

## WE MUST RECLAIM WAYWARD MINDS



IN THE MONTHS leading up to Christmas a daring raid took place. In stores across America people had been buying toys and then, surreptitiously, bringing them back.

It was fiendishly clever and almost legal. The toys in question were dolls: Barbie and GI Joe to be precise. The purpose of this 'not for profit' scam only became clear on Christmas Day.

Daughters who unwrapped golden-haired Barbie dolls were somewhat surprised to find that they were greeted with gravel mouthed utterances such as "Eat lead. Cobra!" and "Vengeance is mine!"

The staccato sound of gunfire in the background made it clear that frills or no frills, this particular Barbie would be more at home in Cambodia than the kitchen.

No less surprised were the all-American boys. Their combat-fatigued GI Joes simpered alluringly: "Shopping with you is such fun," and "Let's plan a dream wedding."

The swapping of voice boxes in the respective dolls was part of a campaign by a growing number of parents serious about the roots of violence that they face on the streets. There are all sorts of aspects to this, but at least one part goes back to some of the basic (and stereo typed) role models we squeeze male and female children into from birth.

Whether you think that the Barbie Liberation Organisation is spot-on or stupid, the point they are making is a serious one. If we don't like the spiral of random and arbitrary violence that we see (male) youngsters being drawn into, how do we deflect them from it? I ask this more in the context of the second raid I want to mention.

Just over a week ago some 30 or more skinheads, parading themselves in Nazi memorabilia, ransacked the Mushroom bookshop in the centre of Nottingham. It was towards the end of the Saturday afternoon and in little more than a couple of minutes the gang had managed to devastate the shop and disappear. From the various anti-fascist groups in Nottingham we actually know quite a bit of background to what happened. Neo-Nazi groups from all round the country had been planning a rally in London. Those who congregated around the Red Lion in Heanor and the Alexandra Social Club in Sandiacre hit Nottingham en route to this rally. But the rally had been banned and Nottingham became the target for the random and gratuitous violence that masquerades as political philosophy.

The attack on Mushroom was not so random. It is not only an extremely good bookshop, but also focus for a great deal of civil liberties, libertarian and progressive writings. It is also an invaluable place to pick up literature and information by those who monitor far-right, neo-Nazi activities in Britain.

It is an obvious target for the attentions of marauding boot boys. As such it seems reasonable to require that it should receive at least the same protection as that given to the BNP headquarters in London. But

something went wrong. Although the skinheads were under surveillance when they arrived in Nottingham, the surveillance somehow disappeared and the wrecking of the shop went on uninterrupted. We can come back to this and make sure it doesn't happen again, but there are harder questions that we need to face up to. Should we allow neo-Nazi marches or gatherings in our cities? Demonstrations of people in paramilitary uniforms can already be banned under "public order" provisions, but shouldn't we go further?

I simply don't believe that fascism is part of the democratic debate. You and I cannot have a legitimate disagreement about whether I want to burn down your house, murder or mutilate your children or drive you out of the country. I can tolerate all sorts of other extremes, but fascism is the death of democracy, not a part of it. The girl in London who had a swastika carved into her face by a passing gang is testimony to where this sort of 'tolerance' takes you.

Shouldn't we also be saying that we will not offer 'watering holes' for fascists to scheme within. The pubs and clubs which play host to such gatherings (often in openly Nazi uniforms) ought to be told clearly that this would constitute grounds for a police challenge to renewal of their liquor licence.

Finally, back to Barbie and Joe, The young people now drawn towards the violent simplicities of neo-Nazi movements were not born fascists. Most will have had parents who loved them and had their moments as 'little treasures'.

In that sense they are no different from your kids or mine. But life has made them ugly; inflicted a brutality and hopelessness upon them which is now becoming our problem as much as theirs. Unfortunately, making good this damage is nowhere near as simple as changing a voice box. It requires us to have a really serious rethink of how we work with (and retrieve) such young people.

I don't mind if they never go into Mushroom proclaiming 'Shopping with you is such fun" or "Let's plan a dream wedding". What I do want is to tackle the seething anger, prejudice and division that they carry round with them..', if only to ; ensure that all of us — young/old, black/white, male or female — can walk through city streets which do not, increasingly, begin to smell of Germany in the Thirties.