.

A belief in the 'perfectability' of humanity or, for that matter, the perfectability of society, often allows us to avoid immediate



realities. In its extreme forms it can justify acts of terrible violence and inhumanity enabling the likes of Stalin to kill millions of people in the name of 'the Future', just as his predecessors killed millions in the name of God. It is dangerous to believe in abstractions of any kind.

People have 'selfish' needs and will always have them. They must decide where self-interest and the common interest coincide. I happen to believe the two are more often than not the same. A 'competitive' society is both inefficient and frequently cruel; yet the alternative, the paternalistic 'socialist' state, has just as much potential for human destruction and is usually maintained by people quite as authoritarian in character as those they oppose. There are alternatives, even if we have yet to test them. We never have to buy the manipulative lie based in the question: "Do you like this detergent better than that detergent?" or become exhausted in a heated debate over such invented arguments. It is a common and effective technique for obscuring the real question: "Do we want detergent at all?" A friend of mine, for years a journalist on *The Daily Worker*, once confided in me that he privately thought the argument between Communism and Capitalism was like two stone-age men arguing whether it was better to strip a carcass with a bone knife or a flint one.

In recent years we've seen a wave of political action which had no particular party line, stemming from the Peace Movement in America and CND in Britain. This wave spread to include attacks on the world's injustices. While I have some sympathy for the Greenham Common demonstrators, I suspect that the majority of them are using energy which would be better employed elsewhere. I can only hope that out of this event we shall see others emerging which will be more concerned with issues of racism and sexism. The threat of nuclear bombardment is a symptom of more fundamental human problems. When 30,000

women turn their anger against a single judge who has effectively dismissed a case of rape as a minor misdemeanour, then I think I'll feel more heartened. When as much effort is spent on releasing children from the tyranny of brutal parents as is spent on releasing rapacious animals onto an unsuspecting countryside, we might at last begin to get our priorities right. It is disgusting to torture an animal in the testing of, say, cosmetics. By working for a change in the structure of society, however, we can hope to create a world where sentimentality and morality are not confused.

So long as we devote our energies to the Quest for the Perfect Live we deserve to suffer any consequent damage done to our judgement, our morales and, potentially, our physical security. Whether we are destroyed by a process of social collapse or by the explosion of nuclear missiles the fault will lie ultimately with us – in our own capacity for self-deception and our unwillingness to deal directly and courageously with the realities and injustices of our daily lives.



Appendix

## *The Erosion Of Liberalism*

I recently published a novel, *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*. In it I tried to show the destructive social and psychological consequences of pursuing sexual sensation for its own sake. The book was dedicated to Dave Britton and Michael Butterworth, the Manchester publishers who commissioned it shortly before they went bankrupt last year. They had published too many novels reflecting Britton's own literary enthusiasms. In the last two years he published five excellent books by Jack Trevor Story, four by me, four by Henry Treece and Langdon Jones's superb *Eye of the Lens* (for the first time in this country). He had bought other titles, either new or unjustly out of print, for generous advances. His and Butterworth's Savoy Book anthologies publish work by Paul Ableman, Heathcote Williams, M. John Harrison, William Burroughs, Harlan Ellison, Richard Kostelanetz, as well as a good many new writers and illustrators. Britton also published some charming children's books, including one by comedian Mike Harding. The firm always paid authors above-average advances and were impeccable in their courtesy to their writers.

In May 1982 Dave Britton was sent to Strangeways prison. He had been found guilty, at Manchester Crown Court, of possessing obscene material for gain. He served almost three weeks of his

28-day sentence and emerged having gained a haircut and lost some 1½ stone, in a very shaken condition. He had received the usual unpleasant treatment and witnessed rioting when two prisoners tried to kill themselves. His partner Michael Butterworth (a novelist himself as well as an editor of literary magazines) currently faces similar charges carrying the possibility (or increased likelihood) of the same sentence.

The basis of the publishing company was Dave Britton's bookshops, whose profits dropped off after a series of 35 police raids and what began to seem like a policy of active persecution. In common with many other shops, his have been subjected to raids since the senior echelons of the Manchester Police announced their intention of 'cleaning up' the city. Two of Britton's shops sell mainly paperbacks, American comics, 'underground' books and periodicals, general fiction, posters, records and badges as well as a very small selection, in a separate part, of the usual seedy and depressing material one sees on newsagents' shelves everywhere. The third shop sold mainly the same soft-core pornography. On the morning Britton came out of Strangeways, the police raided this shop. By the time he reached central Manchester they had again seized large amounts of stock. One policeman, according to the shop's manager, said: 'Tell Britton we haven't forgotten him.'

The police had brought charges on only seven of all the thousands of books and magazines taken. The volume of stock seized has been prodigious and is frequently returned very late, returned in a battered condition, or not returned at all. No proper check on the quantities removed has been possible, partly because the raids are sudden and well-planned. The books for which Britton was prosecuted were Grove Press and Venus Freeway titles which have been on open sale in England for nine years. I doubt if they could claim much literary merit. To me they are depressing, incapable of stimulating more than a twitch of



irritation. But they were to cost Dave Britton rather more than three weeks of liberty.

They were seized in a general raid in October 1980. They had been seized before on at least half-a-dozen occasions, always subject to Section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act, a standard destruction order applied to all material (including *Penthouse* and *Mayfair*). On this occasion, however, they became subject to a Section 2 order: a criminal prosecution. In April 1981 summonses were issued to David Britton and Philip Bunton (manager), charging them with selling 'certain obscene articles' (the seven novels). In July 1981 Michael Butterworth received an identical summons.

The case, due to be tried at Wigan in October 1981, was adjourned because insufficient time had been granted for preparation of the defence. The case was adjourned twice more, first because the police barrister could not attend, then because the defendants' barrister could not attend. Eventually, on May 24 1982, Britton and Bunton arrived at court to discover their own barrister could not be present. A substitute barrister, unfamiliar with the case's details, had been sent. He went before the judge and applied for a further adjournment. Judge Hardy said he could not understand why the case could not proceed and gave Mr Lever, the new barrister, half an hour to provide a suitable reason why the other barrister could not appear, otherwise he would order the trial to proceed.

In this recess barrister, solicitor and clients discussed what to do. Mr Lever was unfamiliar with the original defence: police inconsistency in their choice of material for prosecution. No reasonable person could expect to know what the police considered obscene. Mr Lever meant to impress the judge with the defendants' wish not to waste public money with more delays. He thought it best to continue with the trial, but chose a much simpler line of defence – that the books were not obscene.

The trial began. Prosecution gave a short routine speech, calling the policeman in charge of the raid as witness. He produced the books, each with markers identifying *passages* he considered obscene. Judge Hardy instructed the jury to look at the extracts, then told both QCs he intended to instruct the jury on the Obscene Publications Act.

When Mr Lever gave his defence he asked if the jury really believed the books were obscene by present-day standards. Summing up, the judge told the jury it must decide for itself if the material 'tends in respect of a not insignificant number of people likely to read it, or come into contact with it, to deprave or corrupt them... It is sufficient if the tendency to deprave and corrupt affects the mind only,' he added. 'It does not need to affect the person's actions.'

It was irrelevant, the judge continued, whether one could find this kind of material, as bad or worse, elsewhere. If the test were whether it would deprave and corrupt the various people in court, there would never be a conviction. If a significant number of people were likely to be corrupted, that was sufficient. They must consider whether young persons might see it.

The jury retired, reappearing an hour later to inform the judge they could not reach a unanimous verdict. The judge reluctantly agreed to accept a majority verdict. He evidently wished to avoid a retrial.

Within minutes the jury returned a verdict of guilty. The defence reiterated the defendants' good character. Formal requests had been made by Britton and his lawyers asking what in the view of the Police was permissible or impermissible. Judge Harvey said that if you wished to sail close to the wind, you could not expect the Police to tell you how close to sail. Philip Bunton received a suspended sentence of a month's imprisonment. Sentencing Dave Britton, Judge Harvey said: 'It must be made clear to people who run these businesses that if they infringe the



law, then they must serve punishment for it.' Britton was sentenced to 28 days.

What happened to Dave Britton is alarming. What others (including Butterworth) now face is even more alarming. It suggests a steady increase of real power among strongly authoritarian and conservative elements in our society. Mrs Thatcher's government, not remarkable for breadth of intelligence or insight into and tolerance for complex social problems, appears to be encouraging and rewarding a reactionary element among those connected with the Law. This gradual 'de-liberalising' of our legal institutions allows certain policemen who, for a while, were somewhat more circumspect in their attacks on the easier targets for arrest and conviction (chiefly black youth but in general the area of so-called 'victimless crime') greater opportunity to exercise their prejudices. Briefly, the bullies are anticipating a field day. That many senior police officers, politicians and lawyers are disturbed by this turn of events is encouraging, but their power of affect is being weakened.

We're likely to see more cases of 'back-door censorship' in the near future. Until now most people prosecuted have been professional pornographers, some recently imprisoned for long periods. I have little personal sympathy for them. They interpreted a vaguely worded act as widely as those who oppose them. But there is now a stronger than ever case for the law to be changed, particularly since it has been used to prosecute people like Dave Britton, who was innocently selling what many others sell. He never dealt in 'hard-core' pornography and sex material was never his main stock-in-trade. Yet he has now been identified with Soho 'porn kings', has a prison record and further threats hang over him. Doubtless recent convictions in London helped his accusers secure a severe and in my view dreadfully unjust punishment.

The case suggests that an increasing number of decent people are about to find themselves accused and punished under the Obscene Publications Act. How long will it be before the excellent political bookshop Grass Roots, a stone's throw from Britton's premises, finds itself threatened? This shop carries a large stock of lesbian and male homosexual fiction and non-fiction. At present any police officer finding a book obscene can obtain a prosecution on those grounds. Would passages extracted from, say, Rita May Brown, impress a jury any differently than the passages extracted from *Secret Sisterhood* or *Two Suspicious Girls* (two of the titles for which Britton was prosecuted)?

I'm worried that the reforming legislation of the 1960s and 1970s is being eroded. These reforms were specifically designed to protect people from many sorts of persecution (including blackmail and extortion). The erosion is chiefly being achieved by means of 'back-door censorship' and biased interpretation of the relevant Acts. Yet it can only happen if lawyers allow it to happen. The responsibility is theirs, as it is Parliament's. But it's also in some part ours. We can't afford to turn a blind eye to the implications of Dave Britton's case. Until recently victims of the new conservatism were those with whom the majority of people could not easily identify. I myself found it hard to sympathise with people prosecuted under Section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act. I find it very easy, though, to identify with Dave Britton, whose record as a publisher was exemplary.

I think racial, sexual and political minorities are now under a greater threat than they know. In the near future some of us who are currently fairly complacent could find ourselves in trouble. I don't want my books censored and I don't want to go to prison. I suddenly find myself facing the prospect that soon I could well become a member of a threatened minority.

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