



Advice for the raw recruit: 'If it moves salute it; if you can't polish it, paint it white'

Get Fell In

The fact that some two and a quarter million men were drafted into national service between 1945 and 1963 was due to the persistence of Major Clem, who happened to be prime minister and whose idea of socialism derived from boys' clubs and batmen; gristle-brained Old Monty, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; and the bellicose bulldog at the Foreign Office, Ernest Bevin. It lasted until the time Britain secured its nuclear V-bomber force, garrisoning strategic imperial strongholds in a period of decolonisation and policing a divided, broken Europe.

The Imperial War Museum has devised an exhibition to commemorate this now largely for-

gotten history, optimistically called *The Best Years of Their Lives*. It accords with current 50s nostalgia. The first exhibit shows a distinctly odd, uneasy dummy boasting teddy boy haircut and orange drape; the next has this imaginary teenager spick and span, head shaved – the action-man dummy clearly more habituated to demonstrating proper military bearing.

It is a most peculiar exhibition, not at all clear who it is aimed at. There is the usual memorabilia: old snapshots and call-up papers; letters home and knick-knacks from faraway imperial lands; photos of Bobby Charlton, John Biffen and Bruce Kent as lads; the manuscript of David Lodge's first novel, drafted between clerking duties.

The exhibition does little to con-

vey the collective experiences of this extraordinary postwar history. It tells us nothing of the politics, nothing of the unremitting tedium, the tight little worlds of intensely brutalised masculinity. For that we need to go to Arnold Wesker or John McGrath. Or to Jeff Nuttall who, on being demobbed, was the recipient of ten quids' worth of paints from his sergeant's mess: 'There they were, the drunken brutalised old fascists, and there I was, more deeply moved than ever before in my life'. Perhaps, today, this exhibition speaks more to our current young Tebbits than anyone else. ●

Bill Schwartz

The Best Years of Their Lives runs at the Imperial War Museum, London, until May 1987.

Style Age Mags

In the art-school-rocking late 70s the detailed, analytical NME was the read. In the 80s its successor is the glossy, gossip-on-acid of *Smash Hits*.

The magazines which have reached the status of 'bibles' this decade – *The Face* and *i-D* – have done so because of their style. Both publications have presented a style for every facet of 80s living – decor, footwear, record sleeves, sculpture, skirts, videos – all of which are to be kept up with.

Into this market comes the pilot issue of *FSM (Fairly Serious Monthly)* – leftish, multi-interest and written for 16 to 25 year olds by 16 to 25 years olds – time-tabled for a spring 1987 nationwide launch.

With its second issue out now is *Well Red*, the pop and politics magazine from Red Wedge. *Scope* is aimed at the young black adult. All three magazines can make an important contribution to the coverage available to young people. But this is hampered by their choice of predictable articles: drugs, Greenham Common, YTS, legal rights, and the Red Wedge concerts. An article on young SDP candidate Danny Finkelstein stands out in *FSM* because it is less 'expected'. It highlights the problems that that absent 'gamble' element can cause.

Red Wedge's *Well Red* is in the difficult position of having to present itself to 'the adult world' as a credible and informed political force, whilst attracting a generation excluded from and disinterested in political involvement. The writing in *Scope* appears sadly flat, *FSM* is more alluring but with awkward rough edges. *Well Red's* style is professional and readable, however the highly-politicised editorial team have covered issues at a level of complexity which will alienate their target readership before they start to read.

The 'communique' section of *FSM*, with its short pieces, is punchy and attractive. With columns and pictures set at angles across the page, its layout contributes to its success.

There is no room now for nostalgic stylistic references to the photocopied fanzines of the punk era. Magazines like *FSM*, *Scope* and *Well Red* will have to compete on the news-stands with *Vogue*, *Elle*, *The Face* and *Smash Hits*. It is desperately important they do so ●
Debbie Hyde

High Tech Rip-Off

With the launch of the new Amstrad microcomputer, the PC1512, the Left's liberation from manual typewriters and greasy card-index systems becomes as close as the nearest branch of Dixons's.

Prices for the new machine from Alan Sugar's competition-busting company start at £399.

The PC1512 has the crucial property of IBM-compatibility, which means that it will run virtually all of the software available for the industry-standard IBM machine. To complete the package just add a printer (£150-£500) and software, and prices for the latter look set to be forced down to the right side of £50 per application.

Such an outstanding bargain is the new Amstrad that for quite a while it will spoil the fun of those computer buffs who love to pontificate about 'best buys' in the micro market. But Sugar's own meteoric rise in the industry spells more serious trouble. A car-boot trader made big, he has demonstrated that Mac-the-Knife tactics pay off in British high-tech.

Where former rival Clive Sinclair - whose company he swallowed recently - emphasised innovation and research, Sugar has prospered by copying established designs. He is said to have given the PC1512 the private nickname AIRO (for 'Amstrad IBM Rip-Off') and his top-seller of last year, the PCW8256, was a cunning package of 70s technology with a razor-keen price.

Third-world manufacture keeps Amstrad costs (and Sugar's UK responsibilities) at rock-bottom. In contrast, rivals such as Sinclair, Acorn and Apricot are built in British. Now Sinclair is gone; Acorn has suffered a humiliating rescue by Italian giant Olivetti; and Apricot is on the rocks, with £15m losses and 180 redundancies in the last year.

The knowledge that he holds the UK's torch for the 'sunrise' micro industry has not unnerved Alan Sugar. In the week of the PC1512's launch he scorned any talk of serious commitment, in terms which were over the top even by Amstrad standards: 'if there was a market in mass-produced portable nuclear weapons, we'd market them too'. Perhaps the best answer to that would be an extra surge of anti-nuclear activity, organised with the help of the new machine ●
Tom Conlon

CURTAIN UP!

On The Home Front by Eastern Angles Theatre Co., touring extensively in East Anglia. Musical play about the first world war based on interviews with land girls, evacuees, WAAFS. 'It was a time for music-from singing in the shelter to whistling in the dark'. Details: 0473 218202.

Misalliance by Bernard Shaw. RSC at the Barbican. Household of underwear tycoon is invaded by aviator with three fathers, plus Polish



tight-rope walker, juggling oranges while reading a bible. Shavian wit, farce and ideas. Details: 01-638 8891.

Hidden Fires by Alfred de Musset. Glasgow Citizens Theatre Oct 3 - Nov 2. Marriage comedy set in provincial France. Innovative company, greatly influenced by European theatre, consistently surprising and stimulating. Details 041 429 0022.

Henry IV pts I & II, Henry V Shakespeare. New Theatre, Cardiff. Nov 17-22. New company headed by leading figure at RSC, Michael Pennington. Should be interesting. Details: 0222 394844.

China Week Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh. Nov 3-8. Workshops with members of Peking Opera, plus films, exhibitions, handicrafts, music. Interesting start to Edinburgh's permanent cultural centre. Details: 031 225 3614.

And the name of the daughter was Rose by Roxanne Schafer. Liverpool Playhouse Studio. Nov 12 onwards. Faded Hollywood starlet copes with her 'bathtub' liberalism when faced with race riots and bigots' backlash. Details: 051 227 5644.



Jesuit priest (Robert de Niro) confronts encroaching colonialists

Mission Impossible

The Mission is set in 18th century South America. Spain and Portugal have joined forces to reorganise the continent's borders, ignoring the indigenous tribes for whom the forests have long been home.

The Guaranti tribe are hostile to outside civilisation, but Jesuit missionaries led by Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) and Mendoza (Robert de Niro) make peace with them. Both want the tribe to survive in their natural sur-

roundings and defeat the colonisers. Mendoza uses fighting power; Gabriel, the spiritual love of God.

There are parallels between 18th century South America and the continuing superpower colonisation of undeveloped nations today. In Brazil and Paraguay, Indians have lost their forest homes to mining, oil exploration, motorways and dams.

The Mission is a reminder that what the Portuguese and Spanish exploited by slavery and plantations was a prelude to the riches being stripped from the Amazon jungle today ●
Nigel Arthur

Row, Row, Row, the Boat!

Harold Wilson Memoirs 1916-1964

Harold Wilson
Weidenfeld and Nicolson
£14.95 hbk

Union Man

Jack Jones
Collins £15 hbk

HAROLD WILSON

Just as Neil Kinnock seems set to repeat Harold Wilson's achievement, and to lead Labour from fratricide to electoral victory, Wilson's own memoirs are published. The coincidence poses the unavoidable question: are the two made of the same stuff? Or should the comparison be limited to Wilson's fellow Yorkshireman Roy Hattersley? For at last month's party conference he at least announced that Labour will 'get Britain working again', a direct crib from Wilson's 1964 slogan.

Comparison is important as it is not just a matter of personalities. But a personal response is an unavoidable part of reading an autobiography, and reading Wilson's I wanted to puke. The pettiness and lack of any sense of history or consequence is not the problem so much as the fact that I cannot but admit to an association with it. I believed in Wilson, however briefly, and in a youthful way fought to make him prime minister. This coloured my feelings as I ploughed reluctantly through his tittle-tattle.

Memoirs, 1916-64 is written by vanity out of petty-mindedness. The opening starts with an untruth ('I fought the Treasury to a standstill'), continues with a wincing and pathetic account of Wilson's relationship with the Queen and ends with an unconvincing explanation of his ultimate resignation. All this in six and a half pages entitled 'prologue'. Words such as 'foreword' or 'preface', or even a long one like 'introduction' are, one feels, too unpretentious for 'Lord Rievaulx', who cannot resist

a slippery formulation.

All the same, his recollections provide some morsels for thought. Wilson's formative influences as a child were Arthur Mee's encyclopaedia, the boy scouts and the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 - to which he was taken in the side-car of his father's motorbike (the famous photograph of him as a boy outside 10 Downing Street dates from that trip). His socialism stemmed from his region (his family and schoolteachers) and his father was one of the insecure middle-class and suffered two long periods of unemployment. Even so, Wilson joined the Liberals on arrival at Oxford, before discarding political affiliation as he strove to excel academically.

In 1940, when he was 24, Wilson was seconded into the cabinet office to help with manpower statistics. He stayed there for two years on the fringe of Churchill's team, once taking minutes of the prime minister's negotiations with de Gaulle. Thereafter, Wilson says, Churchill regarded him as one of 'his boys'. Perhaps. From the many other references to Churchill, we can at least be sure that Wilson saw himself as one of Churchill's boys.

Thus Wilson's mental horizons and social values were formed by the liberal mix of soft imperialism, progressive reform and traditional loyalty. A far more reactionary background than Kinnock's, it would seem. Yet unlike Kinnock today, Wilson was very much the representative of the Left as he led Labour into the 1960s. How is this paradox to be explained?

Wilson's cannot help but display his unalloyed craving for office. Canny, precocious and tremendously hard-working, he played the system for all it was worth and he would have provided radical answers if that is what 'the system' had really wanted. His combination of exceptional talent, absence of principle and total devotion to success is apparent in his memoirs. He had the ability to have been different if this had been insisted upon

by those around him. So we should be cautious about the passionate disgust with which his name is spat out by many on the Right as well as the Left. He has been made into a scapegoat but his formation was exemplary not exceptional.

His programme was change in order all the better to stay the same, because this was the desire of country and party. In 1964, after 13 years of Conservative rule Wilson appealed to popular impatience with Tory failure - he looked back to a time when people were able to look forward. In this way he was able to drape the imagery of progress around nostalgia.

Such an approach, however, calls for a rooted hatred of ideas, rooted, that is, in the labour movement itself. Since the war there have been two attempts to provide the Labour Party with some ideological coherence - those associated with Hugh Gaitskell and Tony Benn. Both were repelled with a great shuddering and groaning. Wilson seemed to confirm his radicalism when he was one of the leading opponents of Gaitskell's efforts to discard nationalisation as a doctrine. But as he makes clear in his recollections of the episode, Wilson was no more for nationalisation than he was against it. The whole argument was 'daft'. Ideology, whether right or left, will get you nowhere. Every case must be judged on its 'practical' merits.

What did - and does - Wilson think, then? He who is now being strongly recommended to us as at least the most successful electoral leader in Labour's history, sums up his 50 years of political experience with these words: 'I consider that the best style of government is like rowing - the ideal solution is to get the boat along as quickly as possible without turning it over'.

Like all sporting analogies (Attlee drew his from cricket, Kinnock shows a preference for soccer) the rules of the game are presumed. What direction should the boat take? This was the issue at stake in the dispute with

Gaitskell, as with Benn. Wilson opposed the former, which placed him on the 'Left' just as Kinnock's opposition to the latter has put him on the 'Right'. But neither deserve such epithets. What they share is a well-founded belief that they can row the boat, in the direction given.

It is interesting to compare Wilson's recollections to those of his contemporary Jack Jones, who led the Transport & General Workers' Union during the 70s and was the architect of the shop stewards movement. Jones writes well, and through the attractive modesty of his formulations his strength of purpose and commitment emerge very clearly.

But for different reasons he shares with Wilson a refusal to reflect upon his times, to argue out what happened and what could have happened to his country and his movement. In his book's early passages (which cover the time when he fought with the International Brigades in Spain) Jones describes how he learnt from practical experience. Later he contrasts his approach to that of 'intellectuals' like Harold Wilson who have no idea how to work with their own people (and to Richard Crossman who 'didn't know his arse from his elbow'). But at the end he describes an incident when he gave a speech about his vision of socialism and prime minister Callaghan leant over to Jones' wife and whispered with astonishment, 'Jack really means what he says!'

The point is evident. It is Jones not Wilson, the docker not the don, who is the real intellectual, committed to his ideas, fighting to have them implemented. Jack Jones sought genuine change according to his own values of working class democracy, by which he judged the system for himself: he set rather than received his direction. The trouble with the Labour Party is not that it seeks to be realistic but that it still takes its notion of 'practicality' from Wilson rather than from Jones. ●

Anthony Barnett