FORA CHANGE

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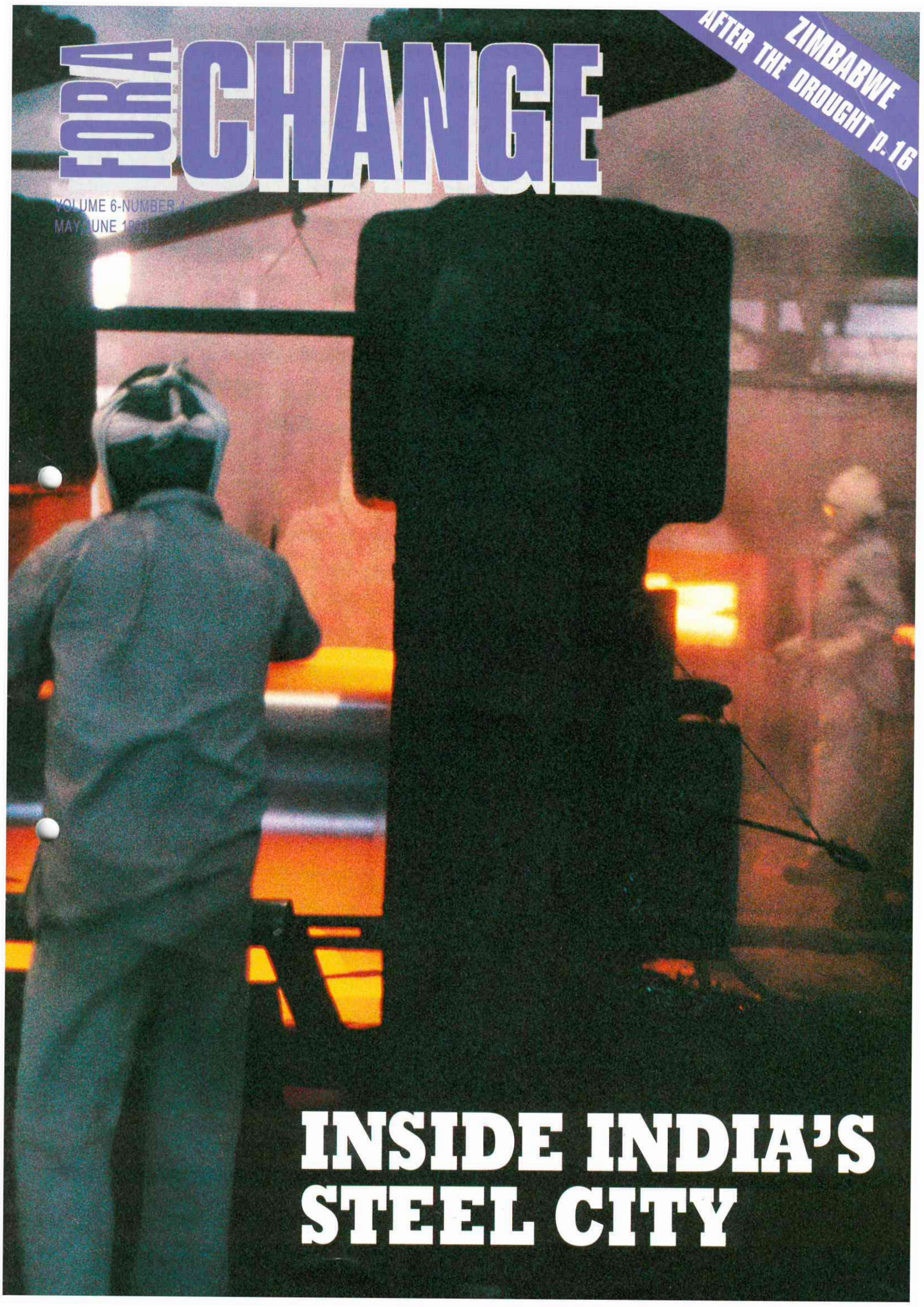
ZIMBABWE AFTER THE DROUGHT p. 16



INSIDE INDIA'S STEEL CITY

EAR TO THE GROUND

by Andrew Stallybrass, Geneva

Head first

It was a caricature of Switzerland: blue skies, majestic mountains, snow and ice, dark rock, and all the colours of the rainbow in the skiers' clothing and the canopies of the para-gliders.

I started my mountain holiday as a spectator. No, I hadn't broken my leg racing down the slopes. I was getting over a nasty quarrel with a bollard and chain in a poorly lit London street. At least that's the theory. I have amnesia – a wonderful excuse, at last, for absent-mindedness and forgetting names.

Several trite morals spring to mind – or have been sprung by helpful friends. You need to look where you're going. If you must pick a fight, pick it with something softer. My forehead will carry a useful reminder for life – an H-shaped scar. Any ideas what that stands for?

Rocks and rapids

I'm not the only one who's finding it hard to see where they're going at the moment. Europe is heading through a rough patch of water and the crew show few signs of teamwork.

Recent months have seen scandals in Italy, divisions in Belgium, fears of racism in Germany, a bitter election in France, doubt and questioning in Britain. Even Switzerland has not been immune.

Last December the country voted against joining the European Economic Area – a first step towards the European Community – revealing deep divisions between French- and German-speakers. Next came a semi-crisis over parliament's refusal to accept the official Socialist candidate for a place in the federal government. She would have been only the second woman member ever.

In a poll after the crisis, 49 per cent of those questioned thought that at least three out of the cabinet's seven members should be women: a surprising result in this conservative country. (Eight per cent thought one was plenty and three per cent thought none would be better still.)

A successful political career here has to be planned even before birth. By tradition, each retiring government member is replaced by one of the same language-group and party, and usually of the same canton. Eventually, a different socialist woman was elected – Ruth Dreifuss, the first Génevoise for 70 years. Well, Génevoise-of-sorts – she moved from Bern to Geneva the day before her election, but she did study here.

A militant trade unionist, from a Jewish family, Dreifuss speaks of the need for a political and moral compass. She says, part in jest, that Switzerland is 'a primitive society; a society of consensus, which takes its time to get there'. That, she says, is the price of getting everyone's agreement. More haste, less speed again?

What price cocoa?

Each year, as Easter approaches, Switzerland's churches campaign for development projects. Our neighbourhood's parishes take a stand in the local flea-market. This year's theme was 'Long live Africa – sharing power, living together'. The display encouraged reflection on history, democracy, spiritual values and relationships, celebration and solidarity.

Last year's campaign promoted Max Havelaar coffee, which guarantees a higher price to small Third World producers. The 2.5 million packets sold in six months last year earned the producers more than twice the world market price. Now the question has been raised: could we do the same for cocoa? Clearly many consumers are ready to pay a little more.

Bad value

Talking of development, some alarming statistics have appeared about 'aid' to Africa. In 1990, according to the UN Development Fund, foreign aid experts there were paid $3.5 billion, a quarter of all aid south of the Sahara.

The 1,000 foreign experts in Tanzania in 1988 received some $200 million in salaries and benefits – twice as much as the entire local civil service, including health and education. That year 152 doctors in Mali were unemployed – while 73 French and German doctors worked in the country as part of an aid programme.

'Africa must be the continent which has received the most advice,' comments one African observer. 'But it's not always the best advice!'

The food of life

Back home, the American evangelist Billy Graham has been speaking live from Essen in Germany to a thousand cities across Europe, with the help of satellites and giant screens. Some commentators and theologians have dismissed his efforts as propagating 'a hamburger gospel'. He may not be everybody's style, but do I detect some anti-Americanism here?

After all, even the gourmet French can't do without hamburgers, it seems. A relation working with an international agency tells me that the main thing on the mind of a group of French soldiers, heading from Sarajevo to Zagreb, was where to find McDonald's.

Ultimate reality

'The way to tranquillity is not easy,' an advertisment assured me recently. 'Wherever you are, you'll find your Visa card brings inner peace....' Can it really be that simple? ■

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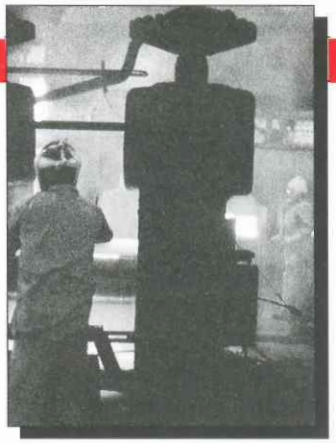

Cover: Furnace in Tinplate Company of India, Jamshedpur

Photo: Greg Williams

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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

IN MY VIEW

Not the whole picture of Africa

by Choice Okoro

The presentation of Africa as a starving child, with mucus running from his nose, too weak to wipe the flies off his face and just strong enough to hold a begging plate, is steeply tilted. That is not the real Africa. These are extreme cases in wartorn zones.

While the press has done its large share in presenting Africa to the world in this way, the booming business of the aid charities has not helped matters either. They have gone even further to project and promote this image. As organizations vie for more donations from the public, the pictures get more harrowing. And the captions that accompany these appeals usually call for financial assistance for the whole continent.

This does not overrule the fact that there are people who genuinely care about Africa; God bless them. And some charities make great efforts to avoid negative stereotypes. But the general effect has been to present to the world a false picture of an Africa constantly in need of assistance, incapable of elevating herself from her perpetual state of self-induced suffering and pain.

There are more than 50 countries in Africa. All with very diverse cultures, traditions and religions. Yet it is amazing how situation reports from one country are used for the others. Africa suffers more than any continent today from stereotyping.

Ethiopia has just ended more than 30 years of war, Angola is fighting for political stability, Liberia is still thrashing about in the throes of the aftermath of a civil war and, yes, the suffering in Sudan and Somalia grinds on. But this does not make Africa a continent of famine.

There is war in former Yugoslavia but it would be erroneous to conclude that there is ethnic cleansing throughout Europe. It would have been comical, a few years ago, to call Europe communist just because Russia and Eastern Europe were. So when charity do's are next being organized for the 'starving in Africa' people should go the extra length to specify where these problems are.

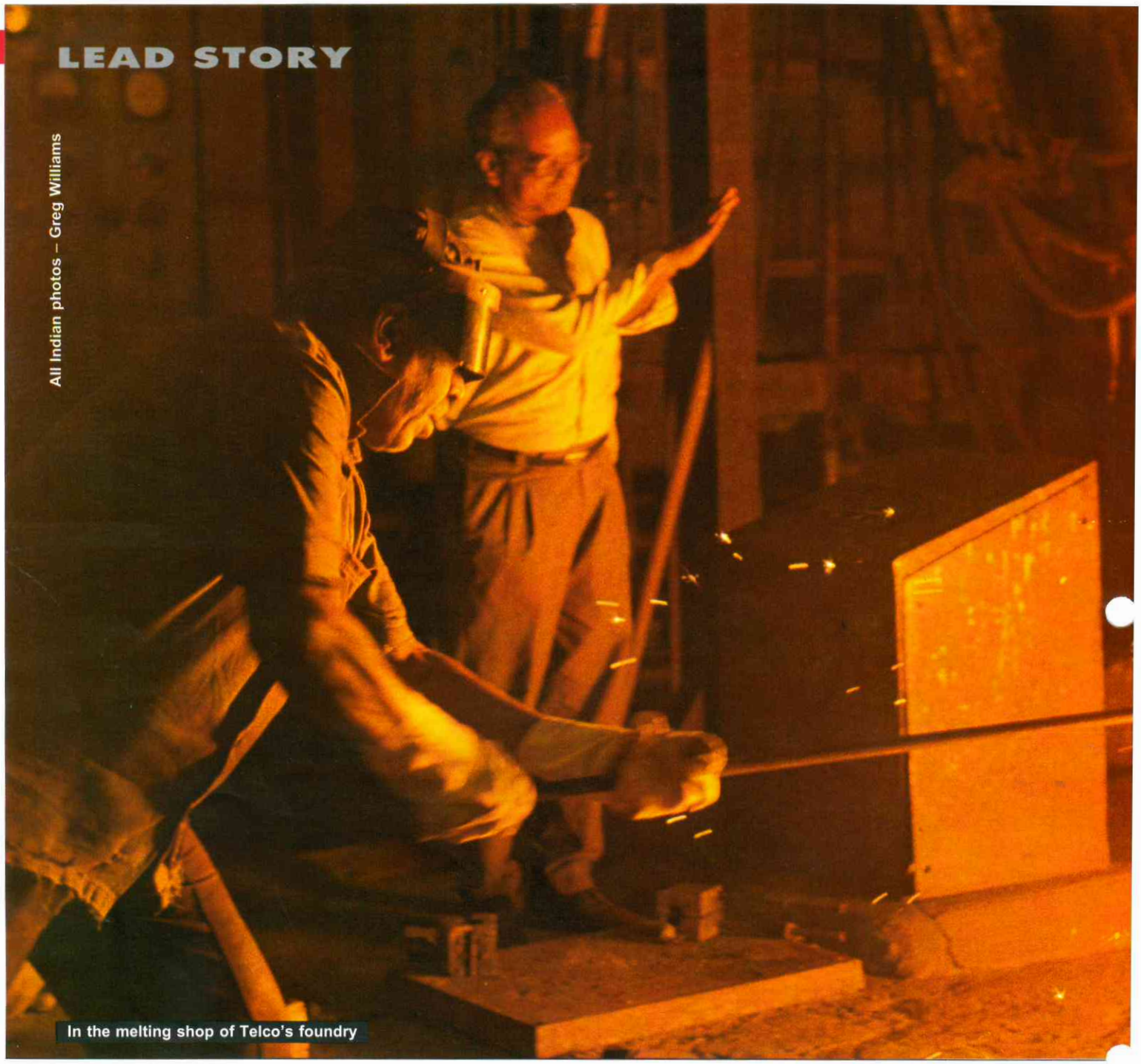
Derogatory presentations overshadow the fact that in Africa there exists a thriving lifestyle, not superior to life in Europe or America but not inferior either. ■

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.

All Indian photos – Greg Williams



In the melting shop of Telco's foundry

India's largest private sector group, the house of Tata, is renowned as a model employer. As economic reforms take hold in India, do Tata's values hold a key for the market economy? Michael Smith went to Jamshedpur in Bihar, home of Tata industries, to find out:

Grit, heat and dust pervade the air. You can almost taste it. The smokestacks of the giant Tata steel mill dominate the skyline. Here in Jamshedpur the first ingots rolled out in 1912, ushering India into the industrial age.

Around the steel plant has grown a city of 1.2 million people, home of the two largest private sector companies in India – Tata Steel (Tisco) and Tata Engineering (Telco). They are the flagships of an industrial empire that has spawned a vast range of goods and services throughout India – textiles and hydro-electric power, locomotives, chemicals, cosmetics and computers, hotels and airlines.

Jamshedpur gave birth to India's industrial revolution. But for years bureaucratic controls held back India's industrial performance. Now, thanks to a more liberal trade policy, India appears set for economic renaissance. Inflation is below

Sarosh Ghandy

INSIDE INDIA'S STEEL CITY

seven per cent, the economy is growing at five per cent a year, and exports – still small in world terms – are soaring, with 27 per cent going to the European Community. Moreover, the rupee has been made fully convertible. 'Many forward-looking captains of industry,' commented the New Delhi journal *Business Today*, 'are beginning to realize that India Inc can sally forth from Fortress India and attack global markets.'

Tata's founder was one of the most forward-looking of India's industrial pioneers. Jamshetji Tata, after whom Jamshedpur is named, held that India should walk tall in the family of nations. He also considered 'the health and welfare of the employees' as the 'the sure foundation of our prosperity'.

Ever since, Tata industries have been renowned for their commitment to their workforce. In Jamshedpur they virtually run the city, providing employment, housing, hospitals, schools and social welfare. And though some of their technologies are now ageing, Tata companies are up to the minute in labour relations and worker involvement.

Tata Steel pioneered the world's first eight-hour working day in 1912, and claims a range of firsts in India's labour welfare – free medical treatment for all employees and their families since 1915; leave with pay; maternity benefits; profit-sharing bonuses; and joint councils for workers' participation in management since 1956. Today employees are deemed to be 'at work' from the moment they leave home and are insured against accident accordingly. Meanwhile, Tata Steel's rural development arm is involved in projects in 150 villages around Jamshedpur.

Little wonder that Tata Steel has enjoyed over 60 years of strike-free industrial relations. When the government wanted to nationalize the company, in the late Seventies, the steel workers' union were the first to cry halt.

There is also a commitment to 'total quality' – the pursuit of excellence in production and working practices – in a nation where *chalta hai* (it'll do) has all too easily been the rule of thumb. To remind them, each of Tata Steel's 27,000 employees has been given a pendant with the single letter Q, for quality, in bright yellow on a blue background.

'Quality and productivity are essential in helping us to compete worldwide,' says Sarosh Ghandy, Resident Director of Telco, one of the world's largest truck manufacturers. The company produces 75 per cent of the commercial vehicles on India's roads and has exported them to over 60 countries.

Last year the millionth truck rolled off the assembly line and recently Telco secured its largest ever export order, for 2,100 truck chassis from the Sri Lankan government. Telco's second factory in Pune is making India's first entirely indigenous cars and has a dealer lined up in France for the European market.

The Pune factory is state-of-the-art. But the investment there, says Ghandy, has been at the expense of updating in Jamshedpur. Instead, he says, 'We are investing in our software: building on the skills, commitment and involvement of our men.'

At Telco's Management Training Centre, groups of workers and managers join in three-day training courses in 'human relations at work' (HRW). The courses grew out of a need to improve industrial relations and involve shop floor workers in the running of the company. Unlike Tata Steel, Telco had suffered from industrial unrest including a crippling 48-day strike in 1969.

Launched in 1982, the HRW courses have been attended so far by 18,000 of Telco's 20,000 employees. They were developed by employees who had taken part in Moral Re-Armament conferences, and have resulted in 21 years of industrial peace, says Ghandy *(see next page)*.

The HRW courses have also led to the birth of quality circles, known in Telco as 'small group activity' (SGA). Groups of workers meet on the shop floor for an hour each week to iron out production problems – and discuss how to tackle alcoholism, family debt, and communal tension in their townships or 'colonies'. Now there are nearly 1,300 such voluntary groups of eight to 12 people.

One group worked out how to repair a fault on a giant metal press which had baffled German engineers. Another built a floor cleaning machine out of an old lawn mower, cutting the job time from four hours to one. Each year shop floor workers make some 100,000 suggestions for improvements. They have saved Telco Rs 80 million (£1,900,000) a year, says Ghandy. Productivity has also increased. The number of trucks produced each year has

gone up by 16,000, even though employment has fallen by 6,000 in recent years.

When the Babri mosque at Ayhodya was demolished by Hindu militants, sparking nationwide violence, Jamshedpur's police chief told Ghandy that relations in the Telco area were so good there was no need to impose a curfew, unlike elsewhere in the city. Thanks to the SGAs, 'any outside political provocation is neutralized,' says Shri Gopeshwar, General Secretary of India's national trade union congress (INTUC) and head of the Telco workers' union. Likening SGAs to shop floor families, he says they are 'a natural information system dealing with apprehension over the consequences of change'.

At the Tinplate Company of India, which manufactures tin cans, oil drums and corrugated roofing, there is a similar commitment to worker involvement. The company spends £2.5 million a year on training and development alone, utilizing behavioural science courses as well as MRA industrial seminars. 'The human being is the key and not the equipment,' says Managing Director R N Sharma, a former Chairman of India's nationalized coal industry who was India's Man of the Year in Human Resources Development last year. It has taken several decades, he says, to achieve a sense of 'ownership' and pride among the workforce. Now the union has told him, 'You look after us and we will look after production.' Thanks to 'cordial' relations with management, says the company's union General Secretary, Sidheshwar Choudhary, 'We produce more than the annual production targets'.

With such a track record, could Jamshedpur be a model for nations now putting a toe in the ocean of free enterprise?

'The Russians are showing a lot of interest in what we are doing,' says Sarosh Ghandy. 'Study teams have visited Jamshedpur and teams from Tata Steel have been to Russia.' But so far, says Ghandy, the Russians have not spent long enough in Jamshedpur to look at the 'nitty-gritty' of employee involvement. R N Sharma believes it is not just a question of understanding production methods but also the employment ethos behind them.

Evaluating Telco's HRW courses, British management consultant Rory Stewart says, 'I know of nothing, even in Europe or the USA, which has been going so long and has such breadth and depth of impact, both on the company and the lives of individuals. Telco are up with the leading edge.'

Ghandy admits Telco still has a long way to go towards 'institutionalizing a system of continuous improvements' in non-production areas such as purchasing and office administration. And, he says, there is a need to slim down the 'marzipan layers' of middle management which would hardly be missed if they weren't there. But so far, he says wryly, 'They are not ready to be missed.'

Tisco also needs to tackle its pollution problem. Though the company says it is spending a small fortune on emission controls there is little to show for it.

On Founder's Day a carnival marks the 154th anniversary of Jamshetji Tata's birth. All the top brass attend including Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata empire since 1991. A float mounted by the Tinplate Company of India depicts the tin man from *The Wizard of Oz*, who has lost his rust and gained a heart. The imagery seems to sum up the whole Tata philosophy. This year, Tinplate has stolen the show.

If Tata's are anything to go by, India could also steal the show in international markets in the years ahead. As London's *Economist* magazine commented recently, 'India has already changed more than any informed observer dared hope.... If it keeps up its good work, the Indian economy can astonish the world.' ■

Founder's Day in Jamshedpur

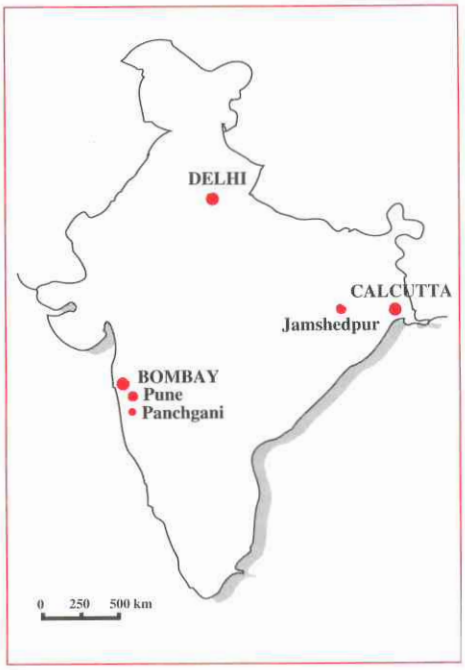
V N Prasad: apology

Five strikes in 1973 disrupted production of engine blocks a cylinder heads in the melting shop of Telco's foundry. Two groups of workers battled for union control on the shop floor. Men carried knives and guns. During the night shift a fight broke out. A worker was hit over the head with an iron pipe. Armed police had to intervene.

Production was so low that management planned to transfer work to their Pune plant a thousand miles away. The melting shop had the worst industrial relations in Telco. One director said it would be more profitable to grow crops.

New on the scene was an engineering trainee, Kiran Gandhi, who had recently graduated with first class honours from the Indian Institute of Technology in Bombay. Gandhi had gone into industry believing that it held a key to India's development. He had also found in Moral Re-Armament 'a way of relating to people of all backgrounds'.

Now he found himself in the midst



Human relations at work

C P Singh: heart-to-heart talk

the troubles in Telco's melting shop. Surely, he thought, in this situation there must be God's plan'. He set out to befriend the leaders of the two union factions.

V N Prasad, a union committee member (shop steward), was shovelling coke into a furnace when Gandhi talked to him. Prasad's first impression was of a young man from a high society family. 'His father was a top executive. But he invited me to his home, which was a big surprise for me, an ordinary worker. His mother was kind and brought me snacks. Then he visited my wife and children and we became very close. This helped me to think again about my political opponents.'

Gandhi also got to know C P Singh, now an Assistant Secretary in the Telco Workers' Union. Then he was one of the faction who fought against Prasad, believing he had not been tough enough over wage demands. Singh expressed to Gandhi concern over wastage of company materials. 'I never thought that workmen were so concerned,' responded Gandhi, apologizing for his 'prejudiced view'. This and Gandhi's convictions about the contribution of industry to national life made a deep impression on Singh.

That March Singh's wife died in a smallpox epidemic, leaving him with five small children. Gandhi took food cooked by his mother to Singh's children. 'I felt he was a member of our family,' says Singh. 'His care seemed to be completely selfless – that he was not trying to get something in return. It was the beginning of a life-long friendship.'

The following January, Gandhi invited the two men and their colleagues to a conference at Asia Plateau, the Moral Re-Armament centre in Maharashtra. 'At first,' recalls V N Prasad, 'I could not understand when they talked about the "inner" voice.' But after several days he felt he needed to apologize to C P Singh for his hatred of him. Singh had been feeling the same, and the two men had a heart-to-heart talk.

On his return, Singh's men were taken by surprise when he opposed a strike call and supported Prasad instead. They threatened to kill him. But he stood his ground, and over the next six months the two opposing groups were reconciled.

That year, the annual production target in the melting shop was met in 10 months, allowing two months for maintenance work.

The company started sending further groups of senior managers, union leaders and workers to MRA industrial conferences. To date, 470 have attended.

For Kiran Gandhi there was still the question of how to sustain and multiply personal changes of attitude within the company. When a vacancy fell open for a training officer in the Management Training Centre, Gandhi took it, encouraged by Telco's head of management development, Nazimuddin Ahmed, who had also been to Asia Plateau.

The two men began thinking about the need for 'self-motivation', recalls Ahmed. 'Really motivated people are inner directed. They have a characteristic of their own and are not dependent on others. We decided to use the methodology we had picked up from MRA – the whole issue of inner change. We asked workers and union officers who had been to Asia Plateau to conduct a programme for a cross-section of people: divisional heads, supervisors, workers and opinion leaders. Kiran coined the phrase "human relations at work" (HRW). It came just at the right moment when people realized we had to change our ways.'

Another key player in the birth of HRW was P N Pandey, one of four senior executives to visit Asia Plateau in 1978. He had taken a Rs 10,000 loan from the company on the pretext of buying a car – but had no intention of getting one, though he produced false documents to show the company that he had. Laying his career on the line, he felt he needed to be honest with the accounts department. Much to his relief he was not reprimanded, but had to repay the loan in 24 instalments. *Continued*

On the Telco test track: trucks exported to 60 countries

P N Pandey: 'live example'

Nazimuddin Ahmed: 'self-motivation'

Kiran Gandhi: 'sustain change'

Pandey, who had a reputation for being a tough and temperamental manager, also apologized to a supervisor, Jaswant Singh, whom he had insulted. They had not been on speaking terms for 12 years. Singh was 'completely overwhelmed' recalls Pandey. 'He grabbed me in a hug and tears poured down his face.' A senior manager who witnessed the scene commented that Pandey had completely changed.

'This whole experience was formative in drawing up the content of the HRW programme,' says Pandey. 'It was a live example of what human relations means.'

Today, shop floor workers are encouraged to be on the training faculty of the HRW courses. At one afternoon session, a chargehand from the toolroom, R B Singh, conducts a programme for 20 production workers. On the agenda are alcoholism, absenteeism, punctuality, synchronizing work functions, responsibility versus blame, and even blood donation schemes.

Other HRW inputs include a session on conflict resolution, a discussion on the life and values of Jamshetji Tata, and an industrial film from Brazil made by MRA.

Says Sarosh Ghandy, Resident Director of Telco, 'The main reason why we launched into our training using the approach of MRA in such a big way was to try and improve our managers and workers as people. We have also had two or three dozen swamis (Hindu priests) giving talks on various aspects of human behaviour.'

'HRW has led to a total attitudinal change among employees at all levels,' says Pandey. In the four years that he was Telco's head of industrial relations, disciplinary actions against employees fell from 260 a year to 60. Man-hours lost in stoppages declined from 10,000 to none, and absenteeism, once chronic, has virtually been eliminated.

Now other industries are taking a keen interest in Telco's experience. Chandreshwar Khan, Assistant Manager at the Management Training Centre, has given talks on HRW to conferences of the Confederation of Indian Industry. 'Improvements in the quality of our products will come from an improvement in the quality of life of our workforce,' he says. 'Industrial relations too often suggests "we and they". In our company we talk of human relations, meaning we work together. And we don't just talk about it – it has become a way of life.' ■

Small group in action

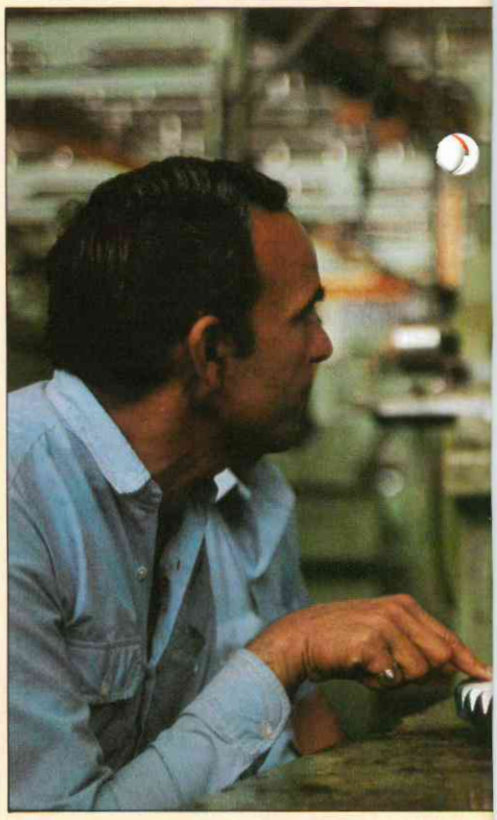
You could cut the atmosphere with a knife among the workers making axle parts for Telco trucks. Several were not on speaking terms. The bad feelings were affecting production and quality targets were not being met. The rejection rate of one component, the spacer rings, was 13.5 per cent.

Then in 1984 the men formed one of Telco's first 'small group activities'. They began to talk through their differences and within three months the rejection rate was reduced to 0.6 per cent.

But it didn't stop there. U N Singh, a production supervisor and one of the group leaders since 1984, describes how they were able to help one of its members:

'An unskilled worker had taken to alcohol and had incurred a debt of Rs 45,000 from money lenders demanding 120 per cent interest. One of our group met his wife and three small children walking to the railway track. She was going to commit suicide under the wheels of a train, but was persuaded to turn back. Our small group took up the whole issue and helped the family out of debt. 150 people contributed Rs 20 each towards the family. A co-operative credit society helped with the rest at a much lower rate of interest. Within five years he was out of debt.'

Singh is now an HRW faculty member at Telco and believes the courses have transformed his housing colony, once known as the crime capital of the area. To make a stand against corruption, his family did without electricity for 13 years rather than pay bribes to get it installed. Now, he says, 'HRW has brought a change in the thinking of the people who live here and crime has been virtually eradicated.' ■



Industrial seminar at Asia Plateau, the MRA centre

Asia Plateau

Lighting a ceremonial candle, Pune's Postmaster General, K R Rambhad, opened the 115th industrial seminar at Asia Plateau, the MRA residential conference centre in Maharashtra, last February. Over a hundred workers, managers and employers attended from 16 companies, two banks and a Pune hotel.

Since 1975, 7,500 people from nearly 80 industrial concerns have taken part in four-day seminars on 'Creative Leadership for Industry and National Development' at Asia Plateau.

Here, high in the mountains with a breathtaking view across the Krishna river valley, participants have time to reflect on the promptings of the 'inner voice', as Mahatma Gandhi called the voice of conscience.

In the large auditorium, a worker tells the conference that he would rather go with fewer rooms in his home than pay bribes to get the construction work done. Another worker has refused to pay a bribe to the gas company to speed up the connection of his cooker. A personnel manager, responsible for 3,000 people, tells how the atmosphere in his home changed when he stopped shouting at his wife and son and learnt to apologize to them. Now he no longer abuses his workers but listens to their grievances. As a result production has gone up, he says.

Taken together, these and many other similar decisions add up to an ethos that tackles corruption and improves industrial performance. As faculty members emphasize, each person has a leadership role, whatever his circumstances.

Marking its 25th anniversary this year, Asia Plateau was founded by Rajmohan Gandhi, author, journalist and a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. He has since been awarded a gold medal for industrial peace by the Xavier Labour Relations Institute. 'Through the Moral Re-Armament movement, through Asia Plateau and through numerous articles, speeches, plays,' read the citation, 'Rajmohan has worked for moral regeneration as the necessary prerequisite for any real human and economic progress.'

Chandreshwar Khan (centre) with a shop-floor 'small group activity'

The warehouse that Gaynor Jones opened to help Europe

streets of Mannheim for racial harmony ● *Sue Rickell give*

PEOPLE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by Choice Okoro

C Okoro

Gaynor Jones: raised £300,000 for Europe's suffering

Gaynor Jones, a full-time mother of three, thought all she needed to do to help children in war zones was to drop clothes or food at one of the charity centres in Britain.

She took donated items from her church in Newbury to the Feed the Children headquarters in Reading but found out that the organization was short of manpower. 'There weren't people milling around to take my donations as I thought would be the case.' Somebody turned up eventually to receive the gifts but Jones was never the same again.

'I knew I needed to do more than dropping donations at the centre. I thought that if I set up a warehouse where donations could be collected, that would mean less work for the staff in Reading. I had no money, and I had not worked for years so did not know how to go about things.' But she felt it was what God wanted her to do. This feeling was confirmed when she was offered a disused warehouse free for one year.

Armed with confidence by this 'divine intervention' she went to town, organizing fund-raising activities in schools and putting adverts in the papers. Food, clothes, bedding and toys began to come in and Jones passed them on to Feed the Children who took them to Albania and former Yugoslavia. (The organization, founded in 1990, was the first British-based aid agency to alert the public to the plight of children in Albania.)

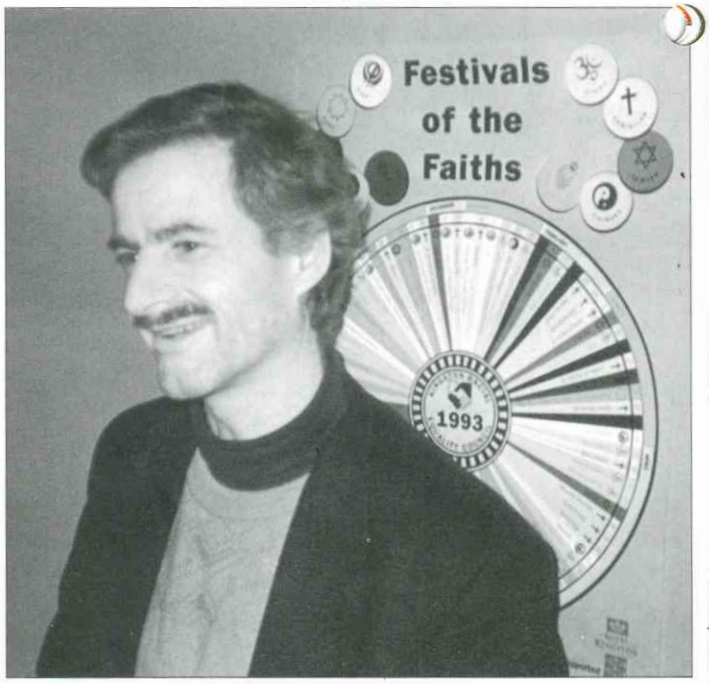
Since last year Feed The Children in Newbury has sent eight lorries of educational materials and £300,000 worth of aid to Bulgaria, Albania and former Yugoslavia. 'We get our donations from schools, churches, and grants from companies and the government,' says 37-year-old Jones.

Mannheim on the Rhine is one of Germany's big commercial centres, which is becoming known for its good treatment of 'foreigners'. Half a million refugees entered Germany last year.

Ten years ago Helmut Schmitt was already known as the 'foreigners' friend' because of the supplementary German classes and the cultural meetings which he organized. So it was no surprise when he was appointed to his present post of Officer of the City Council for Foreigner Welfare.

One of his achievements has been piloting the planning permission for a mosque for the large Turkish guest-worker community. Eighty per cent of the 60,000 foreigners in Mannheim are Turkish and in five years they raised the money to buy the land for the mosque. They laid the foundation stone in February this year, says Schmitt.

In January he organized a 'Chain of Light' march against racial hate and violence, inspired by those in Munich, Hamburg and other German cities last



R Carpenter

Helmut Schmitt: friend of Mannheim's 'foreigners'

's hungry children ● Helmut Schmitt leads 30,000 onto the
s power to the disabled ● Josephine Austad's turning point

year. 30,000 people from Mannheim and neighbouring Ludwigshaven turned out from government offices, schools, factories and homes to form a candle-lit procession. They met on the bridge over the Rhine which links the two towns, where the two Mayors shook hands.

Schmitt is concerned about the lack of integration of newcomers into the political and social life of the country. The majority of guest-workers remain foreigners, he says, even when their children have been born in Germany. They are excluded from voting rolls and from any responsible post in government service, and there is no legislation on racial discrimination.

Schmitt interprets the success of the right wing in recent elections as more of a protest at the existing political parties than a dangerous revival of an almost forgotten national socialism. Sensational media treatment, he says, has deliberately played to the fears of older Europeans with scarred memories, but today's younger generation needs purpose and hope in the turmoil which Germany is facing.

● Sue Rickell is living evidence that disablity is not incapability. 'And that is what I tell disabled people in my course.'

She is well known for her empowerment programmes in the North East of England. 'My aim has always been to let disabled people know that they could be what they want to be and not expect the public to tell them what their aspiration should be.'

She runs training courses not only for people with disabilities but also for organizations providing services for disabled people. 'These are usually on equal opportunities issues, like getting people to change their working practices and policies. We work towards pulling down barriers that prevent full and active participation for the disabled.'

She left her previous two jobs – one as fund-raiser and regional organizer of the Spastic Society, the other as the marketing manager for Action on Disability and Development – to give her time fully to working directly with the disabled. 'Usually programmes are done for them. I challenge them to be responsible for making decisions that affect their lives.' What is unique about these courses is that Rickell teaches what she has experienced herself.

C Okoro

Sue Rickell: pulling down the barriers that face the disabled

Born spastic 40 years ago in the North East of England, 'I spent years wishing I could go to college before realizing I could if I wanted,' she says. 'My speech, balance and writing were poor so I was not employable, but I was determined to get work.' She got a job packing in a factory 'but it was horrible – freezing in the winter and scorching in the summer'. After several years combining work in the factory with evening classes, she finally left work to pursue her education fully.

She took a degree in sociology – 'something I only dreamt about' – and graduated in 1976. She worked with the elderly and disabled in her home community in Durham for 18 months before going to work for the Spastic Society as fund-raiser.

Now living in Bath she has co-founded a support group for the parents of children with disabilities and travelled to Uganda on a disability empowerment programme. 'The essence of my work is helping the disabled take control of their lives,' she says.

She hopes to train two or three other disabled people who could run programmes of a similar nature in other parts of England.

Additional reporting by Russell Carpenter

TURNING POINTS

by Paul Williams

Growing up in Malta where her parents worked to scratch a living from the land, Josephine Austad vividly remembers the pain of poverty. She was the second oldest in a family of eight. 'There were times when there was simply not enough money for our daily needs,' she recalls.

At 18 she left school and found work in a factory. 'Cheating was part of normal life,' she says. 'I soon started to take sick leave when I wasn't sick, hiding broken chips and wires, taking short cuts to make more bonus.' Feeling she had not been given the love she longed for at home, she sought it in a succession of boyfriends. 'My life was becoming a mess. There were times when I would hold my weekly wages in my hand and reflect sadly that money cannot buy happinesss.'

She pinpoints April 1978 as the moment when things took a new turn. A Moral Re-Armament meeting for young people with the theme 'What are you living for?', attracted her attention. 'There among 400 people, I felt a small light come on in my heart.' She asked two young Swedish women to tell her their secret. 'They told me about the experiment of listening to God and his whispers. I didn't fully understand it, but I thought I would give it a try.'

One 'whisper' she obeyed was to write a letter of apology to the manager of the factory. He sent for her on Monday morning and thanked her for the letter and her courage in writing it. He had read an article in the Sunday paper about the MRA visitors to the island and so was able to understand what had happened to her. 'This was the moment when I discovered a living faith in God. There and then in that office I decided that having risked once, I would continue to take risks for God.'

Now back in Malta with her Norwegian husband, she says that over the last 14 years her decision has taken her to work for change in many different parts of Europe and to South and Central America. ■

European with a compass

Andrew Stallybrass profiles a former Belgian Prime Minister who believes in a federal Europe but is determined to look out beyond her borders to a needy world.

He looks the distinguished elder statesman that he is. After 28 years in Belgium's parliament during which he served as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister (1974-78), Leo Tindemans now heads the Christian Democrat group in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

One of the 'second generation of Europeans', as a young man Tindemans met Jean Monnet and worked with other founders of the European Community. A welcoming, down-to-earth Flemish-speaker, he expresses himself fluently in French, the language of Belgium's other main community.

In his Strasbourg office, looking out over this lovely French city only minutes away from the Rhine and Germany, he recalls his studies in Belgium during the Second World War as one of the great formative experiences of his life. It is hard to imagine, he says, the intellectual awakening of a young man 'under the low skies' of the German occupation. 'I could not understand how we could share so much of our culture, and yet fight so much. Europe was the political, economic and cultural centre of the world. Yet millions of young men were being killed on our battlefields. The absurdity of it!'

'I am a convinced European,' he says and talks of a recent experience when a German of his own generation told him that he had been brought up to believe that there could never be peace between

France and Germany. Yet now, Tindemans points out, they are both part of a community of some of the world's most democratic countries.

European union, he believes, is essential for three reasons: the necessary reconciliation of hereditary enemies, primarily France and Germany; to avoid the economic rivalries of the Thirties that prevented common action to deal with the economic depression and the rise of Hitler; to give Europe a political voice in the world, there being no European superpower. The 'revolutionary' creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 was the first step towards preventing another European war, he says. 'A new climate was born.'

He admits that the great visionary ideas of Europe, apart from those linked with avoiding conflict, are harder to find and formulate today – which could explain why he called one of his ten books *Europe without a compass*.

'Perhaps we don't talk the language of the younger generation,' he says with regret. 'They live in a very different world. Our choices were easier. They aren't always helped to understand the importance of managing society and its problems well.' Modern education stresses a highly critical approach, 'but where's the openness to noble ideas? We can become so critical that we are no longer able to appreciate the beautiful and the good.' The challenge for a new generation is 'to create a better idea for society, without falling into the old mistakes of the past'.

As a proponent of European federalism, Tindemans believes that the free movement of people and goods, introduced this year within the European Community, must lead naturally to Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) – an idea which is anathema to some British and Danish politicians, in particular. You cannot have a single market with 12 different currencies, he maintains. Even Britain's anti-federalist former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, agreed with that. 'She can't now say that she didn't.' There has to be a common struggle against unemployment and the economic crisis, he says. But if the Danes or the British say 'no' to the Maastricht Treaty (which paves the way for EMU), the rest of the European Community will go ahead without them, he warns.

He disagrees with those who see the European Commission and its 'Eurocrats' in Brussels as a threat to the sovereignty of the smaller EC countries and to the regions. He notes that Luxembourg has 12 seats in the present European Parliament, and that Germany would need 1,200, rather than the 81 they now have (99 next year), for the same level of representation. It's not fair to blame moves towards European unity for minority problems, he claims. By and large, the Community treats its minorities well, he says, citing the little known example of the German-speaking minority in Belgium. But that's not news. Conflict is.

He doesn't talk much about his private life, but readily cites his marriage as one of his proudest successes. As a self-confessed perfectionist, he wonders whether he was wrong to turn his back on an academic and writing career for politics; whether he could and should have spent more time with his family. But one of his four children now works with him as a personal assistant.

In 1978 he dramatically resigned in a parliamentary debate on a constitutional issue. 'I'd do it again,' he says, 'but perhaps I could have done it a little differently! There's no merit when everything's easy. Political life is always difficult.' When life gets unbearable, 'I complain to my wife, and then when I've calmed down, I start fighting again. I am like an old war-horse.'

Through the EC's Lomé Conventions with developing countries, Tindemans has been deeply involved in the Third World. 'Lomé' has 'become a vast machine,' he says. 'It has lost its dynamism.' But he is encouraged that the latest agreements respect cultural differences, as well as stressing the importance of women's role, human rights and democracy.

He is concerned about the 'tragic situation' in much of Africa, and speaks with emotion of prison visits 'not far from here, in the 20th century, but in indescribable conditions'. 'We are moved by the situation in Somalia because of the pictures on television. There are other situations just as bad, but because there are no pictures, we don't think about them.'

Of the World Bank and IMF's efforts to promote democratic values through 'programmes of structural readjustment', Tindemans says that their hard work will fail if they do not appreciate the complexity of the problems. These are not purely technical, he believes, but involve an understanding of differing cultures and traditions. Controversially, he would like the United Nations Trusteeship Council to be given a wider role in promoting reform in Africa, while recognizing that 'we must avoid neo-colonialism'.

Just back from the United States and an interview with Mickey Cantor, the Clinton administration's trade negotiator in the GATT talks (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), Tindemans is deeply worried about Euro-American relations. 'The new administration is mostly concerned with internal US problems, and is looking towards Japan. "Europe's no longer a priority," it is said. And out of the 110 new members of the House of Representatives, only one has asked to be on the Foreign Affairs Committee.' But he concludes with his pragmatic credo: 'We must be open to each other, meet, and look reality in the face, but without prejudices and clichés. For example, we must get beyond the idea that all the French eat frogs' legs!' His own country – like Ireland in the English-speaking world – is the butt of many 'racist' jokes.

Looking beyond the problems of an increasingly divided Belgium to the ethnic conflicts of Central and Eastern Europe, he stresses, 'We must cultivate respect for and tolerance of others.' ■

© Spreng

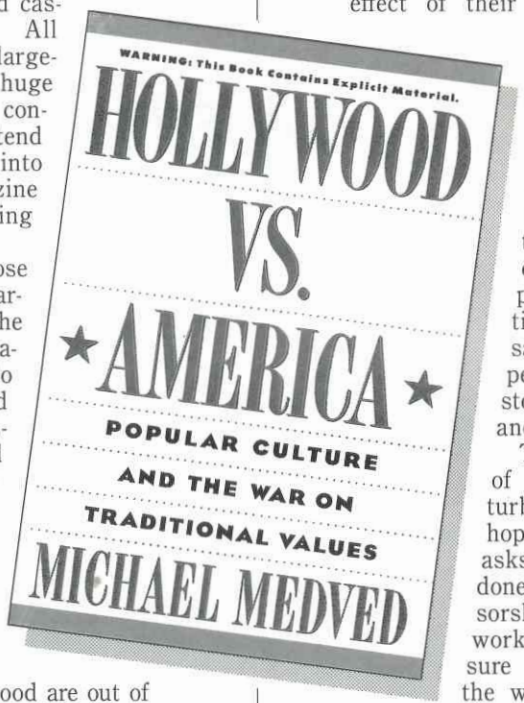
Italian school children visit the Palais de L'Europe in Strasbourg

BOOK REVIEWS

A BUGLE BLAST FOR MIDDLE AMERICA

Hollywood versus America
by Michael Medved
Harper Collins,
New York & London

A superficial glance at this book can be deceptive. There is even more to the title than at first appears. By Hollywood, Michael Medved does not just mean the dream factories producing feature films for your local cinema. He sees Hollywood as the originator of most networked television entertainment in the USA and, with Manhatten, as the main source of rock music CDs and cassettes worldwide. All three activities are largely in the hands of huge communications conglomerates that extend their tentacles into newspaper, magazine and book publishing as well.



Nor is his purpose immediately apparent. Early in the book, Medved irritated me by seeming to say that Hollywood shouldn't be producing sadistic and violent movies because they generally lose heavily at the box office.

But he has another purpose altogether: to show that the moguls and stars of Hollywood are out of touch with the values of 'middle America' – in fact of decent people everywhere. This is partly because of their own chaotic lifestyle and the isolation and insulation from the rest of the country ('arrogance and ignorance' in Medved's term) which leads them wrongly to assume that theirs is the lifestyle most people aspire to. Their delusions also stem from a perverted sense of artistic mission, a *folie de grandeur* that paints the film-maker as an 'alienated artist' struggling to educate the benighted public in permissive and 'liberal' values.

At root, Medved says, the leaders of Hollywood do not purvey violence and sleaze because they want to make a quick buck by pandering to popular values. On the contrary they are attempting to impose their distorted values on the rest of us, even at the risk of alienating a vast potential family audience and losing billions in the process.

Through a dazzling array of data and statistics Medved seeks to prove that Hollywood has got it wrong: that contrary to popular belief both the divorce and crime rates are going down; that over 80 per cent of Americans believe in God; that 40 per cent regularly attend a place of worship (less than two per cent in Hollywood); that marriage and sound family life are more in favour than ever before; that the vast majority of Americans are patriotic; and that they are worried about the effects that scenes of sadism, promiscuity and violence are having on their children.

If, as Hollywood commonly states, the effect of their products is 'not proven', Medved says they ought to refund billions of advertising dollars which they have taken under false pretences. Nor can they logically claim that their positive and 'politically correct' messages influence people while their stories of perversion and brutality do not.

Towards the close of this detailed, disturbing but ultimately hopeful book Medved asks what can be done? He rejects censorship, praises the work of outside pressure groups, defends the weapon of boycott, but sees the best hope in a quiet religious revival currently underway in both Christian and Jewish constituencies in Hollywood itself.

Tinseltown, he believes, has already shown it is capable of change – in regard to its on-screen treatment of drugs, smoking and the environment – and the best sort of change comes from within. It will be a reawakened sense of responsibility in the film-makers themselves which will ultimately make the difference. It is to be hoped that Medved's loud bugle blast will hasten this awakening.

Hugh Williams

Genius and grace
by Gaius Davies
Hodder and Stoughton, London

Through these biographies of people faith who came through handicaps, author, a Christian psychiatrist, seeks show that even a flawed personality 'r demonstrate... aspects of God's grace'.

His 'patients' include John Bunyan, Bedfordshire tinker who began *Pilgri Progress* while in prison; William Cowp an attempted suicide, who wrote the co ballad *John Gilpin* as well as much-lo hymns; and Amy Carmichael, wh rescue of temple prostitutes in sc respects foreshadowed Mother Ter There are two more poets: the lo suffering (from her family) Christ Rossetti and the Jesuit Gerard Mar Hopkins; and two modern theologi scholars: JB Phillips and CS Lewis.

At times the biographical detail somewhat threadbare – particularly wh it comes to Martin Luther and the so reformer Lord Shaftesbury. The book about what made its subjects tick, rat than the details of their careers.

Readers may find courage from th 'successful failures'.

Alan Fau

Shoot a line: a merchant mariner's war
by Denis Foss with
Basil Entwistle
Linden Hall, Yeovil

These merchant mariner's tales s effortlessly along from one colour incident to the next – never detaining too long, so never losing your interest.

The canvas is as broad as the warti sea routes – Malta, Buenos Aires, Vanc ver, Sydney, Shanghai, New York, Al andria, Tokyo. What makes the b different from the usual war saga (it l its quota of torpedoings, dockyard bor ings and air attacks) is Foss's particu combination of humour with disarm honesty about himself.

Speaking his mind when 'wiser' he would have held their tongues and act promptly, and if necessary unilaterally, his convictions, Foss often left oth saying, 'I wish I'd had the courage to that.' He writes naturally about his we nesses, including the difficulties in marriage, adding depth to his book.

Paul Willia

An English voice from Ireland

When Joan Tapsfield retired from Government service in England, she went to live in Northern Ireland. She explains why:

'That's where you ought to go and see what the Establishment is doing,' was the electric thought which shot into my mind one evening as I listened to a radio programme from Northern Ireland.

Forty years in Government service and a patriotic English upbringing had given me a permanent concern for the character and reputation of my country and its Establishment. But neither my official career nor my private interests had any connection with Ireland and I did not know anybody there. So was the thought crazy?

Tentatively, I talked to my one Irish friend, who put me in touch with a lady in Derry I had met in London some 20 years earlier. Warm invitations and several visits to Derry and Belfast followed.

It soon became clear that the conflict in Northern Ireland was much more confused and history-oriented than media reports of 'terrorism' suggested. If I was to understand the present, I needed to study the past.

One visit to Derry coincided with an exhibition in the university on the theme of emigration, chiefly the exodus to America during the famine years of the 19th century. There were pictures of family farewells at Derry and other ports of the Inishowen peninsula, and advertisements from shipping companies who would provide a few loaves for the five-week voyage. Many exhausted passengers died en route, and the ships became known as 'coffin ships'.

The exhibition confirmed the impression of the reading I had been doing, that England, which ruled the whole of Ireland in the 19th century, was being blamed for these tragedies – an idea I strongly resisted, saying 'this must be a very left-wing university'. But I was troubled, all the same.

Later, visiting a little church in the lovely Inishowen countryside, I came upon a picture of Pilate, washing his hands to disclaim responsibility for the death of Jesus. It struck me like lightning that he was an official, not deliberately wicked but sacrificing truth to expediency. He was typical of much officialdom in our day, and typical too of my avoidance of the truth of how my country had harmed Ireland.

I knelt and prayed for forgiveness for myself and my country, and for the courage to do whatever God wanted me to do in reparation. A year later I sold my home in Kent and moved to Northern

Ireland to serve the Irish in any way I could. It has now been my home for 15 years.

I have come to love Ireland, but the mainspring of my motive in moving here was love of England. If my father, whom I loved and respected, had died in debt, I should have wanted to repay that debt. I feel the same way about my country.

Living here it has become steadily more evident that the debt is much greater than I had realized. Most of those who had to leave their homes were Catholic and many of their successors have also suffered deprivation. So I was surprised at the hand of friendship offered when I told those I met why I was living here.

Milestone

Recent media programmes have portrayed this aspect of history but less attempt has been made to understand the Protestant background. Ever since they came from Scotland and England in the 17th century, often with Government encouragement, the Protestants have been used for English interests and discouraged from fraternizing with their Catholic neighbours.

A milestone in this process was the Act of Union of 1800 which abolished the semi-independent Dublin parliament and transferred government to London. From then on Protestants were encouraged to believe that the preservation of their religion meant an allegiance to Britain. Wolfe Tone's school of thought, which wanted men of all creeds to unite as Irishmen, faded to a faithful few. The hardened religious divide led in this century to the partition of Ireland, with the Northern Ireland enclave remaining British.

A dilemma in the life of Northern Ireland now is that the Catholic minority regard themselves as Irish, but are not regarded as fully Irish by the rest of Ireland, and the Protestant majority, with a few exceptions, regard themselves as British, but are not accepted as fully British by the rest of Britain. Very few in either community support violence, but it thrives on the underlying antipathies and fears.

The Protestant fear of a united Ireland, where Catholics would be in the majority, makes them resist all Catholic influence and defend their Britishness with a vigour and tenacity which often provokes English accusations of intransigence. I shared the latter outlook and when I came across anti-Catholic views and a resistance to Anglo-Irish cooperation in a ladies' prayer group, I derided them as unchristian and unreasonable. But when I learned about the divisive English measures which had persuaded their forebears that their doctrine demanded rigid anti-Catholicism and fervent Britishness, it was clear that I had no right to judge them.

Moreover, to deride people whose views I do not understand, when my own wide religious tolerance has in it an element of indifference, is symptomatic of the superior English attitudes which are just as much an ingredient of the present impasse as anyone's 'intransigence'.

And it surely is an impasse – there is no solution which will give justice to all parties. So peace can only come when enough people are prepared to forego their rights and sacrifice deep-rooted ideas. We English are not exempt. We need to abandon the idea of being reasonable referees and approach the situation with humble and understanding hearts, recognizing our part in creating the trouble.

To me England will always be Shakespeare's 'precious stone set in a silver sea', and criticism of her past does not come easily. I long for a rebirth of patriotism with the courage and vitality shown by our fathers in time of war, but with truth – not reputation – as its lifeblood; a patriotism concerned with the character of our own citizens and blended with respect and consideration for our neighbours. This is where real hope lies – I am betting my life on it. ■

HOW ZIMBABWE WON HER BATTLE AGAINST DROUGHT

When drought hit Zimbabwe in 1990, people forgot their differences and worked together. Choice Okoro visited the country as the rains returned at last.

Zimbabwe wriggled out of what the United Nations confirmed was the worse drought in decades largely because of the readiness of people to sacrifice and work together.

The drought, which began in 1990, ended when the rain came in January this year. 'Zimbabweans have learnt to care for each other through the hardship they have been through,' says John Landa Nkomo, the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

The Drought Relief Task Force set up by his department was made up of people of different political beliefs who hitherto had been more interested in emphasizing differences and highlighting sectional failures.

Nkomo says his department was able to confront the situation because 'we forgot our differences in the face of such adversity'. He says he learnt to look beyond making political moves. 'I am a politician,' he told FAC, 'but in the face of the drought I forgot politics.'

When the rains did not start immediately after the planting season in 1991, Zimbabweans were unperturbed, as the country has experienced a continuous decrease in the level of rainfall in the last seven years. But when the situation continued farmers became anxious. Six months later anxiety turned to panic and despair as they saw their crops die from lack of rain. Zimbabweans were entering what would become one of the darkest times in their history.

On 6 March 1992, the government declared the drought a national disaster. By that time Zimbabwe had lost close to a million cattle and it was estimated that up to a million more would die of starvation. If farmers had not slaughtered over 425,000 in the first seven months the death rate would have been higher. Zimbabwe, once the highest exporter of maize in Southern Africa and with a history of food surpluses, found itself confronted by food shortage.

As a result small and communal farmers lost their income while families went short of food and essential services. It was torture to housewives who found the stalls in the market empty. Mary Murunda, who lives in the high density area of Harare, says she was lucky to have only one child. 'It was terrible for people who had large families to feed.'

Pa Lazarus Mukuruda, the headman of Mashivu (in the eastern part of Mashonaland) says it was worse in the rural areas. 'People started feeding on seeds from dried grass.' Though no deaths were recorded in his community, there were clear signs of malnutrition 'and we expected people could drop dead anytime'.

Sharing food

Zimbabweans attribute their survival to the response from the international community. But Mario Borsotti, the Drought Emergency Advisor sent to the country by the United Nations Development Programme, does not agree. Famine was prevented, he says, largely because of the competence and care shown by Zimbabweans in distributing food. 'The role of donors in the country was significant without being crucial. A widespread and effective government distributing network was in place. It saw to it that grain got to the most remote part of the country.' He describe the public service responsible fo drought relief operations in the country as 'rational, organized and controlled'.

'The fact that people were willing to share and be honest about food provided in the community meant life for those who might have died in rural areas,' says 76-year-old Mukuruda. As headman he was responsible for distributing government food rations. 'My job was to see all got a fair share.' For his own needs he got 20kg of maize a month while his children got 10. He sees this as a disappointing 'reversal of things'. 'Before, people in the city came to the village to get food. Now they bring food to the village.'

But it wasn't easy on city dwellers either. Some like David Samudzimu lost their jobs. The financial company he worked for went bankrupt because it drew most of its business from the agricultural sector of the economy. 'Loans could not be paid since farmers had no crops to sell.' His wife's job kept the family going. 'I found out there were others worse off than me so I got involved

with my church group in sending food to the areas most hit by the drought.'

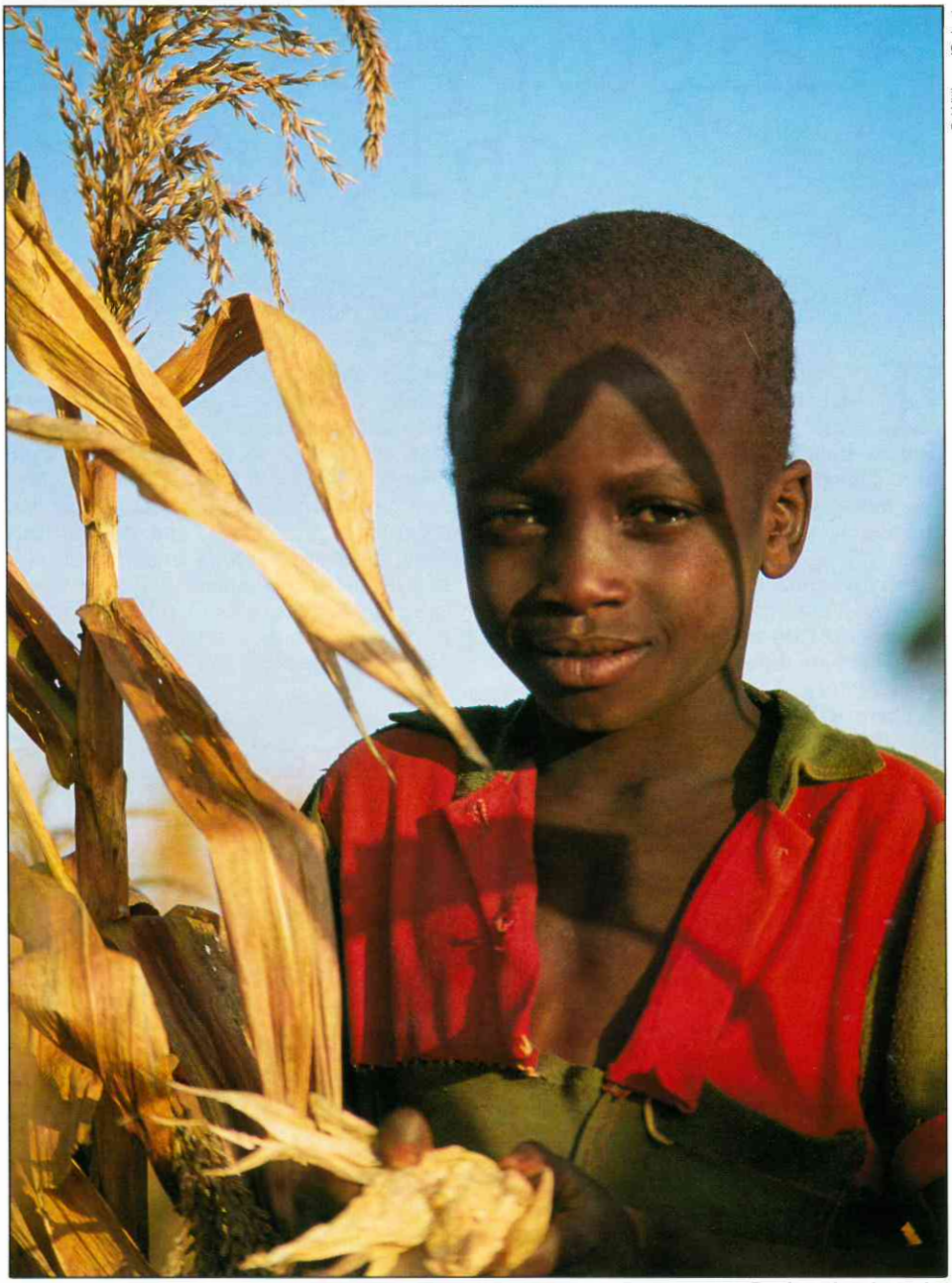
He became a regular voice and face at Trinity Methodist Church, Harare, encouraging people to contribute and share with those who were near starvation. He also joined a church drought relief network. 'We used our church branches all over the country to get information on those in crucial need and to get help to them.' He believes that the caring face showed by the government during the drought has raised its popularity. 'There were those in the rural areas who did not even know the name of President Mugabe until the drought.'

The battle is not over yet. Zimbabweans will still need to test their level of endurance for months to come. The rains mean crops can now grow, but until the harvest comes Zimbabwe will continue to rely on food distribution for its survival. $209 million will be needed to put the country back on its feet.

In May 1992, a report carried out by UNDP and the Ministry of Health assisted by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, identified the need for help in tackling the mounting problem of drought-related illnesses. Cholera rages as a result of the lack of clean water and the report highlights undernourishment among children. The need for basic support in child supplementary feeding was also expressed.

The drought has caused social problems. The crime rate has soared and Zimbabwe now faces the problem of homeless children.

In spite of the hard times, Zimbabweans are optimistic. There is a feeling of euphoria and gratitude in the air and the Minister for Social Welfare speaks for the 20 million Zimbabweans when he says, 'Thank God the worst is over.' ■



G Williams/Select

During the drought

Letters...

From Tamara Antonovna Lashchenko, Simferopol, Ukraine

My letter to you is a cry for help.

Of course you know what is going on in this country, but I believe you cannot imagine how awful it is. I am humiliated and losing step by step my dignity. I cannot steal and swindle and that's why I will die here slowly from continuous malnutrition.

I am a technical translator. I work eight to ten hours a day and with my salary I cannot even buy winter shoes. It is so difficult and shameful for me to write you such things. I used to get everything by my own labour and now I am forced to appeal to people in your country: please help me to get away from here.

The worst side of our life is the moral one. People are degrading so quickly that, it seems to me, they don't notice this themselves. I am afraid to live in this atmosphere of malice, ill-will, grabbing, moral degradation. Maybe it is more frightening than the constant feeling of hunger. I feel no hope ahead of me.

From Frank Ledwith, London, UK

I found the article in your February issue exploring the causes of Britain's economic recession deeply disappointing. None of the wide range of people consulted seemed to deal with the basic issue.

The issue is not, I suggest, which economic theory is better, which political party's ideas are more attractive, how to 'create' jobs, or how to make profits. It is much more, 'What kind of society should we be creating?'

'Progress' has been seen by most political parties in this and other countries as meaning more money and possessions. We are urged to satisfy our limitless demands by living in a state of constant debt. In the UK in the 1980s a large part of the population were seized by a frenzied pursuit of wealth, cheered on by politicians, economists, banks and advertisers.

Could we not attempt an alternative style of living? Instead of 'progress' meaning 'more and more', we should aim for everyone to have a modest share of the world's riches. If more is accumulated, we should at least consider giving the excess to those who have too little. Thrift and self-sufficiency could become virtues again. We might see a remarkable change in many fields of activity, from crime to international relations.

The Editors welcome letters but reserve the right to shorten them. Please write to 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF, UK.

History has many colours


Dennis Mayor

by Michael Henderson

In a British House of Commons debate, Winston Churchill once said of the then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin: 'History will say that the right honourable gentleman was wrong in this matter.' Then, after a pause, he added, 'I know it will, because I shall write the history.'

Having gone to school in Britain and America, and holding British and Irish passports, I do not need to be reminded that there are different perspectives on the same historical events.

There will always be quarrels about how to interpret the past. And historic figures, like fashions, will come into favour or be relegated by some academics into contemporary obloquy or obscurity. Even Churchill now faces an uncomfortable reassessment.

For a time national interpretations of history, though sometimes irritating, mattered less to other countries. But as the world shrinks and at the same time splinters, a more balanced history, and an understanding of the forces that have shaped attitudes, is becoming crucial. Interdependence requires us to find a greater unity about the past.

The Japanese know this well. Their future relations with former foes may well be determined by more honesty in their history books about the way they treated their neighbours earlier this century.

In the United States the issue is the history that isn't there. Recognition is coming belatedly that the important contributions of women and of African-Americans are woefully underrepresented in the national memory. To give one example: 8,000 blacks rode the trails after the Civil War but, as a recent article in the *New York Times* pointed out, 'Not only the history of black cowboys but also the very presence of blacks in the West has been overlooked, sometimes deliberately erased.'

> 'Interdependence requires us to find a greater unity about the past.'

The attempt to educate the nation in a more comprehensive view of the past and a greater appreciation of the heritage of 'people of colour' is called multiculturalism. But multiculturalism is not like motherhood; it has its detractors. There are those for whom the word represents an insidious assault on the very canons of Western culture that give strength to our civilization.

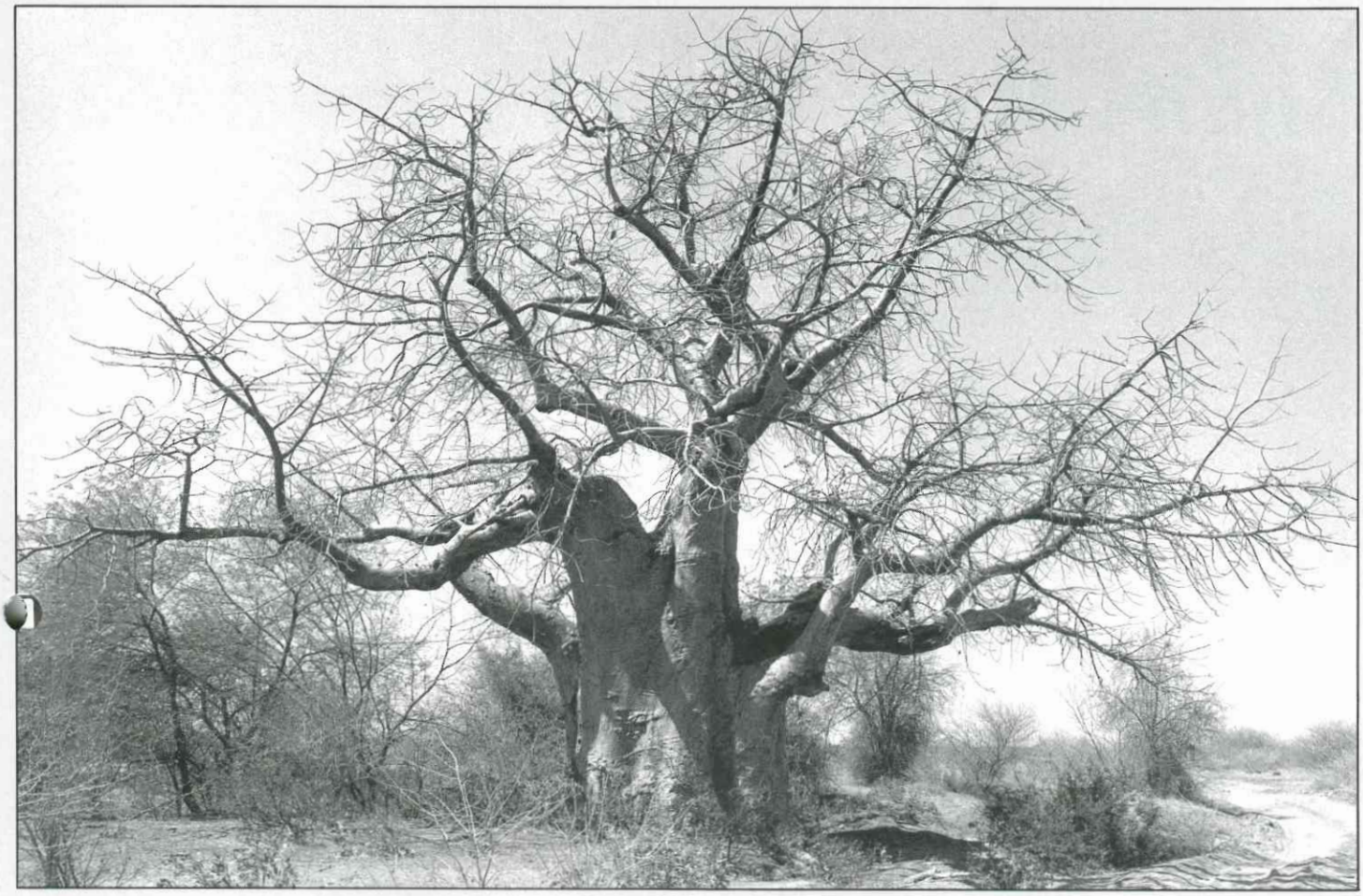
It is a pity that some proponents of multiculturalism have resorted to exaggeration and historical falsification in a way that opens the concept to ridicule. Some revisionists use the past as a vehicle for their own prejudices or advancement. But this should not obscure the fact that many of us have been brought up with a deficient perspective.

Obviously there is not time, particularly in the few hours young Americans spend in school, to learn about everyone's cultures, as well as what we derive from Western civilization.

'I'm proud to be an American' goes the song. But what is essentially American? To the extent that multiculturalism contributes to the cohesion rather than the hyphenation of American society it will be valuable. Our lives are surely enriched, rather than threatened, by an honest conversation about each other's heritage.

Michael Henderson is a British journalist living in the USA.

by 'Robo Ukoko



Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Superstition – or the wisdom of ages?

As a young African, I was taught to respect my elders. They knew more than me, and were partly responsible for my life. There were things you should not question. I remember being angry when my grandmother replied to my questions with, 'that is how it has been'.

Many of their beliefs and actions were founded on 'superstition'. But modern science and ecology is proving they were right all along – or at least most of the way.

God was so great, he could only be reached via intermediaries like the water, trees or earth. Certain trees and animals had to be respected; if you cut or abused them you paid such a big fine that your family saw to it that the mistake was never repeated. One tree which was protected was the Iroko, which takes a long time to mature to its full height.

Water – sea and river – was revered for its value to human life, and for its domestic and agricultural uses. If anyone polluted it, they could be ostracized from the community. Attempted suicide, murder and adultery attracted similar penalties. Because of these belief systems, there was a great sense of responsibility in indigenous communities.

With 'development' these value systems succumbed to economic pressures, where regard for things depended on their price. Today, river pollution is a big problem in Africa. There have even been cases of developed countries dumping their toxic waste in developing countries, such as the 10,000 leaking drums found in Koko, Nigeria, in 1988. No superstitious African would have done that to Mother Earth and the river.

Harmony

Our forefathers knew nothing about the greenhouse effect, but they knew that if it took so long for God to nurture the Iroko tree to maturity, it must be special. They coexisted in harmony with nature. When wood was needed for cooking or other domestic purposes, they cut from trees which had already fallen naturally. They believed that since the gods knew their needs, they would make adequate provision. When they had to cut down a special tree, they made sacrifices of food and drink to the god of the forest. This may be superstitious, but it prevented people destroying the environment.

Animals like the elephant and the buffalo could not be killed at random. Then the Europeans came and decided to Christianize the 'primitive' Africans. Because Christianity offered an intermediary between man and God – Jesus – many Africans accepted the new religion.

After the missionaries came the traders. They were interested in the elephant's ivory tusks. Poaching began. Today, the world is struggling to save the African elephant. Some plant and animal species now face extinction because of man's overexploitation of his environment.

Is it fair that because of our indiscipline, materialism and greed, future generations may not have a healthy world in which to live? Thanks to conservationists, we at least know what we have done, although some of the damage may not be correctible for many years.

Today, as a maturing Christian in an age where indulgence is ripping the values from society, I find some traditional African beliefs refreshing. If you hurt your neighbour, you and your children and grandchildren could pay for it. It ties up with the Biblical warning, 'with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again'.

These aspects of African traditional religion tie up with other religions and with social justice. One day, I hope, posterity will give credit to 'superstitious Africans'. We need their discipline of mind if Mother Earth is to be fruitful for future generations. ■

Shafts of light in a TV newsroom

by Stan Hazell

Heroes have been on my mind just recently. Unsung heroes to be exact. People who work quietly away in their communities doing all sorts of things that brighten the lives of others.

They've brought a rich new ingredient into the varied diet of happenings – some sweet, some sour – which are food and drink to any newsroom. A shaft of light, if you like, amidst all the other things we will always have to cover. And which do, after all, make up the news of the day.

It all started with a report on how one woman working in a Somerset factory had solved the problems of a local playgroup by finding them the new equipment they desperately needed. It was far and above what they'd hoped for.

With the help of the playgroup and her colleagues we went along to the factory to catch her unawares with a bouquet of flowers and words of thanks. A tannoy to her office and she arrived to find a welcoming committee and our reporter – specially selected because she's got the biggest smile in the newsroom!

A very surprised lady quickly became our first local hero. The bunch of flowers we handed over was just a small token of the thanks from the grateful people she'd helped.

A request for other local heroes since that first one was transmitted was followed by a deluge. The file is now overflowing. We have enough to keep us going for months.

Bouquets

Another of our local heroes is a man who every Sunday gets up at the crack of dawn and cooks lunch for a hundred pensioners. One of them wrote to us about him.

He buys all the food, prepares the vegetables and, with a small band of helpers, cooks the meal. Then he helps serve it. Not surprisingly, the customers think he's a saint. We couldn't disagree and put him next on the list for a surprise bouquet.

We managed to surprise him too. It's marvellous to see the look on the faces of the local heroes when the moment of truth arrives and they discover what's in store for them.

Others on the receiving end of our bouquets have been the mother, nominated by her daughter, who has bravely got on with her life after a serious illness. And the school-crossing lady who managed to fit in a great deal else at the school. The children loved being part of the surprise in that one.

We'll be surprising plenty more unsuspecting heroes. I think we enjoy it as much as the participants. And there are certainly a lot of them out there.

It's been a timely reminder of the human qualities that exist in our region – many of them hard to track down because you just never hear about them.

'Not surprisingly, the customers think he's a saint'

It's a welcome part of a packed news day where prominence must inevitably be given to the events which affect all our lives. Like job cuts. There've been plenty of those around here recently. And rising crime. Plenty of signs of that too. Especially attacks on the elderly.

But there'll always be room for an insight into the other sides of life too.

We were certainly moved by the little girl who took her first unaided steps as she struggled to overcome a crippling illness. Her battle still continues. But it was a great moment for her and her mother as she made that first walk – a moment which we captured on video.

Then there's the aid workers going off to countries in a far worse state than our own to provide much needed help. One that we featured was awarded a New Year honour.

An 11-year-old Gloucestershire girl brought us one of our most remarkable stories of courage and inspiration. Kelly Goode wouldn't have thought of herself as a heroine. But she certainly was one.

We first met up with her when she was in need of a donor for a heart and lung operation. She was full of fun and talked with great maturity for one so young about what she faced.

She got her donor, had the operation and came home to recover. All seemed well. But sadly she had a relapse. Her condition worsened and she died. However her courage and thought for others had continued to the end.

As she came to terms with the knowledge that she was losing her fight for life she planned her own funeral.

Two trees

The 350 relatives and friends who attended the service were treated, at her request, to Art Garfunkel's song *Bright Eyes*. It's the theme tune of the film of her favourite book, *Watership Down*.

The minister told the congregation: 'Just like a story in the book, she believed that after a life full of challenge and adventure she would move on to other things that God had planned for her.' She asked that people should not be sad.

Kelly also asked for two trees to be planted in her memory at her old school playing fields so that they would provide shelter for children in the summer. Those trees are now happily in place.

It's one of the privileges of my job to be able to record stories like that. Thankyou Kelly, and all the others, for bringing so many shafts of sunlight into the often harsh world of news gathering.

Stan Hazell is Editor of HTV News in Bristol which covers the west of England for Independent Television.

NEXT ISSUE

Lead story: *For A Change* visits the UN in New York, to discover how those at its heart see its future.

Profile: Sushobha Barve, at work in strife-torn Bombay

Guest column: Dr MEM Mustafa, African representative for the ILO