FORA CHANGE

VOLUME 5-NUMBER 6
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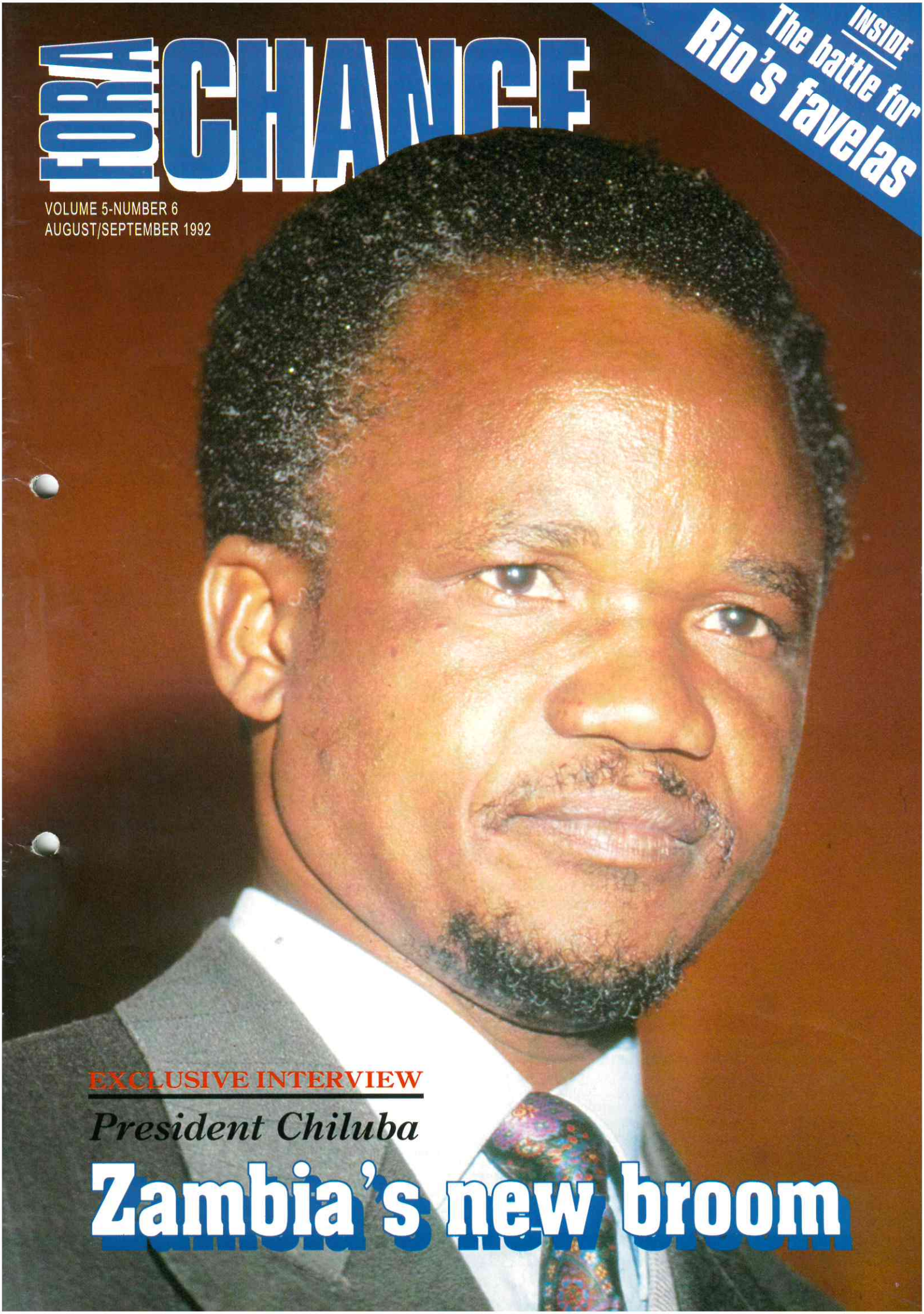
INSIDE
The battle for Rio's favelas



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

President Chiluba

Zambia's new broom

EAR TO THE GROUND

by Mike Brown, California

A heap of rage

In battle-scarred Los Angeles, your mental geography is revealed by whether you talk of 'the riots' (by lawless thugs) or 'the uprising' (by a depressed urban underclass). Either way, 45 people are dead, 2,383 injured, some 5,200 buildings destroyed or damaged, and 40,000 jobs gone. Not to mention a mangled heap of rage, fear, self-righteousness, despair. But the rebuilding has already begun – with help from some unexpected quarters.

Beauty from ashes?

'It's been beautiful,' said Q Bone, a black 27-year-old Crip gang member. 'Out of the rioting, something good came into the world.' Q Bone (his street name) was talking about the truce between seven gangs in the Inglewood area of LA.

Following his directions, I drove down Western Avenue, pock-marked by burnt-out buildings, and turned into a narrow lane bordered by warehouses. Inside one of them, the leaders of the seven cooperating gangs had set up headquarters.

'I'm just tired of seeing the violence that occurs within our race,' Q Bone said. 'We've got to show people this eye-for-eye stuff is out the door.' The non-violent alliance, he said, must be the foundation of a wider truce among LA's 100,000 gang members – and it must stick. 'We need to work to make it last. Only we who have a foundation in the street can do that.'

Hollywood hit

Not far across the city Jennie Richert, a soap-opera actress living in Hollywood, felt she 'had to do something'. Crossing into the burnt-out Crenshaw district, she convinced a black retaurant owner to open his establishment for a dialogue between her well-off neighbourhood friends and some residents of his area. First to speak in the discussion was a woman whose son was killed during a gang fight. Richert had had her eyes opened to racial prejudice by a film she first saw in the Sixties, *The Crowning Experience*. The issue, she says quoting the film, is still one of 'character, not colour'.

Screen body-count

The character of Hollywood, you might say, is partly responsible for the violence. An average 15-year-old American kid has seen 18,000 real or dramatized violent deaths and assaults on television – 3,000 more than ten years ago. Mix that with 1,700 weapons stolen during the riots, an 'inner-city pathology' of unemployment, drugs and despair, and the gang truce has huge odds stacked against it.

Checks and balances

Soon-to-retire Los Angeles police chief, Darryl Gates, walks out of his job with $130,000 a year benefits – which prompted one Los Angeleno to comment that it is no wonder teenagers in slums feel justified in swiping a pair of Reebok trainers from a store. As a school superintendent in a poor district of San Francisco saw it, the riots were less about race than about 'a mentality of anarchy – taking what you want regardless of what's right or wrong, because others are doing it'.

The 'checks and balances' most obvious in government of late have been the bouncing cheques and over-drawn balances of Members of Congress. And when junk-bond dealers retain millions, even after fines and jail-terms, where indeed is equity? A meeting of 800 inner-city workers in Chicago put it succinctly: 'The war-zone environment of our inner cities is merely the violent underside of consumerism – the frustrated mirror image of the twisted values that govern wider society.'

What was it that actress said about character being the issue?

Am I confuzed!

At which point everyone points accusingly at the failure of the education system. If proof of moral confusion were needed, note what one student wrote in her music essay: 'A virtuoso is a musician with real high morals.' Further proof comes from the free distribution of condoms in high schools, and schoolyard murders over jackets and hairstyles.

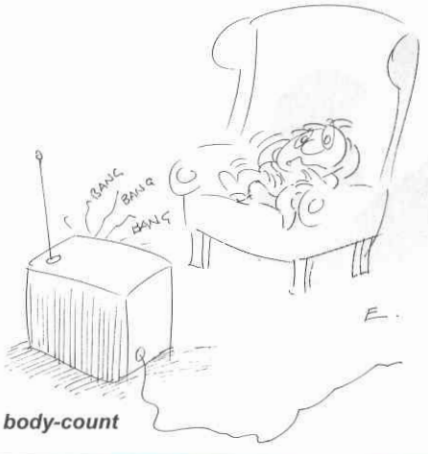
Values education, however, is making a comeback. But 'whose values?' asks *Newsweek* in its cover story. After pages of various people's views, the article concludes that 'the big ideas about values are the oldest or simplest'. Jesse Jackson reminded us of a simple one: the Ten Commandments, he said, form the best ten-point urban renewal plan there is.

A gulf in priorities

A new moral code on its own will not help those gang leaders rebuild their city. Nor will just punishing criminals, says Pasadena's ex-police chief, Bruce Philpott. Philpott makes a passionate plea for priority investment in long-term human development programmes. Resources were found to fight a Gulf war, he noted. Why not make illiteracy the enemy? 'I dream of an education system with the sophistication of an $835 billion stealth bomber.'

Swat claim

Violence, of course, isn't limited to America. And all sorts of excuses are given for it. Take, for instance, the insurance claim submitted by an Australian driver who explained: 'I leaned forward to swat a fly on the windscreen and hit the car in front.' ■



Screen body-count

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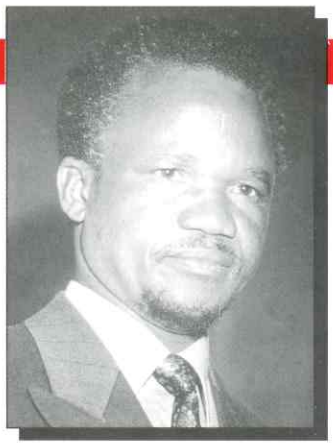


COVER: President Chiluba of Zambia
photo: David Channer

FOR A CHANGE

- examines the changes engulfing the world, what's going right as well as what's going wrong.
- focusses on people, many motivated by faith in God, who are making a difference to the world around them.
- explores the changes needed in attitudes and actions – as well as structures – which are crucial to peace, justice and the survival of the planet.
- was born out of the experience of Moral Re-Armament and draws its material from a wide range of sources.

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

Moral Re-Armament was launched in 1938 when Europe was rearming. Frank Buchman, MRA's American initiator, called for a programme of 'moral and spiritual rearmament' to address the root causes of conflict, and work towards a 'hate-free, fear-free, greed-free world'. Since then people of all backgrounds and traditions have been active in this programme on every continent.

MRA is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make real in their own life the changes they wish to see in society. A commitment to search for God's will in daily life forms the basis for creative initiative and common action. Absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change.

IN MY VIEW

Charles and Diana are not alone

by Christopher Evans

Call off the hounds; put away the telephoto lens; let publishers fight their circulation wars elsewhere. Marriage is not a spectator sport.

Britain's royal marriage is not the first to hit trouble, but, as with any couple, theirs is a dream that deserves to survive. Maybe not the soft-focus romance of years ago, but a true dream, which turns the pain of all that has happened to good account. Any couple who have been through it all and still emerged together have more to offer than those who have never known rough seas.

Few of us who are married can say we have never felt our marriage was in trouble; the lucky ones maybe only for a few silent or stormy minutes, but many for long, empty years.

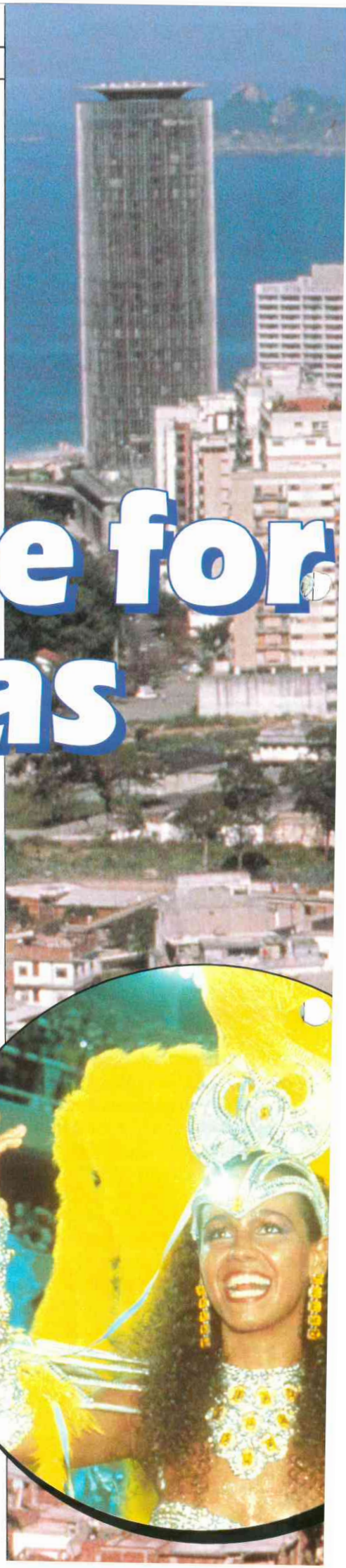
How do you feel again an affection which is no longer there? Or give still more of yourself in marriage if your life is already over-committed in other ways? Experts, friends and common sense can all help. But there is another dimension also.

Christian marriage, and that in other faiths, involves promises before God, who does not taunt us with contracts that cannot be kept or choices that cannot be made. He waits to reach out to us, especially when we most need it. In response to our openness and our obedience to what we understand of his will, he can assume mastery of our feelings. His still, small voice – often no more than a thought that slips into our consciousness when we step aside to seek it – can guide us through the fiercest rapids, and then purposefully out into the wide waters beyond.

I can think of couples whose marriages recovered from rock bottom to become as vibrant as on honeymoon. Stand back and give the royal partners some breathing space.

You don't have to be feckless, criminal or even poor to live in Rio de Janeiro's shanty towns. You just have to be unlucky. Mary Lean meets the residents who are transforming these communities.

The battle for the favelas



A burst of fire-crackers rings out from the jumble of huts on the dark hillside. It tells Rio de Janeiro that drugs are for sale.

This is one of the world's most spectacular cities – and one of its most violent. Drug traffickers based in its 600 favelas (shanty towns) boast a turnover of US$2,500,000 a week. Thousands of children run wild on its streets, hustling or mugging for a living, often dying violently themselves – some, it is alleged, at the hands of police.

Up to three million people live in the favelas which scramble up Rio's precipitous hillsides and across her swampy flats. 300,000 people arrive every year, building wherever they can find a space. There are even shacks wedged in the triangles where flyovers meet the ground.

The favelas are the site of one of the great human development stories of our time, dating back 40 years to the foundation of the first community associations. Many favelas now have brick houses and paved streets, water and electricity. At the heart of this do-it-yourself urbanization have been people who have refused to be bullied, bribed or to feather their own nests.

With new favelas mushrooming all the time, the struggle continues – with an added dimension. Rio's shanties provide a staging post for drugs, en route to North America and Europe.

In some communities the drug mafia is so confident that their employees wear uniforms. They hold power through fear, but also through an alarmingly successful hearts and minds campaign. They finance the breathtaking floats in Rio's world-famous Carnival; they sometimes provide law and order and social welfare where the state does not; in one favela they are even building a magnificent sports club. They now run many community associations.

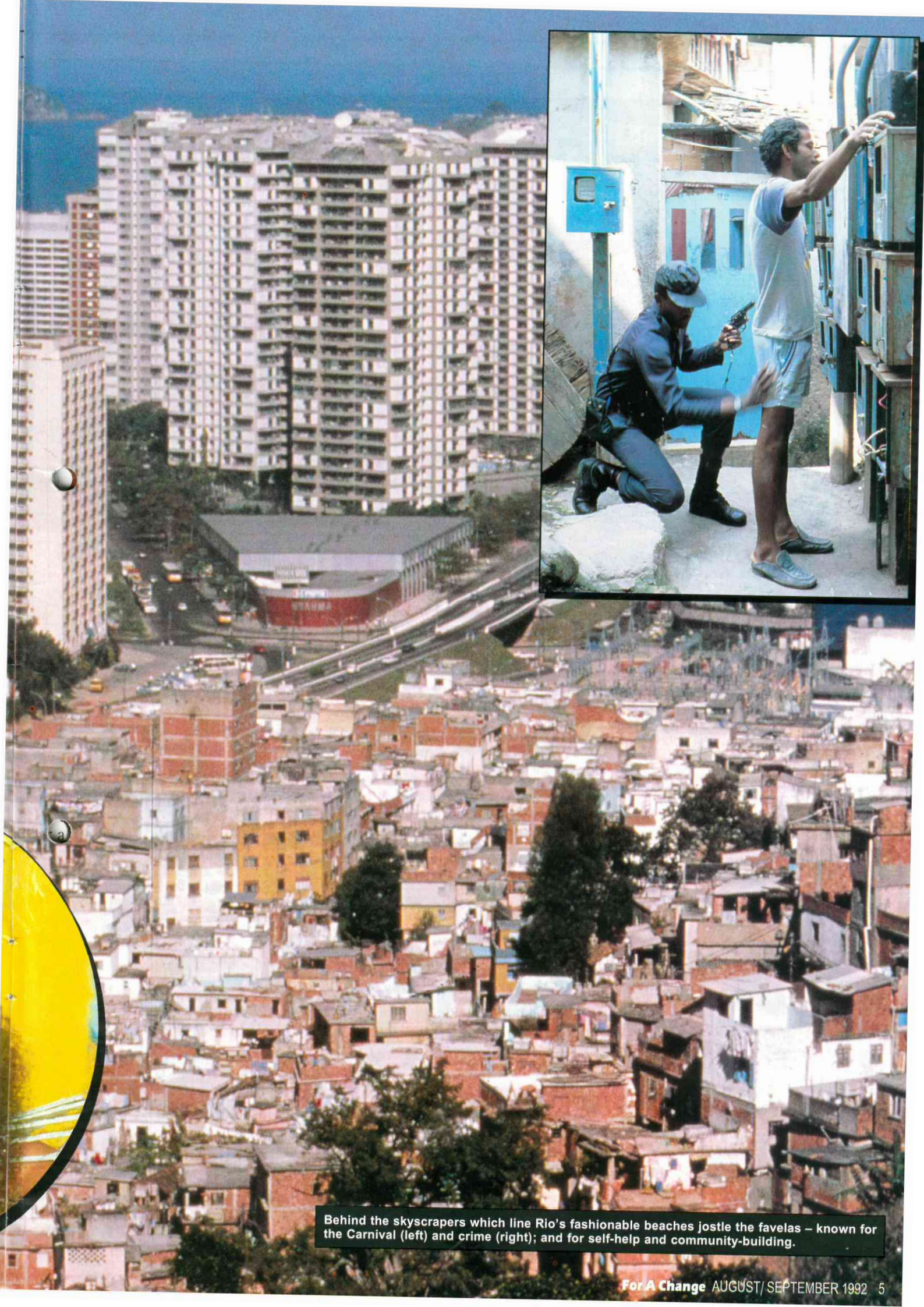
This makes Rio de Janeiro a dangerous place to be honest. The wise do what they can for their communities and keep out of the drug mafia's hair – 'each monkey on his own branch', as one community leader puts it dryly. 'There is a ghost of fear,' says another. 'If you speak out, you may be dead tomorrow. If you invest in a project, someone may take it from you.'

Dangerous – but not impossible. I spent two weeks visiting favelas with Luiz Pereira, a former community leader who makes it his business to give moral support to his colleagues. The people I met convinced me that there is another side to Rio's reality.

Well-educated, professional and dynamic, Ana Inés Sousa isn't everyone's idea of a shanty-town dweller. But she is by no means unique.

Like many *favelados*, Ana Inés (Brazilians don't have much truck with surnames) came to Rio as a refugee from

Arrest photo: M Edwards/Still Pictures Others: Rex Features



Behind the skyscrapers which line Rio's fashionable beaches jostle the favelas – known for the Carnival (left) and crime (right); and for self-help and community-building.

The battle for the favelas

drought in the north-east of Brazil. In 1970, when she was eight, her family left their home in Paraiba for a shack in Rio, two days' bus-ride away.

'The smell from the open drain near our new home was terrible,' she remembers. 'Everything was cramped. There was no social service, no water, no drainage, a lot of disease.' These conditions led her to become a nurse: today she lectures in public health at Rio's Federal University.

Ana Inés's favela, Nova Holanda, is part of a 'temporary' housing project set up in 1960, when the favelas near South Rio's fashionable beaches were cleared away. The idea was that people would move on once they could afford proper government housing. Thirty years on, some 240,000 people still live in 12 communities in the area.

For the people transplanted, the 12-mile move was traumatic. José Carlos de Souza was 19. 'Our community exploded,' he says. 'We were all sent to different places.' For the next 15 years he had a serious alcohol problem. 'I was hypertense, depressed and isolated, desperately afraid of dying.' Eight years ago, he found the courage to face reality and stop drinking. 'I found that I could look people in the eye,' he says. 'Thanks to God, I have had a whole change in my life.'

M Lean

J Henderson

Anna Marcondes Faria (bottom left) looks after 150 children in the Happy Duckling day centre (right) in Parque Vila Isabel.

Since 1991, José Carlos has been president of Nova Holanda's community association, a job he took over from Ana Inés (1987-91) and her sister, Eliana (1984-7). At its first assembly in 1984, the community set out its priorities – basic sanitation, paving, lights, housing, a leisure area, crèche and school. The city authorities, used to presiding over an acquiescent community, now found themselves bombarded with demands. Today many of them have been achieved.

The association's flagship is its building cooperative and brick works, set up in 1988. Some 400 houses have been built. Everywhere you look, people are building. 'That's Nova Holanda today,' says Ana Inés proudly. Their next project is to open a community bakery, to provide training for young people.

The key to success has been involvement, says José Carlos. 'The community defined our priorities and so people were motivated. When someone thinks he knows best, people either feel offended or as if they have been given a Christmas present.'

The integrity, teamwork and continuity of Nova Holanda's leadership has also been crucial. For Ana Inés, as well as José Carlos, faith and honesty are an important part of the equation. A Catholic, she entered community work through her church.

Although no longer president, the association takes most of her spare time. 'I work all day and then come home to a meeting until 11.00 pm. People don't worry what time of the day or night it is, if they have a blocked drain, or the light has gone out, or they need a nurse, they come to me.'

Nova Holanda's community leaders are not paid. 'You can hang your private life on a nail,' says Ana Inés. 'But if nobody had that kind of love for the community, few advances would happen.'

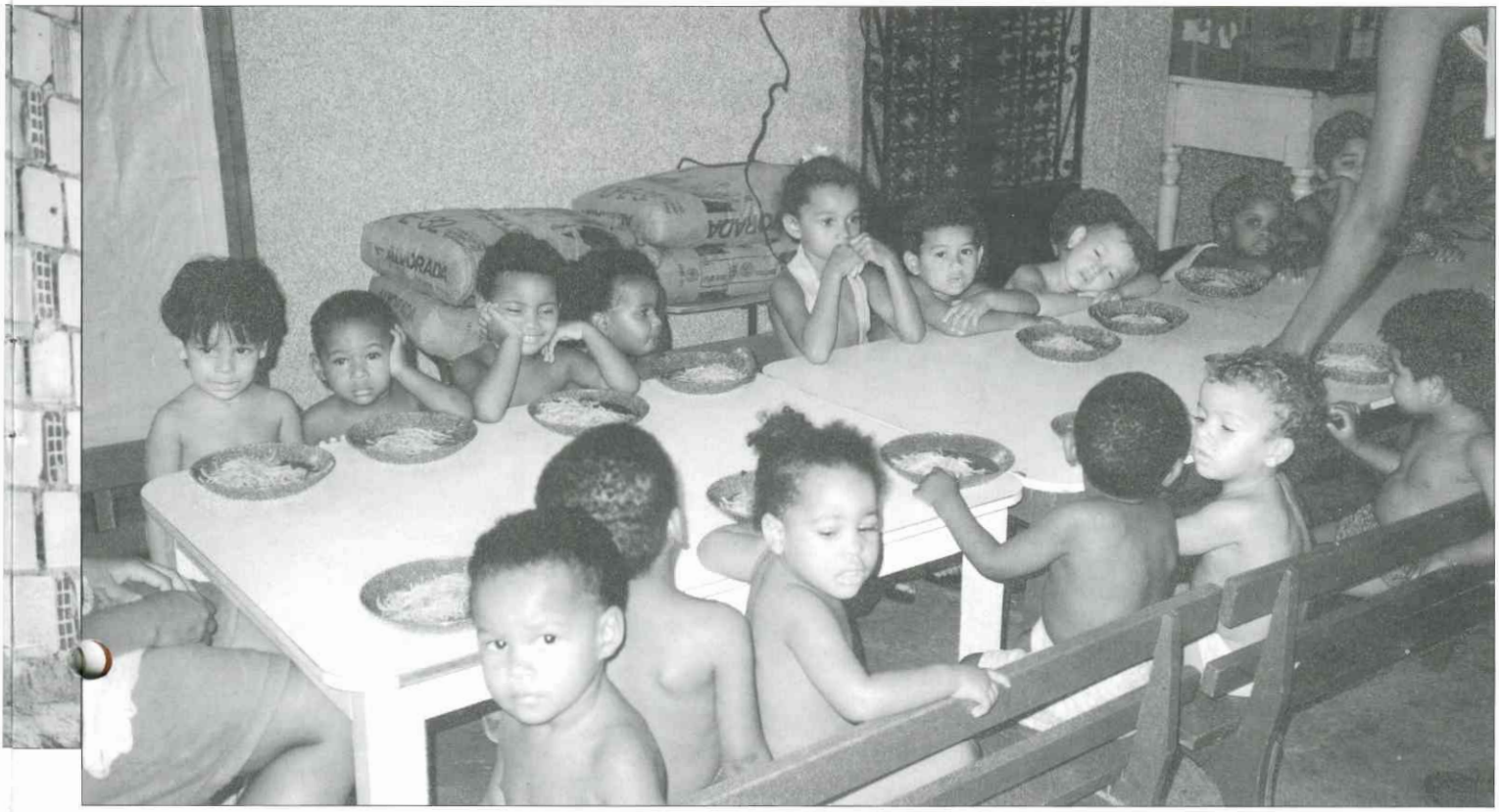
Ana Inés Sousa: 'You can hang your private life on a nail'

In contrast to Nova Holanda, with 15,000 inhabitants, Joaquim Meier favela has only 400. Its secretary, Reginaldo de Souza, knows the plight of Brazil's abandoned children from personal experience. (There are a lot of de Souzas in this story: none of them is related.)

When he was nine, his father killed his mother in a drunken rage. Reginaldo and his brother ended up on the streets, selling lemons, helping women carry their shopping home, sleeping in one friend's house or another's. At 14, he was taking drugs, and stealing to pay for them; at 17, he was managing a drug outlet and living in fear of his life.

A family of evangelical Christians had taken him under their wing, but he refused to live with them. 'They never gave me up. When I was 19 they asked me if I was really happy with my life. When I said I was not, they said it was my turn to do something to help myself. It was not a quick change, but they helped me to find Christ. I never returned to drugs or crime.'

In 1978, Reginaldo moved into Joaquim Meier, then just eight wooden shacks



J Henderson

among the trees. 'I built the ground floor of my house and then the police came and broke it down.' Other new arrivals had the same experience, but completed houses were left alone. 'When the authorities left we started to rebuild our houses cooperatively, with wood, because bricks would take too long. When they came back, they found me in my house – even though it was only one room, with no windows.'

The community set up an association, which got water, light, sewage and some asphalting laid on. In 1983, aged 25, Reginaldo became president, to the concern of those neighbours who knew his past. Under his six-year leadership the community managed to gain ownership of the land and to rebuild their houses in brick. To keep the children off the streets, Reginaldo set up football teams, a youth federation and a choir. 'We never refused any help from the authorities, but 80 per cent of the improvements we did ourselves.'

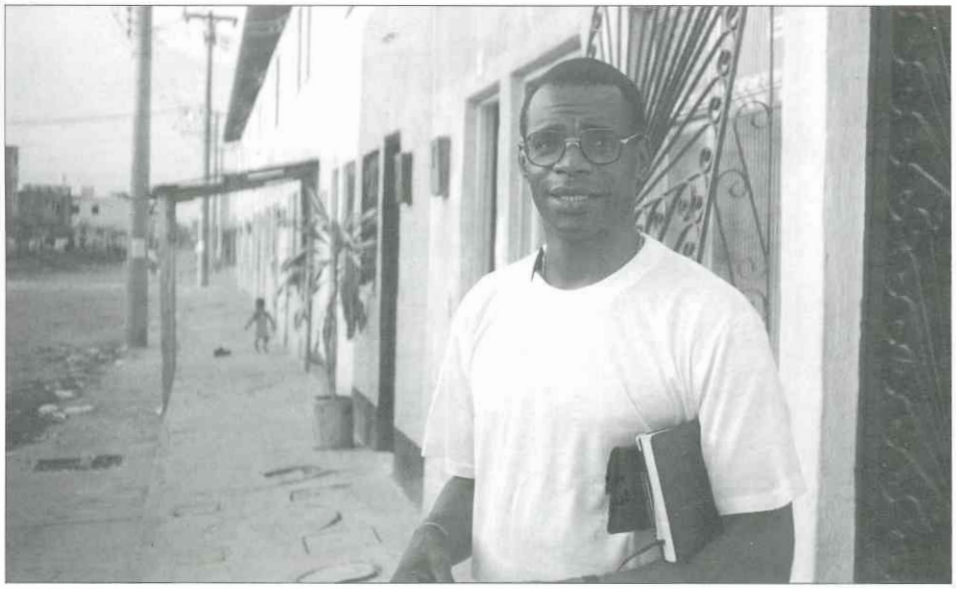
When we met, Reginaldo was working on his house. His wife has multiple sclerosis and, with four children, Reginaldo has to devote his time to his work as a taxi-driver. 'Our life isn't marvellous. The football continues, but only on Sundays. We didn't have the people to keep things going.' But, he says, he hasn't given up hope. 'Solutions don't come in one hour, quickly. Someone has to take the first step.'

Aleixo Polindório Filho, 75-year-old president of the community of Vila Turismo, chokes up when he talks about today's Reginaldos. 'It hurts me deeply that many children in Brazil don't have the chance to study,' he explains. 'I had no childhood or education myself. I had to start work when I was 11.' He has just opened a pre-school for 70 children.

The project was set back in January, when the river burst its banks and flooded the favela, including the unfinished school. In Senhor Aleixo's house, as in many others, the water came up to chest level. Weeks after the flood receded, the favela smelled damp: its streets are so narrow that you can't stretch your arms and the sun doesn't penetrate.

Some miles away, in the hillside favela of Parque Vila Isabel, Anna Marcondes Faria shares Senhor Aleixo's passion for childcare. She founded the favela association with her husband 30 years ago, and went on to found a series of schools and pre-schools.

She exudes warmth and serenity as we talk, against a happy babble of busy toddlers. One hundred and fifty children attend the day centre from 7 am until 5 or 6 pm, cared for by young women from the favela. There is a government-aided nursery school under the same roof. Dona Anna and her staff are launching a new project to provide vocational training for 7- to 17-year-olds out of school hours – Rio's schools are so crowded that they operate in half-day shifts. ▶



M Lean

José Carlos de Souza: 'Our community exploded'

The battle for the favelas

Recently Dona Anna was offered a well-paid job outside the favela. She refused, to the horror of her family. 'When you accept a job like that, you are at the command of the politician who gave it to you. I want the freedom to do what I feel is right, and I want to work for children.'

The day centre receives no help from the government and she is determined to make it independent. 'If we could start a business in the community – a bakery or a clothes shop – and use its profits to support the crèche, we would not be as insecure as we are now,' she says.

When it comes to money, the drug mafia have the edge. The non-criminal community leaders take what little funds they can from government, but otherwise rely on help from local well-wishers and Rotary clubs, and from overseas.

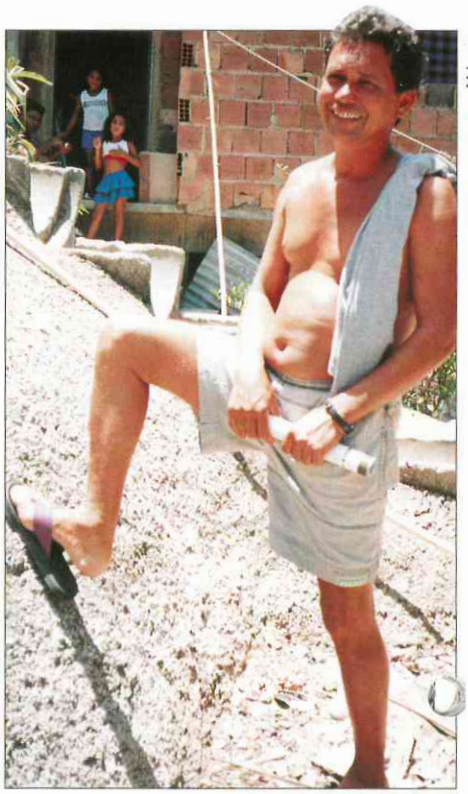
The president of the association of Rio's favela leaders, Pedro Moreira Mendonça, complains that large-scale international aid gets sucked in by the better-known favelas, such as Rocinha, whose 300,000 inhabitants make it the world's largest shanty town. Ana Inés sent out 20 project outlines for the cooperative and only received one donation in return; the bakery project has drawn no response at all. 'I'm a bit discouraged,' she says. What help she gets comes from personal contacts made with foreign visitors.

'It is very important that money goes to what it has been given for,' says Danilo Ferreira de Souza, outgoing leader of the community association of Morro dos Cabritos, a stone's throw from the tourist playground of Copacabana Beach. In the last six years the American multinational Reynolds Tobacco has contributed $350,000 towards sewage pipes, water tanks, paving and building in the favela.

It took the community six months to decide whether to accept the company's money. Even then, they were determined not to be used. 'They gave us 300 promotional T-shirts,' says Danilo, 'but we made sure that whenever they came to see us we were working without shirts!'

Danilo sets store by integrity and independence – and has suffered for his principles. In spite of degrees in economics and accountancy and studies in law, he refuses to 'sell himself' by working for the government and had been unemployed for 18 months when we met. He has frequently been imprisoned and beaten up by the police because, he maintains, he will not keep quiet about injustice or act as an informer. 'The police see all favela people as criminals. It is our duty to show them that it's not true.'

Danilo Ferreira de Souza: 'We are not another race'



M Lean

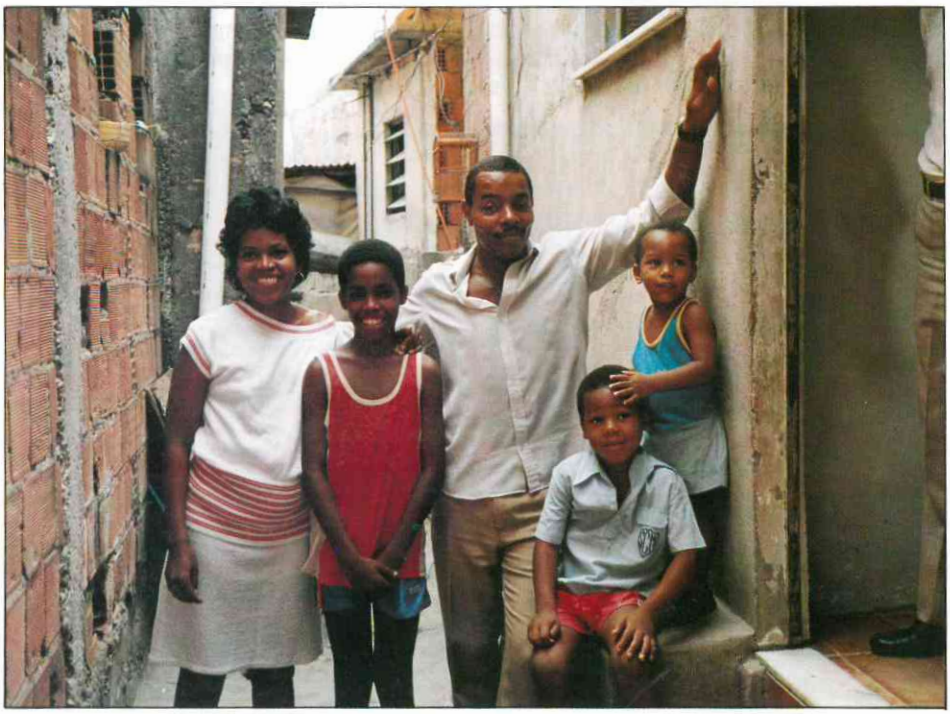
For 11 months – to the horror of the better-heeled inhabitants of Copacabana – Danilo served as sub-mayor for the whole district, favelas and 'asphalt' alike. 'We are not another race,' he says. 'We are the same people.'

The drug problem, he points out, goes far beyond the favelas. 'Many high people are involved. In this city the abnormal has come to be normal. People are so used to seeing dishonesty and dirtiness that they cannot grasp that you act with good will and an open heart.'

With his education and opportunities, what keeps Danilo in Morro dos Cabritos? 'I was born and brought up in this favela,' he says. 'I have carried many cans of water. I have cut trees for fuel, killed birds for food, picked up leftovers in the street markets. I have seen people die of hepatitis, meningitis and TB, or killed by bandits or police. I had the "luck" to study. I couldn't understand why there was so much discrimination.'

He adds, 'And I have a childish dream that the world could change. I know now that this may not be true, but the dream stays with me.'

All across Rio, in spite of crushing odds, people like Danilo keep their hold on reality, but work on as if that dream could come true. ■



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Reginaldo de Souza: 'I never returned to drugs or crime'

Veterans of Morro de São João

It's 22 years since Luiz and Edir Pereira moved into their flat. Unlike most of us, they don't take mod cons for granted – they haven't forgotten what it's like to live in a wooden shack, with five children.

'For me the hardest thing was collecting water at the bottom of the hill, in the hot sun, and having to carry it back up,' says Edir. 'People used to tell me to leave my husband and go home to Fortaleza. There are always people to tell you that you could have an easier life if you just let go of your principles.'

The Pereiras came to Rio from the north-east of Brazil in 1952. They built a shack in Niteroi, across the bay from Rio. Luiz had to leave home at 4 am to catch the ferry to work. 'We had no clock,' he remembers. 'Once I mistook the last bus of the night for the first of the morning and arrived at the ferry at 1am!'

They moved into Rio, to the favela of Morro de São João, just as a wave of evictions swept the city. One day the police demolished 37 of the 125 shacks on their hill. 'Everywhere you turned there was a bayonet pointing at you,' Luiz says. 'People lost their faith in the authorities, and in God.'

As the communities organized themselves for defence, Luiz found himself taking leadership in Morro de São João. When he first put their demands to the state government, he had to be persuaded to include water in his list. 'I thought that would be asking for too much.'

Soon he was leader not just of his own favela, but of a council of local favelas, representing nearly 50,000 people. 'Wherever I spoke I was applauded,' he says. 'I began to think that everything I did was right. I didn't let my wife speak, I didn't let my children take part in anything, my directors had to do what I said. My bitterness grew against the people I saw as exploiters – particularly the Americans.'

Luiz and Edir Pereira

So he was horrified when a colleague from another favela climbed up the hill with a group from Moral Re-Armament which included foreigners. They talked about change in the individual as an essential component of social change, and kept coming back. Eventually, in spite of his hostility, Luiz began to take their point.

'I saw that bitterness would not build what we wanted in the community. A series of changes began in my life.' He made things up with Edir and the family, adopted a more democratic approach to his co-directors and became reconciled with an enemy who had twice tried to kill him – and now lives in the flat next door.

'It's very important to have your head cleaned out, so you can think of fresh things,' he says. Under his leadership, the people of Morro de São João set to work installing a water system and staircases and ramps up the steep hills. The women launched a social welfare programme and a craft workshop got going. Finally in 1970, thanks to liaison with the government, they were rehoused not far from the favela.

Other removals were done less sensitively, although Luiz admits some schemes have turned out better than he expected. 'We did not like the governor of the time, but when he started to build thousands of houses, we changed our opinion. Today there are no removals, but there's no building either.' Morro de São João is covered with huts once again, and the favelas of Rio keep on growing.

A tile-fitter by profession, Luiz now devotes all his time to befriending and counselling embattled community leaders, challenging them to stand firm against the tides of corruption and crime and to work together. He arranges meetings at the MRA centre in Petropolis, an hour and a half from Rio, where they have space to look at their problems with detachment and to recharge their spiritual batteries.

Because he has been there himself, people listen. In one favela, he was told, 'You are the only one who comes up here. Not even the police dare to come.'

At times Edir wonders how things would have been if they had stayed in Fortaleza. 'Sometimes I rebel even now. But suffering can come to you anywhere.' Not fit herself, she looks after a disabled daughter. How does she keep going? 'I take the hand of God and I hold on very tight.'

'Today there are no removals, but there's no building either.'

M Edwards/ Still Pictures

PEOPLE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Visitors to King's House, official residence of the Governor General of Jamaica, shouldn't be surprised to find their hostess working in its vegetable garden. Lady Ivy Cooke is serious about government exhortations to 'eat what we grow'.

When the Cookes moved in last year, Lady Cooke was appalled at the money spent on fruit and vegetables for official entertaining. She found that nothing was being produced on the residence's 140 acres of land and set to work, asking friends for seeds and plants. King's House now has a thriving vegetable garden, tended by her and an assistant, which supplies most of its needs.

She avoids artificial fertilizer, favours mulching as opposed to irrigation and rotates her crops so that 'we are never out of any particular food stuff'. Future plans include a fish pond, an orchard and possibly some chickens.

Lady Cooke believes Jamaica must save foreign exchange by growing rather than importing food. 'No matter how small a plot of land is, you can plant something,' she told *The Daily Gleaner*.

● Hotelier Gordon 'Butch' Stewart shares Lady Cooke's hands-on approach to Jamaica's economy.

When foreign exchange controls were relaxed last September, the Jamaican dollar went into freefall. Speculators had a field-day as the exchange rate rocketed to nearly J$30 to the US dollar in March (as against J$5 the year before). Meanwhile, under pressure from the IMF, the government lifted subsidies on basic foodstuffs. Prices soared.

Then Stewart, head of the Sandals chain of hotels, threw in his wild card. On 14 April, as the government outlined plans to halt the dollar's slide, he announced that he would put US$1 million a week into the economy, selling well below the market price.

The idea of 'saving the dollar' caught on. Ordinary citizens started turning up at the banks with their small caches of foreign exchange, while major companies began to revise their policies. Prices started to drop and the exchange rate to fall. Speculators are thought to have lost nearly J$300 million.

No one suggests that Jamaica's economic troubles are over. But, thanks to Stewart, Jamaicans have rediscovered that they can make a difference.

What made a British war veteran lay a wreath at the Argentine cemetry in the Falkland Islands this year?

Steve Hughes' act stemmed from an encounter last year with Horacio Benitez, an Argentine veteran of the Falklands War. The two men found they shared a concern for soldiers suffering from the psychological after-effects of war. Hughes' two-year experience of post-traumatic stress disorder had been the subject of a British TV documentary; while Benitez runs a co-operative in Buenos Aires for Argentine veterans who are still afflicted.

No Argentine veterans have been allowed to visit the islands since the war. So when Hughes flew out to the tenth-anniversary memorial service, Benitez asked him to visit the Argentine graves with a wreath. He faxed a message to go with it: 'From the Union of Malvinas Islands Veterans Cooperative to the men who gave their lives that we may understand the essentials of peace.'

Hughes, who served as regimental medical officer

British war veteran Steve Hughes lays a wreath in the Argentine cemetery in the Falkland Islands.

aicans rush to save their dollar ● *British veteran visits*
nnery director's century ● *Linda Pierce's turning point*

with the paratroopers, is now an orthopaedic surgeon. He has returned to Goose Green twice since the war. 'It is a way of laying my ghosts to rest,' he says. 'Anything I could do to help Horacio was repaying a debt of honour.'

JJ Tolia: sight-saving voluntary work

One hundred and seventy sight-restoring cataract operations in one week is a staggering workload. Yet that is what JJ Tolia, a consultant from North Wales, achieved at an eye camp in Madhya Pradesh, India, earlier this year.

This was Tolia's fourth mission to India over the last eight years. Born in India, brought up in Kenya and trained in Scotland, Tolia's voluntary work follows a family tradition. Both his grandfather and his father were visiting ophthalmic surgeons to Chitrakoot Hospital, where his eye camps take place.

Such ventures, Tolia explains, are a team effort. He moves between four operating tables, leaving others to do the before- and after-care. When a Welsh anaesthetist accompanied him to India this year – raising her own fare, as he does – she suggested trying the approach in North Wales.

The result was a weekend's eye camp manned by medical and lay volunteers at Gwynedd Hospital, Bangor, where Tolia is consultant ophthalmic surgeon. They performed 45 cataract operations – about the number that would normally take place over two months.

A century is a long innings, and as John Nowell celebrates his 100th birthday in August, he can remember the fairy lights strung in the trees for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee – nightlight candles in coloured jars, in those days before electrification.

Not all the changes have been for the best, Nowell maintains. He decries the loss of good manners which are the expression of a spirit of caring. Yet he is optimistic about the future. He sees evidence of an invincible spiritual power at work in such events as the resurgence of democracy in many countries.

He recognizes the same power at work within himself. He was director of a tannery in Runcorn which employed 500 people. They produced sole-leather from hides which they soaked in an oak-bath pit for six months.

A nominal Christian, Nowell was shaken when someone challenged him, 'Do you give God the last word in your home, civic and industrial life?'

When he looked at his life in this light, he decided to be more open with his employees. He had always been anti-union, but now instituted monthly works council meetings. He told his workers: 'We should be free to say exactly what we feel and come to a decision according to what is right rather than who is right.'

For the first time, Nowell discovered that there was considerable bitterness amongst the workforce. But he decided to trust them, even allowing the union leader to check the wages book. Over the next 15 years – until the plastics industry forced the tannery's closure – working conditions improved and productivity rose dramatically.

What is the secret of a long life? Stress and strain are the roots of many ailments, he says, and quotes from the Psalms: 'Great peace have they which love thy law.' ■

John Nowell: optimistic at 100

TURNING POINTS

by Paul Williams

Bombay secretary Linda Pierce dates her first turning point to the age of 13. At a camp with people from different backgrounds and races she heard someone say that God had a plan for her life. 'This was new and exciting,' she recalls. 'The small decisions I made then as a schoolgirl who wanted to be part of the "cure" and not the "disease" in India laid the foundations for faith in my life.'

Pierce belongs to the Anglo-Indian community and has Kashmiri, English, Irish and Armenian antecedents. 'Our family always looked at ourselves as Indians.' One day, after a fight with another child, a neighbour told her that she did not fully belong to India and ought to live on the border. She was plagued by a crisis of identity.

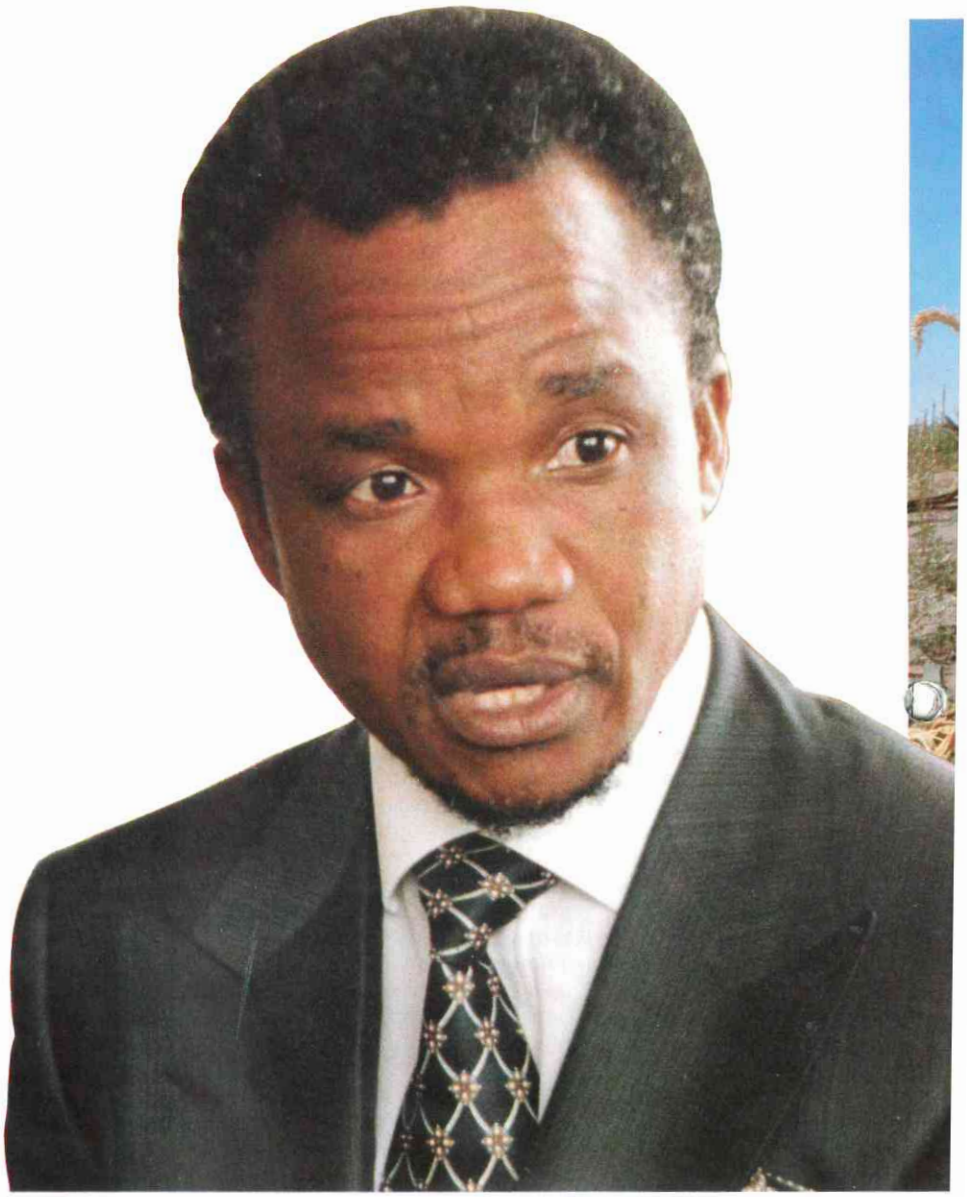
'I couldn't really fault people for thinking I came from some country other than India,' she says. 'But it hurt all the same. To feel that special sense of belonging became an important issue for me. I tried hard to look Indian and wore a sari.'

She was 19, and working voluntarily as secretary to the director of a centre for reconciliation in Western India, when it dawned on her that she was spending her life 'trying to be somebody else'.

'I realized that I could only love India as myself and that nobody could take away that right. I felt a new freedom and peace. It didn't matter what I looked like any more. I even developed a sense of humour when fellow Indians asked me which country I came from.'

Instead of hiding behind a wall she was now able to be honest about the hurt. 'I knew the world needed an open-hearted person, not one who lived like an oyster in a hard shell. Imagine what a gift it was later to set foot in the English hamlet where my ancestors once lived, and to experience the beauty of County Cork, Ireland, from where another branch of my family came.'

Over the last 10 years she has edited a newsletter carrying stories of ordinary Indians whose decisions are making a difference to the quality of life in the village or on the factory floor. ■



E Peters

Zambia's

'It is still possible for an ordinary worker to become head of state.' Geneva's packed International Labour Organization (ILO) conference bursts into applause. The speaker, standing just five feet tall and wearing a double-breasted suit, is Zambia's new President, Frederick Chiluba. In last October's elections he defeated Kenneth Kaunda, in power since independence from Britain in 1964.

Chiluba's stature may be diminutive, the task facing him is anything but. His nation has the world's highest per-capita debt – almost US$1,000 for each of her eight million people. He inherits an economy shattered by falling copper prices and years of mismanagement. Wars in many of Zambia's neighbours, such as Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, have taken their toll on her too. To make bad matters worse, Zambia has been hit by the drought which threatens at least 18 million lives across southern Africa.

Much is at stake – and not only for Zambia. The gap between the world's richest and poorest nations has doubled in the past 30 years. Can this trend be reversed? Can an African nation richly blessed by nature – copper, cobalt and emeralds are plentiful, and the land fertile – meet the needs of its people? And can democracy, re-introduced last year, demonstrate itself a more efficient problem-solver than one-party rule?

Aged 49, President Chiluba is a persuasive speaker who thinks clearly and is unambiguous in his beliefs. His friendly face and twinkling eyes hide the heavy burdens of office. In conversation, a clue to his buoyancy is not long in coming. 'I've thought of giving up many times,' he tells me, 'but God gave me strength to carry on. I have learnt to pray, to seek his guidance.'

The son of a miner on Zambia's copper belt, Chiluba lost his mother at an early age. He was brought up by his grandmother and uncle, dropped out of school early and worked on a sisal plantation in Tanzania before joining Atlas Copco, the engineering multinational, as an accounts clerk. Passionate to make up for his lack of education, he continued his studies by correspondence and overseas courses.

In 1968 he married Vera Tembo and they have nine children. She shares his commitment to the poor and is masterminding projects for women in rural areas.

In 1971, at the age of 28, he was elected President of the Building and Engineering Workers' Union, and three years later head of Zambia's Congress of Trade Unions. The unions had been thrust into the political centre stage during the struggle for independence. It was their continuing championship of human rights that inspired Chiluba to believe 'they had a noble task'.

He points to two experiences which prepared him for national leadership. The first came when he was a delegate to the UN General Assembly in New York in 1973. It was the time of Watergate, and Nixon's accountability before the American people contrasted starkly with what he had seen on recent visits to East Germany and the Soviet Union. He began to dream of bringing democracy to Zambia.

The second experience was in 1981. As a leading opponent of Kaunda's increasingly autocratic rule, he spent three months in prison. A priest gave him a book, *From Prison to Praise*. He was hooked by the idea that, however hard your circumstances, God had a purpose. 'It was a change in my life,' he recalls. 'When I was released I began to think that God was preparing me for something bigger, and therefore I was not bitter. Since then I have felt the urge to work as a Christian for my country.'

He had to wait a further ten years for his big chance. In 1991, under increasing pressure, President Kaunda announced multi-party elections. Chiluba won the struggle for leadership of the newly-formed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), a coalition of disparate elements formed to challenge Kaunda's UNIP. In the October elections it swept to power with 80 per cent of the vote.

'Chiluba gave Zambians back a sense of self-belief,' says Robin Palmer, former professor of history at the University of Zambia and now Oxfam's regional manager for the area. 'It was a remarkable achievement to mobilize so many forces and to keep them together.'

G Williams/Select

Drought threatens at least 18 million lives in Zambia and her neighbours.

In the wave of democracy sweeping the world last year, trade unionist Frederick Chiluba found himself elected President of Zambia. He talks to Edward Peters about the convictions he brings to the job.

new broom

Maintaining that unity – in the face of the pulls of tribal loyalty, expectations of reward for services rendered, rivalry and recrimination – is one of the main challenges facing Chiluba. He brings to it a personal reputation untarnished during the Kaunda years, and a commitment to integrity in government. 'My team must be morally above board,' he stresses. 'If you allow one case of corruption there is no way you cannot allow the second one.'

Since he came to power there have been allegations of ministerial malpractice but Chiluba insists that these have been investigated and found untrue. 'I am still on the lookout though,' he says. Corruption, he acknowledges, also lies in the abuse of power. He believes that the remedy is to be found in 'accountability and transparency'. He looks to the media and the churches for help in this, as the official opposition parties are so small.

Chiluba has the common touch. On his election he renounced the official title 'Your Excellency' – 'a long title for a short President' – and said his portrait would not appear on banknotes – 'I've had enough publicity'. He also said he felt uncomfortable riding in a Mercedes when his people didn't have enough to eat – a remark which backfired, judging by the outcry when he recently accepted a gift of a BMW for his 'services to democracy'.

Many people, including some close to him, have charged Chiluba with being autocratic. Others suggest that democratic reforms have been introduced only to impress international aid donors – with whom he has had considerable success. But one senses that his commitment to democracy is genuine. 'Democracy is not a luxury, it is a necessity for mankind,' he says with feeling.

His declaration of Zambia as a Christian state was a controversial measure of which he remains proud. His enthusiasm seems to stem from a desire to encourage the values which nourish the economy and social structure, rather than from any belief that Christianity is either universally accepted or should be imposed.

During the election campaign Chiluba called for the people to 'undergo moral re-armament'. What did he mean? After the suffering of the previous years, he replies, 'people were building up levels of vengeance which could have created a bloodbath. I was asking people to change their whole character and approach to life, to accept each other in spite of differences. How do we bring about change? It doesn't have to begin with that fellow there, it must begin with me here.'

He tries to practise what he preaches. Asked by an African diplomat why the change of government had been peaceful, he replied with a story. Two days before the election he had resolved to make a hard-hitting speech, attacking those he felt had spread lies about him. Reading the Bible, as is his daily custom, he happened on the verse: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Later he met ex-US President Jimmy Carter, who was in Zambia as leader of the team of international observers. Carter counselled him to 'be a statesman' and adopt a different tone. Remembering the verse he had read, Chiluba changed his speech, holding out a hand of reconciliation. The election passed off without violence.

Since coming to office Chiluba has tried to bring new realism. He feels that Africans – not just their former colonial masters – are responsible for the continent's problems. 'Zambia should blame itself, and everywhere else in Africa where they preached distribution of wealth before generation of wealth, we must blame ourselves,' he told a press conference. He exhorts his people to apply 'discipline, hard work and a determination to look our problems squarely in the face and tackle them head on'. He is committed to free market economics, though painfully aware of the short-term hardships it may cause. The removal of subsidies on the staple maize and other commodities has been tough, but inflation is well down on its 1991 high of 120 per cent. There are other encouraging signs that the economy is picking up.

The Economist describes Zambia as 'one of Africa's more promising experiments in democracy'. If the man at its helm proves as good as his words – and receives the support he needs – there is, as Chiluba himself says, 'hope for Africa after all'. ■

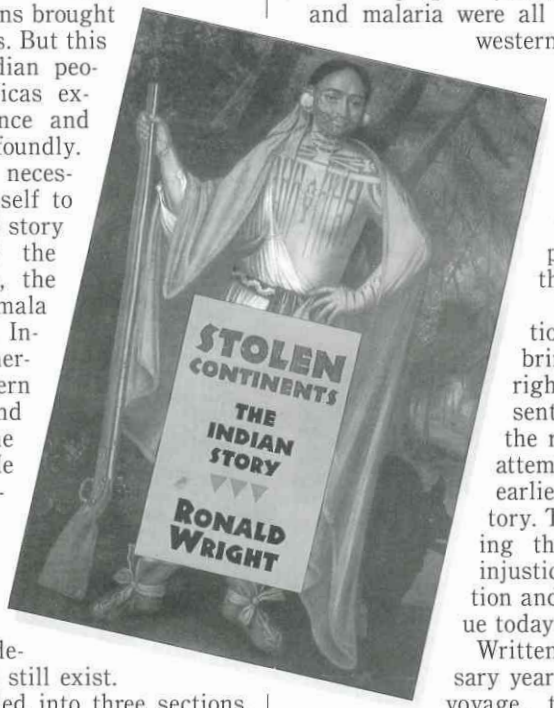
BOOK REVIEWS

HISTORY AS THE FIRST AMERICANS TELL IT

Stolen continents: the Indian story
by Ronald Wright
John Murray, London

In his prologue, Ronald Wright quotes Robert Burns' famous wish for the ability 'to see ourselves as others see us'. His book fulfils it in a powerful and deeply disturbing way.

My WASP ancestors have been in North America for 300 of the 500 years this book covers. I believed that I was well aware of the treachery and destruction which the Europeans brought to the Amerindians. But this history of the Indian peoples of the Americas exposed my ignorance and challenged me profoundly.



The author has necessarily limited himself to the (still immense) story of five cultures: the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayas of Guatemala and Yucatan, the Incas of Peru, the Cherokees of the southern United States and the Iroquois of the Great Lakes. He chose them because they all met the first Europeans to invade their lands, all left accounts of that contact and, despite the odds, all still exist.

The book is divided into three sections, *Invasion*, *Resistance* and *Rebirth*. Each carries a chapter on each group.

What makes this book unique is the fact that although it is written by an Englishman living in Canada it uses the Indians' own words to tell their story. Cortes' arrival in 1519 is described by the grandson of Moctezuma, Aztec emperor of the time. The *Annals* of the Mayas recount the Spanish arrival in about 1524 and end with the first tragic onslaught of smallpox in 1604.

Pre-Columbian North America had no written language as such: pictures and wampum belts provided an outline which could only be filled in from the memories of the elders, who rapidly died off through war and disease. But from their earliest dealings with the Europeans, the Indians dictated their speeches and statements to people who could write, and checked them for accuracy. The author quotes constantly from these sources, which he has researched comprehensively – as over 50 pages of footnotes and bibliography attest.

The book is rich in detail, ranging from the intriguing to the devastating. For example, Albrecht Dürer saw some of the Aztec art brought back to Europe by Cortes and commented, 'Nothing I have seen in all my days has rejoiced my heart so much.' Yet the vast bulk of such cultural riches was destroyed, most of the gold-work melted down, at incalculable loss to the world.

Grimmer still is the scale of death by disease. Smallpox, malaria, influenza, bubonic plague, yellow fever, cholera and malaria were all unknown in the western hemisphere before 1492. A century later, over 90 per cent of the original population (approximately 90 million people) had died of these diseases.

The third section of the book brings the story right up to the present day. It shocks the reader out of any attempt to dismiss the earlier chapters as history. There is no escaping the fact that the injustice, discrimination and violence continue today.

Written in the anniversary year of the Columbus voyage, the book raises issues which must be addressed not only to right longstanding wrongs, but also for the sake of the soul of the world. Wright concludes with a sense of vision, born from that of the Indians themselves: 'if they (the invaders) begin to treat America as a home in which to live, not a treasure house to ransack – a home for the first nations as well as for themselves – they may, unlike Christopher Columbus, discover where they are.'

Anne Hamlin

A dose of my own medicine
by Paul Campbell
Grosvenor, Ottawa and London

Part of the fascination of this book lies in the intimate portrayal of Frank Buchman (the founder of Moral Re-Armament), a man about whom much has been written yet who remains hard to capture on paper.

The author, a Canadian, was captivated by Buchman's vision of a world renewed in accordance with God's will. At the time Campbell was pursuing his medical career at the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. In the hardest decision of his life, he refused a promotion which would have fulfilled his highest medical ambitions and went to work with Buchman.

Two months later Buchman had a stroke and thus began Campbell's 19 years as Buchman's personal physician. Campbell says that one of the chief characteristics of this time was 'merriment'. 'Like Old King Cole, Buchman was a merry soul. He was invigorating, never dull, fun to be with.'

Since Buchman's death in 1961, Campbell has worked in many countries. In Canada, for example, he earned the trust of aboriginal people and of Québécois. He is wholly frank about his needs, believing with his namesake St Paul that he is the chief of sinners. *Garth Lean*

In the absence of angels
by Elizabeth Glaser
Arrow Books, London

In 1981, after a difficult birth, Elizabeth Glaser received a blood transfusion. Four years later she discovered that she was HIV-positive, and that she had passed the infection to her children, Ariel and Jake, in her breastmilk and in the womb. Only husband Paul, Starsky of the TV detective series, had escaped.

Glaser describes the battle against prejudice and ignorance, the fear of exposure and ostracism, the vain struggle to save Ariel's life, the uncertainty of her own and Jake's futures, the family's eventual decision to go public and her campaign to raise funds for research into pediatric AIDS and to increase awareness of the crisis facing 20,000 children in America and 700,000 worldwide.

Glaser takes the reader with her as she storms Capitol Hill and Hollywood, and as she rebuilds her marriage, ravaged by shared grief. Well worth reading, but not in a public place, unless you are exceptionally thick-skinned. *Mary Lean*

Murder on my mind

by Jim Sutton

A car bumper-sticker said it all: 'Life's a bitch, and then you die!'

Why did I view my life in those terms? I had searched for years to find peace or happiness, or whatever it is people need to make sense of life. Yet the fact was I had made a mess of things in almost every area.

My wife had turned to drink, my children left home at the first opportunity. And I felt stretched to the limit every minute of every day.

In retrospect, I can see what the problem was – I always put myself first. 'How does it suit me?' 'What's in it for me?' Only when I had a satisfactory answer to these questions would I consider giving any thought to anyone else. And everyone around me suffered.

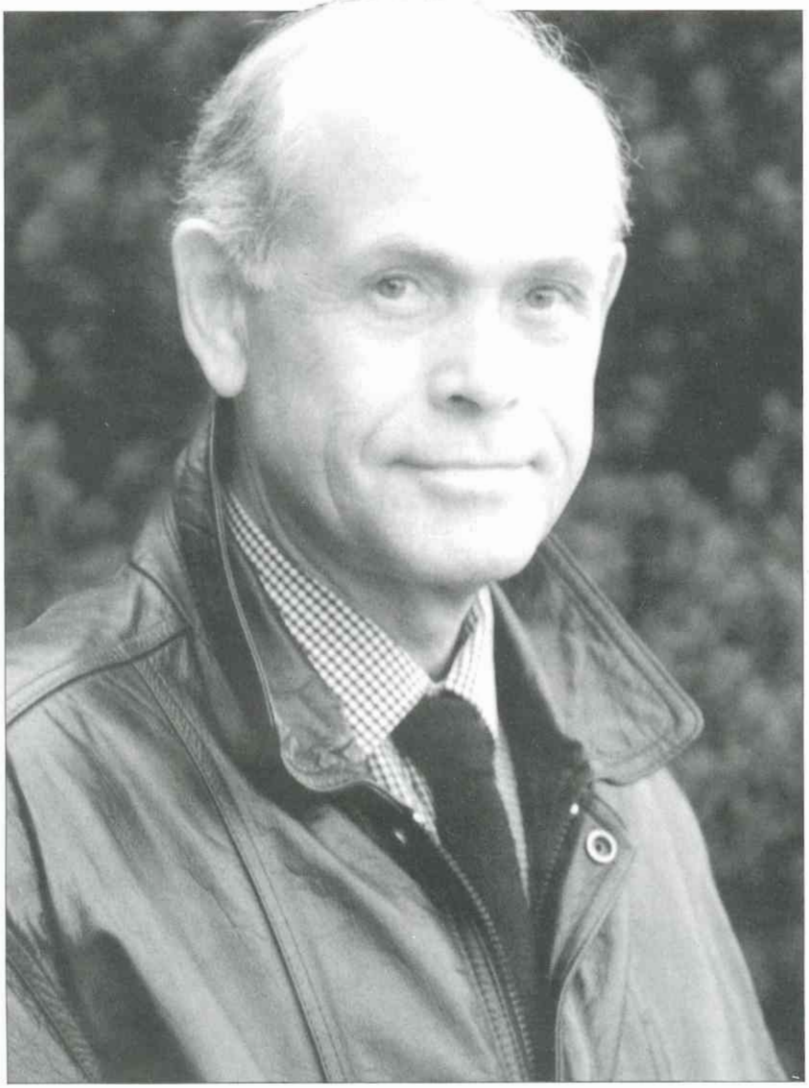
My wife knew all about my selfishness, of course. She spent her whole life trying to ensure that nothing happened to displease me; that the children stayed out of the way if I was tired, angry or depressed – which was most of the time.

But as far as I could see everything that went wrong in my life was the fault of someone other than me.

I was one of those people who have to be taken to the brink of disaster before they can recognize the need to change direction. It took many years and much hurt and heartache. But when the time came, the change that took place was remarkably sudden.

After I retired from the Royal Air Force everything seemed to go pretty well at first. I found a good, secure, pensionable job where my skills were much appreciated. We owned a comfortable home. But I was bored speechless and I was sure I would never be happy in that town. Soon our marriage was heading for an all-time low. There had to be more to life than this.

My job used to take me abroad. On one trip I got involved with a woman and an affair developed. It didn't last long and it certainly didn't produce that elusive 'happiness'. What it did do, of course, was to make my wife even more unhappy.



Jim Sutton: 'My life was continually in crisis.'

But somehow we managed to patch things up and we set out for Spain to start a new life.

Red rage

We met up with an old friend in Gibraltar, a businessman with whom I went into partnership. Foolishly I invested more money in the venture than I could afford to lose. Things soon started to go wrong. I began to question some of my friend's business decisions and his pride couldn't stand it. He was lying to me, failing to keep promises and generally letting me down on every hand.

It quickly became clear that we should end our association. We agreed a date on which I should recover my investment and pull out of the business.

The day came and went. Just as I had feared, I didn't get my money back.

The lies and broken promises continued. To say that I was angry would be a major understatement. I saw the world through a red haze of rage. Worst of all, I felt powerless and foolish.

I began to plot dire revenge. One of the tricks I had learned in my trade was how to kill people. I had murder on my mind.

Happily, at this time we were staying in the home of some Christian friends. I happened on a book about a Lutheran minister, Frank Buchman. He had so hated some people who had wronged him that it made him ill. On hearing a woman preach a sermon about the sacrifice of atonement which Christ made on the cross, Buchman decided to apologize to the people for his hatred. He found healing.

'Could this possibly work for me?' I began to wonder.

Eventually I said to my wife, 'I think we should go to our friend and apologize to him for the way we've been feeling towards him.'

She thought I was crazy. 'Read this,' I said, handing her the book.

We talked about it and for the first time for many years I prayed.

Making that apology was perhaps the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. But the experiment worked. My anger evaporated. And having asked for forgiveness, I found I was able to forgive. That was the turning point. I had changed. And for the first time I was able to admit to myself that my business partner had not been entirely to blame. I felt so different that I thought, 'there must be more to this Christianity than meets the eye.'

I decided to do some more reading, and as a result I found a firm faith.

As long as I was totally self-centred, my life was continually in crisis. Only since I learned this painful lesson and committed myself to living a Christ-centred life have things been coming together. ■

Christians open their doors

by Michael Smith

Scrawled on the entrance door of a dilapidated building just off Nevsky Prospekt in St Petersburg are the letters OX. A passer-by might easily miss them. They stand for Open Christianity. They are not some kind of religious graffiti. Rather they mark the headquarters of an organization which, say its founders, aims to confront a fundamental issue arising out of 70 years of Soviet communism: the choice between faith and atheism.

Open Christianity is one sign, out of many, of the religious ferment filling the vacuum left by the death of communism. Orthodox churches and Cathedrals in St Petersburg – museums under communism – are being renovated and reopened. Nine priests now serve at the Roman Catholic church where there was only one two years ago. At the Baptist seminary over 400 were baptised last year alone.

It has almost become fashionable to join a church. But dangers lurk alongside this religious renewal. Many, even from the communist party, now see church administration as a good job to go into, without having any religious conviction or experience. Baptist pastor Maxim Stashchak warns against dubious outside influences, too: 'For 72 years people were educated in atheism. They have a tremendous thirst for God and will take anything they are offered.' At St Petersburg university the new theological faculty will be funded by the Moonies – because they have the money to offer students trips to the West.

More fundamentally, are the churches prepared philosophically for the new circumstances they find themselves in? Not always, says Vladimir Poresh, a founder of Open Christianity who spent seven years in the Gulag because of his religious convictions. He told a conference at Ampleforth College, in the north of England, 'When a priest tells his parishioners in a sermon, "Remember that you are nothing before God," he has forgotten whom he is addressing. He is talking to people who have always known that they are nothing before any minor official of the local soviet, and almost nothing before any militiaman on the street.'

How can the churches relate to a generation brought up to a belief in no God? After decades of 'ravaging, aggressive atheism', as Poresh puts it, how can believers maintain a respect for those who cannot bring themselves to belief? It was to address such issues that Open Christianity came to birth.

'Our main purpose is to establish dialogue with atheists,' says OX's Chairman, Konstantin Ivanov. Many outside the churches are deeply interested in religious questions, he says. Yet in Russia too many believers can dismiss the questions and doubts of non-believers. Believers should recognize that those who reject Christianity do so because they have not found the answers they are looking for. It is not just a Russian issue but a global one, he points out.

At the same time, says Ivanov, there are many people in Russia who 'don't have a past', either because they were severed from their roots as part of the communist experiment, or because they cannot face the guilt of crimes committed in the name of communism. Much, therefore, needs healing and forgiving.

How did Ivanov, who lecturered in philosophy at Leningrad university, come to his Orthodox faith? 'I had sufficient philosophical background to understand that there were things I didn't understand,' he replied. 'And there were personal ups and downs, so it became important for me internally. God breaks through to one's soul. That is why I greatly respect non-believers because

Easter Mass being celebrated at the Orthodox Cathedral of St Nicholas in St Petersburg this year.

M Smith

Vladimar Poresh and Konstantin Ivanov, founders of 'Open Christianity'

everything depends on him. He leaves them alone and I am afraid to upset his plan.' Ivanov insists that the inclusion of three atheists on their governing body of 18 is not 'a tactical thing in order to convert them'.

At first, Open Christianity was opposed by many Orthodox Christians for such an open approach to atheists. But a TV broadcast by Ivanov, shortly after its founding in December 1988, drew 200 letters in response, many 'expressing a real longing for truth'. Then a Leningrad headmaster asked them to set up a school with Christian teaching, which now has 60 pupils, aged from three to 16.

Open Christianity's 300 members organize conferences and seminars, such as the three-day event reported on TV during the week I was there, on 'The Bible and science; Creation and evolution'. And when OX announced its plan to launch a new Philosophical-Religious Institute this September – the first in Russia to combine secular and religious studies – it was immediately oversubscribed five times.

Open Christianity has its origins in the underground 'Christian dialogue' of the 1970s. Vladimir Poresh was one its most outspoken members, writing to churches, human rights groups and Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the West. But then the KGB stepped in and several were arrested for 'anti-Soviet activity'.

'I was working in the library of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad when two men from the KGB came to warn me,' recalls Poresh. He took no notice. Two years later, on 1 August 1979, he answered a call at his apartment door, believing it was the postman. He was confronted by six KGB officers who bundled him into a Volga car. At the prosecutor's office, he was challenged, 'If everybody became an Orthodox there would be no more Marxist ideology and no more Soviet government. You are against Soviet power.'

He was sentenced to five years in prison and three years in exile in the Urals, subsequently extended for a further three years. His worst moments were under interrogation. 'I was utterly alone. It is very hard when they try to make you change your mind. You also realize your own mistakes and sins.' He was tempted to question his faith, and says he now understands how monks can go through crises of doubt after years in a monastery.

But he was treated well in prison and allowed a Bible. He read it through twice and the New Testament 15 times. He was shocked by the Old Testament and 'very indignant' because it appeared that God asked people to kill. Later, studying the lives of Moses, Christ and the saints, he realized there was 'only one ideal for mankind: the idea of humility' which allows God's power to work.

Poresh had no contact with the outside world until a letter of support arrived on the day of Gorbachev's first meeting with Ronald Reagan. It was from a Mrs Thatcher. His fellow prisoners all thought it was the Mrs Thatcher.

On 20 February 1986 he was called to the prison office and told, 'Your sentence has been annulled. You can go.' It was all the more unexpected because he still had four years of his sentence to run. Poresh believes his release was thanks to pressure from the American President.

He sent a telegram to his wife, a librarian, who promptly burst into tears. Her library colleagues, afraid to ask, thought he had died in jail.

A month before his release, a policeman at the prison had mocked him: 'Why doesn't your God save you from prison?' 'Maybe, if it is God's wish, he will set me free,' replied Poresh. The same policeman took him to the airport.

Two years later, Open Christianity came to birth. 'All the dissidents in the underground understood that, as well as changing the politics, changing the conscience is the fundamental issue,' says Poresh.

'The most precious thing in the world is people,' adds Ivanov. 'The strongest capital is our spiritual experience. At the time of the first democratic elections we remarked that changes in politics and economics will not do unless there is a change in people. That will only come through a spiritual movement. The past four years confirm this view.' ■

Letters...

From Mrs Barbara Chidell, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, UK

Your article about King Michael's potential role as a catalyst in Romania's hour of need, followed by the dramatic TV pictures of rival Thai politicians (both generals) prostrating themselves before King Bhumipol, were reminders of the valuable part which royalty can still play in times of crisis.

In Thailand the king's authority springs not only from the instinctive respect of the Thai people for the monarchy but from his dedication of himself, ever since his coronation 42 years ago, to the service of his country. He spends nine months every year outside Bangkok, visiting the 72 provinces of his country and bringing his keen and practical mind to bear on national problems. So when controversy over the military's role in politics precipitated bloody street battles in Bangkok, the timely intervention of the shy monarch was enough to end the fighting and bring the warring leaders to their senses.

Now Thailand again has a civilian prime minister appointed by the king, plus agreement on free elections in September.

From Mr John Barber, Cranleigh, Surrey, UK

I would like to thank Evelyn Ruffin for a most interesting review of the documentary film, *The restless conscience*. It may interest readers to know that there is also a book, *The secret war against Hitler*, by Fabian von Schlabrendorff, translated into English by Hilda Simon and published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1966.

Von Schlabrendorff was himself an active member at the centre of the resistance movement. By a 'minor miracle' he escaped execution when the Nazi prison where he was being held was bombed by the RAF – he got away in the confusion.

The secret war is a comprehensive record of events from 1933-45, but much more as it gives much essential historical background.

Some years ago I was given this book by German friends. I have always been grateful to learn the truth of the struggle of those committed Christian men.

The editors welcome letters but reserve the right to shorten them. Please address them to: The letters editor, 'For A Change', 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF.

Meeting after 500 years

by Michael Henderson

'We don't want to bequeath our anger to our kids.' These words from David Larsen, a pipe-bearer (spiritual leader) of the Dakota nation, express the desire and anguish of a group of non-white Americans in Minneapolis. They meet weekly to reflect on the implications of forgiveness in the anniversary year of Columbus' arrival on this continent, and invited a few of us of European stock to join them.

The group plans to hold a quincentenary ceremony which, rather than hardening old antagonisms, could point to a new future freed from the burden of hatred.

They know that talk of forgiveness may be misunderstood by some. But they believe that common ground can be found in accepting that we are all at fault, thus ending the 'us' and 'them' cycle.

We met in the home of Gordon Regguinti, of the Anishinabe nation. He is Managing Editor of *Colors*, a new magazine of reflection and vigorous opinion launched by people of colour in Minnesota.

It was uncomfortable as well as salutary for whites to sit in on exchanges which backed up Larsen's view that forgiveness had to be preceded by knowledge of what had really happened. 'We've been your hosts for 500 years and we've never met,' he said. 'We've got to get out of the box of the idea that all good arises out of Europe, but also realize that not all Christians and all police are bad.'

The spectre of the Los Angeles riots and, closer to home, a killing just up the street a couple of days earlier, lent urgency to the gathering. 'Los Angeles is an excellent example of a perpetuation of the cycle of anger and destruction,' said Hector Garcia, a Mexican-American who chaired the meeting. 'The profound message of forgiveness from Rodney King (whose beating by police so inflamed passions in Los Angeles), his plea that we get along, came across more clearly than any of the things said by politicians. I hope we can learn from this lesson.'

Frankness

Anger was giving away power, said Larsen. It literally made you sick. Forgiveness was pro-active. 'What this group is all about is trying to get permission to get healing,' he said. It was just reaction, he told the whites, if his people got a few benefits because 'we've scared the hell out of you'. Forgiveness was a way of giving something. 'We have to keep coming back to spirituality.'

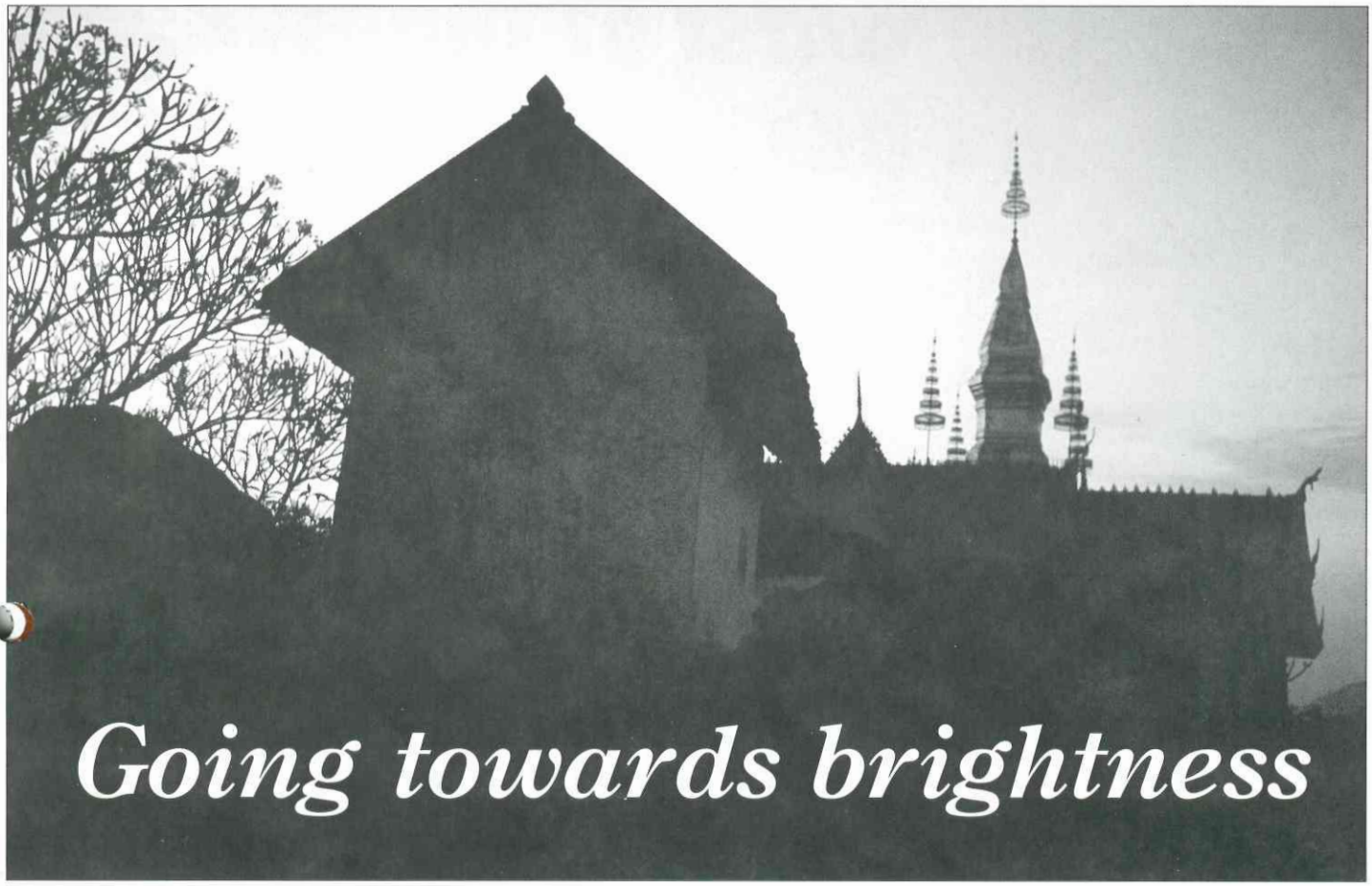
There was a feeling in the group that the pain of frankness had to be worked through because, as David Larsen said, 'I feel like this not because I am angry but because I am desperate. In order to begin regeneration somebody has to take the step and forgive or ask for forgiveness.'

In the course of the two-and-a-half-hour discussion a couple of sincere but overtalkative Europeans were told in no uncertain terms to listen, that they should not try to impose European-style thinking or organization on a move of the spirit which was a native American initiative. They took it humbly. Indeed, a white lawyer said at the end, 'This is a transforming process for me. We have to try and live through the feelings. I want to stay the course.'

Whatever comes of the ceremony, says Larsen, they have planted roots of community, trust and mutual respect across historic barriers which were not there before. 'We felt listened to,' he said.

Michael Henderson is a British journalist living in Portland, Oregon.

by Ajahn Sucitto



Luang Prabang, Laos Photo: D Channer

Going towards brightness

We long for brightness of mind and brightness of heart. Normally these qualities are associated with things that we can get high on – singing, dancing, dressing up to look attractive, or intellectual stimulation.

The life of renunciation isn't so interesting; it doesn't have such powerful stimulation to it, so the mind can get dull and dreary. Yet the brightness of the awakened mind is far more radiant than looking glamorous or having brilliant ideas. And it's not conditioned by situation, health, age, experience, time or place.

In order to brighten the mind we first have to experience what is occupying it, not in a passive way where we just get dumped upon by feelings, but through consciously opening up to some of the mind's passions and moods. Buddhist practice encourages us to understand that the mind with greed is the mind with greed, the mind with fear is the mind with fear, the mind with joy is the mind with joy. This is insight. Being with greed is an accurate description because the mind itself is not greed. The mind is not actually any object or state. Greed, worry, fear – these are mind-objects or mind-states that visit and accompany the mind when it is unfulfilled by awareness.

Buddhist monastic training is based upon renouncing any hankering for the things of this world – for situations, for being influential, for having fine material things. We may use such influence and possessions as we have skilfully, but we don't base our lives on them.

Initially much of my drive in meditation was to get away from it all. But in training as a monk there has been a going towards those very situations that bring up my instinctive wish to get away. And in that going towards, in that abandoning of self, I have found that the assumptions and the habits cease. A great sense of warmth, vibrancy and vitality arises. And with that, the whole situation changes.

It is wonderful how the world changes when we move towards it. When we are open to people as they are rather than clinging to our perceptions of personalities with desire, insecurity or jealousy, we see in them a universal quality: a quality which inclines towards goodness, gentleness and truth.

This awareness brings about a certain selflessness; a humility that helps us deal with whatever conditions come up, not out of a dogged sense of duty, but because we gradually realize that whenever we rise to conditions we feel a sense of uplift. Even if it is just doing the washing up, we feel a definite movement in the mind – it is not just 'OK', or 'I can't get out of it', or even 'Well, I suppose I ought to', but a real uplifting from the heart.

In contemplative life as soon as you get through one experience, something else comes up that you haven't quite resolved your feelings about. And you think that the unpleasantness is caused by people or things out there; that it shouldn't be that way. After a while you begin to realize that the pain is because of your own perceptions.

The objects, the successes and failures are impermanent and can cease. Grasping can be abandoned. Life will always be unsatisfactory as long as one doesn't see the mind as distinct from its states, moods and feelings. And to see that, one needs faith and willingness to go towards the negative; to embrace the quality of being aware of dullness and dreariness.

That act of faith, that real going forth, will melt the seemingly unpleasant mind-states that we can become encumbered with.

Ajahn Sucitto is a Buddhist monk in the Theravada tradition of Thailand.

The worst of times, the best of people

by Alf McCreary

It is an act of faith to live in Northern Ireland and to bear witness to the fact that this province has the best of people, even in the worst of times.

The outside image of a tortured, embittered and disputed statelet is true. But that is only part of the picture. A terrorist bomb or a shooting present the worst picture possible of the savagery and bloody-mindedness that is in our midst, but the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland, Protestant and Roman Catholic, go about their daily business in comparative peace and harmony. We have much the same preoccupations as other people – jobs, education and trying to live with as much respect as possible for our neighbours. There is also a great deal of kindness, which impresses visitors to our beautiful land.

So what is the fighting about? Not religion, in the sense of the theology of the Virgin birth, or transubstantiation. The religious labels are used to denote a tribal conflict. The Province's one million Protestants want to remain British. The half-million Roman Catholics largely favour a united Ireland by peaceful means, though recent opinion surveys indicate that many of them still favour retaining the link with Britain – largely on economic grounds.

The real problem is that of identity – are we British or Irish, or neither, or a bit of both, or something entirely different? Perhaps we are first and foremost Ulster people, with Protestants and Catholics merely different sides of the same coin. When we begin to agree about our identity, we will begin to move towards a lasting peace.

What happens in the meantime? The politicians, despite being hampered by the undergrowth of history and the obstacles of prevailing attitudes, have been trying laboriously to reach some agreement. The best hope for peace is that the British will literally soldier on, with the tacit support of the Dublin Government, while the politicians keep on trying to reach agreement. There is no compelling argument for a 'British withdrawal', which would only bring chaos. Nor is there an argument for continued terrorist violence. The modern impetus towards a more united Europe renders redundant the Provisional IRA dream of a 'free, independent Ireland'. In the new Europe, Ireland cannot be 'free' or 'independent', nor can it economically afford to be so.

'Violence has its own odious power which forces people to pay attention'

If the Provisional Republican movement had the courage to eschew violence, it would open up a new political chapter in Ireland – but the Provisionals know that this would be a hard road to follow. Violence has its own odious power which forces people and politicians to pay attention. But if Irish Republican violence ceased, so too would loyalist counter-violence, its mirror-image, though remnants of each would degenerate further into gangsterism.

Against such a complex background there are many encouraging grass-roots movements towards peace. They do not make the headlines – good news rarely does – but they are a witness to a collective will to remind the politicians and the paramilitaries that there can be 'a better way'. These movements include the Christian-based Corrymeela Community, Protestant and Catholic Encounter, the Peace People, Women Together, and many others.

Even among the majority of people not in peace movements, there is a growing tiredness with violence, and a will towards peace. After the terrible killings at the New Year there was an agonized rejection of violence from all sides, and a growing impatience with the politicians who have yet to deliver peace.

This momentum for peace is likely to continue because people are totally fed up with war. But those on both sides still need to learn that they will have to give up some of their cherished ambitions if peace is to be a reality. Meanwhile, I remain stubbornly optimistic, after many years of reporting on the violence, that peace will come. And as I write these words in my back-garden on a balmy summer evening – not far from some well-known Belfast flashpoints – I am certain that the better side of Northern Ireland, and of this island, will prevail in the long-term. As Gandhi once noted, 'There is no way to peace, peace is the way.'

Alf McCreary is Information Director at Queen's University, Belfast, an author, freelance writer and broadcaster.

NEXT ISSUE

Lead story: As inner-city tensions continue to make headlines, *For A Change* looks at a broad-based initiative to answer the crisis.

Brazil: Meet the taxi-drivers who refuse to overcharge.

Guest column: Georgie Anne Geyer, American syndicated columnist.