

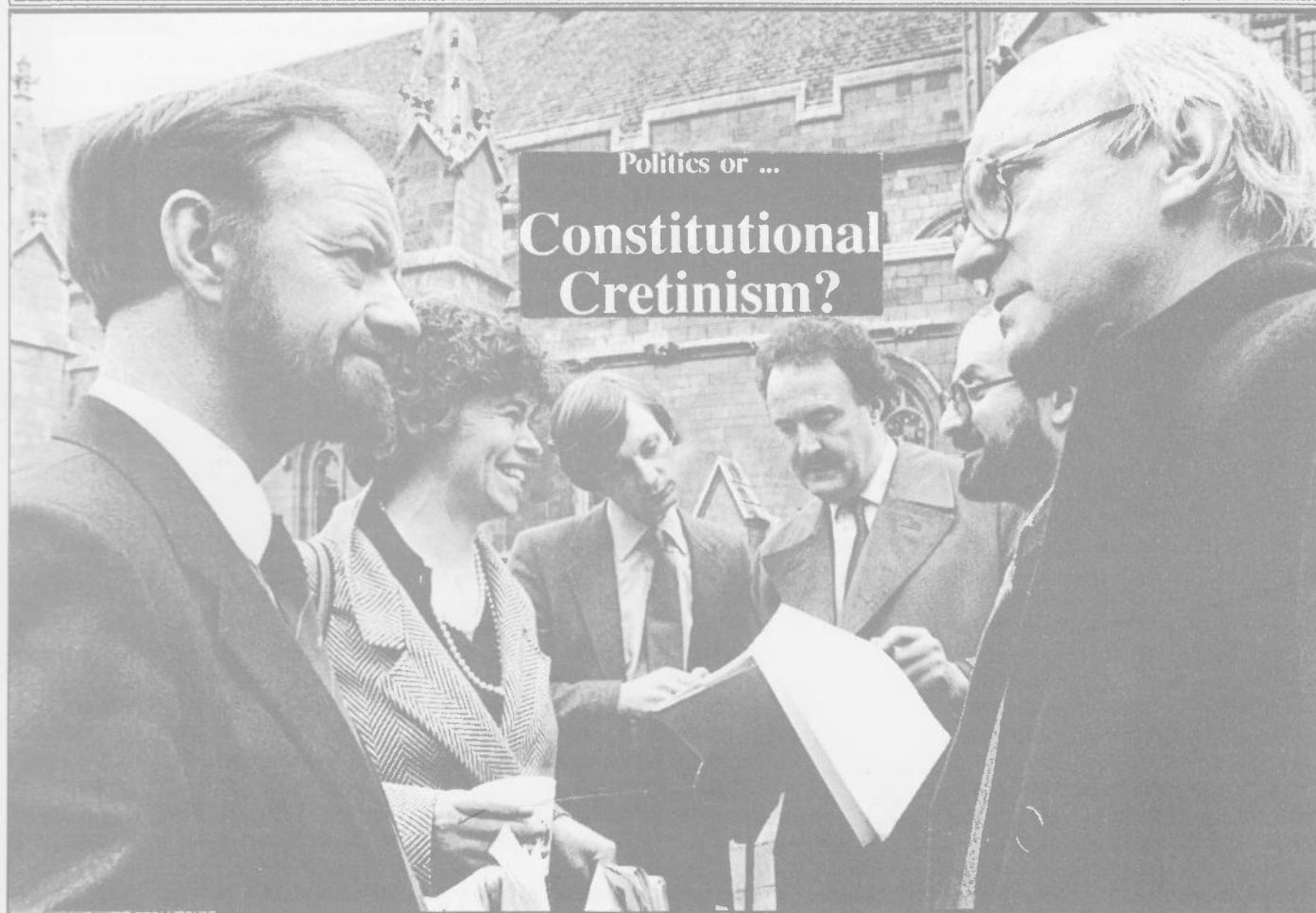
# Labour & Trade Union Review

No 9

Price  
£1

Quarterly Journal of the Ernest Bevin Society

January-March 1989



Politics or ...  
**Constitutional  
Cretinism?**

## Inside

Algeria

Charter 88

Education Act

The End of  
Nuclear Power?

Scotland

Transport

## Editorial

### Labour and the defence fly bottle

*"...his strategy for leading the party involves him in the attempt to suppress its idealism altogether.*

*This strategy is terribly misconceived.*

*Idealism is a necessary and inevitable feature of political activity. No political party can drain itself of its idealism and survive. And Kinnock cannot always expect to win these trials of strength, and is liable to lose some of them in the most embarrassing ways, as was demonstrated last June over defence."*

(Editorial, L&TUR No. 8, October-December 1988)

opened their freshly bought copies of L&TUR than the truth of this statement was amply demonstrated by Ron Todd's speech. And since Blackpool Ron has done it again.

Unilateralism and hostility to NATO are now the last refuge of Labour's idealism. Neil Kinnock and his colleagues have succeeded in draining every shred of purposeful idealism out of Labour's economic and social policy. The Left has allowed them to do this, because it has had no purposeful idealism of its own with which to counter Kinnock's approach. But because the Left is not yet ready to curl up and die, it is making defence the last ditch of

No sooner had the delegates at Blackpool

its commitment to futile idealism.

This would not matter so much if it were only a question of Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, *Tribune*, *Briefing* and the like. But Ron Todd's three interventions since June clearly indicate that unilateralism is a sticking point within the TGWU.

At worst, this means that Kinnock is not going to be able to free the Labour Party from the electoral albatross of the unilateralist stance.

At best, it means that it is going to take many more months of bureaucratic manoeuvring and arm-twisting and vote-fixing for Labour to arrive at a position that stands the slightest chance of passing muster with the voters. And while this is going on, the Party leadership is going to be so absorbed in this dreary business that its capacity to react effectively to what the government is doing, let alone develop its thinking on other issues, will remain paralysed.

Either way, we can get forget about winning - or even coming close to winning - the next general election, as the Kensington, Govan and Epping by-election results all strongly suggest, and the defeatists in the Party have not failed to observe.

***"A way has to be found to resolve Labour's defence dilemma. Labour's leaders refuse to resolve it our way, and they are failing to resolve it their way. A third way must be found."***

L&TUR is not a defeatist publication. Our very existence is an act of defiance and an expression of our determination. For the defeatists who see where Labour is headed but refuse to advocate the changes in approach which are needed to avoid a fresh fiasco, and who prefer to fantasise about electoral pacts and written constitutions and whatnot, we have nothing but contempt.

We stand for a realistic and responsible defence policy as a matter of course. We also stand for purposeful idealism in economic and social policy, and have been steadily developing coherent policy positions along these lines since we began publishing two years ago. We believe that if Labour's leaders took up the kind of serious radicalism which we have been advocating, they would have far less difficulty in persuading the Left to abandon its merely recalcitrant attachment to mindless idealism on the defence issue. In short, if the Left's idealism had proper outlets in economic and social policy, it would be far more inclined to be reasonable on defence.

The approach which has been followed by Labour's leaders is the exact opposite of what has been called for. But we are not content simply to point this out. A way has to be found to resolve Labour's defence dilemma.

Labour's leaders refuse to resolve it our way, and they are failing to resolve it their way. A third way must be found.

In the circumstances which actually exist, the most practicable solution is for Labour to declare that, once elected, it would hold a national referendum on the defence question.

***"Benn and the Left could not oppose a referendum on grounds of principle."***

By giving this undertaking, Labour's leaders could take the defence issue out of the party political debate with the Conservatives and the other parties, and simultaneously out of the internal political debate within the Party, and thereby free the Party to get on with addressing the other vital items on its agenda.

They would, of course, have to weather Thatcher's and possibly Owen's ridicule. Such a declaration could very reasonably be interpreted as a confession of political inadequacy, as an acknowledgement that Labour simply cannot cope with the defence issue. But since this inadequacy is self-evident, little fresh political harm can come from frankly admitting it, *so long as this admission is accompanied by a realistic proposal for dealing with the problem in another way.*

Indeed, with a bit of political robustness and skill, Labour's leaders could make a virtue out of this necessity. If there is one issue of which it may reasonably be held that it should transcend party divisions, it is defence. Since an issue is being made of defence, it is entirely reasonable that the electorate as a whole should have the final word. And since it is desirable that this be clear and unequivocal, it needs to be distinguished from the electorate's judgements on other matters, and therefore be the subject of a referendum rather than a general election.

Such a course would be able to cite two important precedents, the 1975 referendum on British membership of the European Community and the referendum on Spain's membership of NATO held by Felipe Gonzales's socialist government in 1986.

Since Tony Benn and the Labour Left were the champions of the 1975 referendum, they could not oppose a referendum on defence on grounds of political principle. Since the result of the referendum would undoubtedly be a triumph for realism and responsibility, the Labour Right would have no good reason to oppose this course either. Nor would Ron Todd have grounds for baulking at it, since it would get him off the hook with his own executive. And however much Neil Kinnock and his colleagues might dislike taking our advice, they have every reason to do so on this occasion, since it is the only way they can get out of the corner they are now in. That it is a feasible way was demonstrated by Felipe Gonzales two years ago.

Gonzales and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) came to power with a doctrinal hostility to Spain's NATO membership and a commitment to holding a referendum on the question. They had originally assumed that this referendum would give a clear majority for leaving NATO, but in fact it did the opposite, to their enormous relief.

Once in office, Gonzales & Co. realised all the awkward implications of their original position. They therefore abandoned it, with commendable forthrightness. They explained very frankly to the Spanish people that they had been badly placed, in opposition, to appreciate all aspects of the situation and that, while they would honour their undertaking to hold a referendum, they would no longer recommend a vote to leave NATO, but the opposite. And Gonzales actually campaigned very vigorously for a vote to remain in NATO.

In short, Gonzales is a smart cookie, and having realised in time the trap he had got himself into, he adroitly and decisively found a way out of it.

This is the sort of thing that Neil Kinnock needs to do.

***"On the defence issue, the Labour Party - and Neil Kinnock in particular - resemble nothing so much as a fly in a fly-bottle."***

Since L&TUR has been Kinnock's most incisive critic within the Labour Party over the last two years, he may find it psychologically difficult to take our advice. This would be a pity for him as well as for the Party. We should therefore explain that, while we shall continue to criticise him and his colleagues whenever we feel they are going astray, there is no personal or ideological animus in this criticism. We would support them if they were leading the Party effectively. All things being equal, there is nothing we should like more than to see a working class boy from South Wales in No 10.

But one of the prerequisites of becoming prime minister is the ability to distinguish between good and bad advice. And Kinnock has been acting on very bad advice ever since he became Leader, and so getting nowhere, as we have repeatedly predicted.

Ludwig Wittgenstein once remarked that *"the task of philosophy is to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."* British academic philosophy since Wittgenstein has been a precious irrelevance. But on the defence issue the Labour Party - and Neil Kinnock in particular - resemble nothing so much as a fly in a fly-bottle. And since L&TUR is the only publication on the British Left that is oriented by a coherent political philosophy, it falls to us to show the fly the way out.

It must take it or take the consequences.

## Brynmor John

L&TUR was sorry to learn of the death on December 13 of Brynmor John, Labour MP for Pontypridd, at the early age of 54.

Brynmor John was one of those conscientious but self-effacing MPs who used to constitute the centre of gravity of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He will perhaps be best remembered for his spirited opposition to the advance of the unilateralist fashion within the Party, but we shall also remember him as the first Labour MP to acknowledge the value of L&TUR and to take out a subscription to it.

When he invited me to discuss the Review with him at the House of Commons last March, he made it clear that he understood and accepted the magazine's purpose and appreciated its spirit. As Chairman of the *Solidarity* group of Labour MPs (which, as he frankly admitted, was by then virtually defunct), he did not subscribe to all the views which L&TUR has put forward by any means.

But he strongly agreed with our analysis of the basic weaknesses of the Labour Party in its present condition, and expressed the belief that the kind of fresh thinking and uninhibited debate which L&TUR has been pioneering is exactly what Labour needs if it is ever to recover.

We much regret that he will not be able to see the recovery which we are working for.

*Hugh Roberts*

*Labour & Trade Union Review*  
ISSN 0953-3494  
114 Lordship Road, London N16 0QP  
Editor: Hugh Roberts

Volume One Number 9  
January-March 1989

### CONTENTS

<i>Editorial: The Defence Fly Bottle</i>	1-2
<i>Notes on the News: Dukakis; Gorbachev; Poll Tax; The PLO; Anglo-Irish Blarney; Loans for Students; Edwina's Swan Song?</i>	3-7
<i>Comment: Charter 88</i>	8-9
<i>Analysis: Scotland</i>	10-15
Education	16-17
<i>International: Algeria</i>	18-23
<i>Discussion: Transport</i>	24-26
<i>Announcement: No Relation</i>	26
<i>Monitor: The Battle of Ideas</i>	27
<i>Analysis: Nuclear Power</i>	28

### Next Issue:

How Eric Hobsbawm helped get Labour into its present mess  
Bevin, Bevan and Nuclear Weapons  
Trade Union Diary

# Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

## Terminate with extreme Liberalism

The defeat of Michael Dukakis became inevitable, when he took the advice of his campaign managers and started fudging the question of whether he was or was not a Liberal. By treating the matter as something possibly disgraceful, he was doing the Republicans' work for them. By the time he decided to switch tactics, it was too late.

The sad thing is, Dukakis did have some quite good ideas. His proposal to give the USA a rudimentary Health Service was excellent; at present even rich people can get broken by serious illness. He would also have been certain to raise taxes to help plug the Federal Budget deficit.

On the other hand, had Dukakis won, he

might have either opened up the way for new expansions by Russian tanks and Iranian religious fanatics (as Carter did), or else blundered into a really dangerous confrontation (as Kennedy did over the Cuban missiles). America's liberals have a bad record in dealing with the rest of the world.

President Bush has promised not to raise taxes. In any other county but the USA, he would have the power to cut public expenditure instead. The US Constitution denies him that authority; it is deliberately designed to prevent concentration of power. Thus he may not be able to close the gap between spending and revenue; not unless he can get a solid and extensive deal with Congress. The chance remains that there

will be a real economic bust-up, at just the moment when most socialists are assuming that the crises of capitalism are over.

## Gorbachev's Last Post

When Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, it did not occur to him that his own party might create a state that would end up as the last vestige of imperialism. But that, in effect, is what has happened.

The USSR is nominally a free federation of Socialist nations. In practice, it is an evolution of the Russian Empire. Its leaders may be beginning to denounce "Stalin's crimes", but they are happy to hang on to the loot he acquired for them. Apart from

Finland and a chunk of Poland, Stalin recovered all the territories the Tsars had once held, and added a few bits besides.

In terms of abstract logic, the sort of logic that is talked at the UN when other parts of the world are discussed, there is no reason why each of the republics of the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" should not become a separate nation-state. And indeed, the Soviet constitution introduced by Stalin in the 1930s does give them the right of secession. (It gives Soviet citizens all sorts of splendid rights that they have never in practice been able to enjoy.)

But there is little chance of these nations ever again becoming nation-states. Not for any reason of abstract justice or morality. But for a very basic power-political reason: the Great Russians dominate the existing set-up, and would probably start a nuclear war before they would agree to let go of the non-Russian territories. For this reason, and for no other, the Baltic republics should be advised to put up with Moscow rule. Still, it is the last vestige of imperialism; let no one pretend any differently.

#### Revolt of the Poll Tax Payers?

In the 1960s and 1970s, right-wing "ratepayers" candidates had some success in local elections. They were limited by the fact that most people in high-rate areas do not directly pay the rates, or else do not find them a great burden. The "ratepayers" protest could only go so far.

But what happens with the Poll Tax? Most people on the Left have been assuming that it will rebound against the Tories. But the big Poll Tax burden will be felt by poor people in the Inner Cities. They may try to vote out Thatcher - but her power base is in any case elsewhere; she can live with their hostility.

Given a fourth term for Thatcher - a depressingly likely event at the time of writing - what will they do? Poor people crushed by a burden of Poll Tax are likely to turn to anyone who offers to ease the pain. Specifically, there could be an opening for some sort of non-Thatcherite cost-cutting regime that would offer to cut or sell off *everything* to ease the burden.

It is a disgraceful fact that many people on the Labour Left are unconcerned about the Poll Tax. They themselves will be able to pay it; they calculate that it will also inflame "the masses" and increase their power. This cynical calculation may also turn out to be wildly wrong. Honesty can very often be the best policy!

#### The PLO almost say it

Supposing you have a neighbour who has several times tried to murder you; who declares that he has a perfect right to murder you; and who has been indirectly responsible for the deaths of many of your relatives. And supposing that he makes a series of



Arafat addressing the UN in 1974. But what is his word worth today?

ambiguous statements that could be taken to mean that he no longer intends to murder you. Do you therefore embrace him as a friend?

The PLO's statement on Israel was hailed by everyone who is in no danger of having to live with the consequences. It was taken to mean that the PLO recognised Israel, because this was the simplest interpretation of what it said. And a few weeks later, Arafat actually said explicitly that this was what it meant. As far as most of the world is concerned, Arafat and the PLO have done everything they can be expected to do. It is now up to Israel to respond.

The world has a short memory. It has forgotten that back in the 1930s there was simply no place in the world for the Jews who were being pushed out of Germany and eastern Europe. It has been forgotten that Hitler would have been quite willing to ship them to Palestine, had not the British bowed to Arab pressure and forbidden it.

The UN resolution of 1947 tried to make the best of a bad situation. The displaced Jews of the world had to go somewhere; it was understandable that many could no longer feel safe as a minority in any non-Jewish state. A single Jewish state - in a world full of states dominated by Christians or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists - seemed the only solution. But one also had to recognise the rights of the existing inhabitants. Therefore, the UN decided on partition. The Jews said yes; the Palestinians said no, and asked their fellow-Arabs to help them throw out the Jewish settlers.

Arafat has come as close as he can to abandoning this policy, without actually

abandoning it. He says that the PLO now accepts Israel - *but the PLO as a whole has not said it*. Nor has the PLO modified its charter, which still talks of wiping Israel off the face of the map. Even his best friends would not call Arafat straightforward!

It is notable that he waited until *after* the Israeli election; a slight swing to Labour might have produced a government willing to give up Gaza and the West Bank. It was almost as if he designed it to be something that would impress the world, while avoiding any risk that Israel could actually accept it.

If this was his aim, then he has succeeded very well. The USA has agreed to talk to the PLO. But no one on the Palestinian side seems very upset at what Arafat has conceded. And the pressure will now be on Israel, not just to trade land for peace, but also to accept a sovereign PLO-dominated Palestinian state. Israel, the only homeland for the much-persecuted Jews, is supposed to trust its future to the PLO's apparent change of heart.

One should look at the way that other Arab states have treated their minorities - Kurds in Iraq, non-Muslim Blacks in Sudan. Islam in general is less tolerant than it was in 1947, when it refused to see that the Jews might have any rights in the original Jewish homeland, the core of their religious and cultural feelings.

Israel has good reason to fear the possibility of a Palestinian state. Nation-states are *sovereign*; in the last analysis they are not bound by any agreements they may make. Even if Arafat means it, he can not speak for his successors. Today Gaza and the West Bank; tomorrow the whole of what was once Palestine!



### Post-Islamism?

The Iranian revolution was a high point of the "Islamist" movement within Muslim countries. With luck, it may turn out to have been *the* high point: a peak of power and potential that will not be repeated.

It is wrong to speak of "Islamic Fundamentalism".

Christian Fundamentalism involves hanging onto a literal belief in the cosmology and history of the Book of Genesis and in the whole Bible as the literal Word of God. In this sense, all devout Muslims are Fundamentalists; they believe the Koran to have been given down directly from God. And since the Koran is mostly moral exhortation, this does not create such a tension with science and secular knowledge.

The Islamist movement is basically an attempt to rule modern states according to laws derived from the Koran, and worked out in detail for pre-industrial states. Islamists also claim divine sanction for their politics; anyone who is against them is against God.

The Iran-Iraq war was a direct test of this notion. And Iran, despite having a larger population, failed to break Iraq. Nothing in the course of the war suggested either divine guidance or divine favour. They fought it for several more years than were strictly necessary, at vast cost in blood and money. Islamism in Iran proved to be entirely human and fallible.

The victory of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, and the fragile peace that seems to have been made in Sudan, could be signs of a turning of the tide. It is not a question of lack of belief in Islam; when Benazir Bhutto referred to General Zia's death as a punishment from God, she doubtless meant it quite literally. What it may mean is a resurgence of an older and more tolerant form of Islam. Let us hope so.

### Potted History

The standard view of the Nazis was cobbled together for propaganda purposes before and during World War Two. Many aspects of it were quite false. For instance, it

was implied that most of them, including Hitler, were homosexual. This was totally false, but it made for good propaganda at a time when homosexuality was deeply unpopular. It was also claimed that Hitler was really called Schickelgrüber. His father was for a time known by that name, but had established his membership of the Hitler family some time before Adolf himself was born.

I do not blame the people who cooked up the original propaganda. Lies are unpleasant, but not as unpleasant as bombs and bullets. Given that the war could not be avoided, it was fair enough that truth should be the first casualty. It would have been a victim of genocide, had the Nazis won.

The trouble is, most people since then have been too lazy to go back and work out what the Nazis actually were and were not. Everyone played the game of associating their political enemies with Fascism. Even the neo-Nazis tend to imitate the propaganda-Nazis, not the complex populist movement that actually existed. And of course, no one could understand why the Germans should have accepted such a thing.

Christabel Bielenberg's *The Past is Myself* is one of a limited number of books that give a different and more plausible picture of the rise of Hitler. Hardly anyone expected things to go the way they actually did. They backed him because he seemed the best chance of a return to normality. A way out of a world slump that had made everybody poor in the name of economic orthodoxy. A way out of the Versailles settlement that had torn away large territories that were ethnically German. Had democratic politics been succeeding - as they did succeed after World War Two - Hitler would have remained a fringe politician.

I'd been looking forward to seeing the television adaptation of this work. I should have known better. Smart media folk are not going to let the testimony of an eye-witness jolt them out of their pre-conceived ideas. Dennis Potter's *Cristabel* has restored all the comic-book Nazi clichés.

It's often been noted that those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. It was only good fortune that the far right chose to be comic-opera rather than authentic fascists. But, on the other hand, we do have Thatcherism.

Thatcher owes nothing to Hitlerism; I have no doubt that she feels a genuine loathing for Nazism. (As did Churchill, the leading right-wing Tory of his era.) But she has done the same job in the 1980s that Hitler did in the 1930s; she has broken the power of the Left and made right-wing ideas look like "the wave of the future". Moreover, she has done it without setting up a totalitarian system and without any drift towards world war. And most people on the Left find it baffling. They should have looked more closely at Hitler as he actually was!

### Who fears to speak to IRA?

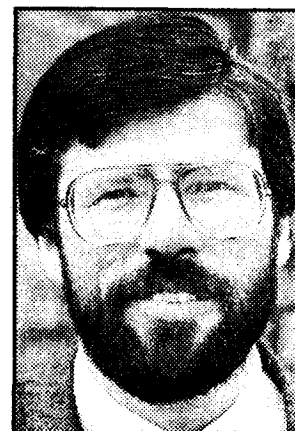
When a jury reaches a split decision about a group of foreigners who came to their home town for the undoubted purpose of blowing up some of their fellow-citizens, then it is reasonable to suppose that the death of the said foreigners was pretty fishy. This is the only sensible conclusion to draw from the Gibraltar inquest.

The trouble is that the IRA is never treated as being what it actually is: an army engaged in a war against the British state. Recognising them as a hostile army would give the British authorities freedom to arrest them whenever they found them, and to hold them for as long as the war continued. While this is not the case, it is not surprising that soldiers are reluctant to risk their lives to take prisoners who may then walk free on some legal technicality.

Successive British governments have confused the issue by trying to pretend to treat the IRA as a bunch of criminals. There is some overlap, of course. But there is probably just as much overlap between the British Army and the British Underworld. The Kray twins got a lot of their ideas during a brief period of National Service. Had there been a suitable war to send them to, they might have ended up as heroes and medal winners.

The British government has accepted the basic idea of Irish Catholic Nationalism: that the Ulster Protestants have no right to reject a "United Ireland". They insist that it can not happen without consent. But they do not say that the obvious lack of consent makes Dublin's claims unjust. As far as Thatcher is concerned, Ulster can sit in limbo until consent is finally given. She won't even allow them to vote for her; Northern Ireland residents are not allowed to join the Tory Party, or any of the other major parties.

Thatcher has tried to silence the IRA, because she has no answer to their basic argument. Unless and until she says that Dublin's claim is *unjust*, she has no answer to people who put their lives at risk in order to enforce the claim.







Tom King and John Stanley flanked by the Irish Foreign Affairs and Justice Ministers  
- but who is leading whom up the garden path?

#### Anglo-Irish Blarney

Once again, the Irish judicial system is somehow failing to extradite known Republicans to Britain. And Mrs Thatcher just doesn't understand why this should be. She can't understand why a state founded by the IRA, dominated by two parties that are both offshoots of the IRA, and sharing the IRA's basic aim of wanting to get Britain out of the "fourth green field", should be less than 100% keen about extraditing people who are wanted for their activities as IRA volunteers.

The Dublin Government does not support terrorism; perish the thought! On the other hand, they have good reason to like some of the results of terrorism. Were it not for the IRA, Stormont would very probably still be governing Northern Ireland. (It had the support of the majority, after all.) And had the IRA decided to call off their campaign some time in the early 1980s, there would have been no Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The British media never seem to think of these things, when they discuss the latest case where some extraordinary legal difficulty has yet again frustrated the Irish in their attempts to extradite patriots who are trying to achieve an aim set down in the Irish constitution. They also never mention the Arms Trials.

To refresh the memory - since no one else is likely to do it - the Provisional IRA had been set up with more than a little support from people in Southern Ireland. Mr Haughey himself was accused of being involved; was put on trial and was acquitted.

But some of the people working for him were convicted.

It's always seemed odd that the shrewdest man in Irish politics should have been unaware of what his subordinates were up to. But in Ireland, as in Britain, guilt has to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

Dublin and London are agreed that the best long-term solution would be a United Ireland - though only "by consent", of course. Therefore, the Province is left in political limbo until such consent shall be forthcoming. But surveys of opinion reveal that a United Ireland is favoured by only a minority of the Catholics - and by practically none of the Protestants. It also turns out that a majority of both communities would favour British political parties organising in Northern Ireland - which they have always refused to do, and which they still refuse to do.

Nothing much new is likely to happen in 1989. I confidently predict that there will be several more cases in which wanted republicans will somehow or other prove impossible to extradite. Northern Ireland will be excluded from normal politics, and then blamed for being abnormal. And so on and on and on.

#### Means Test Blues

Have the Tories suddenly grown concerned that they are giving away too much to the rich? It certainly sounded that way, when they were trying to justify charges for eye tests and dental tests. The same thing has been said about child benefits. It has even

been said - and then hastily denied - about old age pensions.

Should hard-headed socialists decide that, whatever the Tory motives, it is a sound principle that benefits should go only to those who need them? It does indeed seem weird that people with plenty of money can scoop up free benefits, when resources are short to help the really badly off.

The problem is, where do you draw the line? More importantly, *how* do you draw the line? Any sort of "payment by need" must of necessity involve a lot of complicated form-filling, which will put people off, and deprive them of benefits they are supposed to be getting. This has happened with the previous set of Tory welfare changes: the "take-up" has been much less than predicted, which means that the number of losers has been even greater than the critics had expected.

The Tories are trying to establish a stingy principle: you get nothing at all unless you pay for it. The hopelessly poor will be looked after, but only very reluctantly. Meanwhile the well-off and the rich, while no longer receiving free benefits, will pay a lot less tax and be free to spend money on chocolates or dental checks, exactly as they choose. And in due course, assuming that public opinion continues to drift to the right, a really tough system of means-testing can be introduced.

What can Labour say? The fact is, Labour has no coherent alternative principle. Labour governments failed to stick to the simple idea that social needs are met from a social fund

that is raised by income tax, according to the ability to pay. Labour was happy to have the poor and needy supervised by an intrusive bureaucracy. It was under Labour that the notion of "targeting" was established. Labour under Kinnock seems to offer only a softer and less coherent version of Thatcherism.

The socialist answer would be: lots of free testing, since catching faults in the early stage saves money in the long run, plus a simpler system like a negative income tax, removing the absurdities of the "poverty trap".

#### Loan-shark PhD

Educated young people are a basic national resource. A few people can successfully educate themselves, but not many. Skills on a mass scale can only be produced by education, and a well-educated population is essential for a strong economy.

No one should ever be made to pay for their education. It is not a selfish luxury; it is the life-blood of the economy. And if having a degree improves one's future income - as it probably does - then income tax should take care of the matter.

Unfortunately, this principle has never been fully established. There was - and still is - a silly system whereby students with well-off parents got smaller grants. They were supposed to get the rest from their parents, who in turn could claim it back off their income tax. It does not always work out that way; some students from well-off homes end up having less to live on than if their parents had been poor. All in all, it was a system of pointless discrimination that persisted because it had always been done that way. (Precedent and tradition mean everything to Civil Servants.)

Now the Tories are changing things - but from bad to worse. Instead of grants, there will be loans. Small loans at first, but they are intended to get bigger and bigger, until eventually there is nothing but a loan. Students are expected to pay back these loans out of their future earnings.

Students who get grants are likely to feel that they owe something to the rest of society. Those who get loans will feel an urgent need to gouge out the money from the rest of society; they will turn their attention to things that are profitable to them, regardless of who else it hurts. No doubt this is just what the Tories want. But what can Labour set against it, except a bad and silly bureaucracy?

#### Curried Eggs

"Factory Farming" is not really anything new. Humans have been imposing an unnatural life on plants and animals since agriculture began. None of our farm animals have much resemblance to their wild ancestors.

By and large, modern food is also much healthier than what our ancestors would have eaten. Food that we would now class as

unfit for human consumption would have been seen as much better than average in the Middle Ages.

However, farming is a highly competitive business. This means that farmers will do whatever they can get away with to make a profit or just to stay in business. Health regulations are supposed to limit what they do. But it had become notorious among those in the know that the egg industry had problems with Salmonella, and that too little was being done about it.

It has been claimed that very few people are made ill by infected eggs. But Salmonella is not easy to detect, and its effects can easily be confused with other sorts of illness. The truth is, no one knows how much damage Salmonella is doing. We only know that it can be dangerous.

Enter Edwina Currie. She did no more than repeat what had been said before by various experts - that Salmonella bacteria were widespread, and that no egg could be considered safe unless it was thoroughly

cooked.

For no good reason, except that Edwina had already established herself as newsworthy, the tabloids took the matter up. This spread a sudden panic about eggs, and sales suddenly dropped. The mass of the public realised for the first time that eggs might not be safe.

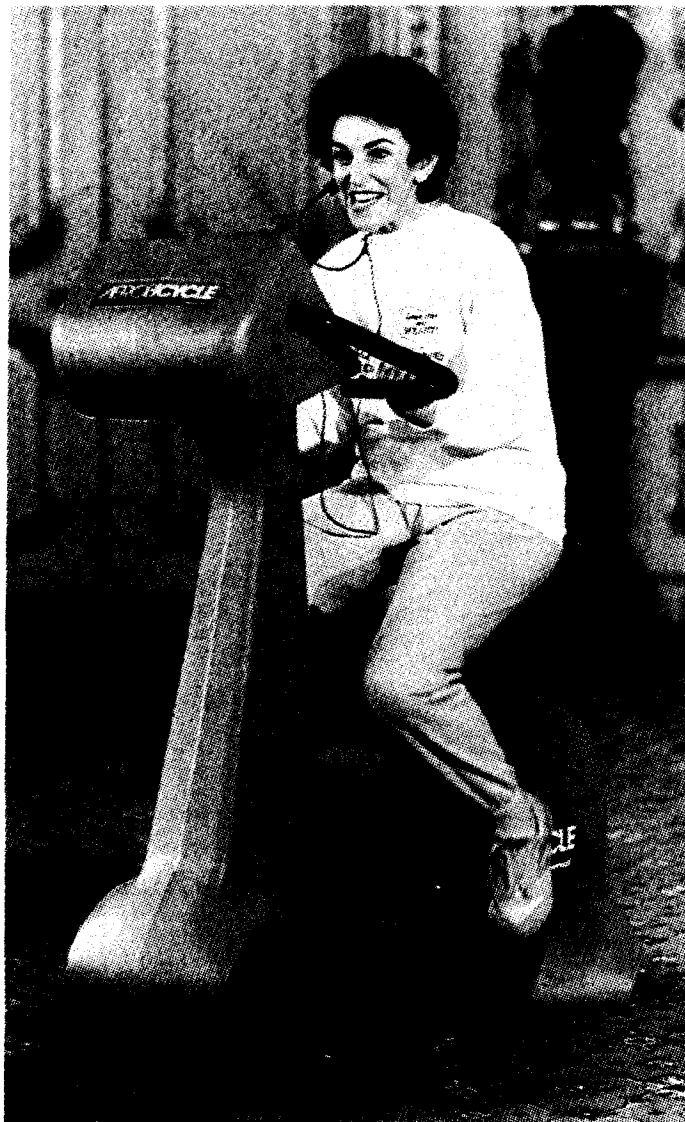
A friend of mine who runs a health shop reported that her sales of eggs actually went up. They were free-range eggs, of course, and also tested for Salmonella. But there was no certainty that they were safe, and with commendable honesty she told them so. And people bought the eggs anyway; presumably thinking that anything from a health store must be healthy.

(People sometimes poison themselves with overdoses of vitamins on the same principle; the "recommended maximum dose" is based on careful research and should be respected.)

In any case, the enraged egg producers raised a storm of protest, and eventually forced Edwina Currie's resignation. Part of the reason for this was the attitude of the Opposition; Labour joined in the attack on a minister who had highlighted a real threat to public health.

Why was this done? On the basis of principle, Labour should have defended the interests of consumers against profitable but risky agricultural practices. Even on a purely pragmatic basis, they should have seen that Thatcher was in a weak position; letting things drift for a couple of weeks while ministers disagreed with each other. Instead, they went along with the notion that it was a gaffe by Edwina Currie, for which she should be punished. Thatcher was therefore able to save face by getting rid of her. And an issue that might have split the different groups of Tory supporters has been allowed to die down.

The trouble with the "pragmatism" of Labour's leaders is that it sacrifices principle even when it would be to their advantage to uphold it!



The Tories have told Edwina to get on her bike - but should Labour have joined the chorus?

# Charter 88 - The New Left's Dernier Cri ?

by  
Brendan Clifford

*Charter 88, which has been given considerable publicity by the apparatus of the state it declares to be undemocratic, is an exercise in political futility and historical ignorance.*

Its basic demand is for a written Constitution. After all the intellectual gymnastics and the hot air, after the "theorising of theoretical practice" and the "hegemonising of the ideological state apparatuses", after the Marxism and the Leninism and the Gramscism and the Korschism and the Althusserianism, we end up with the fetish: a written Constitution.

For twenty years the New Left authors of Charter 88 applied their considerable energy and intellectual ingenuity to shifting the British Labour movement out of the "empiricist tradition" which they imagined to be the obstacle to an inconceivable but deeply felt revolutionary transformation. What they actually achieved was to make the Labour Party unelectable. And now the magical formula for raising themselves out of the hole they have dug themselves into is that Britain should pick up the cheapest bit of trivia in the political bazaar: a written Constitution.

## Calvin and Rome

Anthony Barnett, trail-blazer for this counter-(1688) Revolution, writes in the *New Statesman* (December 2):

*"many of those who are distinctly Scottish and those who are self-consciously Catholic now argue for a written constitution...When the inheritors of Calvin and Rome agree, then something really has changed in the British order of things."*

But Calvin and Rome *always* agreed that peoples should be bound up in written Constitutions judicially administered. Both had comprehensive schemes for the maintenance of social order, and did their damndest to sew society up in them.

If Cromwell and the Independents had not in 1648 overthrown the Parliamentary majority by force, England would have got the Covenant as a written Constitution, and maybe three-and-a-half centuries of liberal disorder would have been averted. And if James II had not been overthrown in 1688, England would very likely have got a written Constitution in the very effective form of a Concordat with Rome, and three centuries of disorder would have been averted.

A Declaration of Rights, to have  
Page 8

ideological force, needs to be a coherent positive vision. Rome and Calvinism both had their positive visions of the destiny of mankind. The American and French Revolutions also had their visions, constructed by theoretical systematisers out of the 1688 Revolution. And 1917 had the economic-determinist vision of scientific socialism.

## Political impotence

The distinctiveness of Britain derives from the fact that the 1688 Revolution was not enacted in the service of a positive vision. The state it established did not exist for an ulterior purpose. Its function was to provide a framework for open-ended change.

Successive waves of radicals in Britain took their inspiration from 1688 for this very reason. And in the great radicalism at the time of the French Revolution, Locke was the Bible of both the English Corresponding Societies and the United Irishmen.

The denigration of 1688 by the present generation of radicals stems from the fact that, having been caught up by totalitarian fantasy, they have no practical programme of change to implement. And having rendered themselves politically impotent, they are dreaming of a *deus ex machina* in the form of a written Constitution.

They want a Constitutional Revolution because they no longer hope to win a general election. But if you cannot even win a general election, how can you expect to make a fundamental alteration in the Constitution of the state?

## A committee concoction

Charter 88 is a cry of despair, or a chorus of several discordant cries of despair. It is obviously a committee concoction, with incompatible bits put in to satisfy incompatible opinions.

For example, it says in the fifth paragraph: *"The current administration is not an un-English interruption in the country's way of life."* That is the proper position of New Left Marxism. But since the Charter is also signed by people of a basically different political disposition, paragraph 7 says: *"The break with the immediate past shows how vulnerable Britain has always been to elective dictatorship."* So it is an un-English interruption: but, though it took 300 years to materialise, its possibility has always lain in the unwritten character of the 1688 Constitution.

We read in another paragraph: *"Conditions here are so much better than in Eastern Europe as to bear no comparison. But our rights in the United Kingdom remain unformulated..."*

Most states in the world have beautifully formulated rights in their constitutions, though the people are not in actual possession of them. The people of Britain are in possession of very extensive rights, but in order to remain in possession of them they must uphold them continuously by political activity. Liberty in Britain is dependent on there always being an effective party of opposition - an Opposition which makes the outcome of every election doubtful.

Furthermore, if there had been a comprehensive and authoritative formulation of rights for Britain in 1688, things would have been frozen at the stage reached in 1688, and many rights which are now commonplace would probably have gone unthought of.

## Constraint on government

The concluding paragraph says: *"The inscription of laws does not guarantee their realisation. Only people themselves can ensure freedom..."*

But the thrust of Charter 88 is that a party which wins three elections in a row should be subjected to a Constitutional restraint in legislation. As it is put in another paragraph: *"No country can be considered free in which the government is above the law."* In the case in point this means that Parliament must be prevented from making what laws it pleases. (In Britain, government is always above the law, in the sense that it rests on a Parliamentary majority, and can therefore change the law. This capacity for changing the law means that it is not in the long run bound by any particular law.)

The constraint on government required by the British Constitution is effective Opposition. Assuming, as Charter 88 does, that the Opposition has rendered itself permanently ineffective, there are two possible devices by which a Government with a reliable Parliamentary majority can be prevented from doing as it pleases: the Swiss way and the Irish way.

It has always been a condition of the existence of Switzerland that the legislative capacity of the state should be limited. One of the means to this end is that legislation



can be struck down by referendum.

The Irish in 1937 adopted a statement of the rights which the independent state was to cherish. And to ensure that Parliament (the Dail) did not legislate in breach of these rights, sovereignty was transferred from it to the judiciary.

#### A conservative force

The value of a written Constitution policed by the judiciary has been demonstrated in Ireland recently. The world outlook enshrined in the 1937 Constitution was thrown into considerable confusion twenty years ago as a result of the Second

Vatican Council. If Parliament had been free to legislate, it is probable that during the next fifteen years it would have established a right of divorce and other liberal rights. But the conservative power of the written Constitution held the ring all through the 1970s, until the traditional value system enshrined in the Constitution recovered its vigour in the early 1980s.

A written Constitution, effectively policed, is an immensely conservative force. If Britain now decided to adopt a written Constitution, it is reasonable to suppose that the party which has won three elections in a row would determine what was in it. We cannot imagine why the Charter 88 people imagine they would be allowed to write it.

There has been for some time a body of Tory opinion in favour of a written Constitution. And if one were to be adopted now, Lord Hailsham probably has a first draft ready.

#### Lester at a loss

The Radio Four phone-in on December 5 was given over to Charter 88, in the person of Anthony Lester QC. It was a dismal affair, with one moment of enlightenment which showed how little thought the Chartists had given to the meaning of their demand.

Lester was asked whether he would include in the Charter the right of the Northern Ireland electors to take part in electing the government, i.e. to cast their votes between the parties of Government and Opposition. But he just couldn't see it. His response was



*Consorting with the merchants of trivia - Robin Cook taking delivery of Charter 88 outside Parliament*

the response of the Tory administration in Northern Ireland when it cannot avoid speaking to that demand: parties are free to contest elections where they please, and can't be forced to contest them where they don't please. This reply was entirely in the spirit of what Charter 88 calls "the dark side" of the Glorious Revolution. It was a negative expression of the disorderly political mentality fostered by that Revolution.

The Charter says "Scotland is governed like a province from Whitehall". But Scotland participates in the election of the Government, and its votes have been rendered ineffective in the past decade only because the Labour Party has made itself ineffective. But it makes no difference in Northern Ireland what is happening in party politics because the Northern Ireland electors are under exclusion orders from both the Labour and Tory parties, and also from the SLiDs. It is always governed by a Government elected elsewhere, and by a party through which it can have no representation. It is "governed like a province from Whitehall", and it is governed by dictatorship - a dictatorship being a government which you are allowed to play no part in electing. But this is not mentioned in the Charter. And Anthony Lester could not see that it was of any relevance to the Charter.

There being no pressure of callers, Nick Ross gently talked him round to an admission that maybe there was something undemocratic in not being able to vote in the election of the government.

#### The Chartists' best friends

It is understandable why the Chartists overlooked the best example they could have cited in making their case. They participate in the bias against the Union with Northern Ireland.

But if there were "a written constitution, anchored in the idea of universal citizenship", how could it avoid consolidating the position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom? It would in fact accomplish what the Ulster Unionists demand, but what is impossible under Parliamentary sovereignty: a binding guarantee to Northern Ireland.

And if the Constitution, "anchored in the idea of universal citizenship", could contrive to perpetuate the unique form of disfranchisement practised against Northern Ireland, that would suit Ulster Unionism down to the ground. The Unionist idea of heaven on earth is to have a secure position within the UK while remaining free of the British political system.

Reactionary elements within Ulster Unionism have been in favour of a written Constitution for forty years. For a long time they thought they had one for themselves in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, and legal ideologues fed that illusion. But you cannot have a secure written Constitution within a basic unwritten one, so the Unionists got a rude awakening in 1972 when Parliament abolished Stormont at a stroke.

If Charter 88 wants some really solid support for its scheme, it should canvass Jim Molyneux and Ian Paisley.

# Scotland Not Protesting But Parting

by

Hugh Roberts

*The Labour and Conservative Parties are contriving to create a major constitutional crisis over Scotland. This crisis is yet to come to a head, but there is no sign whatever that it will be headed off.*

The crisis now in prospect concerns Scotland's position within the United Kingdom and the integrity of the United Kingdom as a whole. There is now a serious possibility that the reactionary vision which Tom Nairn, the well-known pseudo-Marxist litterateur, outlined with such misplaced relish in *The Break-Up of Britain* will become a reality.

Such a development would have the gravest possible implications for the British working class and trade union movement as a whole, and for Scottish workers and trade unionists in particular. And there are no grounds whatever for assuming that democratic politics in general would not

suffer, on both sides of the border. (The *New Statesman's* claim that democratic politics would actually benefit is an irresponsible fantasy.)

The responsibility of both the Labour and Conservative Parties in this affair lies in the fact that their respective actions on the main social issues (and especially the poll tax) since the 1987 general election have made a major and qualitative development of Scottish nationalism inevitable. The Conservative Party in office has fuelled the nationalists' propaganda line that it has no mandate to govern Scotland, while the Labour Party has tacitly pandered to this line and comprehensively failed to offer an alternative to it.

## A nationalist thesis

The thesis that the Conservative Party has no mandate to govern Scotland is a

nationalist thesis. This does not make it false. There are occasions when nationalist movements have both truth and democratic principle on their side, as there also occasions when they have neither the one nor the other.

On this occasion, however, the nationalist thesis is untrue. The Conservative Party certainly has a mandate to govern Scotland. What it does not have is a democratic mandate to impose the poll tax on Scotland or on any other part of the United Kingdom. It is essential to Scottish nationalist politics to confuse these two issues, and equally essential to democratic socialist politics to preserve the distinction between them.

The nationalist thesis rests entirely on the fact that the Conservatives won only 10 of the 72 Scottish seats at the last election. This statistic is beside the point. Within the terms of the Act of Union, which is still in force, the Conservative Party has a mandate to govern Scotland in so far as it has a mandate to govern the United Kingdom as a whole. Its victory in the 1987 general election gave it that mandate very convincingly.

(Strictly speaking, the 1987 general election gave the Conservative Party a mandate to govern not the United Kingdom as a whole, but only England, Scotland and Wales. The Conservative Party did not seek a mandate to govern in Northern Ireland and does not possess one. No British political party has either sought or possessed a mandate to govern Northern Ireland at any stage since 1920 and Northern Ireland has accordingly been deprived of representative government throughout this period.

But this argument is of no use to Scottish nationalism. And since the people of Northern Ireland are yet to protest effectively against their





own disfranchisement, by the rule of thumb that legitimate government is government in which the people acquiesce the British party which obtains a parliamentary majority in Great Britain has possessed a *de facto* mandate, by proxy so to speak, to misgovern Northern Ireland in the colonial manner.)

### The Act of Union

Since the Act of Union in 1707, Scotland has been an integral part of the United Kingdom and governed from Westminster. It has retained certain important features of its earlier sovereign existence, including a separate judiciary, education system and established Church. But, in accepting the Act of Union, the Scottish Parliament abolished itself in exchange for full (in fact, disproportionate) representation for Scotland in the Westminster Parliament, and thereby accepted that Scotland would be governed by whatever party held a majority at Westminster.

The Act of Union of 1707 did not stipulate that the party which forms the government at Westminster must possess a majority of the parliamentary seats in Scotland in order to have a mandate to govern Scotland. At no point since 1707 has that demand been seriously canvassed, let alone conceded, until today, and there is a fundamental reason for this.

The Act of Union unified Britain (that is, England and Wales) and Scotland politically. It constituted a single unit of government, Great Britain, where before there had been two. To have required the party in government at Westminster to possess a majority in Scotland in addition to a majority overall would have been to continue to treat Scotland as a separate unit of government and would therefore have negated the act of political unification which had been agreed to.

To make this requirement of the government at Westminster today is to require it to behave as if the Act of Union has already been repealed.

It is natural that the Scottish nationalists should make this demand. The coherent element of Scottish nationalism is the separatist element. They certainly want the Act of Union to be repealed. And they have evidently calculated that an effective way of getting it repealed is for its logic to be subverted first, so that it may be rendered obsolete in practice as a preliminary to its being abandoned in principle.

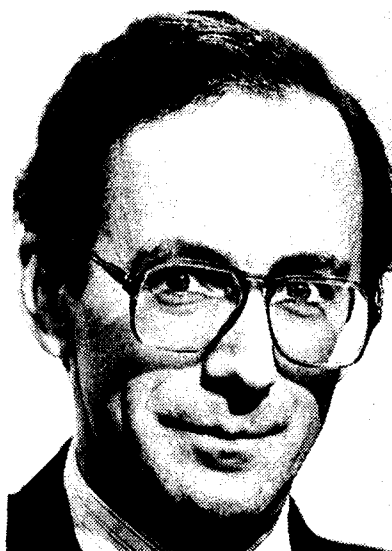
### Labour's recklessness: gutlessness and complacency

In recklessly going along with the SNP's propaganda line that the Conservative Party has no mandate to govern Scotland, the Labour Party has given enormous moral support to Scottish nationalism and has thereby cut the ground from under its own feet.

And by arguing that everyone must

meekly bow to the poll tax and by refusing to give moral support to those who will not do so - even those thousands who are already hopelessly in debt and cannot conceivably pay it - on the grounds that the government *does* have a mandate to impose this legislation no matter how divisive and unpopular it may be, Labour's leaders have ensured that popular feeling on this issue in Scotland is canalised by the SNP.

What Labour should have been saying is exactly the opposite of what it has been saying. It should have vigorously insisted that the Conservative Party does have a mandate to govern Scotland, not only as a matter of principle, in that the preservation of the integrity of the United Kingdom is in the working class interest, but also out of elementary partisan self-interest. (Does not the Labour Party aspire to govern England, after all? And will it not claim to have a mandate to govern England if, despite winning a minority of English seats, its electoral success in Scotland and Wales gives it a majority overall?)



Malcolm Rifkind - No mandate to  
misgovern Scotland

But, while stoutly rebutting the SNP's claims on this point, Labour should have been insisting with equal vigour that the government has no mandate to introduce the poll tax *anywhere* in the United Kingdom, because the poll tax is an act of misgovernment and *no party, whatever its parliamentary majority, ever has a mandate to misgovern the country.*

Part of the reason for Labour's recklessness in going along with nationalist propaganda themes is nothing other than Labour's own gutlessness. Because Labour, under its present leadership, has no politics whatever, it invariably takes the line of least resistance in its relations with its political rivals.

It goes along with the poll tax and all the other essential features of Thatcherism (with

merely rhetorical reservations - as if they count for anything!) at the level of the state as a whole, because at this level Thatcherism appears unchallengeable to Labour politicians to whom appearances are everything.

But in Scotland nationalism enjoys a local moral ascendancy, and Thatcherism is nowhere. So Labour goes along with nationalist ideology in Scotland, and then gets slaughtered electorally as soon as the contradiction between pandering to two wholly opposed forms of politics comes to a head, as it was bound to on the poll tax issue.

But there is another reason for Labour's recklessness, which is its complacent attitude to the nationalist challenge. It is safe to ride the tiger, because this tiger has neither teeth nor claws, and will fall asleep as soon as it has been given the bowl of milk which is its heart's desire. The bowl of milk which Labour is offering is, of course, Scottish devolution.

### Devolution - the new Danegeld

Labour's leaders suppose that the establishment of a devolved government in Scotland will not subvert the integrity of the United Kingdom in any way, and they also suppose that it will satisfy Scottish nationalism. This is to misread Scottish nationalism altogether. But the prior misconception concerns the implications of devolution.

Ever since the late 1970s, the British Left has been suffering from what can only be described as constitutional cretinism. From the Bennites' drive to 'democratise' the Labour Party to Charter 88's demand for a written constitution and Roy Hattersley's latest proposals for devolution all over the place, the absurd assumption has been made that constitutional arrangements have an effect independently of the principal political forces which operate within them.

It is supposed that devolution in Scotland will not subvert the integrity of the United Kingdom because it did not quite do so in Northern Ireland. This is to overlook the fact that the political force which dominated the devolved government in Northern Ireland, Ulster Unionism, being devoted to maintaining the Union, had been strongly opposed to devolution in the first place and, under Craig and Brookeborough, deliberately subverted the logic of devolution by ensuring that Stormont duplicated practically all of Westminster's legislation and otherwise did as little as possible.

Devolution that is offered as a consolation prize to a worked up nationalist sentiment will have very different consequences from devolution imposed on people who never wanted it in the first place and were strong enough and, initially, intelligent enough to nullify it.

The very last thing that a devolved Scottish parliament will want to do is to duplicate economic and social legislation

passed in London, as Stormont did on the basis of "Step by Step with Westminster". The whole point of having a Scottish Assembly will be to protect Scotland from the legislative powers of a Westminster Parliament dominated by Thatcher Toryism.

In addition to this defensive purpose, the Scottish Assembly is likely to develop the ambition to legislate in all kinds of positive ways. And for this reason devolution in Scotland is bound to subvert the United Kingdom's integrity.

The United Kingdom is a unitary state and its integrity is guaranteed by political arrangements of which the keystone is the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament. In establishing a devolved government in Northern Ireland, the Westminster Parliament did not give up one ounce of this sovereignty. It employed it to the full in overriding Unionist objections to devolution in 1920, and then employed it again in abolishing Stormont at a stroke, irrespective of the Unionists' wishes, in 1972, and once again in imposing the Intergovernmental Conference on Northern Ireland via the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985.

The workings of the Westminster Parliament are dominated by the party which holds a majority there and determines how this Parliament will legislate in economic and social matters for the United Kingdom as a whole. It is inconceivable that Scottish nationalism will be satisfied with an Assembly which is allowed to operate only within the narrow parameters consistent with the ultimate sovereignty of Westminster.

The nationalists are bound to demand that Westminster relinquish its power to legislate in economic and social matters for Scotland. They are therefore bound to come into conflict with the keystone of the British constitutional edifice. For as long as the nationalists are a small minority within a Scottish Assembly, the crisis may be delayed. But long before they acquire an overall majority they can be expected to be setting the agenda and calling the tune. And as soon as they achieve a majority within it, the logic of the situation and of their own position will push them into asserting the sovereign claims of the Scottish Assembly against those of Westminster.

At that point, a position will have been reached which will resemble in certain basic respects the position which obtained in Ireland in 1918, when Sinn Fein won an overall majority of parliamentary seats in Ireland, and immediately set up Dail Eireann and asserted its independence of Westminster.

All that stands between the SNP today and the realisation of its separatist vision in this "doomsday scenario", as it already called north of the border, is the Labour Party's complacent belief that the nationalists will forever remain a minority in Scottish politics. Everything that the Labour Party is doing appears to be premised on this belief. It has enthusiastically supported devolution

and has already entered into talks with all the other Scottish parties about setting up a Constitutional Convention to agree proposals for a Scottish Assembly. It has placed itself squarely on the tiger's back with neither the will nor the means to determine where it is going, and comforts itself with the illusion that it is merely riding a outsize domestic pussy cat which will want to come home before long.

#### Devolution everywhere is no way to disarm nationalism



#### From Andersonstown to Govan

British politics, being English in its origins and essence and correspondingly sure of itself and tolerant to a fault, has long felt entirely comfortable with the manifestations of nationalism on the Celtic fringe. It has felt free to patronise this nationalism, because its manifestations have been mainly cultural in content, leeks and red jerseys, haggis and kilts and Andy Stewart - in short, folklore rather than cultural nationalism of the kind that means business. The whole tendency of British politics has been to encourage and even subsidise these harmless and entertaining expressions of Celtic self-consciousness while sustaining (except in Northern Ireland) all-British political arrangements which integrate the populations of the Celtic fringe into a state system in which entirely different lines of political division, arising from conflicts of class and social philosophy, are the basis of political alignment.

It is now obvious that British politics is failing to cope with the emergence of serious nationalist movements. In part, this may be because it has got too used to their unserious precursors, and cannot grasp the difference between the two. Catholic nationalism in Northern Ireland may have seemed to be largely an affair of Fenian songs and shamrock and suppressed longings in the 1950s and early 1960s, but it has been in deadly earnest since 1970, and the British state has still not woken up to this fact. And for as long as it remains under the influence of the most insular and stupidly self-

righteous variety of Little Englander politics, it is unlikely that it will ever wake up to it.

A state which knew what it was dealing with in Northern Ireland would have communicated this knowledge to its army long ago. Its soldiers would know they were fighting a war and would have acquired a healthy respect for the passions which animate their enemy. And there would be no question of off-duty soldiers taking a casual joy-ride to their deaths at the hands of a funeral crowd in West Belfast.

A Labour Party which knew what it was dealing with in Scotland would never have allowed the nationalists to steal its thunder on the poll tax issue, or in any other way infringe its monopoly of the leadership of the resistance to Thatcherism in Scotland. And there would be no question of a nationalist defector from the Party capturing one of Labour's citadels in West Glasgow.

#### Methinks the lady doth protest too much

The reaction of Labour's leaders to the Govan result was to dismiss it airily as "a protest vote". They contrived to sound very sophisticated and knowing when saying this. The question is, do they really believe it?

If the thousands of former Labour voters who voted for Jim Sillars in Govan were merely registering a protest, what were they protesting against? If they were protesting against Thatcherism, why didn't they vote Labour?

They cannot all have been protesting against the Govan Labour Party's choice of candidate. Whatever Bob Gillespie's limitations, the way he has been scapegoated by the Labour leadership in London and in Scotland has been ridiculous as well as disgusting. And although Jim Sillars was a most impressive candidate, the fact that the Nationalists' appeal was far from dependent on his personality was made clear on the night of the Govan result itself by the SNP victory in a local government by-election in Livingston, where Labour came *third* in a seat it previously held.

Clearly the voters in Govan and Livingston alike were protesting against Labour's failure to oppose Thatcherism effectively. So why on earth has the Labour leadership made no change in its political strategy?

If it was an anti-Labour protest, the obvious thing to do would be to acknowledge Labour's mistakes in order to reassure Labour's errant voters that their point had been taken, and thereby win them back, or at least stem the flow. If acknowledging mistakes does not come easily to Labour leaders, they could have done it implicitly but nonetheless clearly, by announcing a new departure in Scotland, in their anti-poll tax campaign for example. There has been no such announcement.

Labour's leaders have not reacted at all to the Govan result. The function of

dismissing Govan's voters as mere protesters was not to explain them, but simply to dismiss them. It was to treat them as of no importance, in order to sustain the pretence engaged in towards the London media that all is well and Labour is, as ever, on course.

Time will tell who has really been dismissing whom, but it should already be clear that it is Labour's leaders who have been protesting too much. And in doing so they have been compounding their error in Scotland, by treating the voters who abandoned them in Govan with undisguised contempt, as sheep engaging in a transient fling of frisky adventurousness, before automatically - that is, like automata - returning to the fold.

The only conceivable basis for such complacency must be the conviction that Labour's electoral support in Scotland is fundamentally secure, such that no concessions need be made to whatever impatience or unease may develop among Labour voters. This conviction would be reasonable if a Labour victory at the next general election were a serious possibility, and if the SNP were self-evidently incapable of extending its appeal. But it is clear to all and sundry that, barring an unforeseen collapse of Tory politics, there is at present no prospect whatever of a Labour victory. And if Labour's leaders assume that all the SNP can manage is the odd flash in the pan at by-elections, they have not yet got its measure by a long chalk.

### The SNP spreads its wings

Scottish nationalism may once have been an essentially nostalgic and introverted affair (as Welsh nationalism has always been), but it has clearly ceased to be anything of the kind in recent years. It has expanded far beyond its original social and geographical bases and is developing into an increasingly complex and dynamic form of politics.

At the 1987 general election, the SNP's victories were confined to Moray, Banff and Buchan, and Angus East. It has now captured a major bridgehead in Labour's heartland in Glasgow. And its minor victory at Livingston was also highly significant; the seat was in a prosperous new town area that is part of Edinburgh's dormitory suburbia - a very different place from Govan. And while the Tory in Govan was humiliated, the Tory vote in Livingston held up as the SNP took Labour votes.

Since then, Labour has held seats in several council by-elections, but with reduced majorities as the SNP has improved its share. The SNP can expect to pick up more council seats in the coming months, perhaps off Independents, who are plentiful north of Perth except in the Aberdeen area. And above all the SNP can expect to do well in the European elections in June. It should retain its Highlands and Islands seat and may gain Tory-held North East Scotland. And, while it is unlikely to take the Glasgow seat

from Labour (although it is sure to have a good crack at it), it may well be in contention for the Tories' Borders seat and could also threaten Labour's David Martin in Lothian.

To suppose that the Govan result was a flash in the pan is to suppose that the SNP is the same party which won Govan from Labour in 1973, when Margo MacDonald was the nationalist candidate. It isn't. And a sure sign of the transformation which has been achieved in the SNP's profile and prospects is the changed attitude of Scotland's Catholics.

The Catholic element of the Scottish electorate was generally hostile to the SNP in the 1970s, because in those days the SNP was an essentially bourgeois affair, and the association of 'bourgeois' with 'Protestant' was still strong, for sound social reasons. All that now seems to be in the past. Since Margo MacDonald, Alex Salmond and Stephen Maxwell set up the "'79 Group", the SNP has had a vigorous and increasingly influential left wing element in its leadership, which has transformed the party's capacity to appeal to proletarian, including Catholic, voters. And the Catholic Church has accordingly, if discreetly, adopted a new and very flexible attitude to the Party.



Jim Sillars - Labour's bane?

The SNP can now appeal to middle class, traditional working class, new upwardly-mobile working class, Protestant and Catholic voters. It has acquired the essential elements of a truly national appeal within Scotland. And as it has done so it has attracted into its ranks vigorous, intelligent and ambitious individuals from a variety of political backgrounds, as all successful nationalist movements do.

Its success in this respect has everything to do with the fact that its vision is no longer a narrow or backward-looking affair, but the very opposite.

### Independence within Europe

Immediately after its triumph in Govan, the SNP opened its campaign for next June's Euro-elections by launching its new

watchword, which is also an historic vision, *"Independence within Europe"*. (That the fortunes of the SNP are now being guided by a formidable political intelligence is obvious to all with eyes to see.)

Scotland has always been a European country. It has drawn on and contributed to the general development of European culture of its own accord. Since the Act of Union it has taken the framework of its politics from England, while continually invigorating British politics in various ways (especially on the radical side), but it has never needed to rely on England for its access to European culture, and on accepting the Union it did not for one moment abandon its interest in the wider world.

It should not be forgotten that the Act of Union followed by only eight years the fiasco known as the Darien Scheme, Scotland's one abortive venture in imperialism on her own account. The Darien Scheme demonstrated Scotland's inability to sustain an imperialist enterprise by herself. But much of the appeal of the Union lay precisely in the fact that through it Scotland could take an active (and, in the event, disproportionate) part in the greatest imperial enterprise the world has known.

The end of the British Empire need not have meant a suffocating contraction of Scottish horizons within the United Kingdom. But the failure of British politics to develop an enterprising and inspiring orientation to Europe in place of the Great Game has meant just that.

The sentimental basis of Scottish nationalism today is a deep hostility not only to the reactionary social character of the present Conservative government, but also, and perhaps above all, to its offensive and increasingly ridiculous Little Englandism. A United Kingdom governed in the Labour interest by socialist Little Englanders of the Wilson, Callaghan and Foot vintage was, perhaps, tolerable to enough Scots enough of the time. But a United Kingdom governed indefinitely by Thatcherite (or even post-Thatcher Tory) Little Englanders is evidently more than Scottish flesh and spirit can bear.

The problem for the Scots is not simply that the Labour Party shows no sign winning a general election, or of providing effective opposition to the Tories in the meantime. It is that Labour itself not only shares the Little Englander mentality (and actually pioneered it, long before Thatcher converted the Conservative Party to it) and takes no purposeful interest in the wider world *but also, to cap it all*, has now abandoned its distinctive social purposes at home in a spiritual capitulation to Thatcher's petty-bourgeois counter-revolution.

In these circumstances, the only reason for Scottish electors to vote Labour is material self-interest at the local level in the short term, and the inertia of longstanding habit. Neither of these factors has a future.

*"Independence within Europe"* offers



Scotland an escape both from Thatcherite reaction and the impoverished cultural and spiritual landscape of Little England. There is no reason to doubt that it is a realisable vision. Whatever practical obstacles may stand in its way, the Scots can be counted on to overcome them if they make up their minds to go for it. And unless the Labour Party begins to take on board what Labour & Trade Union Review has been saying to it for the last two years, it will soon or later discover that it has absolutely nothing to counter this vision with.

#### The New Statesman and Scotland

One member of the Labour leadership who should be aware of how the ground has begun to move under Labour in Scotland is Robin Cook, who was Kinnock's campaign manager in the leadership election last year and, more to the more point, is the MP for Livingston.

Cook allowed himself to be photographed receiving the editor of the *New Statesman and Society* and other luminaries of the Charter 88 roadshow at the House of Commons a few weeks ago. The fact that the NSS carried an editorial on November 18 warmly welcoming Labour's humiliating defeat in Govan appears to have meant nothing to him.

By the conventional criterion of political loyalty, the NSS must now be counted an anti-Labour publication, however friendly its staff may continue to be with individual Labour MPs.

To say this is not to reproach the NSS. It made a clear decision to break with its traditional pro-Labour stance when it appointed Stuart Weir to replace John Lloyd a year ago, and it has simply been following the logic of that choice ever since. And one thing in Stuart Weir's favour, apart from his ideological consistency, is the fact that he has cut out much of the abject sycophancy towards Labour's leaders which was Lloyd's editorial hallmark. (Remember those amazing editorials of yesteryear - *"The Best There Is"*, *"Kinnock The Master"*, etc., etc.?)

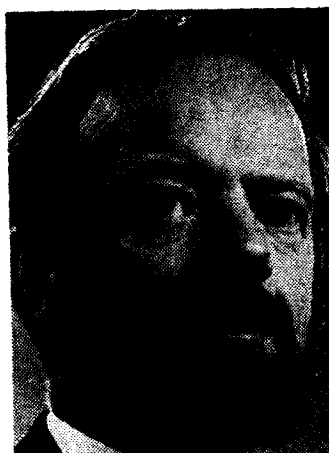
L&TUR is the most determined and principled supporter of the Labour Party. But because we are not sycophants, and presume to tell Labour's leaders where and why they are going wrong and what they ought to be doing (and have the added temerity to be right more often than not), we are having a hard time getting through to them.

The Labour Party is led by men who lack the self-confidence to take cogent criticism in good part and who have a fatal tendency to surround themselves with courtiers. And their tendency to consort with editors of the NSS is the last thing that will help them to shed their misconceptions about Scotland, in part because of, rather than despite, the fact that the last two editors of NSS have been Scotsmen. London eventually does strange and terrible things to some of the

superficially Bolshie Celts who flock to it like wasps to a jam-jar, and who meet similarly sticky ends as soon as they have contrived to get their once vigorous wings satisfactorily coated in jam.

I went along to the NSS fringe meeting at Blackpool in October, to sell the Review rather than to listen to the speakers. (In this case, unlike most other fringe meetings, it was more a case of showing the flag than selling the magazine; since when could one sell gall to the Philistines?)

The point of the meeting was the unveiling of the New Statesman's new ideological product, *"Citizenship"*, which was to galvanise a nationwide recovery of the Left and, in the meantime (and more to the point), counter *Marxism Today's* inroads into the NSS readership with its latest model, *"New Times"*. (Product differentiation is the name of the game when the products, being packages sans content, are for all practical purposes indistinguishable.)



Robin Cook - MP for Livingston

Nothing of substance was said by the platform speakers (Ken Livingstone engagingly ignored the theme of the meeting and simply entertained us), and nothing of substance was said from the floor, until someone from the back raised the matter of the Poll Tax and explained in understandably urgent tones the nature of the problem Labour faced in Scotland on this issue.

Now, one would have thought that this was very much grist to the *"Citizenship"* mill. If there was any political content whatever in the notion, one might have expected Stuart Weir, who was in the chair, to embrace question and questioner with open arms and claim them for his own. At the very least, since the questioner (although of English origin) was an active member of the Labour Party in Scotland of many years standing, one might have expected him to be listened to with a certain respect by an audience composed overwhelmingly (if dress and accents were anything to go by) of people from the South East of England.

The opposite happened. He was heard out

in a bored if not resentful silence, and then the meeting promptly took up where it had left off before real politics intruded. Fifteen minutes of inconsequential waffle passed and then, at last, another speaker from the floor, Carole Tongue, MEP for London North-East, referred to the comrade from Scotland and explained to him and the meeting what the real problem facing Scottish socialists was.

*"The real problem in Scotland,"* she informed us, *"is the aggressively macho culture of the Scottish Labour Party."*

Neither the audience nor the platform gave the slightest sign of disagreeing with this. *"I've been put in my place,"* observed the man from the back, and he had been, by God, a long way below the salt. And Stuart (*"I'm a pluralist"*) Weir, having noted what I was selling on his way into the room an hour earlier, managed to overlook my repeatedly raised hand so there could be no dispute about the fact.

There are incidents in political life which express the essence of a problem or condition, and this was one of them. And the fact that Labour's leaders still seem to care more about what the NSS and its readers think of them than about what Labour's best activists in Scotland think of them has everything to do with Labour's abject condition on both sides of the border.

#### Democratic and socialist daydreams

The belief that the progress of nationalism in Scotland is in the democratic interest in Great Britain as a whole, and the supposition that an independent Scotland would be a beacon of socialism, are ludicrous daydreams. Their function is to provide an *"ideologically sound"* pretext for supporting a movement which seems to be going places for those politicians and journalists who cannot admit that they are merely parasitic followers of fashion.

Democracy is being eroded in Great Britain (it is non-existent in Northern Ireland) because of the state of the Labour Party. An effective Opposition is the condition of democratic government in this country, and, as we pointed out more than a year ago (*"Fiddling while Jerusalem burns"*, Editorial, L&TUR No. 4, October-December 1987), the country now has government without opposition, because Labour has lost - at least for the moment - the will and the ability to be one, and the centre parties have failed to acquire either.

It follows that *nothing* matters except to restore the Labour Party to political health. But that is the one thing that fashion followers are not interested in, because it is hard work.

Nationalism cannot progress in Scotland except at Labour's expense. Its progress is therefore bound to subvert the work of re-establishing an effective party of Opposition in Britain, not assist it. So much is as plain as day.

An independent Scotland under Nationalist government would not necessarily be a more democratic place than Scotland is now. In the process of acquiring a political majority in Scotland, the SNP is bound to absorb or at least greatly weaken the other political tendencies, exactly as nationalist movements in the former colonies have done. An independent Scotland could well see the SNP in power indefinitely. It would no longer be governed by Mrs Thatcher. But the erosion of British democracy has not been a function of Mrs Thatcher's authoritarian inclinations, but of the fact that Labour's collapse has allowed her to indulge them in what has virtually become a one-party state bar the trimmings.

Independent Scotland could also turn out to be virtually a one-party state. The SNP would enjoy a massive moral ascendancy, as the artisan of independence, over all the other parties. The experience of other newly independent countries suggests that it would require the SNP to split for the conditions of democratic government to be restored. This is what happened in Southern Ireland in 1921 but the split over the Treaty was a very chancey affair, and has few parallels elsewhere.

But what happened to the Labour Party in Southern Ireland - its emasculation at the hands of a self-confident nationalism - could very well happen to Labour in Scotland.

Independence would be bound to disrupt the trade union movement in Scotland for a start. It did not do so in Ireland because the British-based trade unions there had already been marginalised by specifically Irish unions before 1921. But practically all the unions in Scotland are sections of British unions. An independent Scotland under Nationalist government would be bound to stimulate the formation of properly national trade unions, free of British connections. The existing British-based unions could well survive alongside the new creations, as they have done in Ireland, and even retain many of their members. But their members would unquestionably have to forget all about British rates of pay. And the split in the trade union movement could not avoid weakening it as a whole, and generating political confusion and demoralisation. How on earth would that benefit democracy - let alone socialism - in Scotland?

The fact that a Nationalist triumph would have relied on votes which had formerly been Labour would be no guarantee of a socialist Scotland. Practically all modern nationalist movements have had a populist appeal and a socialist wing and have owed much of their success in working up nationalist sentiment to this fact. But working up nationalist sentiment as a protest against foreign rule is a very different business from governing an independent state. That socialist nationalists may play a large part in the former is no guarantee that they will determine the latter.

The experience of post-war Europe (after

the national resistance movements in France and Italy and Greece) and the former colonies was that the socialist visions which inspired large parts of these nationalist movements were early casualties of the facts of life after Independence. Only where national liberation movements were under Communist control and inside Moscow's sphere of the post-war world (or close enough to it, as in Indochina) was this not so. But these conditions do not obtain in Scotland, even if one relished the prospect of Scotland ending up like Czechoslovakia, which Stuart Weir and Neil Ascherson presumably don't.

It may be objected that Scottish socialism is made of sterner stuff. I have no wish to belittle Scottish socialism, but I have too much respect for Scottish socialists to patronise them, and illusions are illusions whoever entertains them.

Scottish socialism - like Welsh socialism - has been a force in the world in so far as it has been a source of idealism and vigour for British socialism as a whole. The dominant strain in both Scottish and Welsh socialism has been unrealistic militancy. Much of this tradition was channelled by the ILP for many years and by the Tribune Group after the Second World War, and much of the rest of it by the Communist Party. John Maclean, Jenny Lee, Willie Gallagher, Mick McGahey are all illustrious names in the pantheon of Scottish socialism, but the tradition they embody is very much a tradition of socialist protest.

This is simply not the sort of thing out which a functional socialist Scotland can be built and there is absolutely nothing to be gained, and a good deal to be lost, from pretending otherwise. And the unadventurous political tradition embodied by those Labour MPs who have actually deserved their part of the scornful sobriquet "the feeble fifty" (now forty-nine, of course) is equally unpromising, as should be clear to all.

#### Fighting back

Labour's fortunes north and south of the border are indivisible and the pass has been all but sold. But for those people in the Party who are still capable of clear-eyed political reflection and purposeful political action, and who take their democratic as well as their socialist principles in earnest, there is no alternative to working to restore the Party to political health, so that it is once again credible as an alternative government for the United Kingdom as a whole.

In Scotland, this requires Labour to meet the Nationalist challenge head on. Everything that the Scottish Labour Executive and the Scottish TUC have been doing has been grist to the nationalist mill, whether they realise it or not. Labour cannot wrong-foot the SNP by championing devolution or by otherwise trying to outbid the SNP on the national question. It can only dig its own grave in this way.

What Labour has to do is to outflank the SNP as the serious opposition and alternative to Thatcher Toryism and Little Englandism. It has all but surrendered its claims to this role and must now reassert them with vigour.

So far as the national question is concerned, Labour should bear in mind that Scottish nationalism - unlike Irish nationalism - has no ideological reason to be anti-British. The Scots are British. There is no counterpart in Scotland to the Ultramontane Catholic content of Irish nationalism which made it allergic to British liberalism and the Protestant heritage. It is the Little Englandism of Thatcher which the Scots have reason to detest. And this means that Labour actually has a great opportunity to assert its claim to be the British party, precisely in so far as the Tories under Thatcher have been abandoning this claim.

But Labour can only do this convincingly if it also emancipates itself from the ideological thrall of Thatcherism in economic and social matters and stops substituting public relations for politics. And it can only do this successfully if it also reverses its opportunist and self-defeating line on devolution.

Labour should not be scared witless by the imposing percentage of support for devolution revealed by opinion polls. By its own behaviour it has helped to create a large part of this support. It should recognise that this percentage is composed of all kinds of different elements which are jumbled together because other political options are apparently being closed off.

Labour should explain to the Scottish people that devolution can only function either as a stepping-stone to an independence that only a minority really wants or as an expensive extra tier of government which will be powerless to protect Scotland from the ravages of a Tory government in London. Labour should explain that it is opposed to devolution for this very reason, because it is neither interested in independence nor in ineffectual resistance to Tory misgovernment. Its position should be that it aims to give the Scots good, democratic and progressive government within the United Kingdom, and that if, once Labour has delivered this, it does not satisfy them, then they must take the road to independence and its consequences.

Until Labour poses the choice in these terms, which are the real terms, it cannot expect to concentrate minds in Scotland, and only the SNP can benefit from the prolonged confusion that Labour's current stance on devolution has been generating.

And what this also means is that those members of the Labour Party in Scotland who see the sense of this perspective need to look beyond the purely Scottish context, and join with their true allies in England and Wales in putting political purpose, principle and spirit back into British Labour as a whole.

## The Education Reform Act

by  
Christopher Winch

The 1988 Education Reform Act is the single most important piece of education legislation since the 1944 Education Act and it will shape the nature of our education system for the rest of this century and well beyond.

It has a number of unstated political aims which are worth noticing:

1) *it represents an attempt to make our education system deliver at a level comparable with our industrial partners and rivals;*

2) *it marks a diminution in the power of local authorities and educational experts and an increase in the power both of the State and of parents;*

3) *it aims to encourage a variety of different types of school.*

It is therefore well worth consideration by socialists, both in order to see what aspects are positive and should be supported or perhaps developed and which aspects socialists should seek to modify.

### The national curriculum

The most obvious and striking aspect of the new Act is the establishment for the first time of a prescribed national curriculum for all state schools from the age of 5 upwards.

Previously, the curriculum was in the hands of local authorities and schools and at the 16+ level the examining boards which, in the case of the GCE and GCSE examinations, were and to some extent still are dominated by the requirements of the universities.

Since the LEAs, in the main, were unable to exercise their statutory powers of controlling the curriculum within their own areas effectively, let alone coordinate with other LEAs in order to ensure consistent provision across the country, it is right and proper that control of the curriculum should be removed from them.

Teachers, parents and children will as a consequence be freed from the imposition of badly thought out and sometimes half-baked ideas which people who had some influence within a local education authority hierarchy were able to impose on schools. This, again, will prove to be a huge boon to the education system.

At present, working parties are giving reports to the Secretary of State on what the content of the curriculum should be and there have already been disagreements between the working parties and Baker on content.

It is clear that Baker and Thatcher are making a determined attempt to diminish the

power of the trendy educational establishment and to substitute high expectations and clear assessment procedures for the woolliness that used to affect so much of curriculum thinking (and which still does to an alarming degree in some of the working party documents issued by Baker's hand-picked teams).

### Testing and assessment

In order to ensure that the national curriculum is actually worked to efficiently and to keep schools and local authorities up to the mark, there will be a national assessment procedure. This will take place at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16 and the results of schools, but not of individuals, will be available to the public.

The tests will consist of a mix of formal and informal methods and will measure what pupils can actually do rather than their performance relative to their peers, although this will still be apparent from the results obtained. The public will therefore be able to see what results a school is obtaining in various areas of the curriculum and, no doubt, this will serve as a basis for parental choice of school.

This will have certain unfortunate consequences for some schools which are effective but which achieve comparatively poor results. Schools have to teach the children who enter them. They should be assessed on how they have transformed the children in their care rather than how they have 'performed' relative to other schools with different children.

It is also unfortunate in this connection that children will not be tested at the age of 5 when they enter school, first of all to diagnose as early as possible where their strengths and weaknesses are and, second, to allow meaningful comparisons to be made between different primary schools in terms of effectiveness.

### Governing bodies

To compensate for the shift of power away from local authorities towards the state, and to act as a further point of pressure on schools to deliver the goods, school governing bodies have broadened their composition to include local businessmen

and workers as well as a higher proportion of parents.

The governing bodies have been given wide-ranging powers, particularly with regard to hiring and firing staff and financial management. Since staff costs form by far the greatest proportion of the running costs of a school and there is not much discretion about the minimum number of staff needed in any school, it might seem that the proportion of the budget over which the governors are going to exercise *real* control is quite limited.

However, schools will receive an allocation of funds, a proportion of which will be allocated to cover the number of staff considered necessary to teach in the school irrespective of how much these teachers are actually going to cost as individuals.

Now teachers, even those on the same grade, are not paid the same amounts. They have a place on an incremental scale which is determined by experience and qualifications. More experienced, better qualified teachers cost more than inexperienced, less qualified ones. Therefore, schools will incur a financial penalty by employing experienced and well qualified teachers.

What is more, teachers will steadily eat into the school budget as they stay longer and longer at a school. In large schools, this may not prove to be too much of a problem, since there will be a steady outflow of older staff and a steady inflow of younger staff. In small primary schools where there will be less staff movement, it is quite possible that escalating staff costs could lead to the curtailment of provision in other areas. This issue is going to make it difficult for schools to attract the best staff they can and also gives hard pressed schools a possible reason for dismissing experienced staff so as to appoint a younger teacher at the bottom of an incremental scale.

There is clearly an important job for the teaching unions to do in order to preserve the interests of teachers, which happen to coincide with the interests of children and education generally in this case. Such local financial management will make a career in teaching a risky business, as the older teacher gradually prices himself or herself out of the market. This in turn will make teaching an unattractive option as a career.

There are already problems in getting parents and others to stand for governing bodies, since not many people wish to involve themselves in the running of schools in this way. Ironically, the Act may well lead to an increase in teacher control of schools - surely an unintended consequence - through teachers who are parents and members of the community taking a prominent place on the governing bodies in default of an apathetic public.

This will give teachers a chance to make their collective voice heard more strongly and authoritatively, if the opportunity is used wisely. The teaching unions should also



Kenneth Baker

make every effort to encourage trade unionists from other unions to stand as parent governors and community co-optees, so that workers as well as businessmen have some influence on how schools are run.

### Opting out

If a simple majority of parents wish to do so, they can remove their school from the control of the local authority in perpetuity and receive funding directly from the Department of Education and Science.

Thatcher sees this as a way of ultimately removing schools from local authority control, although Baker probably sees the provision as a way of disciplining local authorities, to force them to put their house in order.

This right of opting out is a dubious one in terms of democratic principle. It means that the parents of one generation of children can alter the terms by which the school is controlled *for ever*, irrespective of the wishes of parents of generations of children to come, let alone the wishes of the people who actually work in the schools and who have to bear the consequences of such an action.

This provision will be watched with great interest by all concerned with education. Will we see Muslim schools, West Indian schools, grammar schools and even the Lenin Academy for Young Comrades acting as interest groups to bring various schools within the scope of their particular interests? It is ironic that the government should consider giving so much influence to political activists to act on behalf of the apathetic majority.

### Issues for socialists

There are various positive aspects of the Education Act which socialists should welcome. Indeed, it contains many measures which should have been introduced by a reforming Labour administration. In addition, there are ways in which the Labour movement ought to consider seizing the initiative on educational issues instead of merely reacting to events.

Having a national curriculum means that, theoretically at least, all children have access to the same quality of education no matter where they live in the country. Labour needs to ensure that this becomes a practical reality as well.

By establishing a national curriculum which is, from what can be seen so far, quite demanding and ambitious - which is a point to be welcomed, the Tories have made certain commitments. An ambitious national curriculum requires a skilled and dedicated workforce to make it work and it requires adequate resources. The Labour Party should make it a priority to hold the Government to these commitments.

The way in which the quality of schools is assessed is likely to be contentious. Labour should fight to ensure that this is sane and realistic.

Schools should be judged on what they do with what they get. Like should be compared with like in order that fair judgements are arrived at. Otherwise there is a danger that schools which produce relatively poor results on a national or even a local comparison, but which do very well in relation to the level of ability, motivation and parental support of their pupils, will be left to wither on their vine.

The last thing we wish to see is schools which do a good job for children who would not on the whole become academic high fliers being allowed to decline because they are being compared adversely with schools which, because of their catchment area, turn out academic high achievers almost as a matter of routine.

The way in which technical and practical education is treated is particularly disappointing. It is also disappointing that Labour did not make more of this during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. It seems to have been left largely to Sir Keith Joseph in the House of Lords to voice misgivings about this question.



*Can Jack Straw seize the initiative for Labour?*

Briefly, having a national programme of study is not incompatible with having more than one curriculum reflecting different emphases in educational aims. In particular, the development of the ability and interest of pupils who have a strong practical rather than purely academic inclination seems to have been neglected. It is true that science is a core subject and technology a foundation subject. But this is not enough to give technologically minded pupils what they really need, which is a programme oriented around technology and practical activity which will then lead to a first class post-16 system of vocational and technical education. Practically minded children get a very poor educational deal and the new Act does not do much for them.

The implication of this is that the Government still seems to think that the only worthwhile kind of education is a traditional academic one and that most of the population do not have talents worth cultivating. This is not, incidentally, a view taken by our neighbours and competitors.

The consequence of this arrogant view is that talent will continue to be wasted and skills which could serve the country well will continue to be neglected.

### City Technology Colleges and the trade unions

It is little short of a scandal that the Labour movement should have made so little of the vitally important issue of practical, technical and vocational education, since many of the children who would benefit most form part of its future natural constituency.

Labour and the trade unions, it seems, are still fixated on the aristocratic idea that the only worthwhile kind of education is an academic and non-vocational one. The Tories at least have shown some small recognition that here is a problem which needs to be dealt with, and have made a gesture towards remedying the situation with the setting up of City Technology Colleges. However, there is only one of these at the moment and only a few in the pipeline.

The Government has also committed itself to financing these colleges in a gimmicky way, through trying to attract money from firms to run them. It has had embarrassingly little success so far, showing either that industry would prefer the Government to do this job properly or that industry is simply not interested in technological education, despite the noises they make about it. In one of the colleges, a tobacco company is putting up some of the money; it will be interesting to see how health education shapes up in this particular institution.

The establishment of these colleges was greeted with roars of protest from Labour and the unions. Unfortunately, the effect of this was to give the impression that we are against initiatives in practical education. There is no doubt that this impression was an entirely accurate one so far as certain sections of the Left are concerned.

Labour should be campaigning for more City Technology Colleges and for the Government to fund them adequately. Trade unions should offer to fund them themselves and get the union movement actively interested in the issue. The sight of the unions doing what is right and necessary, where the Government and its natural supporters cannot be bothered, would do an enormous amount of good to the morale and standing of trade unionism in the country and, as a welcome bonus, would severely embarrass the Government.

The activity of the unions and the Labour Party in pushing practical education up the political agenda would also serve the interests of those children who are not well looked after in our present educational system. Such a campaign might well earn their future gratitude in union subscriptions and in the polling booths.

That is a factor which unions and Labour can ill afford to ignore in their current state of decline.

## L'Algérie algérienne and the givers of lessons

by  
Hugh Roberts

*Ma yebka fi'l oued ghir hjaru*  
Nothing stays in the river's bed but its stones  
(Algerian proverb)

*Algeria has a new government, but you would not think so if you relied on the media for elementary political information of this kind.*

Since October's riots, practically all the top men in Algerian politics have been replaced: the prime minister, the ministers of foreign affairs, the interior, justice, information and culture, education and training, higher education, finance, commerce, energy, heavy industry, light industry, agriculture, transport, construction, posts and telecommunications, public health, and youth and sport; the general-secretary of the Party, the Chief of the General Staff, the Inspector-General of the Armed Forces, and the commanders of the land forces, the air force and the navy, five of the six military regions and, last but by no means least, of the military security apparatus.

These changes are not merely a reshuffle. The vast majority of the men replaced have been given no other post. They have been dismissed. But because President Chadli Bendjedid has not been replaced the media have supposed that there has been no change of government.

Chadli's re-selection by the FLN Congress on November 27-28 for a third five-year term as President was given considerable media coverage, to the virtual exclusion of all the other changes which were happening, as if everything depends on him and nothing else matters but his personal position as President. This would have been fair enough if Algeria had presidential government. And it was taken entirely for granted by all and sundry that Algeria does have presidential government. But Algeria is not governed by its president any more than the USA is.

British media coverage of the recent presidential election in the USA conveyed the impression that it was reporting the American equivalent of a British general election. It was doing nothing of the kind. America governs itself through the complex ramifications of a political system based on the principle of the separation of powers, in which executive, legislature and judiciary control and check one another at both federal and state level, and in which a very large number of offices are elective. Other countries' governments may feel that they are talking to the American government when

they meet the President and his Cabinet, but the President never speaks of his 'government' when addressing his fellow-Americans. He speaks only of his 'administration'. This remarkable system of government, in which the President's administration falls far short of being the government, is regulated by a written constitution which is taken in earnest.

America now has a new president, but it cannot be said that it has a new government, while Algeria has a new government but the same president as before. The interesting thing about this is that Algeria too has a written constitution, and moreover one which accords very extensive powers to the President. But the real constitution which the founding fathers gave to the Algerian state has never been written down, for good reasons, and it overrides whatever written constitution may happen to exist at particular moments in time, whenever this is necessary.

This real constitution does not preclude presidential government. Algeria had presidential misgovernment under Ahmed Ben Bella and, after a period of what was in effect collective leadership, it was very well governed from about 1971 onwards by the late President Boumediene, who had merely presided over the collective leadership before that date. The real constitution of Algeria allows for presidential government but also allows for other formulae to be adopted. It also allows for evolution. It is one of the most remarkable constitutions in the world, and it has never been described.

What is at issue in Algeria now is whether the new government of prime minister Kasdi Merbah can save the situation within the

parameters of the real constitution of the Algerian state. There is no telling what may happen if it fails.

But you would not think so if you relied on the media.

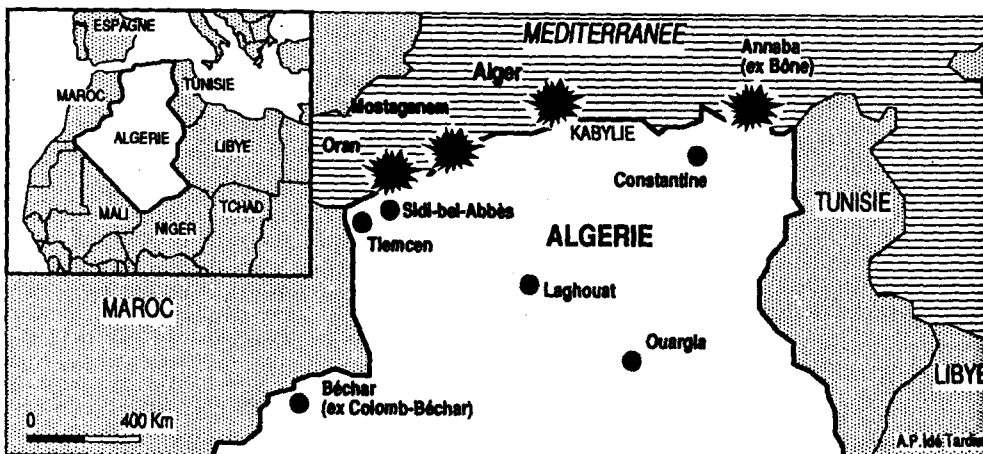
'A far away country...'

Those of our readers who have been following our coverage of foreign affairs since we began publishing two years ago will not have been surprised by October's massive riots and their political outcome.

Our very first issue carried an article on the riots which took place in Constantine, the capital of eastern Algeria (and the cultural and religious capital of the country as a whole), in November 1986. This article explained the significance of the events in Constantine and concluded that "unless we are very much mistaken, the heartland of the Algerian nation has at last begun to serve notice on its rulers, much as it took the lead in serving notice on the French 60 years ago" ('Algeria: the Wind from the East', L&TUR No. 1, January 1987).

L&TUR gets a constant stream of feedback from its readers, and one of the first bits of feedback which came our way concerned this article. I was told by one of our sellers in London's East End that local Labour Party members there were bemused by the very idea of a leftwing magazine aimed at Labour audiences which carried items on exotic places like Algeria. He had been given to understand that Labour Party members were not interested in information of this kind, that Algeria was a far-away country of whose people they knew nothing and cared even less, and that it was a mistake to include material of this nature in the Review.

Whatever L&TUR can be accused of, pandering to the prejudices of our readers is not one of them. Neil Kinnock and Tony Benn will agree with me (and with each other) on this, if nothing else. Labour Party members who want their prejudices pandered to should read the *New Statesman* or *Marxism Today* or *Samizdat* or whatever-you. They can hardly complain that their prejudices are not very fully catered for



A French map showing where the worst rioting occurred last October



as it is.

'A far away country' of whose people 'we know nothing' was how Neville Chamberlain described Czechoslovakia in 1938. This description turned upon a most disingenuous use of the first person plural. By 'we' Chamberlain actually meant the entire British people except for its government, in short, 'you'. He was not for one moment confessing his ignorance of Czechoslovakia, but postulating a state of widespread public ignorance as the condition of his acting freely towards Czechoslovakia in the best traditions of cold-blooded English *realpolitik*.

Foreign affairs constitute the area of government policy which is most insulated from the pressure of domestic public opinion. In a liberal democracy, the existence of party political competition means that it cannot be so insulated all the time. But public opinion can be brought to bear upon Government foreign policy only when it is mobilised by the party or parties of Opposition.

An opposition party can stir up public opinion to good effect only if it shares the Government's knowledge, rather than the public's ignorance, of the particulars of the case and possesses a coherent world view which enables it to understand what is at issue and conceive an alternative policy for dealing with it. When these conditions are not met, government foreign policy invariably goes unchallenged and the media cannot help reflecting the view of the question which the government holds or, at any rate, wishes to foster in the minds of others. In this way is public ignorance, the pre-requisite of government freedom of action, preserved.

Chamberlain's presumption of public ignorance of the Czech question in 1938 was particularly ill-founded. As is well known, public satisfaction with the Munich Agreement did not last long and a thorough-going reaction to it soon set in. But a radically different view of the question did not merely develop in reaction to Munich, it existed within British political circles well beforehand, and it is probably for this reason that the public reaction was as powerful as it was.

The principal locus of this alternative view of the matter was the TUC General Council. The Chairman of the General Council in 1936-1937 was Ernest Bevin.

Speaking in the debate on international affairs at the 1936 Labour Party Conference in Edinburgh, Bevin made the following prophetic remark:

*"The International Movement are wondering what we are going to do in Britain. Czechoslovakia, one of the most glorious little democratic countries, hedged in all round, is in danger of being sacrificed tomorrow. They are our trade union brothers. They want to know what the British are going to do. You cannot save Czechoslovakia with speeches. We are not*

*in office, but I want to drive this Government to defend Democracy against its will, if I can..."* (Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, Vol. 1, page 585).

L&TUR is the only publication on the British Left which approaches international affairs in the spirit in which Bevin approached them in the 1930s. Fifty years before L&TUR anticipated the recent upheaval in Algeria, Bevin anticipated the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia, and the time which elapsed between the anticipation and the event was about two years in each case.

It was because Bevin worked indefatigably to equip the British trade union movement and the Labour Party with a coherent and well-informed world view based on democratic and internationalist principles that Labour in government after 1945 was able to have a clear and effective foreign policy of its own. It is with the same end in view that L&TUR persists in carrying analyses of developments in countries such as Algeria.

#### Algeria and the Czech analogy

A change in a country's government, however far-reaching, is a very different thing from the dismemberment of a state. The comparison of contemporary Algeria with pre-Munich Czechoslovakia may therefore seem far-fetched, and may bemuse not only our readers in the East End. But it is not as far-fetched as the comparison which the Charter 88 grouping is now making between Thatcher's Britain and Husak's Czechoslovakia. And it has this advantage over the latter, that it does not insult either of the countries compared.

(The authors of Charter 88, who are none other than the editor and leading lights of the *New Statesman*, are the last people entitled to question our comparison. The *New Statesman* has become infected with the debased outlook of latter-day New Leftism, and its intellectual grey eminence is Tom Nairn, author of "The Break-Up of Britain". Nairnism looks forward to the disintegration of the British state, for which it long ago conceived an irrational hatred, because it cannot conceive of a progressive change in the country's government and regards the former as an acceptable surrogate for the latter. The *New Statesman* welcomed the Scottish Nationalists' victory over Labour at Govan on this basis.)

Like Benes's Czechoslovakia, present-day Algeria is a young state which came into existence following the disintegration of a great empire in the wake of a world war. Like its Czech counterpart, the Algerian state has had to cope with a major internal cultural division (Czechs and Slovaks, Arabs and the various Berber populations, especially the Kabyles). In the same way as Czechoslovakia in the 1930s faced a major irredentist claim by Hitler's Greater German Reich on the Sudetenland, so Algeria has been facing the challenge of Moroccan

irredentism, championed by the mainstream of Moroccan nationalism, the Istiqlal Party, which regards large parts of the western Algerian Sahara (in addition to the former Spanish Sahara, now conventionally known as the 'Western Sahara') as belonging to historic 'Greater Morocco'. And just as Czechoslovakia also faced the lesser irredentist claims of Hungary (on the Magyar-inhabited districts of southern Slovakia) and Poland (on the Teschen region), so too Algeria has had to face Tunisian and Libyan claims to areas on her eastern frontier.

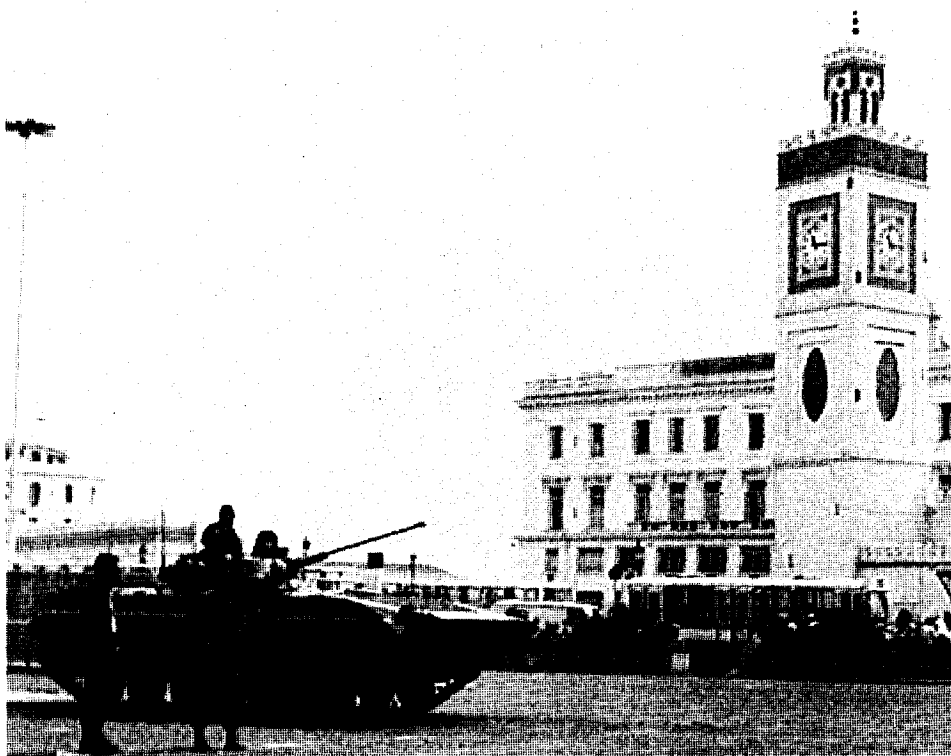
The fragility of Czechoslovakia's national unity was demonstrated by the ease with which the state was dismembered between September 30 and November 1, 1938. Algeria's national unity is also a somewhat fragile affair. When President Chadli warned of the danger of civil war in his speech to the nation on October 10, he was not joking.

But, while this danger is to be taken seriously, it has so far been warded off very effectively. The reason for this lies in the most important difference between the Algerian and the Czech states - the fact that the Algerian government is informed by a very powerful will to preserve the state, while the Czech government lacked precisely this will.

#### The Algerian national will

It so happens that the only British scholar to have attempted to account for the strength of the Algerian national will is himself of Czech origin, namely the distinguished sociologist, social anthropologist and philosopher, Ernest Gellner. Gellner has attributed Algeria's capacity to preserve its national unity to the impact of the Islamic Reform movement of the 1920-1940 period, which preached a strictly orthodox, scripturalist and modernist Islam capable of transcending the parochialism of traditional Algerian society and which, by simultaneously promoting a revival of Arabic language and culture, established the Algerian national idea in the social consciousness at the expense of both tribal and regional particularism on the one hand and the concept of "*l'Algérie française*" on the other.

This view contains much truth. But it is one thing to promote an idea, it is quite another to develop a sentiment. That an Algerian national sentiment was far from being a fully accomplished fact by the late 1940s was amply demonstrated by the history of the war of independence of 1954-1962. The National Liberation Front (FLN) which launched and led this war, was seriously opposed by many Algerian Muslims. Some adhered to a rival nationalist formation which resisted the FLN's monopoly, while many others fought on the French side. Above all, the FLN itself was continuously confronted with internal threats to its unity, as tribal and regional divisions surfaced within it,



*The army was given full civil powers during the riots for the first time since the War of Independence*

aggravated at times by outside (especially Egyptian) interference.

The powerful political will which Benes's Czechoslovakia lacked but which has so far preserved the Algerian state has its origin not in the Islamic Reform movement but in the war of independence itself, in the complex revolution which constituted the state. The central aspect of this revolution was the way in which the FLN learned to handle its internal differences and its external relations (particularly with Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, the USSR and the USA) in the process of simultaneously getting a grip on Algerian society and organising the military and diplomatic offensive against French rule.

The threats to the FLN's coherence were legion, and it triumphed over them all in seven and a half years in the course of which an extraordinary number and variety of problems were dealt with and lessons learned, at breath-taking speed, in a process of incessant political conflict. If the Czech state had been the product of a comparable revolution it would not have meekly gone under in 1938.

The fact is that the Algerian Revolution has never been properly understood, because its political history has never been adequately described. This is a problem for outside observers of Algerian affairs and, more importantly, for the Algerian public. But there are grounds for supposing that this general incomprehension has been regarded as extremely convenient by the men who rule Algeria.

Algeria's national unity is not a function of the common Arabo-Muslim culture promoted by the Islamic Reform movement,

except in merely ideological opposition to French culture and sub-national parochial culture. There is nothing in their common Arabo-Muslim identity to differentiate Algerians from Moroccans and Tunisians, or even Egyptians and Kuwaitis. But the Algerians are certainly very different. There is an Algerian nation. What distinguishes this nation is its particular history and the concentrated expression of this history, its politics. And the subjective unity of the Algerian nation has been organised and thereafter preserved by its politics, rather than being an emanation of the most abstract aspects of its culture.

But contemporary Western academia, having been taken over by the tandem of sociology and its *marxisant* alter ego, political economy, to the virtual exclusion of political history, is entirely incapable of seeing the remarkable nature of Algerian politics. And the fact that the Western media are even more incapable of seeing this, even when it is staring them in the face and has actually been pointed out to them, was made graphically clear by their coverage of October's riots and their aftermath.

### Three easy stereotypes

Three false interpretations of October's events were broadcast to the world in rapid succession by the media. The first put the riots down to 'austerity', the second to 'Islamic fundamentalism' and the third to 'hardliners' opposed to 'Chadli's economic reforms'.

Oil prices down, food prices up, equals riots. This simple equation has clearly acquired the force of a physical law in the

minds of our journalists, at any rate where the Middle East is concerned. "Another Arab bread riot, seen it all before, so what else is new? (Don't tell me, whatever you do.)" The fact that there had never before been a single "bread riot" in Algeria (unlike Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco) in 26 years of virtually uninterrupted austerity was effortlessly overlooked. The full significance of the fact that the riots were occurring in the run up to the FLN Congress was explained by no one. Even more remarkably, the fact that the rioting ended as if by magic immediately after Chadli's speech to the nation, in which he insisted that the economic reform programme would continue and offered not the slightest concession to public impatience with 'austerity', was also overlooked. Either the media were incapable of taking a huge hint or they could not bear to admit they had got it all wrong.

By this point the second interpretation had got under steam. "If it's not a bread riot, it must be the fundamentalists." The prominence given to this eyewash was quite extraordinary, when one bears in mind the fact that none of the eye-witness accounts of the first two days of the rioting, which had already been transmitted by the media themselves, had noted the slightest Islamist content in the acts or utterances of the rioters. It is certainly true that Islamists in Algiers and probably elsewhere began to take part from the third day onwards and provided some of the leadership of the thing at street level. But it was crystal clear that they had not been behind it. The claim they had been was put out by certain Algerian officials and taken up with enthusiasm by the western media, whose foibles the Algerians have long studied and know inside out. Had the claim been true, Chadli would certainly have said something to assuage Islamist sentiment in his speech on October 10. He said nothing. This was overlooked by *The Independent*, which published a long article elaborating this misinterpretation (*'Algeria's Enemy Within'*) on October 13.

This second stereotype did not have much mileage in it, however, and was soon overtaken (or should one say relieved?) by the third. "Well, if it is not bread riots and it's not our old friends the fundamentalists, it must be our other old friends the hardliners, bless'em, died-in-the-wool conservatives clinging with cynical desperation to their clapped-out socialist orthodoxy and their corrupt privileges and so frustrating Gorbachev's - sorry, Chadli's programme of badly needed economic reforms which are intended to set the people and especially the market free and are undoubtedly a good thing."

This thesis was first put into circulation by a mysterious "special correspondent" of the *Daily Telegraph* on October 8 and has stayed the course remarkably well, rapidly achieving the desired status of orthodoxy in terms of which everything which has

happened since must be explained. And whatever cannot be explained in these terms is not reported, such as the fact that the most prominent and outspoken advocates of the economic reforms, notably the prime minister, Abdelhamid Brahimi, the finance minister, Abdelaziz Khellef, and the minister of light industry, Messaoudi Zitouni, were among the heads which rolled in the course of changes almost universally described as Chadli's successful efforts to turn events to his advantage by getting rid of 'hardliners'.

The third interpretation is rubbish. Its virtue is that it is easy to understand and ideologically loaded in the right way. We all know who the goodies and the baddies are. *Long live economic reform and down with the hardliners!* The fact that this bears no relation to what is actually happening is neither here nor there.

The mainstream western media are not in the business of objectively reporting events in foreign parts, not where these events matter and serious interests are at stake. Madcap economic determinism, bogey men and ideologically loaded stereotypes are their stock-in-trade, and coherent political analysis is beyond them. And this will remain the case where the British mainstream media are concerned until the Labour Party recovers a coherent world view, its sense of purpose and its social influence.

#### The government of Algeria

What has been happening in Algeria since October is a comprehensive change of government. This change has been organised by the FLN itself, *faute de mieux*, and it has occasioned turmoil and many deaths, because the old government would not go quietly. The change was necessary because the old government was making a comprehensive mess of things. It was governing badly because it was operating with an unrealistic idea of what Algeria is. And because it was badly overestimating its possibilities, it could not be made to understand that it should go by anything short of a popular upheaval.

The new government is as committed to economic reform as its predecessor. The abstract merits of economic reform have never been at issue. What has been at issue is how Algerians are to be governed. The new government is led by men who have a realistic view of this matter and accordingly stands a much better chance of carrying out such reforms as are necessary. And Chadli, an old soldier without political pretensions but with a usefully 'positive image' in the western media, has detached himself from his previous government and come to terms with his new one, and has consequently been given a further five-year term as President.

Contemporary academia, being dominated by economic determinism, assumes that the principal issue in the new states of the 'Third World' is how their economies are to be developed. At this point, 'Development

Studies' splits into two schools, the technicians who wish to advise Third World governments, and the utopians who wish to fantasise and moralise about them. Neither school is capable of conceiving that the principal issue in many of these states is how they are to be governed.

Many Middle Eastern states are not really new. They may have experienced a period of imperialist interference or supervision, but they have an indigenous state tradition which antedates this interlude and which has survived it. This is particularly clear in the case of Egypt, but is also true of Morocco, Iran, Iraq, Syria, the Yemen, several of the Gulf states and even Tunisia up to a point. But it is not true of Algeria. The state tradition in Algeria is a tradition of alien (Turkish, French) states imposed upon the Algerian population. The indigenous tradition is one of eternal resistance of such alien states by a fragmented population of self-governing tribes.

In abstract cultural terms Algeria may resemble Egypt or Syria. But politically it has very little in common with either. The Egyptians have always had a state, and the state-society relationship has scarcely changed at all in its essential outline for many generations. But the Algerians have only had a state of their own since the national revolution, and they are a long way from settling down into a comfortable relationship with it, which is another way of saying that the national revolution is not quite over yet, and why the written constitution of this state cannot be the basis of its government.

#### The Algerian state

One of the most influential theories in western academic studies of Third World states holds that these states have inherited the state apparatus which their former European rulers created for the purposes of colonial exploitation and repression and which they left behind, virtually intact, at independence. This theory was first propounded by a Pakistani academic, Hamza Alavi, in a celebrated article, *"The State in Post-Colonial Society"*, published, very appropriately, in *New Left Review* (No. 74), the cradle of many a *marxisant* fantasy. And one of the most typical and influential books to have been produced by French academic Marxism on Algeria, *Le Capitalisme d'Etat Algérien* (Maspero, 1977) by Marc Raffinot and Pierre Jacquemot, explicitly states that independent Algeria inherited the colonial state apparatus. This has been a most seminal error.

A state apparatus is not a collection of ministerial buildings, police stations and barracks, but a number of specialised bodies of men and women whose activities and interrelationships are orchestrated in a particular way. There are states which inherited elements of their apparatus from the departing colonial power. The Indian Civil

Service and the Jordanian army were both British creations, as the Moroccan army was a French creation. But the French did nothing to create the Algerian state apparatus and they did everything they could to prevent the Algerians from creating it.

But they failed, and they are still measuring the extent of their failure.

The Algerian state is the FLN in power. The FLN created the Algerian army, the Algerian intelligence service, the Algerian diplomatic corps and the nuclei of the Algerian police force and civil service between 1954 and 1962, that is before winning independence. Since 1962 this state apparatus has been filled out very considerably, with assistance from various foreign states (including the USSR, the USA and the UK as well as France), but its framework was established by 1962. The FLN did everything that mattered for itself. And it not only created these special bodies of men, it also worked out how they should function and how they should be regulated. And it learned that they could not be regulated on the basis of a written constitution.

To have attempted to regulate the state by a written constitution would have been an ideological thing to do. The American constitution, which was a pure product of the ideology of the Rights of Man, has been able to function because this ideology has from the outset been subscribed to by the society which govern itself by means of it. From 1789 to 1958 the French state had numerous written constitutions and repeatedly failed to govern itself for long by means of them, because none of them rested on a substantial consensus of French society.

The FLN clearly understood the need to avoid the French mistake. It gave its state a written constitution as a matter of pure form but refused to be bound by it, and so retained the political capacity to modify or replace this constitution when necessary. It thereby spared Algeria the fate of post-1789 France, by enabling social change to occur within political continuity. But French politicians and intellectuals, whose particular national characteristic is their tendency to fixed ideas, appear still to be unable to comprehend what the FLN has done, because what it has done is so un-French.

#### *L'Algérie algérienne*

Following the loss of Algeria the French political class consoled itself with the belief that independent Algeria was still substantially French in its politics; the turbulent infant had come of age and wilfully gone its own way, but its political parentage was not in doubt. French commentators regularly refer, with paternal pride, to the "Jacobin" character of Algerian nationalism, for example, while French Marxists waffle with equal complacency about the "Bonapartist" character of the FLN-state. And having convinced themselves that

Algeria's politics are of French pedigree, these observers have felt entitled to lecture Algeria's rulers whenever they fail to conform sufficiently closely to the French prototype, whether this be the prototype of bureaucratic efficiency or the prototype of revolutionary idealism or the prototype of political democracy.

The FLN knows all about these Frenchmen. It calls them "*les donneurs de leçons*" - the givers of lessons - and it has recently demonstrated its spiritual independence of France by the robust manner in which it has refused to be browbeaten by them. But to say this is not to deny the enormous power of attraction which the French model of politics has exercised on many Algerians, including many senior figures within the FLN. And in recent years the vigorous denunciation by the Algerian media of the givers of lessons (and their Algerian counterparts, *Hizb Fransa*, the 'Party of France' in Algerian politics) has actually served as a smokescreen for policies and politicians that have been French in tendency.

'*Hizb Fransa*' - like 'agents of imperialism' in the USSR once upon a time - is a term of abuse which is employed by all kinds of people in Algerian politics; but this does not mean that its use is never justified.)

From the early 1980s onwards the Algerian government pursued policies which owed a good deal to French influence. The ambitious industrialisation objectives, the centre piece of President Boumediene's drive for economic independence, were abandoned, together with the radical anti-imperialism of his foreign policy, as better relations were sought with Paris and Washington. The adoption of a policy of economic liberalisation opened up the economy to foreign capital, especially French capital, as well as permitting flagrant inequalities to develop at home. As domestic opposition movements proliferated, Algiers came to rely on its relations with Paris to keep the emigré wing of these movements in their place. And, having tacitly abandoned the socialist vision and egalitarian policies of Boumediene, the government came to rely more and more on an extremely doctrinaire cultural nationalism - the ideology of "*l'Algérie arabo-musulmane*" - as the means of mobilising loyalty at home. The irony of this is that the Algerian leadership has never been more Jacobin, that is French, in its approach to governing the country than when it was promoting this abstract and doctrinaire conception of the nation in contempt of Algerian realities.

These departures in policy, and even more the departures in political philosophy which underlay them, could be undertaken because of the disruption of the FLN's inner core which occurred in the early 1980s in the wake of Boumediene's death. One of the effects of this was that the regime got dangerously out of balance from around 1982

onwards, with men from eastern Algeria monopolising the key posts to the exclusion of their counterparts from the centre, south and above all the west. Increasingly it began to look as if the FLN was degenerating into a mere Algerian version of the Syrian or the Iraqi Ba'ath, both of which are notoriously run by political mafias based on regional clientels (the Alawites and the 'Takriti clan' respectively). And with this concentration of power in the hands of the '*clan de l'Est*', its exercise became an increasingly despotic and arrogant affair, more and more reliant on repression and merely ideological arguments for lack of a real consensus, and increasingly dependent on its relations with Paris.



Houari Boumediene, the Algerian Cromwell

It is now clear that the disruption of the FLN's inner counsels was temporary. The 'Eastern clan' and *Hizb Fransa* are the great casualties of the recent upheaval. A new and healthier regional balance within the regime has been negotiated, while Paris's preferences have been silently ignored. And, as the FLN has got itself back on the rails and back in business, the native empiricism of its politics has reasserted itself at the expense of the doctrinaire manner.

Economic reform will be pursued, but not as an ideological crusade nor uniquely in the bourgeois interest; and in pursuing it the new government will take care to carry public opinion with them, by ensuring that the burden of austerity is shared equally: there is to be a progressive wealth tax, and a return to the philosophy of equality of opportunity in education in place of the elitist approach of recent years, together with efforts to reduce unemployment. And the doctrinaire refusal to acknowledge the Berber element of Algerian national culture appears to be going by the board, together with the elitist stigmatisation of Algerian colloquial Arabic. The reality of "*l'Algérie algérienne*" is asserting itself over the abstract ideas of both "*l'Algérie française*" and "*l'Algérie arabo-musulmane*". And because Algerian Algeria is not doctrinaire and because her relationship with France is a fact which has to be accommodated, the 'Party of France' will

continue to have its place in Algerian politics and to be represented in the FLN leadership. But *Hizb Fransa* is unlikely to be allowed to govern the country again.

Underlying these changes is the recognition that Algerians cannot be governed in a dictatorial manner indefinitely, that a social consensus is the precondition of good government, and that the FLN can conserve its function as the guarantor of the state only if its nominees govern with public opinion and not in contempt of it.

These changes are almost certainly being watched with interest in Moscow. (As one of the more acute French commentators, Jean-Francois Kahn, observed in October, the riots were, in their subjective content at least, a revolt against *perestroika*.) And they have been watched even more closely in Paris, where they have gone down like a ton of lead.

But then it was perhaps to be expected that French socialism, which when it was last in government in 1956-7 proved incapable of settling the Algerian question and chose instead to aggravate it, should have spent the last seven years endeavouring to sap Algerian independence through the medium of *Hizb Fransa*. And that, having failed, it should have responded by unleashing the givers of lessons in a chorus of media condemnation of the FLN for its denial of human rights and its refusal of democratic reform.

#### French lessons in human rights

Human rights were certainly given short shrift by the Algerian authorities in the course of October's events and France, which likes to think of itself as 'the country of human rights', has made a great fuss of this fact in recent weeks. But France had very little to say about human rights when it actually mattered, during the riots themselves, when the political outcome - in which Paris had a large stake - was still in doubt. And, of course, the France which emerged from the Revolution of 1789 repeatedly made short work of the human rights of thousands of its own citizens, in 1792-4, 1848 and 1871, and gave not a damn for the human rights of millions of Algerians from 1830 to 1962.

Not long ago the French socialist government went out of its way to have the former Gestapo chief, Klaus Barbie, put on trial and condemned in his dotage to life imprisonment. But it has never shown the slightest interest in putting on trial Generals Jacques Massu and Marcel Bigeard, the men who fought the famous Battle of Algiers against the FLN in 1957, and did so, as they frankly admitted, by the massive resort to torture. (Bigeard, by all accounts an honest soldier, suffered not one iota for his conduct in 1957. He ended up as Minister of Defence under Giscard d'Estaing, with nary a protest from the French Left.)

By French standards, and by the standards

of the first battle of Algiers in particular, the toll of human rights in last October's battle of Algiers was rather light. And the subsequent French condemnation of this toll has deliberately ignored the fact that the principal artisans of the repression were relieved of their posts shortly afterwards.

As a woman in Oran told a reporter last October, "nothing can console a mother who has lost her sons." But by Algerian standards, the human price paid in October for getting rid of an incompetent and despotic Algerian government was miniscule by comparison with the price paid 26 years ago for getting rid of an incompetent and despotic French government. And, as they say in Kabylia, where Kasdi Merbah comes from, *"la peine ne compte pas."*

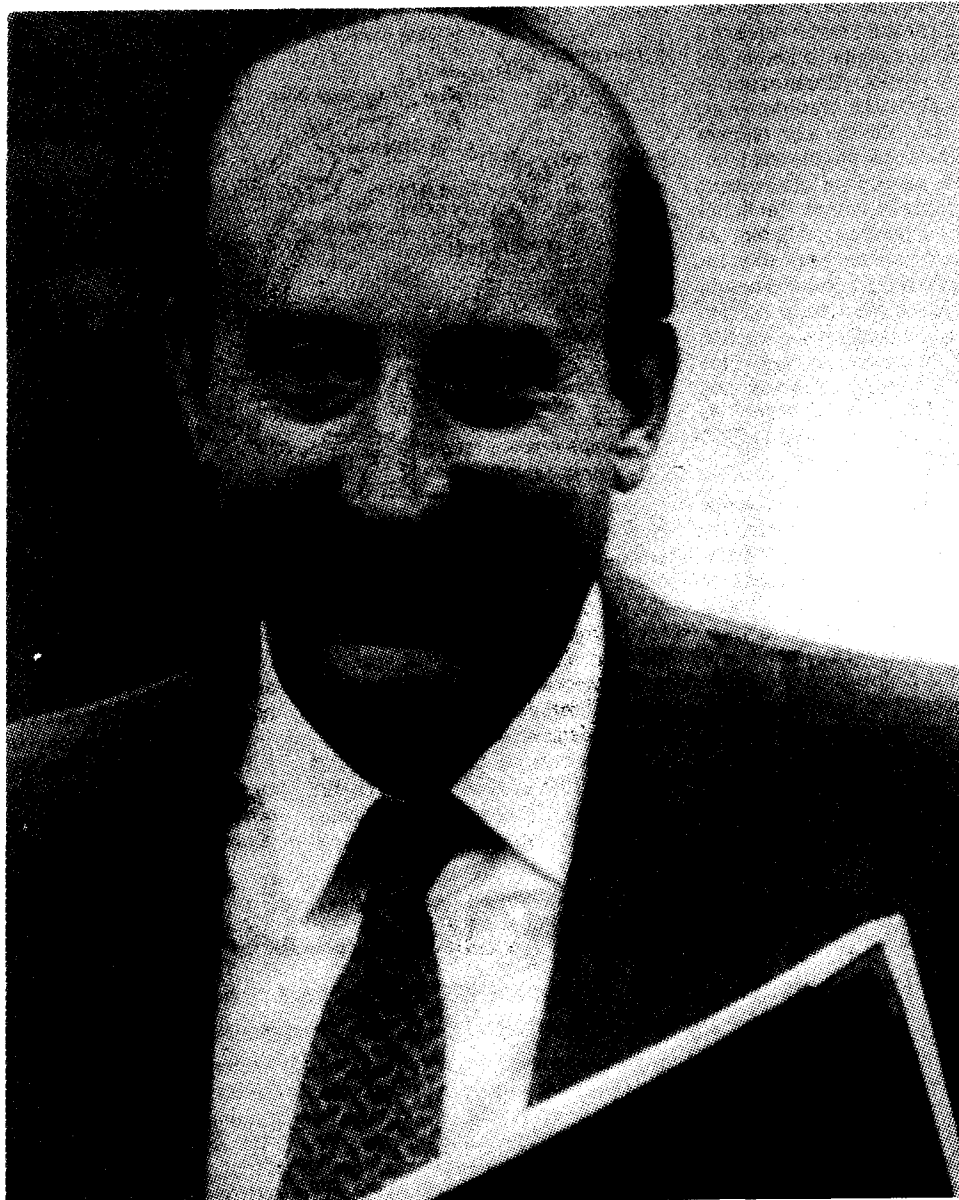
#### French lessons in democracy

Algeria is not a democracy and there accordingly exists a democratic tendency within the Algerian opposition. This tendency is essentially an affair of the Algerian intelligentsia, which is that section of Algerian society which is most thoroughly imbued with the illusion that Algerian politics is French in its origins and should therefore be judged by the yardstick of French democracy on one of its better days. (A smaller fraction of the intelligentsia supposes that Algerian politics is Islamic in origin.) If the popular upheaval of last October had been the work of the democratic intelligentsia, then it would be the case that the democratic character of the Algerian state was at issue. But the democratic opposition was caught napping by October's events and had no influence on them, and have merely been a side-show in their aftermath.

(One of the lessons which Algeria's political history teaches is that those who do the ploughing and sowing reap the harvest. The exploitation of share-croppers was abolished by the Algerian government in 1972.)

The FLN has made it clear that it will not permit party political pluralism to develop in Algeria in the foreseeable future. It has given as its reason for this the overriding imperative of preserving Algeria's national unity, and it would be a mistake to underestimate the force of this argument. The Algerian democratic opposition has not made the slightest attempt to show how pluralist politics might develop in ways consistent with this imperative, but has contented itself with making a purely ideological case for its proposals. It is therefore yet to learn two of the main lessons of Algerian political history, that ideological arguments count for nothing on the Algerian shore of the Mediterranean, and that playing to the French gallery gets Algerians nowhere.

The FLN very probably includes thoughtful people who recognise the desirability of political pluralism at some stage. But for as long as they have reason -



Algeria's new Prime Minister, Kasdi Merbah: can he ring the changes?

as they do - to believe that this pluralism would be exploited by interests opposed to Algeria's national unity and independence, they can be counted on to defer the question, and find alternative solutions to the problems they face.

#### Algerian lessons

Algeria in October resembled nothing so much as a Saharan *wadi* in full spate. The thunder storm and the flash flood have come and gone and only the stones remain. The stones in the Algerian river bed are the elements which compose the FLN, its roots in the society, its monopoly of physical force, its capacity for political innovation, its resolution and strong nerves, and...its empirical political philosophy. Together they form the rock on which the Algerian house stands, whether one likes it or not.

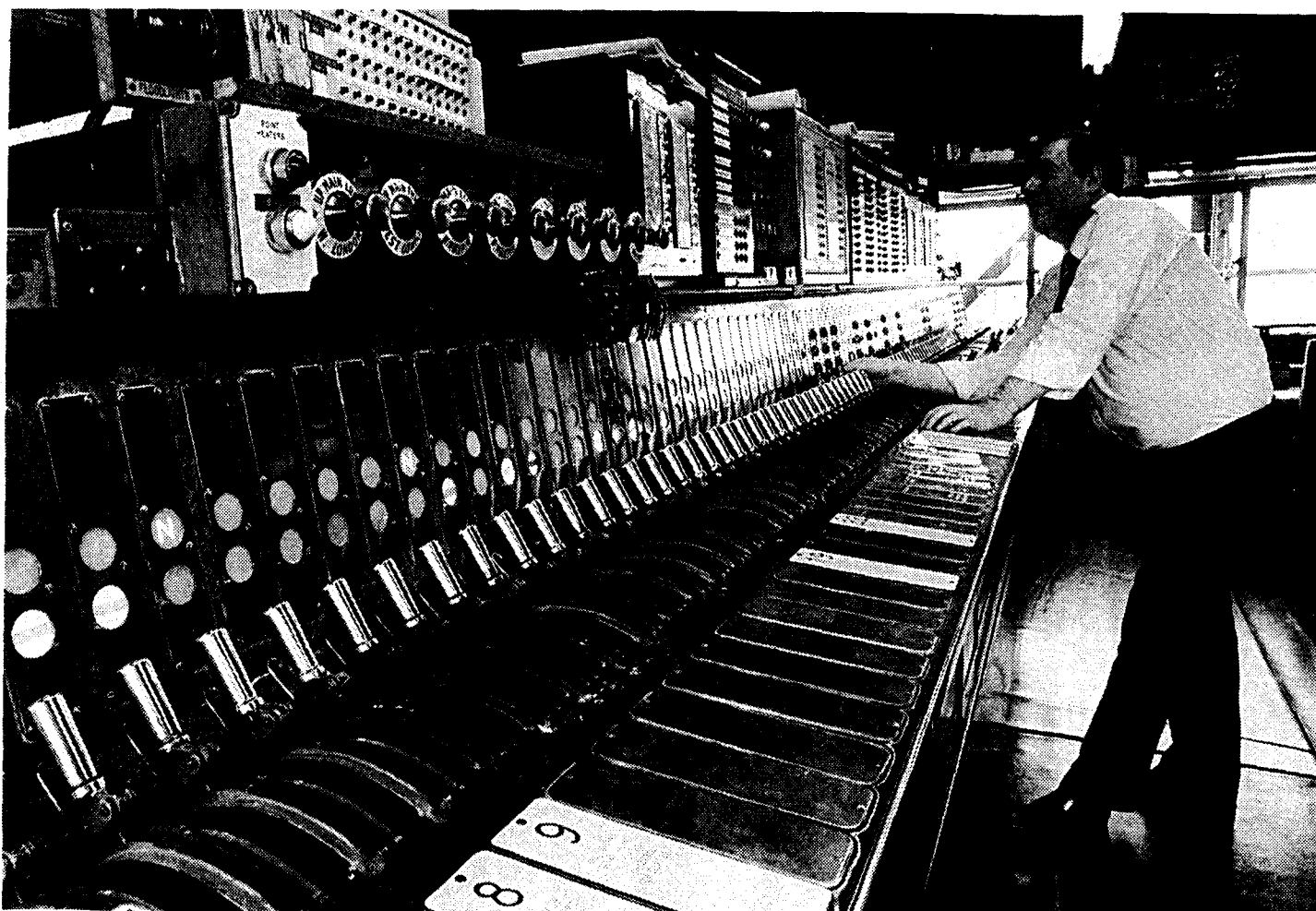
L&TUR is a socialist publication which takes the world as it finds it. The Algerian FLN is a nationalist movement, not a socialist one. It has adopted socialist policies and employed socialist rhetoric when

this has suited it, and has abandoned both when it has thought fit. Not for one moment do we make the mistake of regarding the FLN as ideological brothers in arms.

But it is undoubtedly in the interest of the Algerian people, including the Algerian working class, that a sovereign Algerian state exists. And it is unquestionably in the interest of the new states of the Third World that the Algerian state exists and continues to set them an example of purposeful independence. Under Algerian influence the Palestinian Liberation Organisation has at long last begun to think politically. And until the democratic opposition in Algeria starts thinking seriously about its politics, there will be no progressive alternative to the state which the FLN founded and is keeping in business.

In the meantime, the FLN will continue to set an example of political resourcefulness to all with eyes to see. There are lessons which British socialism could learn from the Algerian October, and it is Algerians who have been giving them.





The signal box at Clapham Junction. A computer error was blamed for the recent disaster.

## Discussion

### Transport: what Labour needs to do

*The reports of severe - indeed dangerous - overcrowding on London's commuter trains which flooded the media after the Clapham Junction disaster demonstrate that public transport is an issue which Labour could exploit to great effect in recovering lost ground in the South East, as Mike Squires explains.*

Transport has always been given a low priority on the political agenda. Not since the days of Ernest Marples has there been a high profile Transport minister. Indeed, the majority of the population would be hard pressed to name the current holder of the post. This state of affairs is somewhat surprising, as transport - whether for work or for pleasure - plays a very large part in our daily lives.

Just before the last election, Labour issued its transport policy, *Fresh Directions*. Included in the document were two contradictory statements, viz.:

*Labour's plans for an integrated freight system are not designed to attack or defend any particular type of transport (p.17).*

*For instance, we almost certainly do not make the fullest potential use of our railways*

*or our inland waterways for freight transport (pp.17-18).*

It should be self-evident that if the sentiments expressed in the second statement were given practical effect this would be at the expense of road transport, which would perhaps be subject to various restrictions in the way it operated.

The details do not concern us here. In reality, a Labour government might not have the bottle to carry through the fundamental changes which would be necessary in order to bring about large transfers of freight from road to rail and inland waterways.

#### Vested interests

It was Ernest Marples who put his finger on the problem shortly after taking over as Minister of Transport in 1959:

*As soon as anyone is hurt in transport, an immense scream goes up from the party hurt, perhaps rightly. Until I came to this Department, I thought I knew the meaning of the words 'Vested interest' (Hansard, 10.12.59).*

'Vested Interests' mean as much to Labour as they do to the Tories and there is plenty of evidence that changes of direction in transport

policy have taken place as a result of lobbying by interest groups which are part and parcel of the Labour Party's structure.

In 1947, the Labour government proposed that holders of 'C' licences (that is, traders operating their own fleets of vehicles) should be restricted to operating on distances not exceeding forty miles from their base. This measure was designed to assist the railways, as Herbert Morrison explained:

*My attitude was that if there was cut-throat competition between rail and road services, transport costs to the public and to industry were bound to be unduly high because of duplication...It was obviously in the public interest to ensure that the railways had the highest possible load factor and that road transport should play its proper part (Herbert Morrison, *An Autobiography*, London, Odhams, 1960, pp.258-9).*

It was not the road haulage industry which caused the then Labour government to backtrack on its intentions, but a sectional interest within the Labour movement. According to Morrison, there was "a distinct lack of enthusiasm" on the part of the Co-operative Movement towards the proposal to restrict 'C' licence holders. They lobbied as far as the prime minister, Clem Attlee, and were successful in getting the 'C' licence provisions dropped. Morrison's reaction was one of disappointment:

*I thought this made a weakness in a plan*

which was undoubtedly imaginative and could have eradicated most of the troubles which beset transport today - the congestion on the roads with heavy loads which could better go by rail and the losses on the railways because they are not getting the traffic they should (op.cit., page 259).

Morrison's remarks were made in 1960. He took no part in the cabinet discussions of the dropping of the 'C' licence provisions owing to illness.

Morrison's commitment to public transport was total. As a member of MacDonald's second Labour government, he laid the foundations of the London Passenger Transport Board (set up in 1933) and Londoners owe a debt of gratitude for the foresight and administrative abilities of Attlee's deputy. Herbert Morrison must surely be turning in his grave at the thought that his creation is being run in terms of profit margins amid acrimonious arguments over safety standards.

#### Sectional pressures...

When Labour took office in 1964, there were many who thought that public transport - especially the railways - would be given a chance to expand.

A feature of the post-Beeching debate was the contention that road users (especially private freight carriers) did not pay the total cost of the road network and were responsible for hidden costs such as increased medical care arising out of accidents and pollution. Harold Wilson was attracted to the idea of pursuing a cost analysis and thought that Beeching was the ideal man to carry out such an enquiry - but the idea never got beyond the Cabinet.

Although Beeching is usually associated with rail cutbacks, he was always determined that the railway industry should get a fair crack of the whip - and for this he gained the respect of the railway unions. The idea never came to fruition because of sectional interests, as Harold Wilson explained:

*Unfortunately, I had not reckoned with certain of my colleagues who, road conscious, regarded Beeching as an enemy of road transport. It was an occasion when I yielded to sectional cabinet pressure (The Labour Government 1964-1970, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971, p.184).*

#### ...versus public opinion

However, despite these setbacks for the railway industry, Labour did introduce the concept of a "social" railway, in which financial support came to be given for socially necessary, but loss-making, services.

The proof of the pudding was thus in the eating: sectional interests might have muscle and influence on their side, but public opinion delivers votes and voters are concerned with day-to-day issues rather than with back-stage fighting over policy choices.

Even the Heath government dared not



*Labour should attack Paul Channon with an alternative policy, not personal irrelevancies*

buck public opinion. When Heath's transport minister, John Peyton, was discussing a programme of possible rail closures with British Rail management, the Chairman, Richard Marsh, played what he himself described as

*a slightly underhand political trick. I had asked one of my colleagues to produce an overlay of the Railway map in transparent paper, which illustrated the Conservative and Labour Party seats as blue and pink areas. We showed him (Peyton) a complete map of the existing British Rail network. We then removed that and put up a much smaller British Rail network on which we superimposed the political map. He suddenly realised that all the closed lines were in rural areas and, by sheer coincidence, happened to be in Conservative seats. He said something to the effect, 'Well, I don't know why you didn't show me that at the beginning and why we wasted all that time this morning' (Richard Marsh, Off The Rails, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978, p. 167).*

Thus the railway unions have come to the conclusion that they are better advised to seek

to influence public opinion than to vie with other sectional interests in the corridors of power. Indeed, the Rail unions have conducted two campaigns in recent years. One was the *No Rail Cuts* campaign in the late 1970s and the other was the *Better Rail Campaign* of 1988.

The purpose of the *Better Rail Campaign* is to highlight the position in which the railway industry finds itself. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Network South-East sector (NSE). This is the sector that generates most complaints - usually about punctuality and overcrowding. It is also an area that provides a solid bloc of Tory seats and it is those electors who are bearing the brunt of the effects of Thatcher's financial policies on the funding of British Rail.

#### Thatcher's financial policies

In 1979, the government's grant to British Rail was £950m and, at 1985-86 prices, the 1990-91 grant is expected to be £539m. Faced with these problems, British Rail has had to find ways of reducing expenditure rather than relying on increased revenue in an expanding transport market.

As residents of the South East need to push further and further out of London to find cheaper housing, so the need to provide an efficient transport system becomes paramount. After all, what is the point of tax cuts if there are problems getting into work?

In its 1985-86 Annual Report, British Rail spoke of its dilemma:

*Improvements were made in quality of service but much more remains to be done. Timetable adjustments were made to reduce overcrowding on some routes, but the benefits of these were largely cancelled out by the increase in commuter business.*

The increase in NSE business can be measured by the fact that, of the three passenger sectors, growth in revenue is greatest in NSE:



*Will John Prescott exploit Labour's transport opportunity?*

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(source: BRB Annual Reports)

In addition to the improved financial performance, the two years in question have seen an increase of 9% in terms of passengers carried - thus confirming the problems in NSE to which the BRB refer. As if this were not enough, public complaints within the NSE sector increased by 64% since 1979 (according to the *Better Rail Campaign*). Most of these complaints concerned overcrowding, punctuality and dirty trains.

Clearly, then, British Rail has problems in as much as it has been working in a climate of cut-backs; increased demand was bound to cause difficulties. Pressure from the Government by means of grant reduction can only have been a contributory factor. It follows, therefore, that as Government has contributed to the problem, it must contribute to the solution.

For a start, NSE relies on subventions. Unlike the Inter-City sector, there is no likelihood of its being able to pay its way. Never have so many Tories relied on the public sector to organise their daily lives. In 1985-86, NSE's operating loss was £222m and twelve months later the loss was down to £162m. Quite clearly, an unleashing of market forces in their crudest form would cost commuters dearly.

Transport is thus an area on which Labour needs to make an impact in the south-east at the next election.

#### Labour, transport and the south-east

At one time, our elections were national in character and we tended to regard American presidential elections with a certain amount of mirth as aspiring presidential candidates delivered speeches on different themes depending on which state they happened to find themselves in. The political map of this country has now changed and there is a North/South divide.

What Labour has to do, therefore, is to recognise this fact in its campaign strategy and place more emphasis on regional issues. This would leave the party free to campaign on employment opportunities in the North, Wales and Scotland whilst concentrating on issues like transport in the South-East. I can well see Labour activists throwing up their arms in horror at the thought but, in the words of Lionel Bart's song, *fings aint wot they used to be...*

Transport does matter to those living in the South-East. When Ken Livingstone became Leader of the Greater London

Council, he had just taken part in a campaign which placed transport at the top of its policy priorities. The problem for the Tory Government was that the London Labour Party had identified itself with the aspirations of the electorate and with so many Londoners relying on public transport, they voted for a party which placed an emphasis on the expansion of this mode of travel. The GLC had to be stopped, therefore, from becoming too popular and a variety of mechanisms - the courts, reactionary Tory boroughs, government legislation and, finally, abolition of the GLC itself - were used to do this.

Having lost its main campaigning platform, Labour was left to cater for the Rainbow coalition - and that proved to be a vote-loser.

At the next election, therefore, Labour must take up the theme of public transport and take the debate into the whole of the London and South-East area. The *Better Rail Campaign* estimates that one-off payments in the area of £300m, plus annual costs of around £74m would solve many of the problems faced by NSE travellers. It is a small price to pay for expanding our public transport system. Our principles would be intact; the means of providing public sector support to cater for people's aspirations would be a high ideal, and we would be taking on board a *real* issue.

Come to think of it, we might put Ken Livingstone in charge of the campaign and leave him to get on with implementing the policy.

(The author is a branch official of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association. He writes in a personal capacity.)

#### Announcement

### No Relation !

We have recently learned, after two years of publishing *Labour & Trade Union Review*, that there exists another publication with a similar name. This is the *Labour & Trades Union Press Service*.

It has taken us so long to discover this because, so far as we can see, the L&TUPS is not sold in shops, but only on subscription.

The L&TUPS describes itself as the "*Monthly Service of the Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding*." In other words, it is not really a magazine at all, but a kind of newsletter, containing a few very short articles, and in all no more than seven or so pages long.

The *Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding* (LCTU), we learn, includes a number of well known figures on what is conventionally regarded as the right wing of the Labour movement (e.g. its President, Lord Stewart, its chairman, Bill Jordan and its treasurer, Eric Hammond, not to mention Lord Chapple, Kate Losinska and John Gilbert MP) as well as various social democrats from Western Europe, such as Mario Soares from Portugal, etc. It also includes a number of Americans. We gather that the Committee organises seminars three times a year "*on issues of importance to the (Atlantic) Alliance*" and also the annual Ernest Bevin Memorial Lecture, in association with Robert Maxwell.

Since *Labour & Trade Union Review* is produced by the *Ernest Bevin Society*, and does not subscribe to pacifism or unilateralism on the defence question, it is possible that some of our readers have jumped to the conclusion that we are from the same stable as L&TUPS. We are not.

As far as we can see, the LCTU is a rather elitist affair which is not seriously interested in changing opinion within the Labour Party and trade union movement as a whole. Above all, its interest in Ernest Bevin appears to be confined to Bevin's realistic attitude to the defence issue; it seems to have no interest in or use for Ernie Bevin the trade union leader and socialist committed to the development of working class power. It certainly appears to have forgotten all about Bevin's normally well-founded contempt for 'the middle-class mind'.

The *Ernest Bevin Society* and its journal, *Labour & Trade Union Review*, have never had anything whatever to do with the LCTU (or with whoever may be backing it) and we are not in any way connected with or responsible for any "annual Ernest Bevin Memorial Lectures" organised by the LCTU and Robert Maxwell.

We are and always have been an independent society and L&TUR an independent magazine, and this is how things will remain.

Hugh Roberts

Editor

*Labour & Trade Union Review*

Jack Lane

Secretary

*The Ernest Bevin Society*

Monitor

## The Battle of Ideas

by  
Jack Rhys

*That "the worst are full of passionate intensity" is certainly true of British leftwing journalism today. Our rivals have damn-all to say, but they know how to organise publicity stunts and hype themselves, and pass themselves off as being in earnest.*

L&TUR most certainly does not lack conviction, however. It is written and produced by people of profound convictions, and its articles manifestly carry conviction. What we lack is money and cronies in the media, which is why we do not hype ourselves - quite apart from our well-founded distaste for such activity.

According to the conventional wisdom, an enterprise so utterly bereft of material resources should have no influence whatsoever. But we have scant respect for conventional wisdom and little difficulty in refuting it.

In the two years since we started publishing, our thinking has had a discernible impact. It is now an open secret in London political and media circles that L&TUR and the Ernest Bevin Society are where the new ideas and penetrating analyses are coming from. In some cases, our ideas are simply being lifted without acknowledgement (that is plagiarised). In others, eminent figures are slowly getting around to thinking and saying what we have already thought and said well ahead of them.

Since our readership across the country has a right to be aware of this, we shall from now on be monitoring the influence we are having in a regular column. For instance...

### The ethic of public service

Compare the following:

a) *"At the heart of productive socialism there must be...a spirit and an ethic: the spirit of cooperative enterprise and the ethic of public service."* (Editorial, L&TUR No. 8, October-December 1988, page 6).

b) *"Developing a new ethic for the public services - which they badly need - will be one of the most important political tasks for the next decade."* (John Lloyd: 'Modernising Labour and its Policies', AEU Journal, November 1, 1988, page 16.)

It comes as no surprise to us that an eminent person such as John Lloyd should be an avid reader of ours. But we would put it to the editor of the AEU Journal that his readers do not need to have our ideas watered down for them by others. They would

undoubtedly prefer to have them served up neat.

### Industrial democracy

It has also come to our attention that Gordon Brown and Bryan Gould are now talking about the virtues of what they prefer to call "supply-side socialism" rather than "productive socialism", and that Gordon has declared himself in favour of industrial democracy.

Readers of L&TUR No 8 will recall that industrial democracy was central to the conception of "productive socialism" outlined in that issue.

It is not yet clear what the "supply-side socialism" of the more adventurous end of Labour's front bench really adds up to, still less that Mr Brown is thinking along the same lines as ourselves, but we shall watch his political evolution with interest.

### The credit boom

L&TUR No 8 - which, it should be borne in mind, went to press in September - carried on its back page an article on the credit boom and the new inflation. This was written by Jack Lane and was entitled "Loadsamoney!"

On December 4, the Sunday Times carried a useful report on the credit boom entitled "How teenagers are being tempted", with the sub-title "Money...money...money: easy credit from the high street shops lures youngsters into loadsadebt." This article followed an earlier report in the same paper on November 27. We congratulate the Sunday Times on following our lead.

Peter Walker MP, the Secretary of State for Wales and one of the last substantial Tories in the Conservative Party, may also deserve our congratulations, if press reports are to be believed. Consider the following:

a) *"High interest rates across the board are a crude and counter-productive way of tackling excessive credit, because of their effect on industrial performance"* (Jack Lane: 'Loadsamoney!', L&TUR No. 8, October 1988, page 28).

b) *"In a speech to the Tory Party's 'holy of holies', the Carlton Club, the Welsh Secretary last week made clear that he thought Chancellor Nigel Lawson's use of interest rates as the sole way of curbing the domestic credit boom was gravely damaging"* (The Observer, December 4, 1988, front

page).

But how ridiculous it is that it should be a Tory politician who takes up a point first made in a pro-Labour magazine, and thereby steals Labour's thunder on this issue! Since Walker's speech, Labour's leaders have apparently woken up to the fact that there is an issue here. But they have not dared to propose an alternative to Lawson's reliance on interest rates. An alternative was suggested by Jack Lane, of course, but we don't expect Labour to take it up until some intelligent Tory does, by when it will be too late, as usual.

### Northern Ireland

In L&TUR No. 1 (January 1987) we reported very sympathetically on the campaign in Northern Ireland to persuade the major British political parties to organise and contest elections there. In our editorial in L&TUR No. 5 (January 1988), we argued that where the Labour Party is concerned this proposal is the only serious alternative to Ken Livingstone's policy of unconditional "British withdrawal".

The policy of allowing the people of Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants together, to join and vote for British political parties - which we have supported from the outset - has since made considerable progress. It has been supported editorially by The Independent (29.8.88, 14.11.88), Today (11.10.88), The Spectator (3.9.88, 10.12.88), The Daily Telegraph (10.11.88) and The Times (15.10.88). It has also been supported in signed articles in The Spectator (22.10.88, 12.11.88 and 19.11.88) and The Sunday Times (16.10.88 and 4.12.88). And there are rumours that Dr Owen's SDP might at last be about to adopt this policy and act on it at the next election.

But it is not at all an idea of the Centre or Right. It was first launched by socialists in Belfast who founded the Campaign for Labour Representation for Northern Ireland in 1977 and who have since been tirelessly canvassing the Labour Party, year in, year out. It is absolutely absurd that the Labour Party and the so-called leftwing press should have refused to take up this wholly democratic and progressive proposal, and thereby once again allow the right and the centre to make the running on this question as on so many others.

It continues to be opposed by the Guardian (which flirted with it in an editorial on November 10, 1986, but was evidently scared off it by someone or other), and (surprise! surprise!) that clarion of citizenship and democratic principle, New Statesman and Society.

As for Samizdat (the journal of the Birkbeck College underground), its views on the genuinely undemocratic manner in which Northern Ireland is governed are yet to percolate to the surface. We have their person-holes under surveillance.

# Nuclear Power: Is the End Nigh?

by  
Dick Barry

For over 30 years Britain's publicly owned nuclear power industry has received the unstinting support of successive Tory and Labour governments. Billions of pounds of taxpayer's money have poured into an industry which currently accounts for around 10% of generating capacity, less than 20% of electricity supplied and less than 4% of total energy provided to the consumer.

Continued public ownership of the industry would, therefore, on past evidence, guarantee its future well into the next century. Even a Labour government, committed to phasing out nuclear power, would find it difficult to dispense with, given other more urgent priorities. But why wait for a Labour government, however determined it may be to terminate the nuclear power programme, when the present Government's proposals to privatise the electricity supply industry (ESI) will do the job for it?

The Government more or less guaranteed a market for nuclear power, in the early years of privatisation at least, when it suggested that up to 20% of electricity supplies should come from non-fossil fuel sources. In the short term, due to the underdevelopment of renewables, this must mean nuclear power.

However, as the renewables and other non-fossil fuel alternatives are developed, they will gradually replace nuclear power, which will prove increasingly expensive under normal commercial conditions. Coal, too, will become more competitive with nuclear power if a discount rate of 10% or more is used for nuclear power, as it should be if investors are to get an adequate return on their investment.

## Parkinson's dilemma

This presents the government with a dilemma. If, as Cecil Parkinson insists, it is committed to nuclear power as part of a diversified source of electricity, how can its future be guaranteed under private ownership

without outside help, i.e. from the government? And, if the Government supports the nuclear industry as it proposes to do through a 20% non-fossil fuel clause and a nuclear tax, how can it do this and claim that the market will determine the true cost of electricity to the consumer?

Left to the market, the future of nuclear power would be exceedingly bleak. Most of the evidence submitted to the Select Committee on Energy claimed that nuclear power could not long survive in a more competitive environment.

The Select Committee's report<sup>1</sup> even said that

*"The independent witnesses we examined on 27 April 1988 were unanimous in their view that, primarily because of commercial discount rates and the price of international coal, private generating companies unsupported would be most unlikely to build new nuclear power plants."*

## Coal and nuclear power

Disregarding Heysham II and Torness, only one nuclear station, the Sizewell 'B' PWR<sup>2</sup>, is at present under construction. Assuming planning permission is granted, work on Hinkley Point 'C' PWR could begin in the next year or so. Further PWRs are planned by the CEBG on at least three other sites.

The National Power Company, which will form the larger of the two generating companies to be set up under privatisation, will be responsible for the CEBG's nuclear capacity. And its size, as Cecil Parkinson confessed to the Select Committee, has been partly decided because the Government had been advised *"from a marketability point of view, that if nuclear power were too big a component, it might be difficult to market it"*. This is an admission that nuclear power, unlike coal, cannot, and must not be expected to, stand on its own two feet.

The uneven treatment of coal and nuclear

power was commented upon most forcefully in the Select Committee's report:

*"One of the most disturbing aspects of the Government's privatisation proposals is the uneven treatment it has given to the coal and nuclear power industries. While the indigenous coal industry is left wholly or largely exposed to short-term forces in the international coal and energy markets, which often do not reflect long-term marginal costs, it is proposed to offer nuclear power a protected share of the electricity market."*

Commenting further on this, the Select Committee says:

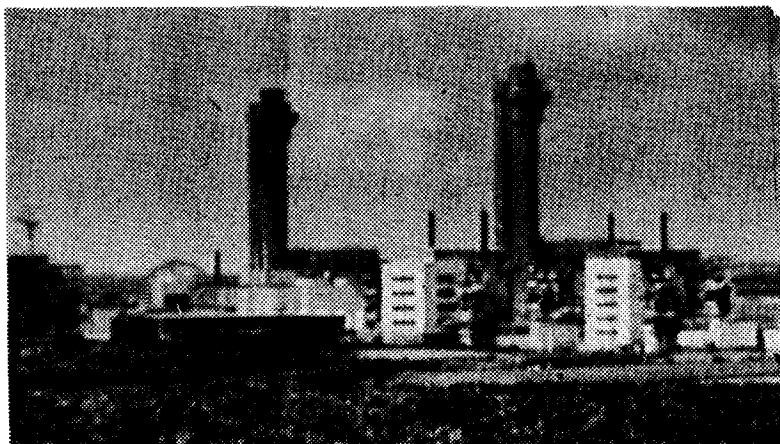
*"In its electricity privatisation White Papers and elsewhere, however, the Government has singled out only two factors to justify its decision - security of supply and a party manifesto commitment to a continuing nuclear power programme. It has glossed over the industry's economics, ignored the industry's external costs, and still cannot be sure that the favoured PWR technology is the best available. Ironically, the lack of persuasive reasoning behind the Government's position is very reminiscent of the arguments that for so many years were being put forward for supporting coal."*

## The wider picture

In L&TUR No. 6 I argued that privatisation of the ESI could mean the end of the British coal industry, or at least a further substantial reduction in its size. For environmentalists this would be no bad thing, for coal is a polluter, even where power stations are fitted with Flue Gas Desulphurisation equipment. For the mining communities, however, it would be disastrous. And the effect on the balance of payments of coal imports as they increased in price would be equally catastrophic.

Privatisation of the ESI could also mean the end of the nuclear power industry. The uneven treatment given to coal and nuclear power is designed to expose the former to market forces while protecting the latter from competition, albeit in the short term.

Once the nuclear industry is forced to compete on equal terms with other sources of energy, the end will not be far away.



- (1) *The Structure, Regulation and Economic Consequences of Electricity Supply in the Private Sector*. Energy Committee 1987-1988 (6 July 1988).
- (2) PWR stands for Pressurised Water Reactor. (This is the type that went wrong at Three Mile Island. Chernobyl was of a somewhat different design. Ed.)