

FOR CHANGE

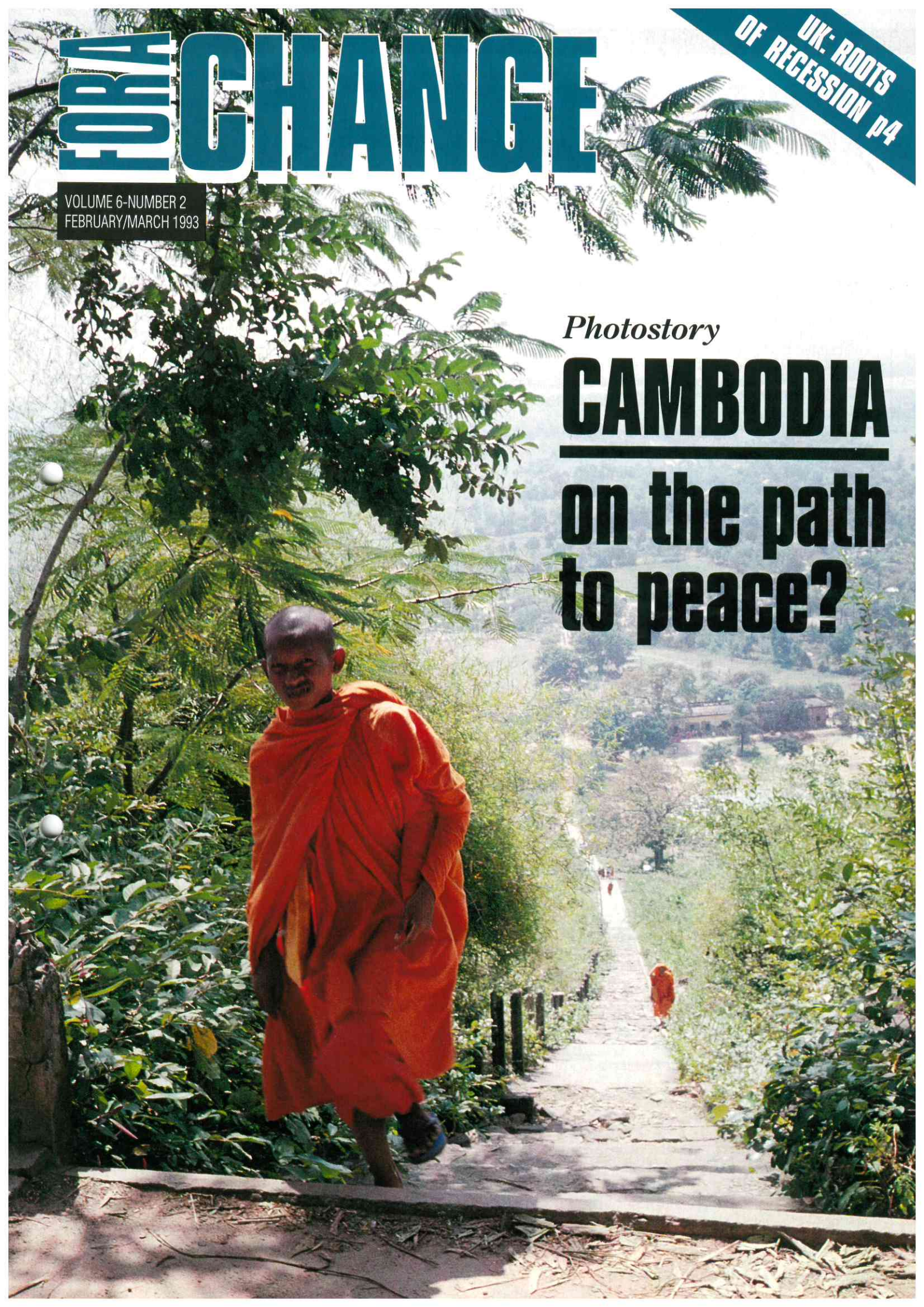
VOLUME 6-NUMBER 2
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UK: ROOTS
OF RECESSION p4

Photostory

CAMBODIA

on the path to peace?



by Mike Brown, California



Holiday mood

A New Zealand farmer, writing to a friend in California, commented that even if Bill Clinton cannot solve all of America's problems, 'a new president is like having a holiday'.

After the year-long barrage of electioneering, the cessation in fault-finding has been a relief.

Not however to some scientists in California, who had found two new seismic faults under Los Angeles and three under San Francisco and were predicting a major earthquake by the end of 1992. In the waning days of December, one scientist dared to say that he still held 'a slim hope' that it would happen within the deadline.

Sometimes I wonder if the fault-finders (seismic, political and economic) cause more tremors than the faults themselves.

Accountant-in-chief

Clinton's summit of 329 economists, business leaders and labour leaders won him high praise all round. Through this 'extraordinary 19-hour nationally televised teach-in on economics', reported the normally staid *New York Times*, 'Captain Crunch Clinton' confronted the US with its need of long-term solutions. 'Dazzling economists with his control of the numbers, Clinton made his case for a honeymoon of eight fiscal years as Accountant-in-chief.'

Clinton's \$18 million Inaugural bash was billed as the 'most public and open in history'. He invited some 50 'ordinary Americans' to fly in for an 'intimate lunch' with

him. Included were two young men from Los Angeles, Charles Rachal and Leon Gulette, whose efforts to bring a truce between gang-members were featured in this column last year (Vol 5 No 6).

The grease factor

While on the subject of lunch, the Presidential profile has given some food for thought. His publicized three-mile jogs have been exemplary, they say. But his habit of stopping off for a calorie-crawling breakfast in McDonald's has justified millions of Americans in sticking their paunches out with pride. (And that after President Bush's poor example of telling American kids that he refuses to eat broccoli!)

Seventy-five notable chefs are fighting back, asking him to promote 'the value of organically grown fruits and vegetables'. Fat chance!

Milken the market

From junk foods to junk bonds – those questionable high-yield investments which left so much owed to so many by so few.

Convicted junk-bond king, Michael Milken, was recently released from a federal prison after serving

only 22 months of a ten-year sentence for defrauding investors. True, he paid \$1.5 billion in fines and a similar sum to those whom he had cheated. But his new 'job', apart from doing court-ordered community service in Los Angeles, is 'advising' his lawyer – presumably on how to make the most of the billion he is reputedly still worth.

Meanwhile, 23 per cent of American children live in poverty... to say nothing of Somalia.

Stealing the show

It isn't just junk-bond dealers: while touring Japan, members of a large university band from Texas went on a shoplifting binge in Tokyo and stole \$22,000 worth of electronic goods. Stunned shopkeepers managed to stop the buses leaving and retrieved most of their property. Back home in Texas, the university disciplined the offenders by dissolving their

marching band. But it hardly helped US-Japan relations.

Bags of honesty

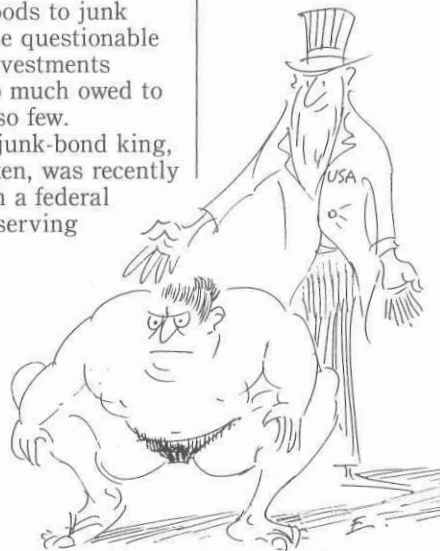
The Japanese themselves are so concerned about corruption in politics that a think-tank on government has sent its researchers to neighbouring Taiwan to investigate a 'Clean Election Campaign' there. It began with voters-in-the-street Ren-Jou and Grace Liu who, during recent elections, decided to make public their pledge that they would neither take bribes nor vote for those who offered them.

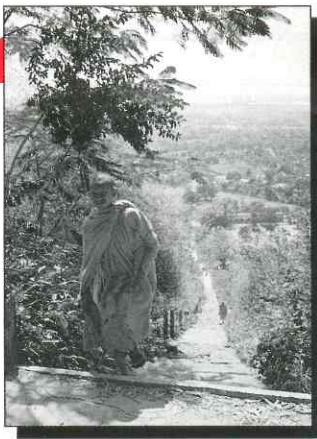
The Lius and their Moral Re-Armament colleagues found ready support for their campaign from 67 organizations – Buddhist, Taoist and Christian included. Thousands started queuing up to sign the pledge. Taiwan's newspapers and television covered the campaign. Teachers sent their students home with pledges for their parents and a taxi-drivers' union distributed them to passengers.

By election day, 620,000 people had signed for honesty, and 156 of the 370 candidates had made public their pledges as well. It was 'God-pleasing action', said the Lius as they sorted through bags of mail piled high in their office.

Teriyaki beef

Weighing in at 446 lbs (202 kgs), American sumo wrestler Chad 'Akebono' Rowan has fought his way to the top of 730 heavyweights and is likely to be nominated Japan's next grandmaster of sumo. You could say he was beefing up American exports to Japan. ■





COVER: A monk climbs the steep hill to the monastery at Phnom Chisaw, in Cambodia's Takev province.

Photo:
David Channer

FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

People need clean water, too

Not long ago, the sight of oiled seabirds and otters once again filled TV screens as the *Braer* disgorged its cargo into the Shetlands' stormy waters. Following tanker accidents in Spain and Alaska, and Saddam Hussein's deliberate polluting of the Gulf, this latest incident has highlighted the toll nature pays for mankind's dependence on oil.

Emotive as pictures of floundering cormorants are, it seems that the long-term effects of oil on the environment may not be as serious as is often feared. Nature seems to be remarkably resilient – providing no species is exterminated.

The Shetlands had two things going for them. First, the spilt cargo consisted of light crude, which is comparatively volatile and more easily dispersed by the forces of nature. Secondly, efforts to spray the oil slick with chemical dispersants – which, many environmentalists believe, do more harm than good – were largely thwarted by near-hurricane winds.

But, even if the environment and the wildlife it supports eventually recover, there is a human cost to major pollution incidents. The *Exxon Valdez* spill in Alaska ruined some people's livelihoods. And the 10,000 people who invaded Valdez to clean up brought with them crime, drug abuse and family disruption.

In the Shetlands, too, livelihoods will be hit as fishfarming and possibly tourism suffer. Financial compensation, however generous, cannot make good the sense of loss.

The arguments about the causes of the *Braer* incident will continue. But long after the last dead eider duck has been washed ashore a far more serious 'pollution incident' will be carrying on without making headlines in the West. In spite of the UN's efforts during its 'water decade' of the 1980s, over a billion people still go without safe drinking water, and every day thousands of children die as a result.

Those who truly care about the environment will not confine their concern to well-publicized contamination accidents. They will not rest until every human being has that most basic necessity, an adequate supply of drinking water. ■

MORAL 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.

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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.

Roots of recession

Britain, like many countries, is in the depths of its worst recession since the 1930s. Kenneth Noble asks what has gone wrong and what can be done.



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A march in support of the coal-miners faced with redundancy

The announcement last November of the closure of 31 coal-mines provoked an outcry from all parts of Britain. It wasn't just sympathy with the 30,000 who would lose their jobs: people also felt that things had gone too far. Already unemployment was close to three million (about 10.7 per cent), and the current recession was the longest and deepest Britain had experienced for two generations.

In the event, the pits were given a temporary stay of execution, but there remains a widespread feeling that industry has been 'hollowed out', in the words of *Daily Telegraph* leader writer Simon Scott Plummer, to the point where it may never fully recover.

It is tempting to look for a scapegoat for the recession. Current favourites include the Government, the banks, high German interest rates and 'international forces beyond our control'.

Andrew Dilnot, Director of the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, feels that the Government must bear some responsibility though it does not have as much control of the economy as people believe. The Government's lack of clarity on where it is going has been damaging. The fact that Britain's recession has been worse than its competitors' suggests that not all the blame can be put on international factors, he adds.

So what went wrong? 'I think we deceived ourselves into thinking that



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ment realized that the consumer boom was fuelling inflation. They put the brakes on, which led to recession.

Or, in the words of Government minister Stephen Dorrell: 'We had a party and then we had a hang-over.'

Dorrell, who is Financial Secretary to the Treasury, says that the Government cannot by itself create full employment. 'Our case is that we will provide an environment where business can succeed. We think that's the best way of generating wealth.' This will finance Government spending on the priority areas of health, education and social security – providing 'a proper safety net' for the needy.

Getting inflation under control, he says, is essential but will not by itself reduce unemployment.

there had been an economic miracle in the 1980s,' says Dilnot. 'During most of the post-war years, if the economy grew at more than 2.5 per cent, we got inflation and balance of payments problems. Then suddenly we felt that the economy could grow at 3.5 per cent without these pressures, and we were wrong.'

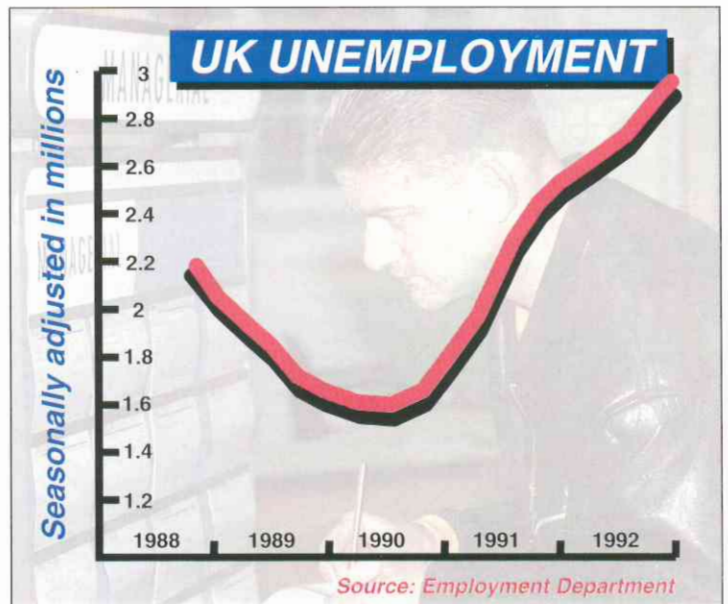
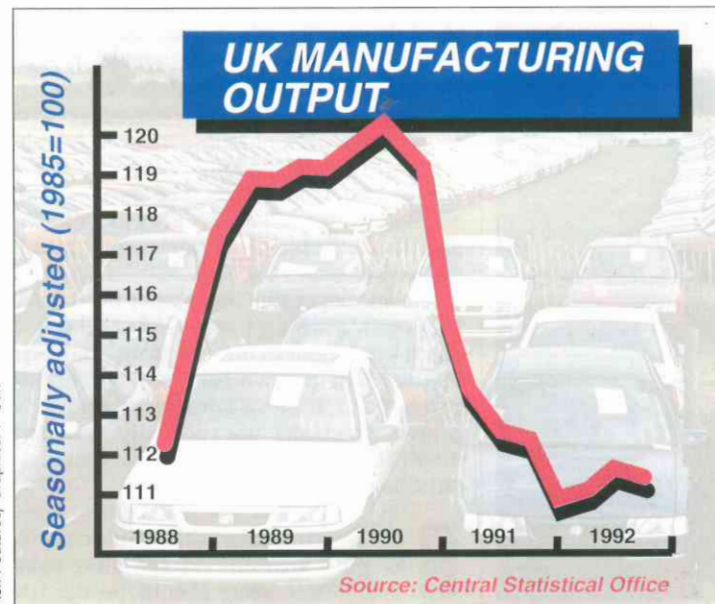
In the 'heady' late Eighties, people borrowed large sums, which the banks readily lent, and the Government cut taxes – all on the assumption that demand would go on growing. 'It wasn't just grasping and unscrupulousness, though that was there, there was an over-confidence in all of us.' Then the Govern-

Masures suggested for ending the recession include boosting the housing market, lowering interest rates and spending public money on infrastructure projects. But many people feel that Britain's economic problems are too fundamental to respond to 'quick fixes'.

Some believe we need to look beyond economics.

Rotherham businessman David Curtis sees a link between the malaise of the early Nineties and the selfish thinking of the Eighties.

Five years ago he was 'a hard-nosed businessman striving to build an empire' but an experience of being 'touched by the Holy Spirit' at a church service brought a



Rex Features/ Graphics: P Carr

Roots of recession

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change in his life. He came to believe that maximization of profit was a false god. As long as a company remains viable, people should not be sacked unnecessarily, he now says. The usual approach in industry is to 'dispose of anything which is not profitable quickly and without flinching. This policy has consumed a dangerously high proportion of our industry and commerce like a rampant cancer in a sick patient.'

Curtis's new approach did not mean that he was immune from the vicissitudes of the recession. His family business collapsed in 1992: 'My family and I were

suddenly faced with losing our home, possessions, everything.' He has since done some consulting work though his house is still up for sale.

'Perhaps the shock of the recession will help more people see that we have become totally obsessed with personal gain and material possessions,' Curtis concludes.

'Competitiveness and acquisitiveness seem to have been encouraged over the last ten years,' agrees David Peel, an Anglican clergyman working in the Meadow Well Estate in North Shields, Tyne and Wear. The estate is home to some 5,000 people and unemployment runs at

85 per cent. He decries 'the injustice whereby the poor fall ever further behind the well-off'. People on the estate, he says, are stigmatized just because they come from there, making it harder for them to find jobs. Their children, already disadvantaged, get a poorer than average education because their schools do badly in the competition for resources.

In Biblical terms, the unemployed are being put outside the city, like lepers, he says. He sees a glimmer of hope in the work of the ecumenical group, Church Action on Poverty. They are bringing people from wealthier suburbs to Meadow Well to hear residents talk about their lives.

Bob Scarth in Hinckley, Leicestershire, is also exercised by 'the underclass', those at the bottom of the pile in socio-economic terms. A former full-time union official, industrial relations manager and college lecturer, Scarth says that the low-paid are often in as bad a plight as those without work. He is angry that the Government is abolishing the wages councils, which guarantee the minimum wages of two and a half million people - farm workers, hairdressers, shop workers and others. 'It is always the very well-paid who want to hold down the wages of the very low-paid,' he says. 'It is the ultimate moral travesty.'

The retreat in recent years from collective responsibility for the weak and needy has given a sanction to selfishness, says Zaki Badawi, Principal of the Muslim College in Ealing, West London. People have lost pride in what they can contribute to the community and in their own worth and have become more concerned with how much money they can grab. 'If everyone is for himself the outlook that makes industry successful is missing - the loyalty to the collective or the company.'

With increasing complacency about extra- and premarital relations, family ties have also been weakened, Dr Badawi goes on. This has led to a weakening of religious authority. 'Spiritual decline contributed to economic decline which in turn has fed into further spiritual decline. Society is moving in a direction which I think is very harmful.'

Sheila Needham, founder and Managing Director of Needham Printers in London links business's lack of confidence with individuals' lack of confidence, which she relates to people lacking a sense of being children of God. 'If we see ourselves as victims of recession we always will be she says. 'I think we have to fight the situation.'

She speaks of the importance of committing one's working life to God at all times. Her own business nearly went under in 1991 and there have been other worrying patches. It felt like a miraculous answer to prayer when she unexpectedly won two major orders that helped her business survive.

Bob Scarth says that the cost of keeping someone on the dole, some £8,000 per year, should be used to employ people on community jobs



S Eason/Hulton Deutsch

Homeless people waiting for a 'Crisis at Christmas' shelter to open



Clockwise starting top left: Bob Scarth, former full-time trade union official; Stephen Dorrell, Financial Secretary to the Treasury; Dr Zaki Badawi, Principal of the Muslim College, Ealing; Andrew Dilnot, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies; Sheila Needham of Needham Printers.

cleaning up towns and doing up sub-standard homes for the homeless.

Having recently visited Australia, Scarth believes we should learn from their experience of a 'tripartite approach' to the economy, a partnership between government, employers and trade unions. He would like the Government to enlist 'the tremendous resources of goodwill, experience, knowledge, understanding and vision that all these other groups have'.

This would involve giving people a sense of being everyone else's keeper. 'A morally-based personal life-style and belief is the sheet anchor whatever else happens.'

To Patrick O'Kane, a building worker in Coventry, the crucial issue is healing the roots of the class war in Britain. Desperation is making trade unions and management work together during the recession but 'once you get beyond survival there will be a battle for control again'.

The deep distrust and animosity between the classes, which is passed on from generation to generation, has its roots in the injustices of the industrial revolution, O'Kane goes on. 'Unless the Holy Spirit comes in and deals with these dark forces, we're almost bound to repeat the mistakes of the past. We must look back honestly, reclaim the best and ask forgiveness for the rest.'

Britain must keep her problems in perspective, says Andrew Bowden, Conservative Member of Parliament for Brighton Kemptown. 'If we think of the poorest of the poor in our country, and there are some who are pretty poor, they are millionaires compared to the majority of people who live in China, India or Africa.' He was one of the MPs who signed an advertisement in *The Times* urging that Britain's overseas aid expenditure should not be cut in the Chancellor of the

Exchequer's 'Autumn Statement'.

He agrees with those who say that the decline in Christian faith is weakening the very structure of society. Describing himself as an imperfectly practising Christian, he says that he returned to the faith he was taught at school when faced with the responsibilities of becoming an MP. Now, 'when I have problems and difficulties I go down on my bended knees and ask God for help and guidance'.

Dr Badawi's view is that without helping the Third World there is no hope for the West. 'We need an economic vision for the whole world, not just the seven main industrial countries or Europe. One of the reasons for our decline is that Third World countries are spending so much on servicing their debts that they can no longer buy Western goods.'

He wants the West to write off the debts, 'which are not going to be paid anyway. Let's face that and see how we can salvage

Roots of recession

the Western banking system. Secondly, let's see how we can give commodities an equitable price so that Third World countries can afford to buy our goods.'

Such a levelling of the playing field could be hard to sell in Britain where, as Bowden points out, expectations have been continually raised by all political parties for 40 years. But not everyone believes that we should be aiming to get back to 'business as usual', even if that is possible.

'In a green universe everyone would have to suffer a bit,' says Nick Goodwin, a part-time teacher of the unemployed who stood as a Green Party candidate in the general election. 'There would have to be a lowering of expectations and a greater concentration on quality of life.' You either have a society where people are supporting each other but to a certain extent sharing comparative poverty or a few rich people and many poor people. The latter could lead to social breakdown; and destruction of the natural environment.

His wife Jackie organizes voluntary work for anyone seeking it. After their daughter Bethan was born they both decided to go half-time in an attempt to 'have a more integrated life'. Jackie would like to see more flexibility in working arrangements, which would also involve reform of the tax and benefit system which discourages people from working part-time. 'If we develop new work patterns, people will have more time to do the

things they really want to. There would not be such a massive division between home life and work life.'

The Greens' vision of Britain won few votes at last year's election (not helped by their former national spokesman declaring himself to be the 'son of God'). But there is a widespread feeling that what former US President Bush called 'the vision thing' is important.

Lord Rees-Mogg, Chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Council and a former editor of *The Times*, says that the British have had little sense of direction since the Second World War. 'Having lived my early life with a fairly strong national sense of purpose, I'm conscious of how it draws a nation together, gives people a feeling of individual purpose which is valuable to them.' But he doesn't feel a purpose can be invented.

Though the British economy is subject to forces beyond our control, it is also affected by each of us in this country – our work, our spending, our day-to-day decisions, how we treat each other. The statistics suggest that we are not treating each other well.

Divorce and crime rates are at all-time highs, drug and alcohol abuse wreck lives, major frauds rob pensioners and small savers. Economists may not be able to quantify the effects; but there must be a cost to morale and efficiency. These, in their turn, erode profits, destroy jobs, cut national income and reduce the tax revenue which can be invested in training tomorrow's workforce. We need to be more aware of the moral factor in the economy – and more willing to address it.

Perhaps, too, we need more debate about what sort of society we want. For if we could find a unity of purpose we might find the will to achieve it. That can only happen as we break down barriers of mistrust between ourselves and those who see life from different political perspectives. It may mean letting go of some cherished prejudices about what motivates other groups. It may even mean being prepared to see our standard of living fall for the sake of others.

'Sacrifice' is not a word that springs readily to the lips of our leaders. But men and women cannot live by bread alone, and a willingness to let go of our materialism might enable us to discover the moral and spiritual values that ultimately make a country worth living in. Paradoxically, embracing such values could improve Britain's economic performance. ■



Managing Director Tony Locke: 'empowering people'

When Ford launches its new 'world car', the Mondeo, on the European market this March (and in America next year) it will include a small but vital component made by the British Midlands firm SU Automotive. It has won the contract, in the teeth of German and French competition, to supply the fuel injection rails for Ford's new Zeta range of engines being manufactured in Cologne, Germany, and Bridgend, South Wales.

The Birmingham components firm has established a reputation for excellence, winning both the Ford Q1 and Rover Sterling quality awards for its supply of carburettors and fuel injection systems.

Yet this track record has not protected SU from the ravages of the recession. Car sales nosedived, component suppliers felt the plunge. Sales at SU fell 30 per cent over the last two years and the workforce was slashed by 100 to 265. Last November the engineering workers even offered to freeze wages for 12 months in order to save jobs, though the management awarded them a four per cent rise. The firm remains profitable on a turnover down from £24 million to £20 million.

Now car sales are expected to pick up, not least at Rover to whom SU sells 80 per cent of its output. Things are 'starting to bottom out', says Tony Locke, SU's Managing Director, who sees an upturn 'at the end of the year'.

SU's engineering workers' conversation



Rex Features

Lord Rees-Mogg: 'A national sense of purpose draws a nation together.'

Back from the brink

Albert Benbow adds, 'We are about to see a turn because of our efforts.' He cites three factors: total work flexibility between his union and the other union in the plant, the transport workers; a highly skilled workforce; and a commitment to quality. Last year the company spent 100,000 to put 60 production workers on voluntary training courses in the plant run by East Birmingham Technical College. Encouraged by the unions, a similar number are expected to attend this year. Taken in the employees' own time, the weekly courses of four hours last up to 38 weeks. Comments Locke, 'If you are going to empower people you have got to give them the wherewithal.'

The investment is paying off. 'While car companies are cutting down on suppliers we have become a preferred supplier for both Ford and Rover,' says Benbow. The company will supply fuel systems for Rover's new K series engines being manufactured at Birmingham's Longbridge plant.

The firm's commitment to total quality means that SU is meeting what Tony Locke regards as an even greater challenge than the recession: competition with the Japanese. 'They have a 20 per cent cost advantage on a typical UK company,' says Locke, who sees the need for a 'flatter, leaner' management. 'A typical UK management is a multi-tiered, Victorian-type structure. At SU we are working out a strategy to get management closer to the production teams.' His manufacturing director now liaises direct with team leaders on the shop floor, and Locke says SU is closing the cost gap.

Benbow also sees dialogue with management as key to SU's survival. They have not just informed shop stewards of their intentions but have consulted them in depth, he says.

It was not always like that. In the Sixties and Seventies, when confrontation was the name of the game, Benbow was convinced that the only way to make management see sense was by taking his men off the job. As a militant shop steward and supporter of the Broad Left, he saw management as antagonists never to be trusted. The 32 skilled toolmakers at SU, with Benbow as a spokesman, repeatedly went on strike in attempts to restore their

pay differential over non-skilled workers. SU, then a subsidiary of British Leyland, gained a reputation as 'the worst factory in the group for industrial relations' according to Benbow. Over several years output of carburettors fell from 32,000 a week to 8,000. With their power to disrupt supplies of vital components, the toolmakers had a make or break role within the ailing British car industry.

The crunch came in 1980 when BL's top management put in a new personnel manager at SU, Bill Rodger, with instructions to wind up the firm and negotiate redundancy terms. A friend of Benbow, from outside the industry, urged him to sit down with Rodger in an effort to save the factory and jobs. Benbow was appalled. 'We don't talk to management. They are the enemy,' he said. 'But you will have to talk to them if you want to save SU from being shut,' replied his friend.

Faced with the abyss, Benbow went to see Rodger, asking him, 'What would we have to do to prevent closure?' 'Are you serious?' replied Rodger. 'Give me 48 hours and I will come back with a formula for making the factory viable.'

The formula included an end to demarcation, unprecedented in those days, and drastic redundancies. Benbow managed to sell the package to the workforce who narrowly voted in favour on a show of hands. It was a total revolution, which saved the company and transformed working relations. Harold Musgrove, Managing Director of Austin Rover, the successor of British Leyland, later described SU as the 'jewel in the crown'. But with the car group's policy of divesting all peripheral component firms, SU was sold off and is now under American owners who have injected new capital.

Benbow says his own change of attitude has been matched by the rest of the shop floor, though it has taken six years to achieve total flexibility between the two unions. 'Now we work as one,' he says. It means that the workforce can respond at a moment's notice to a change in specification as orders come in.

While Benbow talks of the workforce's 'excellent relations with our directors', Tony Locke pays tribute to the trade union leadership. 'It is invaluable,' he says. 'Albert has played a big part in it. His vision is quite incredible. He has always believed in developing a partnership. It would have been much more difficult without him.' *Michael Smith*



Albert Benbow, engineering workers' trade union convenor: 'developing partnership'

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by
Choice Okoro

J Williams



Julia Griffith

Lengthening dole queues are the bane of governments and the despair of the jobless. Unemployment rates that would have seemed nightmarish a decade ago in many western countries are now the order of the day. Australia's is 11.4 per cent and the experts predict that it will stay above 10 per cent for the next five years at least.

Soon after Julia Griffith joined the Department of Labour in the Australian state of Victoria in 1986, she and a colleague were asked to form a task force to look into what could be done for the long-term unemployed. The result was a programme called 'JobLink', for those who had been out of work for at least a year. Griffith was the programme's first manager.

She says that she and her colleagues were appalled by the sense of 'overwhelming rejection' in the unemployed, 'the feeling that society did not want them', so why should they even try to get a job or move out of their 'very isolated lifestyle'. 'Their social and work contacts shrink and their poor self-esteem means they cannot face the risk of further failures so when the opportunities come up they often lose them.'

JobLink was designed primarily to give such people the confidence to take responsibility for themselves. It started with three teams of three counsellors who were given a lot of latitude in seeking out the unemployed, sticking with them, waking them up if necessary for interviews, and helping them write resumés or apply for training programmes. They also talked to employers about their needs for staff. There are now 60 counsellors working out of 20

centres, some of them bilingual and others specially trained to deal with people with physical disabilities. Other government programmes have picked up the idea of a 'case work' approach.

When JobLink began there were some 30,000 long-term unemployed in the state. The recession has trebled this figure, but the programme has helped 16,804: jobs have been found for 9,148 and 7,941 have been helped to take further training.

These results, Griffith believes, come from the fact that 'each person has the capacity for change and even the unemployable can find jobs'.

Victor Couke is a photographer on a mission. He is forging a network of photographers who want to take responsibility – above everything else – to show the things 'that ought to be changed and those that should be appreciated'.

To do this he started an organization called 'Vision Without

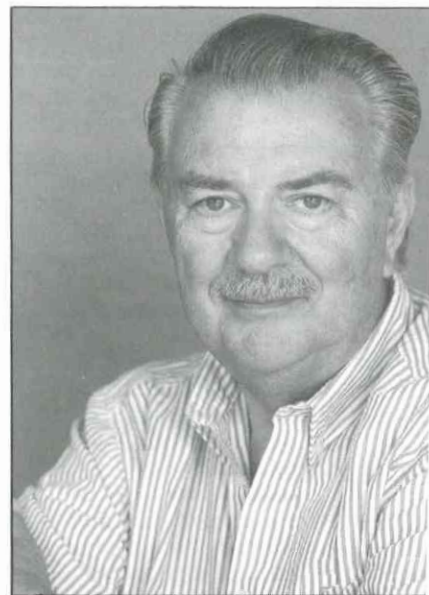
Borders' with its centre in Antwerp in Belgium.

Photographers from different countries have joined. It has become consultant to such international organizations as UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

He says that Vision Without Borders offers consultancy services to these bodies by presenting them with accurate photographs of events covered around the world, 'and also advises them on questions of cultural diversity – so that they can distinguish between real problems and cultural differences.'

It has become necessary for his organization to do this because it is impossible to understand cultural and social events 'without an understanding of the profound way in which the media – for us, photography – shape our environment and our way of thinking, acting, and considering.'

He founded Vision Without Borders after taking the decision to be a photographer who would 'provide and motivate the creation images with healthy sensitivity and morality'. In contrast he says popular photography extends and amplifies images with the sole aim of shocking and



Victor Couke

disturbing a public which has no training in judging their myth-creating effect.

He believes photography is not as technical and impersonal as it is often made out to be. 'Our reactions to the happy events and especially unhappy events taking place around us depend to a large extent on the vision and even more on the morality of all those who act as the media's eyes.'

Couke, born 67 years ago, always knew he would be a photographer. 'My father was one and I had been struck by how powerful a message you could send across through this medium.' He studied photography at college in Belgium and then trained in a studio.

At the moment Vision Without Borders is in the process of starting a school 'for up and coming' photographers. The aim, he says, 'is to teach them the sensitivity needed to understand the diversity in the world we live in'.

'After all,' he says, 'they will be our third eye tomorrow.'

Indian teacher Zarin Virji resigned her job to spend three months in Britain as part of the *For A*

Change service to schools. She was joined by Philippa Faunce, who has just graduated in French and Spanish.

They visited 58 schools showing a 25 minute documentary on Rajmohan Gandhi, an Indian journalist and politician. The film, *Encounters with Truth*, relates development issues to individual commitment to living an unselfish life. It shows how Gandhi, a grandson of the Mahatma, is working to erase the various barriers to development in India.

The *For A Change* schools service started three years ago when Howard Grace, a maths teacher at St Bartholomew's comprehensive school in Newbury, decided there was a need to expose students to more than academic challenges. He wrote a play to encourage those on the brink of the adult world to seek the right framework for making decisions about the future, and took a year off to take it round schools.

Virji and Faunce's three months' stint was a continuation of this programme.



Philippa Faunce and Zarin Virji

They spent an average of an hour in each school.

Though the film is about India, Virji and Faunce felt it was relevant to the lives of British students. Says Faunce, 'It was up to us to direct the discussion to situations the students could identify with.'

In Northern Ireland, for instance, says Virji, 'we asked them how they could use what they had learnt from the film to build bridges. And how they could in their choice of careers resolve conflicts in their community.'

'There is a part where Rajmohan Gandhi decides to

repay the bus company for the times he has travelled free,' says Faunce. 'We asked the students to explain how such a personal decision could affect national development.'

The film also raises the issue of India's caste system. The sixth-formers were asked to look at the question of ethnicity in their own community and how they treated people of other races in England.

Zarin Virji has returned to India and hopes to resume her teaching job. Faunce goes back to college to pursue a post-graduate course in Speech Therapy.

Australian reporting by John Williams

TURNING POINTS by Paul Williams

French schoolteacher Evelyn Seydoux says that a Scottish beach was the scene of a turning point in her life.

She had 'fled' to Scotland during a low ebb in her teachers' training course in Paris. While at University she had discovered the practical implications of her

Christian faith and she felt this included caring for other students. But she couldn't find a balance between this 'mission', her course work and outside activities. She failed even the re-sits of her exams.

Her pride was shattered. She decided to get as far away as possible and found a summer job looking after four children aged between ten and four, the family of a Scottish textile executive. The wife kept the home spotless but seemed very unapproachable. The seven-year-old took an instant dislike to Seydoux. Her main work was to take the children to the beach and keep them occupied. 'Day after

day I watched the children fight while I read my beloved French newspaper *Le Monde*.'

As her conscience began to bother her, she vaguely wondered what she should do to stop the fighting. One day a thought flashed through her mind: 'You have not been looking after the children properly. Leave your paper at home and play with them.' She obeyed the thought. 'That morning we built sandcastles and raced on the beach. Holding my hand, the seven-year-old chatted all the way back to the house and told his mother all about the morning. From that day, security and peace came back to my life.'

She was given more responsibilities and the family insisted she went with them on their special holiday to the north of Scotland. 'The mother wept at the station when I left to go back to France. It was as if God had found my hiding place and was letting me know this with a big smile.'

Feeling reconciled with God, she re-entered her teaching course in Paris, passed her exams and went on to teach for five years. Her work since then has involved looking after the children of many different families. 'Whenever the kids are difficult,' she says, 'I remember the Scottish beach.'

India's man of the trees

On first encounter, one could easily take Sunderlal Bahuguna for an old Indian mountain dweller. Clad in grey, with a scarf around his head, he does look like one. But there is more to him than meets the eye.

Here is one man who has dedicated the last 30 years of his life to halting tree-felling in wide areas of the Indian Himalayas. His Chipko movement is recognized as one of the world's most effective grassroots environmental initiatives.

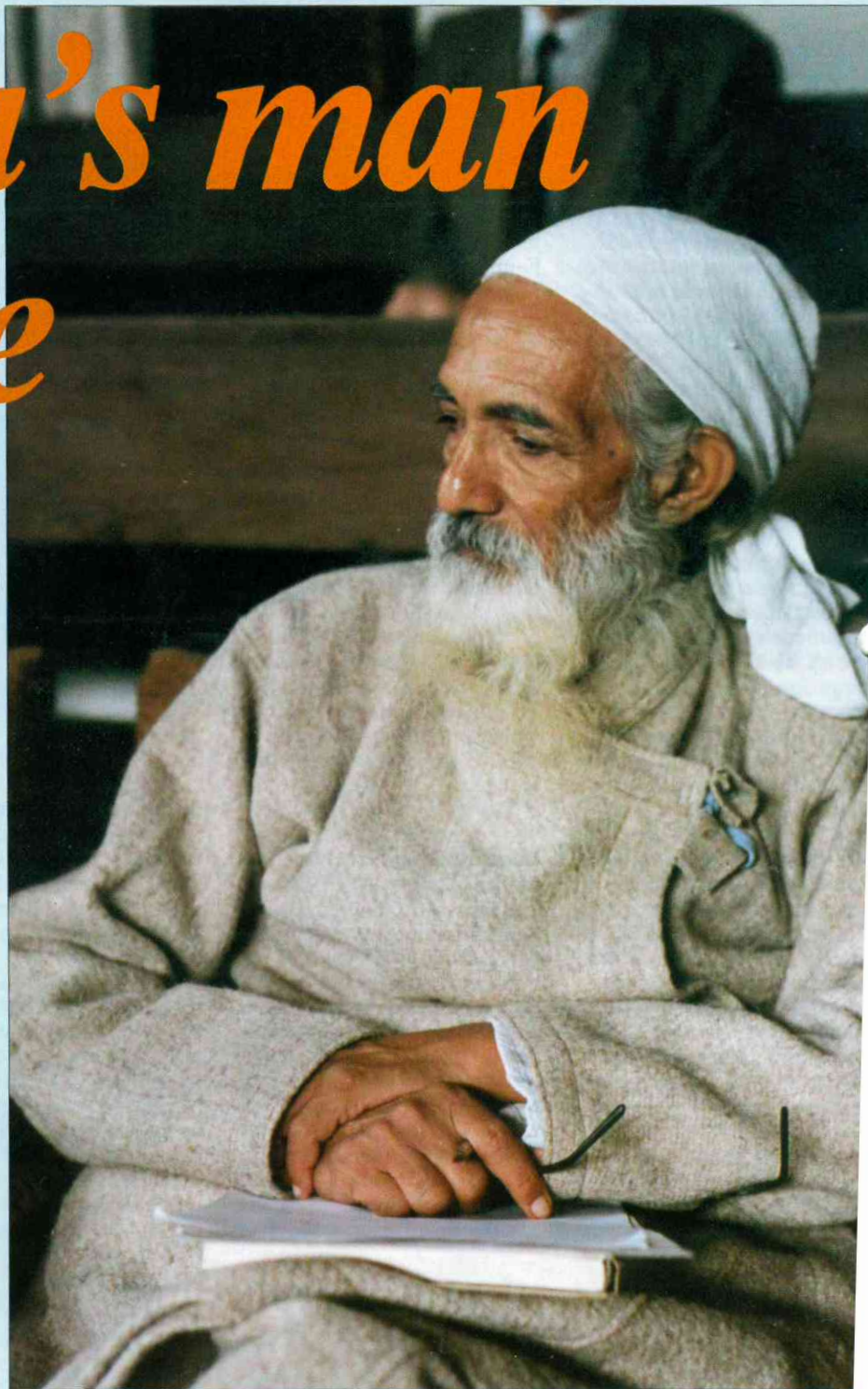
I met him in Paris – on his way back from Germany – looking frail, certainly not strong enough to be dashing around the world, challenging mankind's exploitation of nature. 'I don't always look this weak,' the 66-year-old ecologist told me. 'I have just ended a 40-day fast against the construction of a dam, which will uproot thousands of people.'

Couldn't he have written a petition to the government? 'I did, but they would not listen to me.'

Bahuguna, who has become a prominent voice of the poor in India, is used to making the authorities listen. His success lies in his ability, as a disciple of Gandhi, to combine non-violent ways of protest with the resolute pursuit of change, even at risk to his life.

He was born in the region of Uttarkhand, surrounded by the great Himalayan mountain range which is India's principal source of water. At the age of 17, he was jailed during India's Independence struggle. He went on to work with India's Harijan community (the former 'untouchables') and gained a degree in political science. In 1956 he gave up party politics and founded an ashram in Silyara, a Himalayan village, with his wife, Vimla Nautiyal. They have three children.

Uttarkhand has always been thickly



Over three decades of fasts, marches and tree-hugging, Sunderlal Bahuguna has fought to save the forests of the Himalayas. He talks to Choice Okoro.

forested. Heavy logging began last century, to provide timber for the construction of railways. As Bahuguna grew up he watched the natural wealth of the area diminish.

It was the economics of the situation that first gripped his attention. 'I was concerned because the local people were not getting any profit from the continuous felling of the trees,' he says. He rallied people to fight for economic independence from the big forest contractors, and a number of local forest-based industries sprang up. But as floods, soil erosion and drought – caused by the denuding of the watersheds – became more common, he became aware of a wider ecological dimension.

'I saw that it was wrong for man to exploit nature for his selfishness – and that this only made the Earth more uninhabitable, especially for poor people.' One thing he had learnt from Gandhi, he says, was to admit where he had been wrong. 'I now saw that all industry based on the felling of trees was wrong.'

By then he had launched the Chipko movement. The spark came in 1973, when the state government decided to allocate the local peoples' quota of ash trees, used for agricultural implements, to a manufacturer of sporting goods. He led the people of the affected Shange community in protest – hugging the trees, as the axemen of the felling company advanced upon them. Short of cutting through the protesters, the lumbermen could not do their job. *Chipko* means 'hug'.

As well as undertaking fasts, he has walked over 15,000 kms on *yatras* (foot marches) to spread the message of Chipko. These activities are usually carried out in the full glare of supportive media. He was arrested during one fast – demanding the end of tree-felling in three communities – for fear he might die and become a martyr. The felling eventually stopped.

Such successes have not endeared Bahuguna to those businessmen and hoteliers who put profit before people. When they look at the natural wealth of the Himalayas, they see dams which would provide water for industries and for hotels that would attract tourists to the area. Bahuguna sees the people who would lose their homes and the trees that would have to be cut down to make space for these projects.

He also sees the unborn children who would be deprived of a healthy environment in which to grow up. 'We don't own nature,' he says. 'She owns us. After we go, this Earth will remain. It is wrong for us to make it uninhabitable during the short time we are here.'

He blames the current world environmental crisis on the 'wrong definition of development'. To him – and he has the support of people around the world – development should mean the availability of peace, happiness and fulfilment to

all. But, he says, 'the prevailing view of development encourages consumerism and keeps the individual in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction'.

Bahuguna is sad that less industrialized countries are hell-bent on following the industrialized nations 'with all their shortcomings'. He criticizes cash crops, directed towards earning foreign exchange rather than producing food for local people, as a means by which the less industrialized nations have allowed themselves to be exploited.

'There are hungry people in the industrialized world as well,' he says. 'More technology has not rid the Earth of its ills. In fact it has created war, pollution and materialism.'

After 34 years at their ashram in Silyara, the Bahugunas left in 1990 to live in the village of Seria and campaign against the construction of a gigantic dam at Tehri, in Uttarkhand, and 'share the miseries of those displaced by it'. It was for this cause that he had been fasting just before we met.

'These people's lives are woven around the natural environs of Tehri,' he says. 'They draw their water from fountains and streams, collect fuel and fodder from the woods and take their cattle to graze in pastures without dearth.' The place to which they are being moved has no greenery and the homes they are being offered are 'barracks'. 'This is made even worse by the fact that they will have to

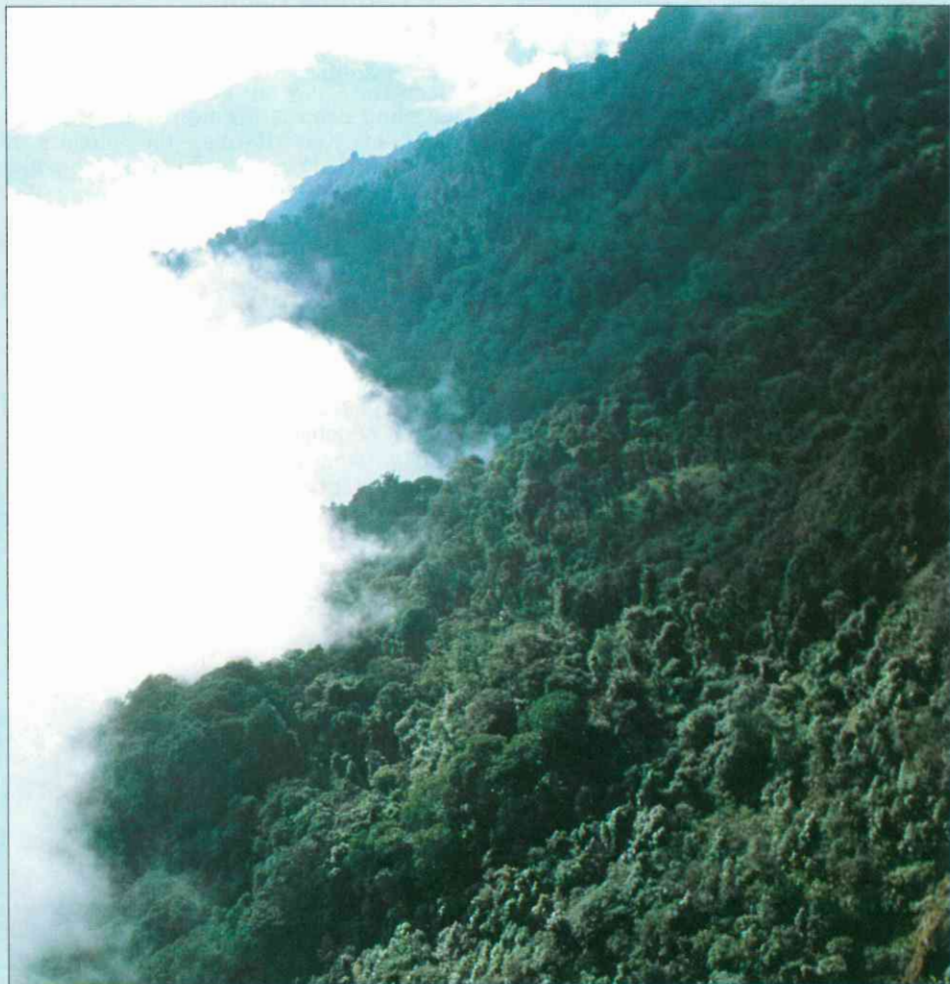
find new sources of livelihood.'

The local people have been squatting at the site of the dam, in spite of the threat of arrest. 'This is not a question of the environment,' says Bahuguna. 'It is the question of our survival. I don't care what they do to me. At least the next generation will not blame me.'

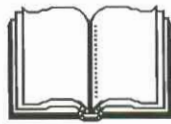
As spokesman of Chipko – he does not wish to be called the leader – he has gone on *yatras* through Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, giving lectures on the work of the movement. He has inspired young people all over the world to get into action on protecting the environment. 'We must not just grumble in our comfortable homes but let the culprits know that what they are doing is wrong. In their greed they may be unaware of the damage.'

He is the recipient of five awards from home and abroad and holds honorary degrees from two Indian universities for his contribution in the field of social work.

But Bahuguna says that the greatest award is when he has been able to stop a particularly disastrous project. He has helped to halt tree-felling in more than ten forest communities. He foresees fighting for many more years: 'It is not enough to know all the facts. People will have to conquer the selfishness and greed in their own hearts and yield to the warning signs that the Earth is sending across.'



The forests of the Himalayas, protecting India's main source of water



BOOK REVIEWS

PILGRIMS' PROGRESS

Rediscovering Freedom

by John Lester and Pierre Spoerri
Grosvenor Books, London

Although this book's theme is 'freedom, librarians could be excused for classifying it under politics, sex and religion – or all three. For these are areas in which human freedom is expressed, tested and often abused.

The book offers a pilgrim's progress towards true freedom. Its background is the new political freedoms in Eastern Europe and 'the search for inner freedom in the West'.

But there are two pilgrims progressing, usually in step and concord, spiritual and practical. John Lester is a doctor and Secretary in Britain of Moral Re-Armament. Pierre Spoerri is a journalist whose writing and MRA work is based in Germany and reflects an astonishing range of interests, knowledge and multi-national sources.

Books of joint authorship can be difficult to write and read. This one achieves unity of style in sensitive, readable English.

Lester and Spoerri are able to appeal to reason even when writing about emotions. They relate examples of dramatic personal changes. Yet they neither overstate individuals' influence on events nor underrate the destructive potential of the moral and political confusion which marks post-Cold War Europe but is not confined to it. Spoerri makes some good points with Asian examples, though the book has relatively little to say about Africa and especially the acute questions raised by South Africa.

Much of Lester's contribution is a discussion of freedom and sexual and other permissiveness. His basic assumption (also valid in politics) is that the essence of freedom is self-control. One may, however, question the wording if not the intention of the claim that only 'a minority have a calling to permanent chastity', and similar references to those 'who have chosen chastity'. Celibacy would be a more appropriate word. If (as Lester says) married love is a gift, is it not both more reasonable and more helpful to think of marriage as a chaste and not merely an honourable estate?

But both Lester and Spoerri manage to

convey and advance their idealism in a remarkably realistic way. Their book is a warning against illusions about human nature, and about freedom. How right Spoerri is, for example, to challenge the assumption that new generations in Europe 'will be able to live life less weighed down by the past'. As he says, experience shows that time alone may not cure everything. Events since the book was written tend to sustain the warning and to emphasize the need for repentance, forgiveness, compassion, and 'positive action with a former adversary'. It is not through passage of time but by the interaction of divine grace and human response that pilgrims can lose the burdens that weigh them down.

RD Kernohan
former Editor, 'Life and Work', the monthly journal
of the Church of Scotland

A CRUSADER FOR JUSTICE

Keir Hardie

by Caroline Benn
Hutchinson, London

Caroline Benn is the first woman biographer of Keir Hardie, the pioneer of Britain's Labour movement and its first Member of Parliament. She aims to tell of Hardie 'as a man like other men, in no way diminished for being shown to be human'. Her book also gives a meticulously researched account of the birth-pangs of the Labour Party.

Keir Hardie was a warrior of many battles. She shows him at grips with the issues of the class war (which he rejected

as 'out of date' in 1903); women's votes; nationalism, Welsh and Scottish; as well as documenting his unceasing, lifelong crusade for the unemployed and the underprivileged. She describes his controversial speeches on his journeys to Australia, America, South Africa and India. She takes him from 'a party of one' at Westminster to the leader-

ship of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Finally there is his heart-breaking failure to avert the First World War through the Socialist International.

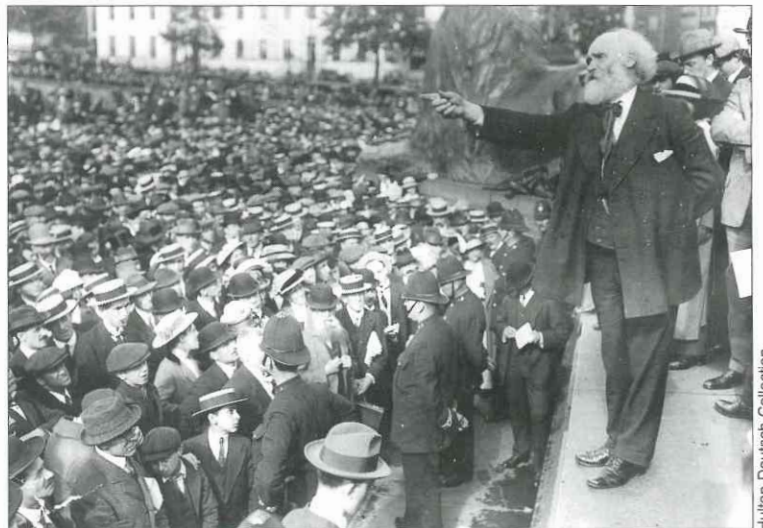
Benn's special contribution is her account of Hardie's work with the women in his movement, and his relationship with his wife, Lillie. Benn sees the strain and poverty under which Lillie raised their family of four, one of whom died in childhood. Hardie's proud passion to keep his political hands clean made him turn down well-meant offers of financial help. 'It is not hard to imagine Lillie's anger,' writes Benn. But is it Lillie or Benn who is angry?

At times Benn seems to judge Hardie's behaviour as a husband by what is acceptable today. Yet she notes Lillie's loyalty to Lillie and his care, for instance in writing her a post-card every day of his life. She describes his vulnerability (in later life he was strongly drawn towards some of the younger women in the movement) and his battle to stay on what he called 'the straight path'.

In all Hardie's work, Benn notes, 'the ring of religion was always heard' – he was won from atheism to faith when he discovered that Jesus was 'a common working man'. His fight against capitalism sprang from his convictions about ethics. Benn might have quoted his astonishing assessment: 'The impulse which drove me first of all into the Labour movement, and the inspiration which has carried me on in it, has been derived more from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth than from all other sources combined.'

Benn ends the book: 'Keir Hardie surpassed all his contemporaries in carrying forward the "high tradition of world" which alone transforms society and advances social justice.'

Henry Macnicol



Keir Hardie addressing a British Peace Demonstration

Hulton-Deutsch Collection

The compleat birder

Illustration: W. Cameron-Johnson



We birdwatchers are not being left behind in this high-tec world. Witness the advert in *Bird Watching* monthly which begins, 'Fed up of pishing?'

'Pishing' is a technique for enticing into view those frustrating birds that insist on skulking in the middle of a bush. One method is to kiss the back of your hand with tightly pursed lips. Personally I've had more success making soft 'psss, psss' noises - and it's less embarrassing. Now, it seems, progress demands that you purchase an 'Audubon Bird Squeaker' (sic).

The same advert also offers leech-proof socks. Wonderful! All my Christmas present problems solved in one!

Or how about an American 'Eye of the Pirate' plastic nest-box? It looks like a pirate's face and 'easily attaches to tree'. Entry is through the missing eye. Next time I'm in the States I must watch out for spooked woodpeckers.

No, I'll not be needing a Sonic Super Ear Mark II ('will amplify sounds from up to 200 feet away'); a handheld Tally Counter; a Tripod Tamer; 'the Ritz of the Skies' birdtable; a Dazzer 'ultrasonic aid to dog deterrence... for stray cats too!'; nor even 'the world's most advanced binocular' (worn like spectacles, it would, according to one reviewer 'take considerable personal courage to wear these binocular-cum-spectacles in public').

Not that all the ads are for gadgets. Who could resist *What bird did that?*, the book which helps you identify the culprit behind that sudden splat on your car windscreen. At least that's *meant* to be humorous.

Fletcher Moss Park

Letters...

From John Bocock, St Albert, Alberta, Canada

1993 is the United Nations' Year of Indigenous Peoples.

My mother's family immigrated to Canada from Ireland to escape religious persecution in 1921. Sadly, one of the first edicts enforced in Canada banned the Indigenous People from practising their potlatch or sun dance ceremonies.

My father's father had been a tenant farmer in England and was drawn to Canada in 1912 by the promise of being able to own land. It is tragic that, as the settlers pushed west across the country, they did not respect the Indigenous peoples' strong attachment to the land.

There is no comfort in saying that these events happened before our time, because the same exploitative attitude is painfully evident today. We continue to approve new projects which will further pollute our rivers, land and air. The result is rivers without fish or with fish that are unfit for human consumption.

An honest appraisal of the past would be a good start in giving meaning to the UN's year. We need a determination never to repeat the mistakes of the past. This will involve both new legislation and new attitudes.

From Dr Robin Mowat, Oxford, UK

Congratulations on your issue of January, especially the report of the hostages in Lebanon and their spiritual development under unbelievable stress. Would it be possible to put the hostages episode into context? Apart from the general question of why we human beings tend to maltreat each other, there is the background of resentment in the Islamic world against the West and even hatred. This arises from the West's domination, arrogance and insensitivity as shown recently in the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Muslim memories go back to the Crusades, when the barbarians from the West practically destroyed the good relationship which had existed for some time between the vast Islamic area and its Byzantine and Latin neighbours; and to the later bigotry and fanaticism of Christians destroying the rich intercultural civilization of medieval Spain.

From Miss Nia Rhosier, Llangollen, Wales

I agree with Paul Williams's constructive view on ways of marrying unity and diversity, particularly apropos the relationships between Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England (Editorial Jan/Feb).

It is most noticeable on the television quiz programme for secondary schools, *Blockbusters*, how little is known by English pupils about Wales and Scotland. Why is it that English schools do not include in the curriculum some study of Welsh and Scottish as well as English history?

Those of us educated in the schools of Wales, particularly in the 1940s, were forced to learn English history to the almost complete exclusion of the history of Wales. So a whole generation has grown up in Wales, deprived of a proper background knowledge of their own history. Whether this was a deliberate political ploy to weaken the Welsh identity or just plain arrogance and ethnocentricity on the part of the English I do not know, but I hope and pray that in the 1990s we can leave that sort of thing behind us and go forward together as equals, each respecting the other's culture and language.

Sadly, the Welsh people are still having to struggle for equal status for their own language within Wales. How nice it would be if English people took up the challenge as a human rights issue! Then I would really believe that true repentance for the wrongs of the past was at work. Without that, and an accompanying willingness to forgive on the part of the Welsh, we shall make little progress.

The Editors welcome letters but reserve the right to shorten them.

CROSSWORD

The winner of our Christmas Crossword competition was Mrs ZM Brooker of Chichester, UK. She wins a copy of *Window* by Signe Lund Strong.

Solution

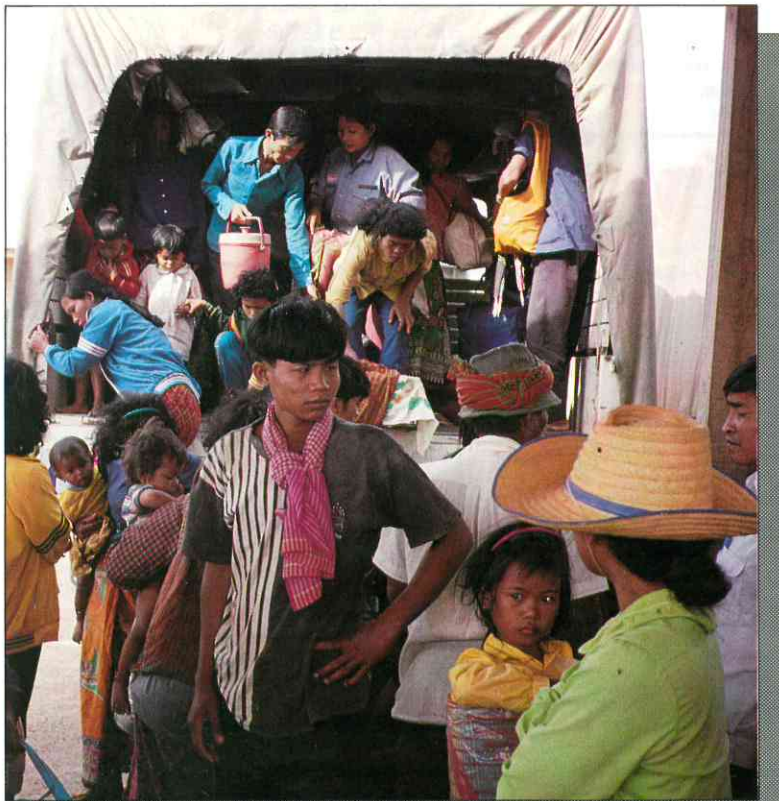
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Film director David Channer recently visited Indo-China.
His camera captured images of

Cambodia's fragile peace



(Left) Sixty-five per cent of Cambodia's population are women. 'I want to be able to vote so that there will be peace and people will stop killing each other,' said this woman.



Refugees from the Thai border camps arrive in Cambodia. For many it is their first sight of their country. By the end of March, all the refugees – 370,000 from Thailand and 50,000 from Vietnam – should be home.

Renée Pan places incense in a monastery near Odong destroyed during the terror. She fled Cambodia in 1975 with her three children, leaving behind her husband, who held a responsible position and is presumed killed. She returned to translate for UNTAC in the run-up to the elections and speak everywhere about how she has overcome her bitterness.



Beyond the killing fields, a new generation swims in the ponds and paddy fields as harvest time approaches.

(Right) Buddhist monks relax in Phnom Penh. Religious practice was eradicated under Pol Pot, but gradually returned after the Vietnamese invasion.



A tormented history

Mid-1960s 10 years after Cambodia gained independence from France, civil war breaks out between opposition guerrillas and Prince Sihanouk. The Prince names the guerrillas the Khmer Rouge.

1965 American troops arrive in Vietnam.

1966-7 Sihanouk allows Vietnamese communist bases in Cambodia and puts down a Khmer Rouge uprising.

1969 The US airforce strikes against Vietnamese bases in Cambodia.

1970 Sihanouk is overthrown by a US-backed coup and flees to China.

1973 US bombing of Cambodia ends, the US withdraws from Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, starts a Maoist revolution in Cambodia.

1975 The Khmer Rouge captures the capital, Phnom Penh. Over a million die in the genocide of Pol Pot's 'Killing Fields'. The Vietnamese war ends.

1979 Vietnam invades Cambodia, captures Phnom Penh and sets up a puppet government. The Khmer Rouge fights on in the countryside.

1989 Vietnam withdraws under international pressure, opening the way for peace negotiations between Cambodia's warring factions.

1991 All parties sign the Paris Accord. Prince Sihanouk returns as head of state and the UN is mandated to supervise the peace and prepare for elections in May 1993.

The United Nations peace-keeping operation in Cambodia (UNTAC) is the largest UN operation yet undertaken, with over 22,000 personnel and a budget of \$2 billion. It has been criticized for everything from reckless driving to being too soft on Khmer Rouge led guerrilla groups or on the Vietnamese installed government.

Yet there have been some notable successes. UNTAC electoral teams have reached into the far corners of the country and 4.4 million out of the 5.5 million eligible to vote have now registered for the UN-supervised elections due in May.

'The challenge in Cambodia is the challenge of reconciling a people with themselves,' explains the Director of the UN Electoral Component, Reginald Austin. 'At the same time it is a fundamental historical reality that Cambodians hate the Vietnamese. It doesn't help to pretend it is not a problem.'

The dilemma tearing at people's hearts was expressed by a young Cambodian, 'Vietnam was absolutely wrong to have invaded Cambodia, though absolutely

right to have defeated the Khmer Rouge.'

For the first time in two decades Cambodia has independent media, opposition parties and an indigenous human rights group.

'The fragile plant of democracy and the rule of law in Cambodia will require careful nurturing in the next years, if it is to survive the inevitable political storms,' points out the Director of the UN Human Rights Component, Dennis MacNamara. He describes the UN's human rights strategy as an attempt to back up fragile indigenous groups until they can function independently. 'Such support is vital, particularly in the post-election and post-UNTAC period... Experience elsewhere has shown that it will take more than elections to create a just society and heal past wounds.'

David Channer was in Cambodia to launch the Khmer language version of his film, 'For the Love of Tomorrow', which describes the work of French wartime resistance leader Irène Laure to reconcile France and Germany after World War II.

This is the Nineties after all

by **Michael Henderson**



Dennis Mayor

I was with a young American the other day who had been travelling through Europe with two women students. He was quite put out that in some places their relationship and sleeping arrangements were not universally approved. After all, he said, there were two women, not just one. Then he added the ultimate putdown, 'This is the Nineties after all.'

The younger generation assumes that each advancing decade automatically brings with it more wisdom. I wish for their sakes it were true. If it were, we would be light-years wiser than our forebears. And our children wouldn't be inheriting such a confused world.

With the passage of the decades we have certainly become increasingly skilled at disseminating information, good and bad. With great artistry, we have also made immorality acceptable. If everybody's doing it, or appearing to do it, it can't be wrong. The social cost is glossed over.

A Rip van Winkle awaking even after only 30 years would be shocked at what he saw on TV and in the newspapers, at what he heard in our conversations. He would conclude that modesty, restraint, discipline and morality as he knew it had been thrown to the winds. This might

impress him more than the strides we have made in recognizing and appreciating diversity or the new freedom given us by the ending of the cold war. He might wonder whether our civilization was in a state of terminal decline.

I know one German exchange student who, surprisingly, had not watched TV in her own country and was devastated when she was introduced to it here in the US.

'A Rip van Winkle would be shocked by what he saw and heard.'

Just as we fail to notice our peers go grey around us, we sometimes fail to realize how easily we now accept what would a few years ago have been unacceptable.

If laxer morals and a lessened religious influence had succeeded over the decades in turning out freer, happier, more mature people, one might be prepared to question time-tested commandments. But sadly this is not the case.

With the ravages of Aids, the devastation of drugs, the prevalence of violence, the numbers of dysfunctional families, perhaps we will begin to take a look at much derided moral absolutes, not as dry rules to tie us up, but as a door to the freedom we covet.

My student friend rebels against conventional morality because of hypocrisy he has encountered. But he is also

questing for a more satisfying and fulfilling life than he has yet seen demonstrated. He will be helped to find it as my generation faces up to how much our money, our deals, our drugs, our hankering for less demanding standards, have prepared the ground for societal breakdown.

In earlier generations there were moral fences along the road of life - you might not keep to the path, but you knew when you had left it.

We need to put the markers back - and to demonstrate why the less travelled road is worthwhile. So that in ten years, commenting on some antiquated immoral act, we can say, 'This is another century, after all.'

Michael Henderson is a British journalist living in the USA.

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by Alan Channer

When the breeze falters

'Some folks' lives,' sang Paul Simon, 'roll easy as a breeze, drifting through a summer's night, heading for a sunny day. But some folks' lives – oh they stumble, stumble and fall.... And some never roll at all.'

I stumbled recently, in a modest way. I was ill. I don't know any physical agony more furious than a migraine headache; but the humiliation hurts more. 'Sorry I can't make it; cancel the trip – again!'

The thing that astounds me about Christ was not that he suffered physical pain but that he allowed himself to be totally humiliated. By us! To be humiliated by circumstances is commonplace. To accept humility freely as one's role is supernatural. 'We find it easier to identify with God the

Creator than with Christ crucified,' said the French thinker Simone Weil.

I went walking in the hills, brooding over my health. I stopped on a ridge overlooking a long valley, knelt on my raincoat and whispered, 'All that I am I give Thee.' I suppose I've experienced it before but the stealth of grace is always unexpected: the potion is suddenly coursing warmly in your veins, dispelling every concern. I walked home along the muddy path in the drizzle, conscious that I'd experienced something of the love of God, directly.

Sometimes, then, the breeze falters or dies and you can reassess your position. What breeze were you drifting by anyway, and where? Sometimes, in those moments, you see more clearly – and treasure the vision. ■



Why doesn't somebody do something?

One afternoon in the mid-Seventies in Kingston, Jamaica, I was on my way home from school with my friend Kareen. The bus was uncomfortably hot.

At one stop, a man frantically pushed his way through the tight mass of passengers, got off the bus and collapsed on the sidewalk. Convulsions shook his body.

'It's fits,' someone in the bus said.

'No, it's because of the heat,' another person decided. But nobody made a move to help him.

'Why doesn't somebody do something?' I asked Kareen, as we both looked on.

Finally the driver and the conductor carried the man to a nearby police station. When the bus moved off again, Kareen said very quietly, 'We could have done something, you know.'

I nodded, embarrassed. We were only 15, but we could have held the man's hand, wiped the perspiration from his face, anything.

I haven't seen Kareen since we both graduated from high school and left Jamaica, but I've been thinking about her a lot, partly because of a conversation I had recently in Brussels, miles and years apart from that Kingston afternoon.

Another friend, Patricia, and I were telling each other how depressed we were by the horrors taking place in the world – Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sudan, Burma, South Africa... Why didn't they (meaning governments) do something? Why hadn't they helped Somalia years earlier, before 30,000 people died?

After expressing our anger at 'them', we began wondering what we as individuals could do. As we both have small children, we could not go to work in Somalia, but there were so many other contributions we could make. We all have skills that we could use to make a difference and, as we talked, some ideas occurred to us that we are already implementing.

We conducted an informal poll among our friends, with the question: what can you/we do to improve things in the world? The responses gave us food for thought – and action. Here they are:

Frieda (just back from vacation in Chile): Ah. Um. (Laughs).

When I was in Chile, I was struck by how friendly people were. If you ask someone on the street for directions, they don't react with surprise and suspicion. They look in your eyes when they talk and seem genuinely happy to help you.

When I came back to Belgium, I started talking to people in the supermarket and



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on the train. Most reacted pleasantly, quick to talk back and keep the conversation going. If everyone talked to other people more, that would be something. If someone seems lost or in trouble, we could take the initiative in asking what's wrong.

I met a woman in Chile who loans money to people in poor neighbourhoods who are trying to help themselves. For instance, she will lend money to a dressmaker who

'What kind of question is that?'

can't afford to buy a sewing machine, and then the woman pays it back weekly without interest.

I don't really feel I'm doing my bit. My life consists of fun. In between I give to charity. (Along with having fun and giving to charity, Frieda has read to blind people every week for more than 10 years.)

Paul: The question is too ambitious. The only thing you can do to improve the world is to improve your own little world.

Rivka: The greatest contribution you can make to humanity is to bring up your children properly. When I think of the way I was brought up and the way I'm bringing up my children, there's a big difference. They feel so much better in their skins than I do. (Rivka and her husband David sponsor a child in Uganda.)

David: Improving myself is enough of a problem (laughs). But I think what Rivka says is right.

Debbie: My daughter says, 'Mom, you'll have to do something about your plastic bag syndrome.' I'm trying to do that, to use a rag instead of paper towels, you know what I mean.

As a Baha'i, I pray a lot because if the spirit is right, we won't want to take advantage of our fellow man. I try to understand why things happen rather than to be upset or self-righteous and bang people over the head with pamphlets.

YE: What kind of question is that? Are you writing for a Sunday School magazine now? I can't say I'm doing anything actively about it, but I'm going to give it great thought because I've become very cynical with people as far as doing good.

In the end Patricia said: 'Try to feel the pain and loss personally of all those who are suffering or dying, whether it is in Somalia or closer to home. Feel that you're diminished by the situation. That will be enough motivation to act for a change.'

For my part, I've made a commitment as a journalist to help to keep human rights violations in the news. For as Alain Destexhe, the Secretary General of Médecins Sans Frontières, said recently, 'Western leaders only react when they see something on television.'

And I've decided to smile at aggressive drivers, instead of trying to race them.

Alecia McKenzie is a Jamaican journalist based in Brussels, Belgium. Her collection of short stories, 'Satellite City', was published recently by Longman.

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