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Editorial

FIDDLING WHILE JERUSALEM BURNS

The Tories have made clear their intention to introduce new legislation depriving trade unions of the right to sanction their own members when these ignore a democratic decision to strike. This legislation has nothing in common with the earlier laws on ballots and so forth. It has nothing to do with democratising the unions - this has already been done. On the contrary, it will encourage individual members to flout the outcome of democratic decision making. It will emasculate the unions, by depriving them of a right which any self-respecting voluntary association enjoys as a matter of course - the right to enforce its rule book and to apply sanctions to those who transgress collective decisions.

The Tories have also made clear their intention to introduce a poll tax. The very grave implications of this have yet to be recognised by the British Labour movement. As is pointed out in an article in this issue, the poll tax will involve an unprecedented violation of British traditions of the liberty of the citizen. It will imply an entirely new relationship between the citizen and the state.

And now Douglas Hurd has announced that he is proposing to abolish the right to silence of citizens engaged in 'helping the police with their enquiries'. In future, if he has his way, the fact that people who have not been arrested or charged choose to keep silent when faced with police interrogators will be stated in court and will be held against them.

This proposal is not Hurd's first innovation in the system of British law. It is merely the latest in a series and there is presumably more to come. It follows his decision to abolish the principle of trial by jury in fraud cases. Hurd is turning out to be the most authoritarian Home Secretary this country has known for many decades.

Government without Opposition

These are all real and extremely serious attacks on British democracy, but the Left is incapable of recognising them as such because it has cried 'Wolf!' so often in the past. These attacks are in prospect, not because of the subjective inclinations of Margaret Thatcher and Douglas Hurd, but because the British political system is ceasing to be a system of government with opposition. The fact that none of the opposition parties is a credible alternative government means that the actual government is not being seriously opposed. The checks and balances which operated as a matter of course when we had a real two-party system are becoming inoperative.

These threats to democratic rights received nothing remotely approaching a robust resistance at the TUC in Blackpool and there is no reason to expect them to be thought about in Brighton. The Labour Party and the trade union movement are still in the most appalling disarray. The result of the general election appears to have had no useful impact on the minds of Labour's leaders at all.

Since June 11, the only British politicians to have expressed serious concern about the future of British democracy have been Tories, notably Michael Heseltine and John Biffen. Both of them have deplored the absence of a serious and credible Opposition. Their remarks seem to have gone entirely unnoticed by the Left and the Labour movement. Whether or not one believes in their sincerity, the situation they describe and deplore is real enough and certainly deplorable.

It is a fine state of affairs when the British working class is obliged to look for serious oppositional thought to free-wheeling members of the party in government. But this state

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of affairs will undoubtedly continue for as long as Labour remains determined to evade the implications of its disastrous performance on June 11 by concocting myths about it.

The Vanishing Proletariat

Labour did not lose the last election, or the two elections before it, because the British working class has refuted the Marxist dogmas being taught its children in most Sociology departments in the country by abruptly and comprehensively disappearing off the face of the earth. It lost these elections because the British working class wishes the country to be competently governed.

The idea that 'images' are somehow independent of the reality they are supposed to represent has infected Labour minds recently, but it has no application to democratic politics. If Neil Kinnock's Labour Party had been a competent potential government in June, it would have looked like one to the voters and it would be in office today. And legions of careerist pen-pushers would be rushing into print about the vanishing petty bourgeoisie.

But it wasn't and it didn't and it isn't, and so the working class is made the scapegoat for Labour's own failings. An extreme form of sociological determinism has supplanted the thought processes of the Left intelligentsia. The working class must be disappearing, otherwise Labour would be in power, for workers, merely by virtue of being workers, are bound to vote Labour by a kind of reflex action.

This sociological determinism considers itself to be the last word in political sophistication. In fact, it is the ultimate in unrealism. It assumes that workers are indifferent to *politics,* or incapable of evaluating the quality of the rival forms of politics on offer. This lack of realism is therefore the corollary of a profoundly patronising attitude to the working class.

On June 11, millions of British workers judged Margaret Thatcher's Toryism to be a more effective form of politics to which to entrust the government of the state than Neil Kinnock's brand of Labourism. Labour politics were judged to be not only incoherent if not reckless on defence, but also wholly unconvincing on the economy, as Boyd Black points out in this issue. Millions of workers who would otherwise have preferred to vote Labour voted Tory on this basis and displayed considerable political sophistication in doing so.

Working class selfishness

The theory that the vanishing proletariat is to blame for Labour's defeat is not the only theory doing the rounds. Its main competitor is the theory that working class selfishness is to blame, that the Tories won by successfully appealing to the 'self-interest' of workers, in contrast to Labour's appeal to their idealism.

This theory clearly contradicts the first in its recognition that the working class is still with us. It therefore opens up the possibility that Labour might come to terms with the need to address the real interests of British workers. To that extent, the theory has merit.

But it does not look as if Labour will follow the logic of this theory. Labour appears to be psychologically or spiritually inhibited from doing so. Roy Hattersley has recently been

talking about the need for Labour to find a new "ideology" and has expressly ruled out the suggestion that Labour should try to find out what working people actually want and then undertake to give it them. No stooping to conquer for Roy.

The implication of Hattersley's remarks is that Labour is not in business to represent the interests of British workers. It is in business to put ideologies into practice. If one ideology cannot be sold to the electorate, another must be found.

This Review is sceptical about Marxism in general, but is aware of the fact that Marx himself had a far more realistic conception of the working class than most contemporary British socialists appear to have. He once made the interesting observation that the workers *"have no ideas to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society..."*

The Labour Party is not in the business of setting free the elements of the new society. It made that clear ten years ago when it refused to legislate for industrial democracy when the situation was ripe for it. It is in the business of realising ideas instead, even if it now proposes to change these ideas. And these ideas, whatever they may be, are necessarily independent of the actual interests of British working people, who accordingly refuse to vote Labour.

Labour is therefore not in the business of government, however much it may kid itself about this. And because it is not in the business of government, it cannot be expected to offer serious opposition to Thatcher and Hurd.

A mistaken diagnosis

The apparent contradiction between these two theories is only a matter of form. They are in reality alternative forms of the same mistaken diagnosis. The intuition underlying them is that the working class is disappearing in so far as it is becoming "selfish", or that workers are becoming motivated by "self-interest" in an historicallyunprecedenteddegree to the extent that they are ceasing to be a class.

This intuition rests upon a merely romantic conception of the working class. It presupposes that what held British workers together as a class was pure idealism. It is incapable of grasping that the opposite is in fact the case, that it was the self-interest of generations of workers which underlay their solidarity as a class and their awareness of the need to secure collective solutions to their grievances by means of collective representation of their interests and collective action in support of them.

The working class is not disappearing in the sense of becoming a smaller proportion of the population. If it is disappearing, it is doing so only in the sense that it is a larger proportion of the population than ever before and is therefore tending to identify itself with the society as a whole as opposed to a distinct and

subaltern section of the society. It is only the old, manual, working class which is diminishing as a proportion of the population. The vast majority of the population still depend overwhelmingly upon income from work for their livelihood.

These changes in the composition of the British workforce have been accompanied by ever rising expectations of material well being, a fact which every socialist should welcome. But they have not necessarily implied a tendency to turn away from collective representation and the search for collective responses to working class demands.

If millions of British workers have lost faith in the collective organisations they once supported, the Labour Party and the trade unions, this is because these organisations have forfeited their allegiance. The Labour Party has treated the interests of British workers with contempt. Roy Hattersley now appears to be at one with Ken Livingstone in this respect, if no other. And the trade unions have also been guilty of arrogance and conservatism in relation to their own members.

Selling the pass

The Labour Party in particular has only itself to blame. The extent of its capitulation to the gung-ho market ideology of Thatcherism was manifest during the general election campaign. This Review has nothing in common with those socialists who fetishise the role of the state, but the need for active state intervention in certain major areas of the country's social and economic life is as great as ever. It is particularly acute in housing, as articles in earlier issues have pointed out. It is self-evidently acute in the inner cities, as Mrs Thatcher has herself acknowledged.

Neil Kinnock's Labour Party had nothing to say about the need for intelligent and progressive state intervention on behalf of working people during the election. No reasoned case was put to the electorate on these issues. The pass was sold.

All Labour offered the electorate on June 11 was Thatcherism without tears, the "compassionate market economy". The electorate is less and less interested in being on the receiving end of Labour's patronising "compassion". And if it must have a market economy, it prefers to entrust the running of it to the party with a track record in such matters.

The Labour leadership appears to have convinced itself that the election result signified the electorate's rejection of socialism. It has accordingly engaged the party in a totally unnecessary identity crisis. It is perfectly true that the electorate rejected 'socialism', if by 'socialism' is meant the market economy enlivened only by sanctimonious bleating about "compassion", dubious fiscal policies, a non-existent defence policy, *sotto voce* support for trade union conservatism, the political fetishisation of eccentricity and the cult of Neil Kinnock's personality.

But if by 'socialism' is meant a reasoned policy of selective state intervention on behalf of the working class where this is clearly in its interests, socialism was not rejected on June 11 for the simple reason that it was not on offer. If by 'socialism' is meant a policy of progressively reforming industrial relations in order to enhance the role of workers in the process of production, this too was not on offer. Labour's manifesto said precisely nothing about industrial democracy, unlike that of the SDP.

Into the silly season

What was rejected on June 11 was not democratic socialism, but Kinnockism, a public relations stunt devoid of political content. The Labour Party appears to be quite incapable of recognising this. It is correspondingly incapable of responding politically to its latest electoral fiasco.

Even by the standards of the silly season, Labour's performance over the last three months has been a monument of inanity. Neil Kinnock has found nothing better to do than tinker in a particularly clumsy manner with the party's constitution all over again. Ken Livingstone has had nothing better to do than publish his memoirs and make life difficlt for Kinnock. And Bryan Gould, mastermind of Labour's "brilliant" campaign, has scaled new heights with the discovery that 'socialism' allows its adepts to quaff champagne, on condition that by 'socialism' is meant support for the market economy, a principle which has been orienting Tory drinking habits for generations.

Since June 11, the Labour leadership has divided neatly into two categories. There are those, such as John Smith, who have been saying nothing. And there are those who have been busy reminding us that they have nothing to say.

The prospect is one of renewed and futile turmoil within the party. Kinnock will press for his constitutional changes and Livingstone and others will press their personal ambitions. The one thing which is not on the agenda is a political response to June 11.

Why not suicide?

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that a bevy of constituency parties should be proposing that the party commit itself to a strategy of coalition with the soon-to-be-enlarged Liberal Party and all that this entails, including the acceptance of proportional representation. This strategy amounts to admitting that Labour has abandoned all hope of ever again forming a majority government at Westminster. It concedes in advance that the British electorate will never again entrust Labour with sole responsibility for governing the country. It proclaims this concession to the electorate and thereby encourages, if not obliges, the electorate to fulfil the prophecy it contains.

The strategy, in short, is suicide, as Ron Todd, in a passing moment of lucidity, has recently pointed out. If a party which at least maintains a public pretence of believing in itself can only muster 229 seats, a party which can no longer keep up this pretence must expect to win substantially less.

The strategy of committing Labour to an alliance with what's left of the Alliance is predicated upon an incoherent attitude to Thatcherism. On the one hand, it assumes (quite unnecessarily, as we have pointed out), that Thatcherism has engineered irreversible changes in British society such as to preclude a future Labour victory at the polls. On the other hand, it assumes that the electoral defeat of Thatcherism takes precedence over everything else, such that any alliance against the Tories is worth having, or even mandatory. The second assumption makes sense only if it is conceded that the social changes engineered by Thatcherism can be reversed.

In fact, of course, the strategy is really predicated upon a totally mindless attitude towards Thatcherism, an attitude which is religious rather than political. The electoral defeat of Mrs Thatcher will give enormous spiritual satisfaction to Labour activists. It is an end in itself.

This attitude has nothing to do with working out a coherent and plausible set of policies in the working class interest which would form the basis for a progressive government. It is the expression of a childish and manichean view of the world, and all it has to offer is displacement activity. It has nothing to do with politics, and it has no political prospects.

Time is running out

It must, however, be taken seriously by Labour politicians. That many honest and dedicated Labour activists should have reached such depths of despair is no laughing matter.

First attempts at suicide are often to be interpreted as cries for help. It remains to be seen whether Kinnock and Gould and Hattersley and Smith have it in them to respond effectively to the growing despair of Labour activists. *Labour & Trade Union Review* will support them if they show signs of doing so. But constitutionalist navel-gazing and desperately

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NOTES ON THE NEWS

by Madawc Williams

The Bitter Sea

The past few weeks and months have seen a series of dangerous confrontations in a body of water that the Arabs call the Arabian Gulf, and the Iranians call the Persian Gulf, and to which the British media attach the bland label "The Gulf". The ancient Mesopotamians, the first people to leave written records about it, had a name for it that might seem very suitable. They called it "The Bitter Sea"!

The Bitter Sea has been getting ever more bitter recently, in part as a follow-on from the "Irangate" shambles. What happened there is a perfect argument for democratic control over foreign policy. Naturally, some things have to be done in secret. Spying has to be organised secretly. It was quite reasonable for Nixon to make secret contacts with Peking, for instance, before publicly ending many years of bitter hostility. But Irangate was another matter. It was secret, mostly in order to stop Congress from restraining President Reagan's wishes, even though Congress was fully within its rights in restraining him.

Success might have justified such double-dealing. But the whole idea was a basically stupid one. Reagan had said, publicly, that there were going to be no concessions to terrorists. And of course he was right. If someone has a just claim, you should concede it before they need to resort to terrorism. If the claim is not seen as just, then it is pointless and short-sighted to give into it.

Plane hijackings are a case in point. The first hijackers were given everything they asked for. So naturally, everybody started doing it. There are no limits to the number of armed groups who want world-wide attention to their cause. A far higher price in blood was paid - is still being paid - than if the first hijackers had been resisted and given nothing.

Reagan seemed to know all this. And then behind the scenes he started trading arms for hostages, making it clear that hostage-taking could be a highly profitable business. Naturally, the Iranians and their allies snatched as many more hostages as they could lay their hands on.

To make up for the arms for hostages deal, and after cunning diplomatic manoeuvring by Kuwait, the US sent its forces into the Gulf. This was a risky move. A small body of water like the Gulf was and is dangerous territory for a navy. It is particularly dangerous for the US Navy, which is mainly designed for fighting on the great oceans of the world, and which relies on allies for some basic elements like minesweepers.

Nevertheless, the manoeuvre seems to have worked. Partly, perhaps, because it was done openly and publicly. Those who didn't like the idea were able to say so, through the normal political channels. And it became clear that the opposition was not so strong as to prevent President Reagan from acting.

(The US Constitution is set up with "checks and balances", which mean in practice constant strife between the President and the different factions within Congress. The President is free to do almost anything he likes, provided only that he does it openly, and that his opponents can not get it ruled unconstitutional or deprive it of funds. Neither of these things are likely to happen.)

Iran could have chosen to fight. But this would have been unwise. The US had built up huge naval and air power in the region. They could have hurt Iran very badly. They would certainly have been able to cut off Iran's oil exports, on which it depends for its war against Iraq. Besides, for a time it seemed as if Iraq had stopped its attacks on tankers carrying Iranian oil. But these attacks have now resumed, and still Iran has made no major response.

At the time of writing, the drift seems to be towards peace. Iran is no longer demanding that the Iraq's leadership be overthrown. They will settle for

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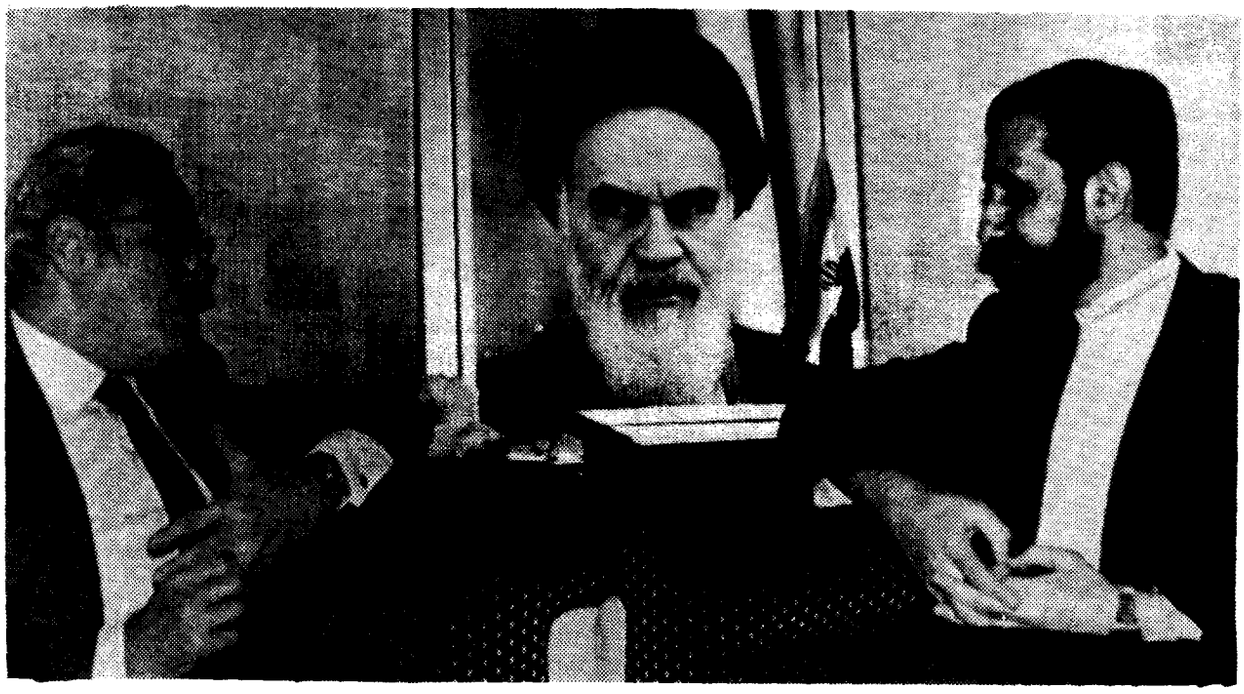
seeking ideologies are no response at all.

Time is running out for the Labour Party. It cannot afford to evade reality any longer.



an official UN declaration that Iraq was the aggressor which began the war. The presence of the US naval forces means that the dream of a Shiite Fundamentalist revolution spreading into Arabia no longer seems practical. The Iranian leaders are neither mad nor evil; they simply operate from a world view very different from anything you can find in Europe. Hopefully, a continuing war no longer looks worthwhile from the Iranian point of view.

Sri Lanka

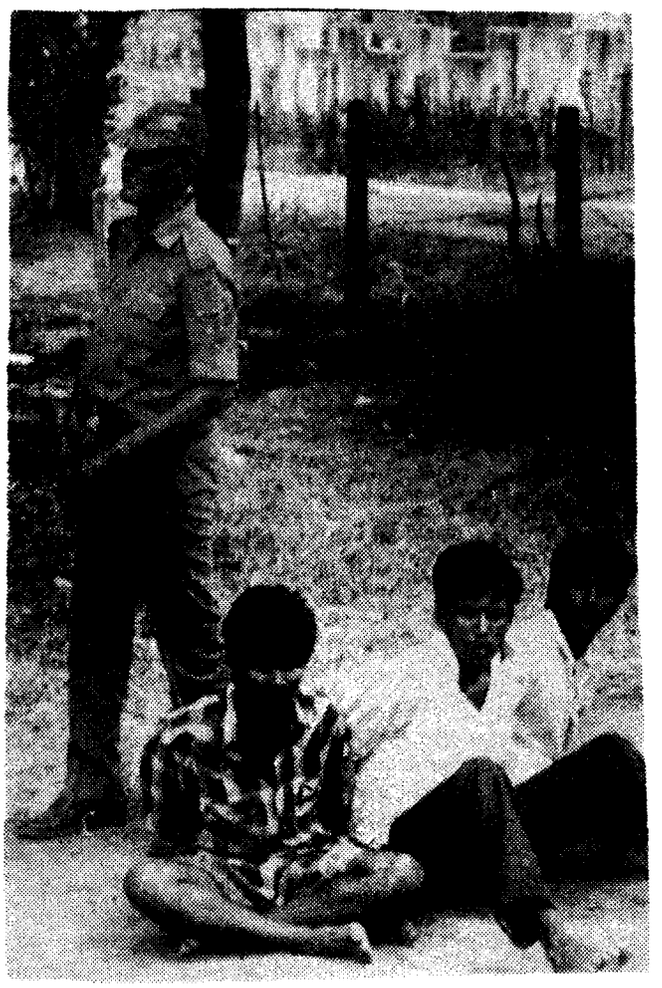
In the West, we tend to think of Buddhism as a gentle and tolerant faith. The sight of Buddhist monks leading riots, as a protest against a peace agreement, must therefore seem very strange. But that is just what happened, when the long-running war in Sri Lanka was brought to an end.

Buddhism began in the north of the Indian sub-continent. For a time it became the dominant religion, eclipsing Hinduism. It spread to many other parts of Asia, notably China and Japan. But in India itself, it dwindled in the face of a revived Hinduism.

In Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), Buddhism held on. The Sinhalese population remains Buddhist, while the Tamils, immigrants from India over many centuries, are Hindus. In part, this may have been an expression of Sinhalese resistance to pressures from the much larger and stronger states of Southern India.

And so it continues to this day. The Tamils of Sri Lanka are a minority; but they are also an extension of the Tamils of Southern India, some 50 million strong, and of Hindu culture as a whole. The Sinhalese Sri Lankans fear domination by India. Buddhism is the clearest expression of their separate identity.

(Buddhism, of course, began as a pacifist creed. But then so did Christianity. Throughout history there have been many wars fought by Buddhists, often against other Buddhists. Most notable of these were the Japanese Samurai, almost all of whom were Buddhists.)



At the time of writing, the riots are over and the Tamil guerrillas have ceased to fight. And there are Indian troops in the Tamil areas, to help guarantee the peace. Time will tell if the peace will hold. But I wouldn't foresee Buddhism doing much to prevent a new outbreak of rioting or fighting.

Institutionalised Racism?

We are told that black children do badly in British schools because of "institutionalised racism". If pupils from one background do worse than another, then clearly the schools or the teachers must be at fault. There must be "unconscious racism", even among those who at a conscious level accept the doctrines of the "anti-racist" lobby.

I always had my doubts about such notions, and the results of a recent survey are definite proof that it is false. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) tried looking at the exam results of the various non-white immigrant groups, instead of lumping them all in together. The ranking was:

Indian;
African-Asian;
Pakistani;
South-East Asian;
English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish;
Arab;
Caribbean;
Bangladeshi;
Turkish.

The sharp difference between Bangladeshis and other Asians is the most striking result, because very few non-Asians could even tell the difference. Clearly, it is *not* the attitude of the teachers that is decisive. Pupils are not inert raw material that can be processed into anything the teachers want to make of them. The background culture is also very important.

There has been a great deal of talk about different performances by pupils from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. By contrast, the massive difference between schooling in different parts of the country has been largely ignored. Pupils in Brent, say, are likely to do much better than pupils in Hackney.

There is a good reason for this silence. In the U.S.A, demands for racial equality in education led to "bussing" of school children, often over very long distances, in order to provide an even ethnic mix in all schools. Just imagine trying to introduce something like that over here! The differences between two primary schools cause quite enough trouble. (Though just how does it happen that one school has an Asian majority, while another has hardly any Asians?)

Hamburger Hill

There has been a crop of films about Vietnam lately, as the United States finally starts to come to terms with its recent history. *Hamburger Hill* is the latest of these, and perhaps the best. It shows the battle for a single hill, which the US forces took only after very heavy losses. It doesn't try to analyse what the war was, or why it was. You simply get a nightmare slice of the action.

Like most such films, *Hamburger Hill* is only concerned with what the war was like for the Americans who fought there. You get a recognition of just how tough the enemy are, and you get just one reminder that the enemy are human too. But in general, the Vietnamese view of things is almost ignored. Just as it was during the actual war, which is a major reason why America did not win it.

The conflict in Vietnam was between two forms of nationalism - a strong and well-organised Communist nationalism, and a weaker, younger and less definite pro-Western nationalism. America's great mistake was to take over the fighting from the pro-Western nationalists (weak and corrupt though they were). The more it became a war between American and Vietnamese, the less it was possible for the Americans to win it. I wonder if there will ever be a Hollywood film that will recognise this (as

TRADE UNION DIARY

by Dave Chapel

Designer unionism

The 1987 TUC was to see the great launch of "new realism". It didn't. I can only say thank God for that. "New realism" is a gimmick, a coat of gloss similar to the nauseating cloak which covers up the emptiness in the Labour Party. As I reported in the last issue, its great proponent is John "call us GMB" Edmonds.

Edmonds seems to have no notion about the purpose of trade unionism, no respect for *any* of its traditions and no policy for halting its slide towards irrelevance. He despises the institution which has given him his role in life and wants to hide it away from public view under a cover of glitter.

Edmonds counterposes himself to Arthur Scargill. Scargill has come in for his share of criticism in this column. But at least, as a doctrinaire class militant, he has something to say to trade unionists. He is saying that, if we stick to our guns, times will change, and our day will come again. That may not be good enough, but who can say that he is entirely wrong ? Until the movement devises a purposeful, relevant, role for itself, it is far better off sticking to its guns while responding fairly pragmatically - yes, the good old fudge ! - to problems and challenges as they arise.

The problem lies not with Arthur Scargill but with Edmonds and his ilk running around like headless chickens.

The purpose of trade unions is to represent the interests of working people - to give them the power to look after their economic interests. Most unions are failing miserably, so why should people stay in them ? Everybody knows that the new prosperity of people at work came about not as a result of the activities of trade unions, but in spite of them.

Cheaper insurance, funeral subsidies and free health insurance are no answer. They are also not new. They are as old as trade unionism itself. The NGA or the Sheet Metal Workers have been good benefit unions since before Eric Hammond's grandfather was born. And these days all sorts of organisations offer benefits to members. It's just a case of mass purchasing being rewarded by discounts - the union passes on the name of the insurance man, etc., to its members.

Off course the unions should have these schemes, but they make not a whit of difference to the power or lack of it that a man or a woman has at work. And it is specifically as *workers* that the unions relate to their members. As drivers, workers have the AA or the RAC. As potentially sick people, they have the NHS or BUPA. As peace freaks they have CND. But as workers they have only the trade unions.

Then we have Alan Tuffin jumping up and down about people buying shares in companies. As *general* shareholders, the new vogue in the working class should hardly deserve comment at the TUC. There is nothing wrong with getting money for doing nothing. But it is not especially praiseworthy either, except in the indirect sense that it oils the wheels of industry.

Being a shareholder confers no power if all you have is a few shares. And that's all most people can hope to have. Corporate shareholders and very rich people control *some* companies through the ownership of shares. I mentioned in the last issue a trade union idea of getting BA workers to hand their share votes to trade union proxies. Now this is a sensible, collectivist and effective approach. But I don't remember Tuffin or other "new realists" endorsing this approach at the TUC.

Collectivism was a bad word at Blackpool ! Why on earth do they imagine people will join trade unions if it is not to achieve a degree of power collectively which cannot be achieved individually ? It certainly won't be just to get a slightly cheaper video !

When the unions had *real* leaders like Ernie Bevin, they used their collective power to hammer the powerful employers and begin to get workers a decent wage. They then knocked the nonsense out of George Lansbury's Labour Party and used it to give both protection and political power to the working class. The result was the welfare state and employers who treated workers with respect.

But Bevin's successors were for the most part a poor lot. They could not adapt to the new world that Bevin and Attlee had built and behaved as if they still lived in the 1930s. A few saw this. Jack Jones and Clive Jenkins stand out. They wanted *positive* power, not negative care, for working people.

Workers had the power to negate the will of the employers and paralyse the system if they didn't get their way. But there was a limit to how long this situation could go on without the economy running into serious trouble. *Someone* had to be in charge. In the late 1970s Jones and Jenkins said it should be the workers - or at the very least there should be a partnership.

They proposed industrial democracy via trade union machinery. This would give workers responsibility as well as power. They would determine their own economic future. The class war in industrial relations would end in favour of the workers.

But most union leaders preferred the old ways - Scanlon, Chapple, Scargill, etc. So we had the 'winter of discontent' and Margaret Thatcher. She resolved the stalemate in the other direction by putting the employers back in the driving seat.

This was the beginning of the decline of the trade union movement. And until this is recognised, all the gloss in the world isn't going to reverse this decline.

The path to industrial democracy and greater trade union *relevance* was rejected by conservative trade unionists who couldn't come to terms with the victory of Bevinite unionism. They didn't know how to build on the hard-won power of the workers. They threw that power away for the trivial pleasures they got out of play-acting the class struggle.

But what are we to make of the "new realists" ? They are rushing to come to terms with the new millenium ushered in

by Thatcher. One often feels that they want to appear more Thatcherite than the Boss herself. They have nothing to say for themselves or their members. Thatcher sees herself developing a culture which doesn't need trade unionism. She may succeed. But it is unpleasant to witness trade unionists going along with their own demise.

The Thatcher "millenium" will come to an abrupt end the moment the Labour movement has something relevant to oppose to her - just as the Wilson "millenium" came to an end as soon as the Tories got their act together.

What we saw in Blackpool was the curbing of the excesses of *designer* trade unionism by the old guard. What we did not see was any strategy for taking the movement forward again. That will develop only when the origins of the present crisis are acknowledged - the rejection of Labour's industrial relations legislation in the late 1960s and the rejection of industrial democracy in the late 1970s.

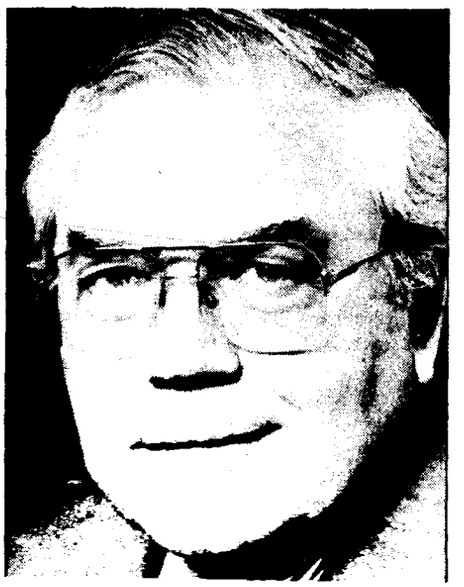
And the initiative must come from the trade union movement. It is highly unlikely that it will come from the Labour Party. Kinnock's Labour Party is incapable of being a radical reforming party - though it may conceivably return to power to administer Thatcherism, just as Tory governments administered social democracy in the 1950s.

Electric Eric

Eric Hammond was again the man in the black hat at the TUC. This time it was single-union and no-strike deals. The nice thing about no-strike deals is that a union is forced to do its homework if it is to persuade the agreed arbitrator to accept its case. Single-union agreements are very understandable given the inter-union bickering that goes on in almost every company in the country - with the notable exception of Fords, where line workers are not divided along union lines.

Of course, once again, Eric won. Other unions, including the T&GWU, had to admit that they too had negotiated no-strike deals, and then lamely blamed this on junior union officials. And single-union agreements have been around for nearly a century. Indeed, such agreements were effectively the aim of the great unions - e.g. the NUM and the NUR.

Hammond had to take some more stick about Wapping. There he didn't have a moral leg to stand on. At last year's TUC his defence of EETPU members taking printers' jobs was totally unconvincing. And yet there are many in the print unions - let alone the rest of the movement - who are damn glad Hammond did what he did.



A section of the movement had got out of order. The Fleet Street printers were regularly cutting each other's throats and dominating their unions to the detriment of other members. They were brought to heel by the amoral actions of a rogue trade union leader. And a lot of people were secretly grateful for that.

How does Hammond get away with it ? Mainly because he knows what he wants and where he is going, while the rest flounder about in confusion. I should prefer it if Eric Hammond took up a more positive position and went for industrial democracy instead of his usual short-term pragmatism. But I cannot deny that it is he alone who has kept the movement from going completely haywire over the last three or four years.

Common sense in UCATT

Whereas a lot of the "new realism" in the trade union movement is a lot of bull - e.g. designer unionism of the John Edmonds variety - there is undoubtedly a growing common sense. A good example of this, although it received little publicity during the Congress, is the decision of UCATT to drop its stupid ban on self-employed members.

The new general secretary, Albert Williams, is to be congratulated. Many private sector unions have long made no distinction between self-employed and PAYE workers. It was recognised that workers moved from one category to another all the time.

But probably nowhere else is this type of movement more common than in the building industry. Yet UCATT resisted all attempts by its more progressive officials to recruit the self-employed, even as this category of workers grew steadily, and even as the *practical* distinction between the two categories became increasingly blurred.

The line coming out of UCATT was a series of moralising platitudes about "the lump". But the real reason for the old policy was the domination of the union by one of the most conservative forces in the country - the Communist Party.

The CP controlled much of the local authority direct labour work force and through this the union. Opening up the union to the great majority of casually employed building workers threatened CP domination. That was the real truth behind the union's old position.

But in the last few years the CP stranglehold weakened for other reasons. The CP itself degenerated into a party of "rainbow coalition" wallies. It lost its old strength of will. And new, non-CP, people began to assume positions of power. It remains to be seen if the new leadership has the get-up-and-go to recruit the non-PAYE workers or, indeed, if trade unionism is still relevant to the modern, smaller-scale, building industry.

Kinnock - Silence is Golden

The Trades Union Congress seems to have brought a wave of sympathy for Neil Kinnock from the newspapermen covering the proceedings. Poor Neil. What hope has he with this lot of carthorses and their dominating block votes ? How can he sort out the Labour Party's image and win the next election when this lot take no notice of nice Mr Edmonds or sensible Mr Hammond ?

Neil Kinnock needs help from no one to lose elections. But the fact that he loses them in style endears him to the media pundits. The miners' strike and Wapping played little or no part in Labour's defeat - especially since the unions lost in both cases. But Mr Kinnock's ludicrous defence proposals (taking to the hills, digging holes in Germany, etc.) and his even more ludicrous Defence Secretary, Denzil Davies, played a very great part indeed. But most of all Mr Kinnock is 'perceived' to be incapable of running an egg-and-spoon race, never mind the country.

Kinnock turned up at the TUC, but didn't speak, unlike last year when he made a point of lording it over the unions as if he owned them. That he didn't speak this year was interpreted by the media as Kinnock not wanting to be tainted by the union's carthorse image. But few of the union leaders *wanted* him to speak. They didn't want *him* to give *them* a bad name - and quite right too !

Left defenceless!

Labour's Election Gift to the Tories

by Madawc Williams

Labour's defence policy reminds one of the ancient Chinese proverb of a man picking up a stone, only to drop it on his own foot. It looks very much as if a deal on medium-range missiles can and will be done - and done despite any doubts or objections Thatcher may have had.

In the run-up to the general election, there were definite signs that Thatcher was unhappy with the proposed deal. There was a widespread belief that she was trying to keep medium-range missiles regardless.

This is an issue on which Labour could have impressed the voters - Labour peacemakers opposing Tories who secretly want to keep the bomb come what may. But only if Labour had stuck to the same nuclear weapons policy that they had during the last Labour government.

It seems clear that Thatcher, and some other European leaders, think it useful to keep American nuclear weapons in Europe nô matter what the Russians may offer to be rid of them. The original argument for Cruise and Pershing was as a counter to Russia's SS20s. But Gorbachev has offered to accept the "zero option", removing his entire force of SS20s. It was objected that this would leave him free to deploy them elsewhere. He has offered to scrap them. The issue of short-range missiles was then raised - missiles that have a longer range than "battlefield" nuclear weapons. By one (controversial) definition of short-range missiles, the Russians would seem to have vastly more of them. But in due course Gorbachev agreed to get rid of them as well.

At present the only problem is 72 rather elderly Pershing 1 missiles that are under joint West German/American control. The Germans have the missiles, but the Americans control the nuclear warheads. According to the Russians, this makes them basically an American weapon, which should go. According to the Americans, they are basically a West German weapon system, and thus not part of the deal. The point is indeed a tricky one.

Tory Duplicity

The issue of short-range missiles only came up when it became clear that a deal on medium-range missiles was in fact possible. It is unclear to me just how the presence or absence of medium-range missiles would make a difference to the power and effectiveness of short-range missiles. But the issue was raised - and Gorbachev once again said that he would make concessions.

It is now being said that *any* reduction of the numbers of nuclear weapons is a menace, given the Russians' greater strength in conventional forces. This is not what Thatcher and Co were saying when the Russians were building up the numbers of their SS20s, and seemed very unlikely to accept a reasonable deal. The "zero option" was a western proposal in the first place!

The suspicion is, that Thatcher wants Trident and Cruise come what may. She may claim to be in favour of multilateral disarmament, but in fact she isn't. One suspects that nothing short of the abolition of the Soviet Union would satisfy her!

The High Ground and the Swamp.

Defence based on nuclear weapons is clearly immoral. But then, so is every other sort of defence, to a greater or lesser degree. The power represented by nuclear weapons is no different ethically from that of the crossbow.

Nuclear weapons do differ in one way from everything that went before them. It is no longer possible for any politician to hope to benefit from starting a World War. Wars generally start because at least one side desires war, and hopes to gain benefits from war that peace would never bring them.

World War One was desired by a variety of politicians on both sides. World War Two was desired by Hitler and Mussolini and many of their followers. But who could hope to profit from World War Three?

It is on this basis, no doubt, that Thatcher wants to secure the Trident nuclear submarine for Britain. Nuclear submarines can not be found or destroyed by any known technology. And the missiles launched by just one Trident could do more damage to the Soviet Union in just one day than the Nazis managed during their whole invasion, occupation and retreat. Thus, there is no possibility that the Soviet Union could treat Britain the way they treated Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Afganistan etc.

That is one sort of high ground - the high ground of ruthless but intelligent pragmatism. The serious alternative is a complete moral revolt against the whole system of warfare and mutual terror. This was the basis of CND.

(In L&TUR 3, Brendan Clifford identified the early CND with Bertrand Russell's scheme for dividing up the world into American and Russian spheres of interest. I can not agree with this. Russell may have been the most notable individual within CND, but his views were very different from those of most CND supporters. They were not widely known, and those who did know them were not inclined to support them.

Indeed, in a very important way, CND was a challenge to Britain's position as part of the American sphere of influence. And while some CND supporters were privately hoping that Britain might somehow transfer to the Soviet sphere of influence, a large majority felt the exact opposite. CND provided a gathering-place for those who were against both Washington and Moscow.)

CND was a moral protest against what actually existed - rival war machines that were willing, if necessary, to slaughter millions of people. The problem came when they tried to put forward some serious alternative. World government would have been the most serious option. But it was a notion that was (and is) very much out of fashion, while disarmament - the issue on which CND had been nominally formed - conflicted with the desire of each nation-state to look after its own interests and keep itself safe.

Once the anti-nuclear movement comes down from the high ground of simple moral protest against mass murder, it gets lost in a swamp of confusion. You get policies which are neither particularly moral nor especially sensible.

Medium to Useless

Doubts about "double zero" disarmament have faded in the months since the election. The fact is, medium-range missiles are not really very useful. Nuclear deterrence is based on the ability to do deep and lasting damage to the enemy, in the event of a war. The distance the missiles travel isn't really very important. Medium-range missiles might make a small difference, if only one side had them. But since both sides have them, there is little that will change when both sides give them up.

From a purely military point of view, it would hardly have mattered if NATO had sent back all the Cruise missiles and Pershings, and let the Soviet Union keep all its SS20s etc. A missile is a missile, whether it travels 100 miles or 10,000.

On the other hand, such a decision could not have been made without casting grave doubts on the whole structure of NATO. It would have been a

step towards an American disengagement from Europe. Equally, it would have been a radical shift in the balance of power had Britain and France agreed to give up the whole of their nuclear armed forces in exchange for a limited reduction in the number of Soviet missiles. But neither of these things happened, nor are likely to happen.

The critical facts in the world nuclear balance are these:

(a) Russia and America could do lethal damage to each other, regardless of who started the war. Any full-scale nuclear exchange would be likely to put an end to civilisation in the northern hemisphere, at the very least. The outright destruction of all human life is a possibility, depending on the side effects, but a rather remote one.

(b) Britain or France could do major damage to Russia, destroying a number of major cities. Possession of nuclear submarines means that either country could hit back even after being devastated by a surprise attack. The general reckoning is that there is no reliable way of finding or destroying a nuclear submarine. That, of course, is why Thatcher is keen to have Trident to replace Polaris.

Shevardnadze

(c) China, likewise, could do major damage to either Russia or America.

(d) Israel almost certainly has nuclear weapons, and the means to drop them on Arab capitals. Some years back, it was pointed out that a small nuclear weapon could be used to bust the Aswan High Dam, releasing a devastating flood along the Nile that would kill 90% of Egypt's population. This calculation did not prevent Egypt from attacking Israel in the Yom Kippur war. But it may have helped persuade Egypt to go on to make peace, rather than hang on in the hope of destroying Israel in some future war.

(e) Several other countries are believed to have a few small nuclear weapons. These are too weak to threaten the superpowers, but could be decisive in a regional conflict.

It is very unlikely that any negotiations will change this fundamental balance. Peace would only be possible if the various governments agreed to trust each other, and not to try to change the existing power balance. This seems unlikely. But minor changes - such as abolishing medium-range missiles - do not in themselves upset the balance of power.

Labour's Confusion

It seems very unlikely that real multilateral disarmament will occur. But the abolition of medium range nuclear weapons is a popular goal, because it is at least a step forward - and because it will, in the long run, save money.

Labour could have cashed in on such feelings. If Labour had stuck to multilateralism, they would have found themselves in clover. A great many people want to be rid of nuclear weapons, but only if they can be sure of not being invaded afterwards. Few of us have forgotten what the Russians did to the Hungarians in 1956, to the Czechs in 1968, to the Poles in the early 1980s. Serious multilaterism would have been popular. Labour could have presented itself as the real party of disarmament, willing to carry out the principles that Thatcher herself had earlier accepted.

Sad to say, Labour managed to saddle itself with an odd and irrational policy of partial unilateralism. Britain was to get rid of its own nuclear weapons, and of US nuclear weapons on our soil, regardless of what the Russians might choose to do. But the USA were intended to keep their own nuclear weapons on their own soil, and keep us safe by threatening a global holocaust. "Yankies go home - but come back if we need you!"

To have said "We are not prepared to kill millions of innocent Russians, in order to keep ourselves safe" wold have been a morally sound position - though probably not a popular one. But Labour's policy added the proviso; "However we fully expect the Americans to be willing to kill millions of innocent Russians, in order to keep us safe."

As a policy, this was an absurdity. If a Third World War were to start, it would almost certainly start after a Russian grab for Western Europe. Labour would ask the US to go on accepting this risk: yet at the same time, would evict US nuclear forces from our own territory. It is doubtful if any US President would accept this; even more doubtful that Congress would allow any President to accept it. It wouldn't even be all that useful - if the superpowers were to start lobbing bombs at each other, it wouldn't make much difference whether any landed on our territory or not. Chernobyl showed that, as clearly as it can ever be shown.

Unilateralism would have been an honest policy - though probably an unpopular one. Partial unilateralism, refusing to have nuclear weapons yet insisting that America defends us with them, sound like *naive machiavellianism.* Had the trick come off, it could have been called dishonest but cunning. But the trick was never at all *likely* to come off.

Liberals and Social Democrats

At first sight, the Liberal/SDP Alliance seemed to have a sensible policy. They claimed to be the moderate alternative to both the warlike Tories and the unreliable Labour party. Looked at more closely, the policy looked less sensible. One got the feeling that the Liberals' defence policy was very close to Labour's, and the SDP's to the Tories.

They found a form of words to bridge the gap, but it was no more than a form of words. They would replace Polaris, not with Trident but with something else. Just what this "something else" was to be, they could not say.

The bust-up in the Alliance since the election is hardly to be wondered at. On defence, as on many other issues, there was a basic difference between Owen and Steel. Owen derives his ideas from the old Labour Right - the people who helped found NATO in the first place. Steel is heir to the Liberal tradition, which has not really been able to cope with the world since the days of Lloyd George.

(Lloyd George was able to lead Britain to victory in the First World War only by overthrowing Asquith, who was Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party. After the war, the split between Lloyd George and Asquith remained unresolved.

During the period between the wars, there were two rival sets of Liberals - those who followed the two rival leaders. It was this split that ruined the Liberal as a party of government and helped the rise of the Labour Party.

The modern Liberal Party derives mainly from the Asquith faction of the Liberal Party. The Lloyd George Liberals diminished in strength and eventually faded out).

A Walk on the Silly Side

The Alliance policy on defence was a series of illogical compromises. First the Liberal party bridged the gap between its rival factions. Some people wanted a sound and secure defence, which would include nuclear weapons. Others wanted no defence at all, or at least no defence based on nuclear weapons. Torn between pragmatism and principle, they came up with an absurdity. The SDP then forced them to be a little bit more pragmatic. But

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the result was still lacking in logic. Britain under the Alliance would still be a nuclear power, but probably not an effective one.

With a defence policy that already sounds like Monty Python's Flying Circus, it was most unwise of the SDP to invite John Cleese to do party political broadcasts for them. John Cleese has a gift for talking total nonsense in a manner than seems quite logical and sensible. This is what the public know him for. He might be useful for giving private tips as to how to put across a less-than-sensible policy with some hope of being believed. Instead, the SDP have used him as a spokesman! Even a perfectly sensible policy is likely to seem less sensible, after a surrealist comic like John Cleese has presented it.

The Alliance has never seemed like a serious governing party. Their "policy" on defence is only one example of this.

Kinnock's confusion.

As negotiations on medium-range missiles proceeded, and began to yield good results, Labour's new policy looked ever more ridiculous. Neil Kinnock had to explain how a Labour government would keep Cruise missiles while the US tried to trade them off for SS20s - but would get rid of them anyway, if negotiations failed.

Such tactics are unlikely to work on a child of four; the possibility of Gorbachev falling for them is barely measurable. But the Soviet leadership had already calculated that Labour would not be forming the next government, and that Western Europe in general was not going to trade something for nothing. Thus the serious negotiations began.

The weaknesses in the Tory position went unchallenged, because of the much greater weaknesses in Labour's position. Thatcher was able to call a general election, certain that debates on defence would only strengthen her position. The missile negotiations could go well, or go badly, and in either case she would gain. The rest you know.

The Monarchy and Progress

by Brendan Clifford

Britain is a democratic republic with a hereditary monarch as ceremonial head of state. It has been a republic implicitly since the 1688 revolution. It was an aristocratic republic in the 18th century, a bourgeois republic in the 19th century, and it is a general democratic republic in the 20th century. No political tendency of any substance has bothered its head about the monarchy for two hundred years.

The editor of the New Statesman bothered his head about it earlier this year. His heart went out to poor Princess Di, who in becoming a Princess was separated *"from her own real desires and emotions"*. He admired Prince Charles as a man with *"too much sensitivity and intelligence... to take for granted the huge pretence that the plutocratic monarchist carbuncle on the face of the nation should have a socially useful or even acceptable role in a modern democracy"*. And he looked forward to the succession as *"perhaps the best hope this country will have for the beginning of a withdrawal from the thraldom of royalty"* (New Statesman, Feb 13, 1987: *The Succession: The Constitutional Nettle No One Will Touch* by John Lloyd and John Rentoul).

The present editor of the New Statesman has something in common with Princess Di in that he is known to be separated from his own real desires and emotions. And he has it common with the Queen, who must bend to the will of her subjects, tht he has been compelled to forgo his own opinions and give way to the very different opinions of his staff in order to remain Editor.

Perhaps he wrote about the monarchy as a safe, nonsensical subject on which he could let himself go without incurring the wrath of his contributors, or maybe he really does share Willie Hamilton's preoccupation. Anyhow, it is worth considering what effect the monarchy, as a social phenomenon, has on the politics of Britain.

The main effect of the monarchy is that it gives a large body of people a sense of participation in the state without active participation in politics.

I have heard this state of affairs deplored by people who considered themselves socialists. They saw it as a device for diverting workers from their class interest, and were of the opinion that a removal of the "diversion" of royalty would bring a great access of strength to the socialist movement.

I can see no ground for the assumption that the people who are now lulled into political inertia by royalty would in the main go towards the socialist movement if they were precipitated into political activity by the abolition of royalty. The evidence is that the soporofic of royalty has benefitted progressive movements over a long period by neutralising the elements who might have given force to reaction.

There has never been a reactionary development, properly speaking, in Britain since the present state was established. By the same token there has never been a revolution. (In situations in which revolution is possible, reaction is also possible.) What there has been is fundamental social reconstruction by active political minorities, with the potential forces of reaction held in check by traditional influences.

It has happened in many European states, in this century and the last, that the whole populace has been precipitated into political activity by the abolition of traditional institutions which engender inertia. The outcome has not in a single instance been favourable to progressive democratic government.

The French Republic of 1848 was made Bonapartist in 1850 by the will of a disrupted people. The German Republic of 1918 was made fascist by the operation of forces which might have been kept apolitical by a compliant Kaiser. The Spanish Republic went down to the Franco dictatorship after it stirred the populace excessively out of traditional forms of lethargy. (That the Republic was defeated because of the intervention of German and Italian forces is, I think, a myth. It went down because it was guided by doctrinaire conceptions, and scorned traditional sources of social stability.)

The Russian Revolution is only a partial exception to this generalisation. It survived because of Lenin's brilliant – though not necessary admirable – manouevre of building a strong reactionary aspect into the Bolshevik state. Bolshevism, as Lenin put it in 1921, accomplished its own Thermidor – and a pretty brutal Thermidor it was.

Britain has been able by Parliamentary means, to enact social reforms more fundamental than those which usually accomplish political revolutions, because the potential forces of reaction have been diverted by the Crown.

The wealth of the royals is beside the point. The monarchy is an institution which enables large numbers of people of all classes who are apolitical by inclination to be apolitical, and to refrain from the reactionary interventions which occur in so many other states. It is, therefore, priceless.

Even if the rag-bag of royals were a sheer cost to the society, I think they would be worth it politically. But they are not a sheer cost. I imagine that they pay for themselves, and even make a profit, as a tourist attraction.

In Ireland the ceremonial head of state is a President. He

costs very little compared to the Royal family. But he earns nothing. His prestige diverts nobody from politics. Nobody would cross the sea to look at him – indeed, nobody would cross the road to look at him. The Irish Presidency has become so burdensome to the country and to the President himself that elections to the office have lapsed. The present incumbent, like his predecessor, was "elected" without an election. When his first term ended last year he had become utterly bored with the job and didn't want to do a second stint. There was panic in the Dail because nobody of any consequence in politics was willing to retire from real life and become President, and to have appointed a willing nonentity would have reduced the thing to farce. Eventually so much pressure was brought to bear on President Whatsisname that he agreed to serve another seven years.

Who would give up a Cabinet post, or any other position of power and distinction in society, to spend the rest of his life in a ceremonial office exchanging inanities with visiting heads of state whose minds are on their meeting with the Prime Minister? And who would come to England in the hope of getting a glimpse of such a person?

Britain is fortunate indeed in having a breed of distinguished people who get job satisfaction from exchanging inane remarks with all and sundry, and whom people come from all over the world to see. It would be an act of cruelty to impose that function of royalty on any normal family of citizens, but seeing that there is a family which is born to it as the fruit of a long historical evolution it would be an act of great political folly to establish a Presidency.

Tom Paine was the greatest of English Republicans. He preached republicanism in England, he made a substantial contribution to the establishment of the American republic in 1770, and he took part in the establishment of the French Republic in the 1790s. But Paine was always clear that a republic was a representative government elected by the people. Kings he could take or leave, depending on their behaviour.

In **The Rights Of Man** he expressed complete satisfaction with the reformed monarchy in France. When the King misbehaved he agreed with the abolition of the monarchy. But he made himself unpopular by speaking against the execution of Louis on pragmatic grounds. And he almost lost his head under Robespierre because of his refusal to participate in the mystical republicanism of 1793-4. He exerted no further influence on French affairs.

In America in the 1770s Paine's **"Common Sense"** pamphlets exercised a degree of direct political and military influence without parallel. They kept the army of independence in being at a moment when it was liable to fall apart. Paine is in the foundations of the American state; but he is not in the superstructure. He quickly became an embarrassment to the United States, and within a generation he was all but written out of its history.

It was in England, and only in England, that Paine exercised a profound and lasting influence. And his realistic conception of the republic could have been formed nowhere but England. He recognised that even in the 1790s there were substantial republican elements in the British state. And succeeding generations of Englishmen, who had assimilated **The Rights Of Man** and **The Age Of Reason,** enlarged those republican elements until they encompassed all the real powers of the state. And when that had been done only a fetishist would have made an issue of the monarchy.

Ernest Bevin was a Tom Paine republican – he concerned himself with the substance of things, used power to good effect in the working class interest, and endured the ceremonial side of things with good grace.

Michael Foot often wrote about Tom Paine, but he was a mere fetishist. He preferred his donkey jacket to the power of government.

Foot's bizarre pantheon of political heroes included Jonathan Swift, a failed Tory, and William Hazlitt, a lightweight literateur, alongside Tom Paine. If we take an image from Swift, it might be said that the function of the monarchy for a couple of hundred years has been to keep the Yahoos of the petty bourgeoisie out of politics by impressing their imaginations with spectacle and pedigree.

I have such a strong sense of the political usefulness of British royalty to substantial and competent progressive forces in the society that if I somehow became Prime Minister I might almost bring myself to have dealings with the Queen. But then again it might be that at the last moment I would be unable to overcome a sheer animal revulsion against the procedure. Fortunately this disagreement between my understanding and my reflexes is something which I am under no necessity of resolving. It is quite certain that the Queen and myself will never have occasion to meet.

There is no doubt that this attitude is self-contradictory. So is my irrepressible feeling of contempt for Labour peers, because I approve of the honours system connected with royalty. But what is life without contradictions? It is fantasy.

Debate on Housing

In the last issue (L&TUR 3), Mark Cowling accused me of misunderstanding the article on housing in L&TUR 1. He claimed that they (Cowling and Smith) "*argued that owner-occupiers tend to vote Conservative because the Conservatives tend to look after them*".

In fact, the reality, as their article acknowledged, is that "*the policies of successive governments have rendered owner-occupation a more satisfactory tenure, all round, than municipal renting*" (my emphasis). So, Labour has looked after the interests of owner-occupiers just as well as the Conservatives.

Labour's problem is that it *appears* to be anti-home ownership. But, other than the proposal to restrict tax relief to the standard rate of income tax, which threatens the interests of a small number of high-income earning owner-occupiers, Labour's treatment of owner-occupiers differs little from that of the Conservatives.

Labour *appears* to be anti-home ownership because, unlike the Conservatives, it promotes and defends the interests of council tenants *in addition* to those of owner-occupiers. This promotion and defence of council tenants is represented by the Conservatives and their friends in the media as an attack on owner-occupiers.

Mark Cowling also accused me of thinking that "*if everyone becomes an owner-occupier everyone will vote Conservative*", and suggests that I am right *if* Labour remains the party of council tenants. I do not actually believe, nor did I argue, that every owner-occupier, potential or actual, will vote Conservative. I simply followed the logic of Cowling and Smith's argument and argued that the higher the proportion of owner-occupiers the greater the potential number of Conservative voters, *if* Labour "*is seen as opposing home-ownership or council house sales*"

But as we have seen, Labour does not oppose home-ownership. Nor does it any longer oppose house sales, as statements made during and after the last general election campaign have shown. Of course it is possible to argue that the Conservatives had already won the argument over council house sales by introducing the "Right to Buy" and portraying Labour as the anti-home ownership party.

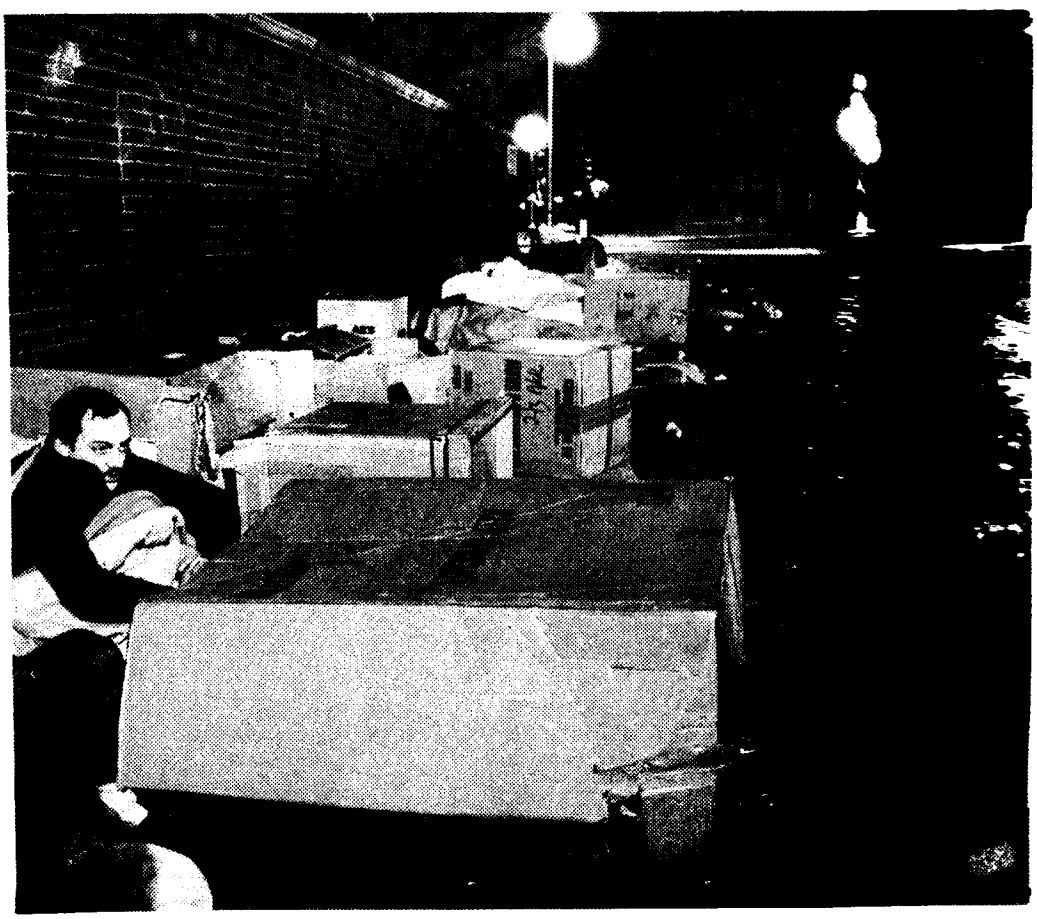
I still believe that selling council houses in areas of housing shortage is wrong, but I recognise the desire to become owner-occupiers under the current financial situation which benefits owner-occupiers more than council tenants. One way of satisfying this desire is for a local authority to give financial assistance to enable particular categories of tenants to buy on the open market, rather than purchase their council property. In this way the tenant's need is met and the local authority keeps the property.

Labour's image as a pro-council tenant, anti-home owner party, is compounded by the treatment of council tenants by the Conservatives. Labour is not anti-home owner, but the Conservatives are certainly anti-council tenant as their record since 1979 clearly shows. Conservative policies on public sector housing, particularly local authority housing, forces Labour, as the party of social justice, to defend the public sector and, therefore, appear to be favouring council tenants more than owner-occupiers. Cowling and Smith see this as a dilemma which Labour can not resolve and proposes, as a way out, universal home ownership.

I still maintain that home-ownership is neither desired by everyone nor is it possible for everyone, even if everyone is given the chance to become an owner-occupier. Under my proposal to increase real housing choice, everyone will have the chance to become an owner-occupier; but not everyone will wish, or be able, to take advantage of the opportunity.

A socialist housing policy has to recognise this and meet the needs of those who prefer rented accommodation, as well as those who wish to become owner-occupiers. This does not mean discriminating in favour of owner-occupiers as the Conservatives do. But it does mean devising policies which ensure, as far as possible, equality of treatment between tenures. Even if, as a result, high-income earning owner-occupiers have their privileges reduced.

Dick Barry



LABOURS ECONOMIC CREDIBILITY GAP

by Boyd Black

The Labour Party lost the last election because of the public's lack of faith in its capacity to govern. There were many contributory factors to this general lack of confidence, but one of the most important was the party's lack of a credible economic policy.

For the second time running it failed to persuade the public that a Keynesian expansion of the economy financed by additional taxation and massive government borrowing was in their interests. What Neil Kinnock believed to be the expansion of the enabling state was perceived by the public as the threat of the disabling state.

Because of an ideological and emotional attachment to traditional nostrums, Labour has always found it difficult to tailor its programme to attract public support. It succeeded in 1945 because the experience of an exceptional leadership in the war-time coalition enabled it to fashion a programme which matched a radical popular mood. The enabling state was put in place with broad public support.

By 1951, the popular mood had changed. The public (and the Tories) had adapted to the reality of post-war prosperity better than the Labour Party. As a result, the Tories held the political initiative throughout the 1950s on the popular basis of preserving the welfare state/mixed economy and encouraging a "property-owning democracy". It took the political bungling of Harold Macmillan in 1963 to let a newly pragmatic Harold Wilson into power in 1964.

The Crisis of Croslandism

vernment had a coherent approach to the economy, it was put forward by Anthony Crosland in *The Future Of Socialism* in 1956. The state would ensure growth through government intervention in industry and through its public expenditure policies. It would also be the instrument of bringing about a more equal society through its tax, spending and education programmes.

Crosland advocated a growth in public expenditure to improve the conditions of the worst-off. Pensions and family allowances would be increased, while the standard of public services such as health, social services, education and housing would be improved. He acknowledged that the welfare state did not actually involve a significant transfer of income from the rich to the poor – the number of rich was too small to do this. It was predominantly a restribution of income *within* the working class. An increase in social benefits would thus involve an increase in working class taxation.

This tax burden was tolerable for as long as incomes after tax were still rising – as they were up to the middle 1960s – and while, in a full-employment economy, which Crosland assumed would continue, the number of welfare recipients was fairly small. But by the 1970s, increased unemployement had increased the welfare bill and thus the burden of working class taxation, while inflation was eroding after-tax incomes.

Labour was vaguely aware of this at the time and Denis Healey negotiated a reduction of income tax with the TUC as part of the Social Contract during 1977. Even so, during the Social Contract living standards fell quite rapidly, even for highly unionised workers. This was in part an adjustment to the increase in the price of oil in 1973-1974.

Inflation was also destroying the value of savings which working class people relied on to supplement their pensions. Others, in addition to pensioners, were living on fixed incomes whose value was being rapidly eroded. Large sections of the working class found they had an interest in stable prices, however exhilarating an inflation may be to trade union militants in the short run.

This was part of the reality that Sir Keith Joseph perceived back in 1974-5. The working class had an interest in controlling inflation; the working class had an interest in controlling public expenditure and borrowing to keep the tax bill under control and to keep inflation and interest rates down.

This latter was important, not just for employment prospects but also because the workers were increasingly aspiring to own their own homes. Both Labour and the Tories had built new public sector housing estates which were a big improvement on the pre-war slums. Labour had virtually abolished the private rental sector. And now they were telling their captive council tenants that they were not allowed even to paint the properties they were shelling out rent for, nor would they be allowed to buy them. Self-improvement was only for the minority who could escape to the private owner-occupied sector, where higher interest rates meant a crippling mortgage. The enabling state threatened to become the disabling state.

At the same time the trade unions were rejecting the Bullock Report and launching the Winter of Discontent, generating a strong public feeling that if the unions didn't want to take a more responsible attitude to the economy they would have to have their wings clipped to allow an increasingly professional managerial caste to get on with managing. It was increasingly acknowledged that British industry was overmanned and uncompetitive. A fairly massive shake-out would be necessary to restore a framework for increased productivity and growth.

Thatcher's Coup

Thatcher captured a mood that something had to change in 1979 and we know what has happened since. The ground has moved from under Labour's feet. Full employment has gone for the foreseeable future. Structural change has been forced through in the economy. The trade union movement, which thought it was too good for the Bullock Report, is in disarray. It is losing membership at a rapid rate, and while it is still just about intact in what is left of its collective bargaining heartland, it is shorn of its influence at the centre. Furthermore, increasingly large swathes of an increasingly service-oriented economy are now "union free" and, in those areas where unions are gaining recognition, a new type of unionism is emerging, typified by the new agreements of the EETPU which stress single status employment, workers consultation and pendulum arbitration rather than strikes.

To an extent, the Thatcherite "revolution" has been a failure because it has not done what it set out to do. Much of the public sector remains with us. Health and social services, education, welfare and law and order remain doggedly immune to privatisation. The total burden of taxation remains high because of unemployment and the increasing costs of health and law and order. Only the very best off have had their tax burden reduced.

Even so, the living standards of those in work have risen rapidly. Many more ordinary workers are now home-owners and even shareholders. They are concerned about unemployment and about standards in the

schools and in the NHS and not totally confident about Thatcher's ability to deal with them. But they also feel alienated by Labour's alternative offering which threatens their new-found prosperity. For a majority of the population, the Tories are perceived to have brought real gains which are not to be put recklessly at risk.

Hattersley's Hole

Roy Hattersley, Labour's economic spokesman up to the election, is an unreconstructed Croslandite. Equality is his mission, taxation his instrument and the disadvantaged his target. Pensions and child benefits would rise and unemployment would be reduced by increased public expenditure which would be financed by reversing Conservative tax cuts and engaging in large additional government borrowing. Estimates of the latter varied from £18bn (**The Economist**) to £35bn (Nigel Lawson).

Economic recovery would eventually pay for this, according to Hattersley, and any threat of a sterling crisis would be warded off by exchange controls and complicated schemes for the repatriation of overseas investments. If inflation threatened – as it would – well, a word in the ears of the unions in the so-called 'National Economic Assessment' would be enough. They were not going to agree with an incomes policy, but they would definitely bargain with restraint to help Roy out of the hole he was digging for himself.

Faced with the prospect of increased inflation, higher taxation and higher interest rates and mortgages, is it any wonder that even the non-rich electorate preferred to play safe and protect its living standards and savings? Labour's economic programme had become just another minority interest, with "the disadvantaged" joining the list of the gays, the environment, the blacks and others. As Hattersley himself has put it, *"whatever the merits of their individual enthusiasms, their treatment of Labour as a vehicle for the promotion of their particular passions blurred the sharp image of socialism and increased the difficulty of portraying and popularising a coherent and consistent strand of policy"* (**Choose Freedom**, page 17). What's sauce for the goose...

What, then, can the Labour Party do to regain credibility on the economic front? First, it must demonstrate that it understands the need for fiscal responsibility. (Hattersley seems to have forgotten that Crosland advocated a budget *surplus* (**The Future Of Socialism**, pages 228, 243, 333.) This does not mean that fiscal policy cannot be used to expand the economy and the size of the public sector. An increased balanced budget is expansionary. It just means that it would acknowledge that any increase in public expenditure should be broadly balanced by increased taxation so as to control borrowing.

This will remove the inflationary threat from a programme of public sector growth while maintaining the expansionary thrust. It will keep interest rates and the exchange rate stable. It will also have the virtue of forcing the Labour movement to face up to the fact that the main constraint on public expenditure expansion is the unwillingness of the working class to pay extra taxes. It will then be seen that Hattersley's approach to equality is constrained by the Labour Party's ability to persuade ordinary taxpayers that public sector expansion is better for them than additional private consumption.

My own view is that the public will be prepared to continue to build up the public services and to fund the compassionate society. It is in their own direct interests to do so. The proviso is that it must be done within a framework of responsible budgeting which does not threaten economic and industrial instability. Labour must maintain its broad commitment to greater equality within these limits, bearing in mind that taking the lowest paid out of the tax net can make a considerable contribution to equality.

A New Theme

But the Labour movement needs a new theme if it is to broaden its appeal. Labour must make itself seen as the party which wants to take responsiblity for improving living standards. This means that it must concern itself with upgrading the quality as well as the quantity of provision in public services such as education, health and welfare, and transport.

Labour must also concern itself with taking responibility for improving the performance of the private sector by encouraging industrial democracy. Our standard of living ultimately depends on the production of goods and services, be they publicly or privately provided, and it is high time that the Labour movement took a more direct interest in the problems of management. If Labour does not take on that responsibility, it will be leaving the field to Mrs. Thatcher, whose policy of markets and managers at least has the merit of addressing the problem.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

* The Bevanite Tradition in Labour Politics (held over from this issue for lack of space)
* Labour's Constitutional changes
* Social Work Versus Socialism
* Thinking about American politics
* Why Socialists should celebrate the 300th Aniversary of the 1688 Revolution
* Notes on the News
* Trade Union Diary
* Socialists in Retrospect

The next issue of *Labour & Trade Union Review* will be on sale on January 1st 1988.

(Continued from Page 5)

some of the later westerns tried to recognise the Indian point of view)?

The "Front Line" moves on

Up until a few months ago, there was a flourishing community of drug-dealers in All Saints Road in West London, near to Ladbroke Grove and Notting Hill. These illicit entrepreneurs responded to market forces in a way Margaret Thatcher could hardly have approved of.

At first it was mostly people selling marijuana; later dealers in more dangerous drugs moved in. Also some of the entrepreneurs used devious methods to improve their profit margins and enhance their cash flow. Customers were sold liquorice as "African Black" cannabis, crushed Anadin tablets as cocaine, "Grass" that really was grass. There were also numerous disputes between the different entrepreneurs, which tended to get sorted out with knives, or even with machetes. The whole scene was getting very nasty indeed. As a traditional poem put it,

"Lord, where be All Sinners
If this be All Saints?"

Things got worse and worse. For a long time the police left All Saints along. Presumably, they preferred to keep the problem in one area where they could keep an eye on it. But as things got worse, there was increasing pressure on them to stop turning a blind eye to lawbreaking. Eventually the police moved in in force, arresting or driving out the entrepreneurs. Since most of these individuals were black, a few silly journalists raised the cry of racism and police brutality. But not many - the whole thing had clearly got totally out of hand. The local residents, black and white, were mostly glad to see these characters cleared out.

At the time of writing, the police presence is massive and highly visible. Time will tell if the change is permanent. But so far, it seems to be sticking. The Notting Hill Carnival was a critical test. There was violence, indeed - but very little of it was aimed at the police. A soft-drinks seller was murdered, a number of visitors were mugged and robbed. A few stones were thrown at the police. But nothing more.

Hess the Peacemaker

Hess's suicide caused a few ripples around the world. But only a few. Nazism is basically a dead issue. Before 1939, Nazism was a major world ideology, in conflict with both Communism and Western-style Democracy. It came quite close to smashing both, but it failed. And since Nazism was a creed where the stronger were seen as morally superior to the weaker, there was no real future for Nazism after this defeat. Neo-Nazis are a nasty but unimportant remnant.

Things could have been very different. The critical factor was Britain's resistance after the fall of France. Hitler wanted to make peace with Britain. According to his racist ideology, Anglo-Saxons and Celts should have been the natural allies of Germans. He would have been quite willing to leave Britain alone, had Britain been willing to leave him alone. He didn't want to conquer Britain, or to take away the British Empire. Moreover, the odds were now vastly against Britain. To fight on alone was unreasonable.

But Britain chose to be unreasonable. Britain in those days saw itself as a guarantor of civilized standards throughout the world. There was a great unwillingness to give up that role and let Hitler's victories become permanent.

The lack of a peace with Britain was to prove fatal for Hitler and Nazism. He controlled Western and Central Europe - but Britain cut him off from the rest of the world, and from the oil and raw materials he needed. Had Britain made peace, it is utterly unlikely that the United States would ever have entered the war. And without the support that the Soviet Union got from Britain and America, it is doubtful that the Nazi invasion of Russia could ever have been thrown back.

Clearly, Hess must have had this in mind when he flew to Britain. We may never know just what he was planning, or what secret contacts he may have had. His journey occurred before Hitler's invasion of the USSR, and it is uncertain if Hess knew that the invasion was being planned. But whether he knew or not, the advantages of a peace between Britain and Germany would have been obvious to him.

We may never know just what game Hess was playing. All we know for certain is that he failed. But there could have been a large number of politicians who were secretly ready to make peace, on reasonable terms. Britain was suffering, the future was uncertain. Peace would have meant abandoning millions to Nazi tyranny. Peace would have been a soft option, but an attractive one.

It's an odd fact that the politicians who appeased Hitler during the 1930s were very much the moderate wing of the Tory Party. Churchill was the leading figure of the Hard Right - much more substantial, and more popular, than those who were actually pro-Hitler.

The Baldwin/Chamberlain tradition gets less credit than it deserves, because it failed to deal with Hitler. But on other matters, their instincts were certainly sound. They tried to grant Dominion status to India - and Churchill played a large part in preventing this. From the viewpoint of the 1980s, we may see a very big difference between appeasing Adolf Hitler and appeasing Mahatma Gandhi. But at the time, it was not so obvious.

Hess must have hoped that there were appeasers and moderates with whom he could talk, given the setbacks Britain had suffered. We don't know quite whom he may have had in mind, nor if he had any solid basis for believing it. But if there *had* been a large body of politicians ready to do such a deal, there is good reason to think that the matter would have been hushed up. That's the way the British ruling class works. Such men would not have been Quislings or traitors; simply honest men who misjudged the situation.

(It has even been suggested that Rab Butler might have been one of this group. It seems bizarre - his politics were miles away from Nazism. But then so were Chamberlain's. And it is rather strange that he kept on being passed over for Leader of the Tory party.)

We'll be lucky ever to know the truth. Hess is dead, and any secrets he had have died with him.

Time Out of Mind

Time Out has been trying to start a campaign against Winston Silcott' s conviction for the murder of PC Blakelock. They ran a few pages on the subject in their August 12-19 issue.

The campaign itself is silly, and utterly unlikely to succeed. But some of the things they say are of interest. They give a description of the killing of Anthony Smith. (Silcott was charged with this killing, but not yet convicted, at the time of the Broadwater Farm riot. According to Time Out, this was the culmination of a long-running feud, that began when a friend of Silcott was cheated over the sale of a stolen cheque book. There were a series of fights, culminating in the killing of Smith.

It also seems that Silcott had stood trial for murder once before, for allegedly killing a musician-cum- hospital worker called Leonard McIntosh. According to **Time Out** *"This gave a double lift to his reputation. To some of the young ones he became the man 'who killed and got off the case'. To the police, for whom he always reserved his most fearsome profile, he became an object of fear and mistrust."*

Time Out seems to see nothing odd about the fact that a man acquitted of murder is widely assumed to have done it, whereas the same man once convicted of murder gets a campaign to proclaimhis innocence.

SURREAL-POLITIQUE

Harold Wilson and the collapse of Labour Reformism

by Michael Alexander

Of all the periods when Labour has been in power in Britain, only the 1945 government has actually done what the Labour Party was intended to do. The others have all fallen short. And the worst and least excusable failure was that of the first Wilson government

In 1964, when Wilson was first elected, the country was in a mood for radical change. People were tired of the Tories, and convinced that something new and different was needed.

The need was there - and Labour failed to meet it. The fact is, the first Wilson government failed to do *anything* of substance during the years it held power. (Nor, for that matter, did the second Wilson government of 1974-76).

Wilson viewed the Labour Party as being "the natural party of government". That is to say, it should sit on top of a society that was content just to drift along. From this point of view, it really didn't matter that Labour had done nothing that the Liberals or the Tories might not have done.

Labour seemed to have the widest basis for support. It was tied to the Trade Unions, which seemed to have emerged as the most powerful vested interests in the society. Nominally, it would remain committed to socialism. But its ideology would be only a moral facade behind which cynical men of the world manipulated the sources of power.

Then came Thatcher.

Thatcher showed how superficial the "men of the world" really were. People like Wilson viewed the existing balance of power as something majestic and god-given. They might toy with ideas of changing this or that. But they would back away as soon as the conflict became serious. Thatcher has very seldom backed down on anything she has set her mind to do. And she has shown just how much a determined Prime Minister can achieve.

Thatcher's success is no accident. It stems from her whole make-up. Thatcher has serious beliefs, and is in politics to carry them through. She can bide her time - she waited several years before risking a conflict with the miners. But when the time came, she was willing to carry on till the bitter end.

Labour was already heading for victory when Wilson took over as leader. If someone else had been in charge - someone with Thatcher's determination to get things done - the history of the past decades might have been very different.

The need for change

From the sixties right through to the early eighties, an increasing number of people in Britain knew that things could not go on as they were. People were ready for a change, and their first thought was to look to the Left for a new way forward.

Wilson thought he knew better. His first priority, during the mid-1960s, was to keep up the value of the pound. He wasted time trying to salvage the old system of fixed exchange rates, and to keep the pound's exchange rate higher than the actual strength of the economy warrented. He tried to defend the orthodoxy of a passing phase of capitalism. And of course he failed. In the long run, devaluation could not be avoided.

There were deeper reasons for Labour's failure under Wilson. There was much talk of the "white heat of the technological revolution", but in fact it was an old idea of the economy that predominated. Socialism was seen as identical with the creation of huge monopolistic industries. Leyland, formerly British Leyland and now Austin Rover, was a prime example of the sort of hopeless monster that was produced.

In point of fact, a very good and successful industry was sacrificed for Leyland's sake. The old sort of London bus - the Routemaster, the sort that has a single open entrance/exit at the back - had been developed over a number of years to meet London's needs. A real social need was being met, and met quite well.

But the Labour Government decided that there should be a single type of bus produced for the whole country, and that Leyland should produce it. The company that produced London

Labour activists had high hopes of Wilson, but he let them down. Many activists became disorientated by this.

buses was closed down. Leyland produced their own bus - which was quite unsuited to London conditions, with frequent stops and starts and crawls in slow traffic. It was some time before a new variety that was fit for London was produced. And a lot of the old style buses are still running. And the public are so disillusioned after years of troubles that there is no serious resistance to the idea of privatisation. People reckon that privatised buses couldn't be any worse, though this remains to be seen.

Wilson on Wilson

Wilson has been good enough to tell us a great deal about himself. He has published accounts of both his periods as Prime Minister, and also a set of memoirs dealing with the time before he became Prime Minister.

The remarkable thing about all these works is the utterly superficial nature of Wilson's mind. He was very good at making a fine impression on the public, and quite good at administration. What is utterly absent is any larger vision, either of what the world is or of what the world should be.

Wilson would phrasemonger about "*building a new Britain*" or about "*the white heat of the technological revolution*". But these were only phrases. They didn't lead to anything in particular. And Wilson seemed to be content with the shadow of events; the immediate media impact and the fine schemes that he could later write up in his memoirs to show what a wise far-sighted person he was.

The Background

Wilson's background, as he tells us, was from a family of Yorkshire Congregationalists. His father had various ups and downs - being at one time a Departmental Manager, but also having periods of unemployment. On his mother's side, he had various relatives who were railway workers.

Wilson's progress came through academic success. He went to Oxford University and did very well there. While there, he joined the Liberals. He excuses himself for this by saying that he was put off the Labour Club by "*Marxist public school products*". It's a pretty feeble excuse, but somehow typical of the man.

Wilson also says "*I have bever read Marx - and still have not. It was that wacking great footnote on the second page which turned off any interest I might have sustained.*" Of course Wilson was quite capable of digesting and remembering vast masses of dull economic statistics, when this was necessary in order to further his career. But he would have seen no personal advantage to be gained from reading Marx, and so did not bother.

Wilson goes on to say "*This did not prevent me, when I had entered public life, on visits to the Soviet Union for trade negotiations, quoting yards of Marx at them which I had made up for the occasion. No one protested or sought to correct my version, no doubt considering it was all the fault of the translation*". (Harold Wilson, **Memoirs. The Making of a Prime Minister 1916-64.** Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1986. Page 35.)

I very much doubt if anyone was fooled. The Russians, perhaps, were being polite. Or perhaps they decided that this was a vain lightweight person who could be suitably flattered and made use of.

Wilson's real breakthrough was when he got a job as research assistant to Beveridge. He has a few interesting things to say about Beveridge. Apparently, Beveridge was put on to Social Services in order to keep him quiet. The man was a genius at understanding administrative structures. But as a practical administrator he was a disaster, according to Wilson, always upsetting people and making enemies by his rudeness.

WIlson managed to get involved in some moderately important decision-making during the war, and to get close to some important people. Here again, his comments are mostly very superficial. The most consequential thing he says about Churchill is an account of how Churchill re-painted a faded mouse on a Rubens painting!

Wilson also gives an account of an arbitration over miner's pay. The miners had demanded a four shilling increase. Lord Greene,the man in charge of the matter, suggested splitting the difference and giving them two shillings. According to Wilson "*The wage award was anything but a scientific proceeding. It ought to look as if we had reasons for our recommendation. What about 2/6d? The phrase 'Greene half-crown' would catch on, as in fact it did....*". (Ibid, p69-70)

"*It ought to look as if we had reasons for our recommendation.*" That sums up the whole Wilson approach to politics.

Towards Power

Wilson had been influenced towards Labour by GDH Cole, or so he tells us. One might suspect that the continuing decline of the Liberals and rise of Labour also played a part. In any case, Wilson managed to get selected as a Labour candidate. He tried and failed to get selected for Peterborough, but then managed to get chosen for Ormskirk in Lancashire. In the election he was aided by a split between the Tories and an eccentric independent who had gained control of the more or less defunct "National Labour" organisation in the constituency.

Having had experience in Whitehall, and given the general lack of experience of the new Labour intake in 1945, Wilson got a government post at once, as Parliamentry Secretary at the Ministry of Works. Doing quite well, he went on to become President of the Board of Trade in 1947 - becoming "the youngest Privy Councillor in history".

Somehow or other, Wilson became attached to Nye Bevan's wing of the Labour Party. It's not at all clear how or why this happened. They were not particularly similar in temperament. Indeed, Bevan said of Wilson "*All bloody facts. No bloody vision*" (Ibid, p178).

Wilson quotes this as a sort of conversational tit-bit, and seems to be quite unperturbed by the judgement that had been passed on him. Presumably, a man with no vision does not view his deficiency as a deficiency. Which does nothing to explain why he became a Bevanite.

In any event, when Nye Bevan resigned from the Labour government on the issues of rearmament and health service charges, Wilson was one of those who resigned with him. For a time, he followed him, through the deepening split with Gaitskell. (Incidentally, Wilson says that Ernest Bevin was trying to heal the split between Bevan and Gaitskell before he died, and might have succeeded had he lived longer.)

Wilson's critical move came in 1954, with Labour out of power. Bevan had been elected to the Shadow Cabinet, but had chosen to resign. This meant, under Labour party rules, that Wilson would automatically be co-opted into the Shadow Cabinet. He had had the highest number of votes of those candidates who had not been elected.

Wilson had a simple choice between backing Bevan, whoes principles he had seemed to support, or else advancing his own career. He chose to advance his own career, and did very well by it. Doing well in the shadow cabinet, he was well placed to succeed when Gaitskell died. Labour's election victory then gave him the Prime Ministership. But he had no idea what to do with such power, and in fact didn't do much.

The aftermath

Labour today is still paying the price of Wilson's failure. In the 1960s, the Labour Left were content to stay in their place. They dreamed of utopia, but had a realistic hope that Labour would produce substantial reforms, as happened in 1945. But nothing substantial was done. It was at this point that a lot of people on the left decided that reformism was played out, and that they might as well have a go at realising their utopias. Why be moderate and pragmatic, when the result might be another bout of Wilsonism? Labour has not yet resolved the issue, and is doomed unless it can resolve it.

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Taxing Problems for Labour

Is there an unholy alliance developing between the Government and the Labour Left on the poll tax issue? There is certainly no evidence that anything like the opposition to rate capping is being planned as regards the poll tax. Opposition there will be, but it looks as if there will be no real heart in it.

The reason is not hard to find. The poll tax will raise more money for local councils and the high spenders judge that they will be able to raise it because they will feel - and they will certainly make the tax payers feel - that they have the support of the government in implementing this tax. The Tories will criticise high poll tax rates but they will have to defend the principle if they have brought in the Act.

The tax is going to be unpopular, and rightly so. But how is public opposition going to express iself in the face of this unholy alliance? That is anybody's guess. Opposition there is going to be and has to be, because this type of taxation is alien to all the traditions of Anglo-Saxon liberties. It involves everyone being registered and accountable to officialdom if they are over 18 and alive.

All other forms of registration, for income tax, for driving licences, etc, are optional (no one *has* to drive a car), and the present rating system, whatever its faults, does not tax people as people. The fact that the poll tax will be inegalitarian and regressive is quite obvious and that in itself should be quite enough to put the Left in total opposition to it.

But its attack on libertarian rights should be more important. At the moment, Labour is anxious to show how compatible individualism is with socialism and thereby steal some of Mrs Thatcher's clothes. This is extremely difficult and a quite pointless exercise at the theoretical level. Thepoll tax is an issue where all these theories will be put to the test and it will be ironic if Labour lets the Great Libertarian herself get away with such an anti-libertarian Act.

But are Labour well equipped to succeed? Could they defend Anglo-Saxon liberties as opposed to continental regimentation without appearing 'racist'? Can they remain good socialists and still look on the increasing power of the state as a necessary evil? It is enough merely to pose these questions to show the problems that Labour would have in trying to mount a real opposition to the poll tax.

But if Labour do not put up a decent opposition, there are elements in the Tory party who can and will. We shall then have the spectacle of Labour being excluded, or rather excluding itself, from a central issue. And that could well be the pattern of British politics on more and more issues.

Jack Lane

Rape - a pertinent question

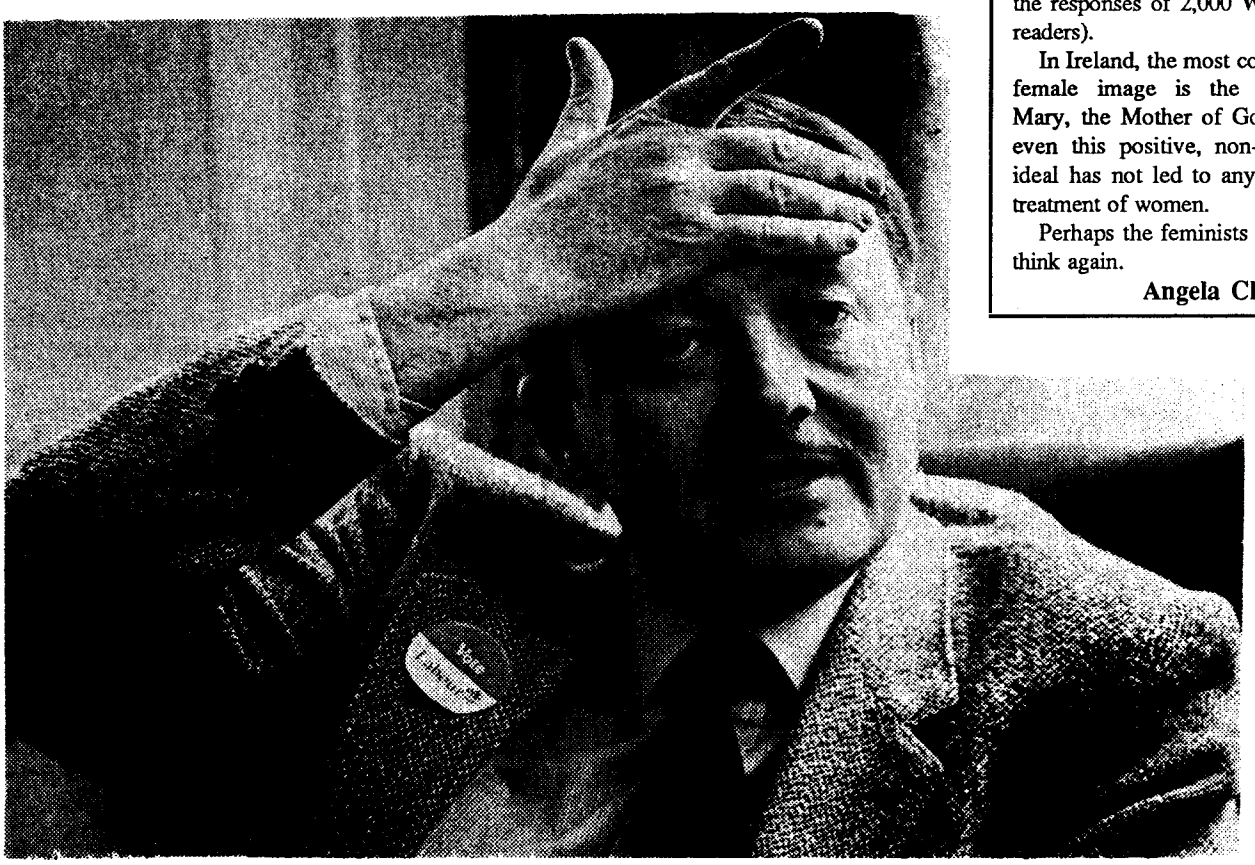
Feminists and Catholic Action combine to campaign against "pornography" in Britain on the basis that it leads to rape, child sex abuse and a generally poor attitude to women. They lump together under "pornography" both sexual material of an ordinary hetero-sexual nature as well as materials more properly dealt with under the heading of violence. They are particularly vehement about pictures of partly-clothed women in popular newspapers. All this erotic pornography is supposed to have dire social consequences.

How, then, do they account for the existence of rape and child sex abuse in Ireland, where a Censorship board carefully bans all erotica from the country? It has recently even banned sex-manuals such as **The Joy Of Sex,** and sex-reports, such as **The Woman Book Of Love And Sex** (issued by **Woman** magazine in Britain: a report summarising the responses of 2,000 **Woman** readers).

In Ireland, the most common female image is the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, but even this positive, non-sexual ideal has not led to any better treatment of women.

Perhaps the feminists should think again.

Angela Clifford



De Valera's Straitjacket !

This is the fiftieth anniversary year of the Constitution of Eire, which de Valera produced in 1937 to sum up the achievements of the national revolution to date and to put into law the social philosophy of the Catholic nation. Even though the Catholic nature of the Constitution has recently been confirmed by the Abortion referendum of 1983 and the Divorce referendum of 1986, a dissatisfaction with the Constitution has become evident amongst some sectors of society.

In a country without a written Constitution it is hard to appreciate just how different is a society with a written Constitution enforced by the Courts. In the United Kingdom a majority of the people's representatives can make any law they wish – and the society will tolerate. There are no formal constraints. Law-making is subject only to the pressures exerted by the society. For the most part, government takes account of society's wishes when drafting a law. And where a law transgresses the limits of social acceptability, it is either brought down by mass civil disobedience, or repealed by the next government. Frequent elections provide a constant reminder of the penalties of flouting popular wishes.

People with political reflexes engendered by this state of affairs find it difficult to understand the lack of parliamentary sovereignty in a place like Ireland, where the Dail may not legislate, or the Taoiseach govern, in contradiction to the Constitution. It is the Courts that decide which legislation is permissible. Their decisions have the effect of retro-active legislation. Thus when the Supreme Court found that the Adoption Board, established by the government in 1952, was an illegal body because they considered that the Board had been given judicial functions, all the adoptions sanctioned between 1952 and 1979 were made illegal. To prevent chaos a referendum had to be rushed through, legitimising the Adoption Board, and the adoption orders it had made.

Not only is law-making and government constrained by the Constitution – even individual behaviour is subject to it. All individual rights in the society are subject to the Constitution and its interpretation by the Courts. This allows an interference with individual rights well beyond anything that would be contemplated in a British court of law. In Britain, it is the Parliament which looks after individual rights. It legalised homosexuality and abortion, for instance. In Ireland, such matters are left to the Courts, and the dozen, elderly men who compose their upper echelons.

In making their decisions the judges rely on the Constitution, in which it is made clear that Catholic philosophy and morality must guide their decisions.

The Constitution begins and ends with a prayer. It opens: *"In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred..."*

The section entitled *Personal Rights* mentions the main liberties common in Britain as being available to Irish citizens, but makes all of them subject to a morality clause: *"The State guarantees liberty for the exercise of the following rights, subject to public order and morality"* (6.1).

In addition, liberty of expression is made subject to a specific limitation that it *"shall not be used to undermine public order or morality or the authority of the State"*. Furthermore, it makes punishable the utterance of *"blasphemous, seditious or indecent matter"*.

The point about all this is that it is expected of the judiciary that they will interpret the Constitution to enforce Catholic standards of social behaviour, even where no laws exist on a particular matter. This occurred recently over the SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) Case against the Women's Clinics of Dublin (run on a voluntary basis). Abortion was already illegal in 1983, but a referendum on the matter was also held to put the matter into the Constitution, lest the Courts sanction a doctor's intervention to save the life of the mother. The Dublin Women's Clinics continued to give counselling and advice on abortion and make references to British clinics. SPUC brought its case against this activity, even though there were no abortions actually carried out in Ireland. It was opposed to information and advice on abortion being made available. There was no law on the matter: the Dail had not passed any legislation for or against.

In Britain, no legal action would have been possible. A pressure group such as SPUC must lobby Parliament for law to be made. The matter is thus thoroughly aired by the arguments of various pressure groups and discussions in constituencies, where MPs are subject to pressures. There is then a thorough debate in Parliament by two Houses before a decision is made one way or the other. A lengthy democratic process is invoked when individual rights are to be extended or abrogated.

In Ireland, a single judge, sitting in the High Court, interpreting the Constitution, was sufficient to stop the Dublin Clinics giving advice to desperate women. SPUC won its constitutional challenge.

Many people both in Ireland and Britain who defend judicial interference with individual rights either in a fully-fledged Constitution or a Bill Of Rights just do not realise what scope for arbitrary action they are giving to the judicial elite.

It is not surprising that few progressives are celebrating 50 years of the Eire Constitution.

Angela Clifford