

Labour & Trade Union Review

No 5

January-March 1988

Price £1

Democracy v. the Poll Tax

by Jack Lane

Accountability and the Rates

i) Council Tenants

The main argument put forward by the government to justify the Poll Tax is that the present system leads to a lack of accountability of local authorities. The authorities which are always singled out to illustrate this are inner city authorities which have a very high number of council tenants, and there is a simple reform which would change tenants' attitudes to rates and bring about all the accountability that is possible in this area. This is to present the tenants with their *annual* rates bill, as happens automatically with owner-occupiers.

The annual rates bill concentrates the mind of those who receive it wonderfully. But under the present system, the rates paid by council tenants are hidden among the other charges they pay: rent, water rates, heating charges etc. It is amazing that the government appears never even to have considered this simple reform. The more one looks at government policies, the more one sees purely ideological considerations behind them. The poll tax proposals are the most blatant example of this.

ii) The Family

The present system is essentially a property tax paid by families. One might expect the Tories to be prejudiced in its favour for this reason alone, because it certainly tends to preserve the family unit, in total contrast to the poll tax.

Family units generate a great sense of accountability and responsibility among members

when it comes to dealing with financial matters affecting the whole family in every area from pocket money to house prices. And, of course, a family unit has a much better appreciation of what is involved in local government in all its aspects; its members are bound to have a more rounded view of the subject that single individuals who may never be affected or may never appreciate how they are affected by several local government services.

If the simple reform suggested above were introduced, there can be no doubt whatever that the present system would generate real accountability.



Mr Heseltine: Poll tax inconsistent with support for the family.

iii) Taxing Property

The government seems to have developed the notion that because paying units will more than double, from about 16 million to

35 million, the poll tax will therefore be fairer and will lead to greater accountability. This ignores the fact that these 35 million already contribute in one way or another in the present system in a way that allows for fairness and accountability at the level of the family. This is certainly preferable to the state, in effect, laying down what people can do very well for themselves.

It is also very anti-social to remove a tax on property. This measure, together with continued tax relief on mortgages, creates a property-owning aristocracy. It is certain in any case that the temptation to tax property could not be resisted for very long by any government and a property tax would be brought back in a very short time. It is as well to remember that domestic rates were abolished in the Irish Republic less than a decade ago, and a property tax is certain to be reintroduced there very soon.

iv) 20 Per Cent

The whole accountability argument falls down at another level. It is accepted that even with full compliance the poll tax will raise about 20% of local government expenditure. 50% will come from central government, and the business rate, set by the government, will provide the remainder. Real power of accountability will rest more and more with the government as it will directly determine the major part of local government financing.

The government has made it quite clear that there will be poll tax capping as there was rate capping if it judges this necessary.

This is admitting that the poll tax contains no automatic guarantee of better accountability of local authorities. Local government accountability will remain a matter for the eye of the beholder, except that the government will have more arbitrary power to implement its view of accountability.

It is hardly necessary to detail how unfair the poll tax will be as a form of taxation. There are enough Tories saying this to make it indisputable. One example from the Low Pay Unit illustrates the point well. It pointed out that despite rebates a single person with a net income of £2,382 will pay as much as Nicholas Ridley himself, who will soon be on £51,068 a year.

The Poll Tax and Civil Liberties

The unfairness of the poll tax as a tax need hardly be detailed. But it is necessary to detail the implications of the Poll Tax for civil liberties, so that the British people, and in the first place British trade unionists and socialists, realise exactly what is being proposed.

The poll tax is not, as some people undoubtedly suppose, a tax on the right to vote. Voting was originally a matter of counting heads, and still is in many cases. "Poll" is an old word for *head*. A poll tax is a tax on people for being alive and adult. The government prefers to call it by the euphemism "Community Charge", but it remains a poll tax - just as Income Tax would still be Income Tax if they called it the "Personal Remuneration Charge".

To put it as briefly as possible,

the following things will have to be done in order to put this poll tax into effect:

- 1) Every adult of 18 or over will have to be put on a register. This will also have to include everybody under 18 in some form, in order to be able to put them on the register proper when they reach 18. So the register will, in effect, include everybody.
- 2) The register will have to be constantly updated, and on a daily basis, if it is to be accurate and take account of all deaths, marriages, births, divorces, remarriages, changes of address, etc, etc.

Cui Bono?

The computer industry is certainly looking forward to this. An article in *Computing* (3rd September 1987) says:

"In many ways it is hard to imagine a better set of reforms in terms of the increased demand for computer systems and hardware... (than the) billing of 35 million adults. Water authorities will also use the community charge in England and Wales. Local authorities will have the right to cross-check the register against other records... housing, libraries, schools, social services... Such cross-checking will only be realistically possible by use of computers... It will lead to something approaching 500 million transactions in England and Wales in each year... This figure is over three times as many as at present..."

Non-compliance is inevitable. No other developed country operates a poll tax of the kind envisaged, so it is difficult to look abroad for comparisons... It will cost at least £100 million to set up the register and the new billing arrangements in England and Wales. The higher running costs could amount to an extra £150-200 million per year. Overall, the cost of running it will be two to three times the cost of the rates, though while both taxes run in parallel, this could be nearer four times the running cost. Benefits will not only cost more to administer, but they may cost the Exchequer more than the existing rebate system..."

For the computer world inside and outside local government, opportunity is about to knock..."

The Threat to Minorities

It will be interesting to see how the government will decide how the following are registered on the computers: itinerants, tramps, seasonal workers, Irish migrants, squatters, runaways etc. And why should be the following be registered - who have very good reason to remain anonymous: illegal immigrants, political refugees, refugees from domestic violence, and many others who are quite entitled to their official anonymity. And of course there are prisoners, religious orders (some with vows of poverty), long-term hospital patients, the mentally ill, diplomats, etc, etc.

Some will be exempt, but they will have to be accounted for and registered in some way in order to be exempted and in order to be included if their status changes. And we are not talking about small numbers here. We are talking about millions of people.

It becomes difficult actually to imagine that the poll tax could even be set up because of the work and cost involved and it becomes impossible to accept that it is worthwhile in order to have a new system of collecting no more than 20% of local government expenditure.

Anglo-Saxon Freedoms

But there is an additional and even more important reason why the poll tax should be opposed. It should be rejected by all possible means because it is alien to the whole tradition regarding taxation in the Anglo-Saxon world. This tradition is one of taxing things, not people; taxing things that people do, buy, own etc. but not taxing people as people. A person must do something before he or she is taxed, a principle which is similar to and associated with the philosophy that insists that a person is innocent before the law until proved guilty.

Taxation, like law and the state itself, all of which are inseparable, is a necessary evil which has a negative role in the life of the individual. An individual may do anything, is taxless and free unless society through the state has good reason to make him or her otherwise. This freedom is defined by the lack of power of the state over individuals except that power which is ceded freely and voluntarily by them to the state.

The best citizens are those who

are constantly challenging the state's laws and rights over them in taxation and other matters. This is obviously a very difficult concept for a petty-bourgeois mind from Finchley to grasp despite her libertarian reputation. In this she is not alone. The majority of people in the world would find the Anglo-Saxon attitude incomprehensible, and in so far as it was understood it would be considered downright dangerous.



Nicholas Ridley

The Totalitarian Temptation

In most societies, the state has a positive attitude towards its citizens in the sense that it takes it for granted that it is its business to decide what is right and what is wrong for them, and would see nothing essentially wrong with all that is involved in setting up and running the poll tax. The increase in the power of the state through the increased knowledge about its citizens would not be seen as a great threat. Quite the contrary, it would be seen as a form of extra security by the citizens as it is accepted by the citizens that the state by its very nature is there for their good.

In Britain, by contrast, the state is under a constant obligation to explain and defend its rights and powers to every variation in civil society and all classes, backgrounds, religions, nations, races etc. have to be taken into account by its agencies. Any tendency which adopts the blanket approach to civil society runs into trouble and has to retreat.

However, at the moment there is a great vacuum in the body politic caused by the absence of an effective opposition, and this has allowed the government to attempt

the implementation of a purely ideological piece of legislation. The government has been allowed to succumb to the totalitarian temptation. Thatcher always had the potential for this, and she has been given the opportunity. The nearest the British ever get to totalitarianism is when a government is not effectively under permanent challenge from the opposition. And Labour has cried "Wolf" too often to be taken seriously now, when the danger is real.

It is conceivable therefore that the government will succeed in putting the poll tax in place. And that there will then develop a whole poll tax industry that will ensure its continuation. There are enough empire builders in local government to facilitate this and an unacknowledged but very effective unholy alliance could develop between these elements and the government.

Labour's Opportunity

Labour councils and the Labour movement generally have been presented with a great opportunity to undo at a stroke some of their recent mistakes and make a strong appeal to the majority of the population by opposing and defeating this tax. But they can do so only if they can convince people that this is not just more of the same from the Tories, but a qualitative change along the road to regimentation of the population.

And, it may be asked, what choice does Labour have? Are Labour councils and Labour councillors going to track down every person in their area and register them, constantly monitor them, allow that information to be on sale as Ridley said? In effect, will they do the state's dirty work? This is not information about the population that is to be just stored in a computer, this is to be usable information and therefore correct information and available information.

All this for a mere 20% of local government income! And despite their best efforts they could still be poll tax capped!

It was said of Wordsworth by his former radical friends; "For a handful of silver he left us", and we shall be entitled to say the same of Labour councillors who assist in implementing this tax.

Livingstone's Logic

Ken Livingstone's remarks after the Enniskillen bombing infuriated the Labour leadership because they ruined a little ploy it was engaged in.

The Enniskillen bombing touched an unusually deep chord in British public opinion and produced a surge of sympathy for the people of Northern Ireland. It therefore obliged the British political establishment to put on a big display of all-party shock and horror at an event which has had numerous precedents and will have numerous sequels because it was an inevitable consequence of Westminster's misconceived bipartisan attitude towards the province.

In order to keep a grip on its newfound image of unutterable blandness, it was essential for the Labour leadership to associate the party in the public mind with the general chorus of condemnation of the IRA. Livingstone's remarks nullified the humbug of the Labour leadership with unerring precision, and what could be more infuriating than that?

No policy

There is to be no discussion of Northern Ireland in the policy review now getting under way within the Labour Party. This is because the Labour Party does not have a policy on Northern Ireland.

A policy is a stated intention to do something specific about a question if elected to office. Labour has not stated an intention to do anything in particular about Northern Ireland if elected to office, other than end strip-searching, which is not an exclusively Northern Ireland issue and is an entirely secondary aspect of the Northern Ireland question.

In lieu of a policy, Labour has a 'belief'. The Labour Party believes in "*a united Ireland: to be achieved peacefully, democratically, and by consent*" (*Labour Manifesto*, June 1987, page 11). The Labour Party also believes in a socialist Britain, to be achieved in the same manner. Belief in a socialist Britain is not a policy and belief in a united Ireland is not a policy.

Labour's failure to have a policy is a major reason why the Northern Ireland question gives every appearance of being insoluble. The Labour politicians whose business it has been to deal with Northern Ireland have asserted the insolubility of the question as an excuse for their own refusal to adopt a principled and realistic policy for it. Merlyn Rees has been the pioneer of this theme and has been tirelessly eloquent on it.

Although the politicians who have succeeded Rees as Labour's

Northern Ireland spokesmen have differed from him in their subjective attitude towards the place, they have dealt with the question within the parameters he established. And, having established those parameters, Rees continues to set an example of respect for them. Although he let it be known that he strongly disagreed with the Anglo-Irish Agreement at the very moment that it was being endorsed by the House of Commons with Labour's vigorous support, Rees uttered not a word in public.

There can be no debate within the Labour leadership because there is no policy that can be debated. There is only a 'belief' and it is understood by all and sundry that this 'belief' is nine-tenths an affair of public relations and that its public expression must therefore necessarily be modified as changing circumstances require. Meanwhile, in the real world, the war goes on, year after year, real people meet real deaths, and nothing whatever is done to put a stop to this state of affairs.

This is the situation which Ken Livingstone is addressing.

Livingstone's politics

Labour & Trade Union Review has an attitude to Ken Livingstone that is unique in British left-wing journalism. We oppose him but insist on giving him his due. We detest his politics and make no bones about the fact. The politics of the 'rainbow coalition' fragments the working class and the socialist movement along every conceivable line of cleavage (colour, national culture, religion, sex, 'sexual orientation', locality, etc.) and substitutes the politics of patronage and pseudo-radical posturing for purposeful socialist politics.

But, while frankly opposing everything Livingstone stands for, we do not misrepresent him or engage in snide attacks on him. We recognise that he represents a brand of *politics* and that he does so consistently and with considerable skill. So, when he puts forward a position on a question of concern to socialist

politics, we consider his arguments on their merits.

Livingstone considers Northern Ireland to be a colony, British rule there illegitimate and the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin a straightforward national liberation movement of the kind which has come to power in many other ex-colonies and which the Labour Party cheerfully endorses nine times out of ten. His position is essentially that the British government should deal with the Northern Ireland problem as it has dealt with countless other colonial problems: that it cut its losses and get out. And that, if getting out involves negotiating with the IRA, then so be it; there is nothing unusual about that. Lloyd George's coalition government negotiated with Michael Collins in 1921, Harold Wilson's Labour government negotiated with the National Liberation Front in South Yemen in 1967, and Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government negotiated with Robert Mugabe in 1979.

This is a perfectly coherent position. Its great virtue is that it does not waste time deploring the violence in Northern Ireland. This violence is certainly deplorable, but for British politicians to deplore violence which they have permitted to continue for 18 years with no end in sight is an evasion of the issue and an abdication of their responsibilities which can only be described as criminal. Instead of joining this feckless chorus of humbugs, Livingstone is addressing the political reasons for the violence and proposing a straightforward way of putting an end to it. And, assuming that he does not lose his nerve, instead of putting himself out of court with British public opinion he stands a good chance of seizing the moral high ground from his detractors.

An end to violence?

It may be objected to this that a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland would not put an end to the violence there. But Livingstone's answer - that the continued British presence in the province is not leading to an end, or even a

Labour & Trade Union Review

ISSN 0953-3494

114 Lordship Road, London N16 0QP

editor: Hugh Roberts

Volume 1 Number 5 January-March 1988

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diminution, of the violence - is irrefutable. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was explained as a means to securing a major reduction in the activities of the IRA. Those activities have increased very appreciably since November 1985.

Moreover, Livingstone is able to argue that the extra violence which might attend a British withdrawal could be expected to be short-lived. Decisive political movement in the situation might well provoke a spasm of widespread bloodletting, but this movement would lead to a political settlement, whereas the current absence of political movement ensures an unending vista of violence which is entirely futile because leading nowhere. That is a perfectly reasonable view.

Finally, Livingstone clearly feels that whatever bloodshed occurred in Northern Ireland after a British withdrawal would be no concern of the British government or British politicians. This is a realistic position and its frankness does Livingstone credit. It is not the business of politicians to beat their breasts over violence that occurs in territories over which they have no control, but to prevent violence in those

territories for which they are responsible. Livingstone's frank indifference to the violence which may occur in Northern Ireland following a British withdrawal is infinitely preferable to the indifference of practically all other British politicians to the current violence in Northern Ireland and the sanctimonious rhetoric with which they disguise it.

A colony ?

Livingstone's view of Northern Ireland is an historically ignorant view, but it is enthusiastically shared by Kevin MacNamara, the uninhibited Irish nationalist whom Neil Kinnock recently appointed as Labour's chief spokesman on Northern Ireland.

This view, of Northern Ireland as a colony and of its people as un-British, was formally rejected by Douglas Hurd on BBC *Question Time* a few weeks ago. But it is taken for granted by the Labour Party. If the Labour Party regarded Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom and its people as British, it would organise there and contest elections there as it does in every other part of the United Kingdom. It has never done either of these things.

The colonial conception of

Northern Ireland which Ken Livingstone shares with all of his Labour detractors was not entertained by the Labour Party's precursor, the ILP. The ILP organised, recruited and contested elections in Northern Ireland prior to the First World War. And its treatment of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom was initially accepted by the Labour Party, which held its first ever Annual Conference in Belfast in 1907.

But, since Sinn Fein's success in the 1918 general election, Sinn Fein's view of Northern Ireland has prevailed in the British Labour Party. There is nothing unorthodox whatever about Livingstone's adherence to this view.

Until 1975, the British Labour Party gave financial support to the Northern Ireland Labour Party. This money was a pittance, and it was conscience money pure and simple. The NILP repeatedly petitioned the British Labour Party to allow it to affiliate or to incorporate it as the Northern Ireland Region of the BLP. These proposals were discussed in the NEC of the BLP in 1942, 1949 and again in 1970. They were turned down flat, and care was taken to ensure that there was no

discussion (or even knowledge) of these proposals outside the NEC.

Since 1977, the Labour leadership has been thoroughly canvassed by socialists and trade unionists in Northern Ireland who wish the Party to organise and contest elections there. This canvassing has had no effect. The Labour Party continues to ban Northern Ireland residents from membership (although it also continues to pocket the political levy paid by some 70,000 Northern Ireland trade unionists).

The Labour Party certainly regards Northern Ireland as a colony, and as a colony which is destined to be got rid of. And it treats the natives of this colony, Catholic and Protestant alike, with far more contempt than it ever displayed, or even felt, for the natives of British India or British Kenya or British Guiana.

Withdraw or Expel ?

Livingstone's policy of British withdrawal ignores the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population of Northern Ireland wish to remain in the United Kingdom. It is not only the Protestants who want this. An opinion poll conducted by the consultant firm Coopers & Lybrand for Channel 4



Television during the general election found that only 9% of the population as a whole wanted a United Ireland and that only 22% of the Catholics wanted this. 62% of the population as a whole wanted to be allowed to participate in normal British politics through the right, currently denied them, to join and vote for the Labour, Conservative and Alliance parties (65% of the Protestants and 59% of the Catholics).

In other words, seven times as many people in the province want admission to the British political system as want incorporation in the Southern Irish state, and two and a half times as many Catholics want the former as want the latter.

These findings were based on a sample of 1,100 people, which is the sample size used for opinion polls in Great Britain. The population of Northern Ireland is not 50 million, but one and a half million. The Coopers & Lybrand poll was 34 times more representative than standard British opinion polls. Its findings cannot be seriously doubted. But they can be and have been very effectively suppressed.

Livingstone's proposals are unquestionably vulnerable to democratic criticism. What he and so many others euphemistically call "British withdrawal from Northern Ireland" actually means the *expulsion* of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants, including a clear majority of the Catholic community. But the Labour leadership is in no position to make this criticism. There is nothing democratic about its own position on Northern Ireland.

Democracy v. "consent"

When the Labour Party talks about "unity...by consent", it is using the term "consent" in an entirely novel way. It does not mean that the people of Northern Ireland are free to choose some other destiny than incorporation into the Irish Republic. It means that Northern Ireland is destined to be incorporated into a "United Ireland" one of these days, and that this will happen as soon as the people of Northern Ireland consent to it. In the meantime, whatever else they collectively consent to, if inconsistent with this destiny, will not happen.

If the Labour leadership thought for a moment that there was any prospect of the people of Northern Ireland giving what is normally meant by "consent" to Irish unification, it would take steps to secure this consent in the normal way, by contesting elections in the province on this platform. In the absence of the Labour Party, only a sectarian, Catholic-nationalist, case for Irish Unity can be canvassed in Northern Ireland and this case inevitably repels the Protestant majority. The Labour Party is not a sectarian party and could undertake to canvass a non-sectarian case for Irish Unity if it chose. The fact that it refuses to do this is conclusive proof that its leadership is not interested in securing the consent of the Northern Ireland electorate to the political destiny it has in mind for it.

It was largely at Tony Benn's instigation that the Labour Party NEC first made explicit its 'belief' in "a united Ireland...by consent". But Benn proposed that the Labour Party should "campaign actively" for this consent, and persuaded the NEC to include this phrase in its public position. This aspect of the Labour Party's position was never taken seriously by the rest of the Labour leadership, and has remained a dead letter to this day.

Thugs and criminals

Neil Kinnock has denounced the IRA as thugs and criminals with whom no democratic politician can associate. This is a fatuous thing to say.

When Ken Livingstone was recently taxed in the House of Commons with consorting with Provisional Sinn Fein, he invited MPs present to deny that the British government has had regular contacts with the same organisation. There could be no answer to that.

The IRA is not a gang of thugs but a highly disciplined army whose use of violence is politically motivated and calculated with remarkable precision. It has made very few mistakes in this sphere and it has had the political resourcefulness to minimize the consequences to itself of its mistakes. It has not suffered at all for its mistake at Enniskillen and it has nothing whatever to fear from being denounced by Neil Kinnock.

Denouncing "the men of

violence" is part of Kinnock's stock-in-trade. Taking principled and purposeful political action in such a way as to obviate the recourse to violence by desperate people is something of which he is entirely incapable.

Kinnock won acclaim from the media when he denounced the violence of the miners' strike in 1984. This violence followed from the undemocratic way in which the strike had been imposed upon the NUM membership in defiance of the union's own rule book and all its traditions. Kinnock never opposed the strike when doing so might have had a useful impact on the situation, that is, at the very outset. In fact, he gave lip service to it throughout and did not denounce the violence it generated until it had already become clear that the strike was lost.

If Kinnock's moralising about the IRA was connected to a political line which was seriously designed to put the IRA out of business, it would be defensible. It isn't.

The hidden complicity

In proclaiming its 'belief' in a "united Ireland", Kinnock's Labour Party expresses public support for the principal war aim of the IRA and implicitly endorses the claim of the Irish Republic, enshrined in Article 2 of its Constitution, to *de jure* sovereignty over the North. Because the Republic makes this claim, the IRA can argue that its activities are those of a national resistance movement confronting the occupying forces of an enemy power. And since no British government has ever challenged Article 2 and the British Labour Party actually agrees with the ambition it asserts, it is impossible for British politicians to dispute the IRA's view of what it is up to with sincerity or conviction. So they dispute it with humbug and bluster.

It would be quite different if Kinnock and MacNamara and the rest of the Labour leadership were sincere about "unity by consent". But it has been shown that they are wholly insincere about this.

They do not intend to seek this consent but nonetheless 'believe' that it will eventually be forthcoming. It will be forthcoming when the people of Northern Ireland have been sufficiently demoralised by the

situation in which they are imprisoned that they decide that even incorporation in the Republic is preferable to the continuation of their present tormented existence in political limbo.

The activities of the IRA are indispensable to the process of demoralising the people of Northern Ireland. They are therefore a necessary premise of the Labour Party's 'belief' in "unity...by consent". Is it seriously conceivable that the Labour leadership, with its taste for *realpolitik*, is unconscious of this? Of course not. But it is essential that British public opinion remain unconscious of it and correspondingly necessary that Neil Kinnock denounce the IRA in the strongest possible terms at regular intervals.

A welcome debate

The effect of this humbug is to allow the agony of the people of Northern Ireland to be prolonged indefinitely. It is likely to take quite a few more years before they have been demoralised enough to "consent" to what Kevin MacNamara and John Hume have in mind for them, which differs in no ascertainable respect from what Ken Livingstone and Gerry Adams have in mind.

The difference between Livingstone and the Labour leadership is that Livingstone sees no point in prolonging the agony and every point in stopping it, and is prepared to take a political chance in order to put this idea across. But the risk he is taking is not very great; it only appears so to Labour politicians who, even by contemporary standards, are remarkable for their timorousness.

The other effect of Labour's official stance is the way in which it has contributed to the slow but remorseless poisoning of the party's internal life in recent years. Cynicism and evasion of the issue are the hallmark of Labour's stance on Northern Ireland, and have become the stock-in-trade of the Labour leadership right across the board.

If the effect of Ken Livingstone's forthright remarks is to provoke a real debate on Northern Ireland within the Labour Party, no harm can possibly come to the people of Northern Ireland, Catholic or Protestant, from such a debate, and it would do the Labour Party nothing but good.

NOTES ON THE NEWS

by Madawc Williams

The King's Cross tragedy

There's been some dispute about who should bear the guilt for the tragic fire at King's Cross Underground. Some have blamed Thatcher and the Tory cuts. Others have blamed the way the system was run, regardless of cuts.

In fact, there is some truth in both these views. Cuts do put everyone under a greater strain. Given a government demand that they cut spending, it was unlikely that the management would take the precautions recommended after the last serious fire on the Underground.

The government demands that both British Rail and the London Underground should "pay for themselves", that they should raise their cash from their passengers. But roads are provided as a public service, on the basis of social need. Therefore rail services become worse and more expensive. More commuters start to bring their cars into work, making the roads even more crowded. But the "miracle of the market" does not correct matters. Better and wider roads are provided, to try to meet the social need. Meanwhile British Rail and the Underground are told to "balance their books", which means cutting back services and pushing even more commuters onto the roads.

Public transport is subsidised in almost all of the advanced industrialised countries. If you look at the full social cost, including road safety, noise and pollution, it is much cheaper to subsidise railways and buses than to try to let private cars do the job. But Tory governments tend to take a narrow view.

On the other hand, anyone who has used the Railways or Underground knows their weaknesses. Attitudes tend to be unfriendly and unhelpful. If there's a delay, you often won't be told why. The Underground is particularly bad; you'll be kept waiting in a tunnel for ten or fifteen minutes, and given a vague explanation only when the train is ready to move again. Another case is the Piccadilly Line to Heathrow.

During early morning runs, it would stop at various District Line stations between Hammersmith and Acton Town. No warning was given of this odd behaviour - at least it wasn't last time I travelled that way. You could easily think you were going the wrong way, or were on the wrong train. One gets the strong feeling that the people who run the system don't give a damn what you think.

Public transport is supposed to be a public service. But the people who work on it often seem to view the system as a thing in itself, with passengers as an unwanted annoyance. It's an easy mode of thinking to get into. Just keeping a complex transport system running is hard enough; to have consideration for those who use it, to remember that they too are human, is harder still. And, regrettably, there has never been any simple way of keeping public transport under effective public control.

The King's Cross fire may have broken out because of shortage of funds and cutbacks in staff. But the fire became a massive tragedy only because it was handled wrongly. We won't know the full facts until the Inquiry, which is likely to take some time. But it seems clear that there was a drastic misunderstanding of what was happening, and that passengers were actually sent up into the fire. Trains continued to run, which may have made things worse by providing an air-flow for the flames. But they were not used to evacuate anyone - they didn't stop at all.

Thatcherism relies on private greed, and the hope that market forces will somehow enable social needs to be met. Traditional Labour Party policies have been to boost public spending and monopoly public enterprises - but without either workers' control or effective social control. The sinking of the "Herald of Free Enterprise" was a dramatic example of the weaknesses of Thatcherism. The King's Cross tragedy highlights the weaknesses of both systems, and the need for something better.

Lord Help Us

This year, as every year, the New Years' Honours List is the usual mixed bag. Failed or retired politicians.

Prominent businessmen - some of whom have

been generous contributors to Tory party funds. A gentleman who was led by his sense of duty to be economical with the truth. And some genuinely worthy people and deserving cases - such as the heroes of the ferry disaster.

It's an odd system, really. The titles derive from military chivalry and feudal land-holding, and were largely formalised during the Middle Ages. Some titles, such as Duke and Count, have their roots in the later stages of the Roman Empire. But such things have largely lost their meaning. I'm not sorry that society has developed past that stage. There was plenty of brutality, oppression and treachery, along with all the honour and chivalry. But the system certainly had its merits.

Knighthood used to be a serious matter, awarded after proof of courage in battle. And it did persuade warriors to behave rather better than they would have without the ethic of chivalry. It's long since become an irrelevance. These days, you have "knights" who would be hard put to it to fight off an angry wasp! Though the military/chivalric tradition is not entirely dead, it is no longer very important. The armed forces have it, but as a tradition of their own. In general, titles and coats of arms have become a matter of snobbery. So much so that some quite intelligent observers have forgotten that they ever meant anything else.

(For instance, Evelyn Waugh in his "Sword of Honour" trilogy expresses much indignation about the "Sword of Stalingrad" - a ceremonial sword that the British gave to the City of Stalingrad in honour of its victory over the Nazis. This strikes me as showing a basic misunderstanding of what such things once meant. The military/chivalric tradition was quite prepared to honour courage and skill in arms as such, without regard for the context. Saladin, who drove the Crusaders out of the Holy Land, was widely admired by them. Even in 20th century Britain, out-and-out enemies could be highly regarded - Baron von Richthofen in World War One, and Rommel in World War Two, for instance. Thus there was nothing very odd about honouring a former and future enemy, who at that moment happened to be an ally. Not unless you see snobbery as being the main point of the matter,

as Waugh almost certainly did.)

In so far as the military/chivalric tradition survives in British society, it is fairly far removed from the whole "honours system". Mostly it is just a matter of silly snobbery, and ceremony that long ago lost its real context. It overlaps with real life only in one area - the House of Lords, which does have some real political functions. In the past, it has been a centre of resistance to the reforms of left-wing governments. At present, it is functioning as a small but definite check on Thatcherism.

It also provides a home for old politicians - and some of them continue to do useful work. With Life Peerages, its hereditary role has already been greatly reduced. It might seem logical to abolish it completely, and then replace it with some completely different sort of "upper house" that was chosen on a quite different basis. But British politics rarely works like that. The normal pattern is for old institutions to take on new functions, and to become something quite new under a venerable old name. Unless one is thinking of overthrowing the whole political system in a violent revolution, one might as well accept this fact and plan accordingly. A sensible reform would be to:

(a) exclude all hereditary members who have not been active in its legislative work, and prevent anyone else inheriting a place in future. (Since the Act of Union between England and Scotland, there have been plenty of old and genuine titles that did not confer membership of the House of Lords. So no really new principle would be involved).

(b) Make a title an optional extra for members. If they really wanted to call themselves Lord Wigan Pier or whatever, they could still do so. But more sensible individuals could avoid all such silly paraphernalia. They would simply be "Member of Parliament (House of Lords)".

Gulf Stalemate

Wars tend to have a momentum of their own. The Korean war had become a complete stalemate by 1951, and yet lasted until 1953. (Formally speaking, it continues till this day. But the actual fighting ended in 1953). It was clear by 1969 that the US could

win no definite victory in Vietnam, yet it took till 1973 to secure a formal peace, and a further two years until the war ended with the collapse of the Saigon regime.

The Gulf war may prove to be a similar case. It will be hard for the Iranian leadership to make peace on the same sort of terms that they could have had years ago, precisely because they chose to push on and fight the war for those extra years.

The war started with a ruthless and unprincipled attempt by Iraq's leadership to grab the Arab part of a seemingly weak Iran. But the Iranians held out, and recovered what they had lost. The Iraqis were willing to admit failure, and return to the *status quo ante*. But the Iranian leadership decided to carry on, and make the Iraqis pay. Morally speaking, they had a good case. The Iraqi leadership had indeed done wrong, and did deserve punishment. But the price of trying to enforce punishment is out of all proportion to the possible benefits of making a rather unpleasant bunch of Iraqi politicians pay the price for their misdeeds.

Or rather - from our point of view, the price seems out of all proportion. The trouble is, the Iraqis treat religion as a matter of undeniable truth, rather than conventional piety. If the casualties of war really do go to Allah's paradise, why should one hesitate to add to their numbers?

The war goes on, but seems to be getting nowhere. In *L&TUR* 4, I argued that the Iraqis would not in fact dare fight the US fleet. I reckoned that their threats were mostly bluster - and so they have proved. The US fleet could do more damage in one day than all the world's terrorists have done in the last 20 years, and the Iraqis know it. Therefore, they stick to attacking those ships the US fleet is not protecting.

On land, Iran goes on trying to break through the Iraqi defensive lines. But to do this needs great military skill, or else vastly superior numbers. The signs are that the task is beyond them. Moreover, the other Arab states could send military aid if need be. Egypt has now been more-or-less forgiven for having made peace with Israel. Their army is probably quite as good as Iran's or Iraq's - it is only wars against Israel that have made them look

inferior. If Iraq were to start to collapse, Gulf State money and Egyptian manpower could be used to save it. But it is just as likely that Iraq will hold on by its own power. As for an end to the war - sad to say, that might be years away.

Human life

If a woman's womb were the size of an average room, how big would the fertilized egg be? As large as a football? As large as a ping-pong ball? As large as a marble?

In fact, the blastocyst is as small as 0.008 inches, and on this scale would be barely larger than a pinhead! The fertilized egg is human life, of a sort. So, indeed, are cancer cells. But it is a very long way from being a human being.

The government's White Paper, *Human Fertilization and Embryology: a Framework for Legislation* tends to confuse matters. The earlier Warnock Report took a much more logical line. Up to the 14th day, a fertilized egg may give rise to a human being, or to two or more human beings, or to nothing at all. Fully half of them give rise to nothing at all.

In vitro fertilization, used mainly as a cure for infertility, tends to produce a surplus of fertilized eggs. Researchers tend to view such fertilized eggs as only one step up from the sperm and unfertilized eggs, which no one at all tries to treat as human. One or two of these fertilized eggs will be placed in the womb and, with luck, will develop into an embryo, a foetus and in due course a baby. The rest have no future.

The White Paper proposes that MPs be offered two alternatives; to allow the eggs with no future to be used for research; or to insist that they be left alone to perish (as they inevitably will). The government will give no guidance as to which of these two options should be preferred. And the danger is, MPs will be swayed by the arguments of small but determined pressure groups, and end up banning all research on fertilized eggs.

If this does happen, a lot of human beings are going to suffer as a result. Research on fertilized eggs could help reduce the tragedy of still-born, short-lived or

hopelessly crippled babies. Such research might also be used to screen fertilized eggs from a couple who risk passing on some lethal or crippling malady. The fertilized eggs could be screened, and a perfectly healthy one placed in the womb; eliminating a lot of worry and avoiding the need for some late-stage abortions.

Ironically, it is some of the anti-abortion groups who are campaigning against research on fertilized eggs. (*New Scientist*, 3rd December 1987, p23). These groups claim to be pro-life. In fact they are nothing of the sort. They simply have a superstitious refusal to allow human knowledge to be used to protect human life. They claim that every fertilized egg has a human soul. One might speculate that a benevolent and all-knowing god would refrain from giving a soul to those fertilized eggs that he knew were not going to become human beings and have a chance to do good or evil. But that's not how the "pro-life" people see it. Nor do they follow through the logic of their own arguments. Fully half of the fertilized eggs created in the natural way of things will fail to develop, and be lost in the monthly menstrual flow. Logically, these people should be insisting that every used sanitary towel should be baptised and given a religious burial. But logic is hardly their strong point.

It's easy to laugh at the "pro-life" characters, and then do nothing at all to oppose them. Bills on abortion are certain to be the object of heavy lobbying from both sides. Bills on fertilization are more likely to be ignored by everyone except the religious nutters. It's something to watch out for. If possible, write to your MP when the matter comes to be debated.

Lloyd of London

I'm not in the habit of reading the *New Statesman*. You usually know what it's going to say without the expense of buying it, or the trouble of reading it. But recently I happened to see what John Lloyd, its departing editor, had to say about Enniskillen.

Now I knew John Lloyd when he was involved in serious politics. He was much less well known in those days, of course. But he was serious about his politics; trying to change the

world, instead of making a career for himself. He grew fed up, when the world showed itself unwilling to change in the ways we hoped it would change. At the time, I felt this was fair enough. He'd served his time trying to change the world; if he'd lost confidence in what he was doing, it was better that he should get out rather than hang around moaning.

Regrettably, Lloyd seems to have been unable to make a clean break with his past. He was doing very well as a journalist on the *Financial Times*, giving an accurate account of events without pretending that he was trying to change them. But his activities as editor of the *New Statesman* have been really disgraceful.

As far as I can see, the *New Statesman* acts as an antidote to thought. So does *Tribune*, though in a different way and with a greater pretence of radicalism. They are there to maintain existing ideology, not to promote anything new. New ideas are developed elsewhere, fight their way through to acceptance within the Labour movement, and are only then picked up and accepted in the *Tribune* or *New Statesman* view of things.

So what was Lloyd going to do as editor of the *New Statesman*? Unlike most of the people there, he was not a sincere believer in *New Statesman* ideology. In particular, he had been - and probably still is - a believer in the "Two Nations" view of Northern Ireland; rejecting not only IRA violence but also the whole notion of a United Ireland as either practical or desirable.

So what was he to do as editor? The answer was, very little. He showed that he still had his beliefs, but lacked the guts to express them in a way that would be understood by anyone who didn't already know them. He wrote editorials that could be seen as implying that Labour should organise in Northern Ireland. But they didn't actually say that. Time after time, he would go half way and then stop.

In essence, Lloyd has carried on the *New Statesman* tradition of being an antidote to thought. The idea of Labour organising in Northern Ireland has been making some progress in Labour Party circles; therefore the *New Statesman* picks it up and tries to smother it with vagueness. Lloyd knows better, but does not act on his beliefs. Such behaviour is far too common in Labour Party circles. The Kinnockites have a more conventional left ideology, but are just as unwilling to stand up for what they believe in. But do they really think that the voters will be happy with people who don't have the courage of their convictions?

Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

The Employment Bill

The Employment Bill published in October covers both trade union and training matters. These notes deal only with the clauses on trade unions. The following are (in brief) the main trade union clauses in the Bill:

1. The right of union members not to be called out on strike without a ballot.
2. The right not to be disciplined for refusing to join a strike or for crossing a picket line.
3. The right to a postal ballot for the election of governing bodies and key officials.
4. The right to have ballots subject to independent scrutiny.
5. The appointment of a "Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members" to give members in dispute with their trade union legal advice and to arrange for their legal representation.
6. No legal immunity for trade unions in disputes over closed shops.
7. Protection for workers refusing to be part of a closed shop.
8. Access by union members to union accounts.
9. Arrangements for ending direct deductions of subs when a worker leaves a trade union.
10. A ban on unions indemnifying their officials when these officials are fined for breaches of the law.
11. A ban on unlawful use of union property.
12. The Secretary of State may issue statutory codes of practice on balloting.

Tory trade union legislation has flouted it through fines or suspension or expulsion from the union.

Bringing the unions within the law is supposed to make them like other voluntary associations. But all voluntary associations are able to make rules for their members and discipline those who break the rules.

This clause also makes industrial disputes unmanageable. An official dispute is eventually resolved by negotiation between union and management. This requires the union to be able to speak authoritatively for its

members. After the appropriate ballots it must be able to organise the withdrawal of labour, and it must also be able to organise the full return to work.

This clause may be designed to prevent the organisation of effective industrial action. All it will do is change the means whereby industrial action is made effective. Workers do not give up their pay and go on strike lightly - especially big official strikes which may last for some time.

They are angry at the way they are treated and eventually decide to make the financial sacrifice involved in going on strike. They will be even more angry if, after all the balloting, they see other people scabbing with impunity. It will only take a small number to enforce strike discipline - by, for instance, beating the living daylight out of a few scabs. And this legislation is supposed to help bring industrial relations further *within* the framework of the law!

Presumably the government looks to the miners' strike for examples of people crossing picket lines with a certain amount of public sympathy. But that strike was imposed on the miners by the NUM leadership. There was no strike ballot. Most people are workers. And if a strike has a justified excuse and is democratically organised, most people will not regard it as doing the decent thing to scab on your workmates.

When introducing previous bills, and most clauses of this one, the government has made a reasonable and popular case. It has not even attempted to do so with the above clause. At the Tory Party Conference in Blackpool, the minister glossed over this clause with waffle and meaningless generalisations. One felt he was trying to slip it in without anyone knowing! The clause is also supported by the Institute of Directors - but again they have made no reasonable defence of it. It is otherwise an unpopular piece of legislation.

This is all perhaps very embarrassing for the government. But it will be able to go ahead if no publicly effective opposition is

forthcoming from the body most affected - the Trade Union Movement - or from the Parliamentary Opposition, the Labour Party.

The trade unions have chosen to oppose every single clause in the Bill, sometimes on the most spurious and contrived pretexts. Once again, they come across as unreasonable and even stupid. Or they would if their opposition amounted to anything more than a few bits of duplicated paper circulated internally.

I should like to comment on the opposition from the Labour Party. I have not been able to find any. Enquiries to Walworth Road produced the excuse that some research worker wasn't around and that they were waiting for someone else to come up with something! But they did expect the Shadow Employment Secretary to make a statement to the NEC in the near future!

This is in keeping with the Party managers' decision to cut the debate on the unions at the Brighton Conference to 20 minutes. It is also in keeping with the findings of a survey commissioned by the Party leadership to find out why people didn't vote Labour at the last election. After the "Loony Left", the second most popular reason was not high rates or Arthur Scargill or Wapping or even Defence. It was the present leadership of the Party.

One is tempted to despair with this kind of leadership. Yet I will nevertheless outline a few points which an effective opposition could take on board - if there is anyone at all out there listening.

1. Select for opposition only the worst sections of the Bill - in particular, the clause forbidding unions to discipline scabs: the "Scabs' Charter", as the Tory Trade Union Group so nicely put it.
2. Acknowledge the good side of previous legislation and of parts of this Bill. This will demonstrate the reasonableness of the opposition, win over public opinion, clarify what is at issue and make impossible a government counter-attack

across the board.

3. Campaign in such a way as to *attract* rather than *repel* support. Bear in mind the big Tory majority and therefore the need for the support of Tory MPs, Tory Peers and employers.
4. Behave in such a way that *we* are the defenders of freedom and democracy, and are prepared to meet the government *more* than half way. *We* are the reasonable side.
5. Talk about the democratic right of voluntary associations to make effective rules and to enforce them - thereby also being *responsible* associations. This cannot be done if we also want to keep rules which *force* people to join a union.

The Prophet Arthur

"The only true prophets are those who carve out the future they announce"

James Connolly

"I was right all along" is more or less Arthur Scargill's election address as he canvasses support to retain the Presidency of the NUM. And in a sense he was.

If anything, British Coal has closed even more pits than Arthur predicted before the strike. Bully for Arthur! Other miners' leaders like Gormley may never have been as good as Arthur as prophets - but British Coal could never have closed so many pits so easily if Joe Gormley was still running the NUM. Joe Gormley took on the Thatcher government in 1981 with a united union and defeated her - indeed wrung undreamed-of financial investments from her government.

Arthur was merely an ideological buffoon who thought he could dragoon the miners into a strike without their agreement and at about the most disadvantageous possible time. He lost the strike, did untold damage to the morale of the trade union movement, and broke up the National Union of Mineworkers.

He predicted disaster. And he ensured that that disaster occurred.

This is the truth about Arthur



Scargill. Nevertheless, it is difficult to work up any great enthusiasm for John Walsh and his supporters either. One maniac on his own could not have destroyed the NUM. Scargill managed that because people like Walsh, Bell, Williams and Bolton didn't have the guts to stand up to him at critical points.

Arthur is likely to win the presidential ballot. Unfortunately it doesn't greatly matter any more. The UDM have concentrated on the beauty of their own navels. The NUM counts for very little in the movement. None of the miners'

leaders emerges as deserving of respect. Maybe a new generation of miners' leaders will serve their members and their movement well - if there are any miners left in ten years time.

In Dispute With the Public?

A brief comment may be in order on the recent non-strike at the Post Office. Formally, the dispute was about a shorter working week. Fighting for a shorter working week is almost impossible in Britain - and particularly in the Post Office.

The problem is *overtime*. Postal workers do an average of six and a half hours of overtime a week. They are fighting a long-drawn-out dispute to prevent the employment of casual labour at peak periods. So "shortening the week" would simply mean more hours at overtime rates.

So in reality the dispute was about more wages and not fewer hours. There may well be a case for more wages - but that is another matter.

It is usually necessary in disputes (especially in the public sector which involves taxpayers' money) to have a degree of public support. Work practices in the

Post Office make this impossible. They also make it easier for the government to hive off, to privatise, to create redundancies.

It is clear to any thinking member of the public that the practice which the Postworkers' union wants to perpetuate is one whereby there is little or no work to do, followed or preceded by hectic periods paid for at overtime rates. The Post Office case for coping with hectic periods by employing casual or part-time labour makes every sense to the public.

Workers and their unions must realise that they must combine their own interests with a public-spirited attitude. Otherwise, in the present climate, they are likely to end up unpopular and eventually out of a job. And that aspect of the present climate that demands a spirit of service to the public can in no way be opposed in principle by socialists.

Happy New Year?

Norman Willis has issued his New Year message to the rest of us. Here is the gist of it:

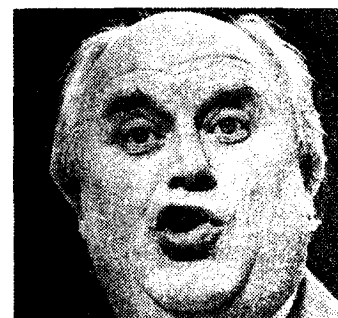
"The image of strike-happy, irresponsible workers prepared to

inconvenience the public at the drop of a flat hat is as inaccurate as it is commonplace....

For far too long the movement has spent much time looking inward, being concerned only with its own affairs and worst of all with inter-union rivalry. The bickering must stop and winning over young people must start."

This may have been the case a few years ago. The present public perception of our movement is of a lifeless beaten movement that couldn't organise the proverbial piss-up in a brewery - let alone a strike.

I would expect something a bit more stirring from the TUC General Secretary. Like some plan of action to defeat the worse aspects of the Employment Bill.



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The Disarming Face of Socialism

by Hugh Roberts

Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World by Mikhail Gorbachev. Collins, 1987, 254 pp., £12.95.

Now that the ballyhoo is over and the INF treaty signed, perhaps developments in the Soviet Union will begin to be thought about once more in the West, instead of being mindlessly hyped. This book provides ample food for thought, although this was certainly not its purpose.

Not the least significant thing about it is the fact that it has been written at all. Active politicians do not write books or commission them to be written in their name on an idle whim and what is true of politicians in general is certainly true of the rulers of the most complex state on earth.

Lenin and Stalin were prolific writers, but their writings were invariably analytical and their purpose was to orient the Communist movement at home and abroad by developing Communist politics on the issues of the day. There is no analysis in this book, no trace of Marxism whatever, and it is not addressed to the Communist movement, since this has practically ceased to exist, but "to the citizens of the whole world", and its purpose is not to orient its readers but to disorient them.

The propaganda function

From the point of view of democratic socialism in the West, the most significant aspect of *perestroika* is the link between the programme of internal reform which Gorbachev and his colleagues have embarked on and the new line of Soviet foreign policy on disarmament. The reform is certainly addressing fundamental problems of Soviet society but, unlike its historic predecessors (Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921-1928 and the protracted period of 'revisionism' from 1953 to 1968), *perestroika* also has a crucial function to perform in external affairs.

This function is to re-ignite the pro-Soviet enthusiasm of the *bienpensant* element of the Western intelligentsia in order, through it, to charm and tranquillize Western public opinion so as to isolate those politicians disposed to doubt the intentions of the Soviet state and the wisdom of making strategic concessions to it.

In the old days, Moscow could rely on the Western Communist Parties and their penumbra of fellow-travellers to do this. But

the Western Communist Parties are not what they were. The CPUSA never had much influence, the Spanish CP has largely lost what it had, the CPGB has fallen apart and the Italian CP has passed its peak and has long been disinclined to do Moscow's bidding in foreign affairs. Since the dismal showing of the French Communist Party in the 1981 presidential election, the Kremlin has known that it has to do everything itself.

This book can be understood only in this context. For the first time in history, the General Secretary of the CPSU has set out to write a best-seller for a Western readership. What is more, he has succeeded. According to the 'Bookwatch' table published in the *Sunday Times* (27.12.87), *Perestroika* has been in the top ten non-fiction best-sellers for the last four weeks (that is, practically since its publication) and is currently in 5th place.

Gorbachev is enjoying *un succès fou*. That he is doing so testifies not only to the generous gullibility of the Western public but also to the shrewdness of the Soviet oligarchy and the acuteness of its understanding of Western

society and its changing fashions.

Made in USA

America is the source of fashion in Western politics, a fact of which the Kremlin is well aware. It is the source of Margaret Thatcher's economic doctrines and Ken Livingstone's "rainbow coalition" politics alike. But the most potent and durable model developed in postwar American politics has been the Kennedy model.

This never did very well in France. It was taken up by the political adventurer Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, and proved unsuitable. Servan-Schreiber was obsessed by American models. He founded the weekly magazine *L'Express* as a conscious imitation of *Newsweek* and wrote a best-seller called *Le Défi Américain* (The American Challenge). Around 1969 he launched his political career by contesting a by-election at Nancy, in de Gaulle's native Lorraine, where he fought a barn-storming campaign in the Kennedy manner. He did not get very far. The Kennedy model was not functional in French conditions, for the simple reason that de Gaulle had

pre-empted it by establishing a home-grown alternative that was superior in every respect, a fact which is demonstrated daily in the political style of François Mitterand.

But the Kennedy model comprehensively captured the imagination of the English left-wing intelligentsia, which has always been at odds with its native political traditions, and which admired Harold Wilson, detested James Callaghan, derided Michael Foot and now drools over Neil Kinnock for this very reason.

The secret of Kennedy's appeal was not that he was a substantial reforming politician. He was nothing of the kind. Both Hubert Humphrey and Lyndon Johnson had far superior credentials as effective reforming Democrats than Kennedy, and Kennedy's credentials as a 'liberal' were markedly inferior to those of Adlai Stevenson. Kennedy's appeal lay in the fact that he had style, that he exuded a sophisticated and ruthless will to power, that he incarnated the prospect of a rejuvenation of the *status quo* and that he knew how to flatter an intelligentsia which was substantially conservative in its outlook, but wholly unwilling to admit this to itself.

The spirit of the apparatchik

It is a necessary element of the self-image of the Western left-wing intelligentsia that it is substantially independent of the socio-political *status quo* and as such the main source of the impulse to change it. In fact, it is overwhelmingly dependent on this *status quo* and its function is to register, rationalize and justify the changes that occur as a result of developments in politics to which it contributes little or nothing.

With the disappearance of the independent gentleman and the Bohemian as the main protagonists of intellectual life, and with the rise of mass-circulation newspapers and broadcasting and the generalization of publicly-funded higher education, the intelligentsia has been bureaucratized and its members are overwhelmingly apparatchiks in spirit.

The rise of Marxism as an intellectual fashion during the 1960s and 1970s was not a departure from, but a convoluted expression of, this spirit. It was exclusively an affair of the

intelligentsia. It had little or nothing to do with the working class and little or nothing to do with politics. It expressed the fascination felt by left-wing intellectuals in the West for the revolutionary adventures of their Russian and Chinese counterparts.

But there was no political purpose in this fascination. Careers were built on books and articles about Lenin's concept of conjuncture and Mao's guerrilla strategy, but these 'Marxists' took care not to act out their day-dreams. They knew they were not the spiritual equals of Lenin or Mao, and confined their adventures to the long vacation, trekking in Nepal or doing up old houses in the Dordogne.

(The French left-wing intelligentsia was a partial exception to this rule. Unlike its British and American counterparts, it had recent experience of extreme political instability and a still vigorous revolutionary tradition which induced it to take its fantasies in earnest. It acted them out in May 1968, almost certainly for the last time.)

The Soviet Kennedy

The rise of Gorbachev does not signify a sea-change in the character of the Soviet oligarchy, but rather this oligarchy's understanding of the changing character of the Western intelligentsia.

For the apparatchik with intellectual pretensions and a confused self-image, political reformers within the system are interesting. One wants to believe in them because one is materially dependent upon the system yet ashamed of the fact. Material dependence upon the system is spiritually unsatisfying, indeed irksome. And so one reconciles oneself to this situation by affirming the essential goodness of the system in the belief in its susceptibility to reform. And one makes a cult of the individual politicians who, by personifying this postulated susceptibility, vindicate belief in it.

Kennedy was the prototype of this kind of politician. He had an elegant wife and could quote Robert Frost's poetry whenever the occasion called for it. And he took care to establish his credentials with the intelligentsia by writing a book *Profiles in Courage*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in the late

1950s.

It is safe to assume that all this has been minutely studied in Moscow. In Mikhail Gorbachev, with his first lady, Raisa, the Kremlin has at last come up with a Soviet Kennedy. It is unreasonable to suppose that it has done so by accident.

Gorbachev, unlike his predecessor but one, Yuri Andropov, is not his own man. Andropov, as head of the KGB, was better placed than anyone else in the Soviet oligarchy to appreciate the need for internal reform, and on Brezhnev's death he secured the succession by his own efforts.

Gorbachev, a comparatively junior figure, was appointed by the Kremlin Old Guard, led by Gromyko, who as Foreign Minister was better placed than anyone else to appreciate what would go down well in the West. Gorbachev was young, sophisticated and had an elegant wife. And now he has written a book. Is it eligible for the Pulitzer Prize, I wonder?

Frankness and Double-Talk

In order for the presentation of *perestroika* to evoke public sympathy in the West, it is essential that this presentation flatter the pretensions to sophistication of Western intellectuals.

Gorbachev demonstrates his understanding of this by bluntly admitting the woeful state of the Soviet economy prior to the current reforms. In particular, the generalized stagnation of Soviet life under Brezhnev is emphasized, if not harped upon. The Soviet Kennedy needs a Soviet Eisenhower.

The elaboration of these themes in the book makes a radical change from the diet of triumphalist data on steel and grain output with which the *Morning Star* has traditionally regaled its readers. But Gorbachev is not addressing *Morning Star* readers, and the flattering of pretensions is a different exercise from the comforting of illusions. Gorbachev enchants his readers with frankness instead of statistics.

Moreover, the true purpose of the reform is actually stated very clearly. Gorbachev knows better than to leave himself open to the charge of unequivocally misrepresenting what he is up to. Thus we are told that "*perestroika*

is a thorough renewal of every aspect of Soviet life", that it is "not a spontaneous but a governed process", indeed "a revolution from above" and even that "we are not going to change Soviet power, of course". Of course.

All this is perfectly true. But this statement of purpose is repeatedly compensated for by the resort to evocative but misleading terminology. Gorbachev describes, up to a point, what is happening and why, but simultaneously manipulates the reader's response to this information by employing vocabulary with all the right overtones. Thus we are told that "*the essence of perestroika lies in the fact that it unites socialism with democracy*", that it arises from the recognition of the need for "*broad democratization of all aspects of society*", and that "*the main idea...was the development of democracy*".

All this is entirely untrue. Or, rather, it is untrue if by democracy is meant the freedom of society to choose its government, to change its government in a constitutional manner at intervals, and the freedom of individuals and groups to pursue major purposes independently of the state, to question publicly the premises of government policy and canvass publicly alternative policies.

It is perfectly true if by democracy is meant the more active, effective and enthusiastic participation of the population in the social projects of a dictatorial state whose character and philosophy it may not question and whose existence it must take for granted.

A "Free Choice"

As Gorbachev remarks, with probably conscious irony, "*there are not many outspoken opponents of Perestroika*" in the USSR, no doubt because "*most of us adhere to correct political and ideological principles*". This is not surprising since, as he also observes, the society's "*entire future had to be decided*" in the 1920s and 1930s.

Perestroika is therefore a renewal of society which conforms to the destiny which was marked out for this society sixty-odd years ago, following what he calls the "*free choice*" of 1917.

The idea that a society is bound by the terms of a fundamental and comprehensive choice made seventy years previously is not a



democratic idea. The idea that Russian society - let alone the numerous other societies comprised within the sprawling Romanov empire - freely chose the line of development which was subsequently followed is a breathtaking misrepresentation of what happened in 1917.

The Bolshevik government had to do a lot of deck-clearing in 1917 and the next few years in order for this 'choice' to be put into effect. The first bit of deck-clearing was the forcible dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, arguably the only freely chosen representative body the peoples of the Russian empire have ever had, which the Bolsheviks chose to disperse because they were in a clear minority within it and could not choose freely how to govern the society for as long as it was around.

Gorbachev can not realistically be supposed to be unaware that Western historians know very well what happened in 1917 and that this knowledge is freely available to the Western intelligentsia as a whole in countless books, articles and both radio and television

documentaries. That he should have felt free to make this extraordinary claim about 1917 suggests he knows very well that facts are largely impotent against fashions. It suggests that he harbours a profound contempt for the people he has set out to impress. And who is to say that he has not, indeed, got the measure of them?

The New Revisionism

Beyond the softening up of Western public opinion, what else is at stake in *perestroika*? The answer is a very great deal, from the point of view of the Soviet oligarchy. But it would probably be a mistake to place much weight on the particular features of the economic reforms involved.

Gorbachev describes the essence of these as the shift in emphasis "from primarily administrative to primarily economic management methods at every level", which implies that a major process of economic liberalization is envisaged, stopping short of privatization but substituting state-capitalist for socialist economy by freeing state enterprises from the

control of the central planners and obliging them instead to run at a profit. He repeatedly employs the terminology of the revisionist 'Market Socialism' school of the Khrushchev era, speaking with enthusiasm of "full-cost accounting", "commodity-money relations", and "the socialist market".

So it is clear that *perestroika* involves, at least in principle, a radical retreat from socialist planned economy to market economy disguised, as in the 1950s, as a development of socialism and disingenuously legitimized, again as in the 1950s, with selective misquotation of Lenin. In matters of doctrine, Gorbachev is unquestionably a revisionist, a "market-socialist" or, as the Chinese of the Mao period would have said, a "capitalist-roader". The difference with the earlier Soviet revisionists is nonetheless a profound one.

The revisionists who began to develop their ideas in the last years of Stalin's rule and who blossomed under Khrushchev imagined that they could revitalise the Soviet economy by

introducing the market and that they could introduce the market merely by dismantling state controls. The market was conceived to be latent in the economy and would spring back into life when permitted to do so. This proved to be an illusion in the Soviet case, although not in the more superficially socialised economies of Eastern Europe.

In no country on earth has market economy been more thoroughly extirpated and superceded than in the USSR. The social relationships corresponding to market economy were pulverised in the 1920s and 1930s and society was thoroughly reconstructed around the socialist state.

The market therefore can not simply be allowed to revive. It must be deliberately and painstakingly re-established, and this can not be done without the most intense stirring up of the society as a whole. Just as the most profound mobilization of the population was required to establish socialist economy in 1928-1934, so an equally profound mobilization is required to reconstruct market economy today. Interestingly, Gorbachev thinks he can do it in six years.

The point of no return

In principle, this is what *perestroika* is about on the home front. But because of its radical implications for the relationship between state and society, it is likely that a major element of the Soviet oligarchy has fundamental reservations about the reform and is determined not to allow it to develop beyond a certain point.

A degree of economic liberalization, a degree of *glasnost* (openness) in government and a degree of popular mobilization, at least for a time, are recognised to be in the interests of the state if it is to fulfill its function of imparting impetus to social and economic development, revitalize its own structures and thereby regain the moral initiative in relation to the society. But to go beyond this point would be to undermine the basis of the state itself in the long run, and the Soviet oligarchy is accustomed to thinking in terms of the long run.

There is no discussion of these realities in this interesting but disingenuous book. But then its purpose is not to educate the West, but to disarm it.

Stalin and Gorbachev

by Madawc Williams

Glasnost is supposed to mean openness. But the Soviet system is based upon secrecy and closedness. And when important matters are to be decided, closedness remains very much the rule. Boris Yeltsin lost his job as Moscow party boss, and people were left to guess at the reason. In public, everyone seemed to hold exactly the same opinion - including Mr Yeltsin himself, who apparently accepted his fall and has been compensated with a lesser but still fairly important post.

Bolshevik power

When I speak of "the Soviet system" I do not, of course, mean the system of rule by councils of workers', peasants' and soldiers' representatives that came into existence in 1917, and in the name of which Lenin took power. Formally speaking, this system still exists, and the "Supreme Soviet" is in principle the highest power in the land. In practice, this system was swallowed up and turned into a formality during Lenin's time. Actual power was exercised by the Bolshevik party. No other party was allowed to exist, and opposition to the Bolshevik party was seen as the same as treason against the state.

In 1917, the Bolsheviks had been a strong minority faction within the Russian socialist movement. The Mensheviks were about equally popular and the Social Revolutionaries more popular than both put together. But Lenin knew what he wanted, whereas none of his rivals on the left were quite sure. He created the basic apparatus of the Soviet state, and it was during his time as ruler of Russia that "worker and peasant power" became identical with rule by the Communist Party.

From Lenin to Stalin

After Lenin's death, things became more complex. Power passed to the "troika" of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. Trotsky set up in opposition - adopting the policies of the "Workers' Opposition", which he had opposed during Lenin's lifetime.

Bukharin started out as a half-hearted ally of Trotsky, but then changed his position drastically; from left to right, in the Bolshevik scheme of things. Stalin made an alliance with Bukharin, splitting with Zinoviev and Kamenev, who promptly teamed up with Trotsky. A bitter confrontation followed, which Bukharin and Stalin won decisively.

They remained joint rulers, until the Bolshevik policy of allowing private peasant agriculture ran into trouble. Bukharin wanted to stick

taken. Without Stalin, or someone like him, the Bolshevik Party would probably not have stayed in power. If the Communist Party condemns him for it, how can they justify their continuing monopoly of power? How could the Polish Communist Party justify their suppression of Solidarity, and of the recently re-created Polish Socialist Party? Unless Mr Gorbachev is a secret anti-Soviet subversive, one must expect his criticisms of Stalin to remain extremely muted.



Nikolai Bukharin and Joseph Stalin

with it; Stalin felt that private peasant agriculture and one-Party rule by the Bolshevik Party could not co-exist indefinitely; one of them would have to go. The majority of the party agreed with him, and supported him in the collectivisation drive that wiped out the independent power of the peasantry, and killed a great many of them in the process. This was the basis of the "Stalin dictatorship", simply a logical continuation of the process that Lenin and the other Bolsheviks began.

Denouncing Stalin?

Around the time that Boris Yeltsin fell from power, there was a widespread belief that Gorbachev was about to launch some violent denunciation of Stalin. I was in no way surprised when the "denunciation" failed to materialise. He can not condemn Stalin, any more than the Pope can condemn St Peter and St Paul.

To condemn Stalin is to undermine the whole basis of the Soviet state. Even Krushchev toned down his criticisms when he saw how far such things might be

In point of fact, Stalin's dictatorship probably was justifiable by the circumstances of the time. During the 1920s and 1930s, capitalist democracies were tending to collapse, and fascism and other forms of right-wing dictatorship were growing. Without Stalin's drastic and brutal industrialisation, it is very doubtful if the Soviet Union could have withstood the Nazi invasion. Had the Soviet Union been conquered, the likely result would have been a world ruled by fascists - or at best by a mixture of fascists and capitalist democracies, with none of the positive developments that have happened since 1945.

(Trotsky, of course, thought that "world revolution" would solve everything. He wanted to repeat the Bolshevik revolution on a world scale, in the hope that somehow the outcome would be something completely different. It probably wouldn't have been. During his time as a Bolshevik leader, he was no less ruthless and authoritarian than Lenin or Stalin. Arguably, he was more so. Shortly before Lenin's death, Trotsky proposed the abolition of

Trade Unions and the militarisation of labour! In any case, neither Trotsky nor any of his followers have ever been able to organise a decent-sized revolution. They can produce splendid reasons why they *should* have been able to do so, or how they almost managed it at this time or that. But that is as far as it goes.)

Unjustifiable oligarchy

As I said, what Stalin did may have been justified by the dangers of the times. Terrible things were done, but there were also great achievements. What is not justifiable is the bureaucratic oligarchy that has followed it. The misdeeds are much smaller, but then so are the achievements. Russia averaged 10% growth *per annum* under Stalin, and has been slowing down steadily under each of his successors.

There is no longer a personal dictatorship - Krushchev's fall proved that. Instead there is a collective and self-appointed dictatorship by the Politbureau, with one or two individuals dominant within the oligarchy. There is still no such thing as a legal and legitimate opposition. To disagree publicly with the Politbureau is to be a criminal, just as it was under Stalin. Such "criminals" are now more likely to be jailed than shot - that is the only step forward!

A shake-up

It is time for a new beginning. Indeed, a new beginning is long overdue. But the Soviet system provides no lawful or practical method of getting rid of the oligarchy. Only the oligarchy could abolish the oligarchy, and there is no sign that it is about to do so. Gorbachev is shaking up the oligarchy, because the oligarchy sees that its long-term power and position is at risk without such a shake-up. It is doubtful if Mr Gorbachev wants any more than that. Nor, as far as we can tell, did Mr Yeltsin. He simply tried to push the shaking-up process rather faster than his colleagues in the oligarchy thought prudent.

HOUSING THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS

by Dick Barry

On the eve of the First World War, privately rented housing accounted for 90 per cent of Britain's total housing stock. Today, it stands at less than eight per cent. The prime objective of the Government's Housing Bill, published on November 19, is to reverse this decline through the adoption of the following measures:

- 1.- deregulating new private sector lettings;
- 2.- reforming housing associations' finances;
- 3.- creating Housing Action Trusts, and
- 4.- giving council tenants the right to choose a new landlord.

The proposals in the Bill have to be seen in the wider context of the Government's privatisation programme. For not only is it the Government's intention to attract private investment to housing by increasing rents to a market level, it also plans to reduce local authority housing stock by setting up Housing Action Trusts to take over certain areas of local authority housing for purposes of renovation and repair before transferring them to other landlords, and by giving local authority tenants the right to choose a different landlord.

Will it succeed?

Restoring market rents

It is widely held by supporters of the Bill that the decline in the privately rented sector is due primarily to restrictions on rent increases following the introduction of Rent Acts going back as far as 1915. Below-market rents, giving low returns on investment, are believed to have acted as disincentives to prospective private landlords and to have forced existing landlords out of the housing market.

The flaw in this theory lies in the fact that the greatest decline in the privately rented housing market occurred between 1959 and 1964, after the introduction of the 1957 Rent Act, which deregulated new private tenancies, just as the present Housing Bill proposes to do. Widespread harassment took place as landlords sought to evict tenants in order to sell for owner-occupation or let new insecure tenancies at higher rents.

Under the Bill, rents of all new tenancies will be at market level, resulting in many cases in increases of at least 50 per cent. Housing benefit will be available to low income and unemployed tenants, but there will be a ceiling on the amount of benefit available, and it is planned to cut housing benefit further from April 1988.

The Government has indicated that adequate help will be available to those who cannot afford the higher rents, but the proposed restrictions in housing benefit and the fact that the DHSS has said that benefit will not automatically be available do not inspire confidence.

The problem of homelessness

The Government expects its proposals to bring thousands of private houses, presently unoccupied, onto the market and thus, in the words of the Secretary of State, Nicholas Ridley, "to be a major contributor to solving the problem of homelessness" (Parliamentary debate on the Housing Bill, November 30, 1987). This is a wildly optimistic expectation.

At present, around 105,000 families have been declared officially homeless in England alone. This figure does not, of course, include single homeless people and childless couples. The number on Council house waiting lists has increased to 1.5 million and many thousands of people live in squalid, overcrowded conditions in houses in multiple occupation.

The Bill fails to address any of these problems - the word 'homeless' does not even appear in its text - and we cannot expect private landlords to be interested in accommodating the homeless unless it is in their financial interest to do so. The restrictions in housing benefit will ensure that this does not happen.

Transforming the Housing Associations

The proposed reform of housing association finance will make it difficult for housing associations to continue with their traditional role of providing accommodation for people with special needs, such as the disabled and the elderly.

A public grant of a maximum of 50 per cent of the estimated cost of projects will replace the present housing association grant, which normally funds 85-90 per cent of a scheme. The remaining 50 per cent or more of the cost of projects will have to be found by borrowing on the market, at considerable cost to the association.

All new housing association rents will be fixed by the associations themselves, but as they will have to meet the cost of raising substantially more private finance, rents will increase dramatically and associations will find themselves attracting those who can afford the higher rents - young people seeking temporary accommodation before owner-occupation - rather than their traditional clients.

Housing Action Trusts - or robbing the public

The Government is fond of accusing local government, particularly Labour-controlled authorities, and trade unions of behaving in an undemocratic manner. Yet it proposes to set up Housing Action Trusts which will be accountable to none of those whom they will have in their charge.

Members of the Trusts will be appointed by the Secretary of State and, although they will take over responsibility for large areas of local authority housing, it is not proposed to include local authority representatives on the Boards of the Housing Action Trusts; yet the same local authorities will be expected to support the work of the Trusts.

Furthermore, local authorities and tenants will have no say as to whether housing and local authority land and property should be transferred to the Trust and ultimately to private developers and landlords. Nor will local authorities be compensated for any loss of land and/or property.

Not only is all this

undemocratic, it is also robbery of public assets on a scale hitherto unknown.

Housing Action Trusts will be financed by a mixture of public and private money. So ratepayers' and taxpayers' money will contribute towards the cost of renovating and repairing local authority houses.

There would be nothing wrong with this if it was proposed to return the housing to local authorities. But the Government proposes that the Trusts should transfer the renovated houses to other owners, including housing associations and private landlords. Thus private landlords will benefit from a scheme towards which they may have contributed little or nothing.

Why the public should contribute towards the setting-up of Housing Action Trusts and the renovation of local authority housing and receive nothing in return, while private landlords contribute little or nothing and receive substantial benefits, would be beyond comprehension if one did not know the present government.

Given all these circumstances, it is likely that many Labour-controlled authorities will refuse to co-operate with the Trusts.

Pick a landlord - the one-way ticket

The so-called 'Pick a Landlord' scheme appears to offer a straightforward choice to local authority tenants. On closer examination, however, this is far from the case.

To begin with, the choice, as far as it exists, is entirely one way. In other words, local authority tenants can choose to transfer to a different landlord, but no such choice is to be offered to dissatisfied tenants of private landlords. Nor will local authority tenants, having once made the transfer, be able to switch back to the local authority.

The choice is complicated further by the proposal that the Housing Corporation should select approved landlords for the scheme. Local authorities are specifically excluded from any list of approved landlords. Local authority tenants may therefore only choose a landlord from the officially approved list.

In support of its proposals, the Government argues that the Bill

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will extend housing choice for many tenants locked into local authority management. But the choice will be severely limited and will operate entirely in one direction.

In many areas, local authorities already have the choice to form housing cooperatives and other forms of self-management. The Bill is over-critical of local authorities and ignores the choices which already exist for local authority tenants.

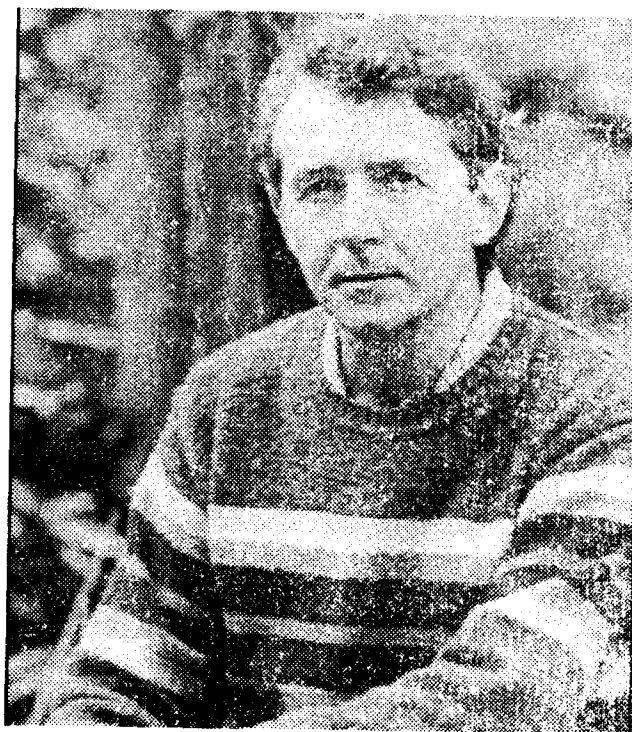
All new tenancies under the 'Pick a Landlord' scheme will be subject to market rents, with no guarantee that housing conditions and management will be better than those which currently exist. Tenants who choose to transfer to a new landlord, therefore, will not only pay much higher rents but may also find that there is little or no improvement in services to account for the increase in rent, and they will not have the right to transfer back.

Given these conditions, tenants who decide to transfer to a private landlord should have their heads examined.

A Bill for the speculators

Britain's housing, both public and private (including owner-occupation) suffers from serious problems of disrepair. Homelessness has reached record proportions and council house waiting lists have lengthened considerably, while there has been a dramatic slump in public sector house-building. There is, without question, a desperate need for decent, secure accommodation at a price that people can afford.

The Government claims that its Housing Bill will go a long way to tackle disrepair and will add considerably to the housing stock. The proposals in the Bill do not live up to the Government's claim. The Government has failed to address itself to the real housing needs of the British people and indeed has sacrificed their interests to those of the speculator. In future, access to housing will be based on ability to pay and not on the principle of what people need.



Why Labour Should Oppose ALTON'S BILL

by Dermot Ranaghan

David Alton has opened up the controversial abortion debate once more. His Private Member's bill, due to receive its second reading in Parliament on January 22, aims to include a clause in the 1967 Abortion Act whereby pregnancies of eighteen weeks duration and over may not legally be terminated. (The present time limit of 28 weeks is included in the Infant Life Preservation Act, 1929).

Alton has strong religious objections to abortion, which are shared by many in the anti-abortion groups SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) and the more Catholic-based LIFE organisation. These two groups are providing Alton with the campaign organisation, both within Parliament and at constituency level, which any MP who lacks the support of his party requires if he is to have any chance of having a Private Member's Bill passed.

The anti-abortionists maintain that the reduction in the time limit is necessary because of the growing number of late abortions (8,282 after 18 weeks in 1986). Alton has said that from eighteen weeks the foetus has sentience, many of the organs are

functioning, the nervous system is developed and a complete skeleton has been formed.

Touching photographs of an 18-week old foetus, sucking its thumb, have been sent to MPs by local anti-abortion groups. The destruction of such human potential, permitted by law, is morally wrong, the anti-abortionists believe, and must be prohibited. Alton, however, is not optimistic about his bill passing through unchanged and has said that he will be prepared to compromise at 22 or 24 weeks.

In 1986, there were only 29 abortions performed after 24 weeks in Britain and since July 1985 DHSS regulations have forbidden private clinics to perform abortions after 24 weeks. Thus any change in the law would have little obvious advantage or disadvantage.

However, as a result of an inability to test accurately when a pregnancy actually began, many doctors will not allow abortions from 24 weeks. If the time limit is reduced from 28 to 24 weeks, the effective limit on abortions will be down to 20 weeks.

Abortions carried out after 20 weeks have often been delayed because tests for abnormality of the foetus can only be carried out

after 18-20 weeks, including tests for chromosome disorders (aminocentesis) and scans for anatomical abnormalities. With delays of 1-2 weeks until results are known, women would be forced to carry the pregnancy through and suffer the agony of a miscarriage or a child born dead or fatally deformed.

The anti-abortionists allow for no permissible conditions, except where the mother's life is in danger. They realise that there can be no return to the pre-1967 era when hundreds of women died as a result of back-street abortions. But they are determined to reduce the number of abortions in Britain. Unfortunately, they have chosen a course which will do nothing to improve the physical and emotional well-being of the women involved.

Abortion is not an easy option for any woman, and the decision is never taken lightly. David Alton's bill has one advantage, in that attention has been drawn by it to the problems facing pregnant women today.

Of the 8,282 abortions carried out after 18 weeks in 1986, over a fifth were referred to clinics before 12 weeks. Less than 50 per cent of the women asking for NHS abortions in 1986 actually received them. (Treatment at a private clinic costs from £150.) In many parts of the country, limited numbers of terminations are permitted in NHS hospitals because of the pressure on operating space.

Many Labour MPs will be under pressure from local anti-abortion campaigners to support David Alton's bill. Others will already have a moral doubt concerning abortion and support the bill. But if the Parliamentary Labour Party believes in a woman's right to choose whether to terminate or continue her pregnancy, it must hold a three-line whip against the bill.

At the same time, consideration should certainly be given to ways in which abortion might be made a much less harrowing experience for those involved. Sex education and contraceptive advice should be made readily available for younger women and those most at risk. And money should be made available to regional health authorities specifically for abortion clinics, to reduce delays.

Let workers buy their jobs

by Pat Muldowney

The Tories have got considerable mileage out of allowing workers to buy their own houses. Instead of the current watery ideas on workers' shareholding, why can't Labour fight the next election on a platform of letting workers buy their own jobs?

Socialism in industry

The primary task of the next Labour government should be to facilitate the process by which capitalism will be replaced by socialism. By this I do not mean ending discrimination against minorities, increasing social services, welfare payments and pensions, reducing unemployment, or nationalising industry. I mean the replacement of the capitalist mode of production by a socialist mode of production. This is an industrial matter rather than a political or social matter, and workers' control of industry is the first stage.

The next Labour government should produce legislation to enable transfer of ownership of assets (buildings, machinery, land, office equipment, materials, parts, finished goods, customer accounts, bank balances) to the workers currently employed in each enterprise, if and when they wish to take possession. This legislation should define the kinds of corporate entities to which ownership could be transferred. The experience of credit unions and co-operatives could be useful here.

The conditions, procedures and time-scales for the transfer of ownership should be laid down. Mechanisms and terms of compensation for present owners and shareholders should be established. Policies for dealing with conglomerates, multinational and foreign-owned business should be advanced.

The transfer of ownership of the means of production to the working class could be assisted by government grants and loans

repayable over a realistic time-scale. This is how the Irish Land Purchase Acts at the turn of the century enabled the tenant farmers to purchase their farms from a class of incompetent and superfluous landlords.

Interim joint ownership

Many businesses such as oil-drilling and refining, steel manufacture and electricity generation, are capital intensive, the value of assets being high relative to the numbers of workers involved. In such cases it may be necessary for some time that the workers hold joint ownership with the government and other interests. The financial resources of the working class - credit unions, trade union funds - should be involved. If the workers' control movement made some headway in the financial sectors, banking and insurance, then some of the problems of purchase might be eased. However, as in the case of the Irish land purchase, the ultimate objective of Labour policy should generally be complete ownership of industry by the workers.

Labour legislation should, in conjunction with the TUC educational programmes, provide for training in management and finance for shop stewards and other interested workers. Terms of redundancy should be arranged for existing management staff who do not wish to continue work in the new set-up.

Electurally popular

Whereas policies such as nationalisation of industry are probably an electoral disadvantage to Labour, a policy of workers' purchase of their jobs would probably be electorally popular. It could cut the ground from under the Conservatives, morally and politically. Furthermore, workers' control of industry can be the foundation of a socialist mode of production.

Supply and demand

In order to build on this foundation, the next Labour government should make legal provision for systems of credit which will ease the pressure of market forces and finance capital on worker-controlled industry.

(By market forces I mean the trade cycle of boom and slump, not the forces of supply and demand. Supply and demand are the primary economic forces and they operate in every economy. The trade cycle operates counter to the cycle of supply and demand. The trade cycle is generally recognised to be a consequence of the capitalist mode of production and is a major cause of unemployment, hardship and deprivation.)

With some exceptions, the flow of goods and services in an economy is circular because, in any unit of production and consumption - firm, household etc. - every item of output is matched by an item of input which is, in turn, an output from some other unit of production. When the new units of production and consumption appear in the system, they simply add new cycles to the overall circulation of goods and services.

What, if any, are the implications of this circularity? If A buys £1000 worth of goods from B, and B buys £1000 worth of goods from C, and C buys £1000 worth of goods from A, then, in principle, no payments of money, no buying and selling, are required to effect the circulation of goods between A, B and C. In reality, none of the cycles of circulation are as simple as this, but this illustration suggests how worker-controlled industry might acquire a new degree of freedom not available to capitalist industry.

Money and circulation

Profit is the driving force of capitalist production. Therefore capitalism requires the circulation of money rather than goods. The interest of workers is their livelihoods or jobs. Therefore worker-controlled industry requires primarily the circulation of goods and services rather than money.

The primary role of money and prices is to give expression to the forces of supply and demand. But money and prices are not the only means of transmitting the basic economic forces. In any large unit of production we have forces of supply and demand which regulate the internal circulation of goods and services. But, as regulation is achieved by administrative systems and record keeping, no internal buying and selling takes

place. If the records show a shortage in one department (Stores, say) then this department indicates or signals to another (Production or Purchasing) by means of a report compiled from records. This initiates a replenishment, causing a movement of goods into Stores.

The modern technology of data communication permits this mode of transmission of demand between pairs of independent, autonomous producers on a wide scale. The forces of supply and demand can be enabled to operate by means of communication networks.

Competitive socialist firms!

In capitalist production, the market is also a means by which industry is compelled to modernise. Does a socialist system of production have any such mechanisms? Objectively, efficiency and productivity are measured, in the first instance, not by commercial criteria, but by the quantity of goods delivered by given resources in given time. And quantity and timeliness are precisely the parameters which computer reporting systems typically measure.

There is no reason to envisage changes of behaviour by socialist firms. Socialist firms would have to compete with each other, and with firms in the capitalist sector, in tendering. Socialist firms that could not perform at a competitive level of efficiency would lose the credit facilities of the socialist sector and would have either to join the capitalist sector or to go into liquidation.

It is possible to speculate equally plausibly in the same vein about start-ups or new enterprise in the socialist sector.

A feasible revolution

In the long run, by taking large quantities of circulation out of the market, the economic power of finance capital and the remaining social power of the capitalist class would be reduced.

These arguments indicate that, as a first step towards money-free circulation, a Labour government should ensure that special conditions of extended credit are legally negotiable between firms in the worker-controlled sector of industry. This is the first step towards establishing a socialist

mode of production alongside existing social capitalism.

In some ways, the Thatcherite bias against statism is more conducive to the success of workers' control than the bureaucratic spirit of the 1970s. By encouraging workers' buy-out of industry, socialists should be aiming to broaden and deepen the rather feeble and superficial entrepreneurial resurgence of the 1980s.

If it is a good idea to enable workers to buy their houses it must be a good idea to enable them to buy their jobs. An Irish revolution was accomplished when the British government of the day let the farmers buy their farms. A British revolution could be accomplished by letting the workers buy their firms. It is high time that British industry became the responsibility of the people whose livelihoods actually depend on it.

DISCUSSION

Socialism and Child Benefit

by Angela Clifford

The Tories are freezing child benefit. They have disarmed Labour opposition by promising to improve means related family payments instead. But it is a mistake to suppose that one can be a substitute for the other.

Of course it will be argued that at the moment child benefit is going to families who don't need it. It is said that, in such cases, it merely serves as pocket money for spoiled brats. This is true. But there are still overwhelming reasons for socialists to maintain and expand child benefit. If necessary, the money can be 'taken back' by making it a taxable income.

The reason for having child benefit in an advanced industrial society relates to the changing nature of the family.

From the Family Wage to Equal Pay

At one stage in capitalism the objective of trade union activity was to obtain and defend a *family*

wage. A man must be able to support a wife and raise a family on his income. Women who went to work only expected to get a single income — not a multiple income in the way men did. This arrangement reflected the actual social relations that existed. On the whole, women were supported by their husbands while raising their children.

With further developments in capitalism women increasingly undertook paid labour. The years in the home were either reduced or not present at all. And quite naturally what had seemed just and proper for the previous era no longer seemed so. Social relations were changing. And the arrangement that men got the multiple wage while women got a single wage no longer seemed right or equitable: it no longer reflected social relations. The new demand which reflected the new role of women was *equal pay for equal work*.

But what was the equal pay to represent in practice? Was it to mean that neither men nor women were to get the multiple wage? Were all to get enough only for the needs of one? If so, what was to happen about children? Or was it to mean that all were to get the multiple wage? Were all to get enough to raise children on their wage, regardless of the partner? Was there going to be such a great social surplus of wealth so that both men and women would have plenty in hand in case they raised children? Where would such lavish provision come from? There is a real problem here.

1945: the beginnings of a new approach

The principle of equal pay in an advanced industrialised society required a new approach to the costs of raising the next generation. This principle was introduced to some extent in 1945 but it has been lost sight of. In 1945 it was agreed that *educating* children was a cost to be born by the whole of society and not the parents in particular cases. As taxpayers, parents contributed to the costs of educating children, but they no longer had to face 15 years of hardship to pay for educating their own children. They paid taxes before and after raising their children and thus had the costs spread over a long period. In

addition, people who did not have children themselves contributed to the regeneration of society. And, of course, the well-off subsidised the less well-off, as their taxes were higher.

This principle, introduced for education in 1945, holds the key to how society should implement the principle of equal pay, but at the same time arrange for the raising of children. Clearly there are many more costs to raising children than educating them. They must be fed, clothed, housed and socialised. It makes every sense to subsidise these costs out of taxation revenue: taxation both of employers and employees. Clearly it is right that men and women should get a single wage each and not a multiple wage. What might be called the '*family element*' in pay should be taken in taxation and paid out in the form of child benefit, so much per child.

Means Testing and Social Justice

As to the argument that these payments should be means-tested — that would contradict the great social principle underlying the equal pay development: the society is paying for the raising of its children. Another objection is that testing produces the 'pauper' mentality — the attitude which tries to screw the state for every penny. It is a necessary evil for many payments but it is not a necessary evil for child benefit.

But what about social justice? Will not families be getting child benefit who do not need it? To this it must be replied that social justice is very well served by child benefit. For a start, the better off will pay a greater amount into the social fund than the worse off. There is redistribution in child benefit. And the bigger the benefit, the greater will be the redistribution. And secondly, if child benefit is treated as taxable income, then it will diminish in value as one goes up the income scale.

A Socialist conception

It should be said that this socialist conception of child benefit is different in principle to child benefit as it appears in many European countries, although the result — of substantial payments for children — appears the same.

In France and Belgium for

instance, there are very large payments to families for having children. In France, where there is no social security as we know it, it is possible for parents to live comfortably if they have enough children. The reason for child benefits in such countries are nationalistic. Given the population losses due to war — and the advantages of having a large population for war — there is in the historical culture of such countries sufficient reason for encouraging a large population. Perhaps, these days, economic weight and cultural ambitions have taken over from war as the motive. Be that as it may, child benefit in such countries has a nationalist rationale.

In Britain the rationale would not be nationalist but socialist, just as the whole thrust of the welfare state has been socialist — which it need not have been (many different systems could develop a welfare state: the fascist case springs to mind at once).

Socialists have every interest in opposing the Tory proposal to freeze child benefit. It runs counter to the progressive trend in society and undermines the equal pay revolution.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir

I was very impressed by Brendan Clifford's article about the Monarchy in your latest issue. (*L&TUR* 4 - Ed.) I'm sure a lot of people on the left have felt something of the sort. But it seems it takes an Irishman to sort it all out clearly!

But one thing that occurred to me is that it isn't only Britain. Holland and Belgium have also got constitutional monarchs. So too do Denmark, Sweden and Norway. In all of them, you have what Mr Clifford calls "*...a democratic republic with a hereditary monarch as ceremonial head of state*", don't you? And now Spain has managed to get much the same thing for itself, and the monarch was able to stop a right-wing coup a few years back. A sort of common pattern for West European states, in fact!

Yours truly
Walter Cobb

The Destiny of the French Peasantry

by John Rhys

Jean de Florette and *Manon des Sources* are being shown separately in London cinemas but they are really two parts of the same film. At the end of *Jean de Florette*, there is a sub-title saying "End of Part One", and neither film is comprehensible on its own. The significance of the action of *Jean de Florette* is made clear only at the end of *Manon des Sources* and the plot of *Manon des Sources* represents the resolution of the action of the first film and is unintelligible to someone who has not seen the first film.

It is an act of great cynicism on the part of the distributors to show them as separate films. This undoubtedly maximises the return to be made on showing them. But it expresses an intense contempt for the public, as well as for the idea of the integrity of a work of art. And the films have certainly been received by the critics as works of art. While letting the public down by failing to censure the distributors for their cynicism, the critics have heaped praise of the most flowery kind upon both films.

This wholly uncritical response on the part of the professional film critics is an index of the degree of disorientation which now characterises the British literati in general. Not a single reviewer, with the exception of a very half-hearted Alexander Walker in the *London Evening Standard* (November 19, 1987), has discussed the meaning of these films. Yet their meaning is unmistakable.

Jean de Florette

Jean de Florette describes how two peasants in the Provence of the 1920s get hold of a valuable water source. Ugolin returns from military service with the idea of growing carnations on a commercial basis. His uncle, Papet, who is as cunning as Ugolin is naive, realises that Ugolin's land lacks sufficient water and tries to buy land containing an important source from an unfriendly neighbour. In an argument, the neighbour falls and dies and the land reverts to his relative, a woman called Florette whom Papet had once known before she moved from the

locality. But Florette is now dead and it is her son, a hunchback called Jean, who arrives with his wife and child to make a new life on the land, abandoning his job as a tax collector in town to try his hand at raising rabbits for sale, armed with the latest scientific theories and techniques and unlimited determination.

But he does not know about the source and Papet and Ugolin have taken care to block it up before he arrives. They assume that he will soon give up his bucolic dream when the summer drought puts paid to his plans. But they underestimate Jean's determination and, by withholding the information he needs, become passively implicated in his eventual death. In his desperate search for water, Jean uses dynamite to sink a well and is killed by a flying rock. Papet and Ugolin buy out his widow and joyfully unblock the source, unaware that they are being observed by Jean's daughter, Manon. Here the first film ends.

Manon des Sources

The action of *Manon des Sources* takes place about ten years later. Jean's widow is pursuing her old career as an opera singer in the city, but Manon, now aged about eighteen, is still living in the area, working as a shepherdess for a local peasant woman, and apparently waiting for an opportunity to settle accounts with the men whom she holds responsible for her father's death. Ugolin is prospering as a carnation grower but is still unmarried. Papet, himself a bachelor and acutely aware that he and his nephew are the last of the Soubeyran family, encourages him to find a wife. Ugolin falls in love with Manon, unaware that she knows the truth about the water source. She repulses his advances with contempt and falls in love instead with a young school-teacher.

Discovering by accident the source of the village's water supply, Manon blocks it up and thereby brings matters to a head. The villagers had always known about the source which the Soubeyrans had blocked up but, in deference to peasant traditions, had

not intervened in the affair to tell Jean de Florette about it, because he was not a local man and there had long been a local animus against his mother for moving away and marrying into another locality. They are therefore implicated in his death. The stopping of their water supply threatens them all with ruin and brings the Church into the act, interpreting it as an act of God to punish the community for its collective treatment of Jean.

The climax comes when Ugolin acknowledges Manon's loathing for him and her love for the teacher and, unable to live with this knowledge, seals the doom of the Soubeyrans by hanging himself. Manon and the teacher unblock the source and the water flows again at precisely the moment the Church is organising a procession around the village fountain praying for a miracle. Papet, a broken man, visits his nephew's grave while Manon marries the teacher. Finally, he - and we - learn from an old woman the truth about Jean de Florette.

The twist of fate

Florette had been Papet's lover decades earlier and had written to him when he was in North Africa with the army to tell him that she was pregnant but would bear his baby if she could tell the village that she was his fiancée. Papet had never replied, so to hide her shame she had left the village, married another man and borne the child. A hunchback. In other words, Jean de Florette was Papet's son and Manon is his granddaughter. Papet had devoted all his cunning to ruining Jean in order to promote his nephew and thereby preserve the line of the Soubeyrans, when Jean was a Soubeyran all the time and a truer Soubeyran, with all his father's tenacity and resourcefulness, than the pathetic Ugolin.

The old woman who tells Papet this upbraids him as an evil man who deserves everything that has come to him. She assumes that he had deliberately left the pregnant Florette in the lurch. But Papet had never received Florette's letter. The army had

5th BIG MONTH

"THE MOST INTRIGUING FILM THIS YEAR..."

Victoria Mather, Daily Telegraph

"THE MOST ENJOYABLE FEATURE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CINEMA"

Vincent Canby N.Y. TIMES

"COMPELLING IN THE TELLING"

David Robinson, The Times

YVES
MONTAND
GERARD
DEPARDIEU
DANIEL
AUTEUIL

JEAN DE FLORETTE

PG



A film by CLAUDE BERRI Based on the work of MARCEL PAGNOL of L'Académie Française

with ELISABETH DEPARDIEU ... CLAUDE BERRI ... GERARD BRACH ... JEAN-CLAUDE PETIT
BRUNO NUYTTEN ... BERNARD VEZAT ... SYLVIE GAUTRELET ... ARLETTE LANGMANN - HERVE DE LUZE
CANNON FILM DISTRIBUTION PIERRE GRUNSTEIN ... ALAIN POIRE

been constantly on the move and mail frequently failed to get through. He had had no idea that Florette was pregnant and had always felt bitter since discovering on his return from the army that she had moved away and married someone else. In other words, the entire plot of the film (i.e. of the two films taken together) follows from a twist of fate, the failure of Florette's letter to reach Papet in North Africa.

Missing the point

The critics have praised the films as a satisfying story of righteous revenge, of guilt justly punished. This is a total travesty of the meaning of the films. The fact that Manon does nothing whatever apart from blocking up the village water source is enough to refute the notion that the second film is a story of revenge. Nor is its theme the punishment of guilt. It is the triumph of fate. Verdi's "Force of Destiny" provides the theme music. The centrality of the theme is made explicit in the key exchange between the pathetic Ugolin and his wilful scheming uncle: Ugolin, resentful of Papet's constant prompting, invokes destiny, only to provoke Papet's furious reply: there is no such thing as destiny, destiny is the excuse of the weak-willed.

The actions for which Papet and Ugolin are 'punished' are not crimes. In aspiring to get hold of Jean's land and water they have broken no law. They are simply peasants seeking to further their own normal interests. Jean's death, like that of the previous owner, is an accident which they do not foresee let alone premeditate. Their only questionable action is to block up the source in the first place and to keep quiet about it thereafter - a piece of peasant cunning and unscrupulousness which is utterly banal in its normality.

In suggesting that Papet and Ugolin are punished for outrageously immoral behaviour, English critics have entirely missed the point. Their story is certainly a morality tale, but it is the mores of the French peasantry in general which are at issue.

Crucial to the meaning of the films is the fact that Papet and Ugolin are entirely typical peasants, representing between them the entire gamut of the peasant character as this is

an extraordinarily satisfying work."

David Robinson, THE TIMES.

YVES MONTAND EMMANUELLE BEART DANIEL AUTEUIL

MANON DES SOURCES PG

JEAN DE FLORETTE PART II

A film by CLAUDE BERRI



conceived in urban stereotypes - Ugolin the peasant's stupidity and avarice and pathetic desire to get ahead, Papet the other side of the coin, peasant cunning and the desire to perpetuate the family line. The films tell the story of their defeat by more powerful forces, Destiny, that is, the will of God, which reduces all their endeavours and plans to naught and, in Papet's case, not only destroys everything he has worked to achieve but confronts him, when he is finally a broken man, with knowledge which reduces his entire life to meaninglessness.

The Church v. the Peasantry

This does not exhaust the meaning of the story, however. The force of destiny, God's will, has this-worldly representatives. Jean de Florette is a townsman. Manon, his daughter, is also a townswoman; she lives as a shepherdess only until she can come once more into her own and in marrying the school-teacher she reverts to her social station. And the social institution which appropriates the victory of destiny is the Catholic Church, the vehicle of an ideology profoundly hostile to the introverted ethic of solidarity of the peasant community and the wilful

individualism of its members.

Jean de Florette and *Manon des Sources* are about the defeat of the French peasantry by urban France and its Church. The story takes it for granted that the urban middle class (the class of tax collectors and opera singers and school teachers) represents civilisation and that peasant society is primitive and amoral. But the victory of French bourgeois society is mediated by the victory of its Church. The scientific aspect of urban civilisation is depicted as useless in the campaign against peasant society.

Jean de Florette's scientific techniques avail him nothing since God is not on his side, and the expert from the Water Department called in by the Mayor after the water supply has dried up is shown to be hopelessly incapable of dealing with angry peasants and is a figure of ridicule.

The victory of the Church is the victory of an ideology which stresses the vanity of human action and human will. The defeat of the Soubeyrans - Jean de Florette every bit as much as his father and cousin - is the defeat of the human qualities of individual will power and entirely natural ambition. The ideology of these films is the extreme fatalism of Catholic doctrine, a doctrine

profoundly opposed to the concepts of human responsibility and individual guilt or virtue. It is the ideology which the forces of democracy and socialism in France have been struggling against for two hundred years.

The Absence of the Left

Within a decade of the action of *Manon des Sources*, France was under German occupation and the Vatican was in virtual alliance with the Nazis and their scheme for a new, fascist, order in Europe. And the densely woven solidarity of the peasant community and the tenacity and resourcefulness of its members were the human bedrock of the French Resistance. But in furnishing the human basis of the Resistance, rural France was organised and given a collective sense of purpose by an aspect of urban France of which no mention is made in these films, the Left, the French Socialist Party and, above all, the Communist Party, the 20th century heirs of 19th century Republicanism and its passionately anti-clerical outlook.

It is, at first sight, astonishing that these films should have been made in France in the 1980s and that the principal role, that of Papet, should have been played by Yves Montand. Throughout his career, Montand has flaunted his left-wing credentials. The star of Alain Resnais's *La Guerre est Finie* (1966), in which he played a leader of the Spanish anti-Franco underground in exile, and of Costa Gavras's *Z* (1969), in which he played the Greek leftwing politician Lambrakis assassinated in 1963, Montand has gloried in his status as a fellow-traveller of the French Communist Party. But since its catastrophic showing in the 1981 presidential election, the terminal decline of the PCF has been plain for all to see, and its capacity to orient artistic activity in France has clearly suffered a corresponding decline. So much for left wing film stars.

None of this explains or excuses the reception which *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* have had over here. It speaks volumes for the mindlessness and lack of philosophical bearings of the contemporary London intelligentsia that these reactionary films should be universally praised and should be playing to packed houses.

The Unmentionables

by Michael Alexander

Spies are liars, by their very nature. Modern spies devote a lot of their time to "black propaganda" and systematic attempts to deceive their enemies. Spies are also very fond of claiming that their activities change the world - or else prevent it being changed. It is against this background that the "Spycatcher" controversy should be judged.

Thatcher seems intent on pushing the secret services back into the obscurity in which they used to reside. They will become "The Unmentionables"; people whose existence is well known but whose activities are never discussed. Whatever the result of the Wright case, it seems likely that she will succeed.

Thatcher is ready to look rather silly, in the short term, in order to achieve a long-term result. She has given Wright the sort of publicity that most authors only dream about - just as she previously made GCHQ the most famous top-secret institution in the world. Her *willingness to fight* has made a difference. Her actions against the press and the BBC seem likely to strengthen her in the long term. By and large, media people do not have the same strength of conviction or readiness to carry on in the face of setbacks. Leaks have grown less frequent, and the BBC shows signs of having been tamed.

The Wright stuff?

Let's look at two of the major allegations; that the Secret Services investigated people close to Wilson when he was Prime Minister, and that there was some sort of coup plot.

On the first point - one should remember the case of former Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt. He had to resign after it was discovered that one of his close political aides was in fact an East German secret agent. If such a thing could happen in West Germany, why not in Britain? In fact, it occurs to me that perhaps they *did* find a spy, and that this was the real reason for Wilson's

resignation, with everyone involved agreeing to hush things up in typical British fashion. In any case, it was fair enough for the Secret Service to investigate the matter.

The possibility of a coup is another matter. Britain has had constitutional continuity since 1688. Changes have been settled, not by violence but by elections. In 1688, power was shared between a powerful monarch and an oligarchy of property-owning voters. Step by step the system has become a broad democracy, with the monarch no more than a ceremonial head of state. The break-down of this system would be no small matter. And it would be a serious set-back for the left, since a politicised army would be almost certain to side with the right.

But what substance is there behind the allegation? As far as I know, there is no more than Wright's statement that some sort of plot existed. If it was only a boozey notion by a few spies, newspaper editors and peers, then it was a trivial matter. Coups are, after all, made by armies. If elements of the army did get involved, that would be another matter. If it was serious, it would be the duty of Labour MPs to put all other matters on the back burner and concentrate exclusively on bringing the matter to light and having the offenders punished. Since Labour MPs have used the coup allegation as one more titbit of scandle to use against the government, one may reasonably conclude that it was never a serious matter, and that MPs know that it was never a serious matter.

Thatcher, Wilson and the spies

According to *Private Eye*, there was a faction in the Secret Services that decided to take a hand in politics. They are supposed to have had a hand in Heath's replacement by Thatcher. I could well believe that there were people about who had that aim. But how important were they?

Heath's political career ended because he failed either to curb the Trade Unions or to do a deal with them. He had no hope of carrying on as Tory leader after losing power - yet he tried to do so regardless. Had he chosen to resign, he could probably have ensured that Whitelaw would have succeeded him. But he insisted that the party vote him out. Thatcher was the only serious contender who was ready to stand against him in the first round of voting. And she made a sufficient impression on the other Tories to be elected leader. Possibly some

members of the Secret Services gave her behind-the-scenes support. But the main course of events was beyond their power to influence. The critical events were those going on in public, and known to everyone.

Then there was the matter of Wilson. Wilson resigned rather suddenly, for no very obvious

reason. There have from time to time been hints that the Secret Services "nobbled" Wilson in some nefarious way.

Is there any substance behind the hints? The Secret Services have no power to get rid of a Prime Minister, who is after all the boss of their bosses. Not unless they have knowledge of something scandalous or dishonest. And if they *did* have such knowledge, they could hardly be blamed for using the knowledge to push the offender out of power.

In any event, Wilson's departure made remarkably little difference to the course of events. Under Wilson and Callaghan, the Labour Government tried to run the country in partnership with the Trade Unions. If the Secret Service had an ambition to break up that partnership, then that ambition got nowhere. It was the Trade Unions themselves which wrecked it. They rejected the idea of creating a new social system.

The Bullock Report offered Workers Control; they didn't want that. Benn and the Labour Left offered a watered-down version of the East European system; they didn't want that either. The logical alternative was to continue the partnership with the Labour government. But in the "winter of discontent" this too was rejected. No doubt right-wing members of the Secret Services were delighted at the way Trade Union power destroyed itself. But they observed the process as spectators; they had no power to prevent the Trade Unions coming up with a sensible solution, if the Trade Unions themselves had had the will!

Spies are a diversion from real politics. They are the stuff of fantasy and paranoia. Most serious intelligence-gathering is based on looking carefully at published material. Spies occupy a little world of their own, which has little connection with the larger world of politics and economics. A Labour movement that knew what it wanted would find that spooks are very insubstantial beings.

