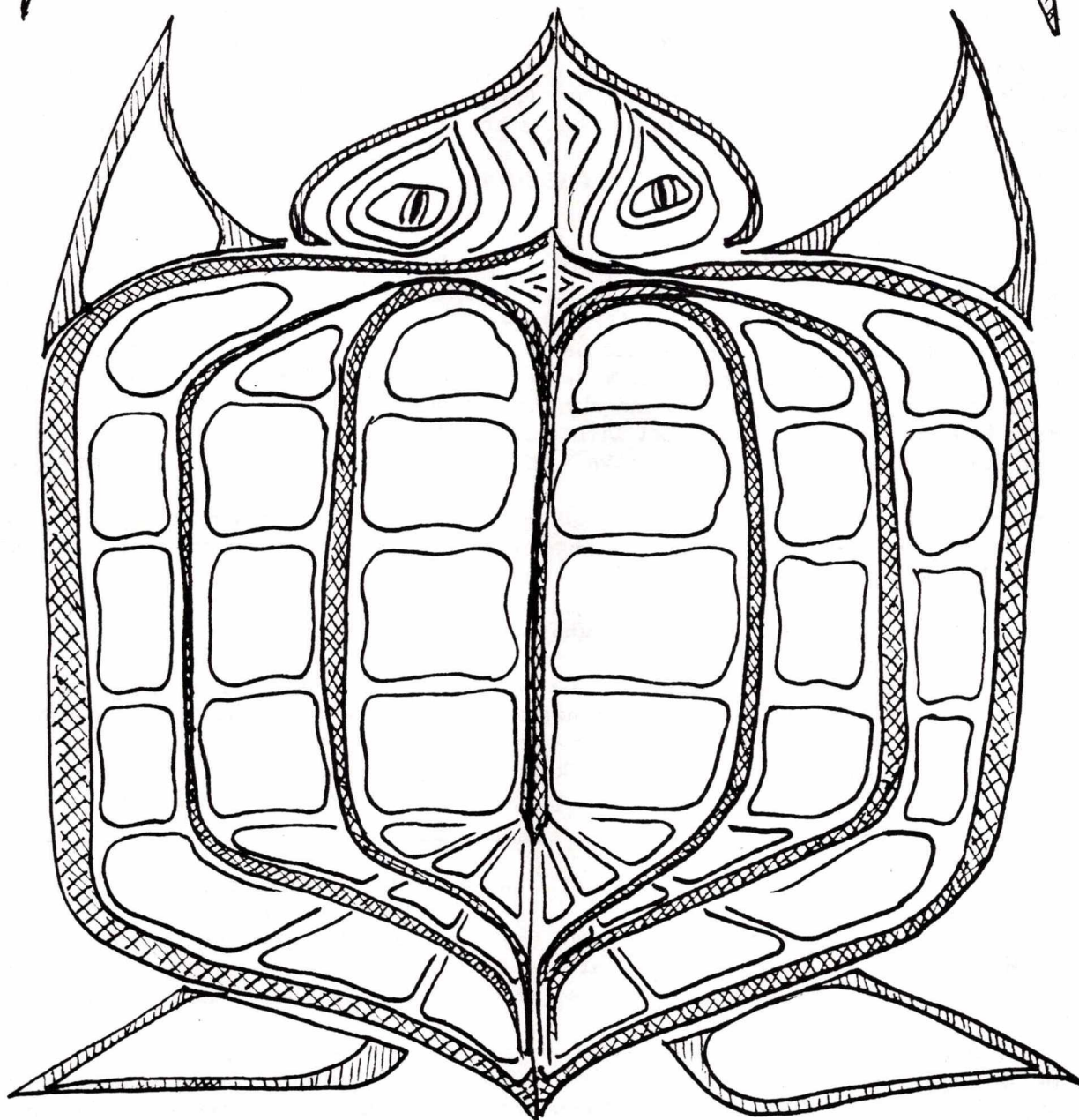


**FTT 11**



# FLATULENT THUNDER TURTLES

FTT 11 -- MARCH 1991

Edited by Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas. Editorial address: 5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill, London N15 6NH, United Kingdom. *FTT* is nominally a science fiction fanzine, which like most such barely mentions the stuff (and then mostly by accident). It is available for "the usual", meaning your publication in exchange, a letter of comment, or an appropriate contribution of text or art (but please enquire first). Single issues (no subscriptions accepted) can also be obtained for £1.00 a copy.

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The illustrations are as follows: cover and pages 4 and 5 by Judith Hanna; page 3 by Teddy Harvia; page 6 by Phil Tortorici; page 14 lifted from *The Guardian*; and pages 21 and 33 derived from the usual peace movement sources.

## FTT WINS NOVA -- EDITORS PRETTY CHUFFED

Some readers will probably know that at last November's Novacon 20 in Birmingham, *FTT* carried off the Nova Award as the best fanzine of 1990. We're sorry that we couldn't have been there to collect the award in person, but were nevertheless surprised and delighted by the result. We'd therefore like to thank everyone who voted for us, and incidentally to promise that we'll carry on producing the best fanzine we can.

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From a debate on the London Underground Bill in the House of Commons, as recorded in *Hansard*, 24 October 1990:

Mr Ron Leighton: "In Newham we want the royal docks to be developed. Ah! I see the Minister for Industry standing at the Bar of the House, wearing a white tie. I have half a mind to order a cup of coffee from the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps that would not be appropriate."

The Minister for Industry (Mr Douglas Hogg): "With pleasure, Sir."

Mr Ron Leighton: "Two sugars, please. The service in this place is wonderful, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Gentleman's dress is a splendid example of the sort of uniform that might attract foreign visitors to County Hall if ever it were developed as a hotel."

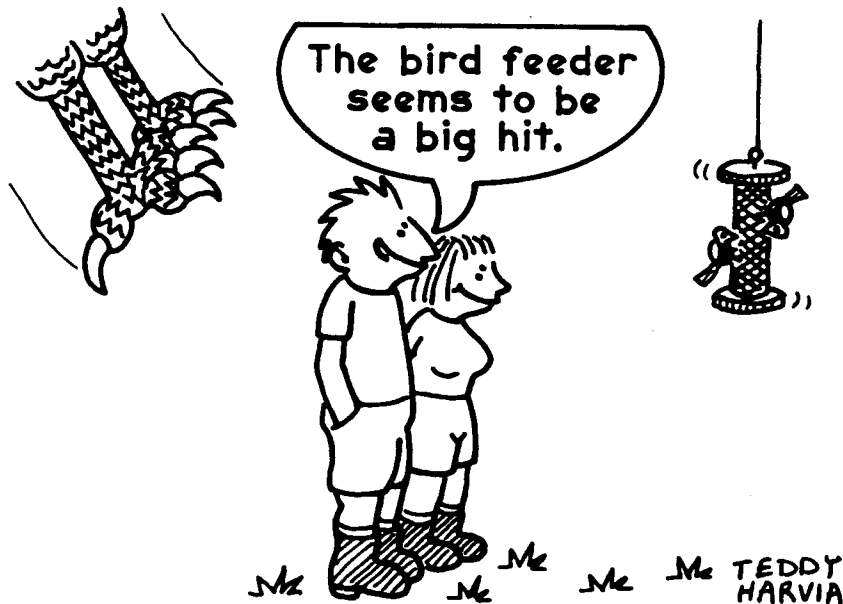
# BIRDWATCHING AT HOME & ABROAD

Judith Hanna

## Backyard Bird Cafeteria Update

We have a new robin patronising the backyard bird cafeteria this year. Last year's robin was a very shy bird, who turned up only occasionally, and would venture in from the bare branches beyond the fence only if no other birds were around, and fly off at the least sound or movement. This year's robin, though not noticeably bold, shows no signs of shyness. Rather, she is an organised and efficient bird. (Male and female robins look the same, but I feel sure our bird is a she.) She calls in every morning at a few minutes past nine, then again at sometime past ten. The first call is as punctual as you could expect from a bird without access to a watch, the second call a bit more variable, presumably depending on what's out on the rest of her round.

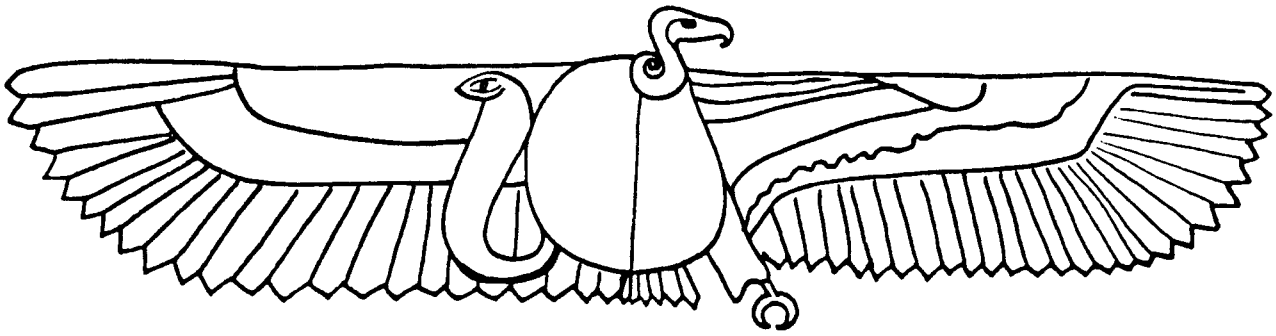
Besides our regular robin, the bird cafeteria's regular clientele numbers: four blue tits (one more than last year), a pair of great tits, two or three marauding and aggressive greenfinches, a dozen or so sociable sparrows, three blackbirds (or one black cock bird and two brown hen birds), a song thrush, and a tiny round wren who flits through the undergrowth beyond the fence but doesn't venture in.



## Birds of the Middle Nile

Sometime before Christmas, we spotted an advert at the back of the *Saturday Guardian* for a very cheap week in Luxor, putting up at the Sheraton for £300 including return air fare. So we phoned up Voyages Jules Verne to make a booking for 7-14 January, and paid a small supplement for a room with a view of the Nile. Then the UN set its Gulf deadline of 15 January. How thoughtful of Mr Bush, we said, to delay the war for which he is so clearly eager until after we get back. We must write and thank him, just as soon as Joseph can get out of the habit of addressing him as "Dear Lying Hypocrite". So off we flew, battery tourists packed into a charter flight, to inspect the pharaonic antiquities of the New Kingdom. The birdlife was incidental.

Our hotel featured flamingoes. Its "240 acres of landscaped grounds" included an arcade of tourist shops selling brass bowls and carved stone scarabs, inlaid boxes, hand-painted papyrus on which a man would inscribe your name in hieroglyphs before your very eyes. The arcade of shops curved around a largish pond with a Japanese style bridge across it and an island with palmtrees in the middle. It was stocked with a dozen or so delicately pink flamingoes paddling round stiltedly on their ridiculously long thin legs with knobbed coral knees. Plus a pair of yellow-white pelicans, a pair of peacocks, and a random assortment of little ducks and dabchicks. Tres bijou for a post dinner promenade.



Egyptian sparrows are small and skinny, half the size of English sparrows but just as omnipresent. Flocks of them hopped hopefully around the hotel, outside the breakfast room and along the terrace bar, scrounging for crumbs. They hopped around the temples of Luxor and Karnak, and perched on the red granite heads and shoulders, or decapitated necks, of the twenty foot tall figures of Rameses II in the guise of various gods. They flew in and out of the tiny chinks where they made their nests far up in the towering pylon walls which form the entrance to the temples, or up among the crowded lotus and papyrus headed columns of the hypostyle halls. Turtledoves with dainty coral feet and a mauve sheen to their breasts potted around the dusty ground of the temples, or perched on the backs of ram-headed Amun sphinxes. I was pleased to note that they do seem the same bird as the pretty little doves I'd been so charmed by in Samarkand. Egyptian crows are grey-backed, like the hooded crows of Scotland and Europe.

Birds figure in the carvings too. Stylised ibis, owl, falcon as hieroglyph figures. The vulture, which is symbol of Upper Egypt and also the goddess Nekhebet, appears with a sundisc grasped in its claws, or the sundisc takes the place of head and body between outstretched vulture wings on which the traces of deep-sky-blue paint sometimes remain. A comical sort of crested hoopoe with raised wings and a pair of rat-like paws, often sitting in a bowl, which one of the tour guides explained represented the ordinary people of Egypt. One bas-relief showed some pharaoh presenting these Plain People of Egypt as an offering to the goddess, who may have been the blood-thirsty lion-headed Sekhmet. There were giant figures of falcon-headed Horus, particularly all over his temple at Edfu, where he had his great fight with his wicked uncle Set who had chopped up his good daddy Oriris; Set was shown as a cute little hippopotamus. I rather took to Hathor, wife of Horus, who seemed a happy and harmless goddess of music and love, shown with a placid cow head or cow's horns and ears. In the tombs of the Valley of the Kings, painted figures of ibis-headed Thoth or Tut appeared with green-skinned Osiris the judge of the dead, and jackal-headed Anubis, and the elongated, star-spangled belly of Nut the sky-goddess stretched over the world beneath her. Over doorways, the kneeling figure of a woman with winged arms, Nephthys who keeps watch over the dead and is sister of Isis, wife of Set and mother of Anubis, all one big family business. The surprising thing about the underground tombs is that they are not cold, as natural caves are, but hot and humid. "Moist exudations from the crowds of tourists," our guidebook warned, "are damaging the ancient paintings." The Gulf war put an end to that damage for a while.

The day Joseph decided we could walk from the tourist ferry terminal on the West Bank to the Valley of the Kings was a good bird-watching day. First excitement was a shiny metallic green bird, very slim and elegant, blackbird-sized, which darted out again and again from a branch above an irrigation channel, as if it were taking invisible insects from the air. A bee-eater? On we walked, past the fields of sugar-cane harvest being loaded into rail wagons, with every taxi that passed stopping to ask if we didn't want a ride, and bicyclists and donkey carts going by with curious looks. One lad on a bike asked the question that was clearly on everyone's mind as they gazed at these mad tourists: "Why are you walking?" "Exercise," said Joseph, "To see the countryside." No doubt it simply confirmed the well-known fact that all tourists are mad, and the English most eccentric of all. Past the temple of Seti I, well spoken of in our *Discovery Guide To Egypt* for its

classical restraint and refinement, the green irrigated land gave way to desert dust, and I took the next taxi that came along. Joseph got aboard grumbling, as if still eager to trudge all the way through the heat towards the distant rock escarpments ahead.

The sparrows hopping among the tables on the deep verandah of the Valley of the Kings Resthouse were even smaller and skinnier than those at the hotel. They were joined by a flock of dust-coloured desert finches with bold orange-red beaks, looking just like Australian zebra finches without the black and white stripes. The guidebook recommended walking over the mountain from the Valley of the Kings to the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut facing the river on the other side, whose three giant terraces of columns could be seen from Luxor. Desert larks soared up from the dust all around us, and from the summit we had a spectacular view of the Nile Valley stretching to the horizon north and south, a broad green snake between the desert cliffs each side, and a haze of grey pollution over the whole of it. Soaring below us, here and there, a red-brown kite or smaller sharp-winged grey falcon; and even further below us, tiny specks of masonry, the Ramesseum and the Colossi of Memnon. Opposite, two or three miles away on the East Bank, we could pick out the temples of Karnak and Luxor. The view was almost worth the insecurity of the steep, scabbling climb down the escarpment on the other side.

We ended the day walking from the Ramesseum, the memorial temple of Ramesses II, where we saw the giant fallen head and shoulders that inspired Shelley's "Ozymandias, King of Kings, look on my works ye mighty and despair". Standing between the feet of that collapsed colossus, my outstretched arms were unable to reach from ankle to ankle. The road led past the two still standing Colossi of Memnon, the only remains of Amenophis III's mortuary temple, and on to the tourist ferry. As we waited for the last ferry of the day, the sun sinking into the Nile bathed water and sky in pearlescence, all faintest gold and rose, and a black and white crested Pied Kingfisher dived again and again from the jetty.

Tours to Edfu and Esna upstream, and Abydos and Dendera downstream, both involved a day of being driven in a coach through the countryside, through villages, past irrigation channels and the green fields they fed. In the cool early morning, trees along the road bore egrets, like large white fruit among their branches. The rest of the day the egrets, their fine white neck feathers blowing, could be seen stalking through the fields and along water channels, on patrol. In the villages we glimpsed flocks of ducks and geese and skinny fowls. On the flat mud roofs of houses, which might be used as kitchens or for hanging out clothes, we spotted various arrangements for attracting pigeons to nest, where their eggs could be gathered, or the birds themselves grabbed while asleep.

A speeding coach isn't the best vantage point for bird-spotting, but I did see a hoopoe perched on a wall outside a verandahed colonial mansion as we waited to drive across the Nile at Esna, to the sunken temple of Khnum who made the first people from clay, and his consort the bloodthirsty lion-headed Sekhmet. Another flash of bright green bee-eater, more hovering black and white kingfishers, more crows and sparrows and kites and more rarely falcons. But mostly we saw green fields where the irrigation stretched, giving way abruptly to desert dust where the water stopped. We saw villages with people going about their business, frequent police posts along



the road, giving out toll tickets that permitted vehicles to pass. We saw fields of sugar cane being harvested, swarming with people of all ages and both sexes, loading up donkeys and camels and rail wagons on the narrow gauge tracks alongside the fields. Not enough to tell what life was like, but different enough from our mechanised, industrial world.

The last two days of our holiday I persuaded Joseph to try something entirely novel and unprecedented: relaxing. True, we took a felucca ride on the river one morning, and hired bicycles to ride up to Karnak and back along the small streets the other. Then we spent two whole afternoons stretched out beside the circular turquoise swimming pool of the hotel, immersed in our heavy reading programme, swimming a few lazy laps, and catching up with the rumours about all charter flights being cancelled in expectation of the war. Among the creepers of the terrace bar, we found two new sorts of small brown bird, also lively sleek bronze skink lizards. One tiny bird with an upswept long tail, scuttling through the undergrowth like a mouse, seemed just like a plain fawn Australian wren; my bird books back home have since suggested it was a Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*). The others, also tiny and smooth fawn, frolicked and flirted among the bougainvillea branches above, as if snapping up insects. Identification requested.

Then, after several hours of elaborate bureaucracy and several more of waiting, we flew home crowded into the belly of a large noisy silver bird called a Boeing 767.

### *And Home Again*

The big snow of February buried our back garden under a foot or so of fluffy white eiderdown with only the tips of the rose-bushes protruding, and brought the little birds clustering desperately around, partly because we're at the lee end of a clump of bushes, partly for the food which I kept replenishing on the bird-tree. Those little birds do get through the food at some pace in the cold; nothing else to eat, and burning up the calories to keep themselves warm. With them all clustered together for easy counting, I find that we have not just one but two robins; the blue tit count rises to five; and there are definitely three, if not four, greenfinches. Also, I note that the sparrows seem to enjoy playing, almost swimming through the snow, and the birds drink the snowflakes. This is a good thing, as water put out in a dish was within a couple of hours either freezing solid or becoming buried in snow, or both. Ah, the joys of watching birds in the snow through the window from one's own nice warm untidy nest!



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The sculptor Sir Anthony Caro refused election to the Royal Academy because of what he called the "appalling" quality of its summer exhibition. What could he mean? *The Daily Telegraph* picked out a work by Michael Sandle, titled "A Mighty Blow For Freedom", depicting a giant bronze of an axe-wielding figure smashing a TV set. The same work was shown in *The Independent*, under an almost identical title: "A Mighty Blow For Freedom: Fuck The Media". Excellent sentiments, much improved by being cast in bronze.

(From the "Zeitgeist" column in *The Guardian*, 10 November 1990)



# WHY FEMINISM DOESN'T WORK IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

*Eva Hauser*

The development of self-realisation in women in countries of the Eastern bloc is probably quite an opposite process than in so-called "capitalist" countries. In the fifties all education was strongly Stalinist. People of course didn't believe blindly all these Stalinist theses but they didn't have access to any other sources of thoughts, opinions, any different model of lifestyle. So there was only one pattern available: woman -- worker who enthusiastically builds the new community, works very hard, spends her evenings in various meetings and goes to brigades on Sundays, and of course also has a happy and enthusiastic husband and happy and enthusiastic children in a creche where qualified specialists rear them. Woman doesn't do housework -- highly qualified specialists do everything, people eat collectively, entertain collectively, help each other.

Of course, this exemplar was never and nowhere a reality. But it influenced women's conscience so that it was simply unthinkable to be just a housewife: the housewife was considered a shameful sort of parasite. So women had to juggle everything, both jobs and families. Women are by nature much more resistant, more stubborn than men, you can burden them unimaginably (as in some Muslim countries where women do absolutely everything).

The result was that there were no housewives in our country in the sixties and seventies. Women stayed at home with their babies for two or three years, then returned to their jobs. Not just because of shortage of money or that feeling of parasitism, but for a feeling of independence, of better social status. Most women consider it very, very boring to stay at home.

The real problem was whether to be a career woman or just a woman with a job. Only career women had to cope with really frustrating experiences if they were not smart enough to persuade their family and friends that they must be supported as they were exceptionally talented, ingenious, or earning lots of money.

So many women preferred to be self-sufficient, with no need of men to support them any longer. What's the sense of taking care of a husband who behaves like a spoiled child and is patriarchally selfish? So many women preferred to be divorced. It starts to look like this is more a problem for men than for women. Men suddenly became useless. In the chaos of the post-Stalinist reforms of late 1989 it became difficult to find creative pleasure in work and perhaps men felt they would like to accept the family as their main value in life. But they weren't trained for child-rearing and housework, and women started to enjoy their dominant position in this sphere. Sociologists asked women to be more patient with their spouses, to educate them gradually, to be helpful and kind to them....which all sounds like just one more burden on women: job -- children -- household -- and then help the poor husband? *No! That's too much!*

That was the situation before the revolution. We didn't have many women politicians or managers, but women were about 60% of the doctors, scientists, lawyers and economists. Nowadays, after the revolution, people are returning to the traditional views. They are starting to speak of the traditional family, of an ideal model with men who are able to support housewife and children, and it looks so appealing and beautiful: everybody has their naturally determined role, men should be masculine and women feminine.... For us all that is a discovery, something quite new, charming and inviting. Women don't want to participate in meetings any more, certainly not feminist ones. They don't want to fight against anyone, and they connect feminism with fighting. They want to discover their feminine identity and perhaps they would accept feminism in this sense. But nobody uses the term in this sense.

# DRAWING THE LINE

Judith Hanna

Have you noticed how Debate drives out discussion? What's the difference, you ask? Discussion explores complexities of a question; Debate simplifies an issue down to two opposing sides, each distorting the other to an extreme straw position to be knocked down. I write about perspectives on feminism ("Peach Fuzz, Bums And Censorship", FTT 9) and we get a lot of letters focusing on the anti-censorship vs anti-pornography debate. I try to widen the discussion to political censorship, the market forces of labelling or boycott, and the nature of public space, and get a lot of letters focusing on the censorship vs pornography debate. The trouble with structuring a discussion around letters responding to a previous discussion is that inevitably they retread the same ground, albeit raising new angles, rather than advancing to new philosophical frontiers. Let's try for some wider angles this time, okay? Like this:

David Redd  
Plas-Hyfyrd  
48 Cardigan Rd  
Haverfordwest  
Dyfed SA61 2QN

"The major point is still how does one decide what is acceptable, and what degree of restriction should the individual accept for the sake of the group? It's difficult enough to decide what is best for a two-person family, let alone a fifty-million-person democracy. You could say that all cultural activity should be aimed at improving society, but are you then just viewing the human species as one more elitist self-interest group compared to the rest of life. Censorship and sexual attitudes have to be a compromise. Treating women as Page Three objects is better than treating women as slaves, not as good as treating women like respectable equals.

"Treatment of women is one side of a multi-faceted problem: the messages we receive in everyday life are full of redundant information, misleading information, harmful information. This is due to greed or apathy or lack of self-awareness. I would love to see a country full of decent intelligent caring citizens, men and women neither worshipping nor abusing each other, just living together. But society is so complex that it offers too many opportunities for error, so utopia won't happen. Transport 2000 and other pressure groups start too late -- educate people at the age of two if you want to change the world."

Yes, how do you decide what is not acceptable, in what circumstances? And can you educate people to be socially responsible and aware, without brainwashing them? And what place for humour and joking in utopia, if one could ever reach it? Where do you draw the line? It seems to me worth homing in on "drawing the line". One of the points made in arguments against any form of censorship or other regulation is "But where would you draw the line?", as if having to make a decision about drawing the line somewhere rendered the whole exercise questionable, if not impossible. The points I was trying to make at the end of "Kali Juggling" (FTT10) were based on the fact that lines of acceptability are drawn, whether we like it or not. The question we should be addressing, I suggested, is how to make the drawing of those lines more publicly accountable. Turning to the letters written, of course, pulls us onto the case example of censorship as a form of drawing the line. I was clearly so tactful in the way I put it that John Rickett was fooled into thinking he agreed with me:

John D Rickett  
41 Forest Court  
Snaresbrook  
London E11 1PL

"I find Lesley Ward's views interesting and valid, although I wish that she had not, by implication, equated labelling with censorship. I cannot see how any reasonably balanced person could object in any way to 'warning' notices to the effect that "this contains explicit sexual material", thereby allowing the potential consumer to exercise their own powers of censorship should they wish. The dangers of legislated censorship are evident, and you have pointed them out. So where better to place the onus than on the buying public?"

It is the dangers of unlegislated censorship that I'm as much concerned about; in our relatively free, individualistic, consumer-oriented societies, we are subject to far more censorship by market forces than by decree. Equally, it is unchecked market



exploitation, using women-as-sex to sell whatever commodity comes to hand, that has provoked most calls for more effective regulations to preserve "public decency". Just what forms "censorship" can and should take is another question worth discussing; as I noted in FTT 9, the dictionary definition is vague. Certainly, "censorship" cannot just be reduced to "banning". I am glad John agrees with Lesley and me that explicit labelling could work without being an infringement of individual liberties. Sherry Coldsmith has reservations:

Sherry Coldsmith  
P.O. Box 330  
Hutto  
Texas 78634  
USA

"The dialogue between Avedon Carol and you shifted from censorship (using the law to influence culture) to consumers' rights (using one's buying power). I don't see why a feminist can't campaign against censorship and at the same time do as you suggest: write advertisers, demand clear labelling, refuse to buy certain products, etc.. That point

aside, I am not happy with the tactics you describe.

"Before I left Britain I bought a copy of *The Satanic Verses* at a university bookstore. The shopkeeper was delighted to see me clutching the last copy in my sticky hands because a delegation of Muslim students had asked him to stop selling it. He would not re-order the book, he said, because he could understand how they felt.

"That's interesting,' I said, 'because there's a lot of dodgy economic theory in here that I'd love to get off the shelves.'

"He smiled and turned to the next customer.

"If it's all right for women to boycott the local sweetshop because it displays *Hustler*, is it also right for me to demand that bourgeois economic theory be hidden away? I think the answer is to be found in a word which, paradoxically, you don't hear much in these times when consumer power is the only kind that people have left. The word is 'boycott' which implies other words, among them 'struggle' and 'politics'. If there was a strong feminist movement, something with teeth in it (not the dreadfully liberal National Organisation for Women in the US) and that movement asked its members to specifically boycott a product, then I'd boycott away. But my candidate for boycott is not the copies of *Hustler* but Gerber baby food. Advertising for almost all baby products reinforces the notion that women are the carers. It's time to tell men what they ought to be doing.

"Why would I be unhappy with a boycott of those shops that display the lurid covers of *Playboy* and *Hustler*? Or a boycott of the magazines' advertisers? Again, I must answer indirectly. Most 'adult' videos are purchased by women. It appears that porn, when it includes a narrative, appeals to women. Would it be right for feminists to boycott the local shop that carries these videos? I think not. Is it right for feminists to boycott the sweetshop with the girlie mags? If the answer to the above is no, then the answer here must also be no, unless you can show that the kind of porn men like is an incitement to violence.

"I think that most men see porn as a fantasy and not as an incitement to rape and abuse. I am a woman, a feminist, and a bisexual in terms of desire (though no longer practising) and I am not troubled by photographs of nude women in my local sweetshop. In fact, I was in such an establishment the other day and the sight of discreet flaps labelled 'Penthouse' and 'Playboy' did *nothing* to make me feel more secure when I stepped outside. I live in America, you see, a place where the number of sexual crimes continues to spiral out of sight despite the flaps, the movie ratings, the curb-side marches whenever an adult video store is put up too near a church or residence.

"If a campaign by Christians or Muslims were to get the filth off the streets, then the offence to the sensibilities of some women would be reduced. But would their salaries go up, their representation in the workplace and parliament increase, their access to the culture industry be made any easier? Would women have any more money to spend at the sweetshop, whatever magazines it displays? Would men become more motherly? The answer's not only no, it's *hell, no*. Moral outrage can be just, and useful, but it is no substitute for genuine political organising. I think the 'saturation' that you and Lesley mention is indicative of how women are regarded in this society. I, too, feel utterly, speechlessly outraged by what many of these images indicate. But I've yet to be convinced that sweeping these indicators under the carpet will empower women to such an extent that it would have been worth

eroding the right to free expression.

"I shudder at the very thought of labelling books with a sticker that says 'Warning -- explicit sex inside'. All across the US thousands of public libraries are stocking work by Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, Joanna Russ and dozens of other feminists because the local anti-smut league doesn't know the books are there. A weapon in the hands of the state is a weapon in the hands of a masculinist, capitalist state. We're entitled to forget this point, to circumvent it, or by-pass it, or put it in a little box and tell it to keep quiet, but we do so at *our* peril.

"My earlier comments aside, I would also shudder at any attempt to make commercial advertising more palatable. I want women to be as disaffected as it's possible to be with monopoly capitalism. I want green, collectively owned companies to put men on baby food advertisements and I want Gerber to go right on infuriating working mothers. Nor do I really want the organs of capitalism to look respectable. *The Sun* is a rag and I want people to have ample evidence that it's a rag. I want *The Daily Telegraph* to have centre page spreads of heaving mammaries; I want its readers to retaliate by buying *The Independent*. And on the other side of this coin, I want every person of good heart to become part of a magazine collective, a workplace newsletter, a fiction or video workshop where she says hell with the mainstream. I want us to create political times. I want the organs of corporate culture to wither and drop off because we created media that were so attractive, desirable and exciting, every person -- whom we might call 'citizen' rather than 'consumer' -- turned to us."

*Fine fighting revolutionary rhetoric, comrade, which addresses a broad sweep of vital issues. But I'm not persuaded that all the constituent arguments hold water when put together. For instance, is Sherry arguing for or against the boycott as a legitimate organised exercise of consumer rights to make a political point? Seems to me it has become a very common campaigning tool over the past decade. Boycott Nestle for promoting breastmilk substitutes to Third World mothers, who can't afford it and have no sterilised water to mix it properly, so their babies die of diarrhoea and malnutrition. Our local supermarket displays a "Whale & Dolphin Society Seal of Approval" prominently beside their own brand tinned tuna: a response to concern about "wall of death" drift net fishing. Last year, all the tampon and sanitary napkin manufacturers in the UK switched from chlorine bleaching, in the face of a "No Dioxin" campaign by Women's Environmental Network. Non-chlorine bleached or unbleached loo paper, paper towels and so on, on recycled paper, appeared at about the same time. It is as much the organisers' publicity, and individual letters declaring intention not to buy, as real sales numbers, that have the effect. It is a form of organised political action which has shown ordinary women how they can exert power, in their traditional role as consumer par excellence. That is, campaigns to create and publicise boycotting are creating the "political times" Sherry calls for. But yes, it's a game everyone can play, us and them, balancing our respective weights and arguments.*

*I share Sherry's indignation at the way so many ads for commodities of which women are the main buyers are patently, offensively, angled past them to titillate some male presence. The currently notorious example over here is a poster by Hennes/H&M, a women's clothing chain. It shows a woman in frilly under-nothings pouting her cleavage alongside the caption: "Last time we ran an underwear ad like this, 59 women complained. No men did." The caption damns you if you complain, and you damn yourself if it intimidates you into not complaining. Presumably H&M have calculated that either most of their customers are men, or are women who are out to attract men by that sort of sexy image. They may be right; or their sales figures may demonstrate that a lot of their trade is ordinary women now determined that is one shop we'll avoid when we go shopping.*

*It seems to me that sort of consumer power, as it becomes a political habit, is the way we may get green companies which respond to public concerns by, for instance, introducing recycling facilities. Good public relations, for those companies which can afford it.*

*But it needs to be backed up by legislation or regulation which defines what can legitimately be labelled "environment-friendly", which requires full listing of ingredients in meaningful terms, or else the cowboys selling to the bottom end of the market will be palming off adulterated junk. That is, a pragmatic set of levers to*

keep public opinion pressure on the market, combining organised and co-ordinated individual action by those people who are concerned, plus pressure for regulations that enforce standards in the market-place. That seems to me a likelier way forward than The Revolution, which would probably be won by the libertoonian Good Ol' Boys and their cohorts, with their guns and survivalist stocks of ammo. I daresay Loompanics have already produced a DIY Vanguardist Revolution Handbook. But have the loony extremists really taken over the US of A, or do they just shout louder so it seems that way?

Sure, Democracy is no easy answer; the trouble is, it's the best bet we've got. Democracy, like feminism, is not some static, reified Thing you can frame and display in a museum, but a process of continuing engagement with the way things are, and ought to be, continually negotiating just where the lines out to be drawn between right and wrong, permissible and unacceptable, between where my freedoms infringe your rights.

The annoying thing about democracy is that everyone has the same rights to the same tactics: any law that allows me freedom allows the same freedom to those who disagree with me; any law that protects me can equally be used by those I disagree with. In theory, at any rate; in reality, some people get to interpret the law. The anti-censorship position is, as Sherry puts it, and Avedon has put it: any law that amounts to a power of censorship will be used by people we can't trust and disagree with, against our interests, as a blow against freedom of expression. That is a serious warning, given force by recent American examples (see, for instance, Tom Collins in the other letter column).

Back to "drawing the line". Let's look at something that should be clear-cut and simple: "Though shalt not kill". That is, except for 1) war, 2) judicially sanctioned executions, 3) killing animals, 4) acceptable risk of death on the roads, or through industrial accident, or environmental hazard, and so on. Then there are the millions of deaths caused by the stringency policies of the IMF, in the cause of the interest-led global economy. What I'm interested in here is how we, as individuals, argue about where society should "draw the line". Some of us campaign against war, or specific wars, whether through turning out on the streets (yes, we marched against the Gulf War in London) or through bombarding our elected representatives with indignant letters. But I suspect most of us say "There's nothing we can do about it". When it comes to eating meat, why, that's perfectly normal; besides "I like the taste" or "Cooking vegetarian is too much trouble". When it comes to the road toll (100 deaths a week in the UK), well, everyone breaks the speed limit, don't they? And after all, if there was an accident, the penalty is probably just a penalty point, maybe a fine. They don't even put you in gaol if you kill someone with a car, even in those cases where the driver has been seen to deliberately swerve to hit a cyclist or pedestrian. But you are not allowed to request, or grant, euthanasia.

That is, though there is a clear legal and moral prohibition against killing, in practice there's a gradation of "drawing the line" of outrage. When it comes down to it, we find that there is not in fact a clear and absolute right, or wrong, but that certain "lines" are drawn between "culpable" killings and killings for which the killers are excused responsibility.

Likewise, I think, when it comes to "freedom of expression". It is a value that, though supposedly guaranteed by the US Constitution and as part of the free-born English tradition that underlies the unwritten constitution, in practice is infringed in all sorts of ways, as are all other human rights. I am not arguing for absolute "freedom of speech", I do not think it is possible nor entirely desirable. The first limits on freedom of speech come when your parents teach you not to comment loudly to their face on how fat that man is, how funny that woman looks, and teach you to say please and thank you and all the rest of the social survival kit called manners. I hate to imagine a world where everyone felt free to speak their mind, let alone indulge their impulses, regardless of others.

So that makes the question one of how you define the limits, where you draw the line. An example: when I was a kid at Kojonup school, in Western Australia, fights between gangs of Aboriginal boys and white boys were frequent. Until the new Headmaster declared it a caning offence to call someone "nigger", "coon", "boong" or similar racist name-calling. Suddenly, no more fights. The Aboriginal kids could call on the authorities to protect them, they no longer had to take the law into their own

hands and end up punished for it. Not only that, the sudden cessation of playground fights was strong evidence that the fights had not been the fault of the Noongah kids being wild and aggressive, but the fault of the colour-blind system letting white kids get away with taunting them while punishing them for self-defence.

Along with the new rule, that headmaster organised for the evening use of a classroom for doing homework, with a couple of teachers to supervise and give a hand. No-one had previously raised the point that living in two-roomed shacks on a reserve, as was then the case, with all the family crowded in, gave little chance for the kids to be able to concentrate on doing homework. These two measures noticeably gave the Noongahs more self-respect, and gave us white kids more understanding of the barriers our class-mates had to overcome.

No doubt there are ways such a rule forbidding "Incitement of Racial Hatred" could be misused. But it seems to me a constructive way of tackling one of the problems of offensive free expression, at a number of levels. Such a law does exist, little used, in Britain.

Tim Jones is another who sees an argument for limited censorship of (carefully defined) pornography:

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"Pornography is any depiction of sexual acts which has, either in what is shown or in the conditions of its production, an element of compulsion, whether this is economic compulsion of the participants to take part or violent compulsion involved in the acts shown or described.

This compulsion may be applied to any of the participants (and I don't think much work has been done on the conditions under which men take part in pronography), but is mostly strongly applied to women, children and animals. I oppose this compulsion, and I believe that works employing it or depicting it should be illegal. Furthermore, I believe that, insofar as the evidence warrants it, works which increase the likelihood of violence, sexual or otherwise, against men, women, children or animals should be illegal.

"I have tried to word my personal definition of pornography quite carefully, to avoid some of the common traps -- that of equating all sexual depictions with pornography (although I don't know exactly where to draw the line, and I don't know if it can be drawn exactly), and that of assuming that only women are adversely affected. Such a definition is not easy to apply in practice, but it seems to me to strike a balance between competing civil liberties (which, to me, include the right not to be raped or murdered, as well as the right of free expression)."

Trouble is that a great deal of standard erotica, from Mills & Boon through to S&M, does revel in games of submission/domination which are hard to distinguish from compulsion. Nonetheless, the elements of force or violence in the porn industry, and images of women as victim, are certainly what most people, including opponents of censorship, would agree are offensive. The other element of compulsion which affects people who don't seek out porn is the extent to which women's bodies, particularly, are used in semi-pornographic ways to sell commodities -- and those images invade public places that ought not to be sexually charged. Here, there's a compulsion imposed for people to view sexual imagery in a situation where many find it offensive and threatening.

What I find worrying about the anti-censorship arguments is that we don't seem to get beyond posing the question, "What can be done about offensive sexual imagery inappropriately displayed?" which produces the reaction: "You can't, because anything you do must be censorship, which is the same as banning. And where would you draw the line?" This doesn't engage with the actual complex of restraints on freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom from fear, freedom from exploitation. As I've said, I don't think it is, theoretically or in reality, possible to have complete freedom of expression. Therefore the issue is to engage with the question of what criteria, what measures should moderate the cases where one human right conflicts with others. Tim suggests one way of determining where this particular line might be drawn. Various advertising codes of practice, press codes of practice, bookseller chains codes of "non-offensiveness" also exist, as models. The more the social climate encourages or demands that such codes and criteria be made explicit, so that they can

be argued with, the better the chances of being able to challenge and influence the decisions made. That is, I think, a fundamental democratic principle of open government. But it does rather depend on trusting the good sense and good faith of the participating demos.

The big danger of polarised debate is that it crowds out the middle ground, the wishy-washy liberal compromise positions that Sherry denounces. To achieve change, you either have to convince the Establishment, or else the middle ground of ordinary people. In the early 80s, enough ordinary people were sufficiently concerned about peace and nuclear disarmament that we got a (possibly temporary) thaw in the Cold War arms race; in the late 80s, ordinary people have become concerned about the environment. In both cases, the action produced is too little, too late. But if the argument had been left to experts and purist radicals, we'd have seen no changes at all.

In Britain, it seems to me that the Censorship vs Pornography Debate is being conducted by radicals addressing themselves to the opposing radicals. This risks a debate that marginalises itself by not listening to and acknowledging what others in the wider feminist and civil liberties movements are concerned about. This seems to me to make three serious mistakes.

First, that of alienating the middle ground, by ignoring their real concerns. People who are unpersuaded by the Dworkinist anti-pornography arguments are going to remain unimpressed by Feminists Against Censorship arguments demolishing what they don't see as the issue anyway. The arguments which are persuasive are those which start from the sort of worries that, for instance, Lesley Ward and I advanced about the feelings of threat from offensive and inappropriate sexual imagery -- a lack of good manners in what advertisers choose to display. Or alternatively, from the worries Jan Orys expressed about "feminists" as extremist ideologues who make her feel guilty about erotic fantasies.

By doing so, they are losing the opportunity to headline what they think can and ought to be done about problems with which they are equally concerned. As it is, what comes across, foregrounded, is the word "censorship". I'm reminded of the

"gentleman dining at Crewe,  
Who found a large mouse in his stew,  
Said the waiter, Don't shout  
And wave it about  
Or the rest will be wanting one too."

Thus, FAC's second fundamental mistake is that their very name advertises the case they oppose, giving "censorship" free publicity as the answer to the question at the heart of the complicated issue. What are FAC in favour of? No doubt it's in the small print, but it doesn't come across. The message that comes across is "You can't do anything because that would be censorship". So people decide they want something done, FAC have sent the message "therefore you must be in favour of censorship", and there's a recruit for their opponents. (The opposing Campaign Against Pornography, however, is exactly that -- their case tars all offensive sexual imagery as pornography.)

The third great mistake is that by doing both the above, the undercurrent of strong public concern that something ought to be done about degrading images which reflect exploitative attitudes towards women is not being harnessed towards any of the real changes that are needed. For instance, humanising streets, stations, and public spaces to reduce the sense of threat.

But, more fundamentally, it seems to me that basing the argument about what censorship does or doesn't mean solely in the hazy territory of sex and erotica is to base one's principles on quicksand. After all, it is not sex, or erotica, or nudity that we wishy-washy liberal types are worried about. What we want the guidelines to focus on are violence or force, truth in advertising (what has swooning sexy female to do with that brand of fags or booze or cars?), and sense of threat in public spaces. Equally, like Sherry, and no doubt Avedon Carol and others, I am just as concerned that there should be less censorship interference with dissenting political views and information, whether on political or sexual information and publication.

Nightly, we recently saw another arena of censorship. "Truth is the first casualty of war", as they say. News bulletins that were thirty minutes of video game commercials for high-tech aviation technology with high kill-potential. Official

press conferences reported deadpan the US and UK official military hand-outs, without questioning. Only when it came to news from Iraq were we insistently reminded that there was management of what journalists may see, hear and report. Except that The Guardian alone, keeping up its healthily agnostic stance, appended to some reports that tag we used to see from the old apartheid South Africa, "This report compiled under conditions of censorship". But as I noted last issue, in the Korean theatre where no official censorship apparatus operated, correspondents called for it to be introduced as preferable to an unaccountable, unpredictable system which boiled down to "Write what you like, and if we don't like it, you'll be shot."



## THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY?

Joseph Nicholas

As part of the preparation for our trip to Luxor in January, I finally read Paul Johnson's *The Civilisation Of Ancient Egypt*, purchased as long ago as 1976 but unopened since. It was like stepping back in time -- not to ancient Egypt, but to that odd period in the middle seventies when the Wilson/Callaghan Labour government finally lost its way and the Conservative opposition fell firmly into the clutch of monetarist ideologues. For the uninitiated, I should explain that Paul Johnson began life as a committed socialist and for a time edited the left-wing weekly magazine *New Statesman & Society* before undergoing some sort of Damascene conversion around 1970 and repudiating everything he'd believed up until then in favour of (you've guessed) monetarist ideology. Thus the conclusion of his book has to be read in the light of both his personal circumstances and the political changes of 1976:

"There was no freedom in the Egyptian state, and in the end its absence was fatal. In the course of the second millenium, Egyptians secured for themselves individual rights in eternity -- as opposed to those subsumed in the divine person of the pharaoh -- but they never won any rights on earth. Their attachment to *maat*, to the principle of order, hierarchy and submission, inhibited them. They were not only disciplined from above; in their hatred and fear of disorder, and of the anarchy they believed lay hidden in their own personalities, they imposed on themselves a degree of self-discipline which no culture can indefinitely survive. They refused to admit their individuality as earthlings and killed their own creative spirit. They sought safety, justice and spiritual equality in the collective and so forced themselves to move at its glacial pace. Inevitably, they fell behind in the human Olympiad. Egypt was a great Bronze Age power but it was already technically backward even during the glory of its Nineteenth Dynasty, and by the middle of the Twentieth it was a culture in rapid and manifest decline. Its ruling class might have restored its old energy and innovatory spirit if, during the first millenium, it had made possible the emergence of the fierce, creative individualism which, in the cities of Phoenicia and Greece, brought into existence new forms of commercial



enterprise and a middle class of traders and intellectuals. Such a new class for the first time offered a dynamic alternative to the repressive division of the archaic class structure -- into the rulers and the ruled. Egypt might have taken this way. Instead, it retreated into its past and reinforced the regulated collectivism of its society. Only the Greek merchant communities were granted the freedom to conduct their own affairs, and in time it was they, the minorities, who took over the country. Egypt finally entered the Iron Age not by its own efforts and as an independent state but as a helpless and leaderless colony. It is a sombre tale. But all civilisations are born to die. Those fortunate to live in one should study the past to learn from its errors, and with the wisdom of hindsight strive to keep at bay for a while the drifting sands of decay."

For pharaoh read Labour Party. For collectivism read collectivism. For Phoenicians and Greeks read Margaret Thatcher. For entering the Iron Age read the rebirth of Victorian values. For insightful reinterpretation of history read rolling about on the floor.

It was particularly instructive to read this nonsense in December 1990, the weeks following the final eclipse of Thatcherism with the departure of Thatcher herself. By then, Paul Johnson was writing deranged columns for the right-wing weekly *The Spectator*, lamenting the *putsch* that had seen off his heroine in terms that, had his readers not known this was the result of an election for the party leadership, might have led them to believe that she had been gunned down in cold blood in the chamber of the House of Commons itself. At which point we leave him....

You'll have guessed that I have little use for this sort of history, which instead of explaining what happened, and why, attempts to map portions of the present onto the past -- or vice versa -- in order to "prove" some spurious corollary. In some ways, this is a rather Marxist approach, not in the sense that it adopts Marx's notion that there are quasi-"scientific" laws which underlie the development of human societies and determine both their character and their fate, but in the sense that it presents the past as something endlessly recapitulated, in outline if not in detail. Well, no: the character of twentieth century Western civilisation is obviously so completely different from that of ancient Egypt that there's no theoretical overlap between them at all.

However, it is possible to identify certain trends which recur over the shorter term and which do provide the historian with a pattern into which events can be fitted. One example of this -- another book that I read last year -- is Howard Zinn's *A People's History Of The United States*. Here's a quote from his first chapter, setting out his ideological approach:

"My viewpoint, in telling the history of the United States, is different: that we must not accept the memory of states as our own. Nations are not communities and never have been. The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex. And in such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, as Albert Camus suggested, not to be on the side of the executioners.

"Thus, in that inevitable taking of sides which comes from selection and emphasis in history, I prefer to try to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, of the Civil War as seen by the New York Irish, of the Mexican War as seen by the deserting soldiers of Scott's army, of the rise of industrialism as seen by young women in the Lowell textile mills, of the Spanish-American War as seen by the Cubans, the conquest of the Philippines as seen by black soldiers on Luzon, the Gilded Age as seen by southern farmers, the First World War as seen by socialists, the Second World War as seen by pacifists, the New Deal as seen by blacks in Harlem, the postwar American empire as seen by peons in Latin America.

And so on, to the limited extent that any one person, however he or she strains, can 'see' history from the standpoint of others."

This is, in other words, a history from below, of groups and social movements rather than national leaders; an "unofficial" chronicle of the daily struggle of the people rather than the official portrait of the exploits of the nation, and one that is simultaneously thoroughly depressing and thoroughly uplifting -- a story of the ways in which the rights of trade unionists, feminists, socialists, pacifists, ethnic minorities, *et al* have been continually abridged and overruled by the courts to preserve the entrenched privileges of the political establishment, yet also a story of the ways in which generation after generation has fought doggedly on to achieve their goal of a more just society. The Farmers' Alliance, the Haymarket massacre, Eugene Debs, the Molly Maguires, Sacco and Vanzetti -- individually, they lost, but their collective legacy is enormous. Indeed, reading Zinn's book, one appreciates just how extensive the US's socialist tradition actually is. And how marginalised and even suppressed it is too, simply because of its omission from the official, national histories, which (as I argued in a letter in *Mimosa* 9) are written to reflect -- and thus present as an unchallengeable consensus -- the views of a wealthy, white male elite who in 1776 owned land and slaves and whose modern successors own oil wells and stock certificates.

*A People's History Of The United States* was published in 1980. Zinn thus denied himself the opportunity to comment on the lunacies of the Reagan administration and the eighties generally, and to assess how Reagan's domestic policies would have fitted into his overall pattern. With hindsight, however, one can see that they would have fitted admirably, bearing out the speculations in his concluding chapter: the continuing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a tiny economic elite, widening differentials in the social and political opportunities available to them and the rest of the US population, heightened levels of relative and absolute poverty, crime, homelessness and life expectancy, rising disaffection with and protests against the existing system and an active willingness to seek alternatives to it. And, too, continued attempts by the establishment to direct that dissatisfaction elsewhere, at Nicaragua or Grenada or the Lebanon or Iran or Libya or the Evil Empire or Commies generally or those wimpy whining Europeans or.... One of Zinn's recurring points, in fact, is that when class differentials become too obvious, and radical fervour too insistent, the establishment seeks to neutralise dissent by creating an external threat intended to enforce domestic unification against it in "the interests of the nation". He gives several instances: the war with Mexico in the 1840s, campaigns against the Indians, the war with Spain and subsequently against the Philippines in the 1890s, and of course the First and Second World Wars. But the strategy clearly failed in Vietnam, and instead inspired a number of popular, grass-roots initiatives which broke through the media-manufactured consensual veil to overtly challenge the power of the state. Thus -- as Zinn would doubtless have pointed out had his book been published a few years later -- the strategy has since been resorted to only when swift and (US) casualty-free victories can be guaranteed. Given this policy, it's not altogether surprising that the war on drugs -- or The War On Drugs, as the establishment prefers -- has been accorded so great a priority, elevated to such a stature; for here is something that can unite the nation without (apart from burning half the farms in Bolivia and then refusing to write off the international debt that forces the peasants to grow coca in the first place) requiring any overseas military intervention at all. And -- to jack the hype up to a wholly new level -- a cause that can be presented as threatening not just "national security" (a term meaningless to anyone but the establishment), but the very sanctity of the family itself!

(No, I haven't forgotten Iraq. That comes later.)

Howard Zinn's *A People's History Of The United States* is, perforce, a book that teaches us something new about the past, and shows (unlike Paul Johnson's *The Civilisation Of Ancient Egypt*) how it actually does relate to the present. Another tome that falls into this category -- I've been reading quite a lot of history lately -- is Paul Kennedy's celebrated *The Rise And Fall Of The Great Powers: Economic Change And Military Conflict From 1500 To 2000*, the book that has been causing US

diplomats and strategists of all shades of political opinion to clutch their heads in anguish and try to convince themselves that, just this once, they're going to buck the historical trend and keep the US at Number One.... Although, as the subtitle suggests, the focus of Kennedy's study is actually quite narrow -- it has no social or cultural perspective, and thus is unable to say anything about, for example, the cultural vitality demonstrated by Islam, presumably because this is something that's not statistically measurable -- his thesis is quite elegant and indeed perfectly encapsulated by the main title. From this perspective, the belief by some US politicians that they can defeat this historical cycle and maintain the US's global hegemony indefinitely is clearly not rooted in reality. On the evidence available, Kennedy suggests in his final chapter, the US has already embarked on the long decline to a position of power and influence commensurate with its actual geographical size and physical population, and -- given both the scale of global economic integration and the current importance of the US dollar to the global economy -- the challenge for future generations of US politicians will be to manage the decline in a manner that doesn't plunge the rest of the world into the turmoil of recession or even war.

*The Rise And Fall Of The Great Powers* was published in 1988. We all know what happened in 1989, decisively ending the Cold War and resetting the global agenda. Curiously, the extinction of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet economy appeared to have been foreseen by a US State Department consultant named Francis Fukuyama, who in the summer of 1989 published an article in the conservative US quarterly *The National Interest* musingly entitled "The End Of History?" which suggested that all major ideological conflicts were now at an end because most of the world either had already agreed or was in the process of agreeing that liberal democratic capitalism was the best way to organise global affairs, and in consequence humanity now faced an era of boredom in which arguments over ideas no longer existed and arguments over consumer goods took precedence.

Readers who suspect that this is a gross oversimplification of Fukuyama's argument should lay their suspicions to rest. It's a simple argument to start with, and the above summary omits nothing. That's all there is because that's all there is.

Fukuyama's article, the brain-numbing witlessness of its thesis notwithstanding, was later fallen upon with cries of glee by right-wing triumphalists who, no doubt driven slightly beserk by alleged Western "victory" in the Cold War, needed some rudimentary philosophical justification for their gloating. After all, Fukuyama even quoted Hegel's belief that history would culminate in an absolute moment in which a final, rational form of society and state became victorious. Unfortunately, as some critics swiftly pointed out, Hegel never said anything of the kind; he argued that history is a continuous process in which the synthesis of the preceding stage is the thesis of the present one, thus setting in motion an endless dialectical cycle (an argument that heavily influenced the early Marx). Perhaps stung by this and other criticism, Fukuyama claimed that he hadn't really intended his article to be taken so seriously: it was just a few ideas he'd been knocking around, the bit about boredom eclipsing everything was certainly a joke, blah blah blah.... However, these evasions promptly fell apart when on 7 September 1990 *The Guardian* published a transcript of a speech he'd given the day before entitled "Forget Iraq -- History Is Dead".

Provocative? Only by virtue of his appropriation of the Humpty Dumpty school of language in which words mean whatever their author wants them to:

"My definition of history, of course, is a special one, and can best be understood as the history of ideas, particularly about the just organisation of our social and political life. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the throwing over of communism by the people of Eastern Europe only confirms my view that liberal democracy is the only legitimate ideology left in the world. Iraq's challenge is not that of a higher idea: indeed it is not based on an idea at all, but simply reflects the age-old impulse of grabbing someone else's land and money.

"In the past generation, there have been two developments of truly world historical significance. The first is the emergence of liberal democracy as the

only universalistic ideology left in the world; and the second is the victory of market principles of economic organisation. These two revolutions are closely connected with each other, and represent a larger, secular pattern of evolution."

Well. Gosh. I'm sure the peasant inhabitants of, let's say, Zaire or Pakistan or Thailand must be *jolly pleased* that their systematic exploitation by the rich West in the name of global capitalism is contributing to the growth and legitimation of liberal democracy throughout the world, and the fact that they haven't got anything of the kind is obviously just an oversight that will be corrected in the fullness of time. Or maybe not, since in the original article Fukuyama dismissed non-Western cultures with the words: "For our purposes, it matters very little what strange thoughts occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso", which more than any other single remark confirms that he hasn't the slightest clue about the real world beyond the United States, or even the State Department. Confucius? Mohammed? Marx? Patrice Lumumba? Well, they didn't think like liberal democratic capitalists, so they don't count. But at the same time, just to demonstrate the vast gulf of incomprehension that exists between him and everyone else, the transcript of Fukuyama's speech shows that he wants them all to be liberal democratic capitalists anyway. Explaining that liberal democracies have never fought against each other, but only against non-liberal democracies or other "undemocratic states", by reference to Kant's essay, *Perpetual Peace* -- which argued that liberal states are infused with a certain bourgeois and commercial spirit to which war is foreign, and that democratic principles of popular sovereignty make it difficult for one liberal state to attack another whose government it regards as legitimate -- he says of the then-impending Gulf war:

"As we speak the liberal democratic US and the liberal democratic UK are in the process of piling up a mighty military machine in Saudi Arabia to confront Iraq, trying in effect to oust a bunch of 16th century Italian *condottieri* in order to protect the domains of a 14th century ecclesiastical family. But this in a way just proves my point: had Iraq and Kuwait both been modern societies with modern democratic institutions, the original invasion would most likely never have occurred in the first place, any more than the United States would consider occupying Japan a second time to assure itself a steady supply of Nissans and Toyotas."

Thus the rest of the world is to be measured by the example of the United States, and since the rest of the world is assumed to want to be like the United States there can't possibly be any other example anyway. This proves things.

It proves, too, that Fukuyama is not beyond perpetrating deliberate misrepresentations of recent history on the way to his fatuous explanation of the causes of the Gulf war. Here's another quote from the same speech:

"The East Asian experience completely debunks leftist views like *dependencia* theory in Latin America, which blame the Third World's failure to grow on the international capitalist system. Indeed, there is a broad recognition taking root in Latin America that this region's economic problems do not stem from capitalism but rather from the lack of capitalism there. There is now a unique conjunction of leaders in Latin America -- President Menem in Argentina, President Collor in Brazil, and President Salinas in Mexico -- all of whom have committed themselves to free market principles and have begun the task of freeing their economies from the legacy of statism and protectionism."

A more critical reader of the East Asian experience might point out that the success of such nations as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore has depended not on opening their economies to foreign competition but on a statist partnership between government and industry to maintain control of key sectors of the economy and to establish an overall strategy for industrial R & D -- coupled, in South Korea and Taiwan, to artificially long hours and low wages to boost productivity. But then Fukuyama has presumably never heard of Japan's MITI.... Too, a more critical reader of the Latin American experience might suggest that far from a lack of capitalism,

the region's economic problems have stemmed from an excess of it, and in particular from the way in which the international banking system has spent the past twenty years plundering its wealth in the name of foreign debt, extracting far more in interest than was ever loaned in the first place. Since the onset of the debt crisis in 1982, in fact, a net (i.e., over and above capital repayments) US\$220 billion has been exported from South to North, reducing investment by 30 percent and taking the total number of people in Latin America who live below the poverty line to an astonishing 183 million, or 44 percent of the region's population. On the other hand, what ideologue has ever let facts stand in the way of a theory?

Fukuyama's view of Latin American economic development is indirectly refuted by Latin American writer Carlos Fuentes, writing in the 1990 *World Media Project*:

"The real improvements in Latin America were attained by left-wing movements, either revolutionary or evolutionary, within or without political power, through actions by countries or civilian societies. It took Battle in Uruguay, the Frente Popular in Chile, Cardenas in Mexico, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, as well as unions, agricultural co-operatives, neighbourhood associations, intellectuals, women and deaths, many, many deaths, to achieve the basic infrastructure, schools and hospitals, protection of the workforce and social security. All this came from the left and only thanks to the left.

"Today, the programmes and activities of the left in Latin America are more important than before. We do not have to look in the rear-view mirror at the Kremlin's signals. The Americans do not have the communist excuse any more to use as a reason for intervention. Civilian society acts dynamically, overtaking traditional political parties and even national states. A hitherto unknown situation is starting to emerge in Latin America. Society is organised and manifests itself from the bottom upwards and from the periphery to the centre. .... However, if this new dynamic is to be maintained, it cannot reconcile itself with the oldest burden of our post-colonial economy: the mythology of the free market, according to which wealth accumulated at the top will trickle down to the bottom. This has never happened, not in Mexico or in Argentina, not in Britain or in the US. A prickly-pear Reaganism will only make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

"The democratic solution cannot be found in Marxism or Reaganism, but in what the Peruvian Julio Ortega calls radical democracy, a constant movement towards the socialisation of public life. .... Only the left can prevent capitalism triumphing over us -- with its authoritarianism and abuse and its lack of critical limits -- and perpetuating our earthly sufferings. And only the left can avoid a populist state, bureaucratic, spendthrift and unproductive, suffocating from the highest level of civilian society's initiatives. Neither savage capitalism nor populist bureaucracy, but a left increasingly identified with civilian society and its action from the bottom upwards, including that real infrastructure that has always been -- at last we recognise it -- the cultural continuity of Latin America."

But not a cultural continuity recognised by Fukuyama, who has only his own to go on and is clearly contemptuous of others. Thus, attempting to elaborate a global schema for a global future, he demonstrates only the narrowness of the base from which he's proceeding. His world view, in fact, is exactly what one would expect of someone who was born and has grown up (he's now 36) in a world determined by the bipolarities of the US/USSR superpower confrontation: the constant which has underlain international relations for the past forty-five years and which leads those who attempt to define and manipulate these relations to perceive them as a game in which there are only two real players, with all other participants merely pawns or surrogates of one or the other. For Fukuyama, there are only two competing ideologies; thus, if communism "loses" and liberal democratic capitalism "wins", then it wins absolutely, because nothing else can have the leading role and because it's assumed that everyone in the winning camp subscribes to it, the alternative histories provided by such as Howard Zinn notwithstanding. (Indeed, Fukuyama probably doesn't even realise that the US has a socialist history.) From this limited perspective, history does indeed "end".

Bluntly, Fukuyama is as trapped in his world view as people of the Age of Faith were in theirs. The Age of Faith was a medieval European era which reached its apogee in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and is chiefly remembered for the magnificence of the cathedrals it built, although in visiting those cathedrals today we see them only as pieces of architecture and not as the literal expressions of the relationship between God and the world that they were to the people of the era. In the gothic masonry of Rheims and Chartres, Winchester and Ely, Cologne and Milan was encapsulated not simply the stories of the Old and New Testaments but the symbolic structure of the entire physical world, which was believed not only to proceed from and be integral with the mind of God but also a world in which nothing could happen unless he had first sanctioned it. It was a world in which everything was known and nothing was new -- and a world that was irrevocably destroyed by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, the first voyages to Africa financed by Prince Henry the Navigator, and Columbus's journey to the New World in 1492. It is a world view that is now utterly lost to us -- but it bears comparison with Fukuyama's world view because of the absolute certainties they both offer. One gives us original sin and Christian salvation; the other liberal democratic capitalism; and neither can entertain an alternative explanation.

It's a small step from the "victory" of liberal democratic capitalism in the Cold War to the notion of a "New World Order" that an increasing number of Western politicians are now discussing. Although Fukuyama doesn't use the term, his speech doubtless provided the philosophical justification they sought:

"We have to get used to a world bifurcated not along East-West lines, but into what I have called a post-historical and an historical part. Each part will play by completely different rules: economics will dominate the former, while traditional measures of military power will reign in the latter. These two world will come into collision along several points of tangency: oil is one, terrorism is another, and the third is refugees. Indeed, the movement of large populations fleeing countries that are poor to ones that are rich and secure will constitute one of the chief forms of global interdependence in the years to come.

"Post-historical countries like the US and UK will continue to have to play power politics when dealing with a region like the Middle East, many of whose states have only recently been dragged, kicking and screaming, into the 16th century."

In that final paragraph is perhaps the clearest statement yet of what the so-called "New World Order" really means: business as before, under another name. The East-West superpower confrontation of the Cold War helped the US in particular justify its interventions in the Third World, under the flag of "freedom" or "private enterprise", but with the removal of that ideological fig-leaf some other justification must be found instead. Such as oil. Which brings us, as promised, to Iraq, and to a war that was quite clearly the product of a desire to return to the *status quo ante* Vietnam; for the US to carry on as it had in the thirty years from 1945 to 1975, reinforced by the recognition that it is now the world's only superpower, able to lord it over whoever it likes in the name of whatever it wants. (As the playwright Harold Pinter put it in *The Observer* on 3 February 1991, the US "is asserting what it conceives to be its spiritual destiny: 'I am God; get out of my fucking way'." He added that the stink of this behaviour will be with us forever.) Yet the war against Iraq predates even 1945, and was imperialist in the classical sense: it was essentially an old-fashioned nineteenth century colonial war, waged with the object of removing one client dictator perceived by his masters to have risen above his station and needing to be replaced with another, more pliant thug who will do as he's told and repress the people as before. "The war has been a rich source of instruction to the south," commented Jeremy Seabrook in *New Statesman & Society* for 15 February 1991. "It has taught people that if there was little to celebrate in the perpetuation of the bipolar world, there is for them even less to be gained by its extinction. Now that it is no longer possible to play one superpower against another, no one needs to profess a competitive concern for the poor".

Thus, to a certain extent, history does repeat itself. Many of the frontier problems



of the Middle East stem from the nineteen-twenties, and from the way Britain and France abandoned their wartime promises to the Arabs and carved up the post-Ottoman empire to suit themselves. The war against Iraq was fought partly to preserve those borders, and partly, I suspect (despite promises to the contrary) to try to resolve the problems by redrawing them. I need hardly point out that this will solve nothing -- because it is not up to Britain and the US to determine what other nations' borders should be; this is a matter entirely for the nations themselves to decide, free from continuous Western meddling.

Yet if history does repeat itself then even at this horrendous juncture, when the bright hopes of late 1989 seem to have been all but smothered, it is nevertheless the case that despite US politicians' attempts to deny the truth of Paul Kennedy's thesis, the US's global hegemony is drawing to an end. Regardless of the long-term outcome of the Gulf war, its 1992 budget projects cuts of up to a third in military expenditure and the diversion of funds into the civilian sector to repair the hideous domestic legacy of "military Keynesianism": the permanent war economy that was supposed to bring continuous prosperity but has instead handed global leadership to others. Like other empires before it, the US is now suffering from what Kennedy identified as "imperial overstretch" -- too much to do and insufficient resources with which to do it -- and matters have gone too far for the decay to be reversed. There seems little doubt that -- not next year or the year after, and perhaps not for another ten or twenty years -- US power and influence will eventually fade, and a new polity (and perhaps a new cultural paradigm) eventually arise to replace it.

In this Paul Johnson is correct: all civilisations are born to die. We can only hope that what successors we may have do learn something from the errors of our history.

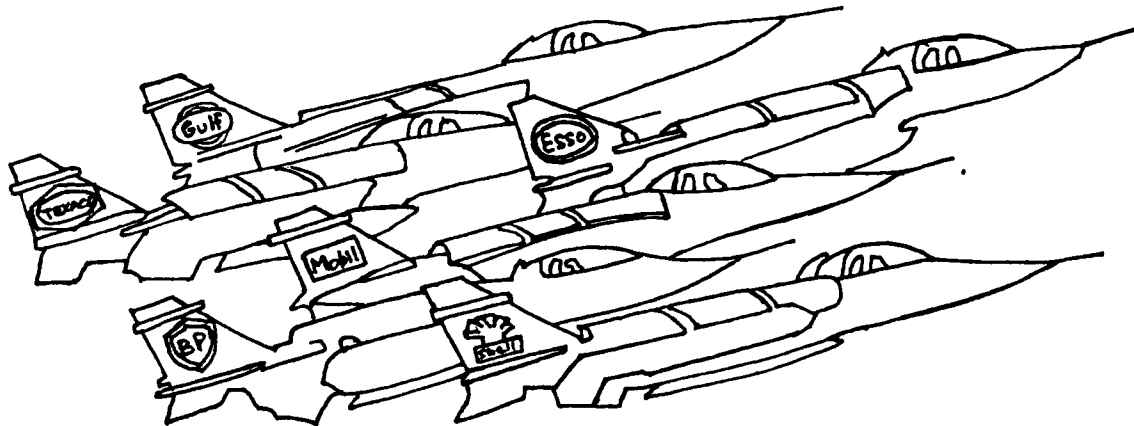
Sound bites following the first air raids on Iraq:

"It was exactly like the movies!" -- a US fighter pilot.

"I feel like a young athlete after his first football match!" -- another US fighter pilot.

"Baghdad was lit up like a Christmas tree. It was tremendous! I haven't seen anything like it since a Fourth of July party years and years ago!" -- yet another US fighter pilot.

"I was gung-ho the whole way. It was kinda neat!" -- a different US fighter pilot.



Poking fun at Stalinists has always been easy; now, with the collapse of Stalinist systems just about everywhere but North Korea, it's easier still. Even the Soviet Union, birthplace of the cult, has abandoned it, leaving its unreconstructed British adherents virtually alone in the world, with no one to turn to for support.

Although if they don't fancy embracing the hero-worship that passes for communism in North Korea they could always join the Conservative Party, which during last November's tussle for the leadership showed itself to be just as slavish and as authoritarian as any Stalinist sect. Grovelling loyalty for Margaret Thatcher, venomous hatred of those who voted against her (most manifest in the attempts to deselect those MPs who had led the coup), ludicrous praise of her supposed abilities and achievements....just like Ceaucescu's Romania, in fact.

# LETTER COLUMN

*Edited by Joseph Nicholas*

*The previous issue's preponderance of letters over articles evidently paid off as we'd hoped, since we have far fewer responses from which to choose this time. Mind you, everyone seems to be writing longer letters than before....and my responses are getting longer, too. But let's first flash back to a few late comments on "Snapshots Of The Soviets" in FTT 8, beginning with our Intourist guide for that trip, who was sent that article plus copies of articles on Soviet history from History Today:*

Lena Mostachova  
Moscow

"The articles from *History Today* were quite interesting since we don't know much history, or sometimes we know only one side of the events, and for the true picture we have to know the other side. As for your article -- I nearly died laughing -- so true, so funny and so typically English. I liked it very much. I wish you could come and see the life of the country now, and describe events here. I'm afraid that there would be too much black humour -- as you probably know, there have been many drastic changes in our country since you left. Our media is busy revealing blank spots in our history, and our dissident writers' books are finally being published. So please send more articles on Soviet history if you can."

Alexander Vasilkovsky  
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Apt 13  
252001, Kiev-1  
Ukraine, USSR

"'Snapshots Of The Soviets' was most interesting, although now somewhat outdated. But it was written in the manner of Western tourists who visit the USSR and view it with unprejudiced eyes. Yes, there are many things that will seem incomprehensible and absurd to you, but this has been our way of life under 70 years of communist rule. Uzbek opera is a bright example of these strange things. The country and its people have developed not according to religious or moral or economic laws, but according to political dogmas many of which are now outdated or even wrong. But several years ago our leaders acknowledged the primacy of human rights over class interests, and the development of democracy became possible. At last those leaders realised that humanity is not divisible into social systems, as is shown by the Gulf crisis. At the time of writing, five days remain before the UN deadline, but who wants this war?

"Awful things are happening not only in foreign but also internal affairs. Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation is an alarm bell for us all. The reactionary forces are regrouping and gathering their strength, and assuming they have many supporters in the army and the KGB, anything can happen during the coming months. The situation in the Ukraine is terrible -- inter-denominational conflicts, the collapse of the consumers' market, an increasing crime rate, the lingering consequences of Chernobyl and other ecological problems, shortages of fuel, and communists still in power at all levels. And the worst problem is that Ukraine has no leader. Russia has Yeltsin, the Baltic nations have their leaders as well, Armenia and Georgia recently elected their new presidents with mass support, but our nation has no true leader despite our proclaimed sovereignty.

"As Gregory Benford said in *FTT 10*, the system is unreformable. Now, after the shooting in Lithuania and Latvia, you have to agree with him. Were all those pretty words spoken during the past few years just words? My English vocabulary isn't rich enough to describe my feelings about recent events in the Baltic states, but I think: Who's next? War in the Gulf seems distant and comparatively less dangerous. Those who compare Gorbachev's actions with Hussein's are not so unreal. You may have heard of demonstrations under slogans like 'Gorby, pass your Nobel Prize on to Saddam Hussein!', or the portraits of Hussein with the words 'Candidate for Nobel Peace Prize 1991'. What was done is unforgivable. Will the system rot and decay in future with no radical changes? The only solution is to set free those nations which want to leave. The idea of the Soviet Union as we know it is exhausted. Communist power in a unitary state has resulted in poverty and degradation. You visited the USSR in a comparably safe period, when most people had some hopes for the future. Now there is only tiredness and frustration. And a lot of fear.

"On 20 January I participated in a demonstration devoted to a Day of Independence and Integrity of the Ukraine. (Independence was proclaimed in 1918, and

the western Ukraine united with the main part on the same day in 1919.) It was also a demonstration of solidarity with Lithuania and its urge for freedom. Most speakers were against the signing of a new Union Treaty, because remaining under Union (i.e. communist) rule will only get more blood and no improvement in the economic situation. Why are other Eastern European countries, such as Poland, already on their way to prosperity? A national bank and finance system, a national currency, an independent economy, their own internal and foreign policies -- all has helped those nations to escape the fabled 'hand of Moscow'. Not all the people of Ukraine have realised this yet, but they are slowly moving towards it. Hope we're not too late...

"And those talks about 'the socialist choice'.... A single party made the choice many years ago for the whole nation, and the nation had to pay for it with about 100 million lives. Yes, those ideals -- *liberté, égalité, fraternité* -- are good, and no sane person can argue against them. But were those ideals ever embodied in this system? Never. Those shy attempts to give this system a human face were thrown aside when its existence became endangered. Most of the nations of the world have achieved prosperity without such social experimenting as here, although they may not be classically capitalist. Their social progress has produced a new society, very different from classical capitalism, with many inbuilt socialist features, though various countries may differ greatly. Can you argue with this?"

*Yes, I can. Sovereignty is not necessarily a precondition for prosperity, and Poland certainly isn't on the way to it -- as the joke has it, there used to be nothing in the shops for people to buy, but now the shops are full and people can't afford a thing. In its rush towards the market, Poland is impoverishing itself by its ready embrace of the same IMF-dictated "solutions" that since 1945 have ruined the nations of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa: increased prices for basic goods, elimination of socially necessary spending on health, education and housing, replacement of production for local needs by production for export, and the sale of key sectors of the national economy into foreign control. If the rest of Eastern Europe follows this pattern, it will be transformed into source of cheap labour and cheap materials for Western Europe; another South East Asia, with lower transport costs.*

*Nor have most of the nations of the world achieved prosperity, and those which have -- under capitalism or otherwise -- have done so only by exploiting the others. Since 1945, in fact, the differentials between the rich nations of the developed West and everyone else have increased both relatively and absolutely. This is hardly surprising: organisations such as GATT, the IMF, the World Bank and the Group of Seven were established expressly to substitute a subtler economic regulation of global affairs for overt pre-Second World War colonialist rule, and thus perpetuate its systematic exploitation and impoverishment of the bulk of the world's population. Bluntly, global capitalism can't possibly deliver the maximum benefit to the maximum number, as its adherents claim, because that would conflict with its inbuilt drive to acquisition and control. The much-touted "New World Order" won't alter this system, and anyone who wants to join it should be damn clear about the level at which they'll enter. Clue: not at the top...*

*Mind you, I don't dispute that Stalinism has done horrendous and possibly terminal damage to socialist ideals; but as his legacy fades they might re-emerge into the light. After all, they long predate Karl Marx: "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?" said Essex priest John Ball, one of the leaders of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, and the collapse of so-called "actually existing socialism" can hardly negate this centuries-old quest for a more just social order.*

*The following letter was written in July last year, which accounts for what are now some slightly dated references to then-current events:*

Alexis Gilliland  
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Arlington  
Virginia 22204, USA

"There is nothing like going to see with one's own eyes, especially when the whole system is wavering on the edge of reformation, deconstruction or other radical changes.

"In 1945, when General Eisenhower met Marshal Zhukov, Zhukov told him: 'Communism is superior to capitalism, because communism is founded on idealism and capitalism is based on greed'. Good old Ike was then at a loss for words, and even when he wrote his memoirs all he could say was that Zhukov had a point. A rebuttal? Capitalism and communism are both founded on idealism, but if capitalism is based on greed then communism is based on

envy, so they have each chosen their fundamental deadly sin and are for all practical purposes morally equivalent. What remains is how the two systems performed, how they behaved towards their people and what they achieved. On all counts, capitalism (evil as we know it to be) makes a superior showing.

"You say that your 'own, rather radical guess is that as the United States slowly founders beneath the weight of its federal deficit...the Soviet Union is set for a boom (with the aid of foreign capital lured by perestroika, the New Economic Policy II, and global warming)'. Even the beneficiaries of your optimism are sceptical, and I suspect that if you weren't still hoping for the judgement of history to ratify your radical past, you might have guessed a little more moderately.

"If the USA founders it will not be to the benefit of the USSR but to the more efficient capitalist societies of Germany and Japan. Certainly the deficit and the collapse of communism is leading us to downgrade our role in world affairs, but I wouldn't trade our problems for Russia's any day. The future of the USSR is more problematical. After 70 years, the masses are judging Marxist-Leninist theory by its fruits, which as you saw are meagre, polluted and bitter. Russian coal-miners are striking because there is nothing for them to buy with their 'pay'. Following Lithuania's lead, the Russian SSR has declared its independence, and so has the Ukrainian SSR, which blames the affliction of Chernobyl on Moscow. Given that the Ukrainians have more grievances against the Russians than the Irish against the English, it is likely that the centre will not hold.

"You mentioned foreign aid. Germany has offered billions as a price to get the USSR out of the country, by building housing for the half-million troops stationed in the former GDR so they will have somewhere to go. The plan is not to give the money to communist functionaries, but go into selected Russian cities with German workers and build houses wholesale. This sort of development has been deferred for too long, and the treasures of Siberia will have to wait on the comfort of the people. A boom? Probably not, and almost certainly not for any regime headed by communists."

*As Alexander Vasilkovsky points out, my speculations have been overtaken by events. But then I never suggested that the USSR would be an automatic beneficiary of the economic decline of the USA; I simply contrasted the likely future performance of them both, and any additional interpretation of this is your own. My comments (to reiterate what I said to Greg Benford) related solely to the presence of exploitable mineral wealth in Siberia, and took no account of the economic system that would exploit them or how economic developments elsewhere might affect this. (Nor will their exploitation necessarily wait on the comfort of the Soviet people: as other resources are exhausted, Western pressure to develop them will intensify.) Your comments, however, seem to owe more to the bipolarity of the post-1945 world order, and the assumption it's fostered that what harms one side automatically helps the other because there are no other players, than to anything I actually said. "Bloc thinking" we in the non-aligned European peace movement call this logic; but it "leads only to blocked thinking", and now is surely the time to discard it.*

*In fact, I'm struck by the way you respond less to what I actually said in "Snapshots Of The Soviets" than to what you wish to believe I said. I wonder if this might not be attributable to an unconscious requirement for a frame in which to place my remarks -- the kind of frame I've previously cautioned people against looking for and then conjuring up when they can't find -- on the assumption that because I'm on the left everything I say must dovetail with some doctrinaire theory. Perhaps I should point out that the European Left abandoned the model of Soviet communism long ago and in fact has always been more diverse than its right-wing opponents have allowed. Spain's PSOE, Britain's Labour and Liberal Parties, Germany's SPD and Die Grünen, Italy's PDS (formerly the Eurocommunist PCI) and now, in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria's UDF, the left half of Czechoslovakia's Civic Forum, and Poland's Solidarnosc (although the problem with including these forces as part of the European Left is that some are moving rightwards so fast they may soon be indistinguishable from overseas branches of the Tory Party): pretending that this disparate collection of programmes and ideologies constitutes some monolithic block is simply daft.*

*I should also mention the various extra-parliamentary forces which either have no specific allegiance to or aren't represented by political parties, like the feminist movement, peace and environmental campaigns, lobbies for constitutional reform and animal rights; movements which are in some senses of but not necessarily on the left,*

and which strike me as clear expressions of widespread discontent with the existing system. Just as people in Eastern Europe have forsaken organised parties thanks to the intellectual corruption of "official" politics during the past 40 years, so people in Western Europe are abandoning political parties as agents of social change thanks to the unresponsiveness and ineffectiveness of the parliamentary system. But then if you're relying on the US media for your information about these social currents it's no wonder you're groping blindly; US newspapers and television can't report their own society's left wing accurately, so what hope have they of understanding anyone else's?

Alexis Gilliland                    "When you suggest that I may have been imputing some imaginary theoretical framework to you, that could well be the case. An alternate suggestion might be that your thoughts are following an old familiar pattern without you being fully conscious of it. In any event, I received an impression which I'm pleased to note you didn't intend to convey."

Oh, come on -- what "old familiar pattern"? This ridiculous pretence that everything I say is dictated by some hidden Marxist-Leninist agenda, your desperate search for a frame that doesn't exist, is both foolish and frustrating -- why not try reading what's actually written down on the page for a change?

Mention of Europe reminds me that there's a continuing debate over its future shape and organisation -- part, presumably, of the continuing debate over the so-called "New World Order". Here's a contribution from:

Mark Nelson                    "The tenth issue's cover was particularly good, and raises an interesting point. Should we cut defence spending, if so how quickly, and what should we do with any savings we make. While the end of the Cold War might not be a hoax, I see no *a priori* reason why we should make dramatic cuts in defence spending. I would prefer a gradual cut over the next decade. Events in Eastern Europe are moving at a rapid pace, and who can say what the political climate might be in a few years' time? And what role should we plan for our military forces in the next century? Obviously, an improvement in relations between east and west can lead to reductions in spending, and in the long term there will be sizeable reductions in our respective forces. But how do you propose to cut defence budgets? Is there a visible way to cut them back as quickly as you'd like? Cutting manpower can't be done without causing problems; consider those the Soviet Union is facing as its troops return from Eastern Europe. Cutting equipment can't be done until we've decided what we want our military to do in the future, and I don't like the idea of abandoning research while other countries continue theirs.

"History teaches us the lessons of disarming too fast when it appears safe. Events in the USSR are moving very fast; the union is obviously crumbling, and who can say what the position will be in a year's time. (Can we discount a military coup?) However, the most likely arena for conflict is probably the Middle East; can we really reduce our offensive capability when countries there are escalating theirs?

"Anyway, such is the pace of fanzine production that no sooner do I have a letter published elsewhere decrying the United Nations as a complete waste of time, as a body with no clout and no claws, than a crisis develops in the Gulf where for the first time in its existence it is showing some muscle. If we're to see an end to the massive forces in fortress Europe it's perhaps worth considering how the UN can be made an effective body. Perhaps a 'small but robust defence force against the unexpected' under its command is not too strange...."

Your initial opinion about the UN was the correct one -- it is useless, because it only has such power as its members choose to give it, and if they withhold their consent to General Assembly and Security Council proposals then it can do nothing. So matters are likely to remain for some time to come; in the present international political climate no nation will surrender sufficient of its national sovereignty to permit the UN to do more than pass resolutions and establish investigative missions. The UN's unanimity over Iraq was sustained solely because it was united behind the US, to suit US interests -- over the invasions of Grenada and Panama it was united against the US, which promptly vetoed the resolutions concerned and ensured that no more was heard of them -- and its exploitation as a cover for US actions was amply

demonstrated by the fact that the ground offensive started while the Security Council was still discussing the last-minute Soviet-sponsored peace bid. Forget the pious garbage about restoring democracy and ensuring that aggression doesn't pay; the war with Iraq was entirely about securing continued supplies of cheap oil for the developed West, and anyone who tells you otherwise is a lying hypocrite.

It's a small step from this to the demand for only gradual cutbacks in defence spending, since without all that military equipment the Western nations wouldn't be able to swagger around the globe putting down "threats" to the existing economic order. This, bluntly, is the real intent behind all talk of unknown political changes during the next ten years and the need for an out-of-area capability: a transparent attempt to maintain under another name the superpower-managed global bipolarity that characterised the Cold War era, and one doomed to fail as increasing numbers of people in the Third World perceive it for what it is: a means of perpetuating the current grossly unequal distribution of global resources. Indeed, last October US Secretary of State James Baker explicitly proposed the creation of a US-Soviet regime to run the world on the same hegemonic basis as before -- and if I was a citizen of the Third World I know exactly what I'd say to that.

Cautions that we don't know what might happen in the Middle East or the Soviet Union in future are quite unreal. If the Soviet Union is falling apart, then a military coup is unlikely to reverse the nationalist and ethnic rivalries now fragmenting it -- as upheavals in the Baltic and other republics demonstrate, attempts to reimpose authoritarian central control only increase the rate of fragmentation, not reduce it. And while it's true to say that Middle Eastern nations are increasing their military arsenals (mostly with equipment sold to them by the West), this is due entirely to deep-rooted regional rivalries driving the nations concerned to arm themselves against each other, not because they wish to attack us.

Military spending can be cut and forces demobilised in a relatively short time. Comparisons with the demobilisation of Soviet forces ignore the fact that this is taking place in a collapsing economy which can't provide alternative employment; in other words, there's no comparison at all. By contrast, demobilised soldiers here would have plenty to do, and the money diverted from the purchase of weapons could be spent on more beneficial and constructive domestic programmes, such as housing, transport, education, and pollution control. Claims that this is impossible ignore the clear historic precedent for precisely such a programme of social reconstruction: the mass demobilisation that followed the Second World War. Arguments that we'd lose a research lead over other nations ignore the fact that the only customer for military research is the military, and that the most cost-effective way to develop civilian goods is by civilian R & D rather than by dreaming up exotic new ways to kill people.

Mark Nelson

"On reflection, I think that my initial thoughts about the UN were correct. Even if individual states were willing to transfer some sovereignty to the UN (making it more effective) I'd have to oppose this on principle, since centralisation of power into such a bureaucracy wouldn't mean that global problems were dealt with more efficiently, and would reduce the ability of individual states to respond. So the UN should remain a talking shop with little political power.

"There are comparisons between the UN and the EC, however. The EC has far more real power than the UN and look what a mess it's made of (say) European agriculture. That people want it to have more power is amazing. It could be argued that the average British voter won't lose any real power if we transfer policy-making to the EC since they have little direct influence anyway. However, I wouldn't support such a view since at least British politicians are generally working to improve conditions in Britain, while European politicians wouldn't have the same aims."

Comparisons between the UN and the EC are difficult, since they were established at different times to do different things in different ways. The UN arose from the idealism and euphoria that briefly obtained at the end of the Second World War, to regulate global affairs by (it was hoped) eventually taking control of its members' foreign and defence policies and being thereby transformed into a world government; whereas the EC grew out of the Marshall Plan, NATO and the OECD to integrate the economies of Western Europe and thereby erase its long-standing rivalries. Judged by how they've fulfilled their original aims, the EC has been spectacularly successful



while the UN has been a complete failure -- probably because in their quest for the ultimate goal of world government the UN's founders tried to leapfrog the essential, regional first step that the EC represents. The current drive to transform the EC arises from different criteria than those which underlay the original Treaty of Rome, namely the need to create a trading bloc of a size sufficient to compete with other nascent trading blocs such as North America and Japan/South East Asia/Australasia. The democratisation of the EC, to prevent its domination and control by an elite of economic oligarchs, is an urgent necessity, and for British politicians of left and right to bleat about threats to parliamentary sovereignty and whether the currency has the queen's head on it reveals a stunning provincialism and lack of vision. Let's go further: the condemnatory bleating of those same politicians that the EC's lack of unanimity over Iraq "proves" that it can never have a common defence policy is myopic to the point of stupidity. For the past forty years, British politicians have deluded themselves that the so-called "special relationship" with the USA makes Britain a world power and that Europe is irrelevant; even now they seriously believe that the US troops withdrawn from Europe will return, and that NATO will carry on as before. Such fatuity would try the patience of a ten-year-old.

Bloody hell, my responses are taking up more room than the letters. Here's someone who also wants to spend lots of money, but on something else:

Chuck Harris  
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Daventry  
Northants NN11 5EB

"I'm pleased that Harrys Andruschak and Warner gave their views about roads and transport too, although I don't know what happened to the rest of your readers. I guess that now than more than half the population owns or has access to a car most of them agreed with what I had to say --

that we need a lot more roads and a lot less pissing about with bicycle buffs, train spotters and scenery fandom. People want cars, they want the roads to drive them on, and they're willing to pay whatever it costs to get them.

"America? I can tell you that Amtrak is not the answer. It serves very few towns indeed in the whole of California. Their trains are oriented more to tourists than basic transport. You can ride *The Zephyr*, *The Desert Wind*, *The Southwest Chief*, *The Sunset Limited*, and *The Texas Eagle*, and they are all memorable and marvellous, but there is no network, no web of local commuter services like we have in the South of England. Further, there's little they can do to upgrade their services apart from building a whole new infrastructure. The small amount of track they own is in such bad condition that speeds have to be kept down to less than 40 miles per hour, and it will cost a lot more than 15 cents a gallon on petrol to make much improvement. Any improvements to Amtrak will have about as much effect on Californian transport problems as those cute paddle steamers that chug up and down the Mississippi.

"Solutions? London is finally taking the first hesitant steps with a red route that bans loading and unloading and no stopping whatever during working hours, but that won't be near enough. Eventually I expect there will be free tube trains on the Inner Circle, shuttle buses from perimeter-based car parks, a total ban on diplomatic cars with CD plates stopping anywhere outside a car park, mandatory loss of driving licences for all traffic offences, and the resiting of government offices and large private concerns away from grid-locked cities. And -- buggar the expense -- a ten-lane highway carved through the town just like the one outside our hotel in Seattle."

Every one of our readers who didn't speak out about transport must therefore support you, eh? I might just as well claim their silence as support for us -- but the whole presumption is so arrogant that you're better off not making it in the first place.

Much of your letter spends its force on something that hasn't hitherto been mentioned -- the deficiencies of Amtrak -- to attack the editors for subjects raised by others -- Californian transport problems. Amtrak doesn't have the same commuter structure as British Rail since the latter was built from the outset principally for passenger use while the former was built mainly for freight. Most of its passenger services thus cater for tourists rather than businessmen or commuters, but that hardly prevents separate investment in dedicated suburban services to relieve road traffic congestion -- the point Harry Andruschak was making, and which you avoid.

It's interesting, however, that you conclude with some radical proposals for excluding private cars from city centres and providing free or heavily subsidised public transport there instead, since this is what many urban planners are now edging

towards. (Although your desire to relocate major offices elsewhere would negate these reforms by removing the need to travel into London.) Yet these proposals sit oddly with your earlier claim that people want cars and are willing to pay for them since one can't simultaneously restrict car use and cater for unlimited demand, for various geographical, political, environmental, social and medical reasons which you continue to ignore -- but then I daresay you have to, for to admit that cars do pollute the atmosphere, consume scarce resources, and kill 5000 people a year in the UK alone would completely undermine your cars-are-wonderful theme. Frankly, I think you've spent so much of your life immured in "car culture", and have unconsciously absorbed so many of its values, that you're now unable to assimilate any information which contradicts its world view. Such data (this is basic sociology) emanates from without: therefore it is deviant: therefore it must be ignored, denied, suppressed.

Here's another first-hand report on recent Californian transport problems:

Robert Lichtman

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Glen Ellen

California 95442, USA

"Only 18 million cars in Britain? (Editorial note: one for every three people.) There are more in California and if we didn't have a strong breeze through here every now and then the air would taste like London's or Moscow's even out here in Glen Ellen. The state's voters elected to

double the state gasoline tax over the next five years starting with a five cent increase on 1 August 1990, and an increased portion of the take will go to fund public transport projects. In Los Angeles, in July, a 30-mile rail line opened between the downtowns of Los Angeles and Long Beach, a major port city. Ridership the first week was triple the projected amounts, surprising everyone. I wish I could use my car less, but living this far out means I'm pretty dependent on it. I can't even commute to work with existing levels of public transport because even if I took the earliest bus in the morning (which would mean getting up an hour earlier than I do) the best connections would get me to work half an hour late. I'd be on buses two hours each way a day for a journey that takes me an hour total daily by car.

"I'd support more motorways in Britain to get more traffic off those 'lovely quaintness and bosky byways' of which Chuck speaks if that's all it would do. As Britain can observe from US experience, building more roads tends to create more traffic. Britain has a marvellous public transport system that could readily be expanded to cover even more than it does with electric feeder buses doing short runs from more obscure villages to rail stations. I'd like to see the evolution of societies with no private ownership of cars, where if one needs a vehicle for a special purpose one rents it from an agency. Vehicle rental establishments would have uniform rates and be regulated like a public utility, allowed to make a certain profit but not an excessive one.

"I loved your point in 'Snapshots Of The Soviets' about the Boy Scouts *vis-a-vis* the Young Pioneers. The covertness of the militarism in the Boy Scouts turned me off them as a child, and I never encouraged any of my four boys to participate and said somewhat disparaging things about the organisation when some of them had little flitters of interest. When very young myself, I never owned toy soldiers (or the awful US trio of cowboys, cavalry and indians) but did have a lot of Lincoln Logs, many toy cars and trucks, and various plastic and rubber monsters. despite growing up in a period when the US had the draft, I never let it get me. I was forced to take ROTC for several semesters at the University of California, but I used to substitute peace buttons for brass, used spray on my shoes instead of endless anal spit polishing, once took apart a rifle on exam but refused to put it back together and left it there in a heap on the table, which I stirred before walking off, and generally had a bad attitude. I won't go into the story of my physical exam day at the induction centre in Oakland in 1965 and all that led up to it.

"On the point of maintaining historic buildings, I agree with Judith that it's better to keep them up so that future generations will have the opportunity to experience them too. For those who want to experience change and decay, there are plenty of decaying sections in practically any city in the world. The unhistoric buildings tell the true stories, while the historic buildings demonstrate the previous existence of better times, perhaps in a fashion holding out a promise of hope against a sometimes bleak present-day reality."

I disagree. Firstly, all old buildings have some history regardless of their state of

preservation; and secondly, to present the past as some sort of lost golden age is to falsify it. History is composed of the good as well as the bad; you have to take it all, not select parts of it. That, you may recall, is what I was arguing against in "Forward Into The Past" in FTT 7 -- and here to take me up on my criticisms of the National Trust is:

Don Fitch  
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Covina  
California 91722, USA

"A brief conversation at Corflu 7 helped me understand better why you disapprove of the British National Trust emphasis on old country houses (the lifestyle they represent idealises the institutionalised repression of the socio-economic lower class), though I can't understand why you seem to be surprised by it. Our house and garden magazines and Sunday newspaper supplements continually feature homes and estates which 95 percent of the readers will never be able to afford, and which most of them will probably never be invited into. Spending a few dollars for a couple of hours of dream fulfilment seems to be on a par with going to see movies depicting upper-crust life during the Depression. I'd guess that these houses have considerable drawing power, and that the Trust needs (or wants) all the admission money it can get.

"The US National Trust for Historic Preservation has few such places, for multiple reasons. The closest equivalent we have to the British aristocracy is a few Old-Wealth families; if they fall on hard times, or want to divest themselves of the family estate, there are always New Wealth people anxious to buy their way into the social status such places entail. Wealth, here, is almost always from business rather than from ancient landholdings, and business money usually leads to considerable political influence; tax laws have been so constructed that the family manor house can be owned by the family corporation, and thus not be subject to inheritance taxes.

"The US National Trust owns very few properties outright; it operates by leverage, working out deals whereby old places can be preserved in co-operation with local organisations. It provides the expertise for getting buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, setting up Historic Districts, or otherwise manipulating technicalities so that the owners find it difficult or impossible to make gross exterior changes to the building, or so that they can get tax or loan breaks if they preserve or restore the place. Certainly the Trust and the government are not (here) in league to glorify a particular social caste; in fact they're usually at loggerheads. Tearing the old place down and developing the area promises more tax revenues for the government than a few tourists would.

"Lacking the 'glorious' country houses of Britain, the US National Trust tends to concentrate on (or most often find itself involved with) urban buildings. Art deco movie palaces are a big thing, often involving some restoration (repainting and regilding, removal of recent and ugly marquee, etc.), and perhaps retention of only the facade and lobby, with the theatre itself being converted into shops and offices if the area (as is often the case) won't support a theatre or concert hall. Churches are also a big thing, and have become a big bone of contention in recent years. With urbanisation, the congregation has moved away, and the church hierarchy wants to sell off what has become a prime skyscraper site. Local preservation groups (often backed by the Trust) move in and...usually manage to do no more than delay things for a few years. Much of the Trust's recent involvement seems to be with the preservation and resurrection of (mostly turn-of-the-century) downtown mercantile blocks and even warehouse buildings -- again, mostly a matter of saving the front and converting the interior into shops, offices, and even apartments, all usually very upscale, in order to make the project self-supporting.

"Also vanishing from our ken are railroad stations. The enormous and glorious one in Los Angeles may survive if light rail and subway lines are constructed, but in small towns...actually, quite a few in Oregon and Washington seem to have been turned into (upscale) restaurants, or into local historical society or railroad museums, developed and maintained by local enthusiasts and volunteers. That's the sort of thing which can work well in a small town, but most likely won't in a big city. But I've been cheered, in recent travels, by the increasing attention being paid to historical remains, even though (especially in big cities) historical districts tend to be disgustingly cute. In almost every small town there is some small historical museum, often in a disused railroad station or outgrown library or city hall building, or just a historic old house ('historic' here most often being 'Victorian'). The

resurgence of interest in the past may be just nostalgia, or it may indicate a real movement away from the impersonal sterility of most modern architecture. Perhaps the US is outgrowing the era in which anything not absolutely up-to-date is considered no good -- or perhaps we're now directing that attitude towards our computers and fax machines."

*I think you misread my response to the British National Trust's excessive concern for the country house. My principal emotion is not surprise but contempt -- firstly because it is not history but heritage, and (as I've previously argued) thus falsifies the rural past; and secondly because (as not hitherto mentioned) it's a distortion of the Trust's original aims, which were to preserve country landscapes and the natural environment in general. It actually owns about 400 miles of coastline, half a million acres of farmland and innumerable smaller buildings, and is Britain's second largest landowner -- but doesn't publicise or even manage properly anything but the country houses. Instead of preserving hedgerows and banning stag-hunting it farts around with nonsense like The National Trust Book Of The Country Garden and National Trust Strawberry & Cointreau Preserve (from "a traditional recipe"). This is, bluntly, a gross misallocation of resources, and in a sensible organisation would get the bunch of patricians who currently run it thrown out of office forthwith.*

*Perhaps it thereby replicates British democracy: we vote, and the leaders then do whatever they like. Perhaps this is the actual method of governments everywhere. Here with a report on the latest government absurdities in the US is:*

Tom Collins  
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Los Angeles  
California 90024, USA

"What with the flag-burning controversy, the Mapplethorpe obscenity trial, the abortion debate, the banning of 2 Live Crew's retarded-juvenile records, the Jesse Helms-inspired attacks on federal arts funding, and the prosecution of Judas Priest for alleged backwards-recorded subliminal messages, things aren't looking good in the land of the 'free'. But then, the US seems more and more like the Bible -- terribly overrated.

"Or perhaps you haven't kept up with all this idiocy. I imagine that it's rather like an American trying to remember all the Ministers who resigned from Mrs Thatcher's government. And remember, this is a country that ignored the entire flap over Mad Cow Disease. You'd think we'd care about bovine spongiform encephalitis, but no, it went almost totally unreported. Perhaps we were too busy dumping aerial pesticides over Southern California in a futile attempt to wipe out the medfly (a citrus industry pest) to worry about problems anywhere else. The spectacle of Actor's Equity keeping Jonathan Pryce from rubbing our noses in the consequences of our Vietnam adventurism by effectively outlawing *Miss Saigon* is evidence, if any were needed, that it's difficult to determine which of our countries is the more benighted.

"Did you catch the moment during the presidential debates, when Dan Quayle (or maybe George Bush) said to his opponent (I paraphrase from memory): 'You say America is not the most envied country in the world, but I think we are'? Everyone applauded wildly, as if his asserted opinion changed the evident fact. Fortunately, we seem to be subsiding into a self-destructive, visionless little backwater of history with less and less impact on the forward march of progress. Or so it seemed until recently. Now we can thank our stars that Iraq has flunked its Hitler history lessons and is threatening the Saudis and the Turks. There was about to be an embarrassing fiasco of tax-raising instead of distribution of the Peace Dividend now that Vietnam is over and the Evil Empire is our ally again, for the first time in 45 years or so.

"This will certainly shut up those peacemongers who want to cut back on nuclear weapons and those environmentalists who want to cut back on nuclear power! Now the statist and centralised-power, centralised-planning people can rest easy again as we rally round the unburnt flag and ritually kick Roseanne Barr for desecrating the national anthem before each trashing of unlabelled rap records and heavy metal offensiveness. And with Bart Simpson on the Supreme Court, liberty and the idea that the people should have ample redress against an oppressive government can be quietly abandoned like any other industrial waste. That way we can focus on busting all those painters and sculptors and performance artists who make us uncomfortable and who are just, well, *rude* to authority and to sacred cows. Fortunately, the fight against authority is sufficient to defund all of them. I love the way the government is prosecuting obscenity cases by pursuing distributors in one state after another.

A stroke of genius -- it keeps everyone busy so they won't do anything useful against anti-abortion terrorists for blowing up clinics, or other organised crime.

"Locally, there's a government-funded controversial art exhibit in Santa Monica, and up from Orange County comes 'Rev' Lou Sheldon, trying to get the show banned -- not from his own neighbourhood, you understand, but from someone else's. If he's so concerned about what other people do with each other in their own town and own county, why isn't he complaining about gambling and prostitution in nearby Nevada? That draws in tourists from all over the nation so they can gamble away their children's inheritance, violate the sanctity of the marriage bed in state-permitted whore houses, and even get a quickie marriage or divorce. How anti-family!

"And that would be a much more worthwhile fight than against a bunch of wimpy homos, long-hair 'artists', and degenerate nigger juveniles spreading male domination fantasies! But no, getting results isn't necessarily the point. The point is to make a good income and maintain the sense of self-righteousness that prevents self-examination about the sources of this sexual terror. It occurs to me that one side effect of this foofaraw over symbols like the flag and the civil war over social issues like government funding for the arts, abortion and drug abuse is that it's an ideal excuse for a lack of vision and an inability to solve the real problems of the nation -- such as the increasing gap between the very rich and the very poor, the rising crime rate, the declining quality of life, the declining quality of health care and the environment and education and all the rest. All of which (and here's my point) is exactly the same result that's achieved by having a handy little holy war that everyone can rally round and sacrifice for."

*Those who can recall the beginning of the letter column will realise that this is uncannily similar to the point where we came in. Those who can recall issue seven will also recall Amy Thomson's letter about being assaulted in her own home by a man who'd been out on parole for only 19 days. Last year she sent us a follow-up, about his retrial and resentencing, but we WAHfEd this in the previous issue because we thought it was too personal. Checking this with her at the Holland Worldcon, however, she confirmed that she had "no qualms" about us printing it; so here it is:*

Amy Thomson  
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Washington 98105, USA

"Lennie Todd Cain, who went on to violently assault three other women after me, was sentenced to 60 years. He was tried by an all-white jury, with a white judge, and white defence and prosecuting attorneys. He was found guilty on all nine counts with which he'd been charged.

"After the judge read out the sentence, I felt an immense sense of elation. Then I found myself looking at Cain. The weight of 40 to 60 years in the cage descended on me. I found myself thinking of all the things he'd never be able to do, like having kids, or living in a place of his own, and started to cry. It seems so futile and so sad to have to cage another human being for what may well be the rest of his life. When I went home after the trial, I felt spiritually trashed. I came in and saw my amaryllis bulbs sprouting jubilantly on the window sill, and thought to myself that Cain will never see something like this. I picked up the cat and felt her purr and again realised that this too was something that Cain would never be able to do. I thought of Greg Bear, holding his new baby daughter Alexandra and talking of the pleasure he got out of the feel and smell of the head of a newborn baby, and felt even worse.

"There was a man who had sat in the audience at the sentencing and rode down on the elevator with us. I asked him why he'd been there, and he said he was with the Victims' Assistance Programme (which provides support and help for victims of violent crimes). I told him how sad I was that Cain would be behind bars for the rest of his life. He expressed surprise at this. I explained, or tried to, about how I felt. He asked if I wasn't pleased to have revenge. No, I said, it wasn't revenge, it was justice. If I was the person holding the keys to his cell, if I had decided his guilt and committed him to that cell all by myself, that would have been revenge.

"And I'm not sorry that it's justice instead of revenge. I wanted revenge for a long time, wanted him tied up and helpless in front of me. But then I realised that all I really needed was to know that I was safe from him. The karmic weight of justice is bad enough to live with. I want no part of revenge. But, despite how bad the sentencing made me feel, I'm glad that Cain will be put where he can never harm

another woman again. For my safety, the safety of my friends and neighbours, the other women already victimised by him, and all the other women in the city who might someday be victimised by him, he must be caged. But I don't have to like it. I said something of the sort to the cluster of reporters and cameras outside the court. I hope it made sense.

"After the trial, I found out more about Cain's history. He committed his first known burglary when he was only 13. He had committed three rapes (combined with burglary and assault) by the time he was 16. He raped one woman repeatedly over the course of nine hours. She gained his trust, he let her go, and she came back with cops. He then broke out of the juvenile detention centre and came back to rape her again. Since she wasn't home, he raped her neighbour. They tried him as an adult, and gave him a life sentence. The parole board, through a series of amazingly inept bureaucratic decisions, whittled the sentence down to 19 years. He was then released after 8 years for good behaviour.

"I talked with the woman he raped and held prisoner for nine hours, and all of the other victims of his recent rampage. We have banded together and are working to see that his parole is reinstated, and that he gets put into a maximum security prison as far away from us as possible. Talking with them made me realise how lucky I was that Ray came home and scared him off. Each attack got more and more violent. If he hadn't been caught, his next victim would have been killed. He was a lost and violent man. The woman who was raped by him when he was 15 described how he would curl up beside her in the foetal position afterwards. She told us how his mother had been seeking some kind of help for him since he was 9. He was the youngest of 13 kids, and she simply didn't have the resources to help him. The state did nothing to help her. Maybe there was nothing they could do. But I wonder....

"I was very impressed with Cain's public defenders; they were competent and dedicated, and did the best they could for him. I'm glad he had such a good defence, even though his attorneys kept delaying things. I wanted him convicted fair and square, although I'm sorry that the jury wasn't more racially diverse. It still feels bad to me that he was convicted by an all-white jury. The chief defence attorney, a tough, idealistic, determined woman, made a statement in front of the cameras about how she felt that Cain was a victim of racism, that because he was a black man preying on white women he hadn't got a fair trial. Perhaps, but I doubt it. Cain was too patently guilty. It was too clear that the defence was grasping at straws to forestall the inevitable. But what if the victims had been black women? Would justice have been as swift or as extreme? Would the sentence have been as long? But the fact that Cain preyed exclusively on white women, taking some trouble to seek them out, is racism of a sort. I think it all rather cancels out.

"Although there is closure of a sort, it isn't really over. There's still the parole board hearing, where they decide whether to reinstate his original 51-year sentence (the one he served only 8 years of). All of Cain's victims will be there. Then there's the appeal; it will be a year before it's heard. After that, we'll have to remain vigilant to make sure he's never released again. That the parole board let him go makes me severely doubt the state's ability to keep violent offenders behind bars. At some point there'll be some kind of political pressure to release people from prison, maybe to save money or relieve overcrowding. We'll have to remind them why people like Cain should remain locked up. A very dear friend was gang-raped by three men this summer, so there's plenty more where he came from. How many men do we have to put in prison to make women safe? How many humans get locked up so that humanity is free from violence? It's a pretty sick culture over here."

Martyn Taylor  
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Cambridge  
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"I had to listen to my seven-year-old praying that he'd die before the bombs came. I don't think any more needs to be said, except maybe to shed some some tears and say some prayers for the seven-year-olds who didn't die before the bombs came.

"We'll doubtless be hearing a lot about the 'glorious war dead' ever so soon. I remember being moved to tears by a war memorial once. It was in a tiny little place called Damuls, in Austria. The glorious dead it commemorated fought in the Wehrmacht. They had mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, wives and sweethearts too. Like the song says, there is only one colour dead."



WAHF: Harry Andruschak, Pat Baddeley, Sheryl Birkhead, Geogre Bondar (confessing to having embraced a New Age doctrine with the authoritarian name of "Life Training"), Brian Earl Brown, Ken Cheslin, David Cropp (about white misrepresentations of New Zealand history), Peter Darby, John Doucet, Mike Glicksohn, Teddy Harvia, Eva Hauser, Irwin Hirsh, Matthias Hofmann, Ken Lake, Mark Manning, Alan Sullivan, Pascal Thomas, Sue Thomason, Lesley Ward (pointing out that Alexis Gilliland's claim that people can overcome their problems by learning not to be disturbed by them won't eliminate war and racism), Harry Warner, and Roger Weddall. Our thanks to you all.

What is this "New World Order" that George Bush has come out with, and where did he find it? Opinion is divided. Some credit Gorbachev, some the Peruvian Minister of Finance, and yes, Hitler was fond of *Die neue Ordnung*. Or was New World Order a group that finished ninth in the Eurovision Song Contest? No, the answer is a little closer to Bush's heart. *Novus Ordo Seclorum* is written across the pyramid on the dollar bill. Old George must have been reading his money.

(From the "Zeitgeist" column in *The Guardian*, 23 February 1991)



"One small formality — Sir Alec wants you to cross your heart + hope to die if these arms are ever used for the purpose for which they were designed."

#### THE CREATION OF THE BIG PICTURE

In the beginning was the plan.  
And then came the assumptions,  
And the assumptions were without form,  
And the plan was completely without substance.  
And darkness fell upon the face of the workers.

And they spake unto their Higher Executive Officers, saying  
"It is a crock of shit, and it stinketh."  
And the HEOs went unto their Principals and sayeth,  
"It is a pail of dung and none may abide the odour thereof."

And the Principals went unto their Assistant Secretary and sayeth unto him:  
"It is a vessel of fertiliser and none may abide its strength."

And the Under Secretary went unto the Deputy Secretary, and sayeth unto him:  
"It contains that which aids growth, and it is very powerful."

And the Deputy Secretary went unto the Permanent Under Secretary, saying,  
"It promoteth growth and it is very powerful."

And the Permanent Under Secretary went unto the Minister and sayeth unto him:  
"This powerful new plan will actively promote the growth and efficiency of the Department and this office in particular."

And the Minister looked at the plan,  
And saw that it was good.  
And in time the plan became policy.