



sixties, rock'n'roll audiences took shamanistic types of drugs, like LSD and marijuana

ul performers appear to generate their "out of psychological circumstances similar to those associated with acquir-ernatural power in shamanistic tradi-The audiences, too, both tribal and 1, seem to gain a therapeutic advan-om the show. They "feel better" at the

ng the fifties and sixties, rock'n'roll rofound impact on its audiences. On ns it contributed towards emotional approaching ecstasy. When, in the ties, marijuana and the hallucin-c drug LSD became popular with rock'-udiences (marijuana having long been ource of much blues and jazz inspira-the psychological atmosphere surng the performance intensified to shamanistic levels. The ritual use of nogenic plants is widespread in istic traditions among both shaman-ers and their audiences. When sim-umstances prevailed during the six- or perhaps the first time in 5,000 years led culture—showbiz stood briefly d for what it (secretly) had always ecstatic religion in performance.

effect on the rock'n'roll singers them-when they were perceived as shaman- / their hallucinogenically-influenced as often marked. Some of them—Lennon, Hendrix and Bowie, for le—rose to the occasion, producing which could have been culled straight any traditional shaman's repertoire. -accounts, like *Desolation row* from ecstatic journeys to "other worlds," nnon's *Strawberry fields*; underworld like Hendrix's *Voodoo child*; and ies between the normal world and the ly realms, from Bowie the sexually ous *Space oddity*: all these were jour- f-the-soul in miniature, just like

the nomadic shamans' songs describing strange encounters in supernatural realms.

Sixties rock'n'roll had the effect of democratising the "occult" on a scale previously unknown. It lit fuses which ran towards the esoteric mysteries of both eastern and western faiths and sparked off a host of minor cults at the same stroke. This one wing of showbiz helped create the kind of youth solidarity which on occasions threatened the stability of governments, in anti-war marches, civil rights campaigns and protests extending from the United States, through western and eastern Europe, to India.

For a while it was all too clear why "mere entertainment" has always been suspected of harbouring a potent threat towards ordered society. The ecstatic mystery at the heart of show business is one which proclaims liberation from the confines of normality. The shaman's ancient business still appears to provide showbiz with much of its charismatic power.

Rogan Taylor is carrying out research at Lancaster University Religious Studies Department. This article is based on his book, *The Death and Resurrection Show*, which has just been published by Blond at £15.

#### TELEVISION

## KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

SIMON HOGGART

According to the latest figures I have, *Only Fools and Horses* (BBC1) is now the second most popular TV programme in Britain, led only by *Coronation Street*. It's a situation comedy, a cross between *Minder* and *Steptoe and Son*. The curious title comes from the chorus of the theme song, also written by the

programme's author, John Sullivan: "Here's the one that's driving me berserk/Why do only fools and horses work?"

Avoiding work is what the plots turn round. The hero, if the show could be said to possess such a character, is Del, stallholder in Peckham, south London (played by David Jason.) He is known to "intimates" as Del-Boy, and wears a gold "D" on a chain round his neck. He spends his life looking out for cheap consignments of Ambre Solaire from Hong Kong and Taiwanese Swiss watches.

He lives in a hideously decorated council flat with his younger brother Rodney, played by Nicholas Lyndhurst somewhere behind his own vaguely flailing but well-meaning arms. Rodney has two o levels and combines utter gormlessness with a sarcastic wit. Thus, Del conducts his business from a clapped-out old three-wheeler car with CD plates and a "tax in post" notice on the windscreen. "Can't you sell this and get something useful—like a bus pass?" asks Rodney, glumly.

Until the end of the last season, Del and Rodney shared their flat (whose address is, with a nice touch of present-day London reality, "368 Nelson Mandela House, Peckham") with Grandad, a crotchety old chancer. The actor who played him has since died and been replaced by Buster Merryfield, who plays Grandad's brother, Albert.

Uncle Albert is a seafaring old scallywag and bore, who came for the night and decided to stay. Unlike Arthur Daley, whose only moral code is "don't get caught," Del Boy's guiding star is his family duty. Uncle Albert can't be packed off back to north London because he's family. When he falls down into a pub cellar, they see the chance to take thousands of pounds off the brewery.

The plot collapses when the defending counsel proves that Uncle Albert has been falling into pub cellars by way of a living for years. Albert argues, with tears in his eyes, that he did it in memory of his dead brother. Del and Rodney are naturally so moved that they take him back. Like both Steptoes, the brothers are convinced it is only their loyalty to the family which is holding them back from wealth and success. At the same time, they instinctively realise that they have to cling to the family because that's all they're ever likely to have.

The language flows better than in most comedies about lovable Londoners, though there is the inevitable ration of rhyming slang. Do people really call necks "Gregories"? I'm quite prepared to believe it; it's just that I've never heard it. But I can easily believe that they call dim people "dipsticks" and say, "Stone me, Rodney, a Millwall fan could have worked that out."

All the best situation comedies derive from the relationship, usually of mingled love and resentment, between pairs of quite different people forced by circumstances to coexist. *Only Fools and Horses* has three such people and thus three pairs—which may be why it works so well.

New Society 14 March 1985



John Sturrock/Network

## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

BEN PIMLOTT

*Digging Deeper: issues in the miners' strike*

Huw Beynon (editor)

Verso/NLB

£3.95 paperback 0 86091 820 3

£16.50 hardback 0 86091 113 6

In some ways, the miners' strike was like Vietnam. For comfortable city-dwellers and suburbanites, the horror was deliciously remote: an epic soap opera which evoked many a domestic debate over the telly dinner, as thrills of shock and outrage made us all take sides.

The most important point about the dispute, however, was that it showed what a divided nation we have become: the prospering employed, perfectly protected from the experiences of the ghettoised poor, and the about-to-be-redundant. Vietnam is one kind of analogy. Poland, even Weimar, are others. This was civil strife, with the worst disturbances mainland Britain has seen since before the first world war. According to Home Office figures, 9,750 miners were arrested. It is astonishing and terrifying how easily these things get absorbed into our sense of daily normality.

The three books under review, all intended as salvos in a continuing conflict, have become epitaphs instead. They are no less interesting and important for that, because issues raised in what Huw Beynon, editor of *Digging Deeper*, rightly calls "a landmark in the political and economic development

*The Strike: an insider's story*

Roy Ottey

Sidgwick & Jackson £7.95

0 283 99228 X

*Policing the Miners' Strike*

Bob Fine and Robert Millar (editors)

Lawrence & Wishart

£4.95 paperback 0 85315 633 6

£12.50 hardback 0 85315 632 8

of postwar Britain" will not be forgotten.

In his preface to *Policing the Miners' Strike*, Mick McGahey refers to "the most momentous episode of class struggle for half a century." Yet part of the tragedy was that it was a struggle within a class as well as between classes. This is the aspect brought out most poignantly in Roy Ottey's personal account. Ottey was the leader of the Power Group within the NUM who eventually resigned from the union executive because of his opposition to the way Arthur Scargill was handling the dispute.

"Ottey is a Tory," shouted the pickets, but he clearly wasn't. Few men, indeed, were more loyally rooted in the industry and the union. A Leicestershire miner's son, his first memories were of the General Strike, and of the privations and comradeship of the mining communities. He joined the union as a pit electrician at the beginning of the war. When he resigned, "I felt . . . as if I was departing from the family I had helped to create."

Ottey belonged to a pre-Scargill generation, for whom union activity was mainly

Miners retreat in the face of a massive police presence at Orgreave, 1984

office work. His story is of a steady, conscientious, bureaucratic ascent up the union hierarchy, backed by craftsmen whose interests were not always identical to those of Scargill in 1969, he underestimated the young Yorkshire activist and was bewildered by his "strange mixture of ruthlessness and sensitivity." "Little did I think," he writes in a passage that illustrates the gulf between them, "that this man would in 1984 be voted 'Man of the Year' by BBC Radio Four listeners."

Ottey was, in essence, a dependable labour movement administrator, a Gormleyite who agreed with the battered cherub's succinct definition of the aims of unionism: "First to sit down with management and decide how to create the wealth. Second, to sit down again with management and decide how best to share it out." According to Ottey, Joe Gormley "was a democrat to the last." Ottey's persistent accusation is that Scargill has been the reverse.

"Let Arthur dig the hole big enough and he'll fall in." That was the initial attitude of the union's moderates. They reckoned without Arthur's defiance, determination and popular appeal. As the conflict deepened in the coalfields, Ottey found himself isolated among the top leaders. When the executive met to decide the crucial question of a ballot, Scargill won by 21 vote to three.

Ottey was supported by his own members in his demand for a ballot. Less helpful, however, was the chorus from outside the union, from people who didn't care a fig about the miners' democratic rights. Why did the union leadership resist a ballot? As usual, it was McGahey who provided the best quotes. "We will not be constitutionalised out of action," he is reported as saying; and again, "It is the media who have got 'ballotitis'."

He was right, of course. There was much hypocrisy in the media attitude, as several contributors to the Beynon volume point out. Plebiscitary democracy is not a principle widely adopted in the organisations of the NUM's most vociferous critics. Nor (depending on interpretations of the rulebook) was there a moral requirement in this case. Bob Fryer finds scriptural authority for a no-ballot stance in the writings of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who denounced the "superstitious worship of the ballot-box" in union affairs, and declared that "the reliance of trade union democrats on the referendum resulted, in fact, in the virtual exclusion of the general body of members from all real share in the government."

The important point about a ballot, however, was not constitutional or moral but practical and political. Once the Tories had successfully implanted the ballotitis bacillus, the holding of a ballot became, for the miners, a tactical necessity. "One of the tragedies of the strike," writes Eric Heffer in his preface to the Beynon book, "has been the

New Society 14 March 1985