

FREEDOM

anarchist fortnightly

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16th October 1999

50p

AT THE TORY CONFERENCE IN BLACKPOOL ...

Heseltine tells it like it is

Anarchists work to change public opinion. The first step towards abolition of slavery was to convince people that slavery was wrong. The first step towards abolition of deference is to convince people that nobody is inherently more worthy than anybody else. And so on. Other groups,

of course, seek to influence public opinion in different, even opposite, directions.

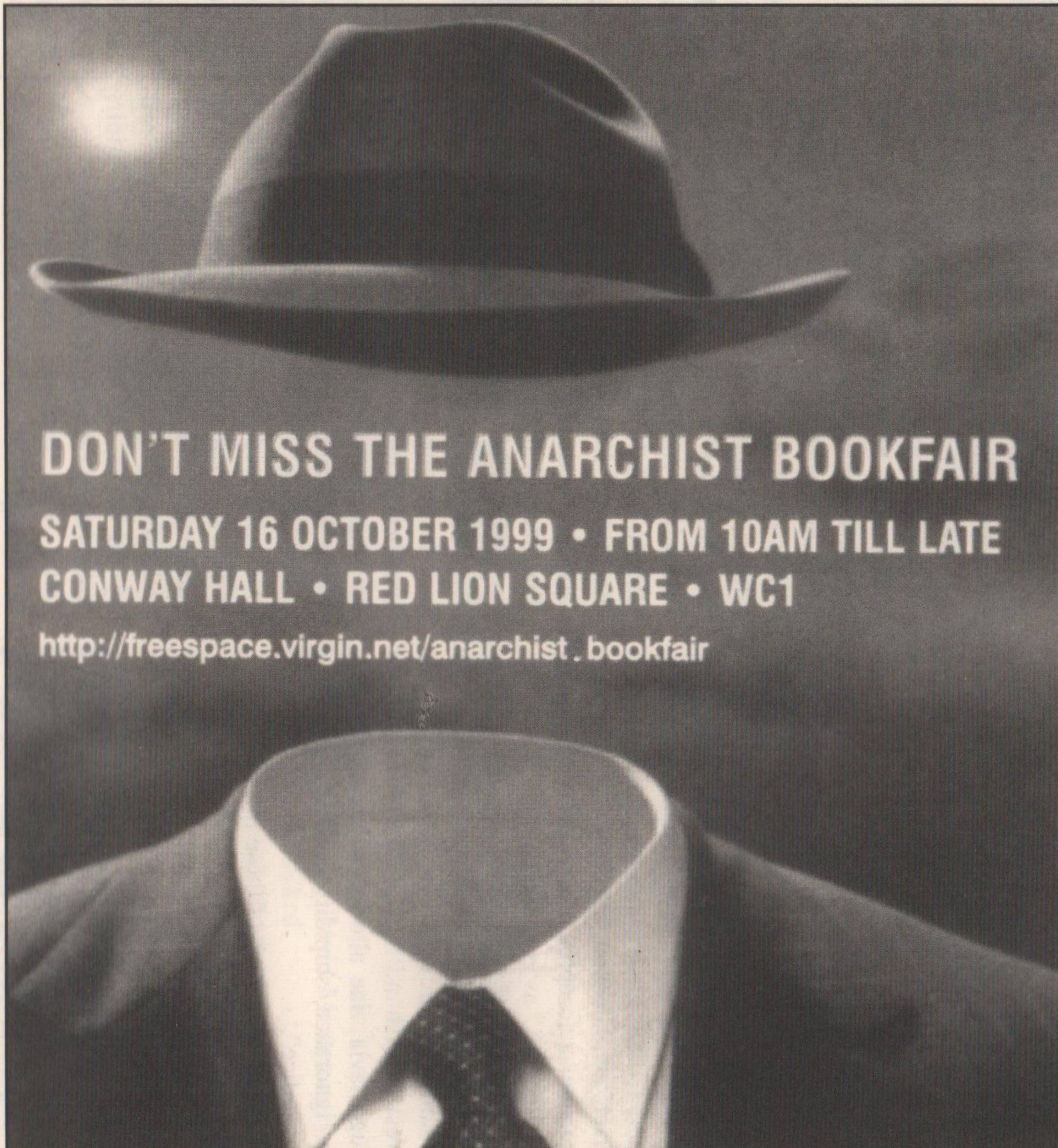
The change in public opinion sought by serious political parties is whatever will get them and keep them in power, which in electoral democracies means votes. No doubt they have ideas for social

reforms they would like, but in order to implement social reforms, the first priority is to get into power, and the second to stay in power. It is not quite accurate to say that getting into power and staying there are the *only* aims of serious political parties, but it is close enough for practical purposes.

Changing public opinion takes time. Getting into power means conforming to existing public opinion. Socialism is not a majority view, so if it is to obtain and keep power the Labour party could not be socialist. It had to appeal to 'Middle England', i.e. public opinion as moulded by the right-wing popular press.

The Conservative Party has responded, it appeared from their conference in Blackpool last week, by moving even further to the xenophobic, pro-prison, smash-the-poor right. This delights the barking party workers, but is turning the Tories from a serious political party into a non-serious party like the BNP, the SWP and a hundred others, with a fantasy of getting into power, but no chance.

The serious Tory politician Michael Heseltine described the danger well: "I hear talk of a search for new policies with clear blue water between us [and Labour]. Take care, I say. We need the votes of the disengaged centre. Without them, without millions of them, there is no prospect of Conservative government." DR



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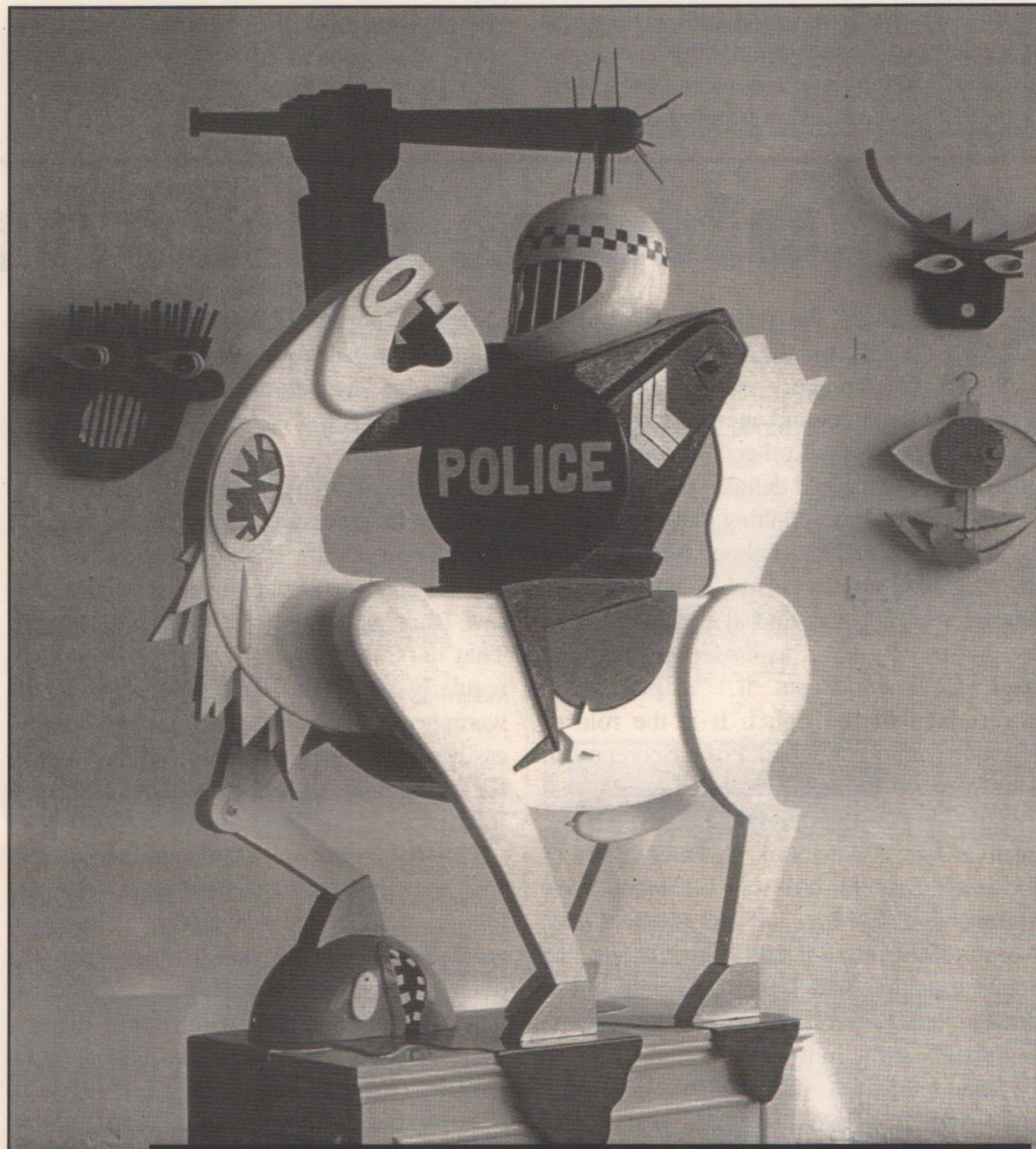
50p

The progressive century?

According to *The Guardian*, the Labour Party conference heralded “a progressive century”, holding forth the promise of the “liberation of the British people from ‘all forms of conservatism’ that have so long held them back” (*Guardian*, 29th September 1999). In his speech to the conference, the New Messiah announced that he wanted to lead “the progressive force that defeats the forces of conservatism. For the 21st century will not be about the battle between capitalism and socialism, but between the forces of progress and the forces of conservatism ... The class war is over, but the struggle for true equality has just begun”.

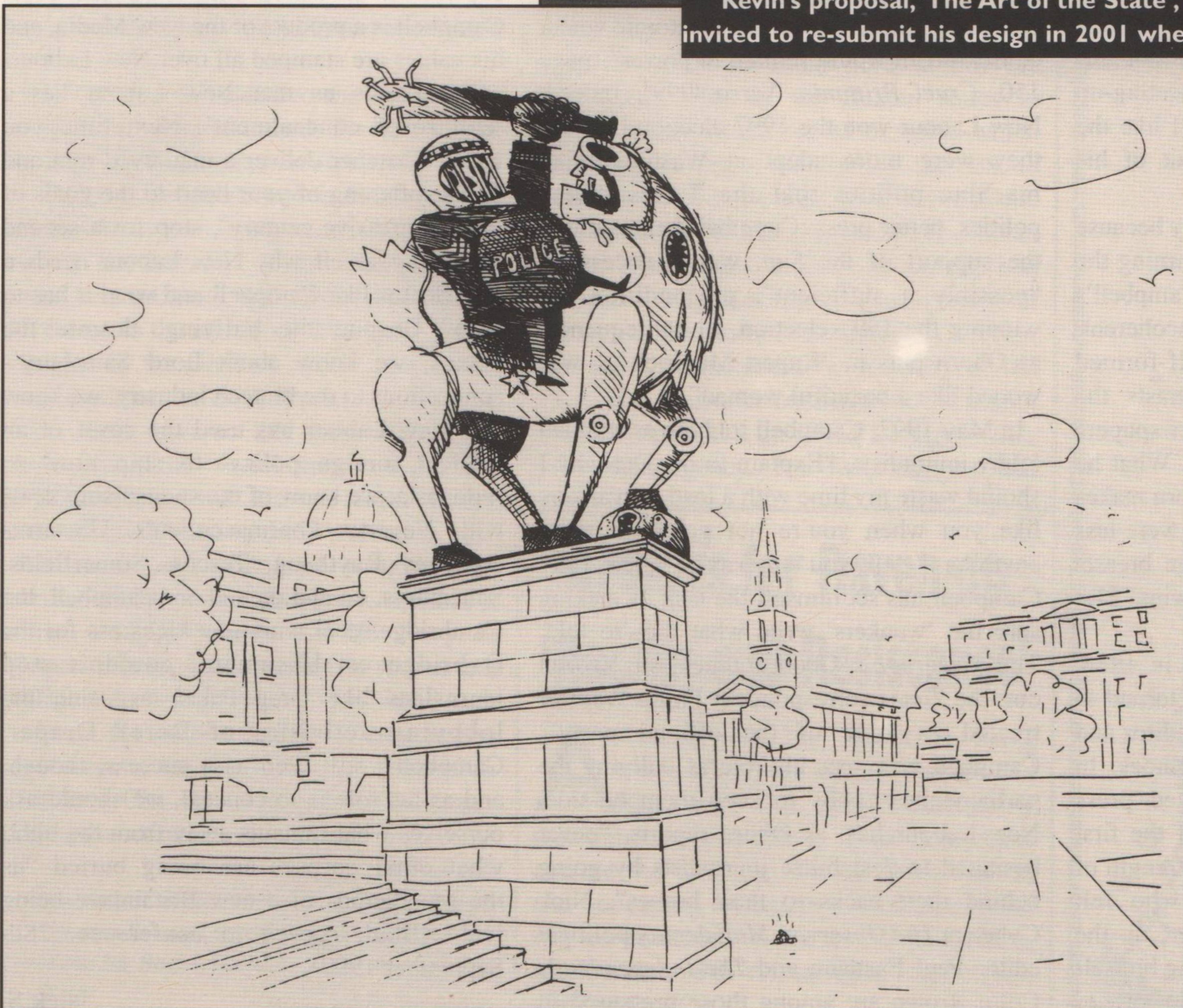
In response, Hugo Young drooled over Tony Blair’s “majestic confidence”, his “presidential speech”, while Polly Toynbee fawned over “a triumphant Labour Party [sweeping] all before it, speech after speech hammering home success and well-laid plans to the sound of golden guineas gushing into the Treasury like a fruit machine jackpot” (*Guardian*, 1st October 1999). (Reading this drivel, you can’t help but be reminded of drunken old men pawing at teenage girls in the pub – the phrase ‘old enough to know better’ comes quickly to mind.)

What was actually significant in Blair’s speech was his declaration of commitment to a society of “equality of opportunity, of responsibility”. Equality then, in the ‘progressive century’ will mean no more than ‘equal respect’, or, as the philosopher Ted Honderich observed, “equality before God”. All men, as the American Declaration of Independence made clear, are created equal. Their equal right to the “pursuit of happiness”, though, is hampered by



London artist Kevin Harrison writes: “Following the recent installation of Mark Wallinger’s sculpture ‘Ecce Homo’ on the vacant plinth in Trafalgar Square, I thought that it would be timely to present my proposal, which I feel would be more appropriate for the site given its position as a focal point for political demonstrations over the years.”

Kevin’s proposal, ‘The Art of the State’, was rejected but he has been invited to re-submit his design in 2001 when the plinth will be vacant again.



economic inequality – I may have the same right to eat at The Carlton Tower as Bill Gates, but Bill Gates is worth \$100 billion, through his ownership of Microsoft and its exploitation of cheap labour, while I have to work to pay the bills. Anyone unsure whether Tony Blair might be committed to ending economic inequality should consider that, as mere subjects of HM Government, you or I have as much chance of an audience with Blair as seeing Elvis Presley play the Hackney Empire. The day of Our Saviour’s big speech, though, he dined with representatives of companies like the retail firm Kingfisher, who could afford £350 per head to attend the conference’s gala dinner, after having cocktails with those captains of industry who’d forked out £700 per head for a corporate conference away-day, and lunch with those donors who’d given more than £25,000 to Labour in

the last year. As Jeremy Hardy noted, “Blair’s concept of meritocracy appears to be that success is proof of excellence and should be rewarded endlessly. Inequality of outcome just goes to show how excellent people like Lord Simon, Lord Sainsbury and Lord MacDonald must be”.

Gordon Brown, meanwhile, spent just over three hours at the conference, delivering a speech which promised that New Labour would deliver full employment within a generation, through the continuation of the New Deal into the next Parliament, and the exercise of ‘responsibility from all’ with regard to pay. He then flew back to Washington to dine with his new best friends at the IMF. Brown’s speech, more than Blair’s, gave the game away. The talk of full employment as a goal, is, simply, a lie. The Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee has decreed that unemployment is a necessary corrective to inflation (it really means wage rises, or at least some wage rises. For instance, Eddie George’s salary from the Bank of England somehow doesn’t impinge on inflation, however much it goes up, while an electrician working on the Millennium Dome would somehow trigger a rise in inflation by taking advantage of his skills, labour shortages, etc., and pushing up his or her hourly rate). Both the MPC and the Treasury operate on the assumption that any reduction in unemployment below present levels is in danger of pushing up inflation. Hence, the age old goal of the Labour Party comes to be redefined. Full employment comes to mean workfare, in the form of the New Deal, and the minimum wage, that glittering prize of the trade unions, comes to act as a maximum wage in an increasingly casualised employment market. Anyone who isn’t keen on wage slavery as an aim in life is deemed, as Gordon Brown told the *Times*, ‘workshy’, and removed from benefits and hence from the employment figures. As if by magic – full employment!

In his first keynote speech after coming to power, Tony Blair told us that “for eighteen years the poorest people in our country have been forgotten by the government”. Many will now be thinking that continued amnesia would have been the better option. Blair has remembered the poor – and in his ‘progressive century’ they’ll stay poor, but their poverty will be maintained by low wages instead of welfare. Those who can turn £4,000 into £4 billion through the exploitation of others will be the heralds of the New Dawn. Those who’ve learned to survive on £47 a week will have an ‘equal right’ to work or starve. Jean-Jacques Rousseau once observed that “The rich are like ravening wolves, who, having once tasted human flesh, henceforth desire and devour only men”. In Blair’s ‘Progressive Century’, “where party and nation [are] joined in the same cause for the same purpose”, the future planned for most of us is as flesh for the ‘wolves’.

Nick S.

NEW LABOUR

Nouveau Riche Managers of Britain

Empire-building on expediency and focus group war cries – Tony Blair told us at last month's Labour Party conference: "We are re-writing some of the traditional rules of politics". Now, as he says, "the class war is over" Mr Blair believes, according to one close aide, that "we can let rip ... on policies and ideas". But what do these ideas amount to?

New Labour will pledge £34 million to setting up new DNA technology to create a national database to test "every known offender" against evidence from any scene of crime. All 16 to 18 year olds who stay in education will get a smart card for cut-price deals in shops, theatres and cinemas, and on trains and buses. Everyone will get the chance to see an NHS dentist in the next two years.

Stirring stuff! Mark Seddon, editor of *Tribune* and left-wing member of Labour's national executive, said that "the idea that all the great divisions of wealth and power have disappeared, so we can let decent managers run the show, is very disappointing".

The system of politics refined in the USA is being proclaimed as a model to aspire towards. God help us! Is Blair serious, or is it more rhetoric? Does he really think the USA is classless?

Just in case he is going to try to take us down that road, let us consider what Noam Chomsky, who lives over there, has to say about it. If I may quote at length from a Chomsky interview in 1984: "There is essentially a one-party system, what sometimes has been called the property party, and the choice about its various factions. There's not a great interest in it. It is as if in a European society you had the vote between one or another faction of the Tories. If that was the only choice, why would you bother voting?"

Chomsky is a left-libertarian who argues that people in the USA are "voting for Coca Cola or Pepsi Cola". And he adds that "if that is the only choice, you have to package the candidates to make them look different". Consequently millions are spent, and Chomsky claims that "you have to have a huge public relations campaign to make people believe that something is happening, to engage them in the political process". In this way people are given the illusion that they play a role in determining the nature of their own society. About half the electorate don't vote in most elections in the USA.

If Blair wants to Americanise British society in this way it will hardly result in a more

participatory democracy, which is what Peter Mandelson keeps going on about.

The senility of Old Labour

Some feel that New Labour lacks ideological substance. Last month the leftist Labour MP Bob Marshall-Andrews complained "a penny on income tax ... is hardly the battle hymn of the new republic". But all he, for Old Labour, has to offer is "modest increases in taxation and the eradication of poverty".

Old Labour was not much cop either. As the former communist David Aaronovitch writes that "the politics of my adult life have been dominated by the abject failure of Labour: in opposition, in councils, and in connection with the trade unions. [The] party was the party of Frank Chapple's machinations and Hughie Scanlon's lost card vote; of support for the Americans in Vietnam and refusal to impose sanctions on South Africa; of Doncaster council and the rotten boroughs of Scotland and Wales."

What does Blair mean when he says that he intends to purge Britain of "the forces of conservatism"? Will Self in the *Independent on Sunday* claims he is not talking about the conservative class as we know it. Mr Self writes: "No, the 'conservatives' he really wants to target are those idiotic workers who believe in, at the very least, true industrial democracy and, at the very most, the infamous ownership by themselves of the means of production".

The other 'conservatives', according to Will Self, that Tony Blair wants to take out are "those propagators of 'libertarian nonsense masquerading as freedom'; those who had the temerity to view open government as the first viable sign of an administration committed to a genuinely democratic society". Mr Self speculates that "presumably these are the same 'conservatives' who would oppose mandatory DNA samples being taken from every criminal in the country ..."

Fair enough! But traditional Old Labour was never libertarian and was often, until recently, openly hostile to anarchism. And though these was always an ambiguous 'syndicalism' in the Labour Party and trade unions, in the end it was diverted from

workers' control to state controlled nationalisation and the 'new boss class'.

After the miners' strike in 1985 the structure of Old Labourism was derelict and the movement was left with a mouldering set of values and seemed somehow lost. Clapped out the antiquarian left, bereft of fresh ideas or imaginative strategies, almost invited a rout by the forces of Thatcherism. This wasn't so much a betrayal by the Labour leaders or union bosses, it was sheer senility in a mass movement.

Blair's empire of expediency

It was obvious that if the Labour Party was to make itself electable it had to be beautified. The spring-cleaning by Kinnock and later Blair involved chucking out a load of old stuff, mainly policies, to package up a make-believe party that nobody can make head or tail of. The editorial in last week's *Independent on Sunday* declares that "the great temptation which Tony Blair dangles before us is that we can all project on to the blank screen of his ambiguity a whole variety of hopes or prejudices".

This is a mark of Blair's brilliance as a modern politician – he dazzles us with fancy words and cute concepts (bullshit baffles brains, as they say). There always was a certain uselessness in most political programmes, but with Blair it has become a set of sleights of hand, a juggling with words. The 'New Jerusalem' Blair is building, according to Will Self, "in this brownfield site of an unpleasant land" is now more than the Empire of Expediency – a scheme of clinging onto power for power's sake.

But there's nowt fresh about this! Mussolini perfected it long ago. Left-wingers will argue until the cows come home over this or that diagnosis, but this only shows how amateurish they are. "The fascist leader's superiority over his opponents", wrote the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone in 1939, "consists primarily in this: he aspires to power, only power, and nothing else but power". Silone claims that it does not matter how this power is used, "whether on the side of the capitalists or the proletarians, the priests or

the devil, is a secondary matter; the important thing is power". Of course this "single-minded conception of politics" offers a clear advantage over the fascist leader's opponents. It seems to me that Blair and his courtiers have understood this simple maxim.

'Fascistic undertones'

At the Labour Party conference the veteran political journalist Alan Watkins was turned away because he had no ticket. Watkins wrote afterwards: "I learnt ... that the hall had been stuffed with fat-cats, captains of industry and other persons of wealth and importance". People were paying £300 a ticket to listen to Blair.

In all this it seems like the unions and the working class delegates have become just a bunch of useful idiots. The hotel lounges were chock-a-block with corporate business representatives. No wonder Will Self writes: "I especially don't envy all the working class delegates who had to sit there in the Winter Gardens of discontent, listening to a cuff-link-sporting, designer-suit-wearing, public-school-and-Oxford-educated, six-figure-salary, PR-accented man, who has never done a day's manual work in his life, tell them that 'the class war is over'."

I am not alone in identifying a fascist streak in New Labour's image. A growing number of journalists, like Matthew Parrish and Alan Watkins, have been hinting at this for some time. In a sense even the words 'New' and 'Labour' are suspect. I think Roy Hattersley claimed recently that Blair hated 'Labour'. Much of the stage management and language tricks remind me of Mussolini and are not really 'New' in that sense. Alan Watkins wrote last week that we shouldn't be surprised that "there was a curious fascistic undertone to Mr Blair's oration".

What has happened is that the Labour Party is no longer even pretending to be a party of the labour movement. It is not a 'New' party either, just as an old house is not new when it has new plastic windows put in. In the past parties opposed to socialism have adopted the disguise of calling themselves 'social' or 'popular' or even 'socialist'. Parties that call themselves 'radical' often turn out to be 'moderate' or even 'reactionary', so no one should be surprised if the Labour Party declares war on labour.

BB



— COPY DEADLINE —

The next issue of *Freedom* will be dated 30th October, and the last day for copy intended for this issue will be first post on Thursday 21st October.

If possible contributions should be typed using double-spacing between lines, or can be sent as text files on disc (with a print-out please).

A part-time photographer

A part-time Photographers Portrait Gallery

by Vernon Richards

published by Freedom Press, £6.95*

Vernon Richards' portrait gallery celebrates some of the most creative and far sighted men (and the odd woman!) of the mid twentieth century. Organised into four sections we have over thirty profiles of men famous for their artistic or political achievements, or for their special relationship to Richards as comrades or friends. It is an impressive line up ranging from the indomitable veteran Bertrand Russell, to well known anarchists and sympathisers like George Orwell, Herbert Read, Gerald Brenan and George Woodcock. It gives a powerful reminder of the talent around the left during the period

of the Spanish Civil War up to the anti-nuclear demonstrations in the '60s.

Richards' approach is direct. He gives us some introductory text which is succinct, factual and highly personal, and then we are straight in, looking into the faces of his subjects. Some images are posed, carefully lit and conventional, others are taken in a variety of settings. The quality of the images may vary, but his intention is consistent in the main – to show us the individual in a positive light. These

are portraits of his friends and people who he has admired and respected.

For his front cover, Richards has chosen a bold and brooding close up of the painter, Jankel Adler. It is penetrating and even perhaps a little disturbing – it captures the personality of a serious man, deep in his own world. It is a dark world. Other portraits of Adler are set against a backcloth of his paintings which give the reader an insight into the artist's style and interest.

There are six other profiles presented in this first section, called 'Artists and Writers'. Herbert Read is shown to be a slight, almost dapper man with bow tie, grey hair carefully combed, sensitive inquisitive eyes, closed lips – definitely a man with a keen wit and sharp mind. The last image in this grouping is of Read's hands. They are beautiful hands, full of personality and life, fingering text. We read "... wild balsam. Like the sweet basil and other herbs it is used in popular poetry as the symbol ... of a girl". The text tells us that Read specifically asked Richards to take a portrait of his hands, and is a good example where Richards' text complements meaning.

The nine images of George Orwell cover a range of moods and give us an intimate, privileged glimpse of the famous writer. The sensitivity of his hands are foregrounded as well, whether at the typewriter, handling a file in his workshop, or with his arms around

his adopted son. His face is easily recognisable as is his pencil-thin moustache which places him as a man of the 1940s. He wears a formal suit and tie. Though mute all images have Orwell with closed mouth – we can feel the torrent of words pent up in his head.

Richards has given us four portraits of Gerald Brenan which show a thoughtful and reflective man; the text compliments Brenan on his letter writing skills and foregrounds Poffet the cat who is referred to in his writings. Alex Comfort, George Woodcock, and Hugh MacDiarmid complete this section. These are single portraits. The poet, Hugh MacDiarmid, pipe in hand, is taken in a sit down demonstration outside the Ministry of Defence. The other two, both anarchists, are shown as candid, handsome men, keen eyed behind round spectacles.

Richards' portraits are crisp images. There is little overt

pretence or contrivance.

There are five profiles featured in the next section on 'Composers, Musicians and Actors': Alan Rawsthorne, Denis Mathews, the Robert Masters Quartet, George Melly and David Markham. The images of Denis Mathews are delightfully stylish showing a flamboyant and spirited pianist, and sit in contrast to the composer Alan Rawsthorne who is revealed as more reticent and self conscious. A dancing George Melly is caught in a dramatic pose as bizarre as the Magritte painting in the background.

'Politicians' is the title of the third section, and the note is more serious. Kingsley Martin – editor of the *New Statesman* and *Nation* – is proudly posed "with his better side" to the camera, and a second shot with Michael Foot at a CND rally. Another CND campaigner, Bertrand Russell is shown, jaw set, strong willed. Two campaigners against the pro-hanging lobby, Sidney Silverman and Charles Duff are featured. The text gives us valuable information on the achievements of these admirable men. And the odd man out is an excellent profile of Kenneth

Kaunda, powerfully positioned – as Richards says "I think his profile is beautiful, whatever you think of his politics". I would agree!

There are thirteen friends and comrades featured in the final section. Wistfully, Richards notes that only three of them are still alive. One is Hans Deichmann, to whom Richards acknowledges his financial support with the publishing of this book. Deichmann looks wonderfully youthful. With a narrow depth of field there is nothing to detract us from his twinkling eyes and sporty braces. Friends who had shared a spell in prison for wartime sedition also feature: John Hewetson and Philip Sansom. And there is a curious snap shot of Tom Wolfe, the son of Tom Keele and Lilian Wolfe so prominent in Freedom Press. He is shown digging an inspection pit for his car!

Finally, there are some Italian friends; a romantic portrait of Camillo Berneri, the father of Richards' first love Marie-Louise, Cesare Zaccaria, Giancarlo de Carlo and Carlo Doglio. For those of us ignorant of their lives and contributions, Richards gives us intriguing details which place each individual as treasured friends. As we come to the end, there is a surprise: an Irishman, Mat Kavanah. Described only as an intelligent anarchist, he stands in for all those unknown, ordinary people who have

contributed to the anarchist's struggle. He has a fine face, worn and cheerful, revealing a concern for humanity.

The final image is full of fun and bonhomie. It is of Eugenio and Nicola enjoying the tagliatelle which Richards has cooked himself. It encapsulates friendship and it is a good place to end. It concluded Richards' 'cookbook' of photos which have made up the ingredients of his interesting life. We have come a long way. As I wrote at the beginning of this article, it is an impressive line up, and it reflects the

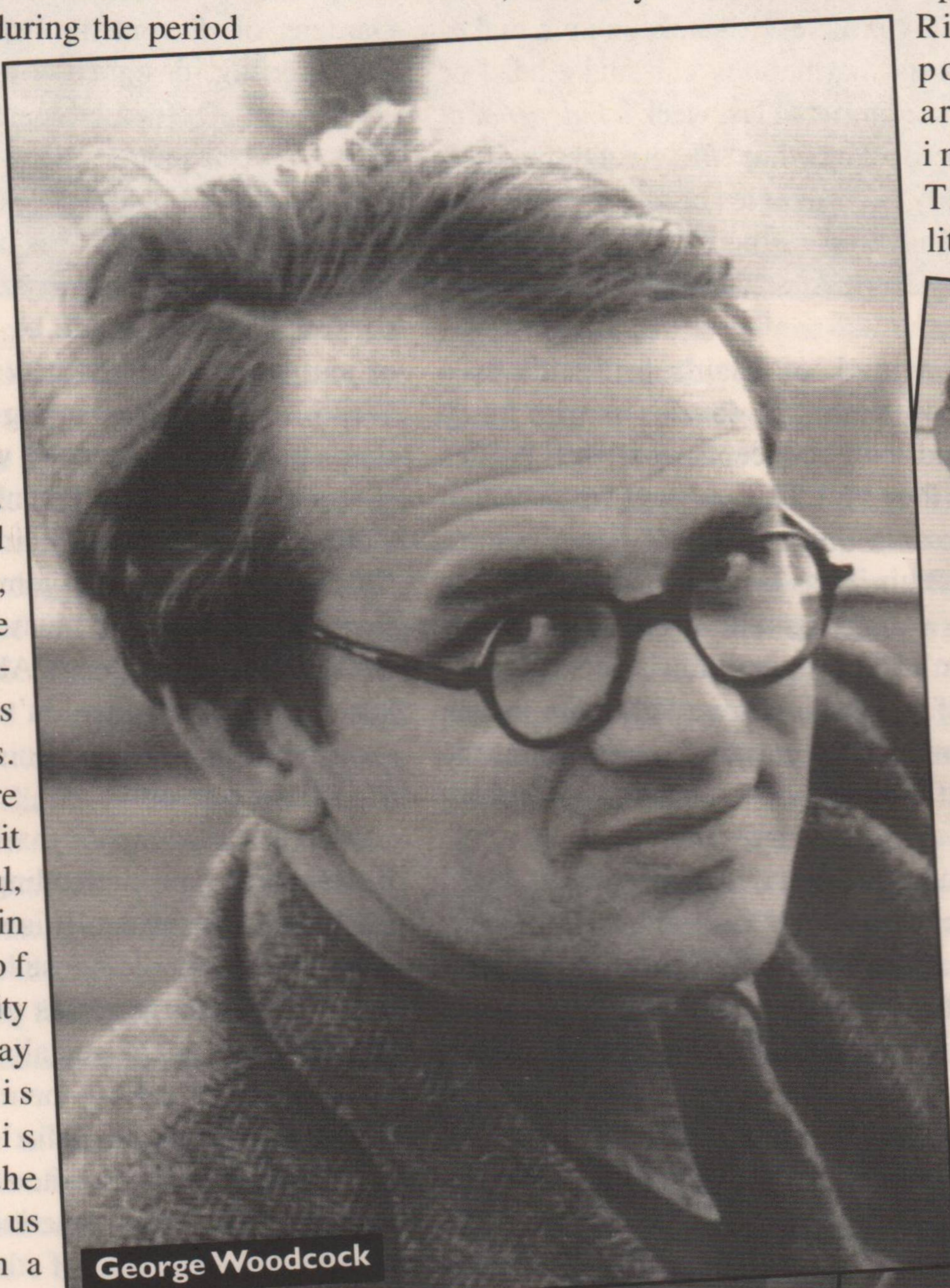
talent and energy of men working in the arts and left-wing politics during this period.

When I became familiar with this book, I found myself tracing the clues in the text and in the images, putting together family groupings of pictures in this volume with others taken from Richards' *Beauty is More Than 'in the Eye of the Beholder'*. There is perhaps an inherent curiosity within all of us to see how the brow of a father translates into his daughter's face; how a look, or smile echo in the next generation. Perhaps one of Richards' strengths is that many of his portraits give us a depth of understanding of personality. Taken by a man with a professional eye, they are family snaps where the sitter is often much more relaxed or at home with being photographed – so the images have a certain integrity and insight.

I have enjoyed taking the time to look closely at these books, (altogether Richards has published four volumes) and I think they warrant a considered study. Together they show the human side of a troubled period in history, and they celebrate the creativity and intelligence of people committed to radical change.

Liz Ashton Hill

* Available post free in UK, 15% for p&p elsewhere.



George Woodcock



George Melly



Giancarlo de Carlo

— ANARCHIST NOTEBOOK —

A backward glance

Readers familiar with the history of the anarchist press in Europe and America will recognise the syndrome of the veteran anarchist journalist who fails to notice that it is time to stop and write a book instead just so that relations aren't left wondering what to do with a mass of paper and notes put aside as raw material for a long-planned but still unwritten volume.

Two things have made me realise that I have reached that stage. The first was reading the review in *The Times Literary Supplement* of Ken Worpole's compilation *Richer Futures* which gave me that interesting sensation that some people have by accident, of reading one's own obituary. The second was reading a new book in which happenings that to me were current news that I wrote about in this journal, are treated as history. This is *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, edited by Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (Rivers Oram Press, £14.95). Most of its twelve chapters sent me scurrying through my mounds of old paper to compare the conclusions of the authors with whatever I wrote at the time.

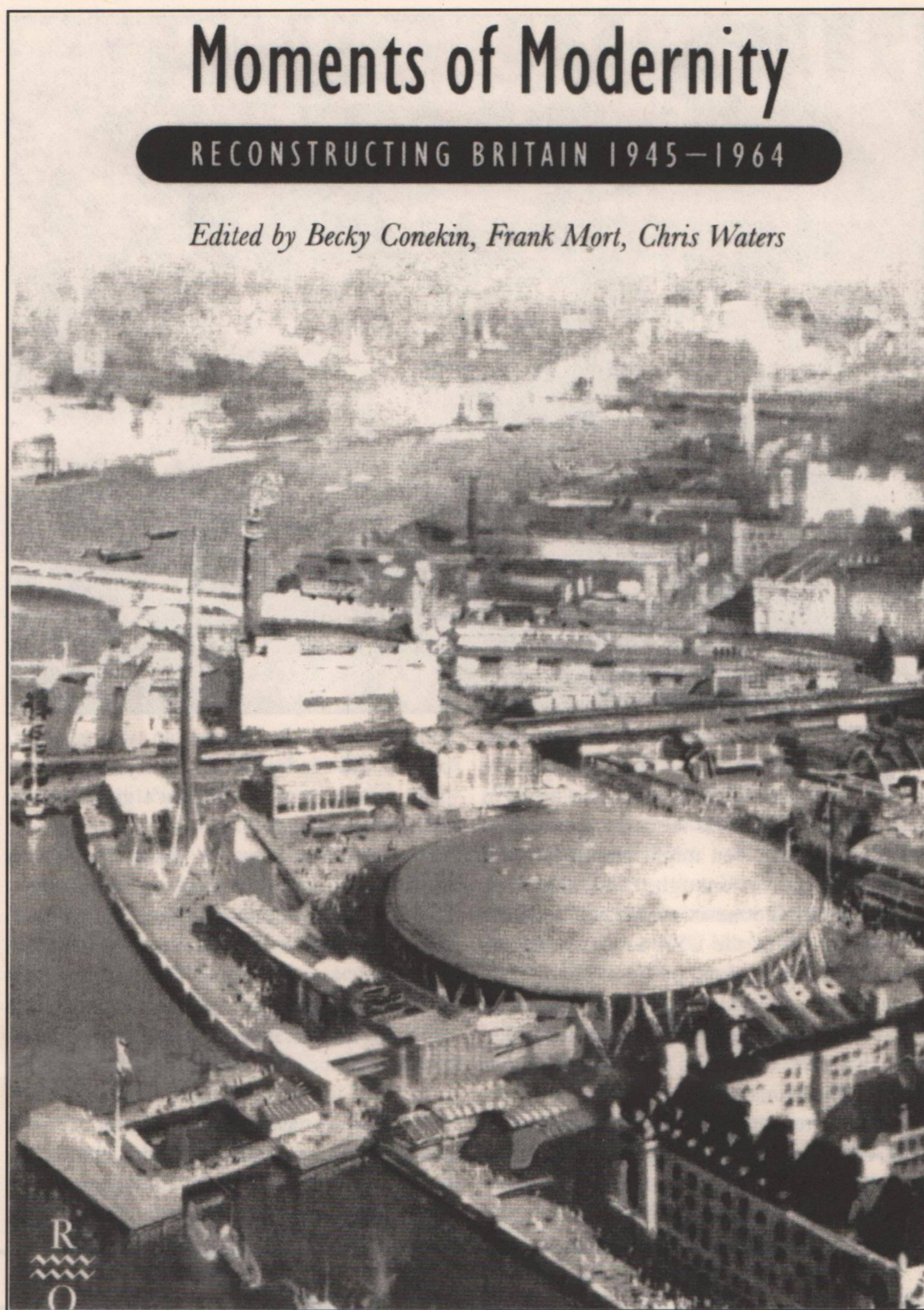
The book has a delicious opening chapter by Frank Mort, 'Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s'. This is about the liberating influence on the young British male, of the discovery of traditional jazz and the blues. Frank Mort burst on the trad scene in Coventry in the mid-fifties, while his father worked all hours in the reconstructed car industry, and the builders set about the kind of new city centre that nobody likes any more. Like George Melly's account of his parallel experience in an earlier decade, and like the story from a later generation whose liberation came from the Vipers skiffle group (this column, 8th April 1995) the experience belongs to a world gone by, both in popular music and in teenage gender relations.

But Frank Mort's account also reflects the boom town experience of the motor vehicle industry in Coventry in those years (though his dad, like most of the other car builders, went to work by bike). Another contributor, Nick Tiratsoo, writes about the influence of "The United States Productivity Gospel in

Britain". I was immensely influenced by (and described at great length in *Freedom*, 18th and 25th June and 2nd July 1960) Seymour Melman's comparison of the making of the same product (the Ferguson tractor) in Detroit by Fords, and in Coventry by Standards. I was hugely impressed by Melman's contrast of the "predatory competition" that characterised the managerial decision-making system with the 'mutuality' of the workers' decision-making. It's all history by now.

Again, the chapter by Peter Mandler on the reconstruction of city centres reflects years of comment in these pages, and Bill Schwarz, in his 'Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment' tells how "in early September 1958 a number of white youths embarked upon a night of 'nigger hunting', as they later described it in court. Unable to get into their local rugby club in Notting Hill they drove to a pub in Bloemfontein Road in Acton. It was the General Smuts". He uses this to reflect on the British canonisation of that particular racist, but he doesn't mention the General's worst sin which was to invent the word 'holism' which has been the source of a huge pile of pretentious rubbish. But I was obliged to turn back to a long sequence of comments in these pages, starting with 'Scapegoats of Notting Hill' (30th May 1959) and running on to examine 'The collapsing environment', 'The culture of the gang' and 'The walls of prejudice'. To me they still seem relevant.

The chapter that was bound to set me thinking about huge changes in public attitudes was by Chris Waters and discussed a book published in 1955 called *Against the Law* by Peter Wildeblood. Everyone, including me, has forgotten it now, but it was reviewed in *Freedom* for 25th February 1956. I discussed his second, slighter book, *A Way of Life*, in the issue for 29th December 1956. The first book was about his trial and imprisonment for homosexual activities, and the second was about various homosexual 'types' he met in jail. Both his books and my review were naive by today's standards, which shows just how far we have moved since the decriminalisation of homosexuality. I can't help thinking that just for writing his books, Wildeblood contributed to the revolution in the climate,



Moments of Modernity

RECONSTRUCTING BRITAIN 1945-1964

Edited by Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, Chris Waters

and I am bound to see as superfluous the opinion quoted by Chris Waters, that Wildeblood, now living in Canada, is "not a very attractive individual". So what?

But it was the book's final chapter that forced me to recognise that there are changes, not only in the climate, but in me. Becky Conekin writes about the Festival of Britain

exhibition on the South Bank in London in 1951. (The Festival Hall is its lasting legacy). She treats it as the effort to create "space for an unuttered, yet unmistakable message that the Labour Party, in office since 1945, was the force behind Britain's recovery, as well as its guiding light for the future. A rational and cultured citizenry with greater access to knowledge would be able to evaluate Labour's contribution". And she points out that unfortunately for Labour, even before the Festival closed its gates, the Conservatives were back in power.

What I notice about the shift in my own attitudes is that while today I can't think of a thing to say in praise of the Millennium Dome in south London, I was almost enthusiastic about the Dome of Discovery on the South Bank in 1951. My front-page leader in *Freedom* for 6th January 1951 began: "As inveterate believers in fun and gaiety..." and went on to describe the realities of Britain's economy and the perils of the Cold War, and by May I was celebrating the Festival Hall with the performance of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* and by the time that the South Bank Exhibition closed, with a Design Congress, I was arguing that design should be taken out of the hands of the designers so that "everyone should have the fullest freedom to exercise their skill and imagination. Then perhaps design and planning could become more than an exhibition frolic".

Nearly half a century later, there must have been a certain loss of imaginative brain cells, as I can think of nothing to say. Time to pack up!

Nick Heath

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— OBITUARY —

Gino Bibbi

Coming from a family of 'good standing' of Carrara with a father who owned a large joiners' works, from early youth Gino Bibbi gravitated towards the anarchist movement. Heavily involved in the struggle against fascism, he distributed anti-fascist leaflets from his motorbike. He was pulled off his bike and beaten and his father's sawmill was put to the torch.

In 1926 whilst an engineering student at Milan, he was involved in supplying his cousin Gino Lucetti, another Carraran anarchist with a bomb which he used to carry out an unsuccessful attentat on Il Duce on 11th September. (Lucetti was sentenced to thirty years for this and was shot by the Germans in 1943 after just having been released from prison.)

After various spells of confinement by the fascists, Bibbi managed to escape to North Africa and then moved to Spain in the early '30s. He began to take flying lessons to prepare for an aerial attack on Mussolini!

Gradually he was joined by other Italian comrades fleeing from Italy, including many Carrarans, among them his sister Maria, as well as Camillo Berneri and Barbieri, both murdered by the Stalinists in May 1937. During the Spanish Civil War, he was assigned many missions behind Francoist lines, procuring arms, carrying out sabotage, and flying reconnaissance flights. In this period, he found himself dogged by the secret police of the Italian Stalinist Togliatti, who had ordered Berneri's and Barbieri's death. He developed a burning hatred for the Communist Party.

Bibbi's relations with the organised anarchist movement ended when he fled to South America at the end of the civil war. Returning to Carrara in the '50s he began describing himself as an individualist anarchist in the '60s, distancing himself from the organised movement. He died at the age of 100 on 8th August 1999. He was cremated with a red and black scarf tied round his neck.

— EAST TIMOR —

Ready for the memory hole?

A policeman fires on protesters

You might almost believe that indignation is at a peak and that the activities of the Indonesian army in East Timor have made the west feel a deep sense of disgust. You might also believe, if you were naive enough, that the UN, humiliated by Indonesia, would call upon the military might of the USA to guarantee the lives of the little folk in East Timor, that American troops would bombard Jakarta in the way they bombed Belgrade and Baghdad with President Clinton in the star role on our television screens telling us, with the heavy weight of responsibility on his shoulders, that America is the indefatigable defender of human rights. All this would be possible were it not for the fact that the US is the most

reliable ally of the Indonesian tyrants and if, behind the media circus, everybody, when push comes to shove, doesn't give a damn about East Timor.

However that may be, East Timor is a blueprint of oppression. It bears comparison to the Iraq-Kuwait model – forceful invasion of a region rich in oil and renamed the '26th Province' – or the China-Tibet model – the colonisation of a small indigenous population with the aim of making it a minority in its own homeland. But Timor is too far away for it to be of interest. All the same it proved to be a real televisual catch for the summer programming schedules, particularly when you bear in mind that the massacres began more than twenty years ago. Indignation burns

out fast when a different focus is required every three months. Afghanistan is well beyond its sell-by date, the Kurds find it hard to find an audience, Kosovo is a bore and who gives a damn about Algeria? Reassuringly we can count on the world coming up with a new focus soon and the journalists will have something to report because, for sure, East Timor will not entertain us through the Christmas period.

And while we wait for the next catastrophe the Indonesian mercenaries have finished destroying Dili, killed or flushed out the population and looted all there was to loot. They are now on their way, with their spoils, leaving behind them a terrorised population and a few blue helmets who have come to guarantee the status quo – meanwhile the world can go back to sleep.

Why does Indonesia want East Timor?

For East Timor read oil. But above all this little plot of land represents a safety valve for the internal colonisation policies for the Indonesian archipelago. To get an understanding of all this bear in mind that Indonesia has a population of 215,000,000 (90% of which are Muslim making it the biggest Islamic country in the world) and 70% of this population is concentrated in 7% of the territory, mainly Java which suffers from high population density. All power is concentrated in the capital, Jakarta. The Indonesians pursue a policy of 'decongestion' from Java to other, poorer, islands with smaller populations. This policy is no more and no less than a colonial programme which aims to spread both Islam and Indonesian nationalism – by force, of course. The great fear for Indonesia and the USA is that after East Timor other islands in the archipelago such as the

Moluccas Islands, Borneo or Irian Jaya (the western half of Papua New Guinea) might now also claim their independence

The possibility of independence for the former Portuguese colony has raised fears of the disintegration of Indonesia. This relatively young country owes its borders to the historical vagaries of Dutch colonisation. It gained independence in 1949 and annexed East Timor in 1976. The fear of a domino effect is not born of fantasy but is grounded in the bloody reality of some half a dozen regional conflicts, mainly in islands on the periphery where oil and US investment is concentrated.

Why a referendum?

Here hypotheses will have to stand in for facts. Probably President Habibie thought he could do a repeat performance of the Irian Jaya model of 1969. This part of New Guinea, a Dutch colony up until that date became part of Indonesia after a fixed referendum overseen by the UN. The Indonesian regime will also surely have thought that their terror campaign carried out by the militias would be enough to persuade the population to vote 'correctly'. One should remember that when East Timor was invaded in 1976 the army slaughtered some 200-600,000 Timorese. Despite the failure of this twenty year campaign of terror, the current situation is not a complete disaster for the regime in Jakarta. In the capital popular anger has been deflected from the economic crisis, generalised poverty and lack of democracy by playing the old but effective nationalist card. This plays into the hands of the military who, as in Algeria, have almost complete control as they have so ably demonstrated throughout recent events. The army has taken its revenge and punished the Timorese for their bravery. Indonesian strategy ultimately is based on the certainty that despite up-front protests the full support of the US can be relied upon.

Franck Gombaud

Le Monde Libertaire, 29th September

In the minds of many people, the terms 'ecology' and 'environment' evoke images of rural landscapes and wilderness, of lands that haven't been touched by human hands. But, are cities spaces all but lost to ecology? Does the environmental movement have anything to do with the big cities?

Avant Gardening: ecological struggle in the city and the world is an anthology of essays edited by Peter L. Wilson and Bill Weinberg containing writings about the cultural, social and political aspects of ecology, with particular emphasis on the ecological struggles currently taking place in New York City. In this megapolis, which for many ecologists represents everything planet Earth shouldn't be, thousands of citizens have taken the initiative of rescuing empty lots and turning them into community gardens. In their essays, contributors John Wright, Bernardette Crozart and Sarah Ferguson (probably not the British duchess, but a New Yorker namesake) describe the efforts and accomplishments of activists that have created these guerrilla gardens in the midst of the concrete.

In New York there are right now some eleven thousand vacant lots in the city's possession. Just in Harlem, the city owns 1,500 such lots and 1,800 abandoned buildings. These spaces are a danger to nearby residents, particularly children, since they're used for illegal trash dumping, with roaming crack addicts and rats the size of cats.

Faced with this situation, groups of citizens undertook the task of rescuing some of this land to transform it into green zones. Today, New York has about seven hundred community gardens comprising two hundred acres,

ANARCHY IN ACTION?

Number 15

Guerrilla gardens and urban ecology

which is four times the size of the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. It sounds like a lot, but it's not even a tenth of the area occupied by the vacant lots of the city.

The creation and maintenance of these gardens has unleashed an extremely positive social dynamic. Neighbours get to know each other, and Puerto Ricans, Anglo-Saxons, Dominicans, Colombians, Poles and immigrants of other nationalities work together planting trees and edible vegetables, painting impressive murals, investing millions of dollars in materials and labour, soliciting grants from foundations, lobbying politicians to obtain their support, organising poetry recitals and jazz concerts. In short, everything in order to maintain and care for these gardens which have turned out to be vehicles for social organising, cultural renaissance, ecological recovery and spiritual regeneration.

One of the better known gardens was the

Chico Mendes Garden, on the corner of 10th Street and Avenue B in Manhattan, in an area known as Little Puerto Rico. In the decade of the '80s it was nothing but a horrible wasteland, and the community cleaned out the garbage, the rubbish and the junkies (the latter after pitched street fights). After the clean-up, they planted tomatoes, cauliflower, beans, garlic and cilantro, built a wooden shed and a chapel to Santa Clara, set on bushes of mint and roses. Also, a pond with fish surrounded by religious icons, including a Buddha, the Virgin Mary, a statue of a native American Indian and an African idol carved on wood.

Why do I speak of the Chico Mendes Garden in the past tense? Because in 1997 the city bulldozed it. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has set out to put an end to all community gardens as if it were a campaign promise. Giuliani and his political allies, who are basically the developers, the landlords and

the speculators, have a vision of New York's future in which there's no room for the poor (who are predominantly African American and Puerto Ricans) and even less for their bothersome little gardens that interfere with 'progress'. Giuliani's favourite colour is gentrified white.

Sarah Ferguson writes the following in her essay 'The Death of Little Puerto Rico': "At the very least [the movement to preserve the community gardens] ... should open people's eyes to the quiet, yet fundamental role that gardens play in humanising an otherwise overcrowded city of strangers. More than green spaces, New York's gardens are microcosms of democracy, where people establish a sense of community and belonging to the land. Like the antic shrines and altars they construct in their flower beds, these eclectic havens are in a very real sense churches, where people find faith – both in themselves and in their neighbours. When I first moved into my building in 1994, I resented the all-night salsa and merengue that the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans on my block blasted from boomboxes on my front stoop. By the end of one summer gardening with them, I'd come to love them as an extended family."

Avant Gardening provides not only an account of these social and environmental struggles, but also examines the different aspects – cultural, economic, political and ecological – of gardening and the production of food stuffs, discussed in articles written by Lyx Ish and Miekal And. It also contains an extensive critique of the

(continued on page 7)

'Machiavellian Calculations'

Dear Freedom,

In his letter to *Freedom* (2nd October 1999) Donovan Pedelty purports to show how my article 'Machiavellian Calculations' (*Freedom*, 21st August 1999) falls prey to an "urge to over-simplify", resulting in a "black and white picture of the world" which fails to recognise how "all of us, politicians and people alike, are prisoners of our circumstances". That he attempts to do so without either disputing a single fact introduced in support of my original argument or offering any concrete evidence to the contrary, leaves me wondering quite what purpose his intervention served, save to share with us his grasp of the complexities of Machiavellian thought (thanks) and to warn me against accepting the words of "left-wing intellectuals" as gospel (I don't).

Donovan asserts, though, that Bill Clinton is more 'clown' than 'conspirator' (indeed, a prisoner of circumstance) and that in "the West's mishandling of the break-up of Yugoslavia, due allowance has to be made for ignorance, stupidity, incompetence, and cowardice".

I'll deal with each of these in turn:

1. *On Bill Clinton* – In the 1992 run for the Democratic nomination, Clinton played the

race card for all it was worth. He was photographed at an all-white golf club, and at a prison farm, surrounded by rock-breaking black convicts. In January 1992, faced with a poll collapse as a result of the Gennifer Flowers disclosures, Clinton flew back to Arkansas to personally supervise the execution of Rickey Ray Rector, a lobotomised black Death Row inmate. (The prison chaplain said of the execution of brain-damaged Rector, "It was a crime. We're not supposed to execute children".) Clinton's enthusiasm for the death penalty answered the media's questions about his 'character'. As Christopher Hitchens put it, Clinton opted "for death as a means of distraction from sex". In August 1988 Clinton ordered the destruction of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, claiming it was a chemical weapons plant. The bombing coincided with Monica Lewinsky's grand jury testimony. Operation Desert Fox was launched on the eve of the congressional vote on impeachment. Clinton's tenure at the White House has seen the 'one-party' anti-poor agenda of the Republican/Democrat axis combined with a degree of personal venality which has sickened even the most hardened Washington correspondents. Similar paths through the swamp have been pursued by the likes of Albright, Vance, Blair, Robertson. Prisoners of circumstance?

2. *On Yugoslavia*: In 1991, the main concern of the Bush administration was the re-establishment of the legitimacy of the Atlantic Alliance following the end of the Cold War and the move towards a common European defence policy through the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty. In January 1992, the US began its drive to recognise Bosnian independence, following its concern at Germany's taking the lead over recognition of Croatia and Slovenia and its consequent desire to carve the Germans out, by engineering a set of circumstances where Bosnian independence would be at risk not only from Serbian aggression but also Croatia. The Izetbegovic government in March 1992 reached an EC brokered agreement with Bosnian Croats and Serbs on a three-canton federal settlement. Izetbegovic repudiated this agreement because the US urged him to go for a unitary independent state. What is at issue here is not the democratic right of the Balkan states to pursue independence but the extent to which such desires were utilised by the US to further its own ends regardless of the actual consequences for the people of the Balkan states. With regard to Kosovar, the US had ignored Yugoslavia's suspension of democratic institutions in the region in 1989, and the US ambassador's branding of the KLA as a 'terrorist organisation' in March 1998 was seen as a go-ahead for Milosevic's counter-insurgency. The facts suggest that

the sudden change to intervention bore more relation to: i) concerns over regional stability and the heading-off of the KLA's strategy for a greater Albania, and ii) US designs with regard to NATO leadership. Neither Dayton nor the Kosovo Accords have secured democracy or independence for the peoples of the region, and it is clear that the US was able to live with Milosevic's bloody pursuit of a Greater Serbia so long as it did not clash with its interests in the region.

Gore Vidal has referred to politics as "those official fictions that have been agreed upon by altogether too many interested parties". One of the duties of a paper such as *Freedom* is the debunking of the 'official fictions' of

our age, of which the notion that "all of us, politicians and people alike, are prisoners of our circumstances" is one such example. If the likes of Bill Clinton are so trapped by the system they represent, strange that they should allocate such resources to its perpetuation, and live so well as a result.

Nick S.

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'GM' Cuisine

Dear Freedom,

One small point about 'Agents of engineered cuisine and their enemies' (*Freedom*, 2nd October). Fears about GM crops should not be confused with concern about farmers "being almost wholly dependent on the big agri-chemical and seed companies".

The seed company on which US farmers mostly depend is the largest merchant by far, Pioneer Hi-Bred, which does not sell GM seeds.

DR

Another new title published by Freedom Press

Donald Room

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The cartoonist Donald Room is perhaps best known as the political cartoonist of *Peace News* during its heyday in the 1960s. An anarchist since 1944, since January 1980 he has been contributing the Wildcat strip to the anarchist fortnightly *Freedom*. The cartoons are copied and translated from *Freedom* (and the Wildcat books) by various anarchist publications in other countries.

"I must admit that my heart sank when I discovered that Matt had sent me a collection of anarchist cartoons to review. I thought I'd find them unfunny, obscure and pedantic. In fact, I found them humorous to the point of laughing out loud."
– Hilary Robinson in *Society for Strip Illustration Newsletter*

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sending in
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(continued from page 6)

new genetic engineering technologies written by this author.

The book is dedicated to the memory of fellow Puerto Rican Armando Perez, who was brutally murdered this past April. Armando, whom I had the pleasure to meet a couple of times when I was living in New York, was one of the founders of the Puerto Rican social centre Charas, located in Manhattan's 9th Street, in the middle of Loisaia. Against attempts by the Giuliani administration and the speculators to evict Charas, he said that they would have to kill him before they could evict the social centre from the building where it was. He was assassinated a few days after uttering these words.

All social and ecological struggles are interconnected on a global level, whether it is the struggle against the US Navy in Vieques island, against suburban sprawl and WalMart-isation in Puerto Rico and North America, for the preservation of the Amazon rain forest, or for the community gardens in New York City. *Avant Gardening* illustrates these connections.

Carmelo Ruiz

(The author of this review is a Puerto Rican journalist and a research associate at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont, USA)

(translation by Luis)

Articles for Raven on 'Racism and Resistance'

An issue of *The Raven* is being prepared on the subject 'Racism and Resistance'. We would particularly welcome contributions from anarchists outside the UK, detailing the processes of, and opposition to, racism, in their countries. Any contributions should be sent to Nick S., c/o Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

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— PROGRAMME 1999 —

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22nd October General discussion

29th October Selfishness as an Ethical
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City'

Anyone interested in giving a talk or
leading a discussion, please contact Peter
Neville at the meetings giving your subject
and prospective dates and we will do our
best to accommodate. **Peter Neville**
for London Anarchist Forum

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Telephone Vivienne for more info:
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**I understand that the Cambridge
Anarchist Group is no longer active.**

**If anybody in the area wishes to
make a connection, please contact me
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