

# Labour & Trade Union Review

November - December 1990

No.20

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Iraq and  
International Law

Labour and Full  
Employment

Tories Turn to the  
Workhouse?

The TUC and  
Incomes Policy

IRA - criminals  
or warriors?

plus

Notes on the News  
The Communist Manifesto now  
Vyshinsky and the Moscow Trials  
American Teamsters Union  
Poverty and the Planet



# Iraq and International Law

The least important thing at stake in the Kuwait crisis is the fate of the tribal despotism of the al-Sabahs, even though Thatcher and Bush propose to launch a major war this December to restore it. The most important thing is the character, reputation and status of international law, and of the United Nations as the guardian of international law.

Law has been travestied by the conduct of Bush and Thatcher in the past year. Last year they collaborated politically in the invasion of Panama and the fabrication of a new Government there on the basis of American arms for the purpose of continuing US control of the Panama Canal beyond its end-date. And that new Government was immediately admitted to Panama's seat at the United Nations. But the Cambodian Government set up by the Vietnamese army which overthrew Pol Pot continues to be excluded from the UN. And when the double-talk is discounted, the restoration of the Pol Pot regime remains the Anglo-American objective.

In point of humanitarianism Noriega was certainly not a worse dictator than Pol Pot. And in point of abstract law there was no difference between the two invasions. But Noriega is to be tried under the domestic law of the USA as if he were not the illegally captured head of a sovereign state, while Pol Pot is to be restored to power because his overthrow was in breach of international law.

The operative difference between the two cases is that Vietnam inflicted on the USA the greatest humiliation it has ever suffered, and the government it set up in Cambodia is therefore intolerable to American feelings. While Noriega attempted to conduct an independent policy in Panama. The difference between the two invasions is American interests. And in the present condition of the United Nations that is what determines what is lawful and what is criminal.

Saddam Hussein tried to keep himself within the law by clearing his occupation of Kuwait with Bush through diplomatic channels. He thought he had cleared it. And considering the service he had performed for them by containing the Iranian revolution, a favourable settlement of his conflict with Kuwait would have been no more than his due.

It was unfortunate for him that on the day of his occupation of Kuwait, Bush and Thatcher were holidaying together, wondering how to exploit their recently

achieved victory in the Cold War. The moral collapse of the Kremlin and the moral cunning of Peking left them in the position of determining the shape of the world after the Cold War. Each had a powerful army and an economy in relative decline. If the new era was predominantly an era of economic competition neither would flourish. And Thatcher was desperate for issues with which to halt the development of the European Community. So it seems that on the spur of the moment they saw that great things might be done with a moral military crusade over Iraq. And Hurd and his little friend Waldergrave had to learn a new language for describing their hitherto strategic ally, Saddam Hussein.

If a war is launched in December it will be a unique war in the history of the world. It will be the least subtle of all wars. It will have been preceded by a food blockade such as Germany applied against England in 1939, and by six months of blatant warmongering while the armies were being openly massed. And the opening slaughter will be exacted in cold blood by Britain and America in the name of the agency of world peace. Will the United Nations survive *that*?

Law is debased when it is capriciously invoked, as it has been in this instance. The US kept itself legal last December by use of its Veto, and it clearly gave the go-ahead to Syria to do what it pleases in the Lebanon in return for a Syrian presence in the moral crusade against Iraq.

An operative system of law requires three things - a body of laws, a judicial tribunal and an executive arm for enforcing judgments. The UN is defective on the last two counts.

The Security Council is both the judiciary and the executive. And the states most likely to act repeatedly in breach of the body of laws all have exemptions of law in the form of the Veto.

There is, notionally, an independent UN judiciary in the shape of the International Court of Justice, or World Court. But the US destroyed the World Court as a credible institution four years ago.

The World Court is made up from various parts of the world according to a formula. And in June 1986, by the votes of 12 judges to 3 (the 3 being the American, British and Japanese judges), it upheld a case brought by Nicaragua.

It ruled that the US was in breach of international law on four counts - arming the Contras for the purpose of overthrowing the Nicaraguan Government; mining harbours; bombing harbour installations; and making intelligence flights in Nicaraguan air space. The court ruled that damages should be paid. It also ruled that the US trade embargo was in breach of its 1956 treaty with Nicaragua and (by 14 to 1) that a CIA manual for the Contras, advocating acts of terrorism against public officials to 'neutralise' them was in breach of the "general principles of humanitarian law".

On July 31st, 1986, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for compliance with the Court ruling, Britain and France abstaining. And on August 13th, the US Senate voted \$100 million for the Contras.

Submission to the jurisdiction of the World Court is voluntary. In 1946 the USA submitted to it theoretically, except when it impinged on American jurisdiction, with America reserving the right to determine when this was so. And in 1986 it subverted it in practice.

The Security Council is the real judicial tribunal. International law therefore does not apply to the major states. Therefore it is not law.

The most effective UN operation was in the Congo thirty years ago. It was conducted by the Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld, who assembled an army which was predominantly African. If in the present instance the Secretary General had been empowered to deal with the Kuwait affair by raising an army which was chiefly Arab and negotiating a settlement which took due account of all factors, the cause of legality in international affairs would have been advanced.

By jumping in as they did, and by their obvious eagerness to prevent Saddam Hussein doing in Kuwait the sort of thing that Bush did in Panama, by megaphone warmongering and by threatening to revive the Nuremberg Trials after Washington has prevented trials of its own war criminals in the Vietnam War, they have debased the concept of international law.

The Secretary General was sidelined until, as a token gesture to the Palestinians, he was asked to look into the Israeli shootings in the annexed city of Jerusalem. Let us hope that he takes advantage of this matter and does something to relieve the UN from its present status as an instrument of American caprice.

# Educating Labour?

Radical changes to the way in which the Labour Party makes policy are proposed in the NEC statement **Democracy and policy making for the 1990s**, submitted to the October conference. The changes will not come into effect, however, until rule amendments are brought forward to the first conference after the general election, and agreed to by it. Nevertheless, it is clear from the proposals set out in the NEC statement that it is no mere tinkering exercise that the NEC is undertaking.

The changes are clearly a major element in the leadership's long-running campaign to inject the blood of modern European social democracy into Labour's veins. Any suggestions that Labour should advocate socialist solutions to Britain's problems, for example, have been given short shrift. Much of what passes for socialism in the policy review could have been written by David Owen. And Labour's cloth cap image is no more. More than one observer at Conference was heard to remark that the delegates looked more middle class than those who attended Tory conferences.

Ten years ago party members would have been in revolt at what is happening to Labour. Indeed, ten years ago the Party was in a state of revolt, the effects of which are said to have led to where we are today. But the fact that party members no longer revolt is due less to their lack of revolutionary fervour and more to their overwhelming desire to defeat Thatcher. So strong is this that they are willing to put up with almost anything as long as they believe it will achieve their objective. There are of course those in the Party who are unhappy with the present direction of the Party leadership and who do not believe that power is to be gained at any price. It is up to us, and them, to state why loud and clear.

In the past L&TUR has criticised the Party leadership for lacking a 'big idea', and this has been echoed in other journals and newspapers in recent weeks. That has now been put right. Labour's 'big idea', it seems, is education and training.

This is a big mistake. Fresh, imaginative and practical policies on education and training are essential, given the criminal way in which Britain's manufacturing industries have been run down under the Tories. But education, in particular, is the last issue that Labour should adopt as an election

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**Editor:** Dick Barry

**Editorial Board:** Andrew Bryson, Brendan Clifford, Martin Dolphin, Jack Lane, Hugh Roberts, Madawc Williams, Christopher Winch

**Address - editorial, advertising and subscriptions:**  
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winner. The current crisis in education is perceived to be due not so much to lack of cash, but rightly or wrongly to the philosophy of education expounded in the 1960s and which took effect in the 1970s when Labour was in office. Now that John McGregor has been able to extract more money from the parsimonious Treasury, the Tories are in a position to exploit Labour's weakness in this area.

The Tories are vulnerable on the economy, but Labour is not seen as having viable, alternative policies, and no real advantage would be gained by promoting them. Better to expose the Tories' record, than reveal one's alternative in this case.

Transport, however, is the one area where Labour is strong and where the Tories are deeply unpopular. John Prescott is an effective performer who should be given a prominent role in the build up to the election. Britain's

transport infrastructure is in a dire condition and there is a real danger of total collapse. The Tories do not have the will to rescue it. Labour does. It should go to work on it immediately. □

## Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

### Dynamite Mike

I always had the feeling that Michael Gorbachev would balk at serious reform, no matter how much he might talk about it. What I was not expecting that his combination of talking much and doing little would demolish the shaky political structures of the Soviet Empire. Yet this is what has happened. And whether or not Gorbachev intended to free the world from the risk of World War Three by undermining the Superpower he was in charge of, he certainly deserves a Nobel Peace Prize for having done so.

There is a singular fitness in his getting a prize that was inaugurated by the inventor of dynamite. He has managed very effectively to demolish the system he was supposed to be saving. Not that it's entirely his fault. The system really began to go off the rails in the 1960s, when Brezhnev refused to allow the outworn one-party political structure to be changed or renewed.

It should be emphasised that it was not socialist state planning that failed. The drift since Khrushchev has been towards market socialism. Combined with political democracy, this might perhaps have worked. As things were, the whole society has been run by people who didn't particularly believe in what they were doing, and who very easily went along with nepotism, cronyism and corruption. Naturally, the economy suffered as a result. Quick decisive action by Gorbachev might have turned things round - and a strong Soviet Union would still be confronting the United States, with the ever-present possibility of global nuclear war. Instead, Gorbachev dithered, wrecked the economy and won the Peace Prize.

#### Read my lips - 'I am a wimp'

In L&TUR No. 19, we said Bush was a disaster at a time when most other people were calling him a strong and successful president. The rest of the world now seems to have come into line with our view. Opinion in the United States is turning against him, especially after he and Congress managed to run the American budget system onto the rocks.

Bush had been elected by promising not to raise taxes, just as Reagan had before him. This refusal was popular with the voters, who missed the fact that a lot of the benefits went to the very rich. Democrats in Congress want to get rid of the infamous 'bubble', whereby the very rich pay a smaller proportion of their income in tax than the moderately well off. Bush has opposed this - he prefers that the budget gap be closed by taking money away from the poor and needy, who mostly vote Democrat anyway.

The American constitution was designed by people who were mostly anxious to prevent tyranny. Efficient modern government was not part of the future they envisaged, and they did their best to set different parts of the state machine against each other. The American government can not decide on a budget and then get it passed into law, as happens in Britain and in most other countries. Congress decides on a budget, and then the President has the option of vetoing it. Naturally, this leads to chaos. And with a division

between a Congress that wants to raise taxes and a President who wants to cut welfare, the budget deficit shows few signs of getting away.

I suspect that private doubts about Bush's Gulf policy plays a part. It is now clear that a definite warning from the American government would have stopped Saddam Hussein from invading Iraq. He more or less asked the American ambassador if America would mind, and got an answer that seemed to say that they wouldn't. Once the deed was done, Bush suddenly leapt into action and started treating Saddam Hussein as a mad aggressor who must be stopped at all costs. But the truth has been slowly emerging - it was all a matter of bad or inconsistent diplomacy. And while few members of Congress wanted to sound unpatriotic by opposing what American troops were trying to do, the budget was a good way of getting back at Bush.

#### Shadow of a Gunperson?

People in Britain may have heard vaguely that the Labour Conference discussed the possibility of organising in Northern Ireland, and decisively rejected it. The truth is less simple. A small debate was allowed on the last day, with the Trade Unions all briefed to use their block votes to crush it. All that was needed - all that was in fact allowed - was a short debate. The proposer and seconder of the motion that the Labour Party should organise in Northern Ireland and put their case, and then Ted O'Brien spoke against it on behalf of the National Executive Committee. Given that all the important votes were already lined up, it should not have mattered what he said. The NEC could have put up a gorilla to oppose the motion, and might in fact have been wiser to do so. For poor Ted really dropped them in it.

The NEC has been running out of arguments against organising in Northern Ireland. Labour policy is for a United Ireland by consent - but since no such consent is likely to be forthcoming for the foreseeable future, something should be done to allow Northern Ireland workers to take part in the politics of the state that runs their lives. Labour might not win any seats - but Labour fights seats that are never likely to go Labour, such as Eastbourne where Labour almost lost its deposit at the recent by-election. The Labour leadership is unwilling to admit that it was wrong on the matter, but finds it very hard to give reasons why it is not wrong.

Ted O'Brien tried a new one - that the entire trade union movement in Northern Ireland was opposed to Labour

organising over there. Now this was untrue. A section of the trade union movement is against it, and within that section the largest and most influential group are members of the Communist Party of Ireland, who became prominent in Northern Irish trade unionism when they were the Communist Party of Northern Ireland and sounded vaguely unionist. Naturally these people do not want Labour politics on their 'patch'. But in fact these people are no longer a majority - the last public statement by the NEC actually said that there seemed to be a slight majority among trade unionists for Labour organising over there.

Given that the man was telling lies, and given that there would be no chance to expose these lies since there would be no more speakers before the vote, there were naturally some angry protests from the conference hall. Ted could and should have ignored it - it is not that unusual to be heckled at Labour movement meetings, and the person with the microphone can afford to ignore it, especially when the debate is about to be cut short. Instead he reacted and said:

*"And by the way when you're shouting at me, you see, next you'll throw your agenda paper and then you might start firing bullets. You see, that's the sort of sectarian thing that we don't have."*

Now we see the sort of thinking that guides the NEC. The Irish must be kept out of the Labour Party, because they are lunatics who might start firing bullets for no particular reason. Now this seems a strange notion, quite at variance with the facts. Ted's own name would seem to bear witness to the major Irish contribution to the British Labour movement. People from both Southern and Northern Ireland blend in easily with the unions and Labour Party in this country. When you do get heckling and the like, it's more usually with a middle-class English accent than an Irish one.

The motion was lost, but the issue is far from dead. A lot of people in the Labour Party are only just discovering that Labour refuses to try to represent people whose destiny any future Labour government will control. And Ted's little outburst won some extra sympathy. I think that very few debaters have ever done so much good for the cause they were speaking against.

Anyway, anyone who feels that the issue does not deserve to be swept under the carpet should contact the Campaign for Labour Representation, 98 Lansdowne Road, Belfast, BT15 4AB.

### I'll be Zeebruggered if I'll take the ferry

Judges are there to guide the jury on points of law. In the matter of the Zeebrugge ferry disaster, there was a serious possibility that a jury would have decided that top management were in some way responsible for a ferry setting sail with its doors open, and consequently capsizing. The risks of such disasters were far from unknown - they had happened before. And to cut staff and insist on fast turn-rounds, while leaving it to one overworked man to be sure that the doors were closed, might seem to be criminally negligent.

The learned Judge knew better. Judges still dress like 18th century gentlemen, even including a version of the powdered wigs that went out of fashion around the dawn of the 19th century. They and other lawyers have preserved many 18th century forms, even while other professions have moved with the times. Modern doctors no longer apply leeches or hot irons, modern teachers do teach other subjects besides Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But an 18th century lawyer brought forward into a 20th century court would not seem greatly out of place.

18th century gentry were mostly concerned with the protection of property, and its proper regulation. The victims of Zeebrugge were not deprived of any significant amounts of property, they simply lost their lives, and it was far from clear that the law should hold the ferry company responsible. And most of those on trial were the approximate modern equivalent of the 18th century gentry, while most of those who died were not.

Given a choice, Judges will almost always act in line with the principles of the 18th century gentry. Since the law did not definitely compel him to consider managers criminally negligent for doing nothing to stop ships sailing with their doors open, he used his authority to stop the case. This is very much in line with established English legal traditions.

There have now been calls for the law to be changed. Given careful drafting - Judges will interpret any ambiguity or uncertainty according to their own principles - it may finally be possible to bring the law on criminal negligence into line with what people other than lawyers would consider to be criminal negligence. Until then, and remembering that many ferry companies face an increasing threat from the Channel Tunnel, it might be wise to find some alternative. Aircraft, which can seem unsafe because very nearly every fatal accident gets reported, are

actually much safer. And the laws that govern their safety are much more modern.

### Cut-price narcissism?

The *Booker Prize* is run by a section of the literary establishment that runs on almost pure narcissism. They don't want to know about the past, the future, other societies or people different from themselves. Such things can be introduced only as a garnish to talking about the one and only truly significant subject - themselves.

Given this, should we care that the Dillons Group tried to sell the six novels shortlisted for the *Booker Prize* at 25% or more below the publisher's

recommended price? It depends what you want. Certainly, the end of Retail Price Maintenance for other sorts of goods led to lots of small shops going under, with big chains and supermarkets rising in importance. Both bookshops and publishing would be brought even more into line with the norms of modern capitalism, if Dillons get away with it. The same thing will be done for other sorts of books.

My own feeling is that there is no point in defending the old system. As a regular purchaser of books, I have never in fact found small bookshops very useful. Even for second hand books, you tend to get the best from the biggest. And the growing trend, at least

## L&TUR £5,000 appeal

### We're Half Way There!

Since we launched our Appeal a year ago, in September 1989, we have raised no less than £2,465.53 in donations, large and small. This has been a splendid response, and we wish to express our gratitude to all who have contributed. It shows that our original target was not pie in the sky. It can be reached if more readers and subscribers follow the example of those who have already demonstrated their faith in L&TUR.

We need the money in order to buy our own printing equipment. When we launched L&TUR in January 1987, we had a relationship with a printer who supported our aims and gave us a bargain-basement rate for the job, and so effectively subsidised the magazine. When this sadly came to an end in July 1989, we had to find a commercial printer, and since then we have been paying a normal commercial price for the printing of L&TUR.

This has put a great strain on the magazine. It forced us to raise the price from £1 to £1.50 a year ago, and has made us extremely dependent on revenues from sales simply to keep our heads above water. The only long run solution is for us to print L&TUR ourselves.

If we had our own printing equipment, we could produce the magazine much more cheaply and economically, and would therefore be able to keep the price stable indefinitely, making the magazine increasingly price-competitive in real terms over time. At the same time, we would also be able to expand very considerably our other publishing activities.

The Bevin Society had already produced several pamphlets before the launch of L&TUR, and has produced more since. Our two pamphlets on the Gulf Crisis seem in fact to be the only pamphlets on the subject that anyone on the left has produced. But this strains our limited financial resources. With our own

printing equipment, printing could be done much more cheaply than at present. In addition to producing pamphlets on current issues, we could publish reprints of important articles and essays by earlier socialists and trade unionists whose ideas are still relevant to the British Labour Movement, but which have been allowed to go out of print and have been forgotten. There are things which people need to know about, and won't get from anyone but us.

There is an enormous job of work to be done in recovering the rich political legacy of earlier generations of British socialists on the one hand and developing new purposeful socialist thinking on the other hand, in order to bring about the intellectual and spiritual revival of British socialism. The Ernest Bevin Society is alone in tackling this task. And we are doing it without any financial backing whatever. We depend entirely upon revenue from subscription to and sales of our publications, and your donations.

We are now completing our fourth year of publishing L&TUR. We have shown that we can keep going and develop our thinking, and it will be clear to all who have followed the progress of L&TUR since its modest beginnings in 1987 that it has succeeded in carving out a significant place for itself in the contemporary Labour movement. We need to maintain our momentum - if possible increase it. Obtaining our own printing equipment will be a key development which will open up all sorts of possibilities. If you value what we are doing, and want to see us continue the good work, follow the example of those who have already made donations to our Appeal - a bit of socialist emulation here is precisely what is called for! and send us your cheques. They will all count, and they will all be appreciated and remembered. Please make them payable to Labour and Trade Union Review, and please make them as large as possible.



in London, for newsagents to sell small numbers of cut-price paperback books has surely undermined the system already.

Anyway, it's now a legal matter. Since it is a dispute between property owners, I have no idea what the law's decision will be.

### Remember, Remember

Every 5th of November, people in Britain take part in a rather odd public ceremony. Formally speaking, it commemorates the failure of English Catholic conspirator Guy Fawkes to blow up King James the First of England and his parliament back in 1605. But the matter has deeper roots than that, and wider ramifications.

Some sort of autumn festival, often involving fire, seems to have been part of British culture for a very long time. It was definitely one of the four seasonal feasts of the Celts, and may even go back before that. It may reflect the simple fact that after summer growth it's not a bad idea to burn up everything that isn't needed for winter.

Coming to much more recent times there is the odd matter of 'Pope Burnings', where an effigy of the Pope was burnt as a demonstration of either Protestant power or Protestant protest. They became a key matter under the later Stewart kings. James the First was the only one of that dynasty to be solidly Protestant. Mary Queen of Scots was his mother - although she seems to have been more interested in power than religion, becoming a Catholic martyr only because her major rivals were Protestant. Charles the First married a Catholic princess and favoured moves that brought the Anglican church closer to Catholic practice. Charles the Second declared himself a Catholic on his death-bed, and his brother James the Second was a declared Catholic even before he became king. Pope Burnings were part of a protest against the apparent drift away from Protestantism. It was a displaced form of aggression against the royal dynasty.

Having thrown out King James in 1688, and survived serious attempts at a restoration in 1715 and 1745, opinions moderated. I don't know just how far back the custom of burning effigies of Guy Fawkes on the 5th of November goes, but it seems reasonable that it took over and moderated the feelings that had been expressed by Pope Burnings - at least some of which occurred in November.

Burning an effigy of Guy Fawkes was a good way of satisfying popular Protestant and democratic feeling

without causing too much offence to either Catholics or nostalgic Jacobites. After all, Guy Fawkes had been a political traitor who had attempted regicide - and attempted it against a member of the Stuart dynasty. Moreover, his target had been monarch, lords and commons - the very forces that went to war with each other later in the 17th century. Reconciliations happened in the later 18th century, especially after the last Stuart claimant became a Cardinal, ensuring that there would be no heirs to carry on the line and continue the quarrel.

These days, it is just an excuse to have a bonfire and let off a few fireworks. People can enjoy it no matter what they believe in. But it is still a part of British history.

### The new Star Trek

Unless you are one of those people who can't stand any Science Fiction, you should take a look at *Star Trek - the next generation*. For reasons best known to itself, the BBC has chosen to put it in the 'DEF' slot, at 6 o'clock on Wednesday on BBC 2 - despite the series' considerable success in the United States. It's actually done much better than the original series, in terms of immediate success. The original *Star Trek* was killed off after three seasons, and only later became big business. This one starts with an existing core of fans.

There are some big improvements. Frankly, I never thought Jim Kirk fit to run a Starship. Captain Picard is much more convincing. And the program's designers have wisely avoided the temptation to simply recreate successful characters - a weakness that was present in the film series. Elements of Spock have gone into three characters - an android who has some of Spock's excessive logic, a half-human alien with special mind powers, and a Klingon who is a Starfleet officer yet still an outsider. Counting both Spock and the android as half-human, there has been a 300% increase in the number of non-humans in what is supposed to be a Starship from a multi-species culture.

The change is very welcome, as is the 300% increase in the number of women among the leading characters. Where it still falls down is in representing Earth human races or cultures other than the white American majority. Only the captain, a British actor playing a French character, is definitely non-American. In the first *Star Trek*, one character doubled for two 'minorities' by being black and female. In this one, the only visibly black character is also disabled, a blind man with special artificial sight. As it happens, the Klingon is also

played by a black actor. It wasn't planned that way, but during auditions he showed the best understanding of the character. Quite possibly, this was because Klingons are a fictional projection of white American racial fears, of which he'd have had a lot of experience.

It's a good entertainment, and it illustrates the progress that women have made in American society since the first series - a 300% increase in numbers represented, as I mentioned. But as far as accepting as equals the other cultures with which America shares the planet, there has been no progress at all.

### The end of the Great Attractor

The largest single object in the universe has just vanished. This was the Great Attractor, the strange object that seemed to be so massive that our galaxy and many like it were being drawn towards it, in a definite movement superimposed on the general expansion that began with the Big Bang.

The movement was spotted a few years back. Our whole local group of galaxy was experiencing a small but definite gravitational attraction from a region of space where there seemed to be nothing very special. There was briefly a notion that it could be some sort of gravitational repulsion from the opposite direction - gravity is only definitely known as a force that attracts, but the opposite is not wholly impossible. But it turned out that groups of galaxies the other side of the region of space thought to contain the Great Attractor were also being pulled towards it. So it seemed to be something like a truly supermassive black hole, or even a loop of Cosmic String, something strange and immensely dense left over from an earlier phase of the universe.

Sadly, though the gravitational tug from the region of the 'Great Attractor' is real enough, the 'Great Attractor' itself seems not to be. Detailed studies now imply not a single very special object, but merely an unusual concentration of clusters of galaxies. So it goes. But on the other hand, there is some good evidence accumulating for a strand of Cosmic String existing in a different part of the universe, and producing double or multiple images of distant galaxies by means of the strange but by now well-established process of 'gravitational lensing'. Closer to home, the planet Saturn is acting oddly. A white spot has unexpectedly appeared. The Space Telescope is investigating. (It is far from being the wash-out that people first feared it might be.)

# Full Employment

## The Big Idea Which Labour Will Not Defend

**Text of an address given by Hugh Roberts on October 1st 1990 to a fringe meeting of the Ernest Bevin Society at the Labour Party Conference.**

I think many of you will be aware that the latest unemployment figures have shown yet another major rise, and all the evidence suggests that there is worse to come. Some experts have forecast that no fewer than 300,000 more jobless will be added to the figures over the next year. There was an article in one of yesterday's Sunday papers quoting the view of John Eatwell, who is, as you know, one of the economic advisers to the Labour leadership, that manufacturing output is going to fall by 10% a year over the next few years. It is estimated that over 80,000 jobs in engineering alone will go over the next year as well as around 100,000 jobs in construction. And a group called Cambridge Economic Consultants have forecast that no fewer than one million jobs in manufacturing will disappear by the year 2000.

In other words, the present reality and the prospect for the foreseeable future is one of permanent, and growing, mass unemployment.

You will probably also be aware that the latest retail price index puts inflation at 10.9%. I can remember a time when we were told that inflation led to unemployment and that when inflation was brought under control you would find the unemployment figures going down. Well, inflation was reduced to low single figures by the Thatcher government in the mid-1980s while unemployment remained high. We have also been told that deflationary policies that unavoidably create unemployment would reduce inflation. But we now find that inflation is back up into double figures.

In other words, this government is extraordinarily vulnerable on the issues of unemployment and inflation.

We should not forget that the Thatcher government came in in 1979 on the basis of a campaign that made a major issue of unemployment. The world discovered Saatchi & Saatchi when it found itself looking at massive posters of dole queues with the legend *'Labour isn't Working'*. The government is undoubtedly extremely vulnerable on these issues - or *would be* if Labour could exploit this opening effectively. But Labour cannot exploit this opening, because it does not effectively oppose what is going on. It does not effectively

oppose what the government is doing. For it, too, accepts permanent high unemployment.

Two years ago, Neil Kinnock, in his speech at Conference, announced Labour's conversion to a principled acceptance of the capitalist order, principled in the sense that it accepts that the economy would be run on capitalist principles indefinitely, not principled in any other sense. What he did not say is that Labour accepts permanent mass unemployment. But Labour does accept it. And the acceptance, in a thoroughgoing way, of the capitalist system implies the acceptance of the mass unemployment that goes with it.

***"Labour cannot exploit the unemployment situation or the inflation figures. It cannot oppose Thatcherism on any ground of principle and does not wish to do so"***

Last night I attended a fringe meeting of a very worthy body called the *Campaign For Work*, chaired by Molly Meacher, and featuring on the platform Tony Blair MP, Paul Boateng MP, Michael Meacher MP and Alan Tuffin of the UCW. Now, you would have thought that if there was one fringe meeting where the issue of full employment would have been ventilated properly it would have been one held by the *Campaign For Work*. I picked up some of the Campaign's literature and found that the Campaign itself is, indeed, formally committed to working to convert Labour to full employment policies. But not one of these four platform speakers dealt with the issue of mass unemployment; not one of them dealt with the question of full employment.

Alan Tuffin, in the course of his speech, listed a number of major issues that Labour needs to tackle: low pay, women at work, Europe, manufacturing industry; not a word about unemployment. Tony Blair, in the course of his speech, made the passing remark that *"a primary function of government is to sustain full*

*employment."* It would seem that he agrees with us. But this was only a passing remark in a speech devoted entirely to another issue, the issue of training. And it was a remark, moreover, that clearly took Michael Meacher by surprise, for in his own speech Meacher alluded to this statement by Tony Blair and said how very glad he was that Tony had said that. But is this to be taken seriously? If you look at the latest statement of Labour policy, *Looking To The Future*, you will find nothing about mass unemployment, nothing about restoring full employment. This Labour Party is not in any way committed to the issue. The commitment that it used to state, very vigorously, even as late as the early 1980s, in the course of attacking Thatcherism, has now been definitively abandoned.

Now, there is mounting evidence of the enormous threat to the social fabric of this country as a direct consequence of permanent mass unemployment. In the old days, that is to say before the war, mass unemployment of course generated major strains on society. It was the condition which bred fascism, among other things. But there was an extent to which mass unemployment was accepted by society insofar as it was regarded as a kind of natural calamity, as something that was inevitable, something you could not do anything about because it followed logically from a system that was regarded as eternal in some sense. And there was in those days in Britain many institutions and mechanisms that functioned very effectively to legitimise the prevailing social order. The power of religion was very important, as was patriotism and the monarchy. There was a ruling class then which still had a great deal of legitimacy in terms of its place in society and was governed, to some extent, by a very paternalistic ethos, an ethic of public service, and was able on that basis to secure a good deal of deference from people. At the same time, insofar as there was popular protest against the conditions of mass unemployment, this was articulated and represented vigorously within the system by the Labour Party and the trade unions. So, in other words, there were outlets within the British political system for resentments and grievances.

All those conditions have now disappeared.

Since Keynes we know that mass unemployment is not unavoidable. Between 1940 and 1970 we had almost three decades of virtually full employment - certainly 25 years of it. That experience is a historical fact that is part of the collective memory of the British people. My father has never

been unemployed. I have been unemployed for the last two and a half years; but my father and his generation enjoyed permanent full employment. Moreover the old, paternalistic ruling class has been swept away by the Thatcherites, religion has lost its grip on people's reflexes and, above all, popular anger and protest arising out of mass unemployment and all that it implies is no longer being given a proper outlet in the Labour Party and in the trade union movement.

The results are seen in the massive evidence of a growing social breakdown. We have recently had the figures for an unprecedented crimewave, particularly in London, and what is interesting is the massive growth in crimes against property. There is increasing evidence of a major drugs problem, we have the continuing problem of racism, there is, more generally, a collapse of public morality at all levels, the disappearance of civilised public and social behaviour in large cities, increasing homelessness. It is impossible to cross London without encountering beggars these days.

All this follows, as night follows day, from the systematic application of the social philosophy summed up by Maggie Thatcher in the famous statement, "*there is no such thing as society*".

Labour spokesmen have deplored that statement. I remember Tony Blair himself writing an effective article in *The Times* taking Maggie up on that point. But they have only opposed that philosophy with debating points.

"*There is no such thing as society*" is a philosophy that virtually makes inevitable anti-social behaviour at all levels. When a government is effectively ripping off public assets through rampant privatisation, and when its cronies in the City are increasingly being caught out in all kinds of dubious behaviour, it is hardly surprising that ordinary people should feel that, in such conditions, a certain amount of theft is simply doing what everybody else is doing.

"*There is no such thing as society*", as a social philosophy, follows directly from the Thatcherite attitude to unemployment, which was summed up by Norman Tebbit in the memorable phrase, '*On Your Bike*'. '*On Your Bike*' sums up a position which basically says this: the state has absolutely no responsibility to provide employment; each individual must become an entrepreneur, an enterprising vendor of his or her labour-power, competing with his or her fellow-workers, fellow-

unemployed, to secure scarce jobs. It is a philosophy which, when put into practice, destroys social solidarities of all kinds. It is a philosophy which, when put into practice, complements the other processes that are going on as a result of Thatcherite policies and has the general effect of atomising society. It creates a dog-eat-dog world.

Labour's answer to this is 'training' - a term that is becoming virtually a kind of panacea in the current Labour leadership's rhetoric. But if we look at what is being proposed on training - and we certainly accept that training is something that needs to be invested in and promoted very vigorously - what it amounts to is helping individuals whose skills have become redundant or obsolete, or who are yet to acquire skills, to become effective and enterprising vendors of their labour-power by adding value to their labour-power through the acquisition of skills. In other words, it is a proposal *within* the essential framework defined by Norman Tebbit. It is not a proposal that in any way subverts that framework or that philosophy. It deals with the problems faced by each individual seeking to compete effectively in a labour market which is totally biased against the supply side - a buyer's market, and one which is destined to remain so. It does nothing about the aggregate problem of unemployment.

So Labour cannot exploit the unemployment situation or the inflation figures. It cannot oppose Thatcherism on any ground of principle, and does not wish to do so.

Some of you may have seen a newspaper interview with John Smith last week in which he spoke about this very frankly - and I like frankness and I respect it. He said "*I don't believe in Big Ideas*." It is now becoming a theme in a lot of media commentary that Labour lacks a Big Idea. Well, it doesn't want one. There is a vacuum, it does not wish to have Big Ideas. Which means, of course, that it is situating itself on the ground of the Big Idea brought in over the last eleven years by Thatcherism, the Big Idea of rampant capitalism, an atomised society and all that that entails. And because there is a vacuum at the level of 'Big Ideas' in the Labour Party, given that a lot of the old, somewhat muddle-headed, ideology has been definitively defeated, there is now a competition to fill the vacuum from the trendy left, with such notions as '*Citizenship*' and '*the Democratic Agenda*', and so on. In other words, there is a tendency to fill this vacuum with waffle, given that people are not addressing the fundamental problem, which is unemployment, and demanding

its opposite, full-employment.

Full-employment should be the central objective of a revitalised socialist politics within the British Labour Movement.

If we look at the achievement of the only Labour government that has ever really done anything useful, the Attlee-Bevin government of 1945-51, we can see that there were really four pillars to the achievement of that government. There was the effective enactment of the Beveridge proposals for social security and national insurance. There was the creation of the National Health Service. There was the establishment of a public sector, giving Labour, in principle at any rate, control over the commanding heights of the economy. And there was the achievement of full-employment.

It seems to me that the achievement of full-employment was in many ways the most remarkable aspect of what that government did, because, of course, full-employment under war conditions was not unprecedented. There had been something approaching full-employment during the First World War. But immediately after the First World War you had an immediate return to mass unemployment. The great achievement of the Attlee-Bevin government was to sustain full-employment *after* the war: to bring about the effective demobilisation of the British armed forces without allowing mass unemployment to return. And not only did they do that, so successful were they in preserving full-employment after the war that they established the commitment to full-employment as the common ground of British party politics. The Conservative Party itself had to accept that commitment to full-employment, and it knew very well that it had to accept it, it could not do battle electorally against the Labour Party unless it, too, undertook seriously to preserve full-employment. And that is what it did, and that consensus endured for the next twenty years. That was the measure of the achievement of the Labour government.

The other point about full employment is that it was, in its own terms, a very radical development precisely because it is subversive of the capitalist system. It eliminated the trade cycle of boom and slump. It transformed the balance of class power in industry. It completely changed the position of the workforce vis-à-vis management. But it also increasingly tended to transform the balance of class power in society as a whole and thereby opened up major prospects for subsequent advances along the socialist road by subverting capitalist mechanisms and making



socialist solutions to the problems arising out of that necessary. It put the working class in the saddle; it gave the working class a position in society that it had never had before.

But - and this is a point which I think has never been fully grasped - it also *actually made possible* the Welfare State.

We are now seeing major cuts in all kinds of benefits, and attacks on the National Health Service that are becoming more and more radical. There is now a very important and influential ginger group within the Conservative Party called "*No Turning Back*" which has just published its proposals, and those proposals will effectively set the agenda of the next Conservative government if the Conservatives win the next election. They involve the complete dismantling, to all intents and purposes, of what is left of the National Health Service and the rest of the Welfare State.

The Labour Party deplores this, but it does not connect this to the issue of mass unemployment. But the point about mass unemployment is that it puts enormous strain on the Welfare State. It puts strain on the services and the benefits that the state undertakes to provide. The more people there are out of work, the greater is the burden that has to be carried by the rest of the population in work producing global output. So we are getting a situation where fewer people in work are supporting a growing number of non-producers. And if we combine the fact of mass unemployment with that of the aging of the population as a whole we can see why it is inevitable that benefits and services will continue to be cut, why it is inevitable that the Welfare State will continue to be diminished in all respects. You cannot have an effective Welfare State and permanent mass unemployment.

The question must arise: why, given all this, has Labour reneged on its former commitment to full employment? It seems to me that there are a number of reasons. One is that it failed to cope with the new problems thrown up by full employment in the 1960s and 1970s, especially the problem of inflation. And, because it failed to cope with those problems then, instead of learning from its failures and working out what it should have done, so that it can have a clear conception of what it should do in future to come up with an effective solution, it is doing the easy thing, and the intellectually dishonest thing, of assuming that its failure to solve those problems was because those problems cannot be solved; those

problems are insoluble and therefore we can forget all about them. But it is also because the Labour Party has been *allowed* to renege on its commitment by the trade union leaderships, and I think that this is a very fundamental aspect of the situation.

At first sight this might seem surprising, when one bears in mind how the trade unions themselves have suffered enormously as a result of rising mass unemployment. They have lost enormous chunks of their memberships as a result of it, they have lost a lot of their bargaining power and, of course, they have lost virtually all of their general influence on government policy. The government pays no attention whatever to the trade unions these days on general economic policy matters, whereas fifteen years ago the views of the trade unions had to be taken into account all the time. You might think, therefore, that the trade unions would recognise that they have a vested interest in the return to full employment. Well, the evidence suggests that they take the opposite view, since it is quite clear that, given the extent of the backing from the trade unions for what the Labour leadership is now doing - and that backing has grown rather than diminished over the last few years, it has become more comprehensive, more general, and more solid - it is clear that there is a consensus within the trade union leadership that underpins Labour's abandonment of the full employment commitment.

***"Mass unemployment puts enormous strain on the Welfare State. You cannot have an effective Welfare State and permanent mass unemployment."***

One of the reasons for this, historically, is that the trade unions could not see in the 1960s and 1970s that they needed themselves to produce solutions to the problems of inflation and low productivity that were created by the way in which their own power had been enhanced in conditions of full employment. This was for several reasons. To some extent, the trade unions were in the grip of an ideology which licensed and legitimated their own irresponsibility. The most extreme example of this ideology, that "it's not our problem", was perhaps Scargillism. But the fact is that Scargillism was simply the left extreme of a spectrum of opinion which really spanned the movement as a whole. "*It's not our problem, it's not our responsibility; that is management's problem, the government's problem.*" This was a

point of view which completely ignored the transformation in the balance of power that had occurred as a result of full employment. And if you have power, then you have responsibility. There is no point in passing the buck. But they did so, partly because they were underestimating the extent of the transformation that had occurred, and partly because a good deal of the pressure in terms of debate and ideology was coming from a section of the Left which actually believed, quite coherently, in irresponsibility as a long-term tactic in order to bring about a breakdown of the economy, in order to have a revolution, in order to have socialism. This was the actual outlook of an important element of the Left in those days.

But I think more generally, even without that rather madcap Leftism that someone like Arthur Scargill very consistently and, in his own way, sincerely has expounded, there was a more general fact that the trade union apparatuses remained wedded to the routines of free collective bargaining, and were unprepared to look beyond those practices and those habits.

Now, the most lucid of them could see that they needed to do that. Jack Jones, in the mid-1970s, could see that the consequences of full employment, the massive enhancement of trade union power, meant that trade unionism as he had known it since the 1930s was, in a sense, at the end of its tether, at the end of the road. It had got to the top of the mountain. And only three things could happen: it could fall into the abyss, or it could learn to do something else and take off in a new direction, or it could allow itself to be forced back down off the mountain. And it is, of course, the last of these which has happened.

Because Jack Jones could see that something had to give, he wanted to preserve the power that the working class had won by getting the working class to start using that power responsibly and positively and imaginatively. But his proposals for incomes policy and industrial democracy were defeated within the trade unions, having been opposed - by a bitter irony - from the Labour Left.

The point is that the Labour movement had to develop, given the progress that it had made, it had to *move* beyond the old free-collective bargaining approach, and it decided not to.

Last night, in the course of his speech, Alan Tuffin made the remark that "*we've had enough of the Thatcher government, we're sick of this eleven years of free-for-all.*" But it was the decision of the

Labour movement to return to the free-for-all, the decision of the Labour movement in 1976 to have a return to free collective bargaining, which is the free-for-all. And Thatcherism was the logical complement of that at the level of government three years later. It was the unions which chose the free-for-all.

The result of all this - a tragic development of which those who like to style themselves as 'Left' have been in the van-guard - is that the entire trade union movement now has adopted the philosophy of the EETPU. *"We are all Hammondites now"* in the trade union movement. We all accept capitalism as eternal, and we all accept what that implies: amongst other things, mass unemployment and the threats to the social fabric arising out of that. And this position - the way in which the trade union consensus to preserve the routines of free collective bargaining *at all costs* has meant that the Labour movement has abdicated its role in British society - was graphically illustrated when we had this major riot over the poll tax in London a few months ago.

The thing that was most striking about that massive demonstration in London that then degenerated into a riot was that the Labour Party and the Labour movement *were absent from it*. There was a political vacuum there. The responsibilities of the Labour Party and the Labour movement to capture and canalise and control but also effectively articulate and represent this frustration and anger had been abdicated. The vacuum was being filled by all kinds of foolish or childish or irresponsible politics, essentially of an anarchistic kind. Two days later the TUC had its 'rally' against the poll tax in the Central Hall, Westminster. *Ticket Only*. The People riot outside, and the TUC demonstrates to all with eyes to see its comprehensive irrelevance to what is happening in Britain by holding a Ticket Only rally, as if this was some kind of buffet reception in honour of some trade union leader about to be presented with a gold watch on his retirement.

It is because of this colossal abdication of responsibility by the Labour movement and the Labour Party that you are having now a genuine problem of democracy. People in the *New Statesman* or on the various fringes of the party who are talking about democracy are not talking about something which is not a problem. There is a problem, because Thatcherism is not actually being opposed effectively on the ground of principle.

There was an article in the paper yesterday which actually said that there

is majority support in the opinion polls for incomes policy, that the British people would actually like to see a return to incomes policy. Nobody *mentions* incomes policy in political debate. It is a taboo word. There is undoubtedly a majority in the country which is sick to death of what Thatcherism is doing to British society, and has a principled objection to what Thatcherism is doing to British society. Yet we have a Labour Party that at the level of principles is actually in complicity with Thatcherism. And we therefore do have a growing problem of democracy in this country, because democracy in this country rests on the combination of Government *with Opposition*, and we have got Government *without* effective Opposition. Popular resistance to government and resentment of government is not being adequately represented in the political system.

***"Incomes policy is essential if you are to maintain full employment, because full employment makes the old routines of free collective bargaining obsolete."***

We should recognise, in relation to the underlying issue of full employment, that, in crucial respects, the pass was sold in the 1960s and 1970s. There is no doubt at all that there were quite a lot of people in the leadership of the Labour Party who understood, in a somewhat superficial way, the problem that needed to be faced there. There is no doubt that Harold Wilson understood it, that Barbara Castle understood it. If you read the first volume of Tony Benn's Diaries, he clearly saw that a new approach was needed in terms of coping with the kinds of problems that were inevitably being generated by the new conditions of full employment, and so did Peter Shore and numerous other people. They vaguely recognised what needed to be done. But they failed to *make the case to the working class* in the trade union movement. They could not take on the forces of inertia and conservatism within the trade union movement, and defeat those forces by the sheer force of coherent argument and conviction, and they backed down.

And, of course, part of the problem, as I have already suggested, is the responsibility of the Left. Part of the problem has been the tendency within British Socialism to conceive of socialism itself as something that is in a sense the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, Jerusalem, the End of History, where everything suddenly reaches a final state

of blissful harmony, and where there are no further conflicts and where everything is in a sense *simplified*. What that frame of mind was unable to cope with was the fact that the very achievements of the Attlee-Bevin government that were socialistic in tendency and potential meant that life was becoming *more* complicated, not less, and that the Labour movement needed to respond to those new complexities and learn how to cope with them by developing its own politics. So there was this general failure, to some extent attributable to an essentially childish, unrealistic, mythical attitude to socialism.

But, I think, underlying that and the extent to which those inadequate ideas could have such terrible consequences was the attitude of the working class itself towards full employment and the other great gains made in 1945-51. They did not experience these tremendous gains in a way which enabled them to envisage the future political development that needed to be made. It seems to me that the basic attitude within the working class was to experience these changes as the satisfaction of a long-standing demand for Justice that was at last being conceded, rather than seeing that what was happening was that the working class was in effect coming to power at numerous levels in the society and the economy, and therefore needed to face the challenge of power and develop its political capacity to take on, increasingly, the role of government and management in the working class interest. Instead there was a tendency to think, *'Well, at long last we've got what we want, what we've been demanding. We can now revel in it, luxuriate in these new conditions.'* And what was not understood was that, if that was the attitude, then sooner or later those conditions would be taken away, as they have been taken away by Thatcherism.

There is no doubt that, in policy terms, what is central is the question of incomes policy, the word which *nobody in Conference is going to dare utter*.

The point about incomes policy is that it is essential if you are to sustain the conditions of full employment, because the conditions of full employment make the old routines of free collective bargaining obsolete.

Full employment inevitably generates inflation. Inflation is not an evil. Inflation is a *necessary* feature of a socialist, full-employment, economy. The trick is to keep it at a manageable level.

Inflation means that demand at any particular moment is exceeding supply. It is therefore a motor for growth. It is

a signal that you have to increase output. The problem in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s was that this signal was not being acted upon. It was not triggering the necessary response to increase output to bring about a new equilibrium between demand and supply, and the result was that either there developed a vicious spiral of cost-push, wage-push inflation, or there was a tendency to suck in imports at the expense of the balance of payments. The problem was, in other words, that conditions in production were preventing the proper response to the signals being transmitted by rising prices. And the reason for this was the extent to which basically the outlook of the Labour movement at the point of production was that 'it is not our responsibility'. There was a situation where the bourgeois class was historically exhausted, no longer had the power to manage effectively in the capitalist fashion, it had lost that power, it had just lost it completely, and where the working class was basically refusing to step into the breach and start having an effective, positive attitude to promoting production in order to preserve an equilibrium in a full employment economy.

There is therefore no question, for socialists, of ducking the issue of incomes policy. It is central to any serious commitment to full employment as a major programmatic objective. And the argument, which can be stated very simply, is that the social consensus in this country requires the preservation of the Welfare State; the Welfare State itself requires full employment, or something very close to it, otherwise you are simply not generating a sufficient surplus to finance the benefits and services that are required; full employment itself, in order to be sustained, requires a functional incomes policy; and a functional incomes policy itself requires the development of a socialist politics capable of making the case to the Labour movement, profoundly, convincingly - not just patching up some kind of deal with the trade union leaderships - but so that the realisation enters into the world view of the Labour movement at every level that it needs to go beyond the old routines of trade unionism, of free collective bargaining, appropriate to earlier conditions, if it is to advance and come into its own.

So incomes policy puts demands on the Labour movement to face issues and take decisions, instead of taking the soft option of leaving those decisions to market forces. It requires both the trade unions and the Labour Party - and especially the Left of the Labour Party - to develop beyond the old habits, the restrictive practices and self-indulgent rhetoric, and the cheap cynicism which is the medium within which all those practices and rhetoric continue to flourish.

## Tories turn to the Workhouse?

**Walter Cobb looks at *Choice and Responsibility: the Enabling State*, a document produced by the Conservative Political Centre for discussion within the Tory Party. The document is no eccentric product of the Tory lunatic fringes, but a very serious proposal that may well shape the future of Conservative political thinking.**

*Choice and Responsibility* is a nasty document, full of ignorance, bombast and bad intentions. It also very probably represents what we'll be in for if Thatcher gets a fourth term.

I do not lightly call people ignorant. There are certainly many highly intelligent and knowledgeable people on the Tory side of politics. But not Thatcher, and not the 'No Turning Back' group of Conservative MPs. I will show later just how ignorant they are, and how sloppy their thinking. I will also be pointing out that they ignore their own free-market ideology when applying it honestly would damage the interests of their class. But first I want to talk about the wider context.

Traditional Tories had a vision of the world with a place for everyone and everyone in their place. In practice they didn't quite live up to this ideal - the 'one nation' of Disraeli - yet nor was it a total pretence. It was the early 19th century Tories who in 1824 abolished the 'Combination Acts', the laws against Trade Unions. It was they who passed the first very basic factory legislation, preventing employers from imposing a working day of more than 10 hours on women and children. The Tories of that era could see that the industrial working class was being squeezed too hard, and that if nothing was done it was bound to lead to trouble. They used the power of the state to discourage overt protests against injustice, but they also in their own time took measures to reduce the injustices that were causing the protests.

This new batch of Tories, the New Right, don't seem to understand such things. They can be very short sighted. The overall social fabric is taken for granted as a sort of God-given framework within which individuals and families can and should grab as much as they can. The only social theory they have is that if everyone does this with enough enthusiasm, and the state does as little as possible, all will be well. If all is not well they call for more of the same.

Thatcher, of course, does at times also talk like a traditional Tory. She talks

about her deep religious feelings. She calls for generosity and compassion. But she tends to invoke such sentiments only when it's a matter of making demands on others. Groups with a vital social function - nurses, teachers, ambulance drivers - are asked to be altruistic, not to make wage demands. Yet these groups are already highly altruistic, accepting wages below what their personal talents would entitle them to. (Some teachers are an exception to this rule - but the profession is plagued with such characters only because the wretched wages attract too few good people.) Thatcher applies a double standard - state employees must be altruistic, but the rest of the society is to grab as much as it can, and be praised for it. No wonder that public services are breaking down!

Thatcher's mind must be full of a mix of traditional Toryism and New Right ideology. She practices the ancient British art of double-think, whereby people hold two incompatible sets of ideas and then act as if only one of them was true. Leninists also practised this art to some degree, and former colonial policeman George Orwell was able to understand and name the process precisely because he saw it in operation in two very different ideological frameworks. But compared to the British ruling class, the Leninists were amateurs. And Thatcher is a virtuoso performer. She will switch from one to another in her public statements, and never seem to see any contradiction. But it is New Right ideas that have in practice dominated her actions.

The ideology of the New Right has obscure origins. A large part in its development was played by refugees from the failed East European liberal democracies of the 1930s. (It should be noted that those societies had mostly collapsed into right-wing and fascist or semi-fascist dictatorships even before they were overrun by Hitler or Stalin.) But the ideas of the New Right would never have caught on had they not been rooted in something that started right back here in Britain. Ideas strongly resembling Thatcherism and the New Right were a part of early 19th century

radicalism. Benthamite Utilitarianism is the closest, but you can find echoes of it even in people like Tom Paine.

You might think it eccentric to argue that Paine and Thatcher could in any way be connected. Certainly, if Paine could be brought back from the dead he would surely strongly disapprove of what Thatcher is doing. The network of ideas that developed into early socialism also played a large part in his thinking. But Thatcher, I suspect, is no more an admirer of monarchy or aristocracy than Paine was. She is somewhat guarded in what she says - her power is after all based on her ability to carry traditional Tories with her in something that is highly destructive to traditional Tory values. But at the recent Tory conference she actually spoke about a classless society! And in her dealings with the monarchy, she has been rather more curt and dismissive than any Prime Minister before her. Every previous Prime Minister went along with the pretence that it was the monarch's government, with ministers responsible to the crown, and the Prime Minister as merely the chief servant of his or her majesty. This language had lasted unchanged since the days when monarchs really did play a large part in forming governments and choosing ministers, and no one has chosen to drop the polite pretence. But Thatcher has - she uses the open language of power, it is "my government", "my ministers."

This, at least, Tom Paine would have thoroughly approved of.

Now let's get onto the substance of Choice and Responsibility. There isn't in fact that much substance to it. The whole thing is based on an assumed and unspoken systems of belief, the nature of which I outlined in the previous paragraphs.

The substance of the pamphlet is a proposal to dismantle the Welfare State. People are to be required to make their own provisions for sickness and old age. The unprepared and the unlucky are to be treated with scorn, and allowed to drift down to a much lower level of social care. The exact nature of this lower level is not made clear, but implicitly it would be a revival of the 19th century workhouse.

You think I'm kidding? Listen to them: "Our purpose should be to wean people off welfare. We advocate the systematic reform of the welfare system into one based on insurance - run on a private agency system." (Page 20). And of course, private agencies are in it for the money, and are quite happy to let the unprofitable and the unlucky vanish down the plug-hole.

You have such a system of 'health care' in the United States. A large part of the working class never bothers with health insurance until it is too late, at which point they get only the very minimum level of care at charity hospitals. And even rich people can get ruined by a serious illness, because insurance companies limit their liability to a 'ceiling'. If one member of a family is unlucky enough to have a long-lasting and expensive illness, then they and all their relatives can be ruined by it - unless the rest of the family decide to be ruthless and leave the unfortunate individual to die on minimal medical care. And on top of all this, the American system as a percentage of Gross National Product costs a lot more than ours, for treatment that isn't noticeably better even for those who can pay.

British private medical schemes like BUPA are run on more civilised lines, with unlimited care for anyone who's paid the premiums. But given a free market, those insurers who limit their liability will be able to undercut the rest, persuading people to choose a cheap scheme that will *probably* be enough for their future needs.

Even so, they couldn't really be talking about the workhouse for the healthy but poor, could they? Couldn't they?

Listen to them, and judge for yourself. Talking about private insurance schemes to replace the state provisions for "old age, sickness, ill-health and unemployment", they say "If an able-bodied person was unable or unwilling at any time to pay the prescribed premium, the State would pay it in return for work... a minimum routine of community work on the basis of ability, aptitude and circumstances." (Page 21.) That is to say, the unwise or the unlucky, and those guilty of being unemployed in an economy that had rather less regular jobs than it has people able to do them, would be forced into a system of forced labour that would not differ significantly from the hated and long-abolished workhouse system!

The 'No Turning Back' group obviously has very large resources at its command. The ten MPs listed on the back cover must in themselves represent a formidable combined earning power. And they could undoubtedly draw on huge resources from rich people who hope to dump yet more of their social responsibilities to the poor and unfortunate. So one might expect Choice and Responsibility to be a quality product, well researched and well edited. In fact it isn't - and given the sort of people who produced it, I am

happy to go for weaknesses that I might have ignored in something that was well intentioned or produced by people with fairly limited resources.

The English is *sloppy*, and on occasion quite simply wrong. The people whose previous work includes a pamphlet called *Save Our Schools* talk on Page 15 about the pollution caused by "the fossil burning heavy State-run industries of Eastern Europe". Now a fossil is a mineralised remnant of some ancient animal or plant, and no one burns them for industrial purposes. Fossil fuel is a well-established term for coal, oil, lignite etc - they do after all contain fossils, and are anyway derived from the break-down of ancient vegetation. But a lump of coal is not a fossil - although it could occasionally contain a fossil - and to talk of fossil burning is simply ignorant.

On the substantial point of East European pollution - a geographical accident gave Eastern Europe large amounts of very low-quality coal that is much harder to burn cleanly than that of Britain and the rest of Western Europe. Even so, we and the other countries used to have a serious clean-air problem, until state action dealt with the worst polluters. (Victorian values included filthy air in the cities, producing among other things the sooty black deposits one can still see on some older buildings.) Nor are the problems over even now. Acid rain and carbon dioxide put the whole planet in peril. And the Tory government has systematically opposed the measures for long-term human survival that other western nations have been proposing.

To get back to Choice and Responsibility. At the foot of Page 12 one has the following: "The State should not take it upon itself to limit the father's right to see his children for no better reason than that it is inconvenient to the mother who is awarded custody must appreciate that though her relationship with the father has broken down, their children's need not." Never mind the sentiments - what can one make of the grammar? One could analyse this spurge of clauses and sub-clauses as " (The State should not take it upon itself) (to limit the father's right to see his children) (for no better reason than that it is inconvenient to the mother (who is awarded custody)) (must appreciate that though her relationship with the father has broken down,) (their children's need not)." - and it still does not add up. English grammatical it not is. Of course people can get much too fussy about such matters - there ain't not nothing wrong with such ancient English forms as the repeating negative, which was rooted out of Standard

English by the same sort of pedantic ignorance that put a totally unjustified s into island. Yet that sentence I quoted is not a venerable survival from a dialect that was left out of Standard English. It isn't anything, except perhaps two sentences irrationally fused into one. Replacing "custody must" by "custody. She must" would, I think, properly express what they were trying to get at.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of current practice, it should be obvious that when a divorced couple cannot agree on civilised visiting arrangements, the law has to make a judgment on the matter, and the state enforce it. Without such enforced rules, kidnapping and violence might become the norm rather than the tragic exception. Saying simply that "fatherhood is for life" is a glib approach to a complex matter. The 'No Turning Back' group are much too ready to approach every problem with an open mouth.

Possibly they should seek advice from Mr Cecil Parkinson, who has had some direct experience of the problems of fatherhood. Although one must doubt if it would be good for his illegitimate child to have contact with a father who tried to have her aborted as a matter of social convenience, despite her mother's desire to have her and despite having ample resources to maintain them both.

To get back to substantial matters. Why do these people want to scrap the Welfare State? It is of course true that better health care and better living standards mean a much larger number of old people, some of whom need a lot of looking after. But equally, societies today are vastly richer than they used to be, and in the future will be richer still. For the young and strong to hog all the extra resources and leave the old and poor with the absolute minimum would be appallingly greedy. It would also imply widespread stupidity, since everyone can expect to be old one day.

**Choice and Responsibility** tries to deal with this problem. The old and rich can of course make sure that they get the best of everything. A middling group would save enough through insurance schemes to stay comfortable - unless they were unlucky to get taken in by tricksters or gamblers, which has happened in a number of cases. But if you add to these groups the short-sighted and careless, you might have a majority in favour of dumping the old and poor down to the very minimum that society can get away with. And the same already applies to many of the

mentally ill. 'Community Care' would be fine if the money for it had been provided. What has actually happened is that the mentally ill have often been left to fend for themselves, which they naturally don't do very well.

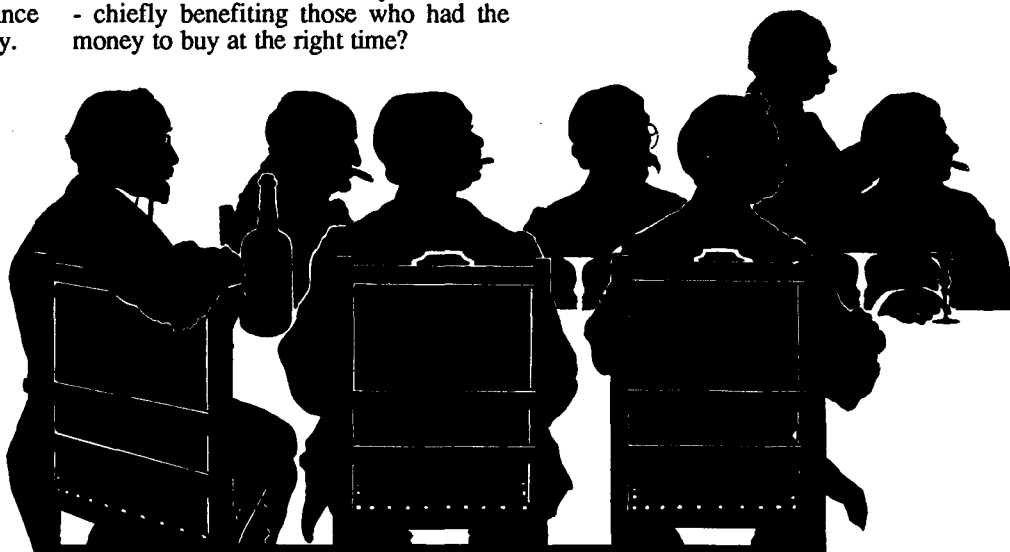
I said earlier that the New Right were not even true to their own principles - not when these would act against their own class. And the greatest of these gaps in principle is the matter of *inheritance*. The supposed principle that people grow rich by working hard and being clever is obviously and massively breached by the inheritance of wealth. People have the chance of receiving huge chunks of wealth for no work at all. This is not always the case - if a whole family have worked to build up a shop or farm or small business, then it is obviously just that it should pass on within the family. But most inheritance is not on such a basis - nor indeed do present laws adequately protect such inheritance.

The typical pattern is wealth being handed down from generation to generation, by people who may not work at all. And with the increase of home ownership, children with no siblings, or with childless uncles or aunts stand to profit massively as the previous generation dies off. It is all a matter of chance - yet I suspect that much more wealth is inherited than is ever produced by cleverness and hard work. For that matter, only certain types of cleverness and hard work are well rewarded. Scientists tend to be cleverer than businessmen, and in the long run may add at least as much to social wealth - the whole electrical industry arose from basic research based on no other motive than the desire to know. And what about artists, who very frequently starved to produce paintings or other works of art that have since become enormously valuable - chiefly benefiting those who had the money to buy at the right time?

The matter of inheritance is very relevant to the notion of dismantling the Welfare State. There would be a sort of justice to it, if each individual got health care and a pension based on how much or how little work they had done. But that's not how it will work. One person might work very hard, fall for one of the numerous fraudulent investments that have always been a part of capitalism, and end up impoverished. Another might be totally feckless and then inherit the value of a house from an uncle, thus gaining a secure and prosperous retirement. And of course, a very large number of people would already be within the charmed circle of wealth and power, secured against any serious hardship.

Inheritance is unlikely to be touched, because the rich do not want their own children to be exposed to the sort of ruthless social struggle that they advocate for others. Those who have started out poor tend to feel this even more strongly than those whose wealth was handed down from a previous generation. But all of them are determined that their own offspring shall be well looked after. Mrs Thatcher is no exception to this pattern. Her own background was one of moderate middle-class prosperity. By hard work and cleverness she qualified as a Chemist, but wasn't having a particularly successful career until she had the good fortune to marry wealthy businessman Dennis Thatcher. With his wealth backing her, she was able to train as a barrister and then go full time into politics. She has also made sure that her own children are well looked after. It is only other people's children who are to be left to sink or swim.

I began by saying that the 'No Turning Back' bunch were short sighted. I'll now explain why I say this. Traditional





Tories knew how to run a society in their own long-term interests - which meant never being too much against anybody else's interests. Thus the Tories have remained a party of government for far far longer than any other party has yet managed. A society in which there is a place for everyone and everyone in their place is quite acceptable to a depressingly large number of poor people. And the glittering display of the monarchy was and is also widely admired.

Thatcher, as I mentioned earlier, has talked about an "open, classless Britain". (The Independent, October 13th 1990). She does not of course mean a society in which everyone is equal. Nor, when it comes down to it, is she talking about a society in which everyone gets an equal start, no special favours and an equal chance to get on. Inherited wealth will not be touched - indeed the spread of share ownership and house ownership will increase the importance of the inheritance lottery. Moreover, 'influence' and 'friends in high places' have remained just as important as ever during ten years of Thatcherism. What she does mean is a society in which nothing is fixed or certain, in which anyone may potentially become almost anything - even though some people start with a large advantage, and others 'get on' by obviously unfair means. Something very Americanised, in fact.

All of this puts at risk the very social stability and feeling of community that previous generations of Tories worked so hard to preserve. This isn't America, a nation of immigrants still in search of a definite identity. British socialism has very very deep roots, whereas socialism in America always suffered from seeming to be a foreign import. The "No Turning Back" group recognise part of the danger - "Until the final bastions of socialism are stormed, a socialist revival can never be discounted." But the real bastion of socialism is the prosperity and self-confidence of the working class. Thatcher only came to power, because she convinced a section of the working class that she was acting in their interests at a time when Labour was blatantly making a mess of looking after those interests. If she now pushes ahead with an attack on the Welfare State, a big shift back towards socialism is likely. And it will then become apparent that all of Thatcher's victories over the left were at the expense of the much more far-sighted work of earlier Tories. In the face of a working class once again determined to build socialism, she would have left the Tories with nothing much to fall back on.

## The IRA - criminals or warriors?

**Jack Lane considers the impact of Mrs Thatcher suddenly describing IRA activities as warfare.**

Thatcher's remark on 19th September about the IRA fighting a guerrilla war has, at a stroke, destroyed a nonsense on which Westminster has based its policy towards Northern Ireland for nearly 15 years.

If words could kill, the IRA would have been defeated years ago. Every adjective of abuse that the English language contains has been used to denounce them. To what avail? In the mid-1970s Merlyn Rees got rid of internment and decided to criminalise the IRA. To the chattering classes this looked like a wonderful idea. It provided a great opportunity for their endless verbiage. Journalists and politicians competed with each other in proclaiming more and more exotic condemnations. People like Kinnock could luxuriate in this atmosphere.

Now it has all been shattered by an off-hand remark by Thatcher. She has obviously experienced enough at a personal level from the IRA that she could no longer keep mouthing the official gobbledygook that tried to portray the IRA as some latter-day Kray twins.

Hattersley described the IRA as criminal lunatics on the same day. If they were as he described them they are only fit for lunatic asylums. At least Brezhnev - remember him? - was consistent when he sent the people he considered lunatics to such places. The solution lies with the psychiatrists not the police if it is lunatics we are dealing with.

It is argued that admitting there is a war is handing the IRA a propaganda coup. That is undoubtedly true. But the longer the official nonsense is maintained the bigger the coup. It is never easy to admit that one has made a complete fool of oneself, but that is what the British political establishment has done, and the sooner it is admitted the better.

Internment treats internees as prisoners of war. When a war is settled prisoners of war are released. It is a very honourable arrangement compared with

treating your enemy army as consisting of criminals, lunatics, psychopaths etc etc.

Southern Ireland has used internment on a number of occasions. It was part of a war that went on for several decades between the Southern state and the IRA who did not accept the legitimacy of the state. And the political issue was always crystal clear. The state won a complete victory, as evidenced by the IRA rules of engagement which now forbid any actions against the Southern state.

The British establishment finds it very difficult to admit that there is a war on because it means having to make a major reassessment of the 'Irish Question'. Britain believed itself to have finished with Ireland with the Treaty settlement of 1922. That satisfied the majority in Ireland and as Northern Ireland would fall or be pushed into an all-Ireland state shortly afterwards the nightmare of Ireland was at an end. Matters did not work out as planned. The divide in Ireland has got wider and deeper, to the extent that it is now unlikely that there will ever be a single national development in the island. Britain has not adjusted to this reality.

British politicians are switched off from Northern Ireland. For 50 years Westminster ordered itself not even to discuss it. The first thing that needs to be done to get switched on is to set up the necessary antennae - the political parties. Otherwise there will be no reception and no signals getting through. Those that do get through are all scrambled by the local sectarian parties and it is an impossible task to expect politicians in Britain to unscramble them without their own direct line.

The result is that the IRA is the political element with the clearest political objective and the clearest idea as to how it should be achieved. By contrast Westminster does not know what it wants for Northern Ireland, and it insists on parading its incompetence at regular intervals when it attempts to set up some form of devolved government.

What greater encouragement and validity could be given to the IRA than the actions of governments that have to regularly admit that they cannot achieve what they consider the proper form of government for the Province? If the word *lunatic* has to be banded about it applies much more accurately to the cabinets that have chased the will-of-the-wisp of devolved government for the past 20 years.

# The TUC and Incomes Policy

**Martin Dolphin asks if the idea of an incomes policy is being put back on the Trade Union agenda.**

On the Wednesday of the TUC congress in Blackpool a composite motion was passed which proposed that at the start of each year there would be public discussions between government, employers and unions to be followed by the concentration of pay bargaining in the first 3 months of the year. Passed by a large majority the motion instructs the TUC general council to

*"prepare a study on the feasibility of establishing a co-ordinated system of national wage bargaining based on authoritative annual assessments of economic prospects and pay movements and comparability, prepared by the social partners to inform wage negotiations."*

This composite motion was proposed by the General, Municipal and Boilermakers union (GMBU) and the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) who, by way of introduction to the issue had published a pamphlet *A New Agenda - Bargaining for Prosperity for the 1990s*. It was followed by a paper offering a similar approach issued by the Trades Union Congress headquarters. In deference to the left, the composite motion also registered distaste for any hint of pay restraint, wage norms or incomes policy. Was it all sound and fury signifying nothing or can we, between the rhetoric and the applause, see a definite political development?

An argument which this magazine has continually made over the last couple of years is that Thatcher is largely in power because the Labour Movement failed to solve the problem of how incomes should be determined in an advanced capitalist society. Throughout the 1970s the trade union movement was characterised by a succession of leapfrogging pay claims being made by different unions. The powerful unions tended to emerge as winners in this setup but many of their erstwhile

members would probably have lost out in their position as pensioners. Overall few felt they were benefitting. The Labour Party appeared to be unable to control the whole process. Various pay norms and incomes policies were tried. None worked. From a position of strength, the trade union movement made increasing demands on society which the society could not meet and for which the trade union movement felt no responsibility. In desperation a portion of the electorate decided to change their electoral allegiance from Labour to Conservative. They were voting for a total break from the consensus politics which had prevailed since 1950 and for strong government in the form of Margaret Thatcher. (An interesting account of this whole period is given in the interview with Barbara Castle in the September issue of this magazine.) The motion on incomes policy at Blackpool has significance to the extent that the discussion suggested that the movement was finally coming to terms with the history of the seventies. The British Labour Movement has always had a natural hostility to incomes policies. Such policies were resorted to in moments of desperation rather than seen as the natural order of things. (Thus for the period of the second world war and of the first Labour Government there was an effective incomes policy in force). This, it should be pointed out is strongly at odds with what pertains in

many other European countries. Sweden is the most startling counter-example. In that country incomes policies have been the norm since the 1930s. It should be remarked that there appears to be little correlation between the politics of the government and whether incomes policies are used. Sweden has always had a strong communist contingent in its parliament.

It may be that we are clutching at straws in hoping that the passing of the motion at congress represents a significant move in Trade Union and Labour politics. It was after all a composite motion and like all such motions tends to give with one hand and take with the other. Thus the motion supported joint discussions with employers and the government but rejected any form of pay norms. What gives me particular cause to hope is the fact that it was supported by Rodney Bickerstaffe of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). Bickerstaffe argued *"it was mischievous and misleading to confuse the building of consensus through a national economic assessment with pay norms."*

He told delegates that the General Council had looked at countries like West Germany, Italy and Japan where there was co-ordination about bargaining at national and regional levels. Now Bickerstaffe represents what would normally be considered as the left wing of the trade union movement. There is definite progress if he is seen to have moved on this crucial issue. The motion is backed by a very definite plan which is outlined in the document written by John Edmonds and Alan Tuffin *Bargaining for Prosperity in the 1990s*. Probably 80% of this document is padding but eventually it comes to the point.

*"However hard we try to push issues of quality and productivity to the top of the bargaining agenda in the 1990s the question of pay will always remain....Just as Britain has much to learn from its foreign rivals on quality and productivity so too are there lessons to be learned in the field of pay bargaining...."*

*In most successful industrial economies, such as West Germany and Japan, the pattern of wage bargaining is different. It is more centralised than in Britain. Pay deals are more influenced by national economic priorities and longer*

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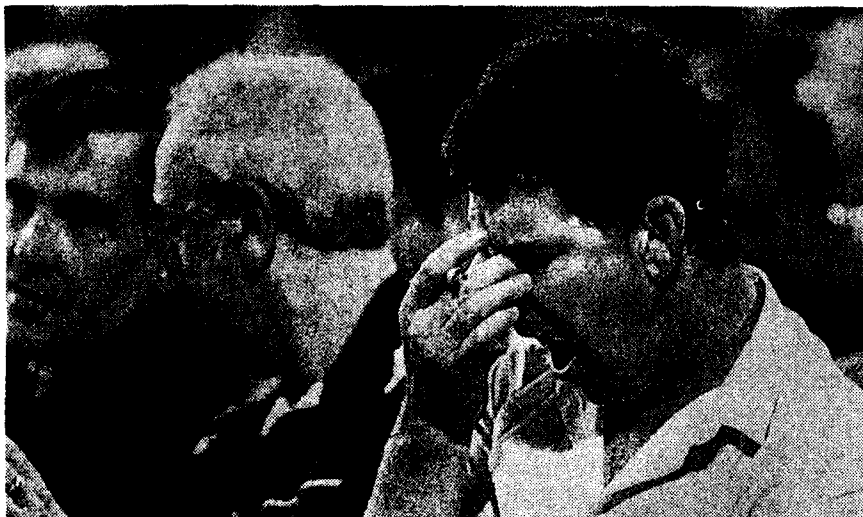
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A dull moment at Congress

term needs. Free collective bargaining continues but a consensus view is reached about the overall scope for pay rises which conditions negotiations and influences settlements, notably by affecting the going rate set in each pay round. In particular the period of negotiations is much more compressed. Britain now needs to move in this new direction. Our fight against inflation could be strengthened if more of our major negotiations on pay and conditions of employment were concentrated in the first three months of the year following a public discussion between the Government, CBI and TUC of Britain's economic prospects. This discussion could be launched by the publication of the Government's annual autumn statement on the economy. Pay settlement would be more likely to fall within a range which the social partners accept as consistent with national needs. There would be less likelihood of the going rate being forced upwards by successive settlements progressively raising the minimum acceptable figure.

... Instead of fragmented bargaining, negotiations would become more centralised and within a narrower time period. This radically different approach offers many advantages. First, pay negotiations would be better informed by coming after the issue of the Government's autumn statement on the economy and a public debate about Britain's economic prospects. Second, within a more compressed period the likelihood of leapfrogging would be much reduced. Third, the chancellor

could take developments during the pay round into account in framing the Budget. Fourth, an element of fairness could be introduced at the end of the pay round through the national minimum wage."

In sharp contrast to Edmonds et al Tony Lennon of the Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance attacked the motion as pie in the sky. It was a pay policy in disguise. Lennon has a point. A partial answer was given by Ron Todd. He felt that at present trade unions are making demands on the basis of insufficient information. Their demands are therefore correspondingly unrealistic. What is required is that they make their demands while in full possession of the facts. It is this lack of information which the motion aims to remedy. Thus we find Ron Todd, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) stating: "There is nothing wrong with and economic assessment. That is common practice in a number of economically successful countries. But our watchword should be information not coercion."

But surely if these economic assessments are not to lay down pay norms what force can they have? Supposing the conclusion from a period of economic assessment is that the economy can afford an average increase of 2% in real terms and the Jaguar workers put in for an increase of 5%. Is that it? Or will the other trade unions take a moral stance against these reckless Jaguar workers? This must

surely be the case otherwise the whole thing will collapse in a series of leapfrogging wage demands. The last 60 years of Swedish Labour history is rich in experience in these areas. Incomes policies in Sweden were not statutory but a union could rarely oppose the line taken by the LO - the Swedish equivalent of the TUC.

Todd pointed out that in the past the experience of workers of any form of rigid formal policies had been an unhappy one: "Every time such a policy has been tried in the past, working people - the victims of inflation - have been made to pay the prices of curing it."

It is undoubtedly a problem with an incomes policy that if wages are generally restrained then the profits of the more profitable firms will increase dramatically. The workers in these firms will perceive this and eventually break ranks to press for higher wages which their firms will give them. Other workers will perceive this change of relative position and push for commensurate increases for themselves. The policy fails because the profit levels of the highly profitable firms soar. The policy as proposed by the TUC will falter in the face of this inescapable logic unless some other issues are dealt with: specifically how will firms with a higher than average rate of profit be handled and how will firms with a lower than average rate of profit be handled. For the latter group the Swedish LO took the view that such firms should be wound up and the workers retrained. For the former group the LO proposed a structure whereby excess profits were moved into special funds called wage-earner funds which would be controlled by the Labour movement as a whole. This policy was proposed quite late (early 1980s) in the Swedish experience of incomes policies precisely to maintain incomes policies which had come under increasing strain.

The pamphlet by Edmonds and Tuffin and the discussion at the TUC appears to have ignored these problems. While it was a step forward to recognize the chaos of free collective bargaining there is still much to be done to determine the reasonable determination of incomes in an advanced capitalist society. Reorganising the timetable of negotiations is not enough.



# The Morality of a Gulf War

Michael Alexander looks at the moral case for the war with Iraq that seems imminent as we go to press.

The Argentinians invaded the Falklands because they had good reason to think that they would get away with it. There may indeed have been a faction within the Foreign Office that would have been happy to see them get away with it. They would have been allowed to profit from their aggression - get clean away with seizing British territory and imposing their rule on British citizens - had they only been wise enough to make peace on the terms that were on offer before the fighting started.

The Iraqis invaded Kuwait in the belief that the rest of the world would not mind too much, and certainly would not do anything effective. There may indeed have been a faction in the American State Department that would have been happy to let them get away with it. There was certainly no great anger among neighbouring countries at the ousting of the ruling al-Sabah family of Kuwait, the J.R.Ewings of the Arab world. There was a widespread feeling that something should be done to get the Iraqis out again. But what then happened constituted a sudden and arbitrary change in the way such matters are handled.

In the case of the Falklands, there was swift agreement in Britain that something must be done, *if the Argentines would not withdraw on reasonable terms*. In fact a quite generous offer was made to the Argentines, one that could have been accepted with no loss of national prestige. There is some argument about whether or not all diplomatic options had been exhausted at the time armed conflict began. But certainly, the Argentines had been given an acceptable way out, and had chosen to refuse it.

The Iraqis have been offered nothing. Bush and Thatcher insist that there can be no negotiations until Iraq pulls out of Kuwait. A negotiated withdrawal might well be possible, with Iraq having its war-debts written off and being given a couple of islands that Kuwait holds but does not need, and which may very well be rightfully Iraqi anyway. Were such an offer to be made to Iraq, and were it then refused, then it would at least be clear that all reasonable alternatives to war had been tried and had failed. But Bush and Thatcher have ruled out any such reasonable offer. First Iraq must give up all that it has. Then it will be told if it is to be given some compensation, or to have fresh demands

imposed upon it.

It is totally impossible for Saddam Hussein to accept the Bush-Thatcher offer. To accept it would leave him worse off than when he started, since in the interim he has made peace with Iran on rather poor terms. Were he to do it, the population of Iraq and of the whole Arab world would condemn him as a coward and a traitor. His regime would certainly be overthrown. Given the nature of Iraqi politics, that would mean him being shot, at the very least.

Whatever his other faults, Saddam Hussein is neither a fool nor a coward. He might accept a negotiated withdrawal from Kuwait. He will never allow himself to be ordered out by the majestic presence of America and Britain and their allies. To go down fighting would be much more dignified. To defy Bush and Thatcher gives him at least a sporting chance of survival.

Moreover, while nothing but humiliating retreat is on offer, it is very unlikely that Saddam Hussein will be overthrown. Who wants to take the enormous risks of overthrowing a ruthless strong and well-entrenched dictator, just for the privilege of withdrawing unilaterally from land that most Iraqis sincerely believe to be part of Iraq, with no better future prospects than additional demands for compensation, debt repayment and a reduction of Iraq's armed forces to whatever level America may choose to deem safe?

Kinnock and the Labour Party should be protesting at British troops being asked to fight in a war that is entirely avoidable. They should say something like 'yes, by all means reward Iraq for its aggression, if this saves the lives of tens of thousands on both sides, if it ends the economic disruption being caused by the threat of war, if it allows the vast numbers of very poor people who came to the Gulf as migrant labourers to get on with their lives again'.

It is also worth mentioning that Thatcher was happy to reward China with the whole of Hong Kong, with all of its enterprising and hard-working people, most of whom had fled from the very regime they are being handed back to, sometimes at very great personal risk. China's claim to Hong Kong was really no better than Iraq's claim to Kuwait - the lease on the bulk of the territory was from Imperial China, which vanished even before the Turkish Ottoman Empire that once ruled Kuwait. There was no legal obligation to turn the place over to the corrupt repressive ex-Leninist regime in Peking - other arrangements were possible, including independence. But there was and still is a very strong practical reason for giving Peking what it asked for - Peking has the power to take it anyway. In the case of Hong Kong, aggression was rewarded and is still being rewarded, simply because no one feels like taking on the enormous power of the Peking regime for the sake of the rights of the Hong Kong people.

Kuwait was not a very deserving case. It simply happened to be sitting on some valuable oil fields, and its people used this wealth to import foreign workers do all the work they either could not do or did not care to do. Some of the poor Third-World workers were



Acknowledgement: "THE AGE" Melbourne

treated more or less as slaves. None of them were treated very well, unless they had strong governments backing them. Kuwaitis were wealth-consumers, whereas the people of Hong Kong were genuine examples of the sort of hard-working entrepreneurial wealth-creators that Thatcher claims to love. Thatcher's moral position is actually very weak, and could easily be destroyed given a sustained assault from Labour in the House of Commons.

I fear however that this will not happen. Kinnock seeks to back both horses - take a share of the credit if the operation succeeds, or dump all the blame on Thatcher if it goes wrong. But people know that this is what he's up to. Labour has lacked a creditable alternative view of the matter. The Bevin Society has tried to provide one, but we have been listened to by only a few people. Protests against the Western build-up in the Gulf have almost all come from people who would be expected in any case to protest about almost anything the British or American armed forces did. In Britain, only Ted Heath has proved an exception.

By and large, the protests have come from the same people who were objecting to Britain being in NATO. But given that the the original objectives of NATO were unexpectedly achieved in 1989, the credibility of this whole political school is rather low. The Left could and should have distinguished between legitimate self-defence, as expressed through NATO, and more questionable overseas ventures to places where Western troops probably had no business to be.

The worst and least realistic are the Trotskyists. I saw the Socialists Workers Party spoil what was meant to be a broad-front protest, by dishing out vast numbers of placards with their name at the top, so that the event was made to seem their work. Several people who realised what was happening left in disgust.

Trotskyists and the like look for some alternative to the actual options. Calling for 'Arab revolution' is a waste of time - that possibility no longer exists. There was a successful Marxist and anti-colonial revolt in South Yemen, and a highly serious Marxist guerrilla movement in Muscat and Oman. The latter was defeated back in the 1970s, with covert British intervention playing a large role. There were a few protest marches in this country, which the Trotskyists noticeably failed to join. The guerrillas were after all pro-Chinese, from a 'Stalinist' tradition - perhaps the number of successful 'Stalinist' guerrillas was

getting embarrassing, given the total lack of anything similar from the Trotskyist side. The Trots didn't want yet another Stalinist success. Anyway, in the long run the guerrillas of Muscat and Oman failed, and even South Yemen has dropped Marxism in favour of a union with North Yemen.

Iraqi secular nationalism is the best way forward for Iraq, and a good model for other Arab states to follow. Given that the left has failed or been crushed, it offers the best means for Arabs to become part of the modern world. Destroying the Iraqi Ba'ath party will not in the long run save the corrupt oil states of the Gulf, any more than destroying secular nationalism in Iran back in the 1950s saved the Shah's corrupt rule. What is much more likely is precisely another Iran, a development of those societies through Islamic extremism. What is totally impossible is that Arabs should remain apolitical under traditional rulers, while the world is rapidly developing around them. Traditional Islamic and Arab culture was tolerant of foreign ways, only in so far as they thought they didn't matter once direct colonial rule had ended. The Islamic extremists understand much better that these things *do* matter, and are fighting a rearguard action to stop the Islamic way of life being adjusted to the developing world norm.

In so far as Bush and Thatcher have a coherent aim, it does seem to be precisely that Arabs should remain apolitical under traditional rulers, while the world is rapidly developing around them. It is certainly the aim of Saudi Arabia. The very name is an anachronism - it means approximately 'that part of the Arabian Peninsula that belongs to the House of Saud'. (It's as if the UK were officially known as 'the Saxe-Coburg dominions in the British Isles'.) Such a set-up might last if kept in strict isolation - but despite all the restrictions the Saudi government imposes, there is continuous and growing contact with the rest of the world, and people see that the traditional way of life is not the only possibility.

Given that this aim is impossible, destroying the Iraqi Ba'aths doesn't even make sense from a right-wing capitalist point of view. If Bush and Thatcher do succeed in their war aims, they will have sown the wind. If this happens, then over the next decade or so all of us will be reaping the whirlwind.

If it comes to war, it seems very likely that there will be massive world-wide terrorism, and especially terrorist attacks on highly vulnerable oil installations. It would in fact be an error on Saddam Hussein's part to encourage or even

permit such terrorism, but on the basis of his past record it is an error that he is very likely to make.

The general rule of terrorism, which the Arabs never seem to have grasped, is that terrorism directed against a society that you have no intention of trying to conquer or rule is usually counter-productive. Hanoi seems to have understood this rule very well during the Vietnam War - terror was used within South Vietnam, and used very effectively, but was never exported to the United States. They undoubtedly had the capacity for such action, including many American sympathizers, some of whom later went in for terrorism on their own account. But Hanoi's whole strategy was to persuade America to dump its Vietnamese allies and go home, which is what it eventually did. If the war had been extended to America itself, then this might have mobilised the whole society to stand together and win. It was after all the attack on Pearl Harbour, highly profitable for the Japanese in the short run, that got Americans united to fight and win a war that many of them hadn't wanted to get involved in. And it was German U-boats sinking America ships that helped to bring them into World War One.

A similar thing happened in Britain after the Birmingham pub bombings - the terrorist attack on ordinary Britons for which the 'Birmingham Six' were jailed, probably wrongly. There was a remarkable wave of anti-IRA feeling at that time, which threatened to spill over into generalised anti-Irish feeling. The subsequent strategy of the IRA suggests that they know just how dangerous it would be to attack the British public, whose enthusiasm for war actually grew in the face of the earlier and much more drastic terror-bombing by the German airforce during World War Two. And it has been argued that the subsequent British and American terror-bombing against German cities had a lot to do with the determined resistance that the Germans put up even after the war had clearly been lost.

As I write, a Gulf War is expected to begin some time in mid December. If this happens, and if the Iraqis prove that they can not be dislodged without a very high cost in British and American lives, then the present peace movements are likely to grow, leading to some sort of peace and withdrawal. But if the war is accompanied by world-wide terrorism, then public opinion is much more likely to move the other way - towards a fight to the finish, no matter what the cost.



# The Communist Manifesto and Leninism

In this article Madawc Williams looks at the beginnings of Marxism, and finds that a sad misunderstanding and neglect of political democracy was already there.

The *Communist Manifesto* is a famous document, the best known of all that Marx and Engels wrote. A very odd document, with a strange and seldom-told history. It is also remarkable for essentially ignoring the struggle for political democracy and constitutional rights, the main issue of the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848. I examined this in *Democracy and the Communist Manifesto* (L&TUR No. 18). This article will show the results of Marx and Engels' failure to see the advantages of democratic structures and multi-party systems.

In the revolutions of 1848, the struggle for democracy was the issue. People wanted parliaments, wanted constitutions, wanted elections on a really democratic basis. But what does the *Manifesto* say about the matter? Astonishingly enough, it avoids it almost completely. There are only a few remarks that hint at a rather dismissive attitude to such things. It says:

*"The executive of the modern State is but a committee for the managing of the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie"* (Communist Manifesto, introduction.)

*"In the French revolution of July, 1830, and in the English reform agitation, these aristocracies again succumbed to this hateful upstart"* (Ibid, chapter III.)

And that is all it has to say about the matter! The struggle for Bourgeois Democracy is seen as only a form of struggle by the bourgeoisie against the older ruling classes. Democratic constitutions as such are seen as unimportant. According to Sorel:

*"The Manifesto of 1847 assumes that the power of the bourgeoisie will be overturned by a coalition of Jacobins and proletarians. The victors, in order to take full advantage of their successful campaign, will organise a democracy which begins by adopting measures of social liquidation, the nomenclature of which was borrowed by Marx and Engels from the literature of their time. Finally, with the working class each day exercising more dominance over the state, the ideals of the League of Communists will enter into the history of institutions. This schematic tableau seems to have been intentionally presented in an enigmatic form. Marx, still only a young philosopher without*

*reputation, could not express his ideas with complete freedom. Many of the members of the association for which he spoke thought that the transitory regime of democracy could be avoided, thanks to a revolution which would be conducted energetically enough to throw the workers into full communism."* (From George Sorel. Oxford University Press 1976. Page 241. The quote comes from *Materials for a Theory of the Proletariat*.)

The point becomes clearer if you look at the earlier drafts for a 'Communist Catechism' from which the *Manifesto* itself grew. Thus in the *Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith*, written by Engels in June 1847, you have:

*"Question 16: How do you think the transition from the present situation to the community of property is to be effected?"*

*"Answer: The first, fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution."*

*"Question 17: What will be your first measure once you have established democracy?"*

*"Answer: Guaranteeing the subsistence of the proletariat"* (Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works Volume 6. Lawrence & Wishart London 1976. Page 102.)

***"Lenin, when he created the Bolshevik State, assumed that workers would have no need to be protected against a workers' state."***

***Opposition - even from left-wing socialists and anarchists, even from minorities within the Bolshevik party - would clearly hinder the efficient functioning of the workers' state. Therefore he took steps to eliminate this opposition; either jailing them or shooting them"***

This clear commitment to a democratic constitution, normal enough for radicals in the 1840s, was both expanded and slightly qualified in *Principles of Communism*. This was produced by Engels in October 1847.

*"Question 18: What will be the course of this revolution?"*

*"Answer: In the first place it will inaugurate a democratic constitution and thereby, directly or indirectly, the political rule of the proletariat. Directly in England, where the proletariat already constitutes the majority of the people. Indirectly in France and in Germany, where the majority of the people consists not only of proletarians but also of small peasants and urban petty bourgeois, who are only now being proletarianised and in all their political interests are becoming more and more dependent on the proletariat and therefore soon will have to conform to the demands of the proletariat. This will perhaps involve a second fight, but one that can end only in the victory of the proletariat."*

*"Democracy would be quite useless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means of carrying through further measures directly attacking private ownership and securing the means of subsistence of the proletariat. Chief among these measures...."* (Ibid, p350. Emphasis original.)

*Principles of Communism* was used as raw material for the *Communist Manifesto*, the joint work of Marx and Engels. The measures detailed at the end of Section II of the manifesto are clearly a modified version of those in *Principles of Communism*, which immediately follow the section I have quoted. But in the *Manifesto*, references to a democratic constitution have been transformed:

*"We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."*

*"The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of the productive*

forces as rapidly as possible." (Communist Manifesto, Chapter II. Emphasis added.)

It is this notion of democracy, democracy as the power of a state representing the proletariat, that was to be followed some seventy years later when Lenin carried out a takeover remarkably like what Marx and Engels had planned for in 1848. The Soviet state was not a distortion of Marxism; the model was there in the **Communist Manifesto**.

The whole notion of political democracy was *evaded*. It may, as Sorel implies, have been because of disagreements over tactics. But also it would have been unwise for the Communist League to have been directly against parliamentary democracy - a popular and highly radical demand at the time. Yet nor did they wish to let a parliamentary system inhibit them, if there seemed a chance of taking the revolution any further. The Communist League could hardly have won majority support even if the whole of the working class supported it, because the other social classes (which Marx regarded as reactionary) outnumbered the proletarians.

The logic of this was a Leninist-type seizure of power, in which a small but determined working class would dominate the rest of society. As a statement of principles, the **Communist Manifesto** had to lay the groundwork for such a development. But not too obviously, since the established governments had not been overthrown, and it was the bourgeois democrats who were likely to dominate the first stages of any revolution. Thus the matter was left obscure.

Marx did not actually tell lies. But he was very good at not drawing attention to embarrassing facts.

In Marx's later writings there is a continuing ambiguity about democracy. He was prepared to accept that a peaceful transition to socialism might occur in Britain, America and perhaps other countries. He would talk about the "*withering away of the state*" - but also about the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*". I suspect that one method was as good as another to him. He did not expect the question of political democracy to be relevant after a proletarian revolution.

Marx avoided the question of democracy and constitutions by merging all states in which the middle class was dominant into a single category, the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. This category ignored specific forms of government

and the normal level of civil rights. It ignored also the very different political traditions that existed in Europe. It lumped together the liberal oligarchy of Britain after 1688 with the self-governing farmers and townsmen of Switzerland and the absolutist monarchical states that existed elsewhere. It failed to separate the Latin and Roman Catholic tradition of a separate Church and State from the Byzantine and Orthodox Christian tradition of a Church dependent on the State.

(Please don't refer me to Engels' **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State**. The book is full of flaws. Much of the evidence that Engels himself cites points to a very different conclusion from the one he draws. But I'll deal with this in another article.)

The simple fact is that Marx and Engels never tidied up their position on democracy. They treated it as an unimportant matter. Thus when Kautsky argued against Lenin and Trotsky on the matter, each side could match quote against quote, opinion against opinion, without any serious distortion of what 'the founders' had said.

Part of the complication lay in the big gap between what Marx and Engels had wanted, and what a state built on the lines of the **Communist Manifesto** was likely to produce. I do not suggest that the Socialist movement should simply have relied upon the expansion of democracy. It was very far from being well established in the 19th century. France swung wildly between democracy and dictatorship. Germany was to acquire democratic forms, elections and parliaments, but the government was not dependent upon them. The difficulty was that Marx had left the matter in a hopeless muddle. He assumed that the differences were irrelevant: one bourgeois state was much like another.

Socialists like Bernstein and Kautsky assumed that democracy would develop as a matter of course. They assumed that workers would acquire power peacefully, by sheer force of numbers. Marx's theory of historical development could be seen as saying that. Bernstein argued in **Evolutionary Socialism** that the whole idea of revolution should be dropped, and that society had not developed as Marx had predicted. Kautsky would not go so far - he hung on to some of the revolutionary language, while in practice expecting an evolutionary development.

A more consistent position was held by

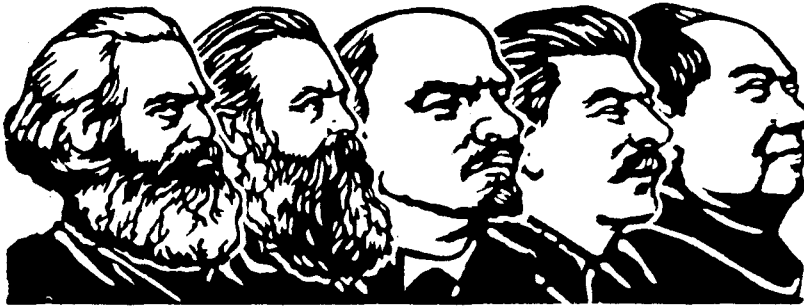
socialists like Lenin or Rosa Luxemburg. (In those days they were all socialists or social-democrats. It was only after the Russian Revolution that Lenin revived the term Communist and used it for his new Third International.) They assumed that revolution was inevitable, and drew particularly on Marx's writings on France for this view. Both views could claim some support from Marx. Neither could deal properly with the critical question of forms of government. Marxism, supposedly a complete view of the world, in fact had an enormous gap in it!

Socialists like Kautsky and Bernstein became almost irrelevant in the world that emerged after World War One. They had had arguments over the interpretation of Marxism. But at the level of political practice, they were on the same side. They were *Independent Social Democrats*, who supported Germany's war effort in a half-hearted way. The majority Social Democrats were 100% for the war, expecting that a victory for Germany would be the victory of a semi-socialist state over its capitalist rivals.

In Germany, the Independent Social Democrats were squeezed out by the mainstream social-democrats and by the new Communist Party. Similar things happened in other countries. It was not just that they could not compete; they hardly knew what to do. Bernstein's autobiography, which is available in English, is a well-written but strangely non-political document.

Many of those who dreamt of a new world in the years before World War One found themselves completely lost in the new world that actually emerged. Rosa Luxemburg was killed by right-wingers. Some people have wondered just what she would have done had she lived; I suspect that she herself was wondering that. She took no steps to get to safety, after a failed revolution in which she had played no part, even though she was blamed for it. Perhaps she preferred to die a martyr than live on in a world she could no longer cope with.

Lenin, when he created the Bolshevik State, assumed that workers would have no need to be protected against a workers' state. (And the fate of other classes did not concern him). Indeed, in **The State and Revolution** he assumed that the actual state apparatus could be abolished soon after the revolution. Since this proved impossible, he took steps to see that the apparatus of the workers' state could operate as efficiently as possible. Opposition - even from left-wing socialists and anarchists, even from



minorities within the Bolshevik party - would clearly hinder the efficient functioning of the workers' state. Therefore he took steps to eliminate this opposition; either jailing them or shooting them.

Stalin's only innovation was to apply similar methods to other leaders of the Bolshevik party. And I suspect that Lenin would have done just the same, had he lived longer. And when we look at what other leaders of Leninist systems have done, it is hard to believe the Khrushchevite or Trotskyite notion that it was perfect apart from the sad fact that it was run by Stalin rather than somebody else.

The remarkable thing is not that the Bolshevik state failed to live up to Lenin's hopes for it, but that it worked at all. The man had no experience of anything except faction fights among professional revolutionaries, who were generally to be numbered in hundreds. Yet somehow he was able to transform his party into a mass organisation that could rule over millions, and be far more powerful and efficient than the Tsarist state had ever been. The critical error was to leave out the notion of a lawful and loyal opposition.

In Western-style democracies, opposition parties may be treated unfairly. They may even be suppressed during times of emergency. But everyone recognises that the *ideal* is to allow them to operate freely. It follows logically from the ideal of free elections, which in practice will always lead to a multi-party system and the possibility of the government being thrown out peacefully. Thus when the crisis has passed, the restrictions tend to get relaxed. Even the Latin American countries have mostly gone back to some form of elected government. Right-wing dictatorship in both Spain and Greece has been transformed step-by-step into parliamentary government with left-wing parties in power.

The Leninist model includes no such provision. The ideal is *no* opposition: the supreme authorities in the workers' state will be acting in the best interests of everyone, and no one at all should

oppose them. Everyone supported Stalin, until he was actually dead and Khrushchev had decided that he was wrong after all. Everyone supported Khrushchev, until he was ousted in a constitutional coup. (It was constitutional, in the sense that the Politburo *did* have the theoretical right to oust a General Secretary. But it was also a *coup*, because that constitutional machinery had not been used for decades, and was not expected to actually operate to settle a power struggle.)

***"Marxism failed to realise the usefulness of political pluralism and liberty of opinion. It tended to sneer at such things, because their operation was not 100% perfect. And for this very reason, it failed to attract large numbers of workers whose day-to-day experience told them the usefulness of such imperfect liberties"***

The Soviet Union in its Leninist days had no place for any legitimate or legal opposition to the leader of the day. Brezhnev was the best leader since Lenin, for as long as he was alive. Likewise for Andropov, and Chernenko. And up until last year everyone said that they were backing Gorbachev, even though it was known that many top party people were out to slow him down and frustrate the changes he was arguing for.

Gorbachev could have chosen to create a system in which he could be replaced constitutionally. But he failed to do so while his position was still strong, probably because the whole weight of Soviet tradition was against going so far. He would have had to have been an outstandingly generous and far-sighted leader to have given his enemies the means to oppose him effectively. There was nothing in conventional Marxism-Leninism, from the Manifesto right down to Lenin's last writings, that

would tell him that he ought to do so. With the election of Boris Yeltsin as leader of the Russian Federal Republic, an effective alternative now exists. But this happened against Gorbachev's wishes, in a situation he is now clearly losing control of.

The critical flaw in Marxism is that it failed to learn from the 1688 revolution in Britain. It failed to realise the usefulness of political pluralism and liberty of opinion. It tended to sneer at such things, because their operation was not 100% perfect. And for this very reason, it failed to attract large numbers of workers whose day-to-day experience told them the usefulness of such imperfect liberties. This is an error that must not be repeated.

On the other hand, even an imperfect theory is better than no theory at all. The Kinnockite 'Socialism with a nice smile and no ideas' model looks likely to replace Thatcherism. But if Labour under Kinnock can not then go on and do something coherent, there could easily be a new Thatcherism within the next ten years or so. Yet coherence on the Left tends to be built on bits and pieces of Marxism, and most people acquired Marx's misunderstanding of democracy, along with the useful and valid things he said. And this fatal misunderstanding has done a lot of damage to left-wing causes over the years.

The possibility of combining Marxist class politics and economic analysis with a recognition of the usefulness of political democracy remains open. Marxists, especially in Britain, have used up vast amounts of intelligence and ingenuity to *avoid* reaching such a conclusion. It was this that messed up the New Left - however much the dictatorial *methods* of Stalin or Mao were condemned, the New Left could not hide the fact that exactly the same *principles* lay at the heart of its own ideology. Attempts to reconcile such contradictions led to incoherence.

It turns out that 'bourgeois democracy', the political system worked out in the 17th and 18th centuries by the English gentry, and only later extended to the bourgeoisie, is exactly what is needed to make socialist systems viable and effective. Because Marxists held out against this notion, and because the rest of the left was very unclear on the matter, great opportunities were lost. But the basic drift of events is favourable - the Manifesto was quite right on this point. Lost chances will come again, and this time should not be missed.

## Moscow Trials

**The Prosecutor and the Prey: Vyshinsky and the 1930s Moscow Show Trials.** By Arkady Vaksberg. Wiedenfeld and Nicolson. 374 pp. £25 (Hardback).

Reviewed by Brendan Clifford.

The author of this biography of Vyshinsky is a lawyer and journalist working in Russia. The book was presumably first published in Russia, but this is not made clear in the publishing details. The omission is surprising, because the value of the book depends on Russian publication no less than on its inherent intellectual quality.

Medvedev's books were published in the West with the connivance of the KGB while he contrived to live in safety in Moscow. And that fact would have devalued them even if their intellectual quality had been greater. Solzhenitsyn's best books were published in the West in defiance of the KGB, and that added to their quality. If Medvedev's books had been published in Russia that would have been the most important thing about them, and it would have overshadowed their intellectual deficiencies. As KGB exports produced in rivalry with Solzhenitsyn, their intellectual deficiencies were all that mattered.

Solzhenitsyn's powerful intellectual assault on Russian imagination won the day. It must be assumed that he subverted the sense of purpose and destiny in the oligarchy which tried to suppress him, and caused that oligarchy to disintegrate.

I find it strange that those who are exulting in the disintegration of the Bolshevik state all give an economic determinant explanation of it. Marxism has wrought such havoc with the bourgeois mind that the bourgeois mind can only conceive of an economic determinist explanation for the disintegration of the Marxist state.

But economic determinism is least of all adequate to an understanding of the state of which it was the official ideology. And in fact Lenin took a lot of trouble to explain that it wasn't, and that he had constructed an *arbitrary* state.

An arbitrary state is a state capable of acting on the basis of an idea. It is the opposite of a representative state. It is, by the standards of the representative state, capricious. The distinctive thing

about it is not that it is oppressive but that it is freely acting, unconstrained by law, custom or civil society.

The soviet state remained arbitrary, despite periods of bureaucratic routine under Bukharin in the 1920s and Brezhnev in the 1970s. It is now dissolving itself arbitrarily. It is doing something which no Great Power ever did before. The only semblance of a precedent I know of is the abdication of the Hapsburg ruler Charles V in 1556 and his division of the European super-state which he had governed.

Two years ago the world was structured by the divisions between the Soviet empire and NATO. Last year the Bolshevik state dissolved its empire. This year it is dissolving itself. The world is consequently disorientated, and we have the delusion of the New World Order, the harmonious whole happy to be directed by the White House.

Vaksberg's biography of Vyshinsky has the novelty of being written from Bolshevik state archives, in a Western journalistic style. And it is clearly post-Solzhenitsyn since there is no nonsense about deviations from 'Leninist norms of democracy', which was Medvedev's line. But since I don't know that it was published in Russia I cannot attempt to estimate its value.

To anybody with an inexhaustible interest in the detail of the Bolshevik revolution it is interesting. But its core is defective.

Pashukanis, the creator of Soviet legal theory who in 1937 was tried for terrorism and confessed, is dealt with in Chapter 5. Since the book is essentially about the Moscow Trials it ought to give an account of Soviet legal theory, but it doesn't. The reader could not possibly gather from this book that Pashukanis developed the view that law was a phenomenon of commodity production, and that political expediency should be the guiding principle of the judicial process of socialism. (I published a pamphlet called *Socialism And Law* on this subject about ten years ago, when some absurd English Marxists tried to make Pashukanis a hero of socialist democracy.)

When I first began to deal with the Moscow Trials about 20 years ago, it seemed to me that the prevailing interpretation of them necessarily implied that Bukharin, Radek etc, the great leaders of Bolshevism, were human rubbish devoid of either political principle or individual integrity. If, as was being suggested, they believed in some kind of 'Leninist democracy' and

saw Stalin as developing the revolution into a crime, why did they not try to get rid of Stalin? If they did try to get rid of him why did they not use their trials to denounce him? If they did not, why did they confess?

They all had their day in court. And as Vaksberg says: "*All the accused had to do was to refuse to confess and the show would be a complete fiasco*" (p 73). An apparent possibility is that the accused had been subjected to a number of fake trials which they supposed to be real and had refused to play along, and that this went on until they performed in court as they had agreed to. Then they were put on trial in public. I considered this possibility 20 years ago, but I rejected it because even if fake trials had preceded the real trial, the defendants would have known through observing who was in court when they had the ear of the world.

Vaksberg says that the idea of a series of fake trials preceding the real trial was "*quite widely circulated in recent years*" (p 18). But he does not think the thing through. He repeats the old idea that Bukharin used his trial "*to send a highly coded but easily readable message to his contemporaries and descendants. This message was decoded long ago, and then examined with the greatest thoroughness by American historian Stephen F. Cohen*" (p 113). Why then did he not give the message straight, if he actually had a message? The usual answer, not given by Vaksberg, is that he had married a young wife and had been promised immunity for her if he played along. But if his views were as they have been 'decoded', why would he have believed that such a promise would be kept? And if the man who exulted in the justification of extreme dictatorship, and who was happy to suppress people in their thousands with a joke, had now nothing but family considerations in mind, why would he, supposing he believed such a promise would be kept, have jeopardised it by a breach of faith, even a 'coded' one.

In another place Vaksberg says that "*these people had no principles for which they were prepared to die*" and "*survival was the only motive force they had left*" (p 76). They had been prepared to sacrifice others by the thousand, but in the moment of truth they were themselves moved by the pettiest motives - because personal survival must be regarded as a paltry motive in people who had done to others what these people had done.

But whatever the particular truth of the matter, Vaksberg makes one observation with which I cannot disagree: "*Smirnov's comment (according to well-informed sources) as the condemned men*

were being led out to be executed - 'We deserved this' - is possibly the most accurate appraisal of these events" (p 84).

## Considering Churchill

**The Speeches of Winston Churchill.** Penguin Books 354 pp. £6.99.  
Reviewed by Madawc Williams.

People who believe the little rhyme about every child being born a little liberal or a little conservative should take a look at the career of Winston Churchill. He both began and ended his career as a Conservative, but he first became a major political figure in the 1906 Liberal government, having crossed over to that party in 1904. When the Liberal Party disintegrated following Lloyd George's ousting of Asquith during World War One, he was briefly out of parliament before being returned in 1924 as a 'constitutionalist' (p 93) and rejoining the Tories the following year. His later career was as a Tory, often an isolated and maverick Tory, but we only remember him as a major figure because he was exactly the right person to lead Britain in World War Two - a man who was conservative enough to reassure the right, and anti-fascist enough to win the confidence of the left.

This book is a collection of speeches, along with a brief biographical outline. It is made clear that his changes of party were matters of principl. (As indeed were those of Pitt the Younger and Edmund Burke, Whigs who laid the basis for 19th century Toryism. Or Gladstone and Palmerston, Liberals who began their career as Tories.) On the whole, though, I found Churchill's principles obnoxious. His observations of the Boer farmer as "a curious combination of the squire with the peasant" (p 23) is interesting, but the non-white majority in South Africa was left out of account, with results we all know about. He managed to wreck the Conservative Government's plan to give India dominion status in the 1930s - had it happened then, before the Hindu Muslim division became serious, the whole sub-continent might have developed both less painfully and on more secular lines. Churchill's opposition was based on the wholly false view that India could and should be governed by Britain for the foreseeable future.

Yet I found some very interesting and very shrewd remarks in Churchill's speeches. A lot of the power of oratory

is in the delivery, and in saying the right thing to the right people at the right time. His remark in the General Strike, that he would not "be impartial as between the fire brigade and the fire" (p 4) is memorable despite its unpleasant reduction of the working class to some destructive natural force. I am much happier with his remarks on the Monarchy: "The Crown of England has not had for hundreds of years the power of making laws, and for two or three centuries has not had the power of stopping laws when they have been passed. It is a very wise thing in every State that the supreme office should be removed beyond the reach of private ambition and should be above the shock and change of party warfare. It is as a constitutional Monarchy that we reverence and honour the British Crown." (p 50)

Churchill's accurate understanding of what Hitler's rise to power meant is well known - though people often forget, what Churchill also noted (p 117), that it was part of something that had begun before Hitler became Chancellor. He also knew when not to say 'I told you so' - saying rather in 1940 that "if we open a quarrel between the past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future" (p 168). One might also quote the following words, spoken in 1945:

*"We had only the North-Western approach between Ulster and Scotland through which to bring in the means of life and to send out the forces of war. Owing to the action of Mr de Valera, so much at variance with the temper and instincts of thousands of Southern Irishmen who hastened to the battle-*

*front to prove their ancient valour, the approaches which the Southern Irish ports and airfields could so easily have been guarded were closed by the hostile aircraft and U-boats. This was indeed a deadly moment in our life, and if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr de Valera or perish from the earth."* (p 259).

Churchill's reaction to the 1945 Labour government was mostly that of a man whose time had passed. His 'some form of Gestapo' speech during the election campaign (p 269) probably damaged his own side more than its intended targets. But even on this matter he was occasionally shrewd. Consider the following: "We are, I understand, after nationalising the coal-mines, to deal with the railways, electricity and transport. Yet at the same time the Trade Unions feel it necessary to be heavily rearmed against State Socialism. Apparently the new age is not to be so happy for the wage-earners as we have been asked to believe. At any rate, there seems to be a fundamental incongruity in these conceptions to which the attention of the Socialist intelligentsia should speedily be directed." (p 293). There was a practical logic at the time to both nationalising and strengthening the Trade Unions even in nationalised industries. Yet the incongruity was real, and it was not to be resolved by future Labour governments. In the event, the habit of Trade Unionists treating nationalised industries as if they were still private employers made it possible for a subsequent Tory prime minister to return them to the private sector.

### (Continued from Page 24)

There's also the politics. I know very little about the history of American Trade Unionism, and it could be that the reason the American Communist Party is not in the index, and in fact does not seem to be mentioned at all in the book, is simply that they were not relevant to Teamster politics. But I wonder. The wider left is briefly mentioned on pages 182 and 183, but only to exult the role of Trotskyists within it.

Still, the book has its merits. Jimmy Hoffa's merits as a union organiser are mentioned, as well as his much better known faults. He had been trained by radicals, and the fact that he went over to 'business unionism' is only one example of the wider malaise. The lack of a major socialist party in America must have contributed to the process - there is ancient corruption in the American Democratic Party, as indeed there was in

the British Liberals, who thoroughly deserved the collapse into small-party politics that they suffered in the 1920s. The Teamsters in fact became supporters of the Republican Party under Eisenhower, and were the only major union to consistently support the Republicans at national level. But when you consider that union radicals like Dobbs and the Minneapolis Teamsters accepted Trotskyist advice and opposed America's involvement in the war against Hitler (p 115), you can understand why people like Hoffa got fed up with radicalism.

Any trade unionist feeling depressed with the state of the movement over here should get this book just in order to cheer themselves up - things could be a whole lot worse. And even in America, even among the Teamsters, there are signs of progress.



## Why the poor give to the rich

**Poverty and the Planet A** question of Survival. By Ben Jackson. Penguin 226 pp. £5.99.

Reviewed by Walter Cobb.

Money talks, but no one has to listen to it. Money will tell you that it is sound and wise to rob from the poor and give to the rich - the rich have the means to reward you well. The pseudo-rational ideology of the New Right argues that whatever money says is wise and good. Imposing huge burdens on some of the world's poorest people must be good for them, because that's the message you get when you look at in in terms of money made or lost.

Poor people have a weak grip on the little they have. Within Third World countries, it makes sense to look after city dwellers, because they can riot and help bring down governments. Thus many Third World countries used to have massively overvalued currencies, making for cheap imports of consumer goods but lowering the export prices that might be obtained by the poor farmers.

The New Right has blamed it all on socialist experiments by Third World governments. Like a lot of their explanations, it is plausible but deeply untruthful. **Poverty and the Planet** exposes such deceptions. "In Africa, official farm marketing boards have controlled all buying and selling. They have paid peasants a pittance for both their food and cash crops... Although some critics attack the marketing boards as attempts at socialist-inspired state intervention (while those on the other side of the political fence seek to defend them for the same reason), they were, in fact, first created by Africa's imperial rulers." (Page 42.)

A genuinely free world market would give poor countries a sporting chance of getting on. For this reason, it does not exist and probably will not be allowed to come into being. "The force behind the timber boom is the Japanese, European and American demand for cheap tropical timber... The real money-spinner is not the rough logs themselves, but the process of turning them into these finished products; a business dominated by companies in the rich countries. Despite their lip-service to free trade, these nations protect their own wood-processing industry by setting import tariffs to keep out processed timber products (like furniture

or plywood) from poor countries. Poor exporting countries can make a small profit by exporting unprocessed logs, giving little chance for investment in replanting and long-term forest management." (Page 20).

One chapter of the book has been definitely overtaken by events. Saying "Western military involvement in the Gulf demonstrates the same web of pious and confusing double-talk that surrounds military action over the drugs issue in Panama... Behind this double-talk there is a growing potential for conflict stemming from competition for resources" (page 167) sound quite topical. So too does "any moral backing for the Western deployments... wore thin in the face of the human rights record of the country which the naval force was bailing out." (Page 170). But what is being talked about is the now-discarded policy of backing Iraq as a defence against the Islamic extremists of Iran. Mind you, given the way Bush has been behaving, this part of the book may not remain out of date for very long.

The weakness of the book is that it does not question the overall political set-up of ex-colonies pretending to be nation states. In Africa, especially, the political structures are irrational. The United Nations principle - that the human race should properly be fragmented into a large number of

political units within each of which anyone who can grab power can more or less do as they please - is the cause of much of the trouble. Having been established as states, the countries of the Third World naturally behave as such. Some - especially the 'little dragons' of East Asia - have been able to develop into real nation-states. The rest are developing much more slowly, even though almost all are gradually being brought into the world economy.

Nation states were the political structures that Europe used to develop itself over the course of several centuries, and to gain a decisive advantage over civilisations like China and India that had previously been no less strong and sophisticated. These same structures are a burden to the Third World. Serious alternatives like a World Federation could not come into existence very soon. But whereas the notion was a standard part of the left-wing view of the future a couple of generations back, the possibility has now been allowed to slide out of public consciousness. But in my view, only planetary politics could cure planetary poverty. States will seldom help other states without some more or less selfish motivation. But people asked to support other people tend to be much more generous. Band Aid may not have achieved very much, but it showed the sort of global consciousness that already exists.

## Trotting out the Teamster rank and file

**Rank and File Rebellion.** By Dan La Botz. Verso 336 pp. £11.95 (paperback), £34.95 (hardback).

Reviewed by Dan Ackroid.

It is heartening to hear that the ordinary members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters are at last taking steps to clean up their own notoriously corrupt union. Still, I found the book messy and confusing. As originally published in America, the mass of details about particular local struggles might have been very useful to any reforming Teamster or other Trade Unionist who needed to know more about what is going on. But to publish it in the same form in this country seems fairly pointless.

There is a very interesting tale to be told, and bits of it can be picked out of the mass of highly specific details in

this book. You understand how someone like Jimmy Hoffa could flourish when you hear about the ordinary union member who's attitude used to be "Ah, so what if he stole five bucks from me, he got me fifteen, so am I going to complain?" (Page 71). A lot of the big corruption seems to have come in during prohibition, because bootleggers needed trucks and found the union an easy way of getting control of them. And in forming an alliance with gangsters, people like Hoffa were only following the example of the bosses who had hired gangsters as strikebreakers, and who often had had union leaders murdered. The book is worth reading for many such insights.

Still, I think that Verso have not done justice to union militant Dan La Botz's book. A proper introduction, explaining American unionism to a British audience, would have been welcome. And about half of the book could have been edited out without losing anything that a British reader would need to know.

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