



Jon Garvey chews the cud

Burying my tongue in my cheek

Oh dear! I am the subject of adverse comment in the correspondence pages. John Clarke wrote from Kent to criticise a paragraph in my May 15 column, in which I deprecated the Medical Campaign against Nuclear Weapons as a fanatical pro-life group seeking to force its own morality down our throats. He suggested that I was burying my head in the sand.

His comments only serve to underline the point I was making. If such a blatantly ironic piece of cant as my article is sufficiently close to average opinion to be taken at face value by an intelligent member of our profession, it is a damning indictment on the moral climate in which we live. Can it really be that the term "pro-life" has become such an acceptable term of abuse that it attracts no ridicule in its own right?

Dr Clarke, my article accused MCANW of fanaticism for trying to stop people destroying the world and its contents. If you really thought it was meant seriously, you should not have criticised me for burying my head in the sand—you should have condemned me for a monster.

The staff of life?

I had the manager of a bakery in the surgery the other day. I don't remember how we came to talk about his work, unless it was some jocular suggestion of mine that inhaling yeast spores set off his migraines.

"Oh, we don't use yeast," the man said. "None of the bakeries do, except the tiny, local ones—it's all chemicals. Saves them time. There's no fermentation at all."

Well, I've always suspected that the British Sliced Loaf came out of a test tube rather than a mixing bowl, and I know they've been shoving in phytic acid since World War Two

for no very sensible reason, so I was not too surprised.

I thought it would be interesting to know just what sort of chemicals they use, but he told me he couldn't say, because it was a trade secret. "In that case," I said, "I'll just have to stick to wholemeal if I want to know what I'm eating."

"That's no good," he replied. "Even that's made with chemicals. Against the law, of course, but nobody knows."

"You'd better be careful," I warned him, "I'm a medical journalist."

"It doesn't worry me. I'd like to see these things brought into the open. These additives ought to be controlled."

So, here I am, bringing it out into the open. According to my source, who ought to know because he makes the stuff:

- Your daily bread is doctored into its final semblance of loafhood not by the means that have developed over the last 10,000 years, but by the use of chemicals whose identity nobody is allowed to know.

- Even allegedly wholemeal bread is being manufactured, illegally, using these unnamed substances, by a good number of the large bakeries.

This is particularly strange in view of the recent report from the Bread Education Council (or was it the Health Marketing Board?) which said what a good, wholesome food graces your toaster each day. Did they not discover how the stuff is made?

Rest assured I am no great proponent of pure organic foods—in fact, it seems a little ironic that my vegetarian brother is probably getting more additives in his diet than I am. Nevertheless, it should be mandatory for us to be *told* when we are being fed junk food, and we should preferably be told exactly what junk is being used. After all, they do it to a degree with other foods, though not, strangely, with drugs, where it is impossible to ascertain whether your patient's anaphylaxis was due to the drug, or to the anonymous substances used to glue it together, make it butterscotch flavoured, or colour it turquoise.

But at the moment, and for the foreseeable future unless someone kicks up a fuss, the only certain thing you know about the loaf you buy is

that it's more fattening with jam than without.

In this advanced age of veneered chipboard, chopped and shaped soya chicken, and blueberry pie filling made from puree compressed to form imitation blueberries, it would, of course, be too much to hope that we could ask for bread in a shop, and actually get bread.

A world fit for our children

The recent furore over lead in petrol will soon be eclipsed by a far more profound environmental hazard—uranium in seawater. So says Dr Stanislaw Yevrag, medical spokesman for ABACUS, the Association for the Banning of All that Confounded Uranium from the Sea. He was replying to a United States government report, which had said that the concentration of uranium in the sea, mainly of natural origin, was far too low to constitute a real health hazard, and the ABACUS' proposal that the government should process all 308 million cubic miles of the oceans was a little ambitious.

The worthy Yevrag said that this was a typical case of fudging the issue by a government whose paymasters were the multinational corporations and the atomic energy lobby.

"Uranium is known to be a highly dangerous substance, as Hiroshima and *Planet of the Apes* have proved," he said, "and there is no scientific evidence that any level of the element is 'safe'. Surely the life and health of our children is too important to gamble away for short-term financial gain...?"

One hump or two?

The entire medical community has been agog to know to which species of camel our adviser Potiphar belongs. Although born in Egypt, he is now fully integrated into the British way of life in general, and the NHS in particular. This has led some to ask if he is an example of the two-humped, or Bactrim, camel. This is clearly nonsense, as a cursory glance at his portrait will show. To set the record straight, Potiphar wishes to point out that, having only a single, shapely, hump, only an idiot would fail to realise that he is a thoroughbred Domiciliary.