



FELIX

Issue 909

25 July 1991

Cure For All Ills

The college governing body will meet this week to examine IC's student accommodation problem. A possible solution to the problem is entry into the government funded Business Expansion Scheme or BES. The scheme is a method by which educational establishments raise funds from the private sector to buy student accommodation. Individuals are allowed to invest upto £40,000 with a tax free return on their investment after five years. Dividends would be solely derived from rent paid by the students in residence.

Imperial would not be the first to enter such a scheme. The insurance company 'SunLife' has set up companies under the BES aegis at Lancaster, Sussex and York Universities, each of which now hold funds of upto £5,000,000. Despite the apparent advantages of the scheme, there are considerable problems in its implementation. According to Malcolm Aldridge, controller of IC's financial services, one sticking point is that students would have to be issued with 'assured shorthold tenancy' agreements, which under the 1988 Housing Act give tenants rights that are so extensive as to make them difficult to dislodge at the end of the student year.

Mr Aldridge said that there had been no test cases evicting students from college accommodation. There is the possibility that students would be tempted to stay in assured tenancies instead of attempting to find accommodation outside the college.



HRH Princess Anne, the chancellor of the University of London, visited the college on the 10th July to open the new centre for Biomedical systems and the centre for Toxic Waste management. The Rector, Sir Eric Ash, said that the new centres were the 'physical embodiment of the merger' of St Mary's and IC.

The centre for Biomedical systems was funded by the Sir Leon

Bagrit foundation and will be named after him. Lady Stella Bagrit, his widow, explained that he was a humanitarian with 'a passionate interest in science', and that he would have appreciated the help given to future scientists.

Professor Bryan Coles, former Pro-Rector of IC, told Felix that both centres will be starting MSc courses in September.

Fresh Start

Imperial's Careers Advisory Service (CAS) has a new director. John Simpson, formerly a recruitment manager for ICI, officially takes up his post on 1st August. He takes over from Russ Clarke whose services were

withdrawn when the college decided to leave the University of London CAS.

Ben Turner, future ex-Deputy President of the Union said that he was 'very confident in his (Mr Simpson's) abilities'.

Laughable Loan Levels

The Department for Education and Science, the DES, has issued figures for the student loan rates for the academic year 1991-1992.

For students living away from home in London, the maximum loan will be £660 for a normal year but only £480 if the student is in the final year. For students living at home, these figures are £460 and £335 respectively.

The maintenance grant for the academic year 1991-1992, for mandatory award holders in the UK, is frozen at the same rate as for last year. For London students living away from home it stands at £2,845 and for students living at home, £1,795 for the year.

The 'top up' loans level for the past academic year, 1990-1991, were £460 for a full year and £340 for a final year student living away from home in London, and £330 and £240 respectively for a student living at home.

In addition the DES has released figures concerning postgraduate award rates. Bursaries for London postgraduates will be £2950, or £1760 if living in the parental home. Studentships will be £4970 in London and £2915 for those still at home.

Buses

The bus route 33, which used to end in Prince Consort road, now terminates at Hammersmith and alternative bus routes from there are the numbers 9, (stops at the Albert Hall) 10 and 27 (Kensington High street).



Edward Scissorhands

The scene is American suburbia where freedom of expression is shown by choosing which pastel colour to paint your house. The time is present irrelevant, but something is very different. Within view of this sickeningly idyllic housing estate is an improbably high 'Dracula' craggy mountain with matching 'Dracula' craggy castle (painted in a tasteful shade of pastel black). Nobody in the pastel houses seems to notice this aberration in normality due to the fact that this is no everyday story; it is a fairy tale.

In the craggy castle lives a creation, a modern-day Frankenstein's monster; a half-finished model of a man with a leather body and scissors for his fingers. He is Edward (Johnny Depp), a model of a man who is human on the inside, but externally, he is a parody of human form, comic in his looks.

Edward receives his first experience of society, when he is taken home and cleaned up by a very motherly Avon lady, Peg (Dianne Wiest). The stereotypical Americans are amused by him, and accept him into their society, much as they would a video recorder if it landed on their doorstep. They are proud of showing him off, letting him cut their hair, clip their dogs and hedges, but few actually get to know him. Fame spreads and soon he looks as if he may even fit into society.

He meets Peg's daughter, Kim (Winona Ryder) and falls in love. She on the other hand accepts him

as a person and figures out that he is a far nicer guy than her current boyfriend. OK, so she falls in love too but doesn't know it. It happens in films all the time.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Life's never like that. After several misdemeanours and misunderstandings later he is being shunned by the gaggle of neighbours, and wanted by the police. Kim suddenly realises that she loves him after all and life in general gets rather difficult for all concerned.

Tim Burton's direction (Batman, Beetlejuice) is superb. Keeping in the same vein as Batman, Edward Scissorhands is a 'large' film which is designed for and works excellently on the big screen. Plenty of wide panning shots and moody lighting are present to keep film buffs happy and set the atmosphere of the film. The pacing of the film is perfect, a very comic superficial beginning and first half which deepens and darkens as the film progresses, ending in a moody and serious ending.

John Depp gave an superlative performance as Edward with firm backing from the rest of the cast. Winona Ryder was as competent as her role would allow, but her character was written as being far too stereotypical to do anything outstanding. Nevertheless her acting would leave any gerbil drooling over his whiskers.

What more can I say? A beautifully written, beautifully acted, beautifully made, wonderfully funny and deeply moving film. As I left the review cinema I was choking back the tears. Then again, I'm a gullible romantic. Romance is contagious; catch it.

Murph.

Alan Vega Deuce Avenue. L.P.

In a week when my grasp of reality was decried as 'tenuous', it is fitting that I should get around to reviewing this album. Y'see, lunacy is a well-worn trick used mainly by avant-garde freaks, following long bouts of going without sleep and taking copious amounts of recreational pharmaceuticals; result being, they get lost in the virtually limitless void of self-contemplation and pretence.

Alan Vega, Stooze-inspired electro rocker and half of Suicide, does not fit in with the above description. This particular freak is unattractively twisted. So unattractive in fact, that his appearance onstage has had the tendency to spark off vicious, horrific audience reactions (bottles, spit and lit cigarettes are the most common form of greeting for this man). The nearest thing this man has known to a normal move was

joining Andrew Eldritch's Mish-kicking spin-off, The Sisterhood.

All this, presumably, is provoking interest in the record, because I haven't said anything about it yet, and it was released last year. 'Deuce Avenue' releases an amphetamine-fuelled psychosis (M.M. standard phrase No. 13); as a portrait of Vega, one could imagine Elvis Presley as visualised by Francis Bacon. A grotesque rockabilly fiend slashing the facade of control over a razored, monstrously minimal backing. Where 'Body Bop Jive' is tense and unnerving, the title track is unequivocally deranged. This is about as close to the edge as is possible - either that or we've both gone overkill. N.B.- to the collective 'YOU', 'YOU' won't like it.

Sonic Euph



The film that reaches the parts other films cannot reach—Robin Hood has everything: humour, adventure, romance, suspense, murder and any other characteristic you'd like to name. Kevin Costner gives an all too convincing performance of Robin—once rich boy now poor man.

Alan Rickman (the evil German from *Die Hard*) makes a very malicious Sheriff of Nottingham.

The star-studded cast includes Brian Blessed, Chris Slater (*Young Guns*), Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio (*The Abyss*) and a famous unmentionable playing King Richard (guesses on a postcard please!). The scenery is amazing, filmed on location in France and England and succeeds in wrapping you in the mystery surrounding the legend of Robin of the Hood.

Sam.

Robin Hood - Prince of Theives

Not so very distant in time or space, there is a country weeping under the brutal terror of a political party run by a human with no discernable character. The only thing known about him is that he is a 'nice' man. Anna Teeman unearths this man's past in the hope of finding something. Or indeed anything.

Mr John Major, the man who is now the Prime Minister of Great Britain, is also the man who failed to become a bus conductor with London Transport.

How did this happen, how did the man rejected by London Transport become the Prime Minister, or rather how did the man who became Prime Minister fail to become a bus conductor?

Many years ago in the time of the sixties, three people spent a nerve-racking day in the recruiting office above Wandsworth garage trying to become bus conductors. There was a tall 17 year-old, a West Indian Woman and a third mystery figure. Each was given a ticket machine to play with and an arithmetic test. The West Indian woman was the best of the bunch and was so thrilled to get the job, she danced.

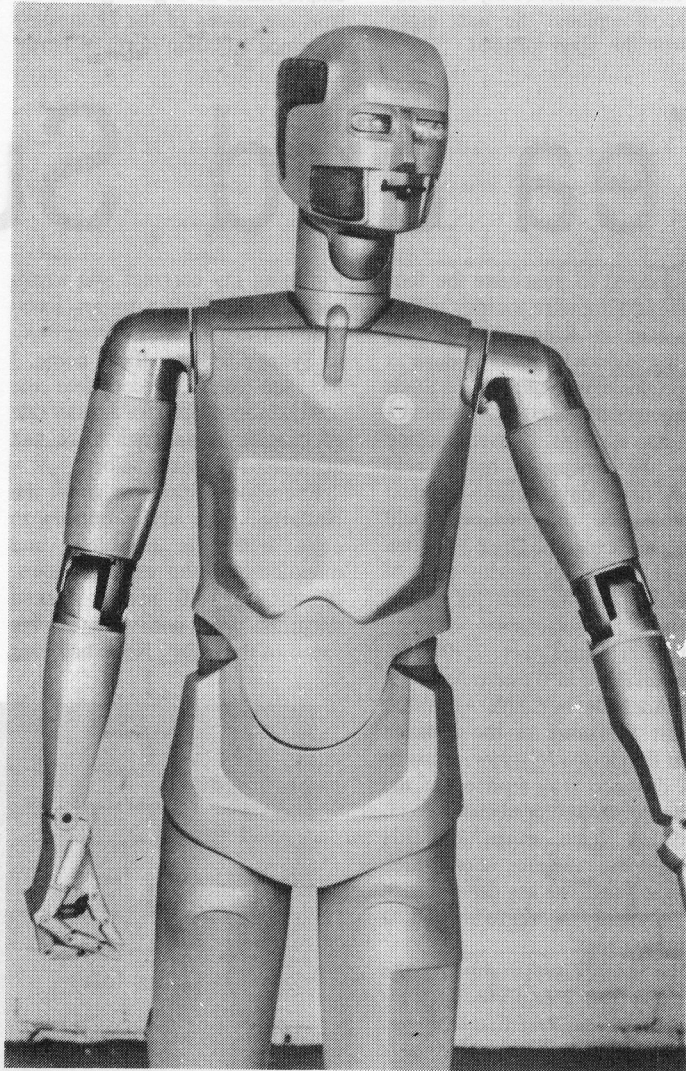
The tall, lanky 17 year-old walked away from Wandsworth garage and wandered far and wide to find himself, not long after in front of the door with the figure 10 on it. So he thought 'Why not?', straightened his tie, knocked on the door and walked in.

The lanky lad, though his contact was brief, was not forgotten. Many years later his trials with the ticket machine and arithmetic test were fondly recalled. This whisper of memory so long held grew louder to a steady rumble until men and women proclaimed from the rooftops 'I've driven with a man, who worked with a woman, who sold a ticket to the man who taught the woman who beat John Major...to sell tickets!'

John Major, hearing this cry, even though the thick walls of number 10 Downing Street, scuttled up onto what was now his roof and cried 'I was too tall, honestly!'. This produced a roar of delight from those who caught the drift of his cry on the winds that blow to the far off borough of Wandsworth. Each and everyone turned to each other and said 'That's funny, that's really funny'—they laughed so much they almost fell off the rooftops—and one or two of them actually did. 'But why this hilarity?' asked a woman of a fallen reveller in the street below.

'He failed the arithmetic test, luv.'

'Oh goody' said the woman.



Mr. Major- man, minion or machine?

WHO IS JOHN MAJOR?

'Oh no' said John M.

'Impossible' said the polite man from the buses, 'because he was the Chancellor.'

'Exactly' said the cynic.

Then suddenly everyone stopped and once again turned to one another but this time said with one voice 'I'm confused'. Then they stood silent, looking exactly that. All except a West Indian bus conductress who danced more gleefully than on the day she got her first job.

In the almost perfect stillness one quiet voice could be heard distant yet clear. 'Show me the great book where 'tis all writ down'. Then the silence, no longer content with itself became embarrassed.

'Ah hem', said an apologetic voice.

'Not possible.'

We lost many of our records in 1980 when London Transport was split up into smaller companies, and thus began this tale of woe:

At the dawn of Eighties Age a blue dragon roamed throughout the land, the fearsome creature, known to one and all as 'Mad Maggie the Money Monster' breathed fire so hot it was white tinged with blue. The fire consumed all in its path, even parching the water itself, and only the scorched plain of privatisation remained. From its lair, deep in Whitehall Castle, the Fire Monster satiated its thirst with juicy red buses as they lingered tantalisingly beyond the castle gates. And the great book where it is all writ down? Lost forever in the blue fire from which only a tattered phoenix rose, fragmented, yet miraculously able to open wide its wings if only to cough at its first flap. The apologetic voice faltered and became weepy.

The Fire Monster, deep in its Dulwich lair, licked its lips—once burning but now long cooled—and let out a tiny puff of smoke, a signal. Now the fledgling monster peers through Whitehall windows and over rooftops crammed with watchful silent figures and glimpses a single cloud, rising. The message is 'All is safe, none will ever know'. The new monster, now miraculously mature, licks lips fast warming.

'How convenient' it breathes and steams up all the windows, then turns its back and lights its fire.

It was on a fresh spring morning in mid September that the Prospector Train sped me east from Perth. Ten weeks of accumulated Aussie souvenirs crammed into four large pieces of luggage surrounded me. I sat on East Perth station, sheltering from the mid morning sun under the brim of my bush hat and contemplated the next eight days on the open railroad.

kilometre Nullarbor plain proper. Opened on the 22nd October 1917, the early supply trains which supplied the navvies with every necessity of life were nick-named 'Tea and Sugar Trains'.

Australia had beckoned three months earlier with the offer of employment as a geologist in the iron ore mines of the Hamersley Province 1,000km north of Perth.

I planned to cope with the tedium of the terrain by writing a university thesis to meet a deadline two weeks after my return to England.

Once out of the Perth suburbs the path of the Prospector pursued the white water of the youthful Swan River, dissecting dense deep fir tree clad hill sides. Such Alpine-style scenery seemed quite unrepresentative of this largely

The Tea and Sugar Train

In 1988, the Australian bicentenary year, Christopher Riley made a coast to coast rail trip across southern Australia

I planned to punctuate the four thousand kilometre journey with a stop-over in Kalgoorlie, a gold mining town with roots as deep as the origins of the gold bearing fluids which once dissected the continent's ancient terrains. Disembarking from the Prospector here would allow three days before the next India-Pacific train which would whisk me across the Great Victorian Desert to the oldy-worldy oasis of Adelaide and the next leg of the journey.

It is a little over 2,700 km between Perth in Western Australia and Adelaide in South Australia, almost the same as the distance from London to Moscow. Most of this distance is comprised of the Nullarbor (meaning treeless) Plain. Today's base maps of this topographic vacuum show three straight lines. The key denotes each as; a road, a railroad and a telegraph line.

The lonely Eyre Highway takes its name from John Eyre, the trail-blazer who made the first east-west crossing in 1841. That journey took five months and resulted in the death of Eyre's companion John Baxter. In 1877 the telegraph line was laid along a route that the highway was later to follow. Later that century the prospectors bound for the gold fields of WA followed the telegraph line. In 1896 the first bicycle crossing was made and in 1912 the first car was driven across. Only three more cars managed the trip in the next twelve years.

In 1941 the war inspired the building of a trans-continental highway, which remained unsurfaced until 1976. The highway follows a southerly route close to the sheer coastline and makes today's Nullarbor crossing much easier. Despite this, petrol stations are up to 200km apart, and help from other traffic scarce.

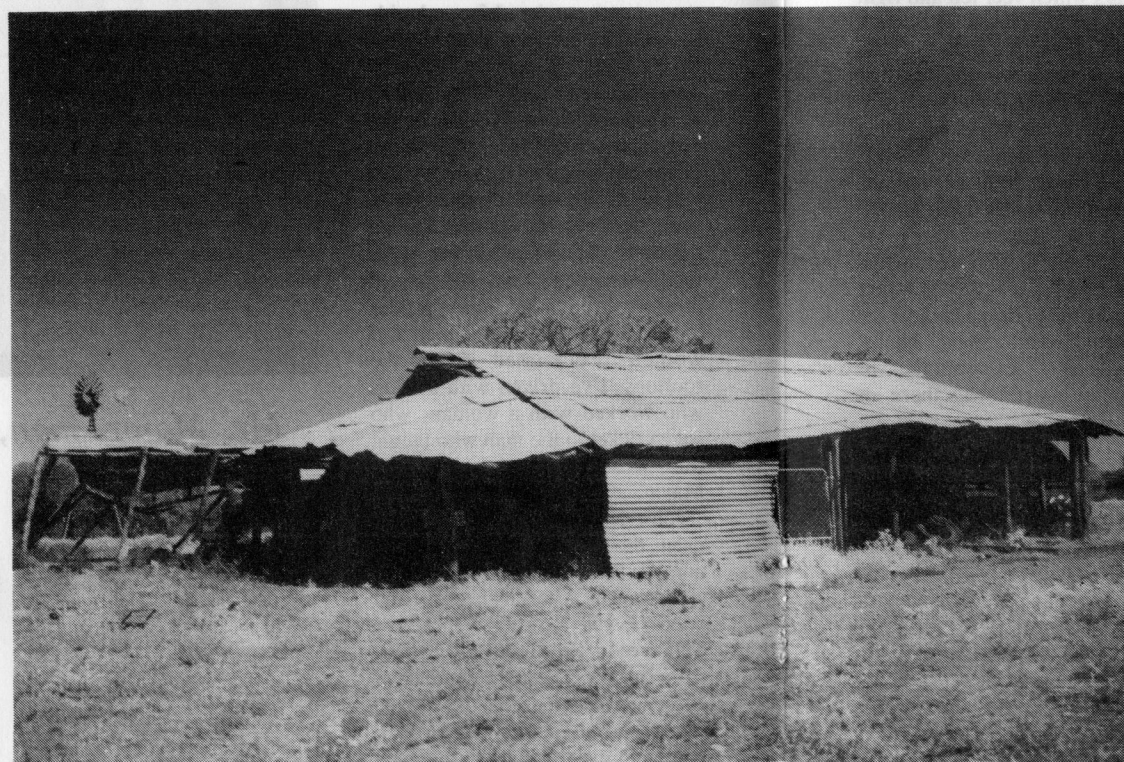
The Trans-Australian Railway runs 150km north of the highway and transects the 260,000 square

Finishing my contract two weeks early I planned to use my new found time to travel overland from Perth to Sydney and my flight home. I had ten days to complete the 3,961km and hoped for a better rate of progress than John Eyre had achieved 147 years before!

Everyone I spoke to about the Nullarbor gave advice on how to cope with the boredom and monotony of the empty wastes. 'Count the 30 metre spaced telegraph poles and work out the speed of the train'. None had ever

desert state, and no indication of things to come. A surface water pipeline accompanies the train to Kalgoorlie, the white streak ducking and diving, swerving and bobbing beside the moving train.

The intricate, green topography created by the Swan River disappeared to the south as we inched our way into the barren gold country. The water pipe persisted to scurry along close by. Although sparsely populated, this stretch of track was positively teeming with life compared with the desolation I



dared to make the journey by train themselves. They preferred to take the highway around the edges of the hostile void, or to deny its vastness, skipping over it by plane in a matter of hours. For a 'Person of Mother England' such as myself, it was the only way to experience the alien dimensions of this island continent.

was to experience once on the Nullarbor. The elderly gentleman beside me had made the journey on the India-Pacific train in the early sixties. He assured me that nothing had changed in twenty-five years. It was easy to believe; there was little that could have changed! Why was he undertaking the monotony

of such a trip again? The Nullarbor plain is surely a place you only attempt to cross overland once in a lifetime. Had it really taken twenty-five years to recover from his first trip?

Six hundred kilometres and eight hours later, without warning, Kalgoorlie was suddenly upon me. No suburbs or outskirts to herald its arrival and only a skyline of mine

shaft head gear to suggest its purpose.

My three days in the gold country ranged from a trip one thousand metres underground with geologists from the Mount Charlotte mine, to a stroll down Hay Street, past rows of bright red corrugated cabins; the prefabricated brothels of Kalgoorlie's red light district.

The India-Pacific pulled out of town at 6.00am, sixty hours after the Prospector had arrived. The bulging brown uniform of an overweight conductor bustled

the Prospector was in the same carriage, still trying to recall if anything had changed. There was now even less on which to gauge any change, with only thirteen settlements in the next 2,000km. My immediate companions for the next thirty hours were three blondes, Dee, 4, Bo, 6, and their mother Susan. Less than one hour into the journey Bo could wait no longer and challenged me to a game of cards—'UNO'. It was sometime since I'd last played, but I quickly recalled the rules and managed not to be beaten. The final score of forty nil impressed only me and it was several days later I realised that perhaps I should have tried a little harder to lose!

By the time we reached Parkstone, Kalgoorlie's trees had disappeared to be replaced by saltbush, bluebush and desiccated acacia trees. These gave way to short brown grass which was finally beaten into submission by the scorched broken rock of the limestone plateau. Humidity did not exist. I could only marvel at the courage and stupidity of John Eyre and John Baxter for attempting such a crossing alone on foot.

The Nullarbor is not an undulating sand dune desert like those of North Africa. It is rocky and flat, inhabited only by kangaroos, rabbits and the odd camel. Even the Aborigines avoid it, their reserves scattered round its perimeter. The snooker table topography rivalled the flatness of the Cambridgeshire fens. The deeply dissected dykes of the fenland fields seemed Himalayan in comparison.

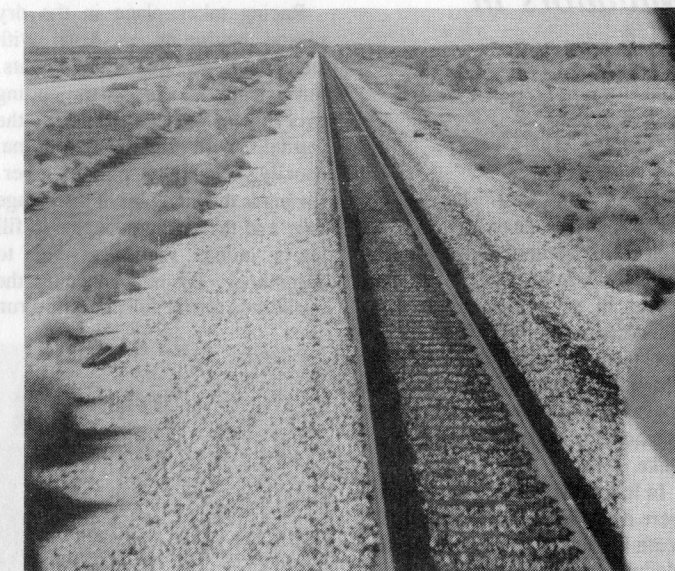
Occasionally we sped through small camps of waving men, women and children, past in an instant. They appeared to live for each train and it seemed a crime not to stop. All we could do was return the wave.

The first stop came at 9.30am in the withering metropolis of Zanthus, a land of loners. At only 200km from Kalgoorlie we were still within dirt road commuting distance for shopping in the gold town. We all spilled off the train and onto the ground, one metre below, awe struck by the remoteness and the lack of buildings which barely formed one street. Our freedom was short lived and ten minutes later we were torn away from THE shop and herded back onto the wagons.

Lunchtime didn't arrive soon enough. Something new to do. I shared a packet of biscuits with Bo and Dee and returned to the thesis.

The next three hundred kilometres bought two more

anonymous supply stops. The train stuck out of each cluster of cabins like an arrow through an apple. The isolated agrophobia of each habitation was hard to fully comprehend. Such isolation bred



claustrophobia, the surrounding hostility of the desert imprisoning and confining each conurbation.

The day 'clickety-clacked' on and the tedium of the train's limited vocabulary started to wear. The UNO, the thesis and conversation had been superseded by the walkman. 'Telegraph Road' started playing and I resorted to counting them, recalling the advice of my well wishers. I calculated the train was doing a demoralising 50mph. I wished I hadn't bothered.

Both Western Australia and the sun were rapidly disappearing. The telegraph poles became silhouetted against an eerie outback sunset, the only trees in a treeless plain. We inched into South Australia and a black, blank night. My staring reflection now dominated the window and I was pleased to draw the curtains, banishing it outside. Time to eat again. I munched my way through some more bread, cheese and apples, pondering the predictability of my provisions.

In the dark an hour later we reached Cook, the halfway mark and a major refuelling station. A large marigold moon glowed low in a blue-black canvas of sky and desert, illuminating the floating canopy of corrugated roofs.

Three hours down the track I suddenly felt a new sensation. Everyone in the carriage had adopted the synchronised swaying so familiar to the London Underground. We had just negotiated a bend, the first since lunch 498km ago! The longest straight piece of railway track in the world was past before I realised it

had begun.

Telegraph road came round twice more before Dee, Bo and Susan decided to turn in. The double seats spun round full circle and the table dismantled to be incorporated into

the 'bed'. Forgetting that deserts get cold at night I hadn't bothered to retrieve my sleeping bag. I regretted this for the next eight hours as I lay shivering on my cushion of biscuit crumbs, covered only by a denim jacket.

By 6.00am (4.30am WA time) I could bear it no longer and rose to use some of the precious water, washing my hair in the compact shower room. Suffering from unbalanced travellers diet I was thankful that the toilet still flushed!

The new day brought new terrain. The Nullarbor had past with the night and the damp morning air and the abundance of trees were most welcome. We clattered into Port Augusta at 8.30am and stopped for ten minutes to stretch our legs. With only 380km left we were now travelling almost directly south. On the right horizon were the fertile Flinders Ranges; to the left the dazzling reflectance of the Spencer Gulf in the hot, bright 9.00am sun. I finished my bread and fruit for breakfast in the hope that we would arrive by lunch time.

Adelaide bought mixed feelings; relief of arrival yet sadness at the disbanding of my travelling companions. I was sorry to part with Dee and Bo. The camaraderie established in the carriage was dismantled only too quickly as the 'expedition' members disembarked to go their separate ways. The satisfaction of enduring the unpunctuated tedium of the 200km 'Tea and Sugar' run was unique.

For now though, the order of the day was to 'do' Adelaide before my train for Melbourne departed.

Kerapan Sapi

*Matadors in
Indonesia, by
David Record*

For as long as anyone can remember men have always tested themselves against bulls; the ancient Spartans would vault over their horns in a brazen display of athleticism, Spanish matadors first test their reflexes and later the sharpness of their swords and the youth of Pamplona prove their manhood by fleeing in the bull's wake.

In Indonesia inter-village disputes were often settled by a fight to the death by bulls, but on the island of Madura to the north of Java in a scene more reminiscent of ancient Rome, teams of bulls race side by side; this is Kerapan Sapi.

Tradition has it that bull racing was encouraged by an early Madurese monarch, King Panembahan Tomolo. Pairs of bulls pulling a plough would race other pairs across the dry and infertile fields.

Today the bulls race in a specially prepared arena and more than just honour is at stake; for the victor is a promised fortune in stud fees, a lucrative prize anywhere in the world.

The finest bullocks, with well documented pedigrees, are reared solely for racing. They are fed a special diet of hay with supplements of extra honey, eggs, beer and secret herbs. Richer owners may employ a trainer but usually a

farmer will train his own bulls.

Racing takes place in the dry season beginning in April with small village qualifying heats, through divisional finals ending every year in Pamekasan, the capital, with the Grand Final usually held in late September. Racing is the highlight of the village year and the stadium begins to fill hours before racing is due to commence. By mid morning the stadium is nearly full, children run

around clasp plastic bags containing iced drinks of the most vivid colours, old men stand in groups renewing old acquaintances smoking the aromatic clove cigarettes so characteristic of Indonesia.

The entertainment begins with a parade of the bulls, shaded by parasols and bedecked in gilded yokes. Accoutered with gold tipped horns and other colourful regalia they swagger like prize fighters

around the stadium. The larger studs accompany their champions with a band of cymbalists, pipers, drummers and gong players, their melodic music adding to an already tense atmosphere. Before racing commences the finery is stripped off, the tempo stepped up and the pairs of bulls goaded into anger by whips and branches. The jockey, small even by Indonesian standards, is lifted onto the sled which hangs between the pair. He sits in a near trance, in each hand a small wooden block with nails, a very primitive steering wheel when one considers that the next 150m will be covered far faster than a chemically assisted Ben Johnson ever could.

A hush descends upon the crowd, the music reaches a higher fever pitch and the trainers strain to hold back their bulls. A hefty slug of arak, the infamous rice brandy, is administered to the bulls, and they are ready.

The flag drops and the crowd roars. Muscles rippling, the bulls surge down the track, the jockey bobbing up and down alarmingly as he desperately tries to keep a straight path. Within seconds it is all over, 30m past the line is a wall and the jockeys frantically reign in their pairs which veer left and right into the seething crowd. They duck and run to avoid the bulls, yelling with joy as the pairs hurtle into their midst. This dicing with death is as much a part of the fun as the racing and no one ever seemed to get hurt.

As the cheers subside and the victor and vanquished depart the police good naturedly clear the crowd from the finish. One hundred and fifty metres away a new race lines up. In the grandstand the more restrained owners shake hands. Triumphant, expectant or seemingly indifferent, there is always next year.



Postgraduate Affairs

*Zoë Hellinger,
Union President,
explains the
Union's plans for
improving the lot
of Imperial's
postgraduate
students*

I am looking at the level of support and structure provided by the Union for postgraduate students (PGs) at Imperial.

Members of Imperial College Union (ICU) elect a Postgraduate Affairs Officer (PGAO) who represents PGs on several committees including Union Council, Union Academic Affairs Committee and the College Graduate Studies Committee.

The PGAO also chairs the Postgraduate Group Committee, which is a meeting representing registered PGs (research assistants, PhD and Msc students). The brief

of this group is to represent postgraduates at all levels within the college, to provide social activities for postgraduates in college and finance for departmental postgraduate groups.

Last year there was no meeting of this group and hence none of the above aims were met. At present there is no PGAO and without this post filled there can be no Postgraduate Group Committee. The loss of opportunity for the PGs at IC includes the reduction of inter-departmental communication on a student level, the overlooking or ignoring of PG problems and the

very few specific postgraduate social activities organised outside research groups.

The group also acts as a general information distribution and collection network similar to the academic affairs network set-up for undergraduates already in existence at I.C.

I am very interested in developing the current ICU facilities offered to PGs, but without a PGAO and the support of committees described above the job could be impossible. If anyone is interested in working with me in this field by putting life back into the Postgraduate group at Imperial, contact me (Zoë Hellinger) in the Union office on internal 3501.

Felix Changes

This newspaper has many good points, but its name is not one of them. There is the possibility that Felix will change its name in the near future. This will occur at Christmas, if at all, along with a rationalised design for its pages. We have a design consultant in to help us with our choice - at no cost to the Union, College or ourselves. I sincerely hope that the newspaper that emerges is more professional looking and easier on the eye. The reasons for a change of name are various - 'Felix' is not a name that immediately conjures up an image of a responsible and intelligent newspaper, it is often confusing to people from outside the college, it is an old and somewhat jaded joke based on the occasional college magazine 'Phoenix', it is, in a word, a puerile name.

There are good reasons for keeping it - the main one being that the name 'Felix' has a reputation in the college. I hope more arguments for and against will be debated in the future - I don't want this change to be seen as the mad fantasy of a megalomaniac editor, but because there is a need to change.

Editorial

Another possible modification concerns the status of the Print Unit in relation to Felix. Any attempt to make this a retail outlet is fraught with complications - mainly due to the state of mental health of the Editor and the independence of the newspaper. I am not against any such change, provided that the primary concern of those involved

is the production of Felix. I would fight tooth and claw against anything I deem to be damaging to the paper.

Credit where it's due

Having been rude to the denizens of College Estates on more than one occasion, I think I ought to correct the balance by saying that the

Likewise the tomato, the apple and the strawberry. What I want to know is why the primeval mammal thought that cabbage was a good idea. If the entirety of the Brassica family were considered nothing but recreational flatulence inducers used as a socially cohesive herb by an eccentric and esoteric south American indian tribe, the world would be just that little bit more logical.

Credits

Chris S, Anna, David S, Chris R, Andy B, Andy T, Rose, Jeremy, Sam, Stef, Toby (for being Toby), Mark, David Record, Zoë and Steve.

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painting of our office, under their direction, is much appreciated and will make the office look and feel far better. I withhold final judgement until the whole thing is completed.

Universal Mysteries

When the primeval mammal discovered the orange, it was a sensible idea to use it again.

Boring Mines

Dear FELIX,

I feel that I must write to you in order to put the record straight after your publication of Anna Teeman's article *British Coal Challenge Ban* in the Felix Summer Special. As a recently graduated student of the Mining Engineering course at Imperial (whose fourth year major project was an opencast coal site in the heart of a suburban area), I feel that I speak from a position of some strength on this matter. A number of points should, I feel, be made about the article.

1. Far from being 'economic stupidity', the operations run by the Opencast Executive of British Coal are some of the cheapest mines in Europe, only being undercut in price by, for example, the large lignite mines in Germany.

2. 'In addition, low sulphur coal must be imported into the country, at cost, for proper mixing'. Much of the coal produced by British Coal Opencast is used as 'sweetener', added to improve the quality of the coal produced by the underground mines so beloved of Ms Teeman.

3. The implication is made that F.O.I.L. would appreciate the site to be mined using underground methods. Three points are raised here:

a) Underground mining may employ more men than opencasting, but is far more expensive than opencast and can, in the shallow

deposits that would be considered for opencasting, produce extreme surface subsidence.

b) Longwall underground mining is only applicable efficiently to deposits with certain characteristics, such as a large horizontal extent, and a relatively continuous orebody topography. The costs involved in establishing such an operation are considerable, and the production costs under the wrong conditions astronomical.

c) Having not long been granted freedom from labour agreements that meant that British Coal had to maintain uneconomic production, they would rather not open a pit of any description than be forced into producing coal at a loss.

4. 'The British Coal planning application...contains only vague assurances that no detrimental environmental impact will result'. No open cast mine in this country will be given planning permission without strict limits being placed on noise, dust, blasting vibration, visual impact and increased road traffic, and can be shut down by government inspectors if these are not adhered to.

5. All coal sites, of whatever design, produced quantities of dust. While I cannot comment on individual cases, it is certainly bad practice to allow a site to shed deleterious quantities of dust, and

this can be prevented by the use of simple water bowsers to lay the dust.

6. If two children were killed by lorries from a site where all of the coal was being moved by rail, I would infer that these lorries were involved in carrying supplies to the site. Should the site be mined using underground methods, the quantities of supplies required would be vastly increased, as these sites require, *inter alia*, face and roadway supports, ventilation equipment and heavy items of plant such as face shearers that are not used in opencasting.

In all affluent countries, as wealth increases, there is a decreased level of understanding as to the source of that wealth, and Ms Teeman seems to be a prime example of this

observation. Employing more people for the sake of increased local employment, to the point where economic realities are simply ignored, is exactly the sort of centrally planned communist stupidity from which Eastern Europe is struggling to free itself. British Coal is an efficient, low cost producer, and extracts coal under stricter environmental controls than almost any operator in the world. Would Ms Teeman like to see the entire, not inconsiderable, workforce of British Coal Opencast and its contractors forced out of work, rather than letting some people be quite close to a heavily shielded hole in the ground for a while?

Yours sincerely,
Dave Healy, M Eng.

Postgraduate Preliminaries

Why has the Union ignored postgraduates this year? As members of the student body the postgrads deserve more from the Union.

To collect your ideas and find out how the Union can aid postgrads and provide the events and help that is needed there will be a series of departmental-based meetings. These will be held either in your departments, providing easier access, or in the Union Building to

show the facilities available.

Notifications will be posted in your departments. We hope that these meetings will enable us to progress to larger inter-departmental gatherings.

If you have any ideas regarding the services you need from the Union, then come to the meetings, which will be advertised soon.

Steve Farrant,
Honorary Secretary (Events)
Ext 3503

Felicitations Hubbing

The Felix 'V' competition, as in the summer issue (908), has been won by Saffron Owen-Jones of the Materials Department. The lucky winner can collect the prize from the Felix office anytime - please bring some form of identification.

The 'Midsummer event', organised by the HUB office, proved a great success, with around 350 people attending the dinner. The organisers hope that it will be the first of many such annual events.

Romania Update

Two weeks ago a group of volunteers left for Romania bearing gifts in the form of toys and clothes for Romanian orphans. Martin Heighway, of the Royal College of Science Union (RCSU) and about 25 others hope to join them on 30th August.

The primary aim of the mission is to provide 'people support' rather than goods. This is due to problems previous teams have suffered; goods often being confiscated at the border or being stolen and sold on

the black market.

The plight of the Romanian people has been over-shadowed by the recent tragedies in the Middle East but the enthusiasm is still there. Martin Heighway is hoping to spend a month with the team and he will give a full report on his return. He extended many thanks to all those people who donated items for the children and expressed the belief that they will be greatly appreciated.

Sumit Success

Sumit Paul-Choudhury (a.k.a. The Flying Gerbil), the Felix Reviews Editor, has been placed runner-up in 'The Daily Telegraph's Young Science Writer Awards' for 1991. His essay, on the seething quantum

activity within vacuums, won the admiration of the judges for tackling 'one of the more opaque hard sciences.' He receives £100 and a year's subscription to 'New Scientist' and 'Nature'.

Welfare Resignation

Yve Posner, Union Welfare Advisor, will be leaving her post on 30th September to take up an MSc offer in the London School of Economics. She has been in the post since January 1989, setting up the present service which gives advice to students, raises funds for needy cases and follows case studies. A

replacement welfare advisor is in the process of being chosen.

The welfare office will be relocated in with the Union office after the planned reorganisation takes place. Ms Posner expected that the throughput of students, presently at 5 to 10 per day, will greatly increase when this happens.

Michael Heseltine might soon find himself in the eye of a storm now brewing in Leicestershire. British Coal is battling fierce local opposition against plans for a new opencast coal mine. The final showdown is set for August when an independent inspector will hear an appeal following the proposal's rejection at local level.

The inspector is not empowered to make a final ruling but to send a recommendation to the Environment Minister, Michael Heseltine, with whom the final decision rests. Mr Heseltine is under no obligation to comply with the appeal's findings.

British Coal has been singularly

with government guidelines on mineral extraction. The guidelines state: 'because opencast coal mining is one of the cheapest forms of energy available to this country it is in the national interest to maximise production where that can be done in an environmentally acceptable way'.

In today's climate of changing energy demands the true worth of opencast coal is no longer so certain. Protestors in Leicestershire hope to scuttle mining proposals with a dual economic and environment broadside.

British Coal claim that their low-cost opencast operations are uniquely profitable and fund a not

1993, are 'protectionist', say protestors, because they prevent companies from buying coal on the international market. Ray Proctor, chairman of British Coal's opencast wing, says he is 'confident of retaining a considerable proportion of the contracts'. Pressure groups remain unconvinced.

In the light of such damning economic evidence, claim objectors, the environmental damage wrought by opencast mining appears indefensible. The impact of an opencast site is threefold: loss of the countryside, pollution from the working mine and reclamation of the land afterwards.

who lost an entire crop to one night's dustfall: 'We just want to be left alone'. Following Ray Proctor's assertion that 'We can extend anything indefinitely', assurances of speedy reclamation ring hollow.

Opencasting is no longer welcome in Britain's mining communities. Deep mines employing whole villages have been replaced by shallow pits employing few local people. The closure of deep mines was followed by a desperate drive to attract new industry of long term benefit to mining areas. The environmental impact of opencast sites, argue protestors, actively discourages such investment. Objectors in Leicestershire claim that the prospect of continued opencast activity has already dampened interest in the area and precipitated a fall in house prices.

Left in limbo by British Coal's plan, residents are impatient for the August appeal. They are also painfully aware that, under current guidelines, ministers have allowed opencasting on almost sixty percent of the land on which local authorities initially refused permission.

The privatisation of British Coal would lie high on the agenda of a future Conservative administration; opencasting is British Coal's most profitable activity. Pressure groups fear that even if the appeal is turned down the project might still be given the governmental green light and the environment would be sacrificed for short-term, short-sighted financial gain.

Opencast Uncovered *by Anna Teeman*

ineffective in its attempts to quell public disquiet about opencasting. A wave of protest against similar proposals has swept through communities nationwide; many with long histories of deep and shallow mining.

Opencast work started in Britain during the Second World War when to question the extraction of a then vital energy resource would have been tantamount to treason. In the Green Nineties things are rather different. It is no peasant army British Coal faces in Leicestershire but a thoroughly modern fighting force; a protest group run by highly motivated individuals.

At appeal hearings objectors must show that proposals do not comply

so remunerative deep mine sector. However, according to Andrew Cox, an independent energy expert, extraction of Britain's near surface coal does not make economic sense due to its high sulphur content. Opencast coal's primary destination is the coal fired power stations of the newly privatised energy companies. The companies are committed, by European edict, to reducing sulphur dioxide emissions and must set-off burning high sulphur with low sulphur coal. Such coal is scarce in Britain and its forced import, says Mr Cox, has contributed to the current trade deficit.

British Coal's contracts with power companies, due to expire in

In common with many other communities similarly threatened, it is the loss of their countryside that concerns protestors in Leicestershire the most. During the proposed eight year working period a vast acreage of land would be swallowed by the extraction process.

Communities who have been involved with British Coal for a long time have little faith in either its ability or commitment to keep pollution levels down. Residents living next to a current site in Leicestershire, but a stone's throw from the proposed site, suffered dramatic increases in both noise and dust when mining started. In the words of a local market gardener,