

# FOCUS

## Just Not Cricket

The English might not be very good at cricket, but they excel at hypocrisy. The Pakistani umpires *have* made numerous dreadful decisions in the current test series but the whole awful row could have been avoided if England had been willing to accept the proposal strongly backed by Pakistan, to have neutral umpires in all test series.

The reason for turning down the plan, which worked well in the cricket World Cup, is that the Test and County Cricket Board believes - though it doesn't put it quite like this - that only British umpires are any good and the rest are a stupid bunch of foreigners. The TCCB wants neutral umpires away and British umpires at home, because the thought of having a Pakistani and an Indian standing instead of Dickie Bird and David Constant at the Lords test match is a greater anathema than allowing women into the Long Room.

That this attitude prevails is hardly surprising, given that the authorities at Lords behave as if all the other cricketing countries were still British colonies. Their reluctance to allow the World Cup to take place outside the UK, amidst unfulfilled warnings of chaos, is testimony to their inability to deal with the rest of the cricketing world on equal terms.

The Pakistanis' support for neutral umpires has given them the moral high ground, despite the dubious standard of their umpires who, over the years, have given twice as many lbw decisions against foreign players as Pakistanis in test matches.

It is a tacit recognition by the Pakistani cricketing authorities that the pressures on the men in the white coats in their own society (ruled by an uncompromising military dictatorship that sees cricket matches against the old colonial power as a form of war) are intolerable. A willier and more progressive bunch than the neanderthal occupants of Lords would have recognised this a long time ago. •

*Christian Wolmar*