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November 1994 FTI 16

Special Bourgeois Sellout Issue

We move, the Earth stays still!

We moved in December 1993, on Joseph's 40th birthday, which makes the new house and garden the biggest and most expensive present he's ever had or is likely to get. Despite Change of Address notices in all the usual places -- some of which gave incorrect details -- odd bits of mail are still descending on our old place in Frinton Road (and just occasionally still being forwarded by the Post Office, despite our forwarding order having run out at the end of June.) **Please check that the editorial address below is the one in your records:**

Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas,
15 Jansons Road,
South Tottenham,
London N15 4JU, UK.
Tel +44 (0)71 211 0159.

It's been a good year for putting up shelves, gardening and sitting around in the sun -- which is why this zine didn't appear by Easter, or in June. Residents of England's south-east will agree that after a slow start the weather put on an excellent summer. So naturally you will understand that we spent those parts of it free of the bonds of paid labour sitting (JN) or pottering (JH) in the garden rather than indoors slaving over a hot fanzine. *FTT* readers, we feel sure, are not the sort of fans who slump zombie-eyed in front of their computer screens, knowing not the healthful delights of digging potatoes and watching tomato and broccoli plants become huge. Thus, despite all our good intentions, this is Yet Another Late Issue of *FTT*. We are sorry. Abjectly sorry. We shall ever strive to make it up to you.

...which means that to return to our unannounced schedule of yore, next issue ought to hit your doorsteps in almost no time at all with, promises Joseph, the 'second half' of his article from last time, sections of which exist in draft. So *even as you read these words*, it will be accelerating to its conclusion. (Unless you're overseas and reading these words around Christmas, courtesy of slow mail, in which case Seasons Greetings and next issue could *already be on its way!* Can you endure such excitement!)

GUFF ballot - important announcement

There is a GUFF ballot enclosed with this fanzine. So what, you say, you've received several copies already. But take note that this is the **correct, authorised version**. Early versions of the ballot, some of which remain in circulation, moved Prague from the Czech Republic into Slovakia, and omitted Joseph's name and address as 'Special British Agent'. A 'Special British Agent' has been appointed for this current northbound race so Eva can avoid the complications of banking and converting hard currencies in post-Communist economies still striving towards stability. Hard currency payments (preferably sterling) may therefore be sent to Joseph (who is of course a former GUFF winner himself.) So this zine urges you to vote for the GUFF candidate of your choice: vote early, donate often! And, since we have to be neutral on this round, we take the opportunity with an eye to the following north-to-south race to proclaim:

VASILKOVSKY FOR GUFF!

Meanwhile, the line-up for this issue of this purportedly science fiction oriented fanzine (into which some fleeting mention of skiffy may creep) is as follows:

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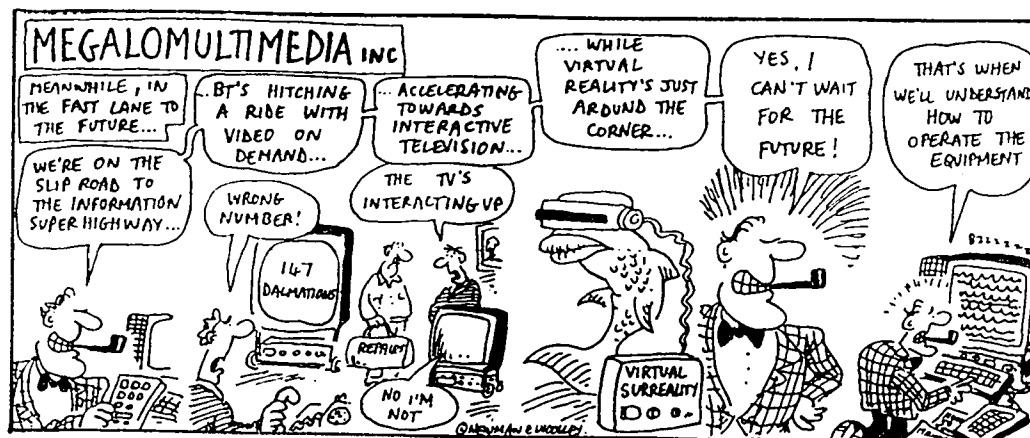
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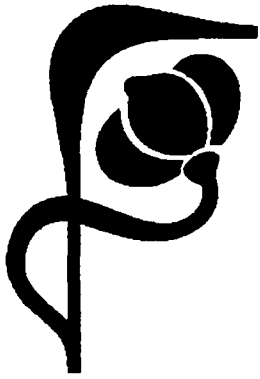
- your publication in exchange
- letter of comment on this or previous issues
- contribution for future issues (but please outline your ideas to us first)
- £1 in coin or stamps -- but since we prefer an active to a passive readership, this should be regarded as a method of last resort.

Since the number of copies we can afford to print and mail is far fewer than the number of people in fandom to whom we would like to send FTT, we have to be ruthless about trimming those who don't respond from the mailing list. If there's a scribble in the margin hereabouts, it's to convey that unless you let us know that you are interested in getting the next issue, you won't. OK?

Meanwhile:

"A Bosnian mercenary who was shot by police after stealing a Haringey Council dustcart was killed lawfully, an inquest jury has decided." (*Haringey, Wood Green, Tottenham, Hornsey and Crouch End Independent*, 14 Oct 1994) Mind you, the story goes on to reveal that he had also just held up a bank, before "dying in a hail of bullets in a Wild West-style shoot-out after being cornered in a timber yard." Eat your heart out, LA and NY. Or to put it in British terms, tut-tut.





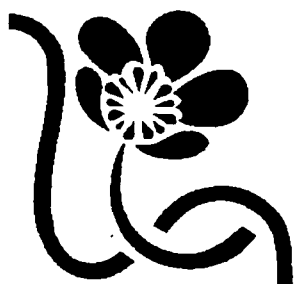
On Being Grown Up At Last

Judith Hanna

It was love at first sight. I think what we fell for was her mini-grand-staircase rising up with an elegant turn from the middle of the main room. That, and the way the bare, stripped-pale main room was flooded with light. She hadn't any carpets down, and her walls were unpainted. But new double-glazed windows were being fitted, as was a new gas central heating system, new fitted kitchen and new bathroom. My pocket compass told us she lay east-west, so all along one fence of her overgrown 35' garden should get year-round sun. She was a turn-of-the-century three-bedroom Victorian workman's terrace cottage under renovation for sale. Bob-the-Builder, who was doing the renovation work himself, was asking £65K for her. Next day we offered it, and on Joseph's birthday, a week before Christmas, she was ours.

I'd started looking at houses for sale about 18 months before, when the property market looked like it had bottomed out. This had shown me that the Tottenham area, where we were already living, was about the cheapest on the London Tube system. It has about 23% adult unemployment, a racially varied population, was home to the 1981 Broadwater Farm riot, taxi drivers warn you to wind up the window and lock the doors as they drive into it, and I've never yet felt threatened on the streets here. Most of the area is part of London's Railwayland - miles and miles of jolly nice little two- and three-bedroom Edwardian villa terraces, most with some form of bay window and trimmed with stuccoed art nouveau door and window frame detailing. Dave Hodson, who lives there and has become treasurer of the Farm's resident's action group, says the high-rise tower block Broadwater Farm is by no means the sink it's painted. The original Gestetner factory was the local big employer until a couple of decades ago and, says Ivy in Number 13, looked after its staff in good paternal fashion.

Eighteen months of desultory looking had showed an immense range of ways that almost identical houses which were pretty much the sort of thing we wanted could have their basic anatomy mucked about to make them poky, dark and inconvenient, besides being done up totally naff. We soon identified our key points to look for. First was basic orientation: did the garden get good sunlight? Next was layout of the rooms: would they give each of us a useable study in addition to the main bedroom and a social room? One reason we were looking to move out of the two-bedroom Frinton Road flat was that the social room was also Joseph's study, allowing him to veto Inviting People Around. I was determined that we needed a room where an unsociable Joseph could retreat to, as well as me having a room where I could shelter from the invasive tide of Tidiness. Third was the balance of price against condition, double-glazing and having gas central-heating. But in the end, we realised, what made us see a house as a potential home for us was a feeling of light and space.



Joseph's father was proclaimed Hero of Housemoving, First Class and Bar. He drove up from Lyme Regis the day after we completed the purchase, and by the

end of the weekend he and his car had moved all our worldly goods - except Joseph's vinyl music collection, my desk and the large muddy pots from the Frinton Road back garden, for which we hired a van the following week. And Vati brought with him as Joseph's birthday present a handy-dandy new Black and Decker electric drill, with which Joseph immediately set to work.



Our new house has a little white airlock of a lobby, which stops the winter winds howling into the main room, with along one wall a row of brass coathooks put up by Joseph and his drill. From it, you step into the main living room which stretches across the whole width of the house, with one plain tall window facing the front and another looking out down a narrow concrete passage between the kitchen and the side fence to the back garden.

The front of the room is now fitted out for sitting and chatting or watching TV, with Joseph's beige and chrome easy-chair, a couple of coffee tables and bean chairs, and a fold-out futon for putting up visitors, while the rear half has our collection of red canvas directors chairs arranged around the beautifully textured small rosewood dining table from Joseph's family's attic. As already mentioned, the staircase rises elegantly from the main room so there is no long narrow dark hallway downstairs. The kitchen, kitted out with new white cupboards, fitted gas hob and electric oven, is a good 17' long and the window above the sink has a shelf wide enough to accommodate pots of herbs over wintertime. Beyond the kitchen, tucked in behind the boiler lobby, is a downstairs loo where the seed potatoes were put to chit until it was time to plant them out and where garden stuff is stored.

Upstairs, there's a big front bedroom for us to sleep in, painted 'orchid white' like the downstairs room and badly in need of shelves and drawers as soon as we catch up enough money to buy the makings. The medium-sized bedroom (pale blue) is the lair of Attila the Tidy and has rows of boxes ranged more neatly than I ever imagined boxes could be. The little back bedroom is mine: pale green with Georgia O'Keeffe and Japanese bird prints on the walls, a huge white desk and a wall full of shelving for my gardening, knitting, feminist and other books Joseph doesn't read. And there's a dinky little pale green bathroom with ferns on the windowsill and spider plants trailing down from the shelves Joseph put up.

Then, of course, there is the garden. Two gardens, in fact: a small patch for decorative flora out the front, and a larger back garden for growing edible stuff. The front garden, having recovered from being well-trampled by the builders, is coming along nicely enough with the roses that survived putting out blooms, plus lilies, Dutch irises, pansies, petunias and feverfew daisies, clarkia and godetia, a fuchsia started up from a cutting from the old flat, and a pretty yellow weed called nipplewort, blue love-in-the-mist (*Nigella*), pink spider flower (*Cleome*), one sunflower, an assortment of summer bulbs, a chocolate cosmos, *Gypsophila paniculata* or baby's breath, and a couple of bearded irises. In short, a jumble of flowery stuff, which we think looks kinda nice.

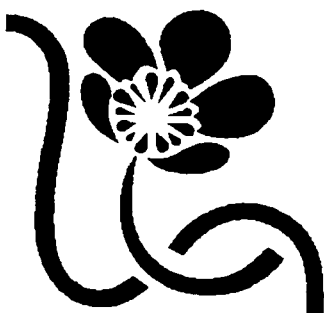
The back garden has more roses, six great trees of them along the shady fence in a nice mix of colours from deep red through to apricot and yellow. It was all overgrown grass, but now only a small patch of lawn at the sunny far end remains where Joseph can sit out with his Heavy Reading Programme and go brown. The rest has become the Vegetable Bed, planted with potatoes, bronze fennel, maroon-flowering asparagus peas and 'Ne Plus Ultra' peas from the Heritage Seed Library, potato-onions and chives, 'cilantro' coriander, florence fennel, chervil, silver beet interplanted with radishes, a patch of cut-and-come-again lettuce, self-sown wild pansies, a bergamot (*Monarda didyma*), and the bird table with sweet peas climbing up its post and a giant sunflower towering over it. But the only birds we get are herds of sparrows and starlings, a pair of wood pigeons, and a couple of blackbirds. Along the shady side of the lawn is the mixed flower/veg Shady Bed, which runs from the Wildflower Corner at the back fence to Jerusalem artichokes and poached egg flower (*Limnanthes douglasii*), recommended for attracting early hoverflies to Hoover up your aphids, to

hellebores, rampant lemon balm (*Melissa*), lovage, salsify or 'vegetable oyster' root, alpine strawberries and pansies.

A path divides the new Vege Bed from the Sunny Bed along the long south-facing fence. This has the herb patch, with three varieties of thyme, the sage Jackie Gresham brought along to our house-warming party, a purple sage, and a winter savory. Runner beans – red-flowered and white – climb the netting Joseph mounted along the fence with mangetout peas (snow peas) alongside them. A patch of broad beans – white and crimson-flowered – where the ants were factory-farming blackfly has been succeeded by the great velvet-blue-grey leaves of broccoli, a froth of green and white par-cel going to seed, and the little golden rosettes of salad purslane. That brings us to the rose arch, which was supposed to be clothed by more mangetout proved slow to get the idea, so it just had a riot of pink clarkia and golden california poppies at its feet, set off by silver-leaved lavender and curry plant (*Helichrysum*).

Beyond the arch Joseph's lawn opens out, and the Sunny Bed widens to what will be the globe artichoke patch. As the artichokes are three mere seedlings yet, it has been dominated by a row of giant sunflowers which didn't seem to understand that they are supposed to face towards and follow the sun. Further along is my ten-strong tomato army, made up of three varieties – the cherry-type 'Gardeners' Delight recommended in all the books, the small bush 'Phyra', and 'Sandpoint', an old variety from the Seed Heritage Library run by the national organic gardening body, the Henry Doubleday Research Association. Behind the tomatoes and two capsicum peppers, which are also in pots, is the big compost heap where two Sweetheart melons are dwarfed by a rampant tomatillo; beyond that is the dual-variety cherry tree, and behind that a smaller compost heap where a spaghetti marrow is doing a rampant jungle imitation all of its own. The cherry tree is one third of our mini-Orchard: we also planted a redcurrant tree beside the birdtable, and a thornless blackberry in the Wildflower Corner among the foxgloves, forget-me-nots and honesty seedlings.

And there we are at the back fence and the pond. The pond is all the Harvey's fault: we spent a weekend before Il Ultimo Mexican sitting around the big pond in their back garden in the rural depths of Hertfordshire, admiring their newts and tadpoles and frog, and when we got back Joseph said: "We need a pond, dear. We need a pond just there." I agreed that a pond would be a jolly nice thing as advocated in all the wildlife gardening books and I could allow it to take over the space where I had been thinking of planting sweet-corn. So a weekend or so later, Joseph dug the pond, lined it with a plastic pond-liner, filled it with water, arranged an artistic rockery of broken bits of brick behind it, and there we were. Except for buying elegant white coping stones for the front rim and one side, and buying it plants like a water lily, a water hawthorn (*Aponogeton*) which has narrow leaves that float like a miniature water-lily's and white spikes of flowers marked with black in spring and autumn, and a white kingcup. And making a patch of bog garden beside it to hold a crimson spike of *Lobelia cardinalis* set against the round yellow leaves of creeping jenny, whose other name is moneywort, and a couple of yellow and orange flowering mimulus which soon died. And collecting up a jam-jar or two of pond sludge filled with interesting creepy-crawlies and swimming things to start up our backyard ecosystem. And lo and behold, when it was just two weekends old, we found our first two frogs had found their way into it, one large and one small, both with elegantly marked sleek leggings. They have since been joined by another three medium-sized itinerant batrachians, which appear at semi-random intervals. And digging up our first early potatoes, I managed not to put the fork through a lurking yellowy-green toad, which has managed to hide from us ever since.



We think it's a jolly good little garden. Compact, but eventful. It's kept us happily occupied through spring and summer, has hosted a few sociable picnics, has kept us self-sufficient in greenery since April, and has been filling our freezer with surplus runner beans and spinach since July. It has given us the opportunity to investigate a dozen or so ways to deal with spaghetti

marrow - when steamed with butter, salt and pepper palls, you stuff it or dredge it with pasta-style sauce.



Apart from doubling our living space and trebling our garden space, we've gained a sense of 'neighbourhood', possibly even 'community'. Within the first couple of months here, we had met more of our neighbours than in four years at Frinton Road. There's the neighbours on either side, of course. In the corner house on our south side are Victor and Dawn, who are black and have been rebuilding their kitchen and garden shed, and their four well-behaved kids. On our north side, in #14, is a very nice cross-racial couple of young chaps we seem to bump into most Friday evenings in the Tescos on the high street, where Philip (the very blonde one) exclaims miserably how he hates shopping in that vast nuclear bunker of a place, while Jugjit works his way down their shopping list. They moved in last year. Next to them, in #13, is Ivy, the oldest inhabitant, who used to work for Gestetner and who's lived here for long enough to remember when there oak trees all down Jansons Road, and the grubby little car repair yard opposite us was a dairy. We don't mind the Clyde Garage: we reckon having Albert and the guys working there during the day provides a burglar-repelling scrutiny for our front door, and the cars they leave parked in the road aren't taking up any parking space we want to use since we don't run a car. But Afrakumah, the Ghanaian-descent Jungian analytical psychologist and artist in #22 across the road, who has lived here 9 years, is hostile to the garage and worried about noxious fumes and seepages from it. She's one of the six other local Friends of the Earth group members to whom I distribute the local group newsletter, and has told us a bit about most of the other households on the street, and about the apparently unowned and unenterable patch of woodland we can see from our front bedroom window over the low roof of the garage.

Jansons is just a short road, a hundred metres or so long but twice as wide as normal, linking the busy local distributor of Philip Lane to the red-brick villas of Clyde Circus, each of which has a shamrock-wreathed Irish name on a stucco plaque between its front windows. Clyde Circus, which is a circle, is the only non-straight street in the area, and we are part of the Clyde Circus Conservation Area. From Clyde Circus, Beaconsfield Road lined with a terrace of bay-windowed Railway Age villas runs long and straight down to West Green Road, which is lined with little shops, most of them 'supermarkets' stocking local specialities such as five types of yam (Brazilian long yam, Ghanaian long yam, eddoes, taro and kumara/sweet potato), breadfruit, plantains, pumpkins (in the UK pumpkin is not normal fare), about five types of aubergine/eggplant, hot chili peppers, unfamiliar greens, salt dried fish, and a maze of tins and packets of things I must try out one day. West Green Road runs along to Seven Sisters tube station, where the Victoria line commutes us to weekday work, and where British Rail trains between Liverpool Street and Hertford also stop. The station is on the High Road, which is the same old Roman Ermine Street to Cambridge, Lincoln and York that ran by our old Frinton Road place.

The other way back to our new house is along the High Road to its junction with Philip Lane. First, we stop in at the soulless Tesco, so handily located. Normally we would walk up the Tesco's side of the High Road past a row of rather dingy shops before crossing back to our side of the High Road. But we'll cross back at the West Green Road traffic lights to the scenic side, which has its wide pavement lined with municipal rose-beds and an old horse-trough. That takes us past one of the two local plant sellers, which I always check for anything interesting or unusual in their stock. Past the range of bus stops, and large, mostly unkempt houses - the traffic makes it a road you wouldn't want to live on - we reach the stately terracotta and redbrick civic Victoriana of the Jewish Home and Hospital behind its wrought iron fence. Next is the College of North East London, an ugly 60s concrete block where a car boot sale is held on Sundays, and beyond that the old Tottenham Town Hall, more red-brick civic Victoriana and very nice it is too, used mainly for weddings and other parties. The modern Borough of Haringey (which in the elections this May

became all but a one-party state, with only two Tory members relieving Labour's dominance) is run from an ugly modern civic centre in Wood Green. An old swimming baths, now closed, and the old County School building nestle by it, facing onto what the modern 'improved' High Road has left of Tottenham Green. A triangle of tree-scattered grass each side of the six lanes of roaring stinking traffic is at least some green space in this inner urban area, and we enjoy keeping an eye on it particularly when the first bulbs come out in spring, followed by fruit blossom and first fresh green leaves. That's the heart of the old Tottenham village. The old village well, with pump, sits by the High Road at the Tottenham Swan corner, with a crumbling Tottenham Nursery School building beside it. Holy Trinity Church, now bedecked with cheerfully amateur murals proclaiming it a Parish Centre, faces the bus garage across Philip Lane, with the kiddie centre run from its church hall behind it visible from the Green. We cut through the parking area in front of the new, all glass and chromium, Tottenham Sports Centre, where I must start going swimming again, and Marcus Garvey Library to make our way along Philip Lane: past the secondhand furniture shop and the set of four Catholic almshouses, over the railway line, past the Jewish Old Peoples Home, and there we are back at Jansons Road and home.

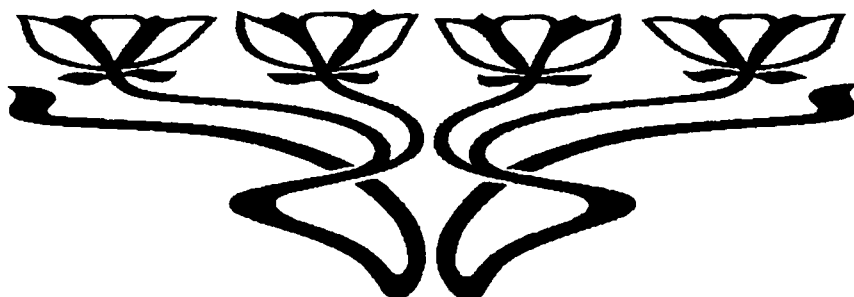
Before we moved, I was starting to feel the approach of middle-age, as what is dubbed 'the big 4-0' toddled nearer. To be precise, when I turned 37 I realised that I ought to stop thinking of myself as a blithe adventurous youngster. After all, one of my knees was playing up, so that if I curled into a handy half-lotus to keep my feet warm while I typed or read, I was left with a knee-ache when I came to uncurl again. Then I tore a little muscle in my shoulder while carrying the groceries home one day, and was subjected to the nagging inconvenience of back trouble. This, I thought, must be the start of growing old.

Since we moved, and acquired a whole house and garden of our very own to play with, I have realised that I have merely grown up at last. At last, I get to properly play house, in a whole house of our very own. I always knew I'd have to settle down one of these days, and, having put it off off until now, I find settling down quite a novelty.

Getting to grips with curtains has been the real initiation test for me. Who could believe that finding the material for a non-naff set of net curtains would be such a challenge! Not until I faced having to get ourselves a modesty veil for the front windows - partly to make it harder for any passing burglars to case the joint, partly because we get a lot of people walking past a mere 8' from our front window as the road is a handy short-cut to shops and tube, and partly out of deference to local custom and decencies - had I actually looked closely at the suburban cliché of net curtains. Once you do, you find that every house is different: wreathing birds and flowers in mock-Victorian fantasias, prim and prissy small scale stripes and zig-zags, hanging plain or draped and frilled. Who would believe net curtains had such variety?

My mum summed it up when she and Dad rang to say 'Happy 40th Birthday'. "I was feeling middle-aged," I told her. "But now I've decided I just feel grown up."

"Congratulations, dear," said my Mum, who is an inspiration and an example. "Sometimes I'm not sure I feel grown up myself yet. I certainly haven't got time to start feeling old. Maybe I'll get around to it when I hit ninety or so."



Space Machine For Living

Martin Smith

Last week, just when I thought that I had my new flat finally sorted, I hit a problem. On opening my last box from Ikea, I discovered that it should have been the second to last. At the moment, I have a chest of drawers with no drawers. This is typical of the way my move has gone -- no really major problems, just a series of minor annoyances and delays.

The main reason I wanted to move was that I was running out of space. I liked the bedsit I was living in because it was convenient. Everything I wanted was in easy reach and I never had to move far from the tv. Both the hi-fi and tv could be operated from my chair, and I could get a beer from the fridge without missing any of what I was watching. I could, by moving the chair out of the way, watch tv from my bed -- excellent when I woke up on Saturday morning with a hang-over. I could even do the cooking and washing up without missing anything. I think it was Le Corbusier who referred to "machines for living". That was how my bedsit felt to me. And it was cheap.

It was, however, small. It was crowded with just the basic furniture in it. Once I added boxes of books, space became a premium. Eventually, I simply ran out of room to put things. The floor was covered with piles of books and fanzines and general detritus. So when I bought a PC, it was just too much. I could not get to the hi-fi without having to climb over the computer. Nor could I get to the computer without having to climb over either the tv or a pile of the books and other junk that came with the PC and the games I had bought for it. Any tidying up I could do was merely moving piles of stuff around with no place for them to go. It would have given Joseph a nervous breakdown just to look at it.

When my offer to buy the flat was accepted I told my landlord, just to keep him informed. He was grateful for me telling him but was not very interested because, as he said, it would be sometime before I was actually moving out. Not even he realised, however, just how long it would be. Most of the next six months passed with my solicitor telling me that he was just waiting for a few more papers from the vendors' solicitor. Unfortunately, it was a complicated lease arrangement and the precise papers required did not show. Eventually, my solicitor decided to go back to the building society (who were, apparently, the ones demanding that all the leases be checked) and asked them if they really needed what they were asking for. It turned out that they did not. It did cross my mind, though I did not actually ask, why he had not done this in the first place and saved a lot of time and trouble. Still, I was not feeling the stress everyone tells you comes with moving. Not yet, anyway.

I had planned to take two weeks off to paint the flat the first week and move the following weekend, and then buy furniture and get the place sorted out. But the completion date we agreed was at the start of two weeks my boss would be away from work. This meant that I could not take any time off as I had to cover for him. However, I was pretty committed to moving out as I had already given my notice to my landlord, and I was not keen on paying for two places at the same time. My brother, Roland, had agreed to help me move using his car and that was about the only weekend he could make it. So I had to move into an empty flat and then do the decorating it needed later.

Having to be at work also meant that I could not spend as long as I wanted packing. Rob Hansen and John Harvey came to help, and it soon became clear I had under-estimated how long

it would take. I had thought that it would be the big things, like the microwave or the tv that would cause the most problems, but those were shifted quite easily. The problem was all the small things I had not had time (or room in the bedsit) to pack properly. Books and magazines, clothes and cutlery just kept appearing out of cupboards and wardrobes and places I had completely forgotten about during my time there.

Eventually, after a very long afternoon, it was done, and the others left me to get used to my new home. John had told me that when he moved into his first flat, he just sat in the corner and enjoyed the feeling of owning his own place. My reaction was to look at the mess strewn all over the floor and wonder why I had bothered at all. I could not start clearing it up because I had no place to put most of it. I spent the next couple of weeks moving piles around trying to create some space while I did the decorating I felt was necessary. Then I went shopping for furniture.

I bought a sofa-bed from Habitat and an armchair and a bed from Courts, none of which gave me any problem. I had decided to get things like shelving from Ikea, which seemed to do the sort of furniture I wanted at a good price. Shopping there, however, was not so easy. I have come to believe Ikea is the Seventh Hell of Suburbia. The store was out on the Purley Way, on London's south-east fringe, easily enough accessible for anyone with a car, but served by a very irregular train service. The store itself was packed with married couples dragging their screaming brats around. I could never find a member of staff when I wanted one, and when I did find one they were not exactly eager to help. I became convinced that somehow I did not fit their profile of an ideal customer -- which would be a married young executive with a pretty wife, two kids and, of course, a Volvo. The worst were the delivery service. They didn't merely charge heavily for their delivery service. They seemed reluctant to help me at all, one of them trying to convince me to get a taxi rather than use their service. When they did deliver (which, thank God was when they said they would, though I had to phone first thing the morning to find out when), they refused to take the boxes above the first floor unless I paid extra; they charged two pounds per floor! I managed to get it all upstairs by myself.

With the furniture in, I could begin tidying the place up. I spent the next few weeks pulling stuff out of boxes that I had packed about six years ago. I still have problems finding things, even though everything is on shelves or stacked in cupboards. In the bedsit I'd be unsure which pile had the thing I was looking for -- now I have several rooms to search before I can finally decide I have lost it.

Becoming a home-owner has brought other new experiences, such as bills. It is nice to know that people know my address, but they do have to keep sending demands for money? I've lost track of which bills I've paid, which I have queried, and which I've merely lost somewhere. Still, the only real problem was when British Telecom cut me off while their bill actually was in the post. They said that they would, as a matter of policy, try to inform people of when they would be cut off. If they tried to inform me, it makes me wonder about their competence as a major communications company. The other grief they gave me was to demand to send round an engineer to check that the phone socket was installed properly. They then had a market research company phone up to ask if I was satisfied with the work I had requested, which I was glad to have the opportunity to tell them I was not; even though the survey questions seemed to assume that work would always be something the customer wanted done, and did not seem to take account of work BT wanted to impose on an unwilling customer.

Today, I received a letter from Ikea. Of course, they want to see my till receipt before letting me have the box I am missing. Equally inevitably, I can find what seems almost every receipt I have ever had, except that one. I do wish life was not so complicated.

Still, there is a good view from the window. Not as good as the one from the bedsit, but quite nice anyway.

THE LOCS EXCHANGE TRADING SYSTEM

EDITED BY JUDITH HANNA

To start on a cheerfully practical note, the redoubtable Catherine McAulay writes from far west Wales:

Catherine McAulay
3 Bethany Row
Narberth Road
Haverfordwest
Pembrokeshire SA61 2XG

I found the letters about LETS (Local Exchange Trading System) schemes interesting because last year I joined the Haverfordwest LETS Group. An example that one of HLG's founders gives of how LETS work runs along these lines: imagine that you get your car fixed and pay the garage by writing a cheque for £100. The garage wants to take an ad with the local paper -- they pay by endorsing the back of your cheque and passing it on to the newspaper. The local newspaper pays for its

Christmas party by endorsing the back of the cheque again, and it goes to the local pub. Then you, a local painter and decorator, are asked by the pub to make good the furniture and decorations after the Christmas season, and they endorse the cheque again and give it back to you. No money has changed hands, yet everyone in the chain has benefited and work has been done. It clearly illustrates that the currency used does not have to have an intrinsic value and that the health of an economy is directly related not to the amount of money that people have collectively, but how fast it is churning around the system.

Actually, this is what a lot of Dyfed farmers were doing up to a couple of years ago when the Inland Revenue caught on. There were cheques that had been in circulation for months, with ten or twenty endorsements on the back. The IR started alleging huge tax evasion, and there were newspaper headlines about massive tax fraud in West Wales. The real story, which I heard from a friend of mine who is an accountant in Carmarthenshire, is that they were working small farms in Dyfed, using old-fashioned methods of transaction but unfortunately interposing a cheque between the elements of barter.

The town of Haverfordwest has a population of around 14,000 with a similar number in towns and villages within a 10 mile radius. HLG has a target membership of 2000 over the next couple of years. If these members are buying £50 worth of groceries and services a week, and can now use LETS units for 10% of this, then there will be an extra £520,000 per year in local pockets. And because people will be buying from local traders who are members of the local scheme, the remaining £45 per person per week is also staying within the community, not wafting off to the London headquarters of Tesco, Sainsbury and others.

The Haverfordwest LETS group has been negotiating with the Co-operative Retail Society for the past few months, and they have agreed to HLG running a stall in the Haverfordwest Leos and Pembroke Dock Leos supermarkets on two half-days a week. The stall will be staffed by volunteers from HLG who will be paid in LETS and will be selling various goods provided by group members. The goods can be purchased either for all sterling or for part sterling and part LETS. People will be encouraged to join the scheme at the stall. The benefit CRS sees is that if people can purchase some goods at the stall using LETS for part of the cost, they will have more sterling to spend across Leo's counters. CRS has joined HLG as a corporate member, and the service it is offering is access to its legal and research departments.

HLG is also negotiating to take over a large building owned by the council. It used to be a residential school and has been empty for five or six years. There are grants available from the Welsh Office, and West Wales TEC and Dyfed Training have expressed interest in setting up training schemes so that LETS

members can learn building skills while renovating the property. Once the property is sound HLG will run a creche, a taxi service, an exhibition centre for local artists, serviced office accommodation, administrative offices for HLG and some sort of shop selling produce and what-have-you.

These are small attempts to try to produce a huge change in the fundamentals of our local economy, but I have no patience with people who would sit back and debate whether such schemes might founder for this or that reason. There is only one way to find out. The theory can be worked out later.

As if on cue, through the letterbox dropped the summer LETSlink UK newsletter which noted that from a handful of groups three years ago, there were now 200 LETS schemes in the UK, involving some 10,000 people. Manchester has the biggest LETS scheme, with 450 members. Halifax has become the first local council in Britain to join a LETS scheme, accepting LETS for use of photocopying, printing and postage facilities, and using its credits to 'support local charitable organisations', it says, while in Canterbury, where unemployment stands at 17%, the City Council's treasurer has opened up discussions on whether rates could be paid in the local 'Tales' currency, and a Glasgow council has supplied a computer and operator to an arts-based LETS network recently launched there.

And Lloyd Penney comments on two aspects of self-sufficiency:

Lloyd Penney
412-4 Lisa Street
Brampton, Ontario
Canada L6T 4B6

When I lived on the West Coast of Canada, our family turned a portion of our backyard into a small farming plot so we could try to grow some of our own food. We planted various herbs, like basil, thyme and parsley, eggplants and zucchini (aubergines and courgettes). The zucchini overran the whole plot, choking out the other plants, and providing us with about 200 lbs of green and yellow bulbous veggies. What to do with all that zucchini? The neighbours wouldn't take it --

they had their own zucchini epidemics to deal with. We bought a food processor, pureed half of them and tried recipes with the other half. Baked, fried, pickled, braised zukes, zukes in various tomatoey sauces, and loaves and loaves and loaves of zucchini bread. That certainly cured the budding gardeners in our family. Now that I'm living with Yvonne (and have done so for the past 12 years now), we don't garden, but we have tried to make sure that we're living close to a lake or a park, or both if possible.

Many people in Canada have put forth the idea of a goods and services exchange, where a group, being very short of cash (sounds familiar) gathers together to provide a service for others and, in exchange, are provided with services from the other members. With expansion, most building services are taken care of, with other personal services, such as a barber/stylist and grocer added later on. The government is attempting to help these groups by providing what's called microloan companies: where banks fear to tread, the government will step in with loans to small businesses topping \$5,000 only. Even so, the interest can be enough to kill those small businesses, so the private groups which don't allow government in usually succeed better. The few groups there have done well.

The zucchini epidemic sounds like the Sydney summer choko plague. The choko is a firm, green, pear-shaped climbing vine which clothes garages and garden walls and is relentlessly prolific. With no actual taste of its own (ie, not unlike zucchini), it can be disguised under spaghetti sauces, or in pies, but seems to be mostly turned into pickles, chutney or jam. It was a mainstay of the Depression years of the 30s, since with a choko vine you would never starve. Those brought up on it shudder at the mention of its name and avoid it. Over here, one sees occasional gourmet articles promoting the exotic chayote, which appears to be the Mexican name of the very same beast.

Meanwhile Mark Harris writes that he has "been living through my own version of capitalist crisis":

Mark Harris
44 Howard Avenue
Passaic
New Jersey 07055
USA

A couple of years ago a small used bookstore business I was trying to get off the ground failed badly, and since then I've had to make do with temp work and unemployment benefits. The inadequacies of our economic systems have become all too tangible. One thought that has occurred to me frequently during the current wave of unemployment is that human capital simply can't be that important to business, no matter how much it seems that it must be. I make an analogy with the big-business spectator sports. Baseball and football teams

employ scouts whose sole function is to scour the country in search of exploitable talent; when that talent is discovered it is drafted, nurtured and protected. The situation may or may not be of the best for the athlete involved but there is no question that someone has been at great pains to identify his or her talents. Compare this state of affairs with the fate of the bright, well-trained graduates that American universities pour out into a market increasingly unconcerned with even taking advantage of them. Chester Cuthbert's references to human surpluses are right on target. There has been an explosive increase in educational attainments at the same time that the only true job growth is in dinky service jobs and

electronic sweatshops. From my own perspective as a Yale graduate one step away from homelessness, I state with some rue that although in a philosophical sense I would rather not serve my capitalist masters, it makes for severe practical problems when they won't even *let me*."

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB

I have found myself subtly blackmailed into 'volunteering' to enlist in Her Majesty's Jobclub for the fourth or fifth time. Jobclub is like the Holy Roman Empire: it is neither a job, nor a club, nor an effective means of finding employment (which is not lost, but gone before -- at least around here). Jobclub is, of course, more to do with the surreptitious shunting of unemployment figures up shady sidings, where they may be hacked down to size, away from the public gaze. Meantime, the 'Jobseeker' is provided with a comforting illusion of purpose. As originally conceived, Jobclub attendance was like potty training for the unemployed -- a lot of striving and straining, greeted with hearty applause when a breakthrough was achieved. Nowadays, however, prospective employers seem predisposed to ignore the obviously mass-produced inquiries with which Jobclub has enabled the Seeker to saturate the market. Now a whole sub-culture of Jobclub inmates is springing up, who are paid travelling expenses to scuttle from A to B like ants, in a largely pointless exercise which somehow parodies 'real life'. I don't suggest or believe that this is a deliberately planned outcome, but could it be a microcosmic image of the West's attitude to the Third World?

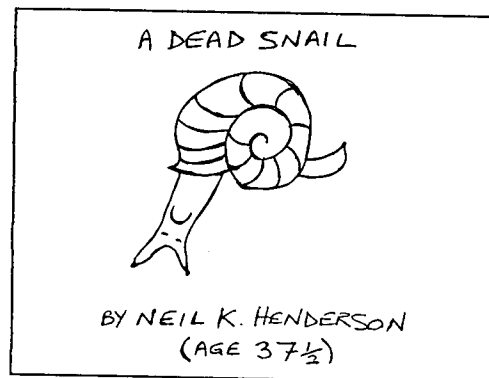
There was I thinking it was designed to inculcate in The Jobless the disciplines of reporting in for work, and to ensure that they don't frivol away their time doing something they might sinfully enjoy, even studying or volunteering their time to some worthy cause. I'm rather cheered by the Labour Party's cautious acceptance of the idea of a sort of 'national community service' for young people without jobs, involving paying them something halfway to a decent wage for community, health, environmental clean-up and similar work currently either left undone or left to the voluntary sector. A sort of 'son of Community Programme', the abolition of which was a sore blow to both the worthy cause sector, and to the ability of school-leavers to build up useful working skills while exercising idealism in a practical context.

The hoops set for the Third World seem of a different nature: buying up raw materials at rock-bottom prices while sucking in debt repayments far in excess of the small sums given as aid -- most of which, as the Pergau dam scandal here has been bringing out, are tied to deals involving buying big arms or engineering contracts which produce profits and jobs here, rather than in the country supposedly being aided, and which often involve massive environmental damage and the displacing of tribal people from their traditional land, to which their 'native title' is not legally recognised.

A moment's relief from the serious stuff as Neil turns our attention from politicians to slugs -- which some might suggest is no great change:

Neil K Henderson
(as above)

As a great believer (non-fundamentalist) in guilt-free gardening, I would suggest posting pictures of dead molluscs around the plot in place of the murderous slug tea mentioned in Judith's *Jungle* article. I find this particularly distressing since some of my best friends are -- though not Tory MPs as Tony Banks is implying -- physiologically akin to those 'glutinous threatening blobs'. I enclose a picture of a dead snail which has been remarkably effective these past twenty years in ridding my garden of all manner of visitors, though not, alas, of slugs.



On, now, to Eric Mayer, who seems to reflect on similar lines to Mark Harris above. A more recent zine since received from Eric reveals that what he's writing about here is now an ex-job:

Eric Mayer
Box 17143
Rochester
NY 14617, USA

What caught my attention was David Redd's comment about the free market actually being at times against the interests of the customer it supposedly serves. Here at Lawyers Cooperative (owned, you may be interested to know by Thomson which, I understand, sells package vacations in the UK and busts unions at small newspapers) we supply our customers with legal texts. Thomson paid \$800 million cash for LCP a few years ago, apparently because it wanted to produce legal books badly.

No, I'm kidding. Thomson doesn't want to produce legal texts. What it wants to do is what every business wants to do -- make money. Whether it does so by selling legal texts or vacations, good ones or bad, is entirely irrelevant to whoever is ultimately in charge. And isn't that the problem? At some point, doesn't someone have to be interested in producing whatever it is they're actually producing and take some pride in the product rather than just in how much money they can generate?

The reason this is on my mind is that I have gotten onto a companywide 'communications committee' assigned the task of figuring out why communications here are so bad and what to do about it. One of the main problems is in the area of management communications to employees and what we can do about it is hard to say since the problem is quite simply that management lies incessantly and the employees all know it. And one of the major things management lies about is 'quality'. (Can you say 'TQM'?) [Ed: Yes -- but not with a straight face. At British Rail, the catchphrase was OFQ -- Organisation for Quality. Try saying the acronym fast several times.]

Naturally management, via the improved marketing techniques Thomson brought with it, tries to impress on the customer the wonderful quality of the product it is offering. Management also stresses to employees that we must always consider the customer, that by supplying the customer with the best product we will become the preeminent legal publisher. All good free market stuff. Problem is, in practice, management doesn't give a damn about either quality or customers. A favourite trick of managers is to come up with extra volumes for our encyclopedias which can be produced cheaply and foisted off on subscribers -- stuff like indexes that aren't yet needed, legal 'checklists' that rehash stuff they already have in their existing texts etc etc. So long as managers of individual departments can get these out the door by the end of the year (even if the sales force can't sell them) they make their budgets look good and, as managers, earn incentive bonuses.

Worse, while talking about paying attention to quality, management gives workers less and less time to produce the same texts. In memos to their superiors, managers boast about such other tactics as producing books more economically with 'lower cost composition staffs' -- ie, using new hires to write cheaply for a few years then getting rid of them.

Now, how do you think the typical lawyer customer who buys our books would react if he were told that the new volume of American Jurisprudence he paid twice as much for as he did four years ago was written in half the time previous volumes were written and using mostly inexperienced editors rather than veteran editors? Maybe the free market would work were such information available..."

Which perfectly illustrates **ChesterCuthbert's** concern about, as he sums it up,

"...the devaluation of people and glorification of money..." "I lived through the 'dirty thirties', and it seems to me that governments have learned nothing from that agonising period of history," he notes. "Are we destined to repeat it?"

Unemployment stood at 2 million in the UK during the 30s, and stands at 3 million now, Chester. High levels of unemployment have become routine. Our area of London, for instance, has some 23% employment; parts of the UK's formerly industrial north have up to 70% unemployment -- with most of those who are in employment being women in part-time low-paid service jobs. But I see the decoupling from the national and international monetary systems made possible by LETS schemes as a way in which trading of local skills and local produce can be got on its feet, enabling scarce 'hard currency' to be kept for those things only obtainable through the national system, but with basic food, equipment hire, maintenance and repair jobs particularly going ahead on LETS credits.

What Eric writes, however, set me reflecting on my own work with a small company publishing transport magazines and related projects. Though the market-speak of calling a publication a 'product' is favoured by the two owner-directors, the keynote of the company is that the owners are actually having a lot of fun being able to make money out of producing transport zines. The transport planning sector in this country is a small world, almost a sociable sub-culture, mostly of men in suits who meet up at conferences about 'Towards a sustainable transport policy' or 'Demand management and traffic growth'. That is, our readers are people who are trying to work out ways of getting people around without covering the countryside with more motorways and filling the cities with traffic fumes. Plus, admittedly, those who are trying to cover the country in tarmac. The way I look at it is that we are working in applied science fiction: you see a trend building towards impending disaster, you look for stories about ways to save the world from the rising tide of traffic.

There's no elaborate management strategy, whether of misinformation or anything else: instead, it's a matter of catching business manager Rodney in one of the brief moments he's not engaged in frantic phone calls, and leaving notes for nocturnal editorial director Peter to scribble all over in red pen -- when he gets around to reading them in between red-scribbling all over magazine proofs, or of deciding whether you can get away with just going ahead and

doing it yourself without further argument. Information emerges mysteriously in dribs, drabs, hints and gossip, changes of mind glimpsed as notes on others' desks, jokes pinned to the walls: sometimes the secretiveness is a matter of 'need to know' hush-hush keep-it-under-wraps (in case we change our minds and it doesn't come off); as often simply the absence of any sort of formal office information system. There are plenty of frustrations, but there are no interposed layers of bureaucracy between the often arbitrary or at least idiosyncratic decision-making and the rest of the staff - nor between the specialised professional audiences for the various magazines and the firm. Chaos, yes and in plenty, which is annoying when it is everyone else's mess and idiosyncrasy but kinda liberating when it is your own. In a small, independent firm, there's no call for us workers (and, come to that, I am the next level of 'management') to feel alienated from the products of our labour. When we get pissed off with the capitalist management, we can go shout at them. Or at least leave Peter a jolly stiff note.

It is a kinda fannish place to work - in part because what we produce are transport zines, and in part because the firm is as much a hobby for the owners, a way of life, as it is a business.

All of which may, or may not, be some use to Andy Andruschak who writes that:

Harry Cameron Andruschak
PO Box 5309
Torrance, CA
90510-5309, USA

I must be honest and say that I do not understand much of what is printed in FTT. All that stuff about economics makes me go rather "Huh?" and wonder what it has to do with reality, such as my paying my bills on time and worries about health insurance reform hitting the Post Office.

Most of us postal workers are part of the FEHB, Federal Employees Health Benefits program, which in my case is to become a part of the government-wide Blue Cross/Blue Shield program. But now Clinton wants to bring in a National Insurance program and cannot seem to find any way to finance it properly. So the Federal Workers are being targeted to terminate FEHB and force them into the inferior National Program, whatever the final version turns out to be. Considering my background of diabetes, high blood pressure and alcoholism, I'd rather stick to good old Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

It is hard to get concrete data. The bottom line, as far as I can tell, is that those of us who **do** have medical insurance will have to pay much more to finance those who do not, either directly through payroll tax, or indirectly through income tax."

(Joseph responds:) Let's put this issue in some sort of context.

One of the most successful economic shibboleths of the 1980s was the New Right's claim that public spending crowds out private spending and is therefore A Bad Thing because it reduces the scope for individual responsibility or initiative. Yet the claim is wholly fraudulent -- does the fact that (for instance) a person chooses to ensure their continued health through a taxation-based state system rather than a private insurance scheme make them less concerned about the diet they follow or the exercise they take? Does the fact that a parent sends their child to a state-funded rather than a private fee-paying school make them less concerned about their child's academic attainments? Or the fact that someone contributes to a state-run pension scheme rather than make private arrangements leave them less concerned about whether they'll be comfortable in their old age?

These elementary points have been completely avoided by the monetary zealots of the New Right. Instead the debate has been dressed up as one of 'choice' -- of slashing public expenditure in order to reduce income tax, so people can choose how and on what they would spend the money themselves. Yet as recent research here has shown, the cost of securing equivalent private provision for a family of four on an average income in the UK, with both parents working, would -- when added to existing outgoings such as mortgage repayments, food and utility bills, travel to work and so on -- actually exceed their income, chiefly because abandoning a national welfare system entails abandoning the economies of scale it delivers. In other words, the New Right's dream of private provision cannot be afforded by the middle classes at whom it is primarily pitched.

The social results of such an economics of fragmentation are wholly predictable and -- having been visible in the USA for the past decade or so -- are beginning to show up here. It is not too fanciful to attribute many of today's social ills to the loss of the sense of community, and of social cohesion, which follow from the emphasis on competition and individualism of the laissez-faire economic philosophy pursued by the New Right. Perhaps in its recent fulminations about the loss of moral values (Portillo) and the need to get back to basics (Grey John Major), the New Right is beginning at last to recognise (but is clearly incapable of resolving) the contradictions between this philosophy and the privatised, centralised, unelected and unaccountable socio-political structures it has set up.

Thus to Clinton's health reform plans. You wonder whether your medical insurance would have been 'levelled down' as a consequence of his (and Hillary's) proposals -- yet this is the wrong question. For all their hype, the Clinton reforms would not have produced anything like the healthcare system we have (or had) in the UK and would have had only a marginal effect on overall costs, because insurance companies and insurance premiums remained central to the plans. Yet an insurance-based system, with profit as its underlying motive, is inherently less

efficient than one funded out of general taxation and free to all at the point of use, like Britain's. This is because ten to twenty per cent of the premium income has to be diverted into invoicing patients, checking claim forms, chasing up overdue bills and so on. As, in fact, the current UK government's so-called 'reforms' to the National Health Service have demonstrated: more people than ever before are being employed in the NHS, and more of them than ever before are the middle managers necessary to keep track of the maze of contractual referrals and funding disputes thrown up by a market-based healthcare system, while proportionately less is spent on actual healthcare, and hospital wards close before the end of the financial year because there is no money left to perform operations

Add to this that such insurance-based schemes generally refuse to cover such long-term debilitating conditions as diseases of ageing and multiple sclerosis; the legal costs attendant on the malpractice suits everyone is motivated to bring against everyone else when procedures go awry and the insurance companies refuse to pay out; the unnecessary extra surgical interventions doctors feel obliged to perform to justify the fees they charge; and so on and so on.

A true reform of the US system would be not more of the same, but a switch to a British-style national health system, funded out of general taxation and free to all at point of use. After all, as Winston Churchill pointed out to his Conservative colleagues, the advantage of a national social security system lies precisely in the fact that it is *national*, and that it therefore gives everyone who contributes to and is covered by it a sense that they have a stake in the future of the nation. That is, it helps the social cohesion -- or sense of public responsibility -- that the New Right have been tearing apart.

So if your "bottom line" is whether you have to pay more to ensure that everyone is covered, the key question is what value you are getting for your tax (or insurance) dollar: is it going to pay bureaucrats and private profits, or is it actually going to pay for secure and decent health care for all, yourself included?

Ted White also reflects dubiously on the relation of economics to real life, but -- despite his opening sentence here -- clearly has no trouble understanding and formulating his position on it:

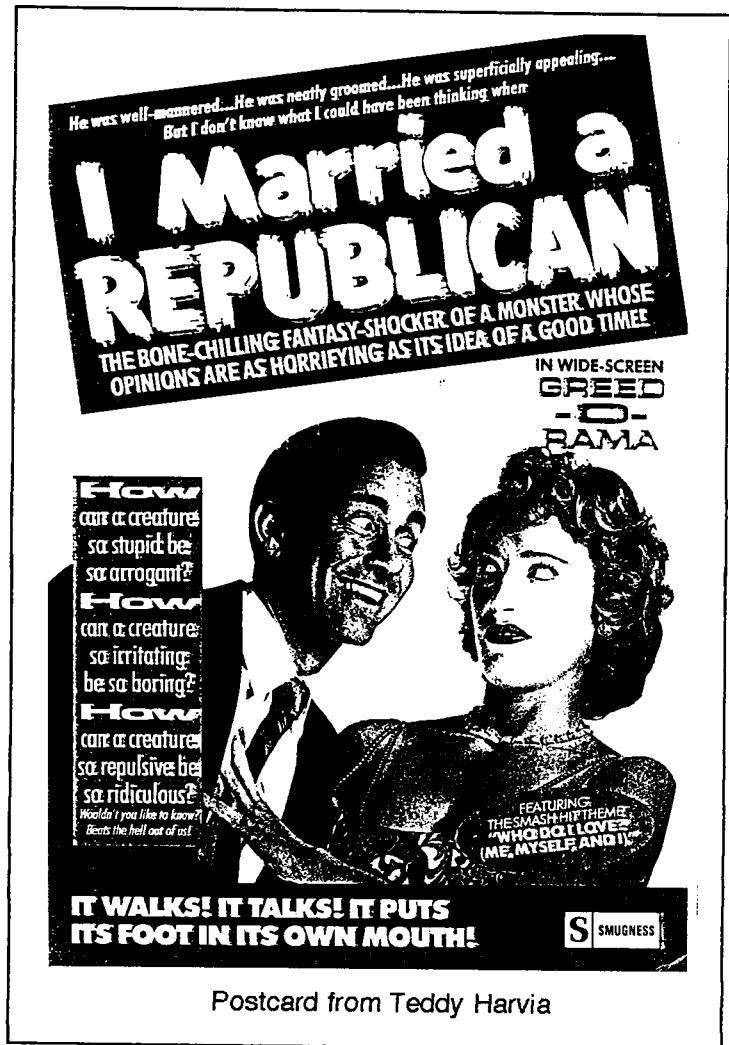
Ted and Lynda White
1014 N Tuckahoe St
Falls Church, VA 22046
USA

You know, I've never been sure what to make of economists. They're like academics in general but a bit more so: they manage to abstract and create a new vocabulary for anything they undertake to investigate, so that often those who are part of what is being investigated have difficulty understanding their explanations of it. Economists are trying to reduce complex human interactions into simple quasi-mathematical models. But the danger arises

when we create models that are too simple to accurately describe events or phenomena.

Here, for example, is Steve George telling us that 'the very concept of money encourages specialisation, the willing abandonment of many skills with intrinsic value to become expert at one skill with market value.' In the model he's constructed fandom does not exist.

Maybe I grew up in a different culture but I never saw money stopping me from doing things for myself. Anytime I can *save money* by doing for myself, I will. I recently remodelled, and effectively rebuilt, two bathrooms in my house. I acted as my own carpenter, electrician and plumber, because I have the skills, I enjoyed the work, and I could afford expensive new toilets because of the money I saved by doing the work myself.



I think human nature -- the nature of *individual* humans -- is stronger the abstract coercive power of money. I think our economic systems have evolved, as have our societies and political systems, in response to changes in our world, and will go on doing so for the foreseeable future. Where we are right now is just a moment in the process of change. Capitalism isn't perfect, but it works better in a free society than anything else. Capitalism today is not what it was in Adam Smith's time, even as Marxism and most other 'isms' have also shifted, evolved or died away. Change is always occurring and fixed models are doomed to irrelevance.

We took Steve George's remark as a criticism of the economists' point of view, rather than an endorsement of it, so the points Ted is making here seem to reinforce, rather than contradict, Steve's point. As Ted highlights, if you have the practical skills yourself, and the time and physical dexterity or strength to be able to exercise them, you can save - or of course earn - useful slabs of money. It tends to be easier to pick up such skills if they run in the family or in the neighbourhood and you are regularly drafted in to lend a hand. You can also save money if you have the storage space to squirrel away useful raw materials - wood, wire netting - as you come across them cheap. And of course, the less of your prime waking time you have mortgaged out to earn money, the easier it is to get such jobs done. If you live a long time in a neighbourly area, too, you're more likely to build up friendly trade and help relationships with neighbours, so that you help next-door concrete their patio, fix the roof guttering for over-the-road and they lend a hand with putting up your new shed, for instance, or I knit their new kid a jumper or two and they water the garden while we're off on holidays. LETS schemes help build up that sort of exchange network, with a formal recording system of how much 'credit' each member of the scheme has built up. But for many of us (as in our previous neighbourhood) the streetspace is so barren or downright hostile that you hardly see your neighbours to talk to, barely do you get to know one than they (or you) move out, and homes are so small there's no space for a shed or woodstack.

Nonetheless, the fact that DIY is a booming business sector attests that plenty of people are tackling their own home improvements, so presumably passing the skills involved onto the next generation. Joseph, as I note in my article this issue, is a dab hand at DIY too - though we haven't yet had to tackle any job as big as remodelling a bathroom.

Ted's point about the evolution of economic systems is an interesting one: the evolutionary framework cues some further reflections, in particular about what capitalism has evolved into, and the evolutionary forces now acting. I don't agree that what capitalism has become is the best system for a free society - and the basis of my doubts about the way it is working is that we are increasingly being dominated by the one system, at the expense of the sort of diversity of local skills exchanges Steve George, Ted and I all touch on above. We are getting an increasingly centralised system increasingly being run to benefit the 'top predators' - those already rich.

One way of looking at economic history is as the interaction of two pressures - on the one hand, those with power, status and wealth trying to hang onto it and maintain their superiority over the masses; on the other hand, you have the masses arguing for a 'fair' distribution of wealth and decision-making. Originally capitalism was a democratising system, empowering the merchants and manufacturers (the bourgeoisie) against the feudal aristocracy, and Adam Smith encapsulated and described that process as part of the Enlightenment thinking. The growth of capitalism went hand in hand with successive pressures for the extension of Parliamentary democracy to first to the bourgeoisie (including the few independently property-owning women - who had to be specifically disqualified during the nineteenth century), then to other adult men, and to women.

As R H Tawney wrote early this century, the essence of a democratic system is a diversity of 'checks and balances' to stop any one interest group pushing through measures for their own advantage at the expense of other sectors. What has been happening over the past decade or so has been systematic repeal of such checks and balances, resulting in what is being dubbed over here as a 'democratic deficit' and increasing concentration of wealth, which leaves whole sections of cities and regions discarded by the dominant money-earning and (therefore) -spending process.

A recent New Economics Foundation study on 'Indicators of Sustainable Economic Welfare' found that quality of life in the UK has been decreasing since the 50s, despite continuing economic growth. The ISEW assessed the performance of the national economy in delivering better quality of life by offsetting against the production and personal consumptions measures which make up GNP such 'defensive' expenditures as public and private costs of cleaning up water and other pollution, depreciation and loss of environmental capital. The result showed that the increases in these hidden costs more than outweighed the rise in incomes, meaning less spending power within a worsening natural and social environment, and therefore less well-being all around. At about the same time, reports from the Institute of Fiscal Studies and one of the universities were published, both showing that distribution of income in the UK has now become more unequal than during the 1890s days of Victorian industrialists and Dickensian slums.

That is, although capitalism evolved hand in hand with representative democracy as ways of increasing the ability of ordinary citizens to have a fair share and fair say, the mechanism now no longer works to fulfil its stated purpose. It

has undergone a perverse mutation. And as Eric's and Mark's letters above bring home, people like us are among those who are falling victim to the increasingly impersonal scale of big business as it focuses on concentrating money to itself, rather than on getting a good job done, let alone the old-fashioned 'paternalism' of looking after its workers. Whatever happened to the notion of putting in 'sweat equity' to a business, as a way of establishing entitlement to a share in the ownership, and thus in any profit? Employee share ownership is strenuously resisted by most modern corporations, though perfectly in keeping with free market principles. I see the alternative local LETS trading systems as being, as it were, the small primitive mammals evolving among the grassroots, eking out a living here and there as they try to avoid being trampled by T Rex transnationals and brontosaural state bureaucracies.

Dale Speirs suggests a different evolutionary perspective:

Dale Speirs
Box 6830
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2P 2E7

As we descend into the current Kondratieff long-wave nadir, I have mixed feelings about it. Our wages go down, but so do living costs. One advantage of living in a fringe economy like Canada is that multinationals are abandoning a lot of niches because they don't provide double-digit returns. This is great for small business. Here in Alberta, the Seven Sisters -- the worldwide petroleum corporations -- have been dumping all the small oil and gas fields, preferring to go hunt for elephant fields. The Juniors -- all the small oil companies -- have multiplied tremendously. Each oil field abandoned by the Seven Sisters now supports one or more Juniors, so employment has increased. Globalisation has meant that the elephant hunters have pushed into Canada in every industry, but in doing so they have left lots of hiding places for the mice. The large retail chains have destroyed Mom-and-Pop grocery stores, but specialised stores are spreading. While Safeway comes in and sells green Californian tomatoes at a penny per kilogram, the farmers' markets can't keep enough Alberta-grown vine-ripened tomatoes in stock at much higher prices.

The current Kondratieff decline doesn't seem to be as bad as the last one, the Great Depression. In both cases the velocity of money is decreasing as governments fight deficits by cutting spending and raising taxes. But the Great Depression was made worse by trade wars, whereas this time around free-trade agreements are preventing stifling of the economy as badly as 60 years ago. I don't like the idea of protectionism too much because the greatest beneficiaries are national corporations who can monopolise a small market like Canada. Canada still has internal trade barriers between provinces, which are only now starting to come down. As they do, prices come down and service improves due to competition. In a monopoly situation, environmental problems are swept under the carpet. In a competitive situation, companies are tattling on each other to the inspectorates in an effort to hurt each other, but inadvertently improving compliance. And, as much as I agree with Shakespeare about what is the first thing we should do with lawyers, they have stunned Canadian industry with the development of 'due diligence' case law. A few years ago, The Crown vs Bata Shoe Corp. put managing directors and company chairmen on notice that they could and would go to gaol for failing to clean up environmental contamination. Company A spends \$\$\$ to clear up a spill, then complains to the inspector about Company B which didn't clean up. This would not have happened in monopoly situations, but as internal and external trade barriers fall in Canada more than a few acts are being cleaned up.

Perhaps we have simply become less shocked by, and less conscious of, the extent of the present depression. Certainly, the stock markets haven't been hit to the same extent as in the 1930s Great Depression -- but I'd suggest this may be because the financial speculative system is becoming detached from the real economy. In the Great Depression, both suffered; in this recession, capital seems to be protecting itself by shedding people and jobs. We developed nations are also exporting poverty, particularly to Africa, through the scale of Third World debt and interest payments. Nonetheless, in the economic ecosystem small enterprises spring up to grab any niche in sight -- and provided their potential customers have the wherewithal to trade -- can prosper. But that is why it is harder for a community which has been dumped by the local big employer closing down its plant to get local trade up and running again -- no money in its veins. And that's where a non-money LETS can kick-start trading.

On free trade, there are a number of important checks and balances the GATT agreement simply tramples over. One, as Joseph pointed out in his article last issue, is that it outlaws environmental and health based standards as barriers to trade, which makes a mockery of the international commitments to sustainable development and biodiversity protection agreed at the Rio Earth Summit. As a consumer, I want to be assured that what's on sale meets minimum health and hygiene standards and does not contain objectionable or poisonous ingredients -- unless it is clearly labelled to inform you of the fact. The US decision that milk containing bovine growth hormone need not be labelled as such because it poses no actual health risk ignores the fundamental principle that the basis of a free market is that customers must be able to make an *informed* choice. Even so, while information that a tin of tuna was fished for with a mile-long drift net

may enable me to avoid buying it, it does nothing to prevent unsustainable killing of endangered fish stocks and damage to coral reefs, in breach of international agreements. Standards designed to uphold international (or national) regulations on environmental protection, workers and human rights, and so on, need to form part of the free trade framework. Unless and until GATT gets its house in order over agreeing such an international framework of standards, global free trade will create as much damage as benefit.

One of the important environmental principles needs to be a form of carbon tax, to provide a financial incentive against unnecessary long-distance movements of goods, which makes transport a huge fossil fuel consumer. If things can be produced locally, it is energy efficient, and economically healthy, to do so – rather than, to take some real examples, all the Marks and Spencers sandwiches sold throughout Britain being made in one factory in Derby and trucked around the rest of the country. Or potatoes grown in Germany being trucked to Italy to be processed into potato crisps, being trucked to Spain for sealing in individual bags, and trucked back to Germany for retail sale. One in five vehicles on UK motorways is a juggernaut lorry, and while 'tonnes of freight lifted' are remaining fairly constant, 'tonne-kilometres moved' are increasing at about 20% a year through lengthening of hauls as production and distribution become increasing centralised, with 'just-in-time' systems substituting fuel-wasting mileage for warehousing and local supply.

The other fundamental problem of GATT is that it allows a company to claim ownership of a seed stock which is the product of centuries of selection by local peasant farmers – who find themselves required to pay for all further use of a seedline for which they developed all but the most recent step, and who are also legally required to pay royalties on future generations bred from that seedline. This epitomises the extent to which the capitalist system has developed to give communally developed and nurtured resources into the ownership of the already rich and powerful – instead of protecting traditional forms of social ownership, joint working and joint decision-making.

Pam Baddeley makes some other points, also highlighting the role of the humble potato in the economic mirage:

Pam Baddeley
55 Union Street
Farnborough
Hampshire GU14
7PX

One thing which didn't come up in last issue's debate on economics is the question of scarcity and surplus, which is distorted by the gearing of modern marketing strategies towards the concept of 'added value'. A surplus of a product does not necessarily mean that its price will slump -- not if you can 'add value' to it, or if it has a wide potential to be added to other products to increase their price and ability to spread more thinly. I put this into inverted commas because the value it adds is debatable to say the least. The classic example is the potato: a simple food, healthy when cooked in its skin and eaten with low fat accompaniment, pretty cheap. But when the 'added value' merchants get hold of it, it's a different story. The simplest processing is to turn it into chips or crisps -- my local supermarket has a whole bay of different crisps, and another of frozen chips. Then there are the other, often bizarre, extruded gunk snack foods with various flavourings added. By the time the consumer gets hold of it, the price per gram of the product has gone through the roof -- and along the way it has been converted into a saturated-fat laden thing of little or no nutritional value.

Then take sugar, which is added to other products to 'improve' them. Sales of packet sugar have fallen considerably in the UK, from 1.7m tons in 1955 to 1.0m in 1978, as people cut down on it in tea and do less home baking. MAFF has claimed that sugar consumption is falling by 20% per decade. However, figures for sugar use by the food processing industry show that overall sugar consumption has not fallen at all, because the balance -- in various forms such as sucrose, glucose, fructose, lactose, dextrose, etc -- has gone into processed foods, from baked beans to sauces to cake mixes. Thus we have massive profits made out of cheap basic ingredients with a huge role played by advertising in creating a market for new products. If anyone is interested in reading further, I'd recommend Caroline Walker and Geoffrey Canon's *The Food Scandal* and Geoffrey Cannon's *The Politics of Food*.

Pam also comments that:

The presence of day-old English newspapers in Istanbul seems pretty good going. A friend who has been to the States a number of times says it's difficult to get hold of British newspapers at all -- and when you do they are a week or so old and usually the choice is very limited. He commented that it seemed part of a generally insular attitude to news about the rest of the world in general. I'll probably offend US readers for making such generalisations, but his comments about the media were interesting. The last time he was there, the bomb had gone off at the World Trade Centre and he was trying to find out what had happened, but the news was all 20-second soundbites and interviews with various people about how they felt about it, but no hard news about what had actually happened.

Finally, a different perspective on economic chaos comes from Alexander Vasilkovsky:

Alexander Vasilkovsky
Poste Restante, General P O
252001, Kiev-1
Ukraine

Congratulations on buying the house. I am also undergoing the financially painful process of building myself an apartment -- which is the cheapest way of buying it in this country.

The economic situation is so awful I can hardly make ends meet. For instance, in December 1993 the exchange rate rocketed skyward again, so the November salary I received on December 13 equalled slightly less than \$US10. A person can survive in this country on a minimum of \$15-20 per month, but \$10 is beyond this limit. The economic crisis is slowly turning into a catastrophe. Yet our homes are heated, though not as well as before; we are not starving, however poorly we are fed; and I am trying to pay for my apartment, which is still being built. It is in a street called Knyazha Zatoka, which means 'Prince's Bay', and there really is a river nearby...

I hope to be able to move in sometime during this year. I say this so uncertainly because under the current economic disorder, all this sort of thing is prolonged either because of unavailability of this and that, or delays in transferring money, and so on. Moreover the apartment I get will not be ready for immediate moving in. Wallpaper, floor polishing and maybe other things will need to be added at my own expense, which will also delay my moving in. Anyway, I'm happy to be getting this apartment because it is my only hope to improve my habitat situation, the only affordable solution to the problem. Theoretically, there are also municipal houses, but you could wait your whole life to get one.

The economic crisis -- or rather, disaster -- dictates its own rules, with minimisation of municipal house construction, and increasing the number of houses sold by auction. So, good old co-operative house construction, of which mine represents one of the last examples, is quickly being forced to die out by the estate market, municipal functionaries, and construction trusts.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Sheryl Birkhead, Pamela Boal ("My experience is that people who actually try to live the 'green' life are keen to use technology." She also notes the work of the Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group who "do not believe a child that has lost the use of its legs and lives in a remote third world village should be left to shuffle around on its bottom because western aids are unaffordable or unavailable. AHRTAG looks at what materials are available in the area and the skills of local craftsmen. AHRTAG uses technology to ensure that available technology and skills produce a wheelchair that is appropriate to unpaved roads.") And urge your MP to call for a UN ban on sales of the anti-personnel mines which are leaving so many third world children and adults minus their legs.

David Bratman, Brian Earl Brown, G M Carr, Tom Collins, Chester Cuthbert, Pete Darby ("I've noticed a distinct Marxist line in the computer game 'Civilisation'. As dictator/ruling class, most of your time is spent trying to keep the populace quiet (opiated?) by means varying from primitive religion to women's suffrage.. a great educational tool to show kids why the ruling classes allowed such sensible things as giving half the populace the vote or letting us march through the capital shouting 'Oy you Tory Shit/Give us back our benefit! ... I'd be interested to know whether Charles Lipsig (Loonywatch, previous issue) would be prepared to personally organise a private collection to keep the US Army going. A car boot sale, perhaps, or maybe a raffle? ...You ruined my week by mentioning Basildon.").

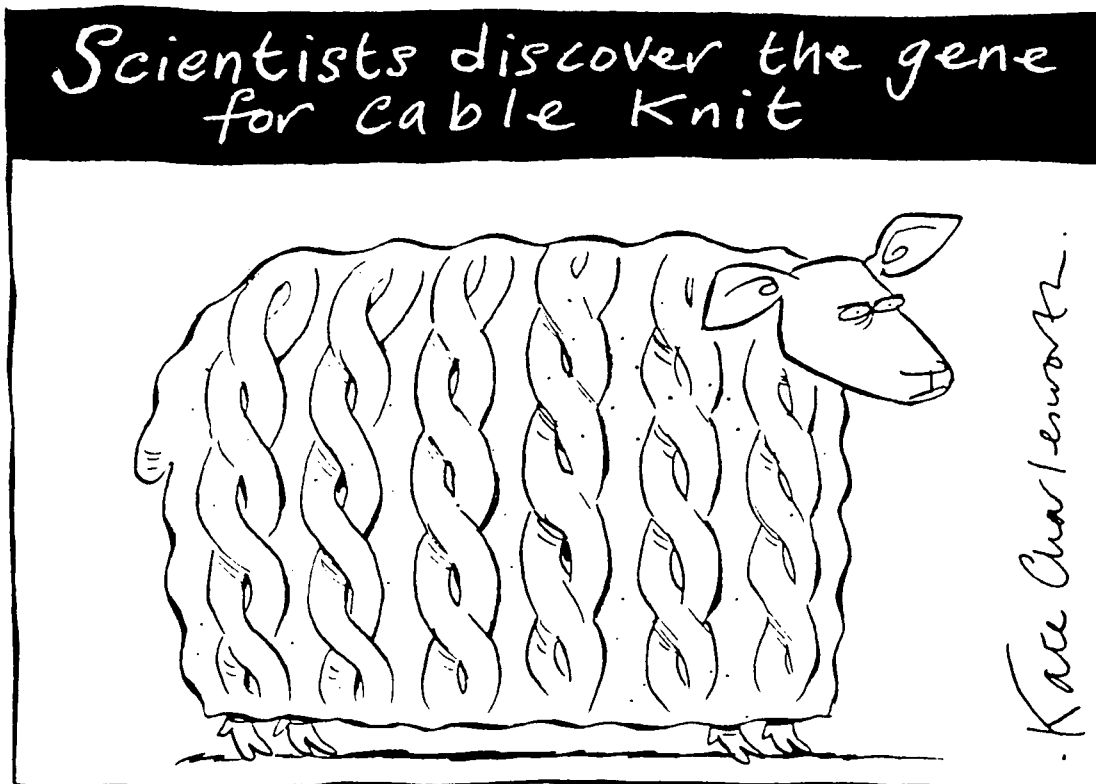
Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown, Susan Francis, Alexis Gilliland, Jack Hanna, Roslyn Hanna (who swears she is working on a write up about being charged by a hippo while canoeing on the Zambezi), **Zena Hanna** (who is going to write about being spat at by a volcano while out for a stroll in Java where she is living), **Chuck Harris, Teddy Harvia, Eva Hauser, Lucy Huntzinger, BM Jed, Steve Jeffrey, Christina Lake, Mark Manning, Perry Middlemiss and Robyn Mills** on their new house adventures, **Par Nilsson, Steve Palmer, Derek Pickles** ("Tory misinterpretations of Thomas Malthus's beliefs no longer surprise me but I wish they would acknowledge that Malthus thought it was *the duty* of governments to invest in measures of social necessity especially those that private investors would not consider.") **David Redd** ("I can see why you commented that macro-attitudes can only be tackled from the grassroots micro-level up," with a long and interesting disquisition proving "the governmental organism is an essentially brainless beast" and blind to much of the effect of its actions.)

John D Rickett, Vicki Rosenzweig ("The Charles Lipsig quote is fascinating. 'Where the hell were you, when I was being killed?' I didn't realise you could have correspondents who were no longer alive. In any case, since he brings up World War 2, I would ask him where the armies and governments of the US and

its allies were when my mother, aunts and grandparents were hiding from the Nazis and others of my relatives were being murdered along with millions of other people. If US involvement in that war was intended to prevent the Holocaust, it was one of the least successful military interventions in history."). (Pam Baddeley also pointed out that conscientious objectors -- Lipsig's "WW2 era peaceniks" -- served in the emergency services during the war and thus saved many lives.)

Yvonne Rousseau ("Chaps-suffocating-themselves-to-an-injudicious-extent while wearing women's stockings happens fairly frequently in the UK, to judge from some forensic medicine textbooks I skimmed through many years ago. A Tory MP's death by this means does seem a bit 1960s Avengerish."), **Tom Sadler**, **Andy Sawyer** (with news of his garden and the Science Fiction Foundation: "Our redcurrants benefited from netting, landmines and frequent survey patrols from the cat to scare off the birds and were good doers, as you and *Gardeners World* remark. The interesting side of the Foundation [of which Andy is Administrator and librarian] is managing the different viewpoints: the people who want it all to be literary-focused and deeply involved with Theory, the fans, those who want intense and accurate bibliographical work, the trainspotters, those who see this sci-fi stuff as a jolly good way of interesting youngsters in physics and proposing models of space-oriented futures, those who want to change various aspects of society through SF and those who think SF is just a sub-set of the Literary Fantastic. Just like politics, really...").

Mike D Siddall: ("Just because a Tanzanian peasant farmer wouldn't see the space programme as relevant to her needs doesn't necessarily mean it isn't. If you'd told her grandmother there was someone in England spending all day playing with rotting food she might have said the same, but the antibiotic which saved her child's life would be no less welcome all the same." Penicillin was not, however, a spin-off from an extravagant multimegabillion dollar programme: Florey and Fleming were medical researchers working on shoestrings looking for stuff that killed off bacteria, even though moulds were not the stuff they set out to look at. Or, in other words, if you want to produce (say) a better heart pacemaker, or new strains of pest-resistant rice, it's more effective to research heart pace-makers and rice, rather than set off to explore Mars.) **Alan Sullivan**, who dutifully commented superficially on almost everything in last issue, rather than letting himself go on any one topic. **Pascal Thomas and Christine**, **Kristin Thorrud**, explaining she had been out of action with 1st and 3rd degree burns from a gas explosion in her face last October and had lost her job, which all rather put a kybosh on her fanzine activity. **Christopher Wickens**, who sent his book called *The Land of the Donkey* from Guernsey, **Denise Yates**, **Kate Yule** and **David Levine**. Our thanks to you all.



LOONYWATCH

Time once again to throw your brains away, and insert a small walnut in their place!

As ever, Parliament provides the best source of total nonsense. Here's an extract from *Hansard* for 4 February 1994, recording debate on a Private Member's Bill for the protection of dogs:

Mr Andrew Robathan (Blaby): "I note that it would be an offence to allow a dog to enter the subterranean refuge of any wild animal. That goes completely against the nature of dogs. I do not know whether the right hon. member for Swansea West (Mr Williams) owns a dog."

Mr Alan Williams indicated dissent.

Mr Robathan: "I see that he does not. However, I do, and I was brought up with dogs. I currently own a very lovely labrador named Otter. As a labrador retriever, it is her nature to retrieve things. She will retrieve anything because that is what she was brought up to do. Such dogs originally retrieved fish in Labrador.

"We used to have a border terrier. She was a very charming little dog called Pippa. She lived with children and never bit a child in her life. However, it was her nature to go underground and kill things. That is what she liked doing. One cannot argue with the nature of dogs. It distresses me that people who perhaps do not own dogs would go against that.

"I notice that rabbits are excluded."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael Morris): "Order."

Robathan is presumably bidding for a transfer to the House of Lords, to join those for whom such buffoonery is second nature. Rivalling him for idiocy, however, is David Amess of Basildon, here participating in Health Questions on 22 March 1994:

Mr Amess: "Does my hon. Friend approve of the centralisation of services in Basildon, with a specialist neonatal care unit on site? Will he issue guidelines on the delivery of babies in water? Finally, does he agree that Basildon's maternity service is the finest in the world?"

Mr Sackville (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health): "There is a feeling among Conservative Members that to be born anywhere in Basildon gives one an unfair advantage in life; but to have the benefit of perhaps the most up-to-date, best-managed and best-equipped maternity unit in the country is an additional advantage for this generation."

Mr Tony Banks: "I believe that, at the last count, the hon. member for Basildon had fathered five children. Has he not already put far too much pressure on Basildon's maternity service? Would not the decent thing be for the NHS to offer him a large quantity of bromide -- or, if it cannot afford that, perhaps a do-it-yourself vasectomy with two bricks?"

Banks's fellow humorist Andrew Faulds made the following spurious point of order two days later, on 24 March 1994:

Mr Andrew Faulds (Warley East): "On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware, as is the House, of the interminable interventions of the hon. Member for Newham some-geographical-point-north-somewhere."

Mr Tony Banks (Newham North-West): "Try North-West."

Mr Faulds: "North-West -- thank you so much for that information."

"Would you not agree, Madam Speaker, that there is a sort of understanding in the House that, when one hon. member wishes to make reference to another, he gives that other hon. member notice? It was drawn to my attention a few days ago that, on an earlier occasion, the hon. member for Newham North-West made reference to the discomfiture he suffered when I placed my buttocks beside him on this back bench."

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North): "Another scandal."

Mr Faulds: "Is there nothing sacred to this wanton boy? Is the House not aware that I have the most beautiful statuesque haunches, like carved Greek marble? Should the House not be aware that, when I place myself beside this hon. gentleman I get not a whimper of pain but a whinny of pleasure?"

On 16 March 1994 an equally spurious point of order was made by a Conservative MP who is now under investigation for accepting money to ask Questions:

Mr Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): "On a point of order, Madam Speaker."

Madam Speaker: "Is it a new one?"

Mr Riddick: "It is a new point of order, Madam Speaker."

Madam Speaker: "Has the hon. gentleman just thought it up?"

Mr Riddick: "Yes."

Madam Speaker: "Yes, I thought as much."

Mr Riddick: "I have just thought it up, Madam Speaker."

Madam Speaker: "Or dreamed it up."

Mr Riddick: "Might not the hon. member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) have had to ask his question because he never serves on Committees -- "

Madam Speaker: "Order. I knew that I was making a mistake when I agreed to listen to the hon. gentleman. We now have a ten-minute Bill, which will make much more sense, no doubt."

Riddick should clearly charge by the word rather than the question -- he'd rake in much larger sums.

Speaking of money, let's turn to *Fosfax*, which -- being a (US) right-wing journal -- is regularly concerned with such issues as the constitutionality of income tax and the inherently neo-communist nature of social security. Jim Stumm addressed the first in issue 166, published in October 1993:

"I'm no fan of democracy. It seems to me that the country has gone down the tubes in direct proportion to this expansion of suffrage. It's not that I have anything against women and blacks voting. I'd like to see white male yahoos denied the vote along with yahoos of any gender. I'd prefer a meritocratic republic in which the vote was limited to qualified people who demonstrate that they have some intelligence, some knowledge of public affairs, and some competence at running their own lives. At heart, I'm a Jeffersonian rather than a Jacksonian.

"I'm especially appalled that those who receive more money from government than they pay to it are able to vote into office those who dispense the money. Not only are we forced to pay high taxes, but net taxpayers can't even control how their tax dollars are spent. Those who get the money outnumber us. Of course, the solution I prefer is to have a government so limited in its powers that peaceful people would hardly be aware of its existence, in which case it would be of little importance who is allowed to vote. Shrinking the government would also solve most of the corruption and bribery problem. Few would try to buy Congressmen if Congress had few favours to dispense."

So on the one hand Stumm argues that it is essential to restrict the number of people eligible to vote, perhaps by requiring them to pass a written exam and produce their latest bank statement before entering the polling booth; while on the other he argues that it is necessary to restrict the powers of the federal government so that the *lumpen* may carry on voting as now. One has to marvel at an intellect capable of entertaining two such mutually contradictory propositions at the same time -- particularly when, in his next paragraph, Stumm advances what he sees as the reasons for the decay of the USA:

"You ask if democracy will survive to 2093. I think we'll be lucky if we're not living in a full-blown Nazi tyranny by 2000. The two developments that concern me most are Rambo-police staging Waco-type invasions and mass murders whenever they like, and massive seizures of property with not even any accusations of crimes, much less trials and convictions. To which most Americans (including some who write to *Fosfax*) react with bovine complacency, believing every word of lying government propaganda, the result of 100 years of public school brainwashing, I suppose."

Thus we understand that drastically restricting the right to vote is necessary to prevent the USA becoming a dictatorship. Or have we missed something here?

As to the neo-communist nature of social security: *Fosfax* contributors are naturally worried about President Clinton's plans for reform of the costly US healthcare system. Lisa Thomas wrote a lengthy piece for issue 168, published in April 1994, which concluded:

"Clinton's plan is socialised medicine, which sounds very nice on paper. In practice, it leads to systems like that of the former Soviet Union, the same system which cost Russia its foremost expert on spacecraft, Sergei Korolev."

After prolonged thought, the only point we have been able to make of this is that socialised medicine kills spacecraft designers (which must be why Britain doesn't have a space programme). Or perhaps that if the Soviet Union had had a private healthcare system it would long ago have conquered Mars.

But we should end with an apology. The previous issue's "Loonywatch" column ridiculed the elaborate conspiracy theories of Australian fan Michael Hailstone, in response to which he has sent copies of his fanzine *Busswarble* to several people on our mailing list, presumably in an attempt to put his side of the case. We therefore apologise to them for this intrusion -- while noting that Hailstone is now arguing that his appearance in this column "proves" that we must be members of his conspiracy. We have to admit that we wouldn't actually mind joining such an organisation -- but the Shadow Ones who run things are so damned elusive that we don't know where to write for an application form....

"Calls for the police to be armed with pepper sprays have received support from Mike Bennett, chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, who said 'police are entitled to as much protection as their French counterparts'. In France, of course, they are issued with the full cruet set (not to mention the *assiette de crudites* tactical weapon). But before we indulge in too much self-pity, we should spare a thought for the poor Italian *carabiniere* who has to tackle the Mafia with only an unwieldy three foot long pepper mill and a teaspoon of parmesan."

(From the "Zeitgeist" column in *The Weekend Guardian*, 23 April 1994)

"Promising to support the right of men to be impotent, demand more tail winds on Danish cycle paths, improve the weather, call for the harmonisation of vacuum cleaner bags, and insist on better Christmas presents for everyone, Jacob Haugaard was the most surprising member of Denmark's new parliamentary intake.

"'It's incredible that I got elected on this twaddle,' Mr Haugaard, of the Party of Deliberate Work-Shy Elements, told a Danish newspaper. Asked after a meeting with Queen Margrethe which party he would support, he was categorical: 'I didn't side with anyone, not even with myself.'"

(From a report in *The Guardian*, 23 September 1994)

"Some people complain about flyposting because it's messy. It is only messy because the police make you do it at night in a rush."

DEATH AND DEMOCRACY: AN EXCHANGE

Edited by Joseph Nicholas

The following exchange, between myself and US fan Taras Wolansky, commenced with my article "What Europe Means To Me" in FTT 12, published in December 1991. In that, among other things, I suggested that Gorbachev's acceptance of NATO's zero option in 1987 and his later refusal to intervene in the popular upheavals in Eastern Europe in 1989 had contributed to ending the Cold War. In his letter on that issue, Taras Wolansky argued that Gorbachev would not have become leader of the then USSR without the re-election of Ronald Reagan as US President in 1984. In a short rejoinder, I pointed to the existence of a reformist bloc within the Soviet establishment which pre-dated Reagan's re-election, which was principally motivated by a desire to revive the failing Soviet economy, and realised on gaining power that the best way to achieve this was to shift economic resources away from the military (which in turn required mobilising the populace against the apparatchiks).

Taras dissented completely from this. He also forwarded a copy of an article from the US magazine The Nation for 24 February 1992, in which one Aryeh Neier suggested in passing that the Reagan administration had better understood the fragility of the Soviet Union than its opponents -- the implication being that the USA had thus arms-raced it into collapse. I in turn dissented from this -- and argument over the Cold War end-game has since formed just one strand of an ever-ramifying exchange.

Space clearly precludes reprinting this correspondence in full. Thus we focus here on another issue thrown up by Neier's article: his argument in favour of Reagan's "crusade for democracy" on the grounds (with particular reference to Central America) that it had been a success.

Even so, readers contemplating the length of what follows may wonder why I embarked on it at all. I sometimes wonder this myself -- the political contexts which underpin our respective comments, the perspectives and histories we bring to bear, and the meanings we attach to certain concepts are so different that we might almost be speaking a foreign language. But perhaps it's this very gulf between the participants -- a non-aligned eco-socialist and a right-wing US conservative -- which gives the clash its flavour: an authentic taste of an encounter with the alien.

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 26 May 1992:

"The Reagan crusade for democracy a success? Rubbish -- the 'crusade' was the usual knee-jerk, pro-right, anti-left US foreign policy under another name, which abandoned dictators like Marcos and Duvalier only when they became too embarrassing to sustain further, and which handed out military 'aid' in such quantities that it had the effect only of prolonging the wars it claimed to want to end. Neier's comments about democracy ultimately engendering respect for human rights are, with regard to El Salvador, downright obscene; it may eliminate extra-judicial killings in the long run, but does nothing to enforce an immediate halt; and in any case the country did not become a democracy until earlier this year, when the military was finally removed from government and all classes and ideological groupings allowed to participate in the political process (the military having previously prevented the left from participating by threatening to shoot its leaders if they emerged from the underground to stand for office."

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 1 June 1992:

"Can you deny that Reagan's policies put the Soviet Union under pressure on many fronts? He bled them directly in Afghanistan; indirectly in Angola and Central America. (Reagan prolonged wars in those countries, you say? You're absolutely right! That was the general idea; for the same reasons the Soviets did everything they could to prolong the Vietnam war.) Though the gas pipeline to Western Europe was too close to completion to stop, Reagan nonetheless put a chill on any other similar ventures for generating hard currency. He maintained friendly relations with China (in spite of his personal feelings), affecting the military balance between that country and the USSR. He worked with the Pope (we now know) to keep Solidarity alive. He strengthened Western Europe's nuclear deterrent; rebuilt the US military; and with his SDI proposals gave the Kremlin the willies (we now know)."

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 5 June 1992:

"'Reagan bled the USSR indirectly in Angola and central America' is pure Evil Empire rhetoric; it wasn't even indirectly involved in either. Nor did it prolong the war in Vietnam; that was the responsibility of the US, attempting to postpone its defeat. To claim that the USSR was behind all the problems faced by the US not only obscures the local causes of such wars (particularly in Central America, where the main issue is and always has been land rights) but also contradicts assertions of its economic bankruptcy. How could it have afforded to sustain such wars? And if it could afford them,

how come it hadn't won its contest with the US decades before? While you search for the answers to these questions, might I suggest you read Mary Kaldor's *The Imaginary War: Understanding The East-West Conflict* for the real (i.e., non-ideological) history of the Cold War.

"'Reagan strengthened Western Europe's nuclear deterrent'. Poppycock -- the Euromissile crisis was the greatest rift in US-Western European relations since 1945, massively undermining public trust in the US and catalysing the arguments (over GATT, the CAP, the WEU, UNCED) that now pull the US and Western Europe increasingly apart. 'Reagan rebuilt the US military'. It hadn't decayed; it wasn't in trouble; and the money spent bloating it to its present size directly contributed to the gargantuan budget deficits the US now struggles to comprehend."

The contradictory assertion mentioned in the first of these two paragraphs was a condensed repetition of a point made in my article in FTT 13, also published in June 1992, about the desire of anti-Soviet Cold War ideologues to have it both ways: to argue that the USSR was strong enough to cause trouble for the USA all over the world, yet simultaneously feeble enough to be easily pushed over by the economically more powerful USA. Taras responded on 19 June 1992 with several pages of quotes from a number of books intended to demonstrate the congruity between the foreign policies of the Soviet Union and its allies, and thus its indirect involvement in Cuba, Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua, et al. In response, I sought to expand my thoughts on the perceived contradiction:

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 25 June 1992:

"The quotes you marshal in support of your case that the Soviet Union was responsible for all the trouble in the world could of course be countered by another set of quotes demonstrating how the US constantly intervened in other countries' affairs (I forget exactly who researched the figures, although it was probably Paul Rogers of the Bradford School of Peace Studies, but the comparative number of foreign interventions by the USSR and the USA in the period 1945-1980, including proxy actions by others, showed that the latter came out well ahead by around 160 to 60.) However, none of these quotes help resolve the central contradiction of your argument. If you wish to argue that the Soviet Union was responsible for all the insurrections throughout the Third World then -- because it is a necessary implication of this argument -- you must also argue that it was both economically strong enough to sustain the expense and politically clever enough to manipulate global politics to its advantage; which in turn means -- again because it is implicit in the argument -- that it would have won the ideological battle with the USA and conquered the world decades ago. Alternatively, if you wish to argue that it was suffering from an underperforming economy and a sclerotic political system, then you have to accept -- against because it is implicit in *this* argument -- that it could not have sustained such interventions on other than a limited and piecemeal basis, and then only when it was forced to do so either for reasons of political prestige (Cuba) or to rescue clients or proxies who were in danger of being overthrown (Afghanistan). A cursory study of the evidence indicates immediately that the latter is in fact the case (see, for example, Jonathan Steele's *The Limits To Soviet Power*).

"A further contradiction then remains, this time concerning the US response to this perceived Soviet 'aggression'. The article you forwarded -- which you presumably endorse because of the support it provides for your Reagan-oriented view of global affairs -- argued that the efforts of the Reagan administration to resolve conflicts in the Third World were genuine: that is, it wished to see them brought to a speedy conclusion rather than to reinforce the privilege and inequality which engendered such conflicts in the first place. In your letter of 1 June 1992, however, you agreed with my argument that these efforts were in fact directed to prolonging these conflicts, in line with Reagan's 'Evil Empire' obsessions: in other words, that the populations of these countries were considered expendable in the US's pursuit of its grander strategic game. I'd be grateful if you'd therefore confirm that the rhetoric with which the Reagan administration's actions were garbed was in fact completely hypocritical, and indicate how you propose to reconcile the aims with which it claimed its foreign policy was guided with the needless deaths consequent on prolonging these wars in defence of dictatorship and exploitation. (And don't start by telling me that Britain did the same when it was an imperial power -- not unless you wish to argue in all seriousness that two wrongs really do make a right.)"

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 30 July 1992:

"If a hard-line Soviet foreign policy had been as successful in the early 1980s as it had been in the 1970s, if Afghanistan and Angola and Nicaragua had not had their conversion to Soviet satellites interfered with, why would the Politburo look for a reformer? For that matter, would an ambitious man like Gorbys make himself a reformer, under those circumstances? If, as you say, the USSR's economic problems were one cause of his elevation, wouldn't those problems have been alleviated by trade and aid, from a Western Europe and Japan increasingly fearful of Soviet military power?

"There are pacifists and isolationists out there, I'm sure, who say the Nazi defeat in World War

Two proves the Nazis were never a real threat. If it were *unopposed*, the Soviet Union would have had little trouble holding onto its empire. Indeed, its colonies would have been economic assets instead of liabilities. When you describe the Soviet Union as being 'forced' by American opposition to waste its resources on Cuba and Afghanistan, you are merely testifying to the effectiveness of America's Cold War policy.

"You don't identify which article you're talking about, so I can't tell what parts of it I agree with. Look, during World War Two the Allies burned millions of civilians to death in Germany and Japan. Were those deaths 'needless'? I don't know.

"Obviously, in any war, the first object is to win; but if that is impossible one seeks to deny victory to the other side. (Should the Allies have eschewed aid to anti-Nazi resistance movements, in the interests of peace?)"

The first of these paragraphs demonstrates how the different strands of the exchange interpenetrate; and much of the rest of the letter consisted of quotes from US media sources intended to show how Nicaragua under the Sandinistas had become a Soviet satellite. Replying, I sought to deconstruct US conservatives' tendency to invert cause and effect where Nicaragua is concerned: that is, how the Sandinistas's eventual turn to the Soviet Union for assistance was taken as proof that the Sandinistas were pro-Soviet all along, rather than acknowledge that they had been forced down that path because Reagan's economic blockade and contra war had left them with nowhere else to go; and how that turn to the Soviet Union was then appropriated to confer reverse legitimacy on the US's actions.

I also argued that Taras's assertion that Japan and Western Europe would have grown "fearful" of the USSR took no account of their political and economic relations during the 1980s; and revisited (at greater length) the contradiction I detected in US conservatives' views of Soviet strength. But it's the contradiction in the US's response to perceived Soviet aggression -- prolonging wars while claiming to wish to end them -- we pursue here. Again requesting resolution of this contradiction, I added:

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 4 August 1992:

"Or perhaps you have already confirmed your hypocrisy with your statement that 'in any war...one seeks to deny victory to the other side'; in other words, that in your eyes it is legitimate to slaughter and maim as much of the civilian population as possible in order to remove popular support for the enemy and so demoralise his efforts; and so much for your morality. Under the principles elaborated at Nuremberg, such actions are classified as war crimes (and if applied consistently would have entailed the victorious powers prosecuting themselves for the aerial attacks on German cities; but, being victorious, they of course had no intention of doing so.) Either you repudiate this sort of morality, Taras, or your argument is in shreds."

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 7 October 1992:

"'Needless deaths in defence of dictatorship and exploitation' or 'tragically unavoidable deaths in opposition to dictatorship and exploitation'? I went back and looked up the Aryeh Neier piece I sent you: it talks about Reagan's 'global campaign for democracy', not 'peace at any price'. Establishing and defending democracy, historically, have been anything but peaceful processes.

"If you wish to place the West's prosecution of the Cold War on the same moral level as the Allies' prosecution of World War Two, offhand I can think of no objection. Except that the former was at least an order of magnitude less costly in human lives."

This rather missed the point, since my reference to Nuremberg was an aside to the main argument. (Taras also attacked the contradiction I perceived in US conservatives' view of Soviet strength, but there is no room here to quote any more of that strand of the exchange.) I therefore went back over this strand of the correspondence and produced a summary for my next letter -- which continued:

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 20 October 1992:

"Explain to me, then: how is democracy 'established and defended' by Nicaraguan contra attacks on Nicaraguan peasant landholders, burning their crops and destroying their schools and hospitals, and why are the resulting deaths 'unavoidable'? How is democracy 'established and defended' by RENAMO's destruction of Mozambican peasant farms and the enslavement as beasts of burden of the farmers and their families, and why are the resulting deaths 'unavoidable'? How is democracy 'established and defended' by the Khmer Rouge sowing mines throughout the Cambodian countryside, rendering agricultural self-sufficiency almost impossible, and why are the resulting deaths 'unavoidable'? How is democracy 'established and defended' by the Salvadorean Atlacatl Battalion's and Treasury Police's murders of priests, trade unionists, students, human rights workers and peasant organisers, and why are such deaths 'unavoidable'? How is democracy 'established and defended' by supporting dictators like

Sese Seke Mobutu, Mohammed Zia, Ferdinand Marcos, Baby Doc Duvalier, et bloody cetera?

"In other words, the Reagan 'crusade for democracy' was a hypocritical sham; a tissue of rhetoric manufactured as a cover for increased violence and repression. By trying to gloss over this slaughter with a lot of cant about democracy and freedom, you not only compound the hypocrisy but confirm your support for it. You even describe it as necessary to achieve 'peace with honour' -- on the basis of which one could conclude that the more people killed, the more honourable and the more democratic the outcome. But perhaps I shouldn't be too surprised by this hypocrisy, since in your letter of 19 June 1992 you stated that 'there has never been anything but poverty and injustice in Central America', adding 'certainly not when the Maya and the Aztecs were engaging in large scale mayhem'. In other words, since the Maya and the Aztecs were responsible for poverty and injustice, the USA need not avoid imitating them; and two wrongs therefore make a right. This morality is obscene."

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 18 February 1993:

"In World War Two, I'm sure you'll agree, the Axis powers were the aggressors; the Allies the defenders. Yet not every action of the Allies, taken in isolation, can be considered defensive; the invasion of Italy perhaps most notably. Similarly, in the Cold War the West may not have always permitted the Soviets to select the battleground. Also, the Allies supported Stalin not because he was morally superior to Hitler; similarly, some of the allies of the West in the Cold War were sleazy to the extreme.

"For what's worth, Winston Churchill was unquestionably guilty of 'prolonging' World War Two. And, yes, the Allies did target civilian populations in Germany and Japan.

"'Peace with honour' was, to the best of my recollection, a Nixon slogan from the 1968 election. I don't recall ever using it.

"The kind of democracy I don't like is the kind we've had in much of Africa, where the elected President declares all opposition parties illegal, and makes himself President for life.

"In many, perhaps most African countries, the population suffers more than in South Africa, where live the continent's richest, healthiest and best educated blacks. Apartheid is an evil, but hardly in the same class as genocide, mass murder, mass starvation. It should end -- but not at the cost of making South Africa another Somalia, or Ethiopia, or Sudan, or Uganda, or Mozambique (or Rwanda, or Zaire, or Biafra...).

"How many deaths would you consider too high to pay for one man, one vote? I assume that if you believe electing the ANC would bring about the death of the entire population of South Africa, you would be against it; so somewhere between 0% and 100% there must be a threshold.

"The idea is to improve South Africa, to preserve what it does well, while getting rid of what it does badly. An ANC takeover, I am very afraid, would result in deaths in the six figures, the impoverishment of the country, the repression of all minorities (the whites treated best of all because of their economic importance). The cynicism of a political movement which encourages its followers not to get educated should appall you."

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 25 February and 4 March 1993:

"Hypothetical suggestions about what the ANC might do to white South Africans were it to seize power fail to address the historical record to which I drew your attention. If you wish to argue that killing large numbers of people throughout the world is necessary to 'establish' and 'defend' democracy, then you must do so by tackling the issue head-on: you must show how these deaths 'established' democracy in the countries concerned, why there were no feasible alternatives to this slaughter, why these killings did not contradict the democratic ideals in the name of which they were carried out, how the murders differed from those perpetrated by the 'anti-democratic', 'nationalist' or 'communist' forces against which the democratic killers claimed to be 'defending' those they killed, and provide actual examples of the resulting democracies which you claim to have been brought into being; in short, how the ends justified the means. Unless and until you can do that, you are stuck with the fact that for all its high-minded rhetoric, the foreign policy of successive US administrations has had nothing whatever to do with 'establishing' and 'defending' democracy, and everything to do with crushing local independence movements in order to install client regimes which will permit US-based MNCs to continue their looting of the respective countries' natural resources. That this is so is recognised throughout the world -- except, it appears, by the conservative heartlands of the US.

"You make some curious references to 'defensive' and 'offensive' Allied operations during the Second World War. I conclude that these must have been made in response to my demand that you produce some actual examples of how killing lots of people engenders democracy. If so, you miss the point -- I am concerned with the period since 1945. Nicaragua, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Haiti, the Philippines, Angola, Guatemala, Vietnam; these have nothing to do with 'defensive' or 'offensive' Allied operations in the Second World War."

With the first of these letters, I enclosed a copy of a then-recent article by Harold Jackson in The Guardian about the crumbling of the so-called Teflon presidency as its lies and dissemblings, particularly over foreign policy, caught up with it. Taras responded to both this as well as my letter:

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 27 April 1993:

"I chuckled when I compared your two letters. In the first you challenge me to provide evidence that establishing democracy sometimes requires violence and death. Germany -- Holland -- Belgium -- France -- Italy -- Japan were the examples that immediately sprang to mind. But in the second you added 'I am concerned with the period since 1945'. I guess you must have suddenly remembered World War Two.

"Almost by definition a Leftist is one who refuses to learn from history -- after all, if human nature is malleable, then what can history teach us -- but I've rarely seen it stated so clearly. I was thinking of the period from 1776 to the present, myself; a classical scholar would surely go back to ancient Greece as well.

"But OK, I'll tie one hand behind my back and limit myself to a few examples from 1945 to the present only. Greece, which escaped the fate of the Balkans only through the defeat of a vicious Communist insurgency. South Korea, which would *still* be an Orwellian nightmare like the North had not America rescued it. Thailand, which defeated its Communist insurgency while the US was occupying the attention of North Vietnam. El Salvador, where a flickering democracy was kept going until the collapse of their patron, the Soviet Union, brought the guerillas to the bargaining table. Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas were forced to hold something approximating a fair election, which they promptly lost.

"Another large area you of all people should appreciate: decolonisation. Establishing Indian democracy was a fantastically violent process. Or how about Kenya, Nigeria, etc.. (If my hand weren't tied behind my back, I'd mention Simon Bolivar as well.)

"Re the Harold Jackson piece: several different questions are mushed together. (Mind you, this is good debating technique when one is trying to uphold a weak position.) Were Reagan's policies: 1) legal; 2) moral; 3) effective. In our correspondence I've mostly addressed point 3."

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, 18 July 1993:

"My main focus is in fact even narrower than the period since 1945: I am principally concerned with the period since 1981, a concern which arises from the statement, in your very first letter of 18 March 1992, that the election of Ronald Reagan as US President 'meant that there would be no letting up in US support for anti-communist insurgents in Central America, Africa and Asia', buttressed by Aryeh Neier's lauding his 'crusade for democracy' as a smashing success. I have since asked you repeatedly to justify the slaughter in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique -- never mind support for repressive dictatorships in Zaire, Pakistan, the Philippines and Haiti -- which resulted from this 'crusade'; and ever since you have dodged away from the issue, retreating into philosophical generalities about World War Two and now, Heaven help us, 1776 (a date without meaning in British history) and ancient Greece (perpetrating the usual reinterpretation of Greek history in the light of the present).

"Now, finally, you have come up with some examples -- and of the five, only one, the Korean War, actually justifies your claim (and then only partly, since the government of South Korea remained under military control, covert and overt, until the late eighties). Your other four examples, however, do not withstand scrutiny for a moment. To take each in turn:

"*'Greece, which escaped the fate of the Balkans....'* The viciousness in this conflict was perpetrated not just by the insurgents, who had been abandoned (and told not to fight on) by Stalin some two-and-a-half years prior to formal US intervention (which came about because Britain could no longer bear the cost of its involvement), but by the government forces, who turned on the Greek population with a savagery not seen since the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 (or seen again until the current wars in former Yugoslavia). Victory for the government resulted in the exclusion from political activity or exile of an entire generation, and by entrenching the military as 'power behind the throne' laid the ground for their eventual 1967 coup when sufficient popular support had been gathered for a direct challenge to their power.

"*'Thailand, which defeated its communist insurgency....'* Then the insurgency couldn't have been that much of a threat if the Thai government was able to deal with it without the assistance of the US, could it? Particularly not when (as recorded in William Blum's *The CIA: A Forgotten History*) Thai forces were actually assisting and participating in the US attacks on Laos and Cambodia. And what is this curious phrase about the US 'occupying the attention of North Vietnam' -- shouldn't it be the other way around, given that the north was attempting to reunify the country and had no interest in anything else until reunification had been achieved, while the US was attempting to entrench the division?

"*'El Salvador, where a flickering democracy was kept going....'* Soviet support for the FMLN was an item of faith with Reagan, although he was never able to produce a shred of evidence to back up the

claim, but to describe El Salvador as a 'flickering democracy' is grotesque. El Salvador, I would remind you, was a nation run by the military, on behalf of the so-called 'Fourteen Families' who controlled the bulk of the nation's agricultural wealth, whose habitual response to opposition was to send forth US-trained death squads to eliminate it. Very 'flickering', I'd say -- the flames might even have burned stronger had the US not been so free with its military 'aid'. And it was not the guerillas who were forced to negotiate, but the government, under pressure from its patron, the US, since Bush (but clearly not his conservative supporters) was by then well aware that the repeated claims to be nurturing democracy in El Salvador were regarded with revulsion and contempt by the rest of the civilised world.

"*Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas were forced to hold something approximating a fair election*' A fair election had been held in 1984, in which the contra directorate was invited to participate -- and in which it had actually expressed a willingness to participate until instructed to withdraw by its CIA paymasters, who feared that such participation would fully legitimise the Sandinista government and make impossible continued pursuit of the contra war against it. In consequence, the 1984 election has been written out of US history (see, for example, Noam Chomsky's *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control In Democratic Societies*), the better to pretend that the election of 1990 was the first free one since 1979 -- which the Sandinistas lost principally because the UNO coalition could promise what they could not: an end to the contra war and a resumption of US aid. (Not that, in the event, a UNO victory has done the Nicaraguan people much good: former contra soldiers, discarded by their leaders, now find themselves in the same boat as the landless peasants; spending on health, housing, education and basic nutrition has steadily declined; and US aid, thanks largely to the manoeuvrings of triumphalist lunatics like Jesse Helms, determined to erase all trace of the Sandinistas, has not been forthcoming.)

"You argue that you have not been concerned with the morality or legality of the Reagan 'crusade', but only with whether it was 'effective'. This of course implies that in your opinion the end justifies the means, and confirms a suggestion in my letter of 15-20 October 1992 that in your eyes two wrongs do indeed make a right. And from these heights you purport to lecture us about this so-called 'crusade for democracy'?"

The quotes in what follows come from a selection of articles which -- pursuing another strand of the correspondence -- I hoped would demonstrate to Taras the diversity of thought and experience on the left, which he has a tendency to regard as a far more homogenous bloc than it is (or ever was). I consider that he's taken the quotes out of context -- that is, the extensive and undogmatic scale of the rethinking that's been under way on the left since the late eighties (and arguably since the publication of Andre Gorz's Farewell To The Working Class in 1980) -- but they are important to his argument:

WOLANSKY TO NICHOLAS, 18 February 1994:

"Okay, you agree that violence was sometimes necessary to establish and defend democracy prior to 1945. And now it seems you're even willing to extend that up to 1981. Do you seriously maintain that what was true for millennia ceased to be true in 1981?"

"As I recall, the point I was making with that piece by Aryeh Neier (which I can't lay my hands on at the moment) is that one of America's most prominent leftists and Reagan-haters, writing in one of America's most prominent left-wing and Reagan-hating periodicals, grudgingly admits the huge success of Reagan's foreign policy. The fact is, with the nudging of the US, democracy did spread during the 1980s.

"The Cold War was a 'crusade for democracy' in the same global sense as World War Two was such a crusade; indeed, some historians insist that the Cold War was merely a continuation of World War Two. Democracy may be described as the overall goal of the enterprise; though not the only goal; and certainly not the immediate goal of every individual act of the Allies in World War Two, or the Free World in the Cold War. Obviously, handing over Eastern Europe to Stalin was not, in itself, an act which promoted democracy in that region -- yet it may have promoted democracy in the world as a whole by helping defeat Nazi Germany.

"Medicine causes pain and suffering -- yet for all that the goal of medicine is the relief of pain and suffering.

"In other words, American interference with the Soviet Union's allies and tributary states could be justified solely on the basis of its helping defeat the Soviet Union, thereby liberating half of Europe and ending the threat of nuclear destruction.

"In all, or nearly all cases, however, American intervention in the Third World had a more immediate justification as well. By 1981, for example, when a left-wing movement in the Third World promised democracy, land reform, religious freedom, agrarian reform, gay rights, free speech, free love, free housing, free food, etc. etc. (that is, promised everything to everybody) only fools still believed it. Here's Stephen Howe ('The New Xenophobes', *New Statesman & Society*, 5 March 1991): 'The third left model...came to dominate not only international communism, but also most socialist and radical

nationalist parties in the developing world. The result in power was almost invariably totalitarian dictatorship.' And Denis MacShane ('From The Ashes Of Defeat', *NSS*, 8 July 1992): 'The "socialist" governments of the decolonised world remain in the hands of self-perpetuating elites whose economic policies have bankrupted their countries and whose idea of social dialogue is to fill prison cells with democratic opponents.' Or Paul Foot ('Fire Below', *NSS*, 5 March 1991): 'The "socialism" preached by communist parties was, for the workers, degradation and tyranny.' To prevent the horrors described by Howe and MacShane and Foot -- isn't that enough to justify intervention?

"In 1975, the Left applauded when a 'repressive dictatorship' was overthrown -- in Cambodia. I think by now, in spite of the best efforts of the Chomskys and Cockburns of the world, you know what happened next. Yet if the US had successfully preserved the Lon Nol regime (saving between one and two million lives in the process) you would by now be asking me why the US was supporting such a 'repressive dictatorship'! And quoting fervent promises of democracy and civil rights from representatives of the Khmer Rouge. Just as you're asking me why the US supported El Salvador against a Soviet-backed insurgency (which collapsed the moment the Soviet Union did), while nudging it toward democracy. We know a Marxist El Salvador would have been bad; we just don't know how bad.

"(Incidentally, you seem -- from *FTT* 15's 'Loonywatch' column -- to have a problem understanding Jeanne Kirkpatrick's distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Think of it this way: Lon Nol vs Pol Pot. Got that? Lon Nol vs Pol Pot.)

"In Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique, insurgencies supported by the Soviet Union had successfully seized power and established repressive dictatorships; at least in the first two cases the US backed opponents of the dictatorships. (In Mozambique, the US has been supporting the government for some years; once again, you pass over Afghanistan without a word.)

"To choke off support for the contras in Washington, the Sandinistas had to make a plausible show of democracy. Perhaps believing their own propaganda, as disseminated by the international media, the Sandinistas thought they were genuinely popular, and permitted an election at least free enough to vote them out of office. Following this blunder, with renewed support for the contras only a few dozen votes away in the US Congress, the Sandinistas had to give up some of their power. (It is instructive to compare the history of the Sandinistas's Nicaragua with Castro's Cuba, where there was no insurgency to pressure the dictator towards democracy.)

"Like most black African nations, Angola suffers deep tribal divisions, and I don't believe a unified democracy is possible. There is no reason why it should be: Angola is an imaginary line, drawn for the convenience of colonial bureaucrats, around the territories of several tribes or nations. Nonetheless, the enemy of our enemy was our friend. No question that Angola was very costly to Castro and to the Soviet Union.

"*South Korea*: If you can't tell the difference between North Korea and South Korea -- well, never mind.

"*Greece*: We don't have a 'North Greece' to compare; but look at Bulgaria and Albania. (Are you acquainted with the book *Eleni*?)

"*Thailand*: If the Thais helped us during the Vietnam War, I salute them! 'The insurgency couldn't have been that much of a threat...' (Because the Thais were ultimately able to deal with it, it 'couldn't have been that much of a threat'! Because the Allies were ultimately able to deal with them, the Nazis 'couldn't have been that much of a threat'!)

"My point was that the Thais did have indirect assistance, in that North Vietnam was fighting Americans when it would otherwise have been extending fraternal aid to its socialist brothers in Thailand. Or, as you put it, 'the north was attempting to reunify the country, and had no interest in anything else until reunification had been achieved'. Perhaps you did not realise you were making my point for me. Vietnam did not get into the imperialism business in a big way until three years after 'reunification', when it conquered Cambodia.

"It is a bitter joke of history that, after spending so many lives and causing so much suffering to make South Vietnam socialist, now Hanoi is trying to retrace its steps, to recreate capitalism in both north and south. The ultimate obscenity of Marxism is that, after tens of millions dead and hundreds of millions of blasted lives, *it was all for nothing*.

"*El Salvador*: The former guerillas themselves admit they were demoralised by the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, because at one stroke they had nothing to fight with, and nothing to fight for. The guerillas had to make most of the concessions; they had to give up the demand for political power and accept merely the right to run candidates.

"But: 1) what a strange coincidence, that this should happen just after the Soviet Union collapsed; 2) when, with the Cold War over, the sole remaining superpower had less reason than ever to pay attention to world opinion; 3) especially if, as you say, nobody in the US ever reported this, so it could have no effect whatsoever on American politics or Bush's re-election. Most fundamentally, 4) when both a government and a guerilla movement are denied outside aid, the government, with its tax base and

control of foreign trade, is holding all the cards. Besides, 5) that 'revulsion and contempt' must have been in the left-wing press, because that's all you ever read, and it will continue to hate the US regardless.

"*Nicaragua*: The Left's rationalisation of the 1990 election is easily blown up. 1) Nobody on the Left said anything like that *before* the election; all were absolutely sure the Sandinistas would win. In fact, the American Left was busily counting its chickens before they hatched -- and was utterly crushed by the result. (It took only a few weeks for the rationalisations to start appearing.) Only right-wing anti-communist types predicted a Sandinista defeat, and they predicted it on a very different basis. 2) The contras were not much of a threat any more, having been strangled in Washington, especially after the Iran-contra scandal. 3) When pollsters asked the Nicaraguan people how they would vote, they lied -- and said 'Sandinista'. They did not fear contra reprisals; they feared *Sandinista* reprisals!

"Sometimes it seems you have problems with analytical reasoning. For example, trying to clear up a muddle, I wrote: 'Several different questions are pushed together.... Were Reagan's policies : 1) legal; 2) moral; 3) effective. In our correspondence I've mostly addressed point 3.' (In this letter I've mostly addressed point 2!) But you muddle it up again: 'you argue that you have not been concerned with the morality or the legality of the Reagan "crusade", but only with whether it was "effective". This of course implies that in your opinion the end justifies the means'.

"On the contrary, all this implies is the undeniable point that a policy may be illegal but moral, yet ineffective; or legal but immoral, yet effective; or any combination of the three. Personally, I think they were generally both moral and effective; but not being a lawyer I hesitate to pronounce about the legality of every act. The advantage of point 3 is that it is the only question which can be answered empirically. And has been answered empirically, by the collapse of the Soviet Union."

There matters have rested until now. I sent Taras a brief acknowledgement when his letter arrived, citing pressure of D-I-Y and promising a reply in a month or so; but then the weather warmed up and the garden became more interesting, and sitting outdoors watching the frogs seemed preferable to sitting indoors gazing at a computer screen. But now the summer is over, our vegetable crops have been harvested, and the frogs are seeking somewhere to hibernate for the winter. High time, therefore, to turn one's attention to the overdue reply:

NICHOLAS TO WOLANSKY, FTT 16:

"Did I really agree that 'violence (is) sometimes necessary to establish and defend democracy'? Doubtless my remarks about the Korean War could be taken that way, but the thesis is entirely yours; I have made no direct comment on it at all. In any case, the issue is not whether 'what was true for millenia ceased to be true in 1981', but -- *again* you dodge away from it -- your deployment of this thesis in attempted justification of the foreign policy interventions of the Reagan administration. This dodging away suggests either that you're too dim to understand the disjuncture between the rhetoric and the reality (which I think is quite unlikely), or that you understand it very well but are too embarrassed by it to wish to confront it directly. Hence, I suspect, your continual retreats into alleged World War Two parallels -- which even in your own terms are no parallels at all. The Allies could rationalise their assaults on German and Japanese civilians by pointing to the enemy status conferred on them by the fact that they were citizens of states against which war had formally been declared -- whereas in the Cold War, according to you, the US was at war with the Soviet Union but attacking the civilian populations of several other nations entirely!

"But let's deal first with your comments about five specific countries, and (apart from those I pick up along the way) leave the general comments until later. *South Korea*: Of course I can tell the difference between North and South. The difference between us is that you presumably think a military-dominated regime which made it a criminal offence to question the official version of the Korean War, massacred an estimated two thousand students in the city of Kwangju in 1980, and was eventually driven from office in 1987 by massive public protests was actually democratic. (Protests about which the supposedly pro-democratic Reagan administration remained curiously silent, presumably embarrassed by its years of support for the regime and aware that a switch to the opposition would be seen as purely opportunist.)

"*Greece*: Straight one-to-one comparisons with Albania or Bulgaria are facile but misleading, since they ignore the very different baselines from which each nation started -- population numbers, level of education and healthcare, stage of agrarian and industrial development, access to resources, trade links, rate of economic growth, and so forth. Moreover, since 1980 Greece has been a net recipient of EU regional funds, which have necessarily increased the disparities between itself and its neighbours. And while I'm familiar with the book *Eleni* I can't accept as work of serious history a partisan memoir which fictionalises the thoughts and conversations of people the author never knew. Richard Clogg's *A Concise History Of Greece* (actually modern Greece since 1825) provides an altogether more even-handed account of the civil war and its legacy.

"*Thailand*: For most of the time here you're actually discussing Vietnam, and manifesting US conservatives' usual inability to confront the facts of the war: that it was the US which helped divide the country at the Geneva conference following the French defeat in 1954, reneged on its promise to allow free elections (because it knew Ho Chi Minh would win) and established a puppet government in the south in 1955, sent in 'military advisers' in 1962, and finally commenced full-scale military operations in 1964 -- that is, it invaded the country to keep it divided. This history has presumably had to be rewritten to disguise the fact that the US was ultimately defeated -- a rewriting which extends even to pretending that Vietnam's later attack on Cambodia was a typical example of communist expansionism, rather than a response to continued Cambodian attacks along their common border. And was not this 'conquest' actually the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime and the exposure of its genocide? Another inconvenient fact which has to be ignored -- not least because the Reagan and Bush administrations, motivated by nothing more than spite at US defeat by the Vietnamese, spent most of the eighties arming and funding the so-called Khmer People's National Government, a supposed government-in-exile which was nothing more than a front for the very same -- and presumably too embarrassing to acknowledge openly -- Pol Pot regime. (In any case, your observations on Hanoi's economic policies make the common mistake of assuming that the rallying ideology adopted by national liberation forces is an end in itself, rather than a means to an end -- in this case, reunification.)

"*El Salvador*: There is an internal flaw in the second of your five numbered points. If 'the sole remaining superpower had less reason than ever to pay attention to world opinion', what then pressured the Salvadorean government to negotiate with the FMLN? Indeed, following this logic, why did the government not refuse negotiations altogether, and simply intensify the war? Because your claim that this happened 'just after the Soviet Union collapsed' inverts chronology, that's why, and your numbered points are therefore baseless. The FMLN, recognising both that Bush was less rejectionist than Reagan and (more importantly) that the Salvadorean business and political classes were growing tired of the war, offered to negotiate in January 1989. Negotiations began a few months later, and continued until the election of Cristiani, the right-wing ARENA candidate, as President in June. While claiming a willingness to talk, Cristiani allowed negotiations to slide. Recognising that he was not serious, the FMLN launched an attack on the capital in November which, although it failed in its immediate objectives, demonstrated its capacity for continued economic sabotage (and thus its threat to the tax base and foreign trade). The military, dominated by the far right and steeped in the ethos of the death squads, responded by murdering six Jesuit priests -- provoking the very 'revulsion and contempt' to which I referred, and which even you must have noticed. Under pressure from the US, Cristiani was forced to reopen negotiations -- which eventually resulted in agreements on human rights, constitutional reforms, a truth commission into the disappeared, the dissolution of the Treasury Police, the reconstruction of the civil police, a purge of the military, the creation of an independent judiciary....this is failure, and the result of demoralisation? Hardly -- indeed, none of it would have been achieved without a guerilla war to force the 'Fourteen Families' to surrender their grip on power. Might I suggest you read James Dunkerley's *The Pacification Of Central America* and the chapter on El Salvador in Barry Carr's and Steve Ellner's *The Latin American Left: From The Fall Of Allende To Perestroika* before you next pronounce on this issue?

"*Nicaragua*: Your statements about the contras are contradictory. Either they 'were not much of a threat any more, having been strangled in Washington', or 'support for the contras [was] only a few dozen votes away in the US Congress'. Which do you want? (You clearly can't have both.) Certainly, the Sandinistas' election defeat came as a surprise to those who'd supported them -- but it was equally surprising to President Bush, who on the very eve of polling day itself was widely reported to be preparing to recognise their political legitimacy, normalise diplomatic relations, and remove the US embargo on IMF and World Bank assistance. (I'd like to see you try 'easily' blowing that up.) And the description of the Sandinistas as a 'repressive dictatorship' is laughable -- they made mistakes, particularly in the geographically and culturally separate Atlantic coast region, but it's a funny 'repressive dictatorship' (or 'totalitarian dungeon', to use Reagan's favourite epithet) which teaches its people to read and write, provides them with basic healthcare and housing, gives them grants of lands to grow their own crops for market, and (most tellingly) distributes weapons to its citizens so they can defend themselves against the contras. A dictatorship which really did repress its people would never have contemplated such an act.

"And so to return to your more general comments. Seizing on a number of quotes from various articles in *New Statesman & Society*, you ask: 'To prevent the horrors described by Howe and MacShane and Foot -- isn't that enough to justify intervention?' If the actual purpose of the Reagan administration's interventions had been to prevent such horrors then they might be justified -- but the historical record shows that its goals were no different from those of previous administrations: that is, the removal of popular, nationalist governments with agendas for economic redistribution and social justice, and their replacement with dictatorships distinguished principally by a proclaimed anti-communism and secondly by a propensity to treat their countries as private banks, to be robbed at will. One half suspects that Jeanne Kirkpatrick's absurd distinction between 'authoritarian' and 'totalitarian' dictatorships was

manufactured solely to get around the embarrassing disjuncture between the claimed desire to promote democracy throughout the world and the results of the actions allegedly taken on its behalf -- but while this distinction might have played well in US conservative circles, it was transparently obvious to the rest of the world as merely another in the long list of grubby justifications for continued support for the usual gang of thugs.

"You now suggest that 'authoritarian' dictators are more acceptable than 'totalitarian' ones because they do not commit genocide -- 'Lon Nol vs Pol Pot' -- but even this example belies such a claim. On seizing power in 1970, Lon Nol sent in army death squads to murder males of ethnic Vietnamese descent along the Mekong, then spent several weeks alternately denying the existence of the several thousand bodies left floating in the river and claiming that they were dead Vietcong guerillas redressed in civilian clothes -- claims so fantastic that not even his US paymasters believed him. And what about another 'authoritarian' dictator, General Suharto of Indonesia? An estimated 500,000 people were killed when he siezed power in 1965; a probable 200,000 have died since the invasion of East Timor in 1975; 5000 were murdered in the state of Acer in 1980; and unknown thousands of tribespeople have been massacred since transmigration commenced in Irian Jaya -- all without a single bleat of protest from any US administration. (When researching evidence of US involvement in Suharto's coup, US historian Gabriel Kolko found that State Department papers for the three months leading up to it were either closed to researchers or 'missing', although the archives held plenty of material on Indonesia both before and after this period -- a sure sign of an attempt to cover up complicity in the resulting slaughter.) Or how about El Salvador, again? Some 75,000 people died in the civil war, 80% of them at the hands of the government, and some of them -- as in the notorious massacre at El Mozote in 1981 by the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion -- children as young as two, beheaded on the grounds that they might grow up to become guerillas. The Reagan administration certainly knew about that -- but, as recently declassified State Department papers show, deliberately covered it up in order not to imperil aid votes in Congress.

"One can thus make a mockery of your claim that killing people is necessary to establish democracy by inverting its premise: if lots of people are being killed, then democracy must be being established; and if very large numbers of people are being killed then the outcome will be even more democratic -- and a country which has been depopulated by murder is by definition the most democratic on Earth. (What a paradigm!) Hence, perhaps, your earlier description of El Salvador as a 'flickering democracy': it was only 'flickering' because *not enough people were being killed*.

"Accusing me of having problems with analytical reasoning, you seem blind to the implications of some of your statements. 'No question that Angola was very costly to Castro and to the Soviet Union' suggests that the people of Angola had no value in themselves, but were regarded as expendable in the Great Game between the USA and the USSR; and no wonder that US foreign policy is so often accused of covert racism. In this case, destabilisation of a regime the US didn't like was masked as civil war, with Jonas Savimbi and UNITA being sustained entirely by the US and South Africa; since 1975, they have been responsible for 300,000 dead, 80,000 war cripples, 50,000 orphans, the highest infant mortality rate in the world, over a million people displaced, and \$30 billion of damage to Angola's infrastructure. I don't need lectures in analytical reasoning, Taras, to tell me that this is illegal, immoral and ineffective. That you can proclaim such suffering and destruction as a success for democracy is contemptible.

"You also seem unaware of how 'costly' Angola was to South Africa, which suffered a huge defeat at Cuito Canavale in 1988 and had to reluctantly recognise that its strategy of destabilisation -- intended to 'prove' that black Africans were incapable of ruling themselves -- could not be indefinitely maintained, and that apartheid would therefore have to go. Nelson Mandela himself has said that without Cuban support the ANC's victory would not have been possible. (While Reagan, by contrast, continually resisted imposing sanctions on South Africa until forced to do so by Congress.) At this remove, it's amusing to re-read the fulminations against the ANC in your letter of 18 February 1993; after all, was the ANC not fighting for democracy against a repressive government, and were the killings conducted in its name not therefore necessary to win that democracy? Obviously not, must be the conclusion, since the ANC was fighting for democracy from the left of the political spectrum rather than the right, and in US conservative eyes there is presumably no such thing as a left-wing democracy because to be left is by definition to be anti-democratic. As distinct, presumably, from right-wing 'democrats' like the contras and UNITA, who must be democratic because they were supported by the USA, which by definition has never campaigned for anything but democracy. Verily, this just proves things."

Readers who've got this far will have noted that the extracts from my letters tend to be longer than those from Taras's, and may therefore be wondering how selectively I've quoted. In good part, such an impression may be a consequence of our very different styles: Taras prefers short, punchy soundbites, whereas I tend to the more discursive (or, as some have it, long-winded). Nevertheless, anyone who wishes to read the entire correspondence for themselves is welcome to do so -- just send an A4 envelope with sufficient postage for 500g to the editorial address, and a feast of photocopies can be yours.

BACK TO BASICS

A Quiz for Aspiring Conservative MPs

1. What do you understand by the term "Back to Basics"? Does it mean:

- (a) getting your end away with a local activist at the annual party conference; or
- (b) fathering a child out of wedlock and then concealing it from the tabloid press; or
- (c) prancing around your home in a suspender belt and a pair of stockings; or
- (d) all of the above?

2. You are taped making a secret speech accusing foreigners of being inherently corrupt. Do you:

- (a) deny everything until the tape is played back, then make a belated, grudging apology; or
- (b) ask journalists to suppress your remarks on the grounds that they would be misreporting you; or
- (c) attempt to avoid blame by accusing the "chattering classes" of cynically running down British institutions; or
- (d) all of the above?

3. You are discovered trying to disguise weapons sales to a foreign country as overseas aid. Do you:

- (a) blame one of your colleagues for "briefly entangling" the two issues without permission; or
- (b) argue that your accusers are ignoring what happens in the "real world" and that the figures in the memos are purely coincidental; or
- (c) claim that British jobs matter more than what is actually sold; or
- (d) all of the above?

4. An espionage trial collapses and you are forced to set up an inquiry into government duplicity. Do you:

- (a) pretend that you were dubious about the trial all along, and scapegoat your advisers for misleading you; or
- (b) attack the press for getting matters out of proportion; or

- (c) explain that ministers have the right to lie about their actions anyway; or
- (d) all of the above?

5. You are forced to increase taxes to compensate for your previous mismanagement and economic incompetence. Do you:

- (a) attack the opposition parties for not explaining how they would make up the revenue shortfall; or
- (b) explain that these adjustments to the tax base are necessary to keep inflation under control as Britain leads the world out of economic recession; or
- (c) claim that the historic rise in real wage rates mean that these increases are actually cuts in real terms; or
- (d) all of the above?

6. You need to explain away the breakdown of society and the rising level of crime which have characterised your 15 years in power. Do you blame:

- (a) feckless single mothers for abusing the council housing and social security systems; or
- (b) school teachers for peddling educational theories developed during the sixties and seventies; or
- (c) the churches for failing to provide people with a strong moral foundation; or
- (a) all of the above?

7. You wish to justify your claim that Britain "is at the heart of Europe". Will you therefore:

- (a) demand that enlarging the European Union should precede deepening, until you discover that this means surrendering your right to veto Commission decisions; or
- (b) seek to dilute the impact of Commission Directives under the guise of reclaiming subsidiarity; or
- (c) object strenuously to every Commission appointment in order to placate the Europhobes in your party; or
- (d) all of the above?

A Javan rhinoceros is almost as rare as a painting by Vermeer.

(Javan rhinos believed still alive: 60. Dutch masters ascribed to Vermeer: 40.)

Cows could be causing up to a fifth of a major global warming gas.

(Percentage of methane in the atmosphere thought to come from cows farting: 7-21)

China aims to keep its acid rain-making sulphur dioxide emissions to 41,000 tons a day, or three supertanker loads a week.

A completely catalysed UK car and van fleet could still pack 42 years of untreated tailpipe pollution into a day.

(Time taken by car exhaust catalyser to reach its 300°C operating temperature: 1 minute. Cars and vans in UK: 22,344,000.)

About 833 juggernaut loads of textiles a day are thrown on British rubbish dumps.

(Tons of clothing and shoes collected at Salvation Army textile banks annually: 24,000. Tons of textiles landfilled: 700,000.)

Researchers found 476 items of manufactured rubbish per hour on an uninhabited Pitcairn Island beach 5000 kilometres from anywhere in the Pacific.

A queue of nose-to-tail juggernauts carrying a year's plastic lines and nets discarded at sea from fishing boats would stretch 65 miles.

The world's whole supertanker fleet would not be able to deliver a year's newspapers to the USA.

(Supertanker loads of newspapers recycled by Americans: 230. Supertanker loads dumped: 578. World supertanker fleet: 791.)

Not a single river in the USA is safe to drink from or swim in.

No US public water supply is considered to be free of cancer-causing chemicals.

On average, 19 chemical spills, explosions and other accidental toxic releases occur in the USA every day.

(Known US toxic chemical accidents 1988-92: 34,000. Known toxic chemical accidents in California: 4820.)

The 24 million Americans born since 1984 will consume more resources than the whole population of Africa.

(Average number of children per US woman in 1984: 1.8. In 1994: 2.1 Predicted US population by 2050: 380million.)

(All cited in *The Weekend Guardian* on various dates from May to October 1994, from a variety of sources.)

This is FTT 16, from:

Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas

15 Jansons Road

South Tottenham

London N15 4JU

United Kingdom

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