Labour & Trade Union Review

July-August 1989 No.12

Price £1 (IR£1.20)

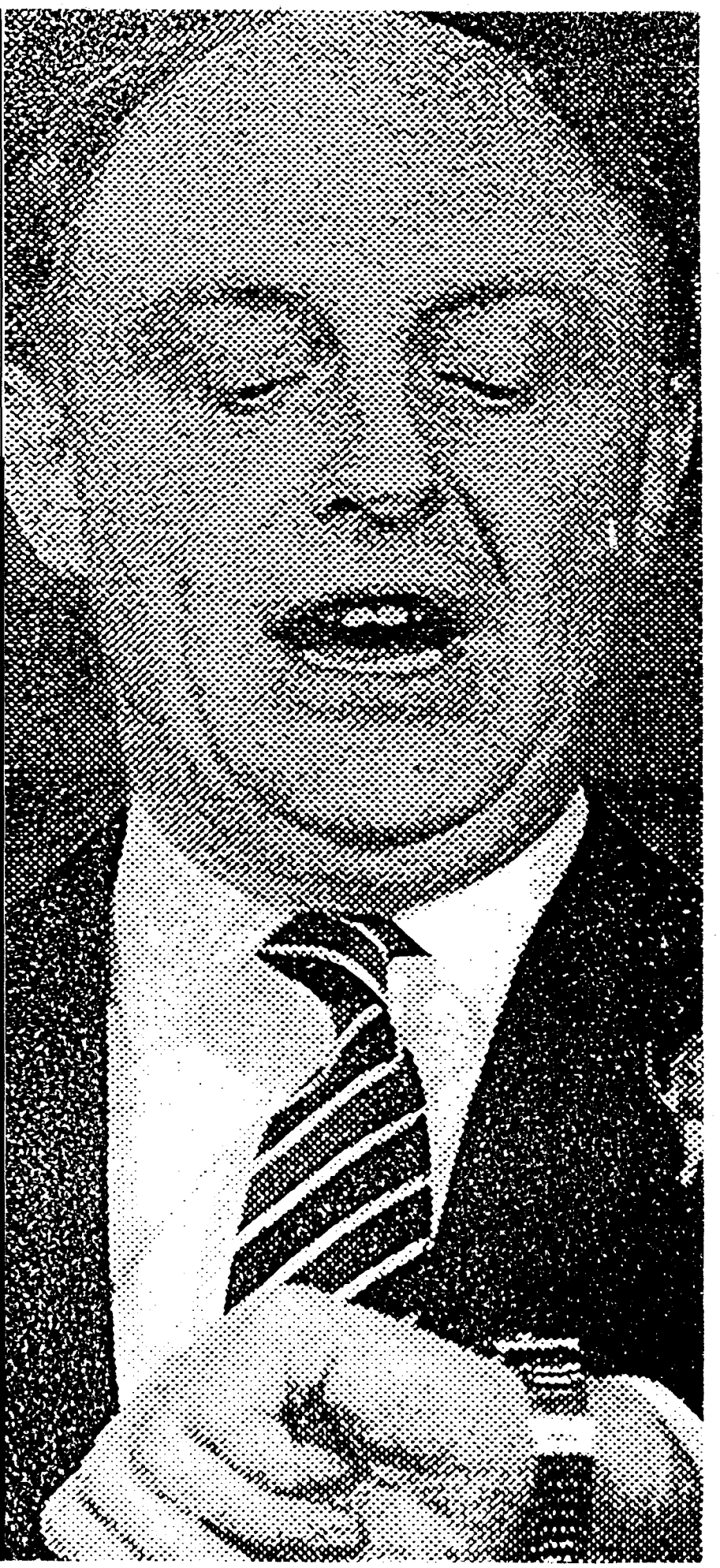
COUNTDOWN?

LABOUR'S BOMB

1789
Art and Life
On Khomeini
Living with the bomb
Mao and Liberty
Queen Maggie

plus

L&TUR in conference
Notes on the News
Trade Union Diary



Can Labour keep the initiative ?

Labour's encouraging success in the European elections has demonstrated how fragile Thatcherism's hold on the British electorate has become now that the situation is no longer complicated by plausible centre parties or by the more ludicrous of Labour's own historic liabilities. What price the prophets of Labour's irremediable decline now? Against the tidal wave of fashionable punditry which has flooded the media over the last two years, we have consistently argued that the transformation wrought by Thatcherism in the British social and political landscape has been far more superficial than most commentators - and Labour's own leadership - have supposed and that, given the right politics, Labour would certainly recover. The European election results in Britain have clearly vindicated our view.

Labour's gains have been due not only to the self-evident crisis of Thatcher's economic strategy - a crisis we have pointed out and analysed in previous issues - but also to Neil Kinnock's success in getting the party to appear reasonable to the electorate. So far has it been from the truth that Labour was irrevocably finished as a contender for government office, that it has merely required the party at last to make vaguely reassuring noises on defence and to sound half-way positive about Europe for a substantial electoral recovery to become possible.

The moral should be clear. If there are two issues on which the Labour Left has made it its business to sabotage Labour's credibility and prospects over the last decade, they have been defence and Europe. The Left has been mindlessly irresponsible on the one and mindlessly insular and negative on the other. Kinnock deserves credit for living down part of his own political past and the ideological legacy of his mentor Michael Foot in acting to free Labour from these encumbrances (although on Europe Thatcher's stance and the resulting conflict within the Conservative Party have been a gift it would have taken genius to squander). The fact that Labour has immediately begun to benefit dramatically in electoral terms as soon as it is no longer identified with these ridiculous positions proves how much Labour has only itself to blame for the last ten years in the wilderness, and how right we have been to insist that Thatcherism has been in power by default of the Labour movement.

And the fact that Thatcher's rhetoric about letting in socialism by the backdoor through Europe has evidently cut no ice whatever with the British electorate also proves that all the media obituaries of socialism since 1987 have been premature. The British public will certainly support a socialism which is intelligent, reasonable and forward-looking as well as irreproachably democratic. The point is that Labour's socialism since 1979 has been *none* of these things. Can it now develop in this direction, rather than merely tail-end a Thatcherite fashion which is visibly obsolete?

"Labour needs to pre-empt the revival of one-nation Toryism by seizing and keeping the initiative on the main policy issues, notably defence, Europe and the economy."

Kinnock's achievement has been to enable Labour to benefit in the short term from the acute disarray into which Thatcherism in crisis has plunged the Conservative Party. But Labour will not benefit from this indefinitely. Thatcher's Conservative critics will also benefit from the fact that her policies have at last become a palpable electoral liability as well as a practical failure in their own terms. The race for the succession is now on: will it be won by a revived Labour Party or by a revived Toryism? The genuine Tories in the Conservative Party could still dump Thatcher and free their party from its association with her bankrupt dogmatism in time to win the next election. Labour must forestall such a development by actively exploiting the current disarray within the Conservative Party instead of passively enjoying the temporary electoral fruits of this disarray when they fall into its lap.

To do this, Labour needs to pre-empt the revival of one-nation Toryism under Heseltine & Co. by seizing (and thereafter keeping) the initiative on the main policy issues, notably defence, Europe and the economy. On defence, we publish in this issue an article by Jack Lane which identifies the next steps which Neil Kinnock needs to take. On Europe, Labour now needs to develop its advantage by putting much more substance into its new, positive and progressive, orientation. Its lead over the Conservatives on this question is due more to the combined efforts of Jacques Delors, Margaret Thatcher and Edward Heath than to its own initiatives in policy. While not hesitating to identify itself with the basic philosophy of the Social Charter, Labour should be wary of merely tail-ending it or embracing it unconditionally. On the contrary, Labour needs to make an *active* input into the debates and discussions that will be taking place in Europe on the questions which the Charter addresses (and thereby consolidate its new-found credentials as the positive and purposeful Europeans in British politics, able and willing to engage with its counterparts on the continent). But, crucially, it also needs to adapt the proposals and ideas contained in the Charter to the particular realities of Britain today and to develop arguments in support of these proposals which are firmly grounded in the appreciation of British circumstances. Given the extent to which the Charter embodies the philosophy of productive socialism, and is based in political reality on Germany's demonstration of the positive relationship between progressive industrial relations and productivity growth, Labour can only make a proper go of this by coming to terms with its own failure to develop this same perspective in the 1970s. It now has a great opportunity to make amends for that failure. It is unlikely to get another chance to do so.

More generally, as Jack Lane points out in this issue, the much vaunted product of Labour's Policy Review cannot be taken seriously by the electorate if it is not taken seriously by Labour's own leadership, if, that is to say, Kinnock and his colleagues persist in their astonishing refusal to put forward serious and specific proposals on the major economic policy questions on which Thatcher's policies are visibly coming unstuck. We can depend on Heseltine & Co. to produce worked-out policies on these matters, should they ever get themselves in a position to advance them on their party's behalf. This is the danger which Kinnock and his colleagues must pre-empt if Labour is to remain on course.

Labour's bomb

by Jack Lane

Kinnock deserves praise for his abandonment of unilateralism and his attempt to get the Labour Party to drop it as well. It raises the possibility that the party will be taken seriously again by the electorate. It is to be hoped that a fudge will not be attempted on the issue. This would undoubtedly be very tempting for Kinnock as there is a legitimate place for fudging and ambiguity on nuclear weapons and their possible use - it is after all an essential ingredient in making them useful as a deterrent.

However, there have to be certainties in order for there to be purposeful ambiguity and these could be established by dropping notions about it being possible to eliminate all nuclear weapons by the year 2000 and by accepting that weapons have to be modernised if they are to have any credibility. It is also necessary to accept that they do not exist only for the purpose of getting rid of them as quickly as possible at the first opportunity and that this can be called 'bargaining' and 'negotiating'.

Every shop steward knows that an elementary law of serious negotiating is not to show your hand before you even start negotiating. It would also be useful and sobering for Kinnock to point out that nice Mr Gorbachev will not be around for ever and that he might well see Russia's interests served by a different approach in the future.

All Russian leaders from Lenin onwards have been wonderfully consistent *and* flexible in promoting the interests of the Soviet Union at all times. Gorbachev has reacted to the new environment that culminated in the Star Wars programme in the US and an unwinnable war in Afghanistan.

It would do Kinnock no harm to acknowledge that this is what has brought about a change of heart in the Kremlin. Otherwise the impression can be given that Mikhail is motivated by some sudden heartfelt desire for bourgeois democracy and that he is now immune to nearly 80 years of Leninist pronouncements on the issue.

What's just happened in China proves that Communist regimes can change their policies overnight. It's not like the Labour Party; policies can switch completely in a way that would not be possible in a parliamentary system, or even for a Latin American junta. No one was expecting nice moderate Mr Deng to invade his own capital city and carry out a massacre of the ordinary citizens: and yet it happened. Communist regimes can switch their policies, just as neatly as a well-trained orchestra can switch from playing Mozart to playing Wagner. Let Kinnock take note.

The Kremlin has produced tons of jargon and gobbledegook to suit any current policy which is always credited with being the summation of human wisdom. Each time, the future of the world depends on the world accepting it as such. Kinnock more than most politicians needs to prove that he can distinguish between rhetoric and reality. And he could begin by doing so in the case of the Kremlin.

Above all *he must cease giving the impression that he has changed his position purely for the sake of winning the next election.* In so far as he fails to do so he concedes the moral high ground to the unilateralists, who at least are right in considering the issue as more important than the election. Some of the shadow Cabinet give the distinct impression that they would say or do anything for the sake of electoral success. Kaufman seems on the point of going anoerexic if he is denied a taste of office for much longer. People like him need office like Dracula needs blood, or like a junkie needs a fix. None of these are pretty sights.

Labour and NATO

In dropping unilateralism Kinnock is joining the mainstream of the Labour

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

Volume One Number 12
July-August 1989

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Party in historical as well as purely electoral terms. And he need look no further in order to justify and defend his position. The British nuclear bomb is in a very real sense a *Labour* bomb, no matter how much that might horrify Tony Benn & Co. It was first constructed by the 1945 Labour government. So too was NATO. And this was the same Labour government that built the NHS and the Welfare State. The present day left must regard that government as a bunch of schizophrenics in having done these things, as they are self contradictory in terms of the Bennite definition of socialism.

But the socialists who actually ran the Labour Party back in the 1940s regarded these things as complementary because they were building a socialism that was unique and appropriate and they sensed that it might well need defending even against other brands of socialism.

They were also in a very real sense defending a helpless Western Europe against Soviet designs and American indifference. Morally speaking, therefore, the British Labour bomb has a very honourable origin and no British government since has made better use of it. (Or better non-use of it, rather. The fact that it existed meant that neither it nor any other weapons needed to be used.)

Kinnock can best secure his position by relying on the Labour movement's own history. There is a rich experience to draw on from the defeat of pacifism in the 1930s right through to the development of his own hero, Bevan, in the 1950s. And if he does not make use of this history it will be misused against him. Kinnock could make history for himself by preventing unilateralism from ever again taking over the party, as it has twice before.

Livingstone's contribution

One particular argument on defence that is likely to get a lot of support on the left is that being developed by Livingstone, to the effect that Labour will not be able to have a proper economic policy of adequate investment for industry because of the cost of a nuclear armaments programme. Labour, the argument goes, will therefore either not win the election or discredit itself very quickly afterwards.

This is a very seductive argument, and therefore very typical of Livingstone. It also highlights a real weakness in the Labour programme - the lack of a credible economic policy. This weakness was dramatised by Kinnock losing his temper recently when pressed by an interviewer on his alternative economic policy. It really was extraordinary that the party leader should behave like this a few weeks after the party had the results of a two year review of its policies. What was the point of the Policy Review if the party leader argues that it is not his job to provide an alternative policy?

Livingstone's policy is to pour the millions now spent on defence into industry. This shows a very touching faith, for a socialist, in the people who run British industry. This is essentially what the Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s did. And was it a success?

Consider what these same people have got from Thatcher. They have been 'liberated' from trade union power, given massive tax handouts, and have been operating in a sea of credit for the past few years which has the same effect as a huge expansion of the money supply.

Has the economy progressed in line with all this investment, incentives and encouragement? Not at all. We are back to where we were with an economy that still operates on a stop go basis, except that stops are now recessions and gos are high inflation. And actual production is no higher than a decade ago.

The fact is that an economy depends on the people *running* the economy and the relationships between them. The relations of production have not changed within British industry. And while that remains the case "investment" is a plausible way of pouring money down the drain.

Labour's policy should concentrate on these relationships within industry. And it would soon become obvious that Labour's natural constituency in industry, the workforce, have all the power for good or ill. But they do not have a corresponding responsibility. That remains with a class that needs unlimited incentives to maintain a commitment to production. That is why we will have stop-go until Labour offers a way out of the cycle by making the producers responsible for production. That is the only way to a stable and real growth in production. And it transcends all arguments on investment as well as arguments on nationalisation and privatisation.

There is no doubt Livingstone realises that a pure unilateralist approach has no hope of success, and he has developed his economic argument in a totally spurious way. However it gives the Labour leadership an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone - to develop its case against unilateralism and to develop the basis for a real alternative economic policy that is radical and realistic, an alternative to bankrupt Thatcherism as well as to the exhausted state socialism of yesteryear.

Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

Euro-blues

A spectre is haunting Europe. Her name is Mrs Thatcher. Despite being the most senior leader in the EEC, and potentially the most influential, she has insisted on fanning the dying embers of anti-EEC Little England nationalism. Labour has more or less thrown out such garbage; Thatcher insists on taking it in.

For the most part, Thatcher has defended Britain from things that are very much in the interests of British people. She insists on our sovereign right to have fouler water, filthier car exhausts and vaguer cigarette health warnings than the rest of the EEC would wish us to have.

Tony Benn's Little Englander socialism made a certain amount of sense. We could have had a collectivist autarkic Britain, provided everyone had been willing to accept a much lower standard of living. But Thatcher wants Global Capitalism and Little England at one and the same time, which is not rational. No wonder the electorate has just given her her first ever defeat in a national election.

Living on the plastic

Kinnock was quite right to hammer Thatcher and Lawson on the state of the economy. He should have put more emphasis on Credit Controls: high

interest rates hit *everyone*, while the big spenders who run up debts buying imported luxuries on credit just aren't thinking about what it will cost them in the *long* term. But he was right to hammer them, and it was damned silly of Thatcher to accuse him of ignorance.

Ignorant people might think that having higher inflation and higher interest rates than other Western Capitalist economies was a pretty poor show. They might even think that raising interest rates was as likely to stoke up inflation as to cool it down. But wise Tories know that it is the economic indicators - M0, or M3, or M25 or whatever - that really matters. Just as medieval theologians knew that it was vital to determine whether the number of angels who could dance on the head of a pin was finite or infinite!

Except that the wisdom of 10 Downing Street doesn't seem to be quite the same as the wisdom of 11 Downing Street. For many months now, we have had a series of conflicts and reconciliations between Lawson and Thatcher. It reminds one of Den and Angie Watts from **EastEnders** - and remember what happened to them!

Going to the dogs

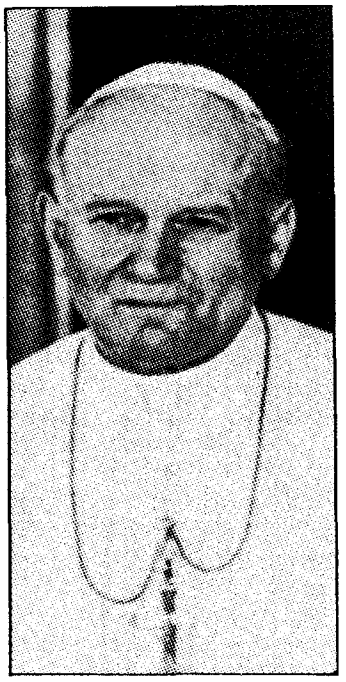
Savage men tamed savage dogs, back in the Stone Age. They began as hunting beasts who teamed up with humans, and until the last few centuries they were mostly still bred to be hunters. Even the poodle started off that way; only the dictates of fashion shrunk it and turned it into a lapdog. And Corgis were bred to herd cattle.

Dogs are not really at home in cities. Dogs do not have to hunt - they can be happy with substitutes like herding, or even going for walks and retrieving sticks. But to keep a dog in a human-sized dwelling is as cruel as keeping a human in a room the size of a telephone box. It takes a lot of work for a city dweller to keep a dog properly. (Cats are a better option. The city really is a 'concrete jungle' to them, and they like it well enough.)

Much more worrying is the habit of a small number of people breeding and keeping extremely savage dogs; canine psychopaths that no responsible breeder would wish for. Most breeders and owners are responsible - but there is no way to control the small number who are not.

This government blundered when it scrapped dog licences. True, they cost more to collect than they raised. But the right answer would have been to increase them to some more reasonable figure like £50. The cost of keeping a dog, even keeping it badly, is very much greater.

Now a spate of attacks by dangerous dogs has led to calls for new controls. And the government is resisting: the Tory sheep keep on bleating 'Private Good, Public Bad' no matter what happens. The limited measures that are being introduced will not be enough.



His Holiness the Anti-Christ

I have no fondness for Free Presbyterians. But their view of the Pope as Anti-Christ is not some private eccentricity. It is basic Protestant theology, that goes all the way back to Martin Luther.

Most non-Catholic Christians would accept that the Pope has valid authority *as Bishop of Rome*, and as the Bishop of the most important Christian see. But some time during the chaos after the bust-up of the Roman Empire, the Bishops of Rome started claiming larger and larger authority. By medieval times, they claimed more or less absolute authority over all members of the Church. And when Luther realised that this larger claim had no solid basis at all, he concluded that the Papacy was an anti-Christian institution. This had nothing to do with the merits or demerits of any individual Pope. To claim to speak for God when in fact you do not is obviously wrong.

But surely, that's all over now, in the world after Vatican II? You get that impression - but in fact Vatican II was only possible because Pope John wanted it, and papal authority remains intact.

Myself, I think that not one of the Christian Churches is anything like what the first Christians intended. But one should not sneer at Free Presbyterians for being true to their traditions.

Are you white or Irish?

In the first issue of **L&TUR**, Brendan Clifford described official 'anti-racism' as a peculiar sort of racism that had got a grip on the minds of the fashionable middle-class left. A survey in the May issue of Hackney Council's newspaper, the **Hackney Herald**, shows how right he was.

Hackney citizens are asked "*Which of these descriptions fits you best? African, Caribbean, Black UK, Asian, Greek/Cypriot, Turkish/Cypriot, Orthodox Jewish, Irish, White, Other*".

What lunatics drew up this list? It makes no sense. In so far as "white" is a meaningful category, it would definitely include Cypriots, Irish and all European Jews. Also, why distinguish *Orthodox* Jews. Is Hackney Council implying that secular Jews, or members of the Liberal or Reformed synagogues aren't proper Jews? Do only the restrictive and conservative Orthodox sects count? And why are English, Welsh and Scottish (not all of whom are white) given no chance to identify themselves?

Hackney Council makes no provision for the best description for *all* individuals in the borough, regardless of race, creed or colour - human being!

Wright or wrong

Two of the most senior leaders of the American House of Representatives - Jim Wright and Tony Coelho - are now out of politics for "financial impropriety". In both cases, the point at issue was not the substance of what they had done, but whether they had breached the highly complex rules governing such matters.

Britain, and most other countries, have sensible limits on what politicians are allowed to spend getting elected. America does not. A mere millionaire would not be nearly rich enough to succeed; fund-raising on a truly massive

scale is required. And fund-raising is governed by a large number of not very rational rules. They do not stop rich people supporting candidates who then give them tax breaks etc. But they do make it rather complex and convoluted. Mr Wright was finished off by his attempts to cut corners.

The trial of Oliver North made it clear that Mr George Bush was much more involved in "Contragate" than he pretended. There have been Presidents called George who never told a lie, but Mr Bush is not one of them. Even so, he is likely to serve out his full term without risk of impeachment.

And why? Because if he goes, Dan Quayle will replace him. No one has any confidence in the man, but that would not stop him succeeding Mr Bush, if Mr Bush were to be ousted. That's the way the American constitution works. When Bush chose Quayle, lots of people wondered why. I think the answer should be obvious.

Mud in your Eye

It is silly that **Private Eye** should have to pay out £600,000 for some false remarks about the wife of the Yorkshire Ripper, remarks that made very little difference to the public's view of her. But it is not totally unjust.

Private Eye is a journal that *publicises* corruption. Sometimes, this publicity has resulted in the corrupt individuals being driven out of public life. Sometimes, it just publicises it, and makes it more acceptable. **Private Eye** has a lot to say about sleazy and corrupt journalists. But they also spend a great deal of time sneering at **The Independent**, which is a healthy reaction to the sort of corruption they publicise. What sense does that make?

They sneer at Maxwell and Murdoch. But do they call for laws to limit and democratise the ownership of newspapers? Of course not. Indeed, they sneer at Maxwell more than Murdoch, though the former is the less disgusting of the two. Maxwell's **Pergamon Press** has published some very good books.

I'd be sorry if **Private Eye** went under. But I'd also see as something they brought upon themselves.

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Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

The great non-merger

I now have to doubt the seriousness of both Eric Hammond and Bill Jordan in their approach to merging the EETPU and the AEU.

The merger proposal was narrowly defeated in the AEU. It was defeated on two grounds. Firstly, that the EETPU was outside the TUC. Secondly, that the rules for choosing the officers of the EETPU were undemocratic.

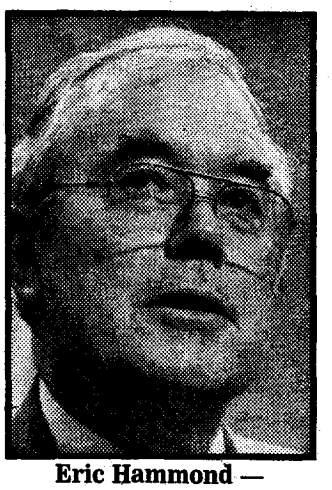
In the merger negotiations, the EETPU insisted that the new union should choose its officials by appointment as opposed to the extensive electoral system to be found in the AEU. The electricians are paranoid about communists. This goes back to the ballot-rigging scandal of the 1950s. The ballot-rigging was exposed by people like Les Cannon and Frank Chapple - themselves active communists, turned violently anti-communist.

Since that time, communists have been excluded from holding office and most officials are appointed from the top down to stop the CP getting secret members elected. Such behaviour may have been understandable up to ten or so years ago. It is no longer understandable. I suspect that it continues partly from habit and party out of fear of *any* kind of boat rocking.

Eric Hammond must know full well that the Communist Party is a pathetic shadow of its former self. It doesn't have either the will or the ability to control trade unions. Indeed, I'd say that in its present Rainbow Politics phase, it probably regards unions and their members as a bit rough and uncouth.

Bill Jordan certainly knows all this. And yet he was prepared to accept Hammond's rules. The merger had a lot going for it - but it was certainly not so desperately needed that the democratic structures of the AEU should be sacrificed for it. Furthermore Bill Jordan should have known that he was creating enemies in the AEU where he badly needed friends. He should have stood up to Hammond.

The result was that those who wished to defend trade union democracy were pushed into the same camp as those who simply wanted to put the boot into Hammond. And the merger proposal collapsed.



Eric Hammond —

The unions and the courts

Over the last ten years the trade unions have taken quite a battering from the government. And many looked like they had lost all ability to fight employers. As the current rail dispute developed ASLEF appeared to cave in without a fight, leaving the NUR in the lurch. Making loud noises followed by quick surrender had become a matter of habit. The National Union of Railwaymen is, it seems, made of sterner stuff.

The Thatcher laws have also had an odd effect on the employers. In recent times they too have developed a new habit. At the first sign of trouble, run to the courts. It looked to them for a while that the courts could be guaranteed to always bash the unions. The rail dispute arose as the dockers got a hammering in the courts. BR management's idea of negotiating was to turn up at ACAS and wait for a phone call from their lawyers at the High Court. They got the phone call allright. But it was to tell them that the union could strike to its heart's content.

Since they didn't arrive at ACAS prepared to negotiate, the BR managers had nothing to say or to offer, and Jimmy Knapp organised a thoroughly effective strike. BR management are still running around like headless chickens. When interviewed it is clear that they want to settle, but they seem genuinely at a loss as to how these things are done anymore.

The **L&TUR** is no great advocate of 'free' collective bargaining. Our goal is to develop a spirit of public service coupled with industrial democracy. But we are actually stuck with collective bargaining. And as long as that is the case it is good to see that we still have the odd strong trade union capable of taking intelligent industrial action. Hopefully the employers will also soon re-learn how to conduct themselves around a negotiating table.

A further example of the fact that employers cannot use the courts at will to intimidate the unions comes with the Law Lords' decision to allow the T&GWU to go ahead with its proposed national dock strike. The chances of a successful strike are not great, but they are much enhanced by this decision.

Scargill and the South Wales NUM

Arthur Scargill seems to have a strange mesmerising effect on the leadership of the South Wales NUM. South Wales was very much against the 1984 strike. But on a word from Arthur a handful of pickets were sent around the collieries and the area was out solid for the duration.

At that time, and ever since, the Welsh leaders have made it quite clear that they absolutely loathe Arthur Scargill. And now the man has done it again. So far as I know, the South Wales NUM leaders were perfectly willing to have discussions with British Coal about flexible working at the new Margam Colliery. Arthur said no. No it is.

Now the UDM have recruited about 400 miners in South Wales and achieved sole negotiating rights at the new colliery, which will eventually employ about 850 miners. It makes you wonder!

Thatcher and the Social Charter

As we go to press the government is sending emissaries all over Europe to counter the Social Charter proposed by the EC Commission. A central point to be made by the government is that Mrs Thatcher's policies are far more effective in bringing about worker participation than anyone else. To support this ludicrous proposition a list of 24 British companies is supplied showing them to have some form of participation.

The Germans for a start will be amazed. Most large enterprises there have formal representation on their boards by their workers of at least one third. And the state companies have 50% worker representation. Nobody accuses German industry of inefficiency. Nobody can claim that German workers are selfish and do not serve the public well.

But the real surprise is not Mrs Thatcher's silly claims. It is the fact that she feels the need to make them. Mrs Thatcher used to share the view of the conservative left, like Arthur Scargill, that it's management's job to run the economy and that workers were there only to graft to order.

She can get away with that 'free' enterprise attitude no longer. The excellent showing of the Labour Party in the European elections saw to that. The political battle is returning to something like it was before 1979. Whether Conservatism or Socialism can *best serve the people.* Only this time there is a European dimension. It is *English* Conservatism versus European Socialism - with German Socialism leading the way.

Much is said about the Social Charter. Not a lot is known about it. For the benefit of readers I will now sum up its main points.

1. Workers should be involved in decisions governing technical changes, mergers, restructuring, general running and international policies of enterprises.
2. Improved health and social standards at work.
3. Entitlement to a living wage.
4. Entitlement to social security.
5. A maximum working week.
6. Freedom to join or not to join a trade union.
7. The right to collective bargaining, collective agreements, the right to strike.
8. The right to vocational training and retraining throughout one's working life.
9. Freedom of movement throughout the EC.
10. The right of workers from other countries to the same conditions as those enjoyed in the host community.
11. Equal treatment and opportunities for men and women.
12. Protection for children, the elderly and the disabled in work.

Hardly the revolution, you may think. Yet this minimal proposal is what all the fuss it about. Furthermore the Charter goes to great pains to demand that, apart from health and safety, its proposals should be flexibly implemented in line with the laws, traditions and practices which vary from country to country.

Why is Thatcher so upset?

L&TUR and the Ernest Bevin Society in Conference

Report by Martin Dolphin

The **Labour & Trade Union Review** and the Ernest Bevin Society jointly held a conference in London on May 6.

There were three sessions, the first on *Labour and the British Constitution,* the second on *Productive Socialism* and the third on the role and progress of **Labour & Trade Union Review** itself. The conference was well attended, with people coming from Leeds, Newcastle, Northampton, Oxford, Sunderland and Winchester to take part, in addition to a strong London contingent.

The discussion on *Labour and the British Constitution* was introduced by Jack Lane. This was billed as a discussion of the defence of society against Thatcherism, plus what Labour's attitude should be towards devolution, electoral reform, local government, Northern Ireland and Scotland. One criticism that I would make of the introduction is that while it dealt with the first of the above issues it neglected the others. Evidently it would have required several more sessions for these to be treated properly.

The notion of defending society against Thatcherism comes from Thatcher's famous statement "there is no such thing as society, there are only individual men and women and their families". Jack Lane argued that this statement expressed the essence of Thatcherism and that Labour, by vigorously opposing that view, could win substantial support. He pointed out that Thatcher had radically departed from old-style Toryism which had a very clear perception that there was such a thing as society and that the preservation of society was supremely important. This point was dramatically emphasised in the later discussion with a quote from a speech made by the arch-Tory Peel at the beginning of the 19th century when he argued strongly against forms of means testing.

The discussion on *Productive Socialism* was introduced by Conor Lynch. I felt that his introduction was too brief. It did not really argue for a definite political position but rather summarised the current situation with reference to the Bullock report in 1976 and emphasised the significance of the failure of the Trade Unions to respond positively to that opportunity. A lively discussion followed during which many points were made including the view that workers' control as it had been conceived by much of the Left was now a dead issue and that the term should be abandoned in favour of 'employee control' or 'the democratisation of employment'.

In the third session, Hugh Roberts outlined the progress the magazine has made in the two and a half years of its existence: it had grown from 16 to 24 pages, it was now appearing six times a year instead of quarterly, the format and layout had been continuously improved, and the general perspective of the magazine had been developed over a wide range of questions.

In terms of the future development of the magazine the key problem was distribution. Here too substantial progress was reported: the number of shops selling the Review had grown from six to twenty-our and was expected to continue to grow steadily, there had been a corresponding growth in sales and turnover and especially in subscribers, who were now being attracted from overseas (Australia, the USA, France, Holland, etc.) The large number of different ways in which supporters of the Review could help to win new readers and subscribers were discussed and participants at the conference were particularly encouraged to seek out new subscribers and sales outlets in their local areas.

There was a definite feeling that the conference had been very useful and that such conferences should be held on a more regular basis. It was agreed that there should be another conference in six months' time. One of the very positive outcomes of all this is that a semi-public meeting will be held on the first Thursday of every month at which the next issue of the Review would be discussed. Readers of **L&TUR** are invited to attend this meeting and anyone interested in doing so should contact the Editor.

For Mao and Liberty?

by Madawc Williams

The Western media insist on seeing politics in Leninist and ex-Leninist states as a struggle between nice moderates and nasty hard-liners. This view of the matter requires some sudden shifts - Deng Xiaoping changed overnight from "nice" to "nasty" when the present round of demonstrations began. But it is the best model they have. They see the juxtaposition of a portrait of Mao and a copy of the American Statue of Liberty as absurd. But the student protestors did not see it so.

The current repression is being compared to the Cultural Revolution. This ignores one very basic fact - the Cultural Revolution was a popular mass movement. When Mao carried through purges and waves of repression, he had the unquestioning support of the majority of the population.

What is happening now is repression by a state apparatus that has no popular support at all.

The student protestor's attitude to Mao is an awkward point for the standard western model of events. A few of the protestors are anti-Mao; most notably those who threw paint on his portrait in Tiananmen Square on May 23. But most of them were outraged by this action, and a large number of them carried pictures of Mao. These never seemed to be visible in filmed reports from China. But plenty of Western correspondents mentioned them, and for a couple of days the **Evening Standard** and **The Independent** included them in a few of their photos. But they don't fit the standard model of events. And journalists nowadays have a depressing habit of leaving out anything that does not fit their preconceptions.

When the demonstrators were allowed to speak for themselves, one sometimes got a different and more complex view of the matter. For instance, during an interview with two student protestors in Shanghai, one said "*I have a very stong resentment against Mao for what he did in the Cultural Revolution,*" but the other said "*Personally I feel Mao was a very successful politician and poet. The breadth of his imagination was remarkable*" (**The Independent**, June 12). I suspect that a high proportion of the other protestors would have insisted on giving the 'wrong' answer when questioned about Mao, and that such opinions were mostly filtered out.

Economic reform

Under Deng, China dumped the notion of a centrally planned economy independent of the world market. This system had visibly failed - neighbouring states that had started out at much the same level had done much better by allowing themselves to be exploited by foreign capital.

Agriculture did very well out of the relaxation of central control. Crops and farm animals need individual attention, if they are to do well. Successful farming needs an intimate knowledge of the local conditions. Techniques that do very well in one place may fail completely if applied only a few miles away. Reform succeeded - and the countryside seems to have stayed quiet while the cities had their mass protests. A report in **The Independent** (June 21) confirms this.

Industry is another matter. Some success has been achieved by letting Hong Kong industries use China as a source of cheap labour. But in general, industries and the cities had not been doing well over the past few years. Inflation - more or less absent under Mao - had returned. Workers who had no right to strike found the value of their wages shrinking. And corruption was spreading on a massive scale. The student protestors knew that things had gone badly wrong.

"*Economic reforms, they said, had benefited only a few entrepreneurs, corruption was entrenched and people such as teachers, intellectuals and civil servants... had suffered. Communist Party control meant that independent management remained a sham. "There's been no structural change in the economy...*"" (**The Independent**, June 12).

The Chinese had sold their birthright, and not received the promised mess of pottage.

Foresight and hindsight

I was saddened but not especially surprised when the remarkable student demonstrations in China ended in tragedy and repression. I was not in the least surprised that they should have had such a drastic effect. At first they seemed nothing new; they became a major news story just after **L&TUR No.11** went to the printers. But lest I should seem to be trying to be wise after the event, let me quote what I said just over two years ago. This was after the fall from power of Hu Yaobang, whose death was the pretext for the latest round of protests:

"*Twenty years ago, China tried to break the mould of world politics, and failed. Mao made a serious attempt to build a society without the profit motive and without major inequalities... The result was chaos. Red guards fought each other in a mad factionalism that defies any simple explanation... After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping rose to supreme power, and duly took the "capitalist road" that Mao had always been warning against.*

"*One constant in all this struggle was the power of the Communist Party. Mao attacked the actually-existing party in the name of an idealised party. His opponents defended what actually existed. All factions agreed that those who had "correct ideas" had a perfect right to suppress those whose ideas were wrong. They just disputed which set of ideas were correct.*

"*A few months back, some Chinese students tried to change the terms of the debate. They called for greater freedom of opinion - even, in a few cases, for a multi-party system. Since the official line on "correct ideas" had changed so many times, it might seem logical to allow open debate and free discussion. Logical - but not expedient...*

"*Power is in the hands of the Communist Party, and likely to remain there. At any given stage, those in charge reckon their own ideas to be "correct", and see no need to give freedom to their opponents. This is the sad legacy of Leninism and one-party rule. Ideas of equality have been toned down... But the power of the Party apparatus remains... How such a system will evolve - if indeed it can evolve - remains to be seen*" (**L&TUR No. 2**, April-June 1987).

Incorrect ideas

Western commentators assumed that the main point of the demonstrations was to oust Li Peng and replace him with the "moderate" Zhao Ziyang. This was not the point at all - although a victory for Zhao over Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping would have been a good beginning. The

main point was to snap Chinese society out of old political patterns that had survived the downfall of Imperial China. **The Independent** (June 10) published a translation of the declaration by four hunger strikers on June 2, shortly before the troops went in. And this puts the matter much more clearly than any of **The Independent's** own reporters have managed to do.

"Li Peng... should resign according to democratic proedures. But Li Peng is not our enemy. Even if he steps down he should still enjoy the rights of every citizen, even the right to maintain his mistaken ideas...

"For thousands of years Chinese society has continued in the vicious circle of doing away with the old emperor and then crowning a new emperor. History proves that the exit of one leader who is no longer popular and the entry of another cannot solve the substantial questions of Chinese politics. What we need is not a perfect saviour but a perfect democratic system. So we appeal first, that society should use methods to establish legitimate, autonomous and unofficial organisations gradually to form a non-official political force as a check to government decision-making: that is the essence of democracy.

"Rather ten devils to check each other than one mandarin with absolute power."

Red Mandarins

Under Deng Xiaoping, the party apparatus seems ready to sit on the rest of society for an indefinite future. The mandarins of ancient China had maintained a sophisticated but basically static society over more than two thousand years, before European imperialism disrupted it. Large parts of the Communist Party seemed ready to set themselves up as a new mandarinate, once they had come to power in 1949. And it was against such people - most notably Deng's former boss Liu Shao Chi - that Mao launched the Cultural Revolution.

The fact that Mao's solution proved unworkable did not remove the problem. The failure of the Cultural Revolution to create a new society enabled the "red mandarins" to stage a partial come-back during Mao's last years. It enabled them to have everything their own way after Mao's death. But it did not enable them to create a stable society with themselves permanently on top.

The old-style mandarins had a more-or-less unquestioned position of cultural superiority. They were corrupt and nepotistic, but also civilized, moderate and competent. No one had any clear idea about how society might be run without them. Such opposition as existed tended to be anarchic and irresponsible, before the West disrupted things.

Protesters against the modern mandarins of the Chinese "Communist" Party have much more solid grounds for rejecting them. The party's dictatorship was originally supposed to exist to promote the building of socialism. If China is now to be part of the world market, what moral authority can they possess?

Two years ago, I foresaw that this situation was unstable. Something had to happen. I did not foresee what; nor am I sure even now. I know what I'd *like* to see happen - more democracy, less inequality - but that is another matter. China has reached a dangerous political situation; those with political power have no moral authority with the rest of the society. I would like to say that it can not last - but Czechoslovakia is still ruled by the people that Brezhnev imposed in 1968, even though the USSR no longer supports them.

The logic of the crack-down

If one understands that the "hardliners" are trying to preserve the political pattern that has dominated Chinese society for the last two thousand years, the severity of their actions becomes easier to understand. The basic patterns were set during the Han dynasty, which existed in the same era as the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire declined and fell. The Chinese Empire declined and then recovered.

The first attempts to suppress the student protests were subtle. For the first week after martial law was declared, everyone was fooled into thinking that

Zhao Ziyang would be taking over shortly and be granting the students' demands. In fact, it seems that he had already been defeated within the party hierarchy. The hardliners pretended to be losing while they were in fact consolidating their position. Despite having *no* apparent support among the mass of the population, they won the power struggle and demoralised their opponents.

I must confess that I was fooled myself: I did think for several days that something unprecedented in Chinese history was about to happen. There really hasn't ever been a case of the Chinese people choosing or replacing their rulers. The May 4 movement of 1919 changed government policies. But it needed the armies of first the Kuomintang in 1926, and then the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, to put some of its ideals into practice.

The closest precedent was the Cultural Revolution. But this was basically a case of Mao as supreme leader using mass protests to bring to heel disobedient deputies like Liu Shao Chi and Deng Xiaoping. Mao was the official boss; he used his position to oust opponents who had more power than him in the ruling party circles. But the fact that the mass of the population *had* acted independently against the senior officials was a fact that was not forgotten.

No one in the West has a good word to say nowadays about the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, everyone approves of the democracy movement. But would the one have been possible without the other?

Once the bulk of the population has decided that it will do something, only massive state terror can stop it happening. Deng and Co must have realised that a long-drawn-out battle against the protestors would mean that more and more people would start thinking and acting for themselves, regardless of what the "red mandarins" might tell them. Sublety failed. The clear defeat of the "moderate" faction reduced the numbers of student protestors, but also made the protest more dangerous.

By the time the crackdown occured, the protest had gone far beyond the Peking students who had begun it. (I could believe that Zhao Ziyang *was* plotting - but only for some restrained public protests to help him ease out his rivals.) Workers had begun to establish independent trade unions on the Polish model. And by putting up a copy of the Statue of Liberty - originally a gift from the French republic to commemorate the American Revolution - the students showed that they were quite willing to look to foreign models of democracy. They had hoped that the party leadership would side with them; when it was clear this would not happen, they decided to press on regardless.

"Serve the people" or "shoot the people"?

Up until June 4, China was a populist state with populist ideology. Everything was done in the name of the people, and very often by the people themselves. There had been crack-downs in places like Tibet - but one thousand million Han Chinese are quite convinced that Tibet belongs to China, whatever the Tibetans themselves may think. People still felt that it was their government and their army. The Cultural Revolution was seen as an error that most people had been involved in. Huge numbers may have died - but this was something that people had done to each other.

Sending in the army to shoot down crowds of demonstrators involved junking the regime's populist credentials. Things can never be the same again. The government of the "Peoples' Republic of China" now has very little credibility indeed. It does not rule by the will of the people. It is not seriously trying to carry out the revolution's original ideals. The corrupt clique in power still use bits of Leninist language. But they seem to have no purpose beyond staying in power, with all the priviliges that go along with it.

The leadership and the army were certainly divided. But talk of civil war proved to be foolish. The division was between those who had a clear idea of what they were doing, and those who did not. There is no evidence that any section of the leadership was willing to give up power and accept a functioning democracy. But many of them must have shrunk from doing what was necessary to preserve party power.

Now that the repression has been carried through, the party and state have re-united behind those who took responsibility for it. A few of those most clearly associated with the repression may be dropped over the next few months. But no faction can hope to win back the trust and respect that the party and state and army once had.

The result could get something very like continental Europe during the 19th century - an autocratic government, a politically inert peasantry and cities that revolt from time to time, only to be brutally crushed.

There is plenty of money to be made out of cheap Chinese labour and raw materials. The switch from a populist dictatorship to an unpopular and repressive dictatorship is not going to put off the businessmen. People will discover that the "moderates" are recovering, and conclude that to carry on trading is the best thing they can do. This is bound to happen, because the party has already damaged the Leninist system beyond any hope of repair. A regime with no popular support can only rely on the profit motive.

The best hope would be the development of independent trade unions. But there is no knowing how long this might take. The limited trade union tradition in China was absorbed by the party; new trade unions would be starting from scratch.

I wish I could say that the present regime can't last long. But I've a nasty feeling that it could. Especially since the western powers look likely to resume trade and economic aid as soon as public opinion will allow.

On the other hand, while the "Red Mandarinate" may take some time to fall, it has no hope of survival in the long run. If it had been able to stay in power without shooting its own peole, it might have held on until the current world trend towards rule by the people for the people ran out of steam. But that possibility is now gone for ever. People will think and talk, and next time they will know what to expect. Static societies may be run by small cliques of rulers - but China has been opened up to the world market, and the Maoist pattern of isolationism can not be restored in a country where the people do not trust the rulers.

Mao may not have realised his vision of a new society. But we may hope that his political legacy will in the long run finish off the repressive social patterns he first rebelled against as a young man, and still rebelled against as an old man who was head of state.

Queen Rat

How 'Snooty Roberts' became the Iron Lady

by Dan Ackroid

In the early 1970s, most people on the Left assumed that capitalism was on its last legs. At the most, it might be able to perpetuate itself by some sort of fascist or authoritarian regime. And *everyone* had recognised the advantages of state planning; there could be no going back to earlier free-market forms.

Socialists were in an unusually good position to advance their cause, had they known what to do. The trouble was, the key people who could have led an advance messed it up. The Labour Right were quite content for things to carry on as normal, provided that they were in charge. Had they been pressurised, they might have moved. But they were not.

On the Labour Left, far too many people saw 'reformism' as some sort of unnatural vice. It was fine to protest about the extreme wickedness of 'the system'. But there was a great fear that anything that might make it less wicked would also tend to preserve it.

Bennery was, up to a point, a serious reforming left-wing movement. But one of its basic ideas was to pull Britain out of the world market, as a preliminary to the building of socialism. Since Britain has been dependent on world trade since at least the mid-19th century, and cannot even feed itself, this made their reformism less practical than it should have been. To put it bluntly, a Britain run on Bennite lines would have suffered a rapid economic decline. It would have suffered much the same fate as Peru.

A serious alternative was workers control, as proposed by the Bullock Committee This alternative was quietly killed off by the three forces I mentioned above: the Labour Right, the anti-reformist Left and the Bennite Left.

Workers control would have given ordinary workers more control over their lives. A lot of ordinary workers wanted that sort of power. But many people on the Left were far from certain that it was wise to let them have it. There was a widespread if seldom voiced feeling on the Left that ordinary people couldn't *really* be trusted, and that it was better for socialism to be build *on behalf of* the workers by trade union officials and left-wing politicians and bureaucrats.

The working class were denied a chance to run their own places of work. Bennery was never very popular, seeming far too like a repeat of East European snarl-ups. In any case it was not offered. Callaghan and the senior trade union officials offered 'business as usual', and then lost control of things in the 'winter of discontent'. Fed up and confused, a significant section of the working class shifted over to the Tories.

A nightmare on Downing Street

Mrs Thatcher's main strength has always been her persistence. Other politicians have had grand schemes for changing society, and dropped them when the going got tough. Politicians in general aquired a reputation for having no higher purpose than to stay in office, without doing anything positive with such power as they had. Harold Wilson is a case in point; during all his years as Prime Minister he didn't really do anything worth mentioning. The best thing you can cite was the founding of the Open University - and it is by no means impossible that the pre-Thatcher Tory Party might have done exactly the same.

Some people regard Wilson as a brilliant politician, because he was good at the day-to-day business of government. This was certainly his view of himself; it comes across in all the books about himself that he has kindly written for our enlightenment. He boasts of how the cabinet he led during his second period in power was the most experienced cabinet ever. He overlooks the fact that it failed utterly and was booted out after the 'winter of discontent'.

I would regard Wilson as a useless politician, because he totally failed to do anything about the problems of his day. He talked about "the white heat of the technological revolution", but in practice he let things drift. It would all have been much the same had he not been there.

Thatcher is a politician of another kind. She is in politics to change the world, and is quite ready to risk her power for what she sees as good ends. She was determined to disrupt the post-1945 consensus, which had come to the end of its useful life. This is not the normal function of a Tory Prime Minister, but since Labour had repeatedly failed to do anything coherent while in office, she got the chance.

Plenty of people were fed up with the pattern of genteel decline, which had followed the winding down of the Empire. Most of these people were not committed to any particular ideology; they simply wanted *something* to change. An effective Labour party could have turned them into socialists; instead they became Thatcherites.

Thatcher's background

When something needs to be done, the right person to do it will unexpectedly turn up. It might be someone who would otherwise have been quite unimportant. Had there been no World War Two, Winston Churchill would have been remembered as a minor and unsuccessful politician. Also as a man who dabbled in military affairs but did not understand them; he planned the disastrous Gallipoli landings in World War One, a blunder that cost him his job.

Thatcher had been a competent but unexceptional minister in the Heath government. There was nothing to mark her out for future greatness. Nor is it likely that she would have achieved it, had the Labour Party been able to find a coherent socialist way forward. But as things actually turned out, she was well placed to take advantage of the circumstances that existed in 1979.

Her origins lie well outside the priviliged circles of the ruling classes; therefore she feels no class guilt, and very little obligation to those less fortunate than herself. On the other hand, she would always have regarded herself as a cut above ordinary people. Her father's grocery business employed five assistants; he was a moderately important figure in his home town of Grantham. It's been said that her attitude at school earned her the nickname of 'Snooty Roberts'. This is not the sort of detail that can be easily confirmed, but it seems to fit.

Margaret Roberts, as she then was, did very well at school. Quite why she went on to do a degree in Chemistry at Oxford is uncertain. The way she has treated British science funding during her time in power does not indicate that she had any love of science as such. Perhaps it was simply a convenient way of 'getting on'. She worked for a time as a researcher, but it is doubtful if she would ever have got very far that way.

Then again, it could be her early experiences as a science worker that determined her attitudes. In his review of a biography of Thatcher, Labour MP Tam Dalyell says:

My suspicion.. is that Mrs Thatcher's less-than-cordial relations with science originated not at Oxford, but at Manningtree, Essex. There, she became a research chemist at British Xylonite Plastics... Some years ago, I met a manager from the firm, who said: "We got rid of Margaret Roberts, and possibly we did not do British science or Industry a service. She did not fit in with us!" Nor does it seem that she fitted into her next post, in the research department of J. Lyons, in Hammersmith, testing ice cream and cake-fillings. Not altogether surprising that tax law became more her métier. (**New Scientist** April 29, 1989, p.61).

Alternative routes

Whatever her prospects in science, Mrs Thatcher had alternatives means of 'getting on'. One way was through politics. She had done well in the University Conservative Club. She made a good impression, and was a Tory party candidate in the 1950 election, albeit in a safe Labour seat. Another was her marriage to successful businessman Denis Thatcher, who was ten years older than she was. Relieved of the need to earn her own living, she was able to drop science and train as a barrister. That could have been her career; instead she got elected to Parliament in 1959.

Thatcher was only a middle-ranking politician in 1975, when fortune again favoured her. Heath had tried to reduce the power of the Trade Unions, and he had failed. He had then tried giving them a major share in running the country, via the tripartite agreements. This also failed; the unions were later to show that they could not co-exist even with a Labour Prime Minister; they were certainly not going to share power and responsibility with a Tory. This impasse led to the Three Day Week, and then to a Labour government.

Heath's policies had failed; the Tory party wanted him to go quietly - yet he refused to do so. The traditional Tory system, in which unpopular leaders went quietly and new leaders simply emerged, had broken down. Heath had been elected, the first elected Tory leader. Only another election could remove him, and that required a serious candidate to stand against him. Thatcher took a chance, and did so. And she did so well that it was impossible for any other Tory to catch up with her in the second ballot after Heath had finally admitted defeat.

In 1979, power passed to the Tories almost by default. Labour had refused to change the system, and had also failed to make a good job of running it unchanged. Almost any Tory leader would have won under such circumstances.

Thatcher said "There is no alternative". This was untrue; there was an alternative. But Labour killed it, and having killed it had no real answer to Thatcher.

An easy struggle

Commenting on Tony Benn, Thatcher said: *"It is all very well for him to attack class and privilege, but he didn't have to struggle, nor did his children, with the enormous trust funds his wife's family set up for them"*. (**Margaret Thatcher, A Personal and Political Biography**, by Russel Lewis. p.16).

Now it is true that Benn comes from a highly privileged background. But can one really say that the Thatcher family had ever really known hard times? They were definitely more secure than the average family. And Mrs Thatcher's rise to power was helped by a series of remarkable bits of good luck. There must have been thousands of people who were just as clever and hard-working, and who never got such rewards.

Margaret Thatcher comes from a smug stratum of people who grab whatever they can, and then think that they've earned it. Less privileged people knew how tough life could be, even before Thatcher set to work. More privileged people had a touch of the ruling-class sense of social obligation, together with an awareness that they had much more than they had ever earned.

The American example

If you want to summarise Thatcherism,

you could say that it has made Britain more like America. Not so much in superficial matters of dress or accent - though this has also happened - but in the much more basic and important attitudes to life.

George Orwell once said that British society is best viewed as a *family* . A family in which different individuals have very different shares of wealth and power, but in which the general obligation to look after everyone is accepted by all.

Thatcher has helped to make British society much harder and nastier. She talks about "family values". But in practice this means splitting society into a multitude of competing families, each of which looks after its own interests alone.

In American society, there is supposed to be equality of opportunity. Anyone can get to the top. In practice there is a great deal of inherited privilege; the children of the rich tend to stay rich, the children of the comfortably off usually stay comfortably off, the children of the poor mostly stay poor. But a significant minority do manage to move up the social hierarchy, and the popular myth is that anyone can do it. Value is expressed in terms of rising through the social hierarchy. Everyone tries to be a 'winner' - and winning is largely expressed in terms of cash. Only in America could the question "What are you worth" mean "How much money do you have?"

Britain has always had a more complex set of values. It was recognised that many people who accumulate large amounts of money are pretty worthless and unpleasant characters. Also that some very worthy and useful people remain poor. American values were viewed with suspicion; they had a lot of money, certainly, but also a much more vulgar and violent society.

Competition did exist, of course. But it was looked down upon. People spoke of 'the rat-race'" And it was remembered that a rat race is most usually won by rats.

(In a speech a few months back, Neil Kinnock did refer to 'the rat race'. He got no immediate response, because many people - especially in the media - have grown so used to the rat race that they forget than other sorts of values are possible. He should try it again. Labour can't beat the Tories by pretending that it will run a better and smoother sort of rat-race. Or if it can, this would be a victory hardly worth having.)

Thatcherism has embraced American values, the values of a competitive society. But a competitive society must of necessity produce far more losers than winners. Only one person can be Number One in any field of competitive endeavour; only a few can be really successful. But the 'losers' are not content to remain losers: they turn to crime as a way of 'getting ahead', or else find solace in self-destructive drinking or drug abuse. Some of the 'winners' also resort to drink or drugs, to cope with the pressures of 'winning'.

The rat society

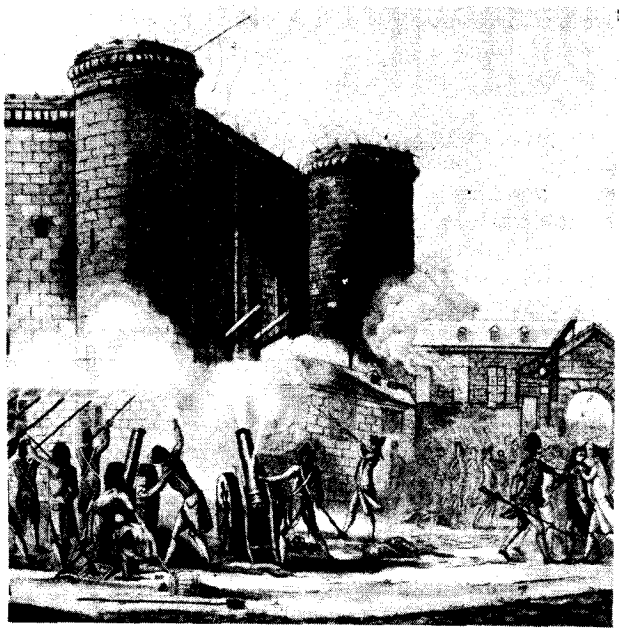
American society would have disintegrated years ago, if it were *only* based on the '$$$ what are you worth? $$$' philosophy. In fact, other sorts of values survive - and have even been making a sort of come-back since the 1960s. Of course the 1960s were not a simple affair; at the same time as some groups were rejecting capitalist values, others were spreading them to new areas. Most notably sex: breaking down old sexual taboos also tended to involve commercialising sex in a more blatant and shameless form than ever before. (The notion that people should be free to do whatever they enjoy doing is logically separate from the notion that they should do it for money or for selfish personal advantage. But in practice they tended to go together.)

The New Right has also had its contradictory aspects. Traditional Christian objections to sexual freedom have been re-affirmed, while equally traditional Christian objections to greed, usury and the rich have been conveniently glossed over. They try to limit the damage to traditional family structures by limiting sexual choice. At the same time they promote competitive money-making, which is at least as damaging to family life and much more dangerous to general social stability.

Thatcher is being inconsistent when she speaks of Christian values and quotes St Francis of Assisi. I cannot see that St Francis would have approved of giving money to the rich and taking it away from the poor. Yet I would not call her a hypocrite. The social stratum she comes from has this inconsistency built in. People are allowed to be greedy and selfish in their public or business lives, and at the same time preserve human values within the narrower circle of the family. And this inconsistency cannot be avoided. To generalise family feelings to the whole of society would lead to socialism. To let market values invade the family home would lead to social disintegration. Indeed, Thatcherism is undermining many of the conservative non-market values that have helped keep British society stable over the past three centuries. □

1789: France's Glorious Revolution Manqué

by Brendan Clifford



The French Revolution attempted for a number of years to reproduce the essential features of the English Revolution of 1688. From 1789 to 1792 it attempted to stablise itself as a constitutional monarchy. And in 1792/1793 it attempted to be a well-behaved Republic such as a constitutional monarchy might be if the monarchical element simply evaporated from it leaving the orderly political process to continue out of habit.

The French Revolution, in the impression it has left on historical fancy, began in the chaos of 1793, when France left the orbit of English experience.

Many histories of the French revolution were published before the declaration of the Republic in 1792 - which, so far as the general idea of it is concerned, was before the revolution began. Among the first was John Talbot Dillon's **Historical And Critical Memoirs of the General Revolution In France In The Year 1789,** which was published by **The Times** (in book form) in 1790.

Between 1789 and 1793 there were at least three possible points at which the Revolution might have stabilised into a functional state. Because it did not stabilise into a functional state these points are largely forgotten.

History is the region of accomplished fact. And despite all the pseudo-scientific debunking of the past twenty years the history of England continues to be known in connection with the accomplishers of political facts - Henry II, Henry VII, Henry VIII, Elizabeth etc.

If the French Revolution had crystallised into a state between 1789 and 1791 it would be forever associated with the name of Mirabeau. As it is Mirabeau, though a statesman of immense ability and imagination, is only a marker at a point at which something remarkable might have happened but didn't.

The old order

The French Revolution - which was for four years a French Disintegration - was launched by Louis XVI, an absolute monarch who, though not much of a politician, was a political reformer. He wanted to tax the aristocracy. If, like his great ancestor Louis XIV, he had been an administrator by vocation, he would have found a way of taxing the aristocracy without throwing the state into flux. But Louis XVI had no gift for either political manoeuvre or administration.

Under the old order in France the aristocracy had an institution, called a Parliament, whose function was to register laws. If the French aristocracy had been of a different social quality the Parliament of Paris might have developed on the lines of the English Parliament. (The role of Parliament in the political life of England was very restricted and uncertain until the Parliamentary assassination of the King's deputy, Wentworth, in 1641 began the era of Parliamentary sovereignty.) But the Parliament of Paris confined itself to preserving aristocratic privileges and rejecting land taxes.

In 1640 Charles I assembled the first Parliament for eleven years, and this led to his downfall. In 1789 Louis XVI called the first general assembly of the three feudal Estates for 150 years: Clergy, Aristocracy and People (or Third Estate). He doubled the representation of the Third Estate to make it equal to the other two combined. His purpose was to mobilise popular force to overrule aristocratic privilege which was disturbing government.

The members of the Third Estate were known as *roturiers.* The word conveys the idea of people who were nondescript and miscellaneous. John Talbot Dillon explains:

"ROTURIERS is a contumelious expression, to denote a man not noble, let him be ever so rich. This body of men, hitherto with great contempt, are described by the word la roture. *It is probable this word will no longer find a place in their dictionaries."* **(Historical and Critical Memoirs Of The General Revolution In France,** 1790.)

The First and Second Estates - the Clergy and Aristocracy - had their allocated places in the Ancient Regime. But the Third Estate had no function in the official order of things. Between meetings of the Estates General the Third Etate existed in dispersion, like the dust of humanity waiting to be reassembled at the sound of the last trumpet. The people were assumed to be going about their particular bits of private business without public awareness while the King ruled, the Parliament vetoed, and the Convocations of the Clergy looked for Calvinists to pester.

But when the Estates were assembled in 1789 it was found that within the miscellany of *roturiers* there had developed the strongest corporate will in French society - that of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had become an informal estate - and an estate more coherent in its social substance than any of the formal estates. But it saw itself not merely as an Estate but as the nucleus of the nation.

The fall of the Bastille

When the three Estates were assembling

the intention was that they should meet separately, as Lords and Commons did in England, and that each should have its distinct relationship with the King. But the Third Estate refused to assemble as a distinct Estate. It called for a fusion of the three Estates in a National Assembly, and it subverted the other estates by attracting a considerable portion of the Clergy and a significant fraction of the Aristocracy to itself. While the King was hesitating about disbanding the Estates and recognising the National Assembly, the people of Paris - and the *respectable* people, it seems, rather than the *sans culottes* - assaulted the Bastille on July 14. The King was greatly impressed by the fall of the Bastille, and he recognised the National Assembly.

(The Bastille was demolished following its capture. And when the Revolution needed extensive prison space a few years later it had to use monastaries and convents.)

In the month following the fall of the Bastille the social order of feudalism collapsed. The peasantry all around the country got the idea that the aristocracy were mobilising a terrorist force to punish them for what had happened in Paris, and in the grip of the Great Fear the peasants of each locality besieged the local aristocrat and expropriated the documentation of the feudal order. The National Assembly hesitated for a while, but on August 4 it adopted a set of Decrees abolishing feudalism and providing for a legal establishment of contractual property relations in land.

The Estates General began to assemble in June. And by August the feudal order had collapsed and the country was being governed by the King and the National Assembly in a constitutional relationship. And John Talbot Dillon set about writing the history of the French Revolution as an accomplished fact.

Of course we know that when Dillon wrote his history of the French Revolution it had scarcely begun. All that had happened was the first stage of disintegration. But who knew in the first year of the Revolution that the revolution had scarcely begun? It would seem that only Edmund Burke suspected such a thing.

Dillon (one of those Irish gentlemen with strong Continental connections who were common in the 18th century but disappeared in the 19th century) wrote:

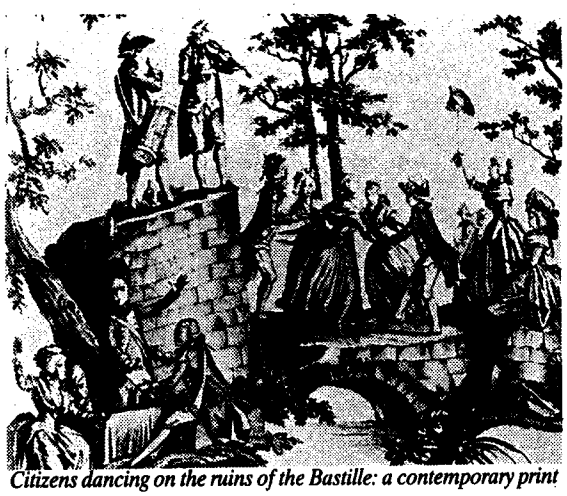
"The Assembly met again on the evening of the 4th of August... when the articles of the famous Constitution of France *were drawn up and passed by the Assembly. Every member seemed eager and impatient to contribute towards the erection of this superb edifice, this tower of adamant, which was to surprise mankind by its beauty and strength, and afford happiness by its perfection...*

"In one night the whole kingdom underwent a total change; the whole order of things, which force had maintained, in opposition to the courage of so many generations, and the devastations of time, was now subverted.

"The enormous and stately tree of feudality, whose extensive branches reached as it were to the skies, while its baneful shade covered all France, was torn up by the roots, and lay prostrate on the ground, to perish and decay.

"In one night, the citizen and the husbandman became free, and no longer subject to the oppression of the proud lord, who enjoyed the fruits of their labour and toil. The noble became truly so, by holding that station in civil society which belonged to him, according to the laws of reason and good sense, in lieu of those of feudal oppression. In one night, the Court of Rome has been obliged to yield the numberous usurpations so long complained of, and finally submit to the decrees of equity and moderation.

"Thus, that Cerberus of despotism - that feudal, aristocratic and parliamentary monster, has been slain by one vigorous blow, and the kingdom of France rescued by an exalted set of men, who had the spirit to raise a new empire of wisdom, justice and liberty" (Ibid., pp.471-2).



Citizens dancing on the ruins of the Bastille: a contemporary print

An accomplished fact?

This was not the eccentric view of an Irish gentleman of cosmopolitan culture. It was pretty well the view of every right-thinking progressive between September 1789 and June 1791. It was the view of Richard Price DD in his famous address to the Revolution Society in the Meeting House at Old Jewry on November 4 1789. And it was the view of Tom Paine when he wrote the first part of **The Rights of Man** a year later. The French Revolution was seen as an accomplished fact - a fact accomplished almost by the stroke of a pen on the night of August 4, 1789.

The August Decrees of the Assembly legitimised the peasant rebellion of the preceding weeks and dismantled all the feudal restrictions on the freedom of the individual. There was now general freedom of expression, of assembly, and of trade. The people - almost all the people - had been freed from the system of feudalism which had caused them to behave unnaturally. And there was a place for all in the new system - a system of Reason which, being in accordance with Nature, was conducive to harmony. A few cantankerous aristocrats and a few bigoted priests might out of sheer distemper refuse to live in the new order but they would be incapable of disturbing it. Virtually all of the people whom the old system had diverted from the ways of Nature, oppressors as well as oppressed, would be restored to naturally harmonious conditions of humanity by the new system.

Only Edmund Burke disbelieved in this miracle. Burke was a very rare bird among politicians - a reformer without a Utopian ideal. His understanding told him that humanity was not a species with a fixed and objective nature, needing only to be freed from distorting influences in order to become harmonious in its social behavour. It was, by comparison with all that lived in nature, an artificial contrivance, and required complex conditions to sustain itself. Aristotle's maxim, "Man is a political animal", was true in the very fullest sense.

Aristotle did not mean simply that many humans are interested in politics: he meant that humanity is constituted by politics. In fact most people are not much interested in politics - but their social character is determined by

the political framework of their existence whether they are interested in politics or not. What humanity is varies with the political environment. Stable human societies of the most diverse kinds have existed throughout history and there has been no sign of any natural gravitation towards a general norm for humanity as a whole.

(The United Nations, which in very recent times has draped the facade of a general norm around the world, was not a product of human nature asserting itself within the diverse forms of human existence. It was established by the sheer power of modern capitalist imperialism, which in the course of the past hundred years interfered with all non-European forms of human existence and disrupted them.)

Burke's closest political friends all believed in the French Revolution of 1789. And Burke, for reasons of human sympathy as well as for reasons of political convenience, would have liked to believe in it. But he could not bring himself to set aside his understanding in order to believe. He knew that man was a political animal, and he could not see that the French Revolution of 1789 had made arrangements capable of sustaining human existence in a progressive form in a large European society.

Burke's disbelief

On February 9, 1790, Burke forced himself to express to the Commons his disbelief in the French Revolution, knowing that in doing so he was isolating himself from the political associates of a generation.

"In the last century, Louis the Fourteenth had established a greater and better disciplined military force than ever had been seen in Europe, and with it a perfect despotism. Though that despotism was proudly arrayed in manners, galantry, splendor, magnificence, and even covered over the imposing robes of science, literature and arts, it was, in government, nothing better than a painted and gilded tyranny; in religion, an hard stern intolerance, the fit companion and auxiliary to the despotic tyranny which prevailed in its government. The same character of despotism insinuated itself into every court of Europe - the same spirit of disproportioned magnificence - the same love of standing armies, above the ability of the people. In particular, our then Sovereigns, King Charles and King

James, fell in love with the government of their neighbour... It were well that the infection had gone no farther than the Throne...

"This day the evil is totally changed in France: but there is an evil. The disease is altered; but the vicinity of the two countries remains, and must remain; and the natural mental habits of mankind are such that the present distemper of France is far more likely to be contagious than the old one; for it is not quite easy to spread a passion for servitude among the people: but in all evils of the opposite kind our natural inclinations are flattered...

"In the last age we were in danger of being entangled by the example of France in the net of relentless despotism... Our present danger from the example of a people, whose character knows no medium, is, without regard to government, a danger from anarchy... On the side of religion, the danger is no longer from intolerance, but from Atheism...

"The French have made their way through the destruction of their country, to a bad constitution, when they were in possession of a good one. They were in possession of it the day the States met in separate orders. Their business, had they been either virtuous, or wise,... was to secure the stability and independence of the States, according to those orders, under the Monarch on the Throne. It was then their duty to redress their grievances.

"Instead of redressing grievances, and improving the fabric of their state, to which they were called by their Monarch, and sent by their Country, they were made to take a very different course. They first destroyed all the balances and counterposes which serve to fix the state; and to give it a steady direction; and which furnish sure correctives to any violent spirit which may prevail in any of the orders...

"When they had done this, they instantly... laid the axe to the root of all property, and consequently of all national prosperity, by confiscating all the possessions of the church. They made and recorded a sort of institute and digest of anarchy, called the rights of man, in such a pedantic abuse of elementary principles as would have disgraced boys at school; but this declaration of rights was worse than trifling and pedantic in them; as by their name and authority they systematically destroyed every hold of authority by opinion, religious or civil, on the minds of the people. By this mad declaration they subverted the state...

"He felt some concern that this strange thing, called a Revolution in France, should be compared with the glorious event, commonly called the Revolution in England... In truth, the circumstances of our revolution (as it is called) and that of France are just the reverse of each other in almost every particular, and in the whole spirit of the transaction" (Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke In The Debate On The Army Estimates. London 1790).

1688 and 1789

History is sometimes written as if

Burke's disbelief in the French Revolution of 1789 caused it to go astray. But Burke had no influence in France. His observation of French affairs was not in any degree an interference in French affairs. French affairs went on their way uninfluenced by Burke's opinions. There was no Burkean party in the French Revolution. André Chenier, pamphleteer of the right wing party of the Revolution, the Feuillants, mentioned Burke's views only to dismiss them.

Burke's views were irrelevant to French politics. Nobody acting within the Revolution could have found them useful or enlightening. The condition of things which Burke described as a subversion of the state was the actual Constitution of France, and there was no possibility of going back to May 1789 and constituting the States General into counterparts of the Lords and Commons. The Estates had crumbled and could never be reconstituted.

Burke backed his political understanding against all current belief when he said that the French Constitution was a subversion of the French state. So far as France was concerned, this statement was in the nature of a detached observation. It was English opinion that it was intended to influence. And in England in Febuary 1790 it seemed to Burke's political colleagues of long standing - who included Tom Paine - that his mind had given way. Paine later came to the conclusion that he had been bribed. But in February 1790 the Prime Minister, Pitt, was still very far from sharing Burke's convictions about France.

Burke backed his own solitary understanding against all current belief. And if events in France during the following years had not confirmed his analysis his influence on English affairs would have been negligible, and he would have gone down in history as a worthy reformer who had collapsed into senility in 1790.

The French politicians of the 1789 Revolution looked to the English Revolution of 1688 as their pattern. In doing so they looked at a mirage.

Not that 1688 was not a real Revolution. It was the most successful revolution ever accomplished, in the sense that it was conducted by experienced politicians who set themselves a realisable objective and realised it, and that the political order of things established by the Revolution actually functioned on the principles proclaimed by the Revolution.

"Burke jeered at the notion that 1789 was a repeat of 1688... in 1793 Robespierre & Co. applied themselves to the task of constituting a French state out of the chaos to which the 1789 arrangement had led."

(John Locke had no reason to bay at the moon in misery when, on the point of death, he surveyed the Revolution thus far. But it seems that Lenin did end up baying at the moon in 1923 - he certainly had cause to - and he made simple-minded proposals for remedying all that he had constructed at the height of his ablilities while he was in the possession of absolute power.)

But 1688 has the quality of a mirage if it is not seen as the culminating point of three generations of political turmoil. The English of the 17th century did not have one go at revolution and get it right. They had numerous goes at revolution and finally in 1688 they got it right. The ability to get it right was developed through having got it wrong a great many times. England had become so accustomed to revolution, and the various phases of politics since 1628 had been so thoroughly described and reflected upon by the people involved in them, that it was able to enact the 1688 Revolution at its ease - the ease of a virtuosity which is the outcome of intensive practice.

The 1688 Revolution was entirely successful in establishing a system of representative government which was capable of evolving in response to social development. It was aristocratic at the outset, and it evolved into a democracy.

The aristocrats of the late 17th century did not have a lineage stretching back to the Norman Conquest. Most of them were of recent creation. They are best considered as a class of professional revolutionaries of independent means. By 1688 they had acquired a stabilising party structure as Whigs and Tories, and they had become largely indifferent to the theological discussion of religion while being determined to preserve Christianity as sentiment. And they had an *esprit de corps* developed through sixty years of the conflict of Crown and Parliament - a conflict which was sometimes military and sometimes intricately political.

The long English Revolution which preceded 1688 was the real cultural and political framework of the 1688 Revolution. The earnest French politicians of 1789 looked to 1688 as their model. They did not realise that 1688 was possible only because of a development which began with the Parliament of 1628, and which included such episodes as the Parliamentary scheme of Presbyterian theocracy, the execution of the King, the overthrow of Parliament by the Protector etc. And what good would it have done them if they had realised it? France was not going to ask to be governed by England, and Engand would in any case probably have made a mess of governing France. Revolutions are particular and specific events.

Burke jeered at the notion that 1789 was a repeat of 1688, and said it was a sort of reverse of 1688. And so it was. But Burke did not explain the antecedents of 1688, though he undoubtedly knew what they were. He confined himself to making an analysis of 1789, and on the basis of that analysis declaring that the French Constitution of 1789 was an arrangement which would subvert the French state. A few years later, in 1793, Robespierre and St Just and Billaud-Varennes and Collot d'Herbois and Carnot applied themselves to the task of constituting a French state out of the chaos to which the 1789 arrangement had led.

Burke's **Reflections On The Revolution In France** has no equal for sheer power of political analysis. It could do with being read at a moment when the English left has forgotten what thought is. In the Penguin edition it is, unfortunately, accompanied by a long fatuous introduction by Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, who manages to turn everything into dross. But there is an Anchor Books edition, which, with admirable American disregard for English tradition, combines Burke's **Reflections** and Paine's **Rights of Man** in one volume. As I tried to explain in my defence of Tom Paine against Michael Foot, Burke and Paine belong together.

Bevan, Bevin and Unilateralism. Part Three

Living with the bomb

by Michael Alexander

Technology and politics have produced an odd situation: two superpowers who feel the world isn't big enough for both of them, and yet who dare not fight an all-out war. This was the problem that Bertrand Russell tried to solve in the 1960s.

Bertrand Russell was a logical monster. His intended life's work was an attempt to provided a complete logical proof of the validity of mathematics. As far as I recall, it took him half the book to establish definitely that 2+2=4. Unfortunately, Göedel's work undermined this attempt. There is no final logical proof that 2+2=4, even though day-to-day experience makes it overwhelmingly likely that this is in fact the case.

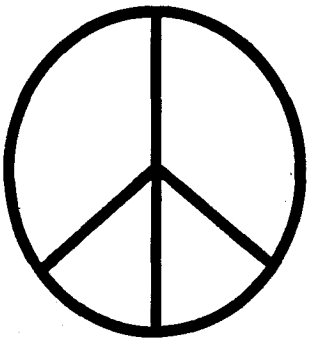
Russell also applied logic to international politics. To the best of my knowledge, his politics and his mathematical philosophy are quite unconnected. But in both cases he tried to base himself on absolute principles. This led him sometimes to urge peace during a war, and sometimes to advocate war when most people hoped to avoid one.

Just after World War Two, he was an advocate of war. Seeing that his sort of person would have a better chance in an American-ruled world than in the sort of world that Stalin aimed at, he decided that America should use its brief monopoly of nuclear weapons to smash and conquer the Soviet Union, before it too should get nuclear weapons. Preserving the world for people like himself was the core of Bertrand Russell's political philosophy.

In the event, the United States did not make use of its nuclear monopoly, and in any case soon lost it. Therefore, in 1958, Russell joined in the agitation against nuclear weapons. He was a major force within CND. He was not the inventor of the famous CND symbol but he helped make it famous.

Most of the people on CND marches had a vague notion that *all* nuclear weapons should be abolished. Russell did not. His idea was that the world should be peacefully carved up between the superpowers. Britain at the time was the third nuclear power; there was some hope that there would be no others. Russell did not think that general nuclear disarmament was possible. He also thought that a war between the superpowers would certainly happen in the absence of nuclear weapons. Therefore, he wanted unilateralism for Britain only.

It is an odd fact that ordinary CND members did not revolt against Russell's ideas, but instead allowed him to become CND's effective leader and spokesman. But the difficulty was that other attempts to translate unilateralism into practical politics looked a lot less workable than his. Only the Communist Party had a clear alternative - basically, to further Moscow's foreign policy. And this could only be done effectively by operating behind the scenes, and working with people who had very different notions of what CND was about.



It is interesting to compare Bertand Russell to his namesake, Lord Russell of Liverpool. The two of them are sometimes confused; they once felt impelled to write a joint letter to **The Times** pointing out that neither of them was the other.

Lord Russell of Liverpool spent his time after World War Two exposing the horrors of the fasicsts. He was the author of **The Scourge of the Swastika** and similar books, which expresses a proper moral outrage at what the Nazis did. The Retired Brigadier felt that the crimes of the past were the most important matter.

Bertrand Russell was more far-sighted and cold-blooded. The Nazis were defeated; it was the Russian Communists who were the problem. He advocated war, and then peace, and the world carried on regardless.

The superpowers' alternative

A world such as Russell proposed might have worked. But in the event, the superpowers did not choose to carve up the world into two permanently separate halves. Instead they accepted a pattern of 'cold war', in which each side is out to win, but both sides show restraint.

It was accepted that the division of the world was not definitely permanent. Each side had a core of nations that could not be touched without starting a global war. NATO cannot invade any part of the Warsaw Pact, and the Warsaw Pact cannot invade any part of NATO. Neither side will attack the societies that are the basis of the other's power.

But some changes are possible. Yugoslavia left the Soviet Block. Cuba joined it. Nations in Africa and Asia swung wildly between support for one or other superpower. Vietnam was eventually unified as a Soviet ally. China went independent for a number of years, trying to be a third superpower, and then for a time was much closer to America than to Russia. The Chinese leadership were settling their differences with Russia at the time the student protests blew up. What they will do next is anyone's guess.

Each superpower hoped that its own economic system would prove superior. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Kruschev talked about Russia catching up with the West over the next few years. For a time, this seemed to be happening. And in the late 1960s, the West seemed to be heading for chaos and confusion.

But now the West has established a definite and increasing lead, and it is Russia that is bending to Western ways. At least that is the situation at the time of writing, in the late 1980s. Further dramatic changes are still possible. A lot of Western politicians seem to be assuming that the Gorbachev reforms signal an effective acceptance of capitalism. I doubt if Gorbachev sees it that way. The contest between East and West is by no means over. If Gorbachev's reforms prove a great success, and if the West suffers a serious financial crisis and slump, then the world

in the mid-1990s could be a very different place.

A game with rules

Russell's notion was fine logically. It failed to take into account human emotions. Neither side wanted permanent co-existence with a hated rival. Both sides expected that history was on their side, and that their own social system would prove superior.

What has in fact emerged is a rather dirty global power-game. Neither side abides by the nominal rules of international law and diplomacy. But there are a set of unwritten rules that both sides keep to, because the cost of breaking them would be an escalation towards a final and fatal nuclear war.

From Vietnam to Afghanistan

When the Americans finally recognised that they had lost the Vietnam war, they suffered a period of confusion. They had not expected that a nation of Asian peasants could defeat them. Suddenly the whole structure of global American power looked unstable.

This created a golden opportunity for Russia. A golden opportunity to establish worldwide peace and justice, or else a golden opportunity to extend its power by fairly direct military means.

Not surprisingly, Russia chose the second option. Actual political thinking by the Soviet Politbureau does not resemble old-style Pravda editorials. Actual Soviet political thinking is never publicly expressed anywhere. But its existence can be deduced from what the Soviet Union actually does.

America in the 1970s was suffering a moral crisis. Its material power remained very great. A direct threat to the United States or to Western Europe, would be likely to cause the US to revert to normal cold-war habits. So things would have to be done carefully, if the Soviet Union was to make the most of its chances.

What actually happened was a series of small expansions in Third World countries. The majority of them, in fact, were against left-wing regimes or movements that were for one reason or another unacceptable to Soviet foreign policy. Thus Vietnam went into Cambodia, ousting a regime that seemed to be applying the notion of 'remoulding humanity' in far too literal a way. Cuban troops went into Angola, giving one African Nationalist faction victory over its rivals. Soviet and Cuban power also settled matters in Ethiopia, where a radical military regime had come to power. The left-wing secessionists in Eritrea were prevented from winning. The Somalis, until then friends of the USSR, were prevented from taking over the ethnically Somali parts of the Ethiopian Empire.

The big move was the invasion of Afghanistan. Formally speaking, this too was a displacement of a left-wing regime that was judged to have gone too far. But few remember this, because it is no more than a formal truth. The substance of it has been right-wing nationalist and Islamic resistance to an occupation by Soviet troops.

Up until the invasion of Afghanistan, it was possible to believe that the Soviet Union wanted only to hold on to what it had. Even the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia could be seen in that light. Global support for friendly regimes could be seen as a counter to what the USA was doing. But after Afghanistan, there was no more room for confusion. Brezhnev's policy was to expand his power wherever possible, by any means.

The third alternative

Iran introduced a new and unpredictable factor. Up until then, global politics could be more or less fitted onto a left-right scale. But Iran broke all the rules.

Basically, the Iranian Islamic

Tom Paine Defended

against Michael Foot

is a new pamphlet issued by the Bevin Society. It looks at Paine and Burke. Why Robespierre almost had Paine executed. Why modern British politics could be considered to be based on a merger of Paine and Burke.

Available from
The Bevin Society, 26 Aden Grove, London N16 9NJ.
Price £1, postage included.

and

Belfast in the French Revolution

by Brendan Clifford

Belfast Historical & Educational Association 1989.
148 pages, £7.50.

Why Belfast more than any other city in the British Isles felt enthusiasm for the French Revolution and participated vicariously in it; how the Vatican thwarted Mirabeau, why the Girondins failed and how Robespierre and the Jacobins reconstituted the French state on an entirely new basis.

This too is available from **The Bevin Society** at the above address.

revolutionaries had a literal belief in the Quran as the *direct* word of God. The rules that Muhammad laid down in Mecca and Medina were quite progressive for the time and place, Arabia some 1300 years ago. But most Muslims believe that the Quran is true for all time and for all places. To disagree with it, or even to reject traditional interpretations of the Quran, is to disagree with God.

Islam in the 19th century had its confidence badly shaken. The nations of Christian Europe were suddenly much stronger than they had been, and this was hard to explain on the Muslim view of things. Many Muslims sought to tone down Islam, and to devise some sort of Islamic secularism. This process seems to have succeeded in Turkey, and perhaps in some of the Arab countries. But elsewhere, the anti-imperialist movement provided a means by which Islamic fundamentalism could come to terms with the modern world without ceasing to be Islamic. The left tried to use them, but ended up being used and then discarded.

Iran upset everyone's calculations. The left assumed that power would naturally fall into their hands, once the Shah was overthrown. But in the Russian and Chinese revolutions, there was no third force that was ideologically independant of both the left and the old regime. You did not have a body of anti-Communist revolutionaries. (The Kuomintang merged with the old order of warlords and landlords. Russian anarchists mostly fought as allies of the Bolsheviks.) Islamic fundamentalism was independent, and it was also close to the opinions of the mass of the population.

Iran undermined the left's belief that the march of history was of necessity with them. It also helped to destroy the authority of Jimmy Carter, who was trying to define a more moral and less interventionist foreign policy for the USA.

At the time of writing, the Iranian Islamic revolution seems to be going nowhere. But a few years back, they looked dangerous. Indeed, they *were* dangerous. Had Iraq collapsed, had the Iranians spread their power to Arab Shi'ites in the Gulf states, things could have gone very differently.

Reagan: reaction and counter-reaction

Reaction is used as a term for the more hard-line forms of conservatism. Its other main meaning is a response to what other people are doing. Reaganism fits both of these definitions.

The eclipse of American power after Vietnam had not led to a better world. Jimmy Carter had meant well, but done badly. Brezhnev was using cynical military methods to expand his power. Ayatollah Khomeini was heading off in a direction that dismayed both left and right.

Reagan's main policy was to rebuild America's global power. Someone, somewhere, must have realised that the USA was likely to do best in wars of machines and technology. American ground troops were mostly kept out of the fighting. Forces like the Nicaraguan Contras could be used with little political cost. Few Americans care what rival Nicaraguans do to each other; they ought to, but they do not.

The Reagan reaction did not, in most cases, involve direct military action. The main exception was Grenada. But this was made possible by a quite unexpected bust-up among the Grenadan left. Maurice Bishop was overthrown, and later murdered, by a hard-line faction led by his deputy Bernard Coard. This discredited the Grenadan left, both inside the country and in the rest of the Caribbean. Without it, the invasion would not have been politically possible. (If one were to translate it into British terms, one would have to imagine that Arthur Scargill had been overthrown and then murdered by a hard-left faction of the NUM at the height of the miners' strike!)

Counter-reaction is not a term that exists in the dictionaries. But it seems the only good term for what Reagan has done over the past few years.

Reagan led a global reaction to Brezhnevism. Partly due to the success of this reaction, Brezhnevism lost popularity among the ruling Soviet elite. After a period of confusion, Gorbachev emerged as a new leader who was willing to make deals with the west, and wind up the unsuccessful parts of the Brezhnevite initiative. And Reagan and the Right have got the credit for abandoning their former sabre-rattling and responding positively to Gorbachev's approach.

If Brezhnevism had been met with a general left opposition to such distortions of socialism, then the left might have reaped great benefits from the end of Brezhnevism. Some of us tried to carry out such a policy. The majority of socialists evaded the issue, while a strong minority backed Brezhnevism as the best way forward.

Unilateral disarmament in Western Europe would have been seen in Moscow as a massive success for Brezhnevism. Brezhnev would have been succeded by a man in his own image; there would have been no *glasnost* or *perestroika*.

Labour's equivocation

Unilateralists have been left looking ridiculous. In Britain, the result has been an uneasy compromise between morality and pragmatism. Labour will not opt for neutralism, which is the only serious alternative to NATO. But equally, Labour is content to be soft and vague about NATO. The Labour leadership hopes that Britain can continue to be defended by NATO and the Americans, without quite admitting that NATO is built around nuclear weapons.

Labour at the last election was asking the Americans to leave their troops in Western Europe, but to take all their nuclear missiles out of Britain. America could have all the danger, expense and moral stigma of nuclear weapons, but should continue to defend Western Europe.

The fact is, the USA could decide to pull out of NATO, to let Western Europe go its own way. This is indeed what the hard left of the Labour Party desire. The rest of the Labour Party does not share this desire. Yet at the same time, Labour for a long time hung on to defence policies that were likely to bring it about.

Labour implicitly accepts that a Russian invasion is still a possibility. If it is not a possibility, then we could safely pull out of NATO and scrap almost all of our armed forces; and hardly anyone is advocating that. People remember Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968; being left-wing is no protection.

Labour must make a clear choice; NATO or neutralism. Either a willingness to risk a Russian invasion, or a willingness to use nuclear weapons to prevent it. A middle-of-the-road policy is neither moral nor rational.

This article follows on from A Carolingian Renaissance (L&TUR 10) and Absolute Beginners (L&TUR 11). It is however a complete argument in itself.

A Matter of Life and Death

by Peter Brooke

I finished the previous article in this series with the resounding words: "*taste is not a matter of indifference, of mere personal fantasy. It is a battleground for the rediscovery of the soul.*"

It is, however, a mistake to think of the soul as of something distinct from the body.

Aristotle regarded the soul as the form of the body and I suggest that we may call it the 'reality' of the body. The soul is what experiences the world and it does so as much through the senses and affections as through the pursuit of chains of argument that pass through the mind. The body as we seem to think of it today - the object as studied by science - is a mere diagram of the body, a fiction which we have devised for the purposes of medicine. As such, it has its uses, but what is unforgiveable is that we have fallen into the habit of looking at this crude caricature of reality as if it were more real than our actual experience of the world. We call the former 'objective' and the latter 'subjective'. But this 'objective' reality is the work of only a very small part of our whole sensibility which we call 'reason', though in arrogating to itself such a monopoly of truth, it is acting unreasonably.

It is the responsibility of the artist to deal not with the world reduced to an abstract schema that can be thought about, but with the world as it is actually experienced. The artist - to the extent to which he deserves to be taken seriously - is thus much closer to reality than the scientist. The job of recovering the soul is the job of recovering the reality of the senses. It is a matter of discovering what the world tastes like.

The remains of a sense of the importance and seriousness of such an undertaking can be dimly seen in the word we still use, usually to designate the opposite of its real meaning, the word 'culture'. We use this word with some idea of what it means when we combine it with the prefixes agri- or horti-. We know that agriculture and horticulture are to do with growth and cultivation. But what can 'culture' by itself possibly mean? It means the growth and cultivation of our own nature, and that is a collective enterprise undertaken in relation to the society of which it is a part. As with agriculture and horticulture, it implies work, even hard work, even full time work. And it requires a rigorous sense of what should be kept and what should be thrown away. It is the judgement made between Good and Bad and the commitment we make towards pursuing the Good. It is not a leisure activity to fill in some idle moments after a busy day. It is - or would be if the word still possessed any meaning - our knowledge of the real value of everything, including, or especially, our own daily work.

Thus we have two theses: that art is a matter of the work of our whole sensibility; and that the idea of 'culture' implies that our whole sensibility is capable of undergoing a growth and development other than the purely natural development of the aging process. And these two theses, simple and incontrovertible as they are, demolish virtually the whole of our modern industrial 'culture' which is based on the incoherence of human sensibility - the cultivation of insensitivity - and which has no concept of human development because, denying the existence of the soul, there is nothing to develop. There is the brain, which can only stuff itself with more and more information.

An example of the cultivation of insensitivity is the replacement of painting by photography.

What is it that renders a landscape nourishing to the person who looks at it? It is the ability of the eye to pass from one thing to the other, the interest maintained by a thousand subtle variations of colour - a colour that is produced by a lively interchange between the light of the sun and complex material structures each atom of which is infinitely variable, distinct from its neighbour.

What makes the difference between a painting of a landscape done by a master and a photograph? It is certainly not a question of superficial likeness, of the mere processing of information. If we want to know where such and such a hedge is situated in relation to such and such a house, it is to the photograph that we must turn. But if we want to offer to the eyes a feast in any way comparable to the landscape itself we must look to the painting. And the reason why painting will work has nothing to do with likeness, though it has everything to do with similarity.

The photographer is working with celluloid, which is a homogeneous material that has no variation in its composition and therefore cannot dance with light after the matter of earth, or grass, or flesh. Variants in colour may be faithfully recorded but in a medium that is itself dead and kills everything it touches. Consequently the eye cannot pass from one thing to another. It can see the whole at one go but the moment it attempts to go for a walk, to take some exercise, in the landscape, it finds itself slipping and sliding because it has no purchase. It is like walking on ice.

A painting on the other hand, even if it is not a faithful copy of a landscape, is worked with materials which have the same properties of catching and playing with light that exist in the natural world. Real paint is a wonderfully subtle and various thing, though the paint one normally buys in the shop bears the same relation (for much the same reasons) to real paint as canned beer to real ale. To learn how to use paint in such a way as to release its possibilities is the work of a lifetime. It is not a question of 'expressing oneself' or of making faithful copies of nature, but of seeing how the play of colour in nature works.

One first principle that may be hinted at here is that the individually beautiful colour has no interest. It is the ability of the eye to move (not slide) from one thing to the other that is interesting; consequently it is not colours but the relations between colours, the dance of light from one colour to another, that makes the painting. And it is on this basis that we may begin to understand the impossibility of an industrial culture - which is a contradiction in terms since culture entails growth and only living things can grow. Machines cannot grow and hence, while they may be useful for certain menial tasks, they should be regarded as contemptible with relation to everything that is alive.

The difference between an eighteenth

century town and a twentieth century town is that in the latter the movement of the eye is constantly stopped. What we see is a great mass of disparate phenomena, each one attempting to assert itself as the centre of our attention. Each shop in the street is obliged to jostle its neighbours and has access to frighteningly loud means of doing so. Painted wood has the possibility of yielding a generous, various surface; metal much less so, plastic none at all. The eye is obliged to jump from one thing to another; its movement becomes saccadic; and this in turn transmits a nervous excitement to the whole sensibility, which we can only resist by a cultivated insensitivity. Which in turn means that those who wish to claim our attention must have recourse to ever larger and more violent effects to do it, resulting in the need of the human organism to defend itself through greater insensitivity.

And that is what we call 'culture': the only activity in which the spirit can freely engage being a kind of dessicated thought independent of the work of the senses. Thus prose of all kinds flourishes while poetry, music (I refer to the living ability to sing, not the adroit interpreting of the work of old masters) and painting become impossible.

I am not indulging in a rhetorical exaggeration. This is if anything an understatement of a problem which was understood and discussed before the war but which is now so overwhelming that nobody thinks of talking about it. Ecology, though important and admirable, is a different matter: a defence of the physical conditions of life, with some concern for preserving certain beauty spots, often where those who have made a lot of money out of industrial culture like to retire to escape the consequences of their own daily work.

(Saccadic - jerky, rapid or abrupt. *Ed.)*

The Bevin Society

Aims and Purposes

***The Bevin Society** was set up several years ago, but lapsed as individual members became involved in other matters -- including setting up **Labour & Trade Union Review**. It has now been re-founded by some of its original members, and given a clearer statement of aims and objectives. We reproduce them here.*

The aim of the Bevin Society is to develop a programme for the Labour Party that will make possible a comprehensive collectivist reform as the framework for a more widely based individualism.

The Bevin Society is essentially a development from a group in the Institute for Workers' Control which actually supported workers' control when it was a possibility of immediate practical politics: when it was proposed as a radical economic reform by the Bullock Committee.

The leadership of the Institute for Workers Control opposed the Bullock proposals on woolly ideological grounds, as did Neil Kinnock and most of the trade union leaders.

The 'right to manage'

The "right of management to manage" was the conservative cry of both the left and right of the Labour movement, as well as of the budding Thatcherites. But 'management' is not a detached element operating between capital and labour. Management must be an agency of capital or an agency of labour.

Conservatism, or the continuation of the status quo, was not a practical possibility in the seventies. Labour had grown too powerful to enable the existing arrangements to continue. Both the leaders and the militants of the Labour movement lived in a fool's paradise, believing that the trade union movement could refuse to become the basis of management and yet retain the power to paralyse the management based on capital.

The status quo was doomed. The only question was whether Labour would become the basis of management, or trade union power would be weakened so that a management based on capital would again be effective. When the leaders of the Labour movement declined to enact a radical reform in the Labour interest, it was only a matter of time before a radical reaction restored the managerial power of capital.

The lost chance

If the Bullock Report had been adopted by the Labour movement it is likely that it would have become a watershed in British history comparable to the Beveridge Report (which established the Welfare State). It would have altered the framework of economics and politics, and opened up an array of new and stimulating conflicts and contradictions.

Because the Bullock Report was rejected by Labour, the Labour movement has ever since been disoriented in the face of successful capitalist reaction.

A static socialism

There were reasons of petty vested interest involved in the rejection of the Bullock Report. But much more important than these was the essentially static character of socialist ideology of all varieties in the movement. Socialism was a vaguely imagined eternal harmony, a secularised version of the state of affairs following the Day of Judgement. Some dreamed of a Leninist revolution as the means by which it would be established, while others imagined a systematic scheme of reform through social engineering. The Bullock Report was equally unacceptable to both because it was obviously not a recipe for eternal harmony.

A similar approach would have led to the rejection of the Beveridge Report in the 1940s. And there were those on the left as well as the right who rejected it.

Recovering the dynamic

But the Labour outlook in those days was not confined to visionary dreams of a final condition of things, and to empty rhetoric following from those visions. Ernest Bevin and Clement Attlee were determined to enact the practical reforms of the day, and to develop through its conflicts while leaving eternal harmony to the metaphysicians.

The Labour movement is now in the doldrums because during the past two generations it has not developed out of the experience of that group of effective reformers who transformed the conditions of working class life when they came to power -- and who came to power because they had impressed society with their capacity for radical and realistic reform.

The Bevin Society intends to regain for the present generation the experience of the Bevin-Attlee era, and to develop out of it a capacity for thought and action in place of the slogan and the gesture which are now the stock-in-trade of the Labour leadership. □

Ruhollah Khomeini

by Graham Dalton

Until the Iranian revolution of 1979 it seemed that whether political changes in the world were good or bad, progressive or reactionary, bloody or peaceful, democratic or tyrannous, there was nonetheless a general overall shape to world affairs, a development that, with a thousand qualifications and upsets, tended in the direction of secularisation. It may be that the Iranian revolution is just another qualification and upset, but it is a big one. If it has done nothing else it has forced the world to take religion seriously - specifically Islam; specifically Shi'ism; specifically "Twelver" Shi'ism; specifically the Usuli school of Twelver Shi'ism; specifically the particular development of the Usuli school of Twelver Shi'ism that Khomeini has pioneered for which I do not have a name other than Republicanism.

While the general tendency of world affairs has been to reduce the love of God to a private affair without political consequences, Khomeini has made it, explicitly, the central organising principle of the state. And while the general tendency of world affairs has been to divest the clergy of all temporal power and influence, Khomeini - acting in accordance with the recent history of religion in Iran, but against the general weight of Islamic tradition - has constituted the clergy into an effective ruling class. This was not apparantly his intention. He seems to have wanted a separation of temporal and spiritual authority. But for the moment, the clergy, organised throughout the whole country, with a long tradition of exercising judicial functions independently of the lay government, have proved to be the only possible guarantors of the integrity of the state. Hence the importance in the "temporal" sphere of clerics such as Khamenei and Rafsanjani.

We are often being told by the religiously minded that the world would be a better place if we recovered our sense of the existence of God. The success of the Iranian revolution ought therefore to be a rich and stimulating subject of reflection for the religiously minded - just as the success of Stalin in the Soviet Union should have been a rich and stimulating subject of reflection for Marxists. Christians may argue that since Khomeini is a Muslim his revolution has nothing to do with them but it is a weak argument in these days of inter-confessional understanding. If Khomeini's conception of God - developed in one of the toughest schools of religious thought in the world - is wrong, it would be interesting to know why.

Of course it can be said that massacre and torture are not compatible with the love of God. But the early history of Christianity and Islam do not bear this out. The Koran required Islam to be relatively tolerant towards Christianity and Judaism. But it said nothing about Zoroastrianism, the old state religion of Iran. If Iran is almost monolithically Muslim now, it is because of the absolutely murderous suppression of Zoroastrianism. And lest our Buddhist friends say that theirs is a very pacific religion, we may add that the first Mongols who devastated Iran in the thirteenth century were largely Buddhist. And with the examples of the French and Russian revolutions before us, we may hope that God's enemies will not claim that they are any less bloodthirsty than His friends.

The Iranian revolution has been a complete remoulding of society comparable to the French and Russian revolutions, though in the opposite direction, and like the French and Russian revolutions it has been forged in a state of war with powerful neighbours. It has used the same methods, so far apparently successfully. Like them, it has frightened the world. Like them, it regards the rest of the world with a pretty thoroughgoing contempt.

The West is comtemptible because it is a mere money making machine for which the highest end in life is sensual pleasure. Such a society, believing that this life is all there is, has an inordinate fear of death, which is why it is so easily and amusingly shocked by the lighter approach to life and death that is possible for those who believe that the soul is immortal. For two centuries Western leaders have worked to emasculate Islam which is the only force capable of resisting their efforts to remould the Muslim peoples in their own image so as to incorporate them into their system of exploitation. It is a coherent and powerful argument and it is by no means clear that the West is capable of answering it.

Similar views are widespread throughout the Islamic world. But the power of the clergy, which is the foundation on which the Iranian revolution rests, is almost unique to Iran and to the particular tradition of which Khomeini is a part. This tradition is relatively recent, originating in the collapse of the Safavid dynasty at the end of the seventeenth century (so its history more or less coincides, admirers of the Glorious Revolution will be interested to learn, with the history of the influence of John Locke). Outside this tradition, religious renovation in Islam has been the work of charismatic warriors and lay rulers who have assumed a religious role and subjected the clergy - who usually have little status in their own right - to their will. Thus radical Islam outside Iran does not have the ready-made hierarchical machinery of government that was available to Khomeini.

It may be useful to finish with a comment on the method by which this remarkable clerical caste is formed. Khomeini could be described as having been a university professor. But clearly he had a sense of purpose and of reality far beyond anyone who goes by that title here in the West. What is the secret of his superiority? There are many aspects but one interesting one is the method of instruction employed in the Shi'i school.

This is a dialectical method. Not in the vague sense of our modern Marxists but in the precise sense used by the old Greek schools. As in the days of Plato and Aristotle, students are trained through dialogue. And training consists largely of the discussion of hypothetical legal cases. The teacher sits surrounded by his pupils. He proposes the hypothetical case and it is then discussed from all possible angles. The training is verbal, the pupil is active, and he is obliged to see every question simultaneously from numerous different angles. Thus when he advances an argument he is constantly confronted with the counter-argument. This training may continue for ten years or more, during which time the pupil is - probably - living in acute poverty. Hence the development of will, of discipline, of intellectual activity directed towards the resolution of concrete problems. And that may help to explain the political intelligence that has enabled the clergy to keep control of the revolution so far.

There is perhaps a lesson there to be learnt by the British working class if it seriously wants to become a ruling class. □