

# Reasons To Believe

From David White, Director of Social Services, Nottingham County Council

I have read with interest Beatrix Campbell's article (*MT* November) in which she attacks the procedures of the joint police/social services enquiry into allegations of ritual abuse in Nottinghamshire, and profoundly disagree with many of the points she makes (while of course accepting her right to make them).

I have just submitted a report to the county council's social services committee, in an attempt to draw together all the threads of this complex situation and to signpost possible constructive moves in the future. In this report I have pointed out that, whilst I initially accepted the conclusions of the joint enquiry team that ritual abuse was not associated with the Broxtowe case, I do now feel, on the basis of the strength of the children's

testimony, that it would be unwise not to accept the possibility that there were ritualistic elements to this case.

While I cannot definitely state the nature and extent of this abuse, having read the diaries of several abused children (contrary to Ms Campbell's allegation of dismissal) I am satisfied that neither the social workers or foster parents could have influenced the children to such an extent.

The child, as a person, must occupy and continue to occupy centre stage, and nothing will be allowed to interfere with that. As I state in my report, one of my major concerns is that certain entrenched positions are in danger of becoming ideological battlefields which are deflecting energies towards the argument at the expense of joint and co-operative action which is needed to protect children.

The difficulties in the work-

children's accounts as fantasy and by exposing the divisions between professional workers who have to deal with these cases. Such polarisation is now familiar and is of course reflected at a national level by the arguments raging in the press, along fairly predictable party lines.

What is not appreciated, however, is *how the split originates in the children themselves*. Because of the response they get when they begin to tell of their experiences, sexually abused children tend to disclose in piecemeal fashion, which is often quite unconvincing. Some reach the stage of retracting their allegations or, worse, telling deliberate lies to cover up the truth. In a classic paper this phenomenon has been descri-

defence. So too can be a retreat into mindlessness, seen by some to be madness, where nothing has power any more to cause much pain.

Our task is to try to help these children to come to terms with the fact of living in an adult world which has betrayed all adult values, and to find trust again in relationships. It can take months before these children can find, through play and the most subtle communications of their states of mind, the words to express their true experiences. First, they must feel safe. It is wonderful that the Nottingham children were able to build up such trust with

ing relationships between some parts of the social services department and some parts of the police force arise from definitions of working terms. The police need proof 'beyond all reasonable doubt', while the social worker acts on a looser basis of 'probability'.

Moreover, it is possible that the media coverage of this disparity may have weakened public confidence in the council's ability to protect children at risk. In this particular case, however, the children were effectively and successfully protected by the efforts of both the social workers and the police officers.

Let me reiterate that the defence of children, rather than that of a particular ideological position, is our prime concern. It is the exclusive moral responsibility of all staff, managers and child protection agencies to provide protection for them. •

by Dr Roland Summit as the 'Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome' (*Child Abuse And Neglect*, 1983). The children cannot bear the truth and may even manage, from time to time, to convince themselves that it did not happen after all.

With a new level of depravity now being revealed, all the old process of denial and disqualification - essentially the shooting of the messenger who brings unacceptable news - are returning. Those who feel that children have already been granted far too much credibility, and should be punished for publicly humiliating their parents, can now sink back with relief in the knowledge that they are just little liars after all. Whichever view you take, it is a step back into the dark ages.\*

their dedicated foster parents that they were able to find the words to describe their experiences to them.

There is evidence that many children who have been sexually abused by perverse adults become abusers in their turn. Rather than dissipating energies and resources in wrangling about the politics of abuse, it must surely be a priority that children are given every opportunity to rebuild trust and confidence in themselves. For it is clear that, whatever the truth of the detail in what the children have said, something terrible has happened, and they need help.\*

## Oil Slick

The Gulf crisis (*MT* November) encapsulates most of the problems - political, economic, religious, nationalist, militarist - of the 20th century. Despite George Bush's denials, it is about the control of oil in particular and raw materials in general.

President Bush, with a bankrupt economy and inflated military capacity, is clearly intent on war, hoping it will give him control of the oil so essential to the economy of the USA. Though the conflict is nominally to be conducted in the name of the United Nations, Bush, aided and abetted by Thatcher, has already shrugged off UN control and exposed once more the inability of the UN to enforce its decisions.

Raw material and the products of the earth must be the property not of individuals or nation states, but of the whole human race, used only in ways that will not deplete their resources nor damage the planet (nor, indeed, any other planet).

Then, as Thatcher says, we should take steps to ensure that no chemical, biological and nuclear weapons can any longer be used by Iraq... and Israel, South Africa, the USSR, Great Britain and the USA. Is this too much to hope for in the 21st century? •

R G Sargent, Cornwall

## Hairy Problem

As a man with a beard, I find it rather disturbing that Sue Vice (*MT* November) seems to find that men with beards are gang-ing up on her.

While not an absolute guarantee of ideological soundness, beards and radicalism have a long connection. After all, while Marx, Engels and Lenin all had one, Stalin only had a moustache. Always a dubious sign.

The connection dates back at least to the late 1850s, when there was a beard movement associated with the Newcastle school of post-Chartist radicalism. Based on strictly material roots (facilities for shaving were lacking in many working-class households without light and running water), it, and similar movements like that of the Turkish bath, sprang up in the wake of the collapse of Chartism, as class views of society were challenged.

Sounds just like the kind of thing *MT* would have supported!\*

Keith Flett, London

From Dr Sebastian Kraemer, Consultant Psychiatrist at the Tavistock Clinic

In Beatrix Campbell's excellent piece (*MT* October), she makes the fundamental point that society is capable of deafness when what is said by powerless citizens is too disgusting and disturbing to hear. There is a risk, however, that she will be seen to be attacking one part of the child protection system (the police) selectively, rather than understanding how these appalling disclosures inevitably create splitting at every level, from mental to social.

An article in *The Mail On Sunday* on October 21 1990 'proved' conclusively to its own satisfaction that there was no such thing as satanic or ritual abuse, both by disqualifying the

From Jenny Kendrick of the Association of Child Psychotherapists

Beatrix Campbell's article (*MT* November) highlights how hard it is for adults to think about and respond appropriately to the horrific child abuse cases that have been revealed in Rochdale and Nottingham.

Time is spent conjecturing whether children could really have experienced such abuse; it seems too dreadful for adults to think about, so the children must have made it up. That can sometimes be true. For when reality is too much to bear, a flight to fantasy and exaggeration can be a way to find some

## School For Scandal

Now that the memory of their political victory over militant teachers and progressive educators is fading, the Tory 'achievement' in education looks more threadbare by the week. Brian Simon (*MT* November) is right to point to the opportunities this opens for an alternative based on rational planning and democracy.

It's a sign of the times that he has to end his piece not with a rallying call, but with a question: 'Will Labour seize its opportunity?' It's a question worth pursuing. Of course, at the level of general principle, Labour's statements are full of the need for quality and modernisation; it's in the small print that the problems start.

If we have anything to learn from the Tories in education, it's in the way they have been able to relate general positions to detailed, ingenious policy. Starting from powerful ideological themes of 'race' and 'nation', and of the failure of a 'producer-dominated' socialism to meet people's needs, they have developed a fine mesh of legislation: on the curriculum, the working lives of teachers, and on the mechanisms by which education can be subjected to market forces.

In many ways, Labour hasn't come to terms with this success, being part-impressed, part-repelled. Its policies in education are an unsettled mix of modernising, egalitarian planning, and borrowed bits of the Conservatives' programme, whose detail is out of line with the best of the purposes it claims to serve. We can see this very clearly by looking at three areas where Conservatism has had its greatest impact.

Firstly, the teachers, who are living through an experience of defeat: cuts, weakened unions and a workload which is reaching the impossible make it difficult for them to play a creative educational role. Yet Labour, by stressing the need for teacher assessment, for testing even more frequent than that brought in by the Tories, and by announcing to all that it will keep the teaching unions 'at arm's length' is doing little to rebuild their energies.

Secondly, the national curriculum is based on neglect of those factors of class, of race and of gender which most af-

fect educational achievement. Labour has no plans for re-thinking it in any fundamental way. And lastly, no plans are developed for accountability other than those founded on regular testing and consumer preference. The democratic dimension, so rightly stressed by Simon, is absent.

Labour's programme may well get it elected. But in many respects it poses problems whose successful resolution can only be the result of further 'battles over education'.\*

*Ken Jones, London*

### Nan Power

I agree with Anna Marie Smith's comment (*Forum*, *MT* November) that men's support is needed for feminist work on unequal pay, job discrimination, sexual violence and harassment, and the unequal distribution of child care and housework.

This conclusion begs the question of why so much attention is given to campaigns for legislation on pornography when there is an urgent need for the Equal Pay Act And Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 to be revised and updated. Do feminists and 'right-on' men (white, employed and well-educated?) find it easier to ponder the morality of pornographic displays than to address the more crucial issues of sexual inequality in the home, in education, on the street and in the workplace?

Radical changes have taken place in the British labour market since 1975, with increasing numbers of poor women taking up part-time, low-grade, low paid employment

which remains non-unionised and not subject to scrutiny by wages inspectors. The introduction of the social fund and the freezing of other benefits have forced many women to enter the informal labour economy where they are exploited as cheap labour.

The Wages Act of 1986 reduced the rights of women workers even further by denying workers rights to pay packet protections. Women in both the public and the private sectors continue to be subject to discrimination on the basis of age, marital status, maternal status and sexuality.

In 1983, Jo Richardson MP introduced a Sex Equality bill which would have amended the Sex Discrimination Act. The proposals included provision for part-time and homeworkers and a broadening of the definition of sex discrimination to include discrimination on the grounds of gender, marital status and sexual orientation. The bill failed in its second reading.

Even had it succeeded, legislation alone cannot solve the problems of unequal pay and the low status of women in the job market. The way paid work is currently organised and structured needs to change so that activities such as caring for children and the sick and elderly come to be highly valued and adequately remunerated. This would help to change the division of labour between men and women both in the home and in the wider economy.

Instead of navel gazing, men who wish to participate in feminism should read up on the legislation, obtain information from the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Low Pay Unit, ask for advice from

local women's groups, form an Equal Pay For Equal Work group and join their local trades council. They can also write to their MPs, MEPs, local borough and county councillors and raise the issues with partners at home and companions at work.O

*Kathleen McMullen, Brighton*

### Smuggling Up

*Marxism Today* can ill-afford vacuity of the order of Suzanne Moore's article (*MT* October). As a witty expose of 'self-flagellating ex-wankers', it was mildly entertaining; as a serious criticism of male feminism and the Campaign Against Pornography And Censorship it was devoid of logic and misleading.

Ms Moore refers to the above activists as 'pro-censorship' and 'moralistic'. I wonder if disapproval of child porn also falls into those dread categories? Most worrying, though, is her creation of new stereotypes, each precisely crafted for maximum laughs, none based on any realistic appraisal of the people she intends to confront.

Please can we have less smug cleverness, and more clear debate?\*

*Adam Hibbert, London*

### Green Machine

The political agenda is beginning to recognise the importance of environmental protection and thus to introduce new concepts into the political vocabulary: Fred Steward (*MT* November) identifies these changes.

What the traditional political parties are currently trying to do is to graft green policies onto the stems of their old credos - a difficult process. A green state has to look to more horizontal structures of co-operation, and more points of access to the decision-making system, through formal 'agencies' and citizens' initiatives.

I do not believe that the traditional parties will be able to break free from their historical baggage. A political realignment is required to succeed, and it must happen fast\*  
*Jean Lambert, Green Party*

### Editorial Note:

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