

# UNITED THEY FALL

*Patrick West on how ideology  
makes enemies of allies,  
especially in fan clubs*

IF the recent internecine feuding on the Shankill Road between the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force confirms anything, it is that tendency among groups ostensibly bound by similar purpose to hate each other more than the common enemy. This is known as People's Front of Judea syndrome, a condition first diagnosed by the Monty Python team in *The Life of Brian*.

In the film Brian approaches a coterie of Judean revolutionaries. 'Are you the Judean People's Front?' he asks, innocently.

'Fuck off!' Reg, the leader, replies.

'What?' Brian responds.

'Judean People's Front? We're the People's Front of Judea! Judean People's Front!?' Reg splutters contemptuously.

'Wankers,' his right-hand man agrees.

People's Front of Judea syndrome dictates that one's enemy's enemy is one's enemy too, and it has traditionally afflicted left-wing groups. Indeed, in this sketch, Monty Python were deliberately poking fun at revolutionary ideologues whose internecine tendencies are legendary.

We have been reminded of the Left's fissiparous nature this year. In May, there was the death of Tony Cliff, founder of the International Socialists, a body at daggers drawn with such dastardly rivals as The Communist Party, the Workers' Revolu-

tionary Party, the Militant Tendency, the Trotskyist Tendency, the Revolutionary Opposition, Left Faction, the International Socialist Opposition and the Revolutionary Communist Party — the last of which an old IS stalwart remembers as being 'media pranksters and disco fascists'. A month earlier, we had the elections to the London Assembly, in which we could vote for the London Socialist Alliance . . . or for Socialist Labour, or the Communist party.

Then there was the demise of the magazine *Living Marxism (LM)* which, since its foundation by the Revolutionary Communist party in 1988, had become a decidedly libertarian organ. *LM's* closure was greeted with unconcealed glee by that guardian of the Left, the *Guardian*, which had been unsympathetic to *LM*; not so much because those who ran the magazine were libertarians, but because they were libertarians who used to be of the Left. Con-founded splitters!

But as the gruesome goings-on in the world of Ulster loyalism confirm, PFJ syndrome is by no means confined to the hard Left. A profusion of bewildering acronyms — UUP, UKUP, UDP, DUP, PUP, NIUP, UDA, UFF, UVF and LVF — all bear testament to a community born of a dissenting nature and now in crisis and at war with itself.



*'Typical men, always bragging about whose is the smallest.'*

Mind you, Irish republicans have their fissures too. Since dissent is not so much a part of the Roman Catholic tradition, it is always necessary for the splinter group to proclaim its unique validity, the true heir in the apostolic succession: the 'Official IRA', the 'IRA under the Continuity Council', the 'Real IRA'. I believe it was the comedian Patrick Kielty who first prognosticated

## Banned wagon



*A weekly survey of the things our rulers want to prohibit*

WILLIAM Hague has been busily positioning himself this past week as the motorist's, and particularly the trucker's, friend. The Mr Toads of this world will not fear persecution by him. Or will they? The truckers baying for Mr Blair's blood last week would do well to avoid reading *Believing in Britain*, the Tories' mini-manifesto published earlier this month. Buried deep within the document lies a promise 'to remove unsuitable vehicles from unsuitable roads'. I telephoned Central Office for enlightenment. Surely the party cannot be contemplating banning last week's 'fine, upstanding citizens' from taking their 40-tonne trucks on short cuts through the nation's towns and villages? But it is. 'If it is desired locally that trucks should be removed from the streets, and if there is an alternative route, we will force lorries to take it,' says a spokesman.

Though it won't win Mr Hague many friends in the juggernaut community, more restrictions on heavy lorries would at least win him support from others. That is more than can be said for transport policy number two: 'We will introduce a minimum speed limit on some lanes of some motorways.' Who hasn't at some time snarled at a caravan or a truck trying to overtake a line of vehicles up a long hill? One more problem: what happens when you get to a traffic jam, and progressing at Mr Hague's minimum legal speed means you rapidly land in the boot of the car in front? 'Obviously you couldn't keep to the minimum in heavy traffic,' says a spokesman. Indeed not. Then why try to make a criminal of every driver who has ever taken to the road in the rush hour?

Ross Clark



that the next republican group will be called 'I Can't Believe It's Not IRA'.

In mainland Britain, PFJ syndrome extends to the far Right, too, which has at various times taken the form of the Empire Loyalists, the National Front, the British National party, the Third Way, the National Democrats, Combat 18 and the White Wolves. (Combat 18 despise the BNP for their namby-pamby, neo-Mosleyite stance on ethnic minorities.) Even the far more moderate United Kingdom Independence party fell foul of a debilitating spate of infighting earlier this year.

Why does this happen? What spawns such groupuscules? What all these groups share, primarily, is a heady, excitable idealism. Fanatics and ideologues always adopt aggressive symbols — clenched fists, scary animals, the conspicuous use of the colour red — and in this kind of adrenalin-fuelled atmosphere there is always going to be much bickering. In more practical terms, people will fall out over who's got the guns and who rules the roost.

All extreme ideologies have religious overtones: salvation, the chosen people, a future utopia. It is, therefore, no surprise that this kind of fissure in ideological political groups should mirror the splits witnessed in Christianity. PFJ syndrome affects socialists most acutely because they are the most religious-minded. Communism has its bearded god (Karl Marx), its own prophetic biblical text of reference (the *Communist Manifesto*) and promise of a golden afterlife (communism).

If the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic party hold a deep, mutual antipathy, we can understand that this is a matter of life and death for their members and their victims. By contrast, one might suppose, the heated rivalry between Help the Aged and Age Concern, or that between the mental health charities Sane and Mind, might seem positively parochial. In truth there is genuine ideological disagreement here: between those who do and don't believe in euthanasia; between those who think dangerous madmen should be locked up and those who believe we should interrogate more closely society's conception of 'madness'.

Fanatics do of course come in more innocent guises, but, really, some should know better. Literary types, who purport to be grown-ups, have had an immense capacity to fall into vicious, opposing camps when it comes to the legacy of Sylvia Plath or T.S. Eliot, or the authorship of Shakespeare. Only last week, it was reported that a personal grudge had led to an ill-tempered fracas between the Voltaire Foundation (based in Oxford) and the French Société Voltaire. How very unenlightened!

Nonetheless, the champion of internecine squabbles seems to be fan clubs: organisations that by definition (*fanatics*) always solicit the obsessive type. At the beginning of the 1990s there were a



series of squabbles in the world of fan clubs. There raged a battle among Tony Hancock fans, with the Tony Hancock Midlands Branch declaring itself independent of the Tony Hancock Appreciation Society. Concurrently, there was a particularly unsavoury stand-off between the Dr Who Appreciation Society and the Dr Who Bulletin (DWB). Rather than gang-ing up on the BBC for not putting the eccentric Time Lord back on television, they just kept squabbling among themselves before the DWB put forward a 'peace proposal'.

But the prize for the most ardent militancy goes to Marc Bolan fans. In 1991 the Marc Bolan Liberation Front split from the official Marc Bolan Fan Club, the reason being that they wanted to promote Bolan as 'an important musician, poet and style-leading colossus, not to marginalise him in some glam-rock ghetto'. The

MBFC remained unrepentant. 'We're not guilty, never,' its leader protested. 'If you let the fanatics in, they've won. And, frankly, some of these people are nutters.'

And then there are the fairies. In 1997 an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Victorian fairy painting caused a ruction between the National Fairy Appreciation Society (NFAS) and the Fairy League. The latter had seceded from the former the year before, disgruntled that the society insisted on looking upon fairies as amiable, dainty creatures. 'The NFAS is full of adults simpering like 12-year-olds,' bemoaned Anita Tabbitt, the league's leader. 'We believe in direct action on behalf of the fairies, who are neither innocent nor particularly nice, but are the true guardians of the land.'

When people get worked up about something, they are more likely to be convinced of their own righteousness, and consequently feel threatened by any rival who might pervert the one true message and mission of the group. Not least, your rival might take all the means and resources with him too. The Real IRA hate the Provos not just because they feel they have strayed from the true path of republicanism as preached and prophesied by Patrick Pearse, but because they want to get hold of their guns, too.

As Reg explained to Brian, 'The only thing we hate more than the Romans are the fucking Judean People's Front.'

A tree can tell you  
many things  
including where to find  
the Iberian Lynx.



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