

Labour & Trade Union Review

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LABOUR RETURNS TO HEALTH?

Eric Heffer

Bankrupting the Gulf
British Academics and
the New World Order
Ireland and History

plus

Democracy & the EC
House of Lords
Notes on the News
Readers' Letters
Trade Union Diary



Labour: a healthy development

It would be overstating the case to say that the Labour front bench has begun to sound like a Government. But it is beginning to sound like an Opposition in the matter of the National Health Service privatisation.

It is the business of an Opposition to ensure that the public is made aware of the implications of changes proposed by the Government and to work up public opinion against changes which it considers to be retrogressive. It cannot be said that the Labour front bench ever did this during the Thatcher era. To have attempted to do so would have smacked too much of agitation, and agitation has been equated with the Militant Tendency.

Under the leadership of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock the Labour Party has ceased to be an agitational party. The capacity to agitate society over crucial issues, which used to be a routine ability of all political parties, has now become the exclusive property of the Tory Party. The Tory Party has not ceased to be an agitational party. It is only that, in the immediate aftermath of Thatcherism, it is at a loss to find a viable agitational issue.

For twelve years it has been left to vested interests in civil society to oppose changes being enacted by the Tory government. Some of those changes were progressive while others were not. A competent Opposition would have selected the retrogressive changes and helped the vested interests opposing them to work up a powerful public opinion against them. But on one issue after another the Labour leadership made mere gestures of opposition in Parliament and left it to the vested interests in society (which were often of a Tory disposition) to try to convince the public that the proposed changes were retrogressive.

Tory trade union legislation in the early 1980s was progressive. The Labour front bench opposed it. Then, having got its fingers burnt, it let the trade union legislation of the later 1980s, which struck at the fundamentals of trade unionism, go largely by default.

And the case against water

privatisation was left to administrators in the water industry to argue. Many of these were Tories with a good sense of public service. They were willing to argue the case against privatisation in public against their own party in government. The Opposition was of little or no use to them in developing and agitating their case.

It was likewise left to the doctors to make the case against the NHS reforms. But because the NHS touches the lives of people at large in a way that none of the institutions previously privatised had done, the doctors were able to do more than argue a case. They were able to agitate the public on the issue. It was only when the BMA had done the agitational work that the Labour

"The doctors' agitation against the government's NHS proposals is a defensive measure by an outstandingly successful socialist institution - or a communist institution in Marx's terms, since it provides distribution according to need."

leadership took up the issue.

Kinnock and Cook must be given the credit for taking up the case made by the BMA, and for standing firm against the counter-offensive launched by Waldegrave and Major in the aftermath of the Monmouth by-election. They must be given the credit for backing an issue developed by others, which could be seen to be a winner. Things had come to such a pass that it was entirely possible that they would not take up the NHS issue, and that they must be given credit for doing so. Having done so, they have given themselves a chance of winning the next election.

At the same time, it must be said that the first politicians who made out a

substantial case against the reforms were Tory backbenchers, and that until mid-May Nicholas Winterton was much better on the issue than Kinnock or Cook. And, that being so, it is conceivable that the Tories will get themselves off this hook in time for the election.

The Health Service was rightly seen by the Thatcherite radicals as the lynchpin of the welfare state. They knew at the outset that if they could not restore private medicine anything else they did towards re-establishing Victorian conditions for workers would be marginal. But a large body of Tory opinion never supported the fundamentals of the Thatcher programme. And traditional Tories have been to the fore in criticising the reform, both before its enactment and since.

The Labour front bench by contrast has generally been very bad on the NHS. By wildly exaggerating the crisis in the service, and by making unfavourable comparisons between the proportion of national income spent on medical provision in Britain and in countries with private medicine, they created the atmosphere in which Thatcher dared to begin dismantling the service.

The Thatcherites could take up Kinnock's point about higher spending on medical provision in other countries and suggest with some plausibility that there would be a greater willingness by people to spend at American levels here if American conditions were established

here.

Private medicine is much dearer and much worse than public medicine. When each individual has to make his own provision for medical treatment in the case of illness, the terror of being poor when sick will cause him to make substantial weekly payments against something which may never happen. And doctors in a system of private medicine are businessmen selling a product to customers regardless of whether the customers need it or not.

A public medical service is almost as much benefit to the rich as the poor. In the olden days surgeons sold operations with little regard to the need for them. G.B. Shaw's greatest contribution to socialism was his play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, about a surgeon who became

rich by discovering a piece of the body which it did little damage to cut out and advertising it as beneficial. The practice continues in America to this day.

The establishment of the NHS not only took the constant preoccupation with making provision for illness out of the lives of workers, but also saved the rich from the wiles of medical racketeers. It was a social revolution which led to a revolution in the medical profession. The social character of doctors has changed fundamentally as a result of it - as anybody who has had dealings with the private doctors who are still cock of the walk in Ireland will appreciate. (In British literature, the novels of A.S. Cronin showed what doctors used to be like before the NHS. Unfortunately those novels seem to have been dropped out of print.)

The agitation by doctors against the government's proposals for the NHS is a defensive measure by an outstandingly successful socialist institution - or a communist institution, if one applies the definitions of socialism and communism given by Marx, since it provides distribution according to need. And one can hear in it a distaste on the part of most doctors at the prospect of being turned back into hucksters.

It is good that Kinnock has taken up the agitation laid on for him by the doctors, and it certainly entitles him to win the next election if Waldegrave and Major hold firm on Thatcher's policy. But it would be much better if he had himself been in the thick of the agitation all along. □

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Editor: Dick Barry

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

Address - editorial, advertising and subscriptions:
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Eric Heffer: A Tribute

I got to know Eric Heffer in the mid 1970s when he was elected to the Labour Party's National Executive Committee. I was working in the Party's Research Department, located at Transport House, home of the T&GWU. Jack Jones was the T&GWU's General Secretary. Jack is a born Liverpudlian. Eric was an adopted one; but he loved the city and its people no less for that. Indeed, when Jack Lane and I interviewed him for the **L&TUR** in his flat in Dolphin Square a few weeks before he died he told us that his greatest regret was that he would never see Liverpool and its people again.

Eric was a man who believed, passionately, in the goodness of ordinary working people. He fought all his political and trade union life for

justice for the working class, but he was not a class warrior who despised those with whom he disagreed. On the contrary he respected his opponents and sought to win them to socialism by argument and persuasion. He followed Schumacher's advice and did what he conceived to be the right thing and did not bother his head or burden his soul with whether he was going to be successful. That is why he found being a Minister so difficult.

He was a prodigious writer, working to the very end on his memoirs and books on Christianity, socialism and the Middle East. In all of this he was assisted by his beloved wife Doris. They were inseparable and it was clear to everyone how much they meant to one another. We felt very proud when he told us that his book on the Middle East includes extracts from our pamphlets on the Gulf War. He read our

pamphlets and the **L&TUR** with great interest and although he did not agree with everything we write, he was a keen supporter of the Review.

Most of the Press obituaries referred to his fiery personality. The nearest I came to witnessing it was on the bus taking NEC members and party staff from their Blackpool hotel to the Winter Gardens conference centre in 1980. Eric and I were sitting together. I noticed that he had a copy of *The Spectator* on his lap and, jokingly, asked him why he was reading it. His response was to give me a stern lecture on why socialists should read Tory journals. After a while he realised that I was pulling his leg, and smiled. He was a wonderful man. We will miss him.

Dick Barry

31st May 1991

Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

Pay Bargaining

Gavin Laird is currently leading the pack of trade unionists against the rather mild TUC and Labour Party proposals for a more rational, organised and centralised system of pay bargaining.

This opposition is dressed up as being in the interests of us all. We are told that skill must be rewarded; that the economy needs differentials to attract labour to where it is most needed.

Laird says "*the AEU is committed to free collective bargaining as part of rewarding productivity, efficiency and skill and promoting the strong, productive economy needed to support vital social measures such as a national minimum wage*" (AEU Journal, May 1991). He goes on to attack past, present and future impositions of pay policies and pay restraint.

A picture is built up of a gallant leader protecting trade unionism and the best interests of the economy from state dictat. Incomes policy has been in the past, and could be in the future, very much a matter of state dictat. But if this is true, then the fault lies not with Labour governments, but with the trade unions.

Under the last Labour government the unions agreed to restraint in return for powers which they proudly abused once the restraint ceased and which the Tories then with ease removed. Constructive powers such as industrial democracy were rejected by the unions.

But, most importantly, pay policy meant a period (length usually unspecified) of temporary restraint - a period of suffering - prior to the resumption of free-market bargaining, or free collective bargaining, as Mr Laird calls it. This is not something this magazine would advocate. More to the point, it is not what the TUC proposals are edging towards. And it is disingenuous of Mr Laird to so suggest.

At the time of the last Labour government, those of us now with the L&TUR advocated a pay policy which involved the matter being worked out as far as possible within the organised working class itself - with the TUC being the forum for this. And then negotiating with the government and the employers on the basis of this working out.

That, I believe, is close enough to what the TUC proposals could mean in practice. That would cover the "*rewarding of productivity, efficiency and skill*" that Mr Laird professes to

worry about. More than that, it would take account of the *changing* requirements of the economy and of the *changing* needs of the workers.

And there's the rub. Because what Mr Laird, Mr Hammond and others really want is to protect *existing* differentials in wages. Given the growing generalisation of all unions, that is not even good sectarian practice. And it is certainly not a position they can expect to be supported by other trade unions.

As to Mr Laird's suggestion that free market (sorry, collective) bargaining will help the minimum wage policy: I'm quite baffled. Whatever the merits or otherwise of having a statutory minimum wage, keeping fixed differentials would only mean the minimum constantly chasing a shifting maximum, with wondrous effects on inflation. Even Mr Hammond seems to appreciate this.

Thatcher's bureaucrats

One result of the Thatcher years has been the emergence in public services of managements who seem to inhabit a world of their own. Brilliant with calculators, they severely lack knowledge of the organisations they are meant to run. Worse, they will not lower themselves to seek the advice of their workforce who know their enterprise very well indeed. We met some of these people in my item on British Rail a couple issues back. Now we have a couple more examples.

Recently those running the London Fire Brigade bought some new turntable ladders at a cost of over £300,000 each. This is nearly double the price of the existing types for the sake of a few more feet of reach. Furthermore, the ladders are too wide to negotiate many of London's streets and only one fire station, Tottenham, is big enough to house them. A quiet word with Fireman Smith could have saved a lot of time and trouble.

The London Ambulance Service has just shelled out £30,000 each on ten new ambulances. They have only one trolley bed instead of the usual two. There is no connecting door to the cab which means no emergency exit and the inability of the driver to quickly join his colleague in the back in the event of an emergency or of violence. The crews are refusing to use the vehicles.

To some extent, as I have often pointed out, the unions must share the

blame. When they rejected industrial democracy in the seventies, it was inevitable that this type of management would emerge. But things have gone too far.

The unions are protesting about these and other *particular* blunders. That is not enough. They must demand formal structures at all levels so that the workforce is involved in decision-making *before* stupid, and possibly life-endangering, mistakes are made.

Bus culture

As I mentioned a few months ago, dealing with British Rail staff is normally a quite pleasant experience. They generally do a good job under increasingly difficult conditions and consequently get the support of a large proportion of the public when in dispute with their ghastly employers.

The very opposite seems to be the case with the London buses. I never cease to be amazed by the attitude of most bus crews. They act as if the buses were there solely for their benefit and the passengers are just a pain in the ass - to be avoided whenever possible.

This kind of outlook was bad enough when driving a bus was more or less a job for life. These days it is little less than suicidal. Already routes are being farmed out to private agencies, and the Tories propose complete deregulation if they win the next election. Deregulation will be a disaster for everyone. Any Tom, Dick or Harry on wheels will be allowed to ply his trade. Forget fixed routes, timetables, travelcards, red buses, the lot...

And that is not just speculation. A study in the *Financial Times* shows this to be the case elsewhere in the country where deregulation has taken place. The government claims an increase in bus miles where deregulation has occurred - but that is down to more buses on popular routes and buses being replaced by what are really souped-up ice cream vans.

Passenger use has fallen - in the Metropolitan areas by 16%. (In the same period passenger use in London has *risen* by 6%.)

Ken Fuller, the T&GWU's man responsible for London buses, is campaigning against both deregulation and the tendering out of routes. In the case of tendering, the Labour Party intends to continue with it. My own personal experience agrees with the view that tendered routes are more efficient - a good comparison being between the 24 and the 29 in central London.

The (reasonable) objection of Mr Fuller and the union is that tendering causes lower wages both on the tendered routes and the routes remaining with London Transport. And here lies Mr

Fuller's real problem. He needs public support against wage cuts - especially support for government or local authority subsidy. That support will not be forthcoming if passengers are treated like dirt. Solidarity is a two-way thing.

I cannot see public support for his current campaign against pay cuts. It is too late for that. But if he wants to get support for the vital campaign against deregulation he is going to have to get his members to clean up their act - and to begin doing so immediately.

As a long-time bus driver himself he knows damn well what goes on. There is "scratching", for example. On the second-last run the bus goes as slowly as possible, arriving late at the terminus. It then gets a "turn", ie only does a portion of its full route on the last run, when it drives like fury, often ignoring stops, so that the driver or crew finish early.

Then there is the game of working things so that the bus is, where possible, going against the flow of traffic. That is when we passengers think we are a bit paranoid because we have this feeling that the bus we want is always going the other way.

There are many other interesting practices which confound the already existing chaos at management level and confound the poor public. There is also the downright rudeness of crews - especially, for some reason, to old age pensioners - called "wombles" in bus jargon.

These are the first problems Mr Fuller needs to tackle. I'm not saying that changing bus culture will be easy. It will be a nightmare. But if rail leaders like Jimmy Knapp can do it, so can Ken Fuller. If he fails, or, worse, doesn't try, deregulation is a real and horrible possibility. Then we will all be the poorer - and not least his own members.

Nalگو and the Poll Tax

Alan Jinkinson, general secretary of NALGO, devoted his column in the May issue of *Public Service* to the replacement of the Poll Tax. His main concern was the effect on the jobs of his members:

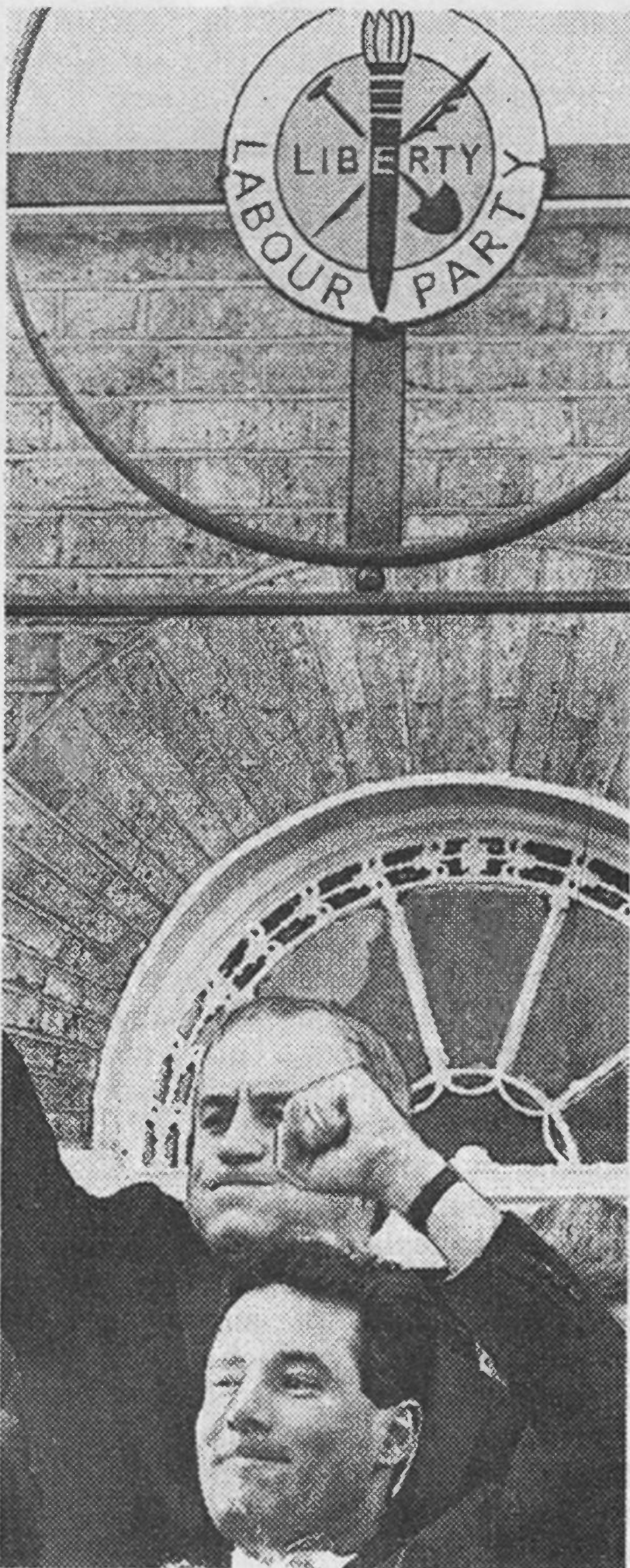
"But above all Mr Heseltine should understand that NALGO will campaign against any proposals which threaten the employment and livelihoods of local government staff. The government should have no illusions. Any reorganisation and replacement for the poll tax will not be introduced at the expense of local government workers."

One of the main problems with the Poll Tax was the cost of administering it: the cost of the extra staff needed to deal with the paperwork and to interfere with the civil liberties of the citizens. Indeed, the only beneficiary of the

wretched tax was NALGO. It is inevitable, and indeed right, that an effect of its abolition should be a reduction in the numbers of people collecting local government revenue - and a massive reduction at that. In Kensington and Chelsea, for example, the collection of the old rates required a staff of 11. Collecting the Poll Tax required a staff of 100 (and that excludes work contracted out to private companies).

There is a case for saying that local authorities should employ more people doing socially useful things - meals on wheels, house renovation, home help, and so on. But that is not the case made by Mr Jinkinson. In any event, the people suitable for such work would rarely, if ever, be the same people employed to operate the Poll Tax.

I can only hope that Mr Jinkinson's comments were mere bluster in an internal journal. If he is serious, and NALGO launches a public campaign to keep the jobs of the extra staff employed because of the Poll Tax, it can do nothing but harm to the image of that union and of unions generally.



The ghost of Labour's past

The rubbish uncollected, and now the dead likely to be unburied... Shades of the Winter of Discontent. The Tories naturally can't resist saying that Liverpool is Labour government in miniature. The gibe may not be taken very seriously. There is no doubt that Neil Kinnock is more appalled than anyone.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that the underlying cause of what happened in 1978-9 has not been tackled at any level in the labour movement. That cause was the victory of trade unionism pure and simple over attempts by people like Jack Jones to develop a new, positive trade unionism - a trade unionism which sought through industrial democracy and a spirit of public service to replace much of the conflict with employers by replacing much of the power of employers.

The Labour and trade union leaderships have never acknowledged that this was the cause of the troubles in the late seventies - and, indeed, the cause of 12 years of Tory rule. Consequently they have never done anything about it. Liverpool today is very much the ghost of Labour haunting itself.

Militant in the Liverpool dispute is therefore in no way contravening Neil Kinnock's concept of what trade unionism is. John Edmonds, Mr Kinnock's closest ally in the unions could only support the actions of his Liverpool members in a recent edition of Question Time. To do otherwise would be hypocritical.

Luckily for Mr Kinnock, Militant is also a political organisation - so he can legitimately have a go at them at that level. Mr Kinnock was once an advocate of industrial democracy. If nothing else, perhaps the embarrassment of the Liverpool dispute will make him or his colleagues think seriously about the matter once more. Otherwise, there is no good reason to suppose that what is happening in Liverpool will not happen elsewhere, or more often - especially if a Labour government is elected - Militant or no Militant.

Neil's names

Finally, I would hate to be thought of as being too often negative about Mr Kinnock's leadership of the Labour party. Wasn't his impulse to support the plan to compensate the Lloyd's Names wonderful! But don't leave it at that, Neil. Develop the idea further.

Extend it. How about compensating any punter who loses, say, no more than £5 on a horse? Support working-class gamblers too - I'm sure there are votes in it too. Sorry. Just trying to be helpful! □

NHS - Privatisation Continues

Martin Dolphin describes the background to the current re-organisation and examines the implications of further privatisation

The Crisis in the NHS before the recent organisational changes was a funding crisis. We must be clear what we mean by this statement. The Tories can legitimately claim that they have spent more on the NHS than any previous government. The statement is true even if you take into account increases in prices over the last 10 years. This fact requires some explaining. How can it be that more is being spent in providing a service than ever before and yet the quality of the service is declining? As it happens the answer to the question is not too difficult.

Over the last 10 years the demand for NHS services has increased dramatically. So although the provision of NHS services has increased over the last 10 years the demand for these services has increased by an even greater amount. And so the quality of the NHS as measured by its ability to respond to demand for Health Care (of which the clearest indicator is the length of waiting lists) has declined.

Some people argue that this trend of demand exceeding supply is inevitable. One hears phrases such as the demand for NHS services (given that they are free) is infinite. I do not think that this is true. There will always be hypochondriacs but they are few and far between. For the most part people will be like you, the reader. They will only visit the doctor when necessary and then reluctantly. Given this situation it is not impossible to make a fair estimate of the level of health care which must be provided to meet demand. For instance it would seem reasonable to assume that only a small proportion of the population will need appendix operations. The proportion could be estimated on the basis of past experience.

What I would argue is that the government has consistently failed to estimate demand correctly. They appear to have operated on the assumption that demand would remain relatively stable. This might not be unreasonable if it was true that the structure of the UK population had remained unchanged over the past 10 years. However this is not the case. It has changed dramatically. The number of people over the age of 75 has increased by .7 million. This may not seem very large but when account is taken of the fact that this age group uses almost 9 times the volume of health care resources used by the average person of working age the effect is clearly

significant.

Previous experience would have told the Government that this population change would imply a sharp increase in the demand for NHS services. The older you get, the more goes wrong with you and the more you need the NHS. Yet the increases in funding for the NHS consistently failed to take account of the increased demand for NHS services implied by the changing structure of the population.

Tory funding failed also to take account of another source of increased demand - advances in medical technology. These advances have different effects. Many recent advances have reduced the time a patient is required to spend in a hospital. Operations can be performed quickly and the patient sent home. This reduces the cost of the operation to the NHS. Improvements in technology can also lead to increased demand for NHS services.

"Surgeons outside the capital tried to send two patients with cancer of the neck to St. Mary's because of the hospital's expertise but were told there was no contract to cover the work and the patients' Health Districts would not pay."

Twenty years ago if you had hip problems due to old age you literally had to grin and bear it. Medical science could do little for you other than provide you with pain killers. This is no longer the case. A bad hip can now be replaced and as a consequence the patient can resume an active and pain free lifestyle. Twenty years ago there were no waiting lists for hip replacements because it was not an option. Open heart surgery is another example of an advance in medical technology which has led to an increase in demand for NHS services. Again the increased demand resulting from medical advances is not infinite. It is limited by the medical advances themselves.

The Tories have not simply made a mistake when estimating the demand for NHS services. They knew very well that the changing age structure of the population and advances in medical technology would have crucial significance in the changing demand for NHS services. Yet they chose not to adjust their NHS funding accordingly. The result was inevitable. The quality of the service as measured by its ability to meet the medical demands of the population declined.

We need some measure of the extent of this underfunding. I would argue that it was not great - of the order of 1-2%. There is no way the Tories can claim that they simply did not have the funds to cover the underfunding. The government had plenty of money available. It preferred to give it away in tax cuts largely to the rich. One can only put the underfunding down to ideology.

Thatcher did not believe in the concept of the NHS. She felt and clearly stated in parliament that those who could afford private medical insurance should take it out. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that she did not believe in the NHS as a system for all the people. Rather she saw it as a safety net offering minimum services for those who could not afford to purchase their own health insurance.

Although Thatcher did not like the NHS she knew that the British people had a great affection for it. She yearned to reform it but her political instinct warned her to leave it alone. After the 1987 general election defeat, however, Labour launched a major propaganda offensive against the Tory NHS record. It was right to do so but the Labour Party campaign probably generated more heat than light. An atmosphere which verged on the hysterical was developed about the state of the NHS.

Thatcher seized her chance and argued that given that her governments had put more money into it than any previous government and given that (by Labour's own admission) it was fraught with problems it was necessary to launch a full scale review of the NHS. The review culminated in the White Paper "Working for Patients" which was published in 1989. The White Paper was supported by 8 working papers. As a whole it could be described as a collection of red herrings. Not once in the whole review is there a suggestion that the Health Service might be



Doctors' plea: Nigel Harris, orthopaedic consultant at St Mary's, Paddington, with a group of nurses at Downing Street

underfunded.

This is the main criticism which left wing organisations must make of the White Paper. It refused to recognise the fundamental problem that the service was underfunded. By implication then the White Paper believes that the NHS is not underfunded; rather it is inefficiencies in the organisational structure which prevent the NHS from meeting the current level of demand with the current level of resources. Although the White Paper refuses to acknowledge the basic problem of underfunding, it is nevertheless necessary to examine the changes which it proposes and their effect on the NHS.

'Internal Market' has a nice ring to it. There is something cosy about it. A simple 'market' is not so nice. It sounds a bit rough. An internal market is different. It sounds a bit more like a market among friends.

The idea of an internal market seems to have originated or at least to have been strongly advocated in a review of the NHS carried out by Professor Alain C. Enthoven in 1985. Enthoven came from Stanford University in the U.S. at the invitation of the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust to carry out this review. Enthoven felt the NHS had a problem. It concerned the way in which the overall budget was allocated between the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs).

Suppose an RHA by good management improved its provision of a particular type of service. The result would be that it would have referrals from all over the country. However an RHA is allocated money on the basis of the number of people in its region (weighted by various indicators like age, sex, morbidity etc). If the RHA provides services for patients from another RHA it receives no immediate benefit. Enthoven argues that there is therefore an actual disincentive for RHA's to improve their services. He felt the solution was an internal market. If the North Yorkshire RHA used the services of the Thames RHA then North Yorkshire would have to pay Thames on the basis of some agreed contract.

When attempting to understand the effects of this internal market it is useful to divide the operation of the NHS into two blocks: the financing of health care and the provision of health care. The unique characteristic of the NHS was that both the financing and the provision of health care were outside the market place. The whole point of the current Tory reorganisation is to put the provision of health care back into the market. The internal market idea is concerned solely with the provision of services. The financing side is not being thrown open to the market; it will remain largely untouched by these

developments. In other words health care will be universally available and free at the point of service (if you can find the point of service. As we show later this is proving more and more difficult).

The provision of services will however be subject to market forces. The Health Authority may choose to obtain services from an NHS hospital in its area or in another area or from an opted out hospital or from the private sector. It can approach these different hospitals, find out what they are charging for a particular type of operation and choose the cheapest.

There is a certain similarity between this system, the French system and the Canadian system. Yet these countries provide very a adequate health care service on the basis of public financing and private provision. The privatisation of health care provision will not in itself cause the quality of the service to decline. (Its main effect will probably be to increase the cost at which a given level of service is provided.) However the way the Tories have implemented this privatisation of health care provision is leading to the worst features of a totally private system.

Recently Mr. Rolfe Birch, a top orthopaedic surgeon, resigned from his London teaching hospital post because the health service reforms were

preventing him from treating patients. Mr. Birch was an international expert in the treatment of nerve injuries. Before the reforms he used to get referrals from all over the country. Now his Health Authority will not allow him to provide medical care to someone from another Health Authority unless the Health Authority has signed a contract with them to pay for the service.

Mr. Nigel Harris, a colleague of Mr Birch's, wrote a letter to the Health Minister, Virginia Bottomley, illustrating some of the worst features of the internal market. His letter referred to a patient with nerve damage suffering long delays before being referred to Mr. Birch's department:

"Management said the transfer could not take place unless the referring authority had done all the necessary work and agreed to pay the cost of treatment. It should be stressed that a severed nerve in an open wound needs very urgent treatment, within an hour or two, if the best results are to be obtained."

In another example Mr. Harris said surgeons outside the capital tried to send two patients with cancer of the neck to St. Mary's because of the hospital's expertise but were told there was no contract to cover the work and the patients' health districts would not pay.

"He warned that the changes in the NHS will lead to an escalation in negligence claims because of patients being sent home without necessary treatment and irreversible disability caused by delays" (The Observer, June 9, 1991).

Radical right wing bodies such as the Institute for Economic Affairs have long campaigned for the Internal Market. Yet even they are appalled by the way the Tories have implemented it.

David Green, a radical right health care guru, savaged this aspect of the reforms in an article published in mid May. He said that the reforms reduced choice for patients and doctors rather than increased it. (There can be no greater crime than reduction in choice for the radical right.) Allocation of money under the reforms did not follow patients wishes (as envisaged by Enthoven and Green) but went to where patients were assigned. If patients preferred to be treated in a London teaching hospital (because they had been advised that that was where the best treatment was available) the reforms did not give them the choice. They first had to get the approval of their RHA. In many instances this would not be forthcoming.

As well as reducing patient and doctor choice the NHS reform has added an administrative layer which did not exist before. One of the reasons that the overall cost of the NHS was so low relative to other countries was that its administrative costs were low. In an editorial on 21st February 1989 the Financial Times commented:

"The NHS's present administrative costs are amongst the lowest of any health service because elaborate pricing and invoicing mechanisms are not used....Under the new arrangements invoices will be flying in all directions... NHS Hospital Trusts, Districts and budget-holding GPs will be

billing each other and the private sector for services rendered."

In the U.S. administrative costs can sometimes be as high as 20% of total costs and we can certainly expect NHS administrative costs to increase sharply. Given that the government has provided little extra money for the reorganisation, this can only mean that resources within the NHS will be diverted from the provision of medical care to administrative work. Users of the NHS can therefore only expect its service to decline.

With the current reorganisation the NHS could only continue to deliver its current level of services with considerably increased funding - considerably more than the 1-2% level of underfunding I identified above as causing the crisis in the first place. There is no evidence that the Tories are going to come up with the increased funding and even if they did it would only be to finance a redundant administrative layer.

Postscript: As we go to press we learn that the government has agreed to limit the working hours of junior doctors to 72 hours in a working week. Since junior doctors work considerably more hours than this at present it would be reasonable to assume that more junior doctors are to be employed at extra cost. Alas no. It will all be done with the more or less the same number of doctors and the same level of funding. The circle will be squared by letting patients suffer a little longer. □

Opinion

See No Evil

by Jim McLarin

The very last thing desired by those who shout loudest about the undemocratic bureaucracy of the EC is to make the EC democratic. That has always been the case. Those of us on the left who campaigned for a "yes" vote in the EEC referendum in the 70s found we caused most horror among the "antis" like Peter Shore and Tony Benn, when we called for a transfer of powers to the European Parliament.

The same is true of Nicholas Ridley, Margaret Thatcher and their like today. They do not want a united Europe. They use the lack of democracy as their propaganda weapon. And they make every effort to ensure that decision-making is kept as undemocratic as possible.

It suits them that an unelected commission makes the proposals and that a huddle of ministers (preferably wheeler-dealers like Douglas Hurd) take the decisions in secret behind closed doors.

Unfortunately for the future of Europe, those in the best position to expose this duplicity, John Major and Neil Kinnock, cannot bring themselves

to do so. For they too have their doubts. In Kinnock's case very grave doubts indeed. But doubts aside, neither can see further than the next election. Both are safe politicians. The result of their dithering can only be a Europe uniting in the worst possible way, dragging Britain along behind it.

Ridley's Little England dream is just that - a dream. The sovereign Parliament he so loves finds the area over which it is sovereign diminishing with each day that passes. The big world out there proceeds without reference to British parliamentary sovereignty.

One suspects that Mrs Thatcher understands at least that much. So she wants to tie the country more and more closely to America. Mainly because she so admires all the worst features of America. (And it appears many of the worst features of America admire her.)

Now the British parliamentary system

is another matter. It has for three hundred years facilitated the development of a democratic and secular culture and it has (the Thatcher years notwithstanding) allowed for the existence of a multi-national state - one containing nations with no great love for one another, and often no great reason to love one another.

The development of a European democratic multi-national state could well do with a good injection of the British Parliamentary system as it constructs its own parliamentary system.

But the Little Englanders and the American lickspittles and the ditherers will wrap it in cotton wool and preserve it as a museum piece nobody will take risks with. The only risk-taker since Clement Attlee was Edward Heath. Thank heavens for Heath's breath of political fresh air. But Heath has no power.

Meanwhile the European Parliament is merely a place where has-beens and never-will-bes are sent to: to collect a lot of money and set themselves up for life. □

The Economic Consequences of the Gulf War

The United Nations war against Iraq was profitable for the US and especially Britain, but it has bankrupted Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the crippling reparations imposed on Iraq's devastated economy on top of the sanctions (which are, indefensibly, continuing) have sown the seeds of a future Gulf war, as George Joffé explains.

As far as the United States and Europe are concerned, the recent conflict in the Gulf is, thankfully, over. Most of the 350,000 Western troops involved, together with their equipment, have been withdrawn - although 5,000 men are to remain in Kuwait and there are still the 20,000 personnel from the USA, Britain and France in the 'safe havens' of northern Iraqi Kurdistan who, politicians at home hope, will be withdrawn within the month. And Washington and London have held their thanksgiving services and victory parades.

Apart from chronicling the further misdemeanours of the Saddam Hussain régime in its treatment of the Kurds and, as an afterthought, of the Shi'a in the south, while passing a cursory and regretful look at the parlous plight of most Iraqis as the summer heat mounts and continued sanctions ensure famine and epidemics, the Western media, too, have lost interest. After all, Iraq was forced to disgorge Kuwait and its armed strength was powerfully sapped. It is true, of course, that Saddam Hussain is still in power and that the Iraqi economy is prostrate and ruined - but neither of these facts is inconsistent with the stated objectives of the original United Nations resolution permitting the use of armed force, so we can claim a kind of victory.

Nonetheless, what does remain is the rigid, inhuman and unsustainable determination of politicians in Washington and London to retain sanctions, come what may, until Saddam Hussain himself is toppled from power. The fact that they failed to overthrow him while they had the military power available for such a purpose means that they are now, apparently, prepared to wage a relentless economic war on the Iraqi people - with whom President Bush (obediently parroted by Mr Major) has repeatedly declared that we have no quarrel.

Luckily, other states and other politicians are not quite so inhuman and most observers expect that the decisions of the United Nations Sanctions Committee to allow Iraqi assets abroad to be unfrozen in order to purchase essential food and medicine will soon be put into operation, despite British and American objections. It is also the case that the world's oil markets expect Iraq

to begin to export oil again by September, probably via Turkey, so that it can begin to pay for vital imports and for the reparations set by the UN at 30 per cent of its oil revenues. Not surprisingly, this is insufficient for the USA which insists on a 50 per cent level - forgetting, no doubt, that it will then recreate the post-Versailles situation of the 1920s and thereby the conditions for another devastating war in a few years' time.

"The simple fact is that the Gulf states are technically bankrupt. They have committed themselves to expenditure greater than their current reserves, even when anticipated income is included...They had little choice, with Washington, London and Paris bartering military support against financial aid during the conflict."

It may also be, however, that policy-makers in Washington and London do not view such a prospect with too much anxiety. After all, they have tried to persuade states in the region to rearm in order to guard against it and have certainly been successful in this. Saudi Arabia expects to spend a further \$20 bn on arms over the next five years, \$14 bn of that sum during the next year alone. Israel has sought \$10 bn worth of arms from the USA over the next five years, as well as compensation for war damage and further aid to settle Falashas and Soviet Jewish refugees. Syria has already received long-range Scud-B missiles from North Korea, whilst also negotiating a \$2 bn arms deal with the Soviet Union, and has signed a tank manufacture contract with the new non-socialist government of Czechoslovakia. Even Jordan, ruined by US intransigence and denial of aid for its ostensible support for Iraq during the recent crisis, expects to spend up to \$1 bn in France

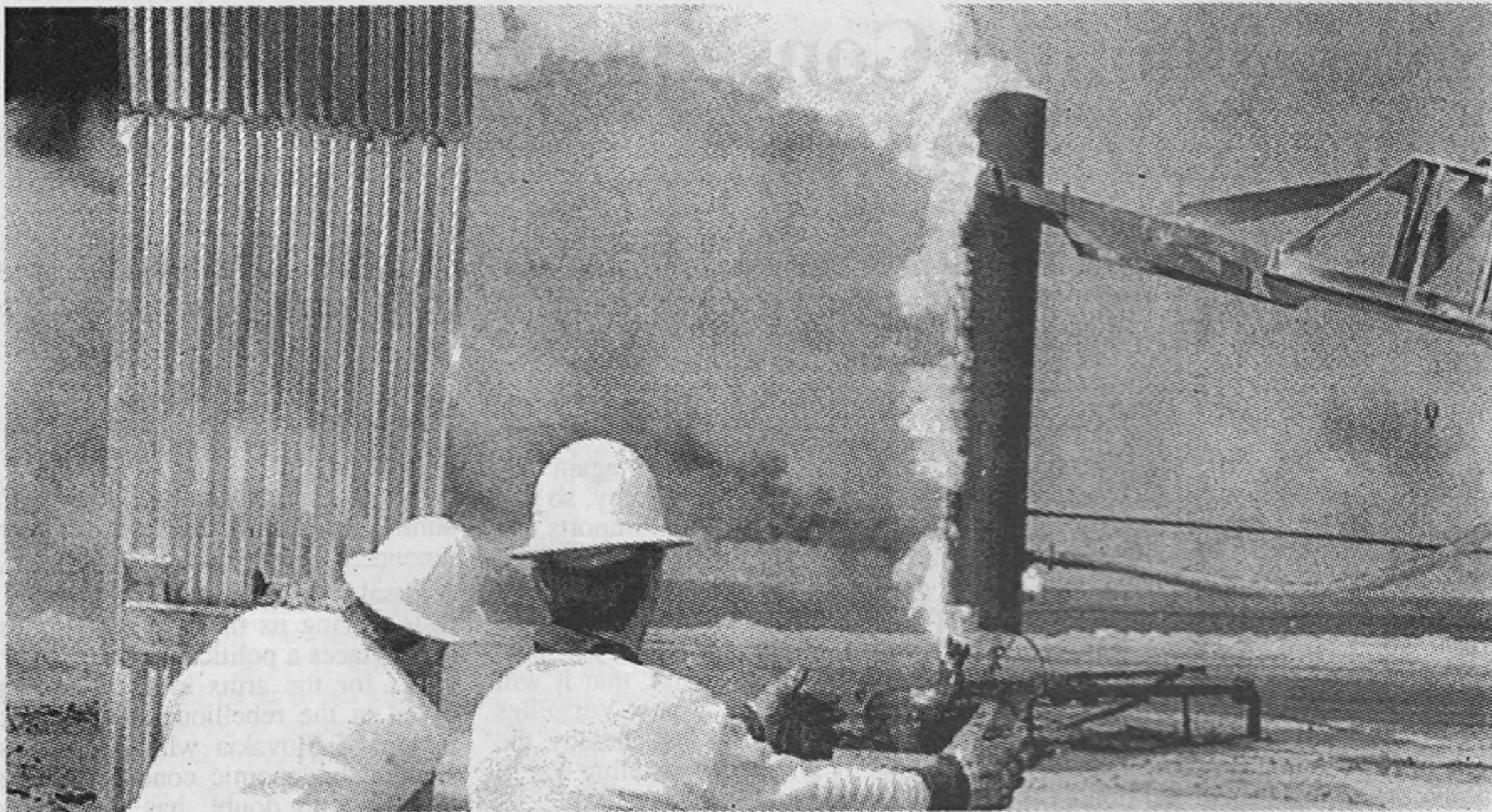
on new aircraft.

(Prague, incidentally, now ruefully admits that its earlier determination to renounce arms sales overlooked the colossal economic problems of restructuring its massive arms industry. It also faces a political problem over the issue, for the arms industry is largely based in the rebellious and disaffected region of Slovakia which threatens to secede if economic conditions worsen. Moscow, no doubt, has taken careful note both of that and of proposed US regional arms sales.)

Indeed, Congress is preparing to approve the \$18 bn worth of new arms sales to the Middle East proposed by the Administration's most recent Javits report for the next financial year. Against that background, President Bush's recent arms control proposal for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to ban "weapons of mass destruction and missiles" from the Middle East seems cynical and ineffective. In the first place, they are already there; secondly, the US apparently intends to lead arms sales to the region - and behind conventional arms sales there are inevitably unconventional arms sales - and there is no hint of any intention to force Israel to abandon its own nuclear weapons, which are a large part of the cause of the regional arms race in the first place.

In fact, the failure seriously to prosecute arms control typifies the West's post-war attitude towards the current state of the Middle East. Similar failures attended the other three elements of President Bush's post-war agenda for a New World Order in the Middle East, as described in his State of the Union message to Congress on March 6, 1991. Peace and stability in the Middle East has foundered on Israeli intransigence and US reluctance to apply sanctions to the Shamir government to force it to observe UN resolutions as Iraq has been forced to do.

Military security now depends on arms expenditure by the states of the region - despite Mr Bush's objective of regional disarmament - rather than on new regional security structures. Egypt and Syria, the two military pillars of the new arrangement proposed by the 'Group of Eight' - Egypt, Syria and the Gulf



Quenching the flames: a fireman deflects heat while a colleague directs the placing of the steel tube over the well

Cooperation Council (GCC) countries which had supported the US-led Coalition forces in the Gulf during the conflict - have now pulled out amidst increasingly acrimonious disagreements over payment. Yet neither Saudi Arabia nor Kuwait - the core of the GCC, with a combined indigenous population of around 12 mn people - can face a permanent Western military presence, nor do they have the demographic strength to guarantee their security against populous states such as Iran (50 mn) and Iraq (16 mn).

So security looks as uncertain as peace and stability do, despite all the new expenditure on arms. Yet, even before the recent conflict, according to the IMF, the Gulf states were amongst the twelve biggest spenders on arms worldwide. Annually they devoted up to 13 per cent of their GDPs to arms purchases, compared with a global average of 5 per cent. Indeed, the IMF has calculated that if the Gulf states reduced their arms expenditure to the world average, they would free up to \$30 bn annually for other purposes.

And that could have profoundly helped the US president in achieving his post-war diplomatic ideals if, indeed, he had really wished to achieve them. Mr Bush's final objective in the New World Order sought to guarantee the future of the Middle East by ensuring that the vast discrepancies in economic development which had embittered inter-Arab relations were eliminated through regional development. This was to be achieved by mobilising the wealth of the oil-rich states of the Gulf.

Despite optimistic noises from the GCC on April 26, when they suggested a regional fund of \$10 bn - \$15 bn, to

be disbursed over five years, Mr Bush stands to be disappointed. Firstly, this new wealth is to be directed towards the two other coalition partners in the 'Group of Eight', i.e. Egypt and Syria. Secondly, in a proposal that irritated both governments but which was clearly directed at dogmatic economic liberals in Washington and London, the funds were to be reserved for the private sector. Thirdly, it seems that the proposed funds are not really new funds at all, but merely the consolidation of existing Gulf aid funds into a single body.

If that is the case, they represent a mere 6 per cent of all the aid the Middle East and North Africa receives annually, according to World Bank sources. That is hardly going to achieve Mr Bush's objectives of regional economic development. Instead it only underlines the massive cynicism of American encouragement of arms sales costing at least \$30 bn annually in peacetime at the expense of genuine peace, stability and economic development in the region. Nor can Britain escape such condemnation, when civil servants here can suggest that arms sales to the region are essential because certain Gulf states are "significantly under-armed".

In any case, Mr Bush omitted to tot up the cost of the conflict to the Middle East before he so cavalierly committed them to massive future expenditure. The simple fact is that the Gulf states are, by and large, technically bankrupt. They have committed themselves to expenditure greater than their current reserves, even when anticipated income is included. To be fair, they had little choice, since Washington, London and Paris engaged in an unseemly spectacle of bartering military support against

financial aid during the conflict which affected both the Gulf and other wealthy states, such as Germany and Japan. However, it was the GCC which bore the brunt of the costs. Three Gulf states alone provided \$36.845 bn towards the cost of 'Operation Desert Storm' - some 67.55 per cent of the total cost of \$54.545 bn, with Germany (\$6.572 bn) and Japan (\$9.84 bn) bearing the bulk of the balance. The USA paid the balance of its total of \$69.5 bn direct and indirect costs, while Britain appears to have actually made a profit out of the war!

The direct costs of the conflict - with Saudi Arabia paying \$16.839 bn, Kuwait paying \$16.006 bn and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) paying around \$4 bn - were only part of the total costs borne by the GCC. They also had to contribute to the US-inspired Gulf Financial Crisis Coordination Group, which raised \$15.7 bn to provide temporary aid to the states hardest hit by the crisis - primarily Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Jordan, although Jordan has not seen any benefit so far. Saudi Arabia provided \$4.621 bn, Kuwait a further \$3.684 bn and the UAE \$1.469 bn. Then there were special payments - \$800 mn to Egypt from Kuwait to ensure the resettlement of Egyptian migrant workers displaced from the Gulf and a further \$900 mn to Turkey to compensate it for trade losses. Saudi Arabia has also provided a loan of \$4 bn to the Soviet Union, a loan which no doubt eased the Soviet conscience over the role it played within the UN Security Council.

All in all, Saudi Arabia spent \$25.960 bn, Kuwait \$23.190 bn and the UAE \$5.469 bn. However, there are also

other costs: Saudi Arabia, for example, estimates it spent \$20.95 bn on the conflict in host country and direct military costs - in short a further \$10.25 bn beyond the additional \$10.5 bn it earned in windfall oil revenues during the last four months of 1990, as prices rose and production was increased to make up for the shortfall from Kuwait and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has also forgiven massive quantities of Egyptian debt, as part of the \$7.7 bn of GCC debt that was written off in February. Overall, the conflict has cost Saudi Arabia around \$45 bn.

Kuwait had to spend an additional \$10.15 bn in supporting Kuwaitis trapped abroad during the conflict, in compensating Kuwait's ruined industries and in writing off domestic debts. Now it has to face reconstruction costs, involving \$23 bn in direct reconstruction costs, according to the United Nations and up to \$40 bn in lost oil revenues as the colossal damage to

the oil fields is slowly put right. In short, Kuwait faces a total cost of around \$96.34 bn.

No wonder, then, that the Gulf states are so anxious to force Iraq to disgorge reparations - although, at a rate of 30 per cent of total oil revenues, it will take around 30 years for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to recover the costs they have incurred. And then there are other claims - \$150 bn in reparations for Iran, outstanding debt to OECD countries of between \$31 bn and \$35 bn depending on how the sums are calculated, and other claims for compensation, from France, the USSR and Eastern Europe for arms supplies. If Iraq has to pay all of these sums, it will be paying reparations for the next century - an ideal scenario for resentments to breed afresh and for a future Gulf war to be guaranteed.

So, if reparations will be slow to come, if they come at all, the GCC states will have to foot their own bills.

To do that, they will have to use their own reserves, mainly held and invested abroad - around \$40 bn for Saudi Arabia and around \$91 bn to \$99 bn for Kuwait. Either they will have to liquidate them or, more likely, they will use them as guarantees for massive loans from the world's financial markets. Whatever they do, the reserves just about balance the calls to be made upon them - and only Western banks will profit from that, along with Western companies that are now hungrily seeking contracts in the Gulf.

So it has not just been Iraq that has lost so heavily through the conflict in the Gulf. The GCC itself has been impoverished and the Middle East embittered - and none of Mr Bush's objectives, except that of liberating Kuwait (and that at immense cost), have been achieved. Yet, at least that too was done at the expense of the victims, so that the victors could enjoy their victory parade. □

Letters to the Editor

Sir,

In his address on the desirability of a Labour commitment to full employment (L&TUR 20), Hugh Roberts argues that, *"because there is a vacuum at the level of 'Big Ideas' in the Labour Party, given that a lot of the old, somewhat muddle-headed, ideology has been definitively defeated, there is now a competition to fill the vacuum from the trendy left, with notions such as 'Citizenship' and 'the Democratic Agenda', and so on. In other words, there a tendency to fill this vacuum with waffle, given that people are not addressing the fundamental problem, which is unemployment, and demanding its opposite, full-employment"* (original emphasis).

In the same address Hugh Roberts states that *"People in the New Statesman or on the various fringes of the [Labour] party who are talking about democracy are not talking about something which is not a problem. There is a problem, because Thatcherism is not actually being opposed effectively on the ground of principle"*. The principles in question are not, in Roberts's view, related to the issue of constitutional reform (trendy waffle) but are those which an effective Opposition party needs in order to differentiate itself sufficiently from the party in Government and which could be adequately supplied by a commitment to full employment and an incomes policy. In relation to incomes policy, Roberts alludes to *"an article in the paper yesterday which said that there is majority support in the opinion polls for incomes policy"*.

Much of this makes good common-sense to me. However, if the recent

'State of the Nation' opinion poll released by the Rowntree Reform Trust is anything to go by, the electorate holds many Big Ideas in the area of constitutional reform which - because of their manifest popularity - cannot easily be dismissed as the domain of trendy fringe-groups.

Of those polled 72% favour a Bill of Rights; 60% of those polled want to see elected magistrates; 77% of those polled want a Freedom of Information act; 50% (as opposed to 23% against) want to see the introduction of Proportional Representation in elections to Parliament. And so on.

According to Martin Linton in *The Guardian* (25th April 1991): *"The Bill of Rights, which Labour's deputy leader Roy Hattersley has consistently opposed on the grounds that it would give more power to judges, is supported by 83 to 5 per cent among Labour voters."*

"Electoral reform, which he also opposes for elections to the House of Commons, is supported by 53 to 18 per cent among Labour voters, which is a ratio of 75 to 25 per cent of those who held a view."

"Despite the claim that it is a middle class issue the poll shows that support is similar among working class respondents (47 to 23 per cent) and higher among trade unionists (59-22) - to that among the middle classes (55-23)."

"On the Bill of Rights there is considerably higher support among working class respondents (76-8), council tenants (78-7) and trade unionists (79-9) than among the middle classes, who are comparatively lukewarm on the issue (63-19)".

Hugh Roberts argues that, *"Popular*

resistance to government and resentment of government is not being adequately represented in the political system" (L&TUR, 20). On this point I can only agree with him and with the general thrust of the L&TUR critique of the Labour leadership. However, the 'State of the Nation' poll indicates that the electorate in general - and Labour's natural constituency in particular - feel that they are not being adequately represented by the present political system and on this issue the electorate is miles ahead of both the Labour leadership and L&TUR.

Yours sincerely
Justin O'Hagan
Newcastle
County Down

Sir,

I do not subscribe to political periodicals because I expect them to agree with me. However, I do not expect to be treated like an idiot.

Your obsession with the 1970s, whilst quaint, is becoming increasingly ludicrous, matched only by your ill-mannered and illiterate attacks upon Neil Kinnock.

I am a great fan of the Social Contract. Jack Jones was a wonderful guy. But you gain no credibility at all by wallowing in a sentimental past whilst attacking the leaders, however imperfect, who have to live in the present.

There is no chance that I shall cancel my subscription. The money isn't a problem. I just might decide I can't be bothered to spare the time to read rude and patronising drivel.

Best wishes, (Cllr.) Andy Thomas
Oxford
May 25, 1991

Aunt Sally and Uncle Sam

Academic Socialism and American Hegemony

Hugh Roberts replies to Ben Cosin's criticisms of L&TUR's position on the Gulf war.

Ben Cosin caricatures the views which have been put forward in L&TUR in constructing a peg for his qualified apologia for President Bush's New World Order. In particular, he misrepresents as expressions of a programmatic vision or strategic political alignment what have in fact been merely explanatory analyses.

In my article 'Murder in Mesopotamia II: Internationalism or Barbarism' (L&TUR 19, September-October 1990), I offered an explanation of the nature of Saddam Hussein's régime, and especially of its violent aspect. This explanation drew attention to the extreme difficulty of governing Iraq in view of the profound ethnic and religious cleavages within its population - in short, the extent to which Iraqi society is not yet national in character.

A society which is not national in character, but which at least formally accords citizenship to all its adult population, can either be governed conservatively on the basis of a carefully negotiated but inevitably precarious equilibrium between its constituent communal groups which institutionalises their political salience and ensures that change will not occur or will subvert the state if it does occur, as in the Lebanon up to 1976. Or it can be governed in an autocratic manner, combining elements of conservatism with elements of progress, by a monarch, as in Iran under the Shah or Iraq itself under the Hashemites. Or it can be governed, as Iraq has been governed since 1968, by a revolutionary dictatorship which seeks to promote national development at the expense of those forces (feudal or tribal aristocracies and religious leaderships) with a vested interest in the preservation of non-national communal loyalties.

The first and second of these formulae demonstrated their limitations - in the Lebanon, in Iran and Iraq itself - long ago. In my article, I pointed out that the Ba'athist formula "was yet to prove inadequate to Iraqi conditions." And that is still the case today, after this formula has been put to the severest test one could possibly imagine.

In the editorial on the Gulf crisis in the same issue, the point was made that the Arab world is developing into a system of nation-states, that there exist various bits and pieces which do not fit into this emerging system, that a

sorting-out process is bound to occur, and that what is at issue is whether Europe will help this process to be as peaceful and painless as possible, or whether America will be allowed to ensure that it is as bloody and as anti-Western as possible.

In short, L&TUR offered its readers an explanatory perspective enabling them to make historical and political sense of the Baghdad régime and of the attempted annexation of Kuwait, and enabling them to see a major element of what was at issue in the Gulf crisis. If L&TUR's explanations are dismissed, neither Saddam Hussein nor the occupation of Kuwait can be explained except in terms of the presence of Evil in the world, upon which self-righteous war may unthinkingly be waged and to hell with the consequences.

Cosin misrepresents all this as a deliberate political alignment of the L&TUR with Iraqi Ba'athism. He suggests that L&TUR was making itself the apostle of "the Saddamite road" and remarks that "this is a poor bet." And he sums up his own position, and his misreading of ours, in the following declaration: *"If the choice is between a Saddamite path for the Third World and the Pax Americana, then socialists should choose the Pax Americana."*

"Cosin's position is a relation of Halliday's position, but while Halliday now takes his bearings from American power, Cosin takes his bearings from a hypothetical development of European and Japanese power. This is not a position which is functional in politics at all."

Ben Cosin is not a member of the Bevin Society which produces L&TUR, and evidently has difficulty in conceiving it realistically. The Bevin Society is a group of free-thinking British socialists and trade unionists. It is aligned politically with the British Labour Party and the British trade union

movement and with nothing else. It has no illusions about either this party or this movement, but in so far as it is 'betting on' anything, it is betting on democratic socialism and on the Labour Party and the trade union movement as the agents of a democratic socialist development. And it is doing what it can in the sphere of thought and publishing to encourage and assist the party and the movement to resume their role as effective agents of this development.

People who are engaged in practical political activity soon learn to be cautious, if not grudging, in offering their support to other political forces. Because they are concerned to have an influence on events, they know better than to jeopardise their possibilities for influence by aligning themselves with political forces which do not share their principles or objectives. Iraqi Ba'athism does not share the principles or objectives of the Ernest Bevin Society, nor does the US government; neither Baghdad nor Washington has the slightest interest in or possibility of assisting the Bevin Society to attain its objectives; and the Bevin Society would no more consider aligning itself with the one than it would consider 'betting on' the other.

But academics and intellectuals who exist in radical disconnection from purposeful political activity are another matter.

I have been an academic. For eleven years I taught Politics in the School of Development Studies at the University of East Anglia. I found that many of my colleagues were possessed by a constant need to define their 'position' in relation to the political issues of the day. 'Positions' would be defined at length over dinner tables and in seminar rooms. And the world would invariably carry on regardless.

Because the business of defining positions was disconnected from political activity, it was unrestrained by practical political judgements. In so far as it was controlled by judgements, the judgements in question were informed by the career interests of those who were making them. The careers in question were academic careers. And the pursuit of an academic career invariably involves the business of aligning oneself with an academic School of Thought and thereby securing outlets for one's writing in some academic journal or publishing house. There is nothing wrong in this at all. But it has nothing to do with politics.

I was unable to inhibit myself from thinking politically about the subjects of my academic research, and I was unwilling to confine my thinking or my writing within the mental parameters and terminological protocols of any of the existing Schools of Thought which I

came across in academia. I found as a result that I had great difficulty in getting my thoughts published in the form of academic publications, and that my prospects of a fulfilling academic career were nil. When I had satisfied myself that this was the case, I resigned my lectureship and went out into the world.

Ben Cosin's position boils down to a close relation of Fred Halliday's position, which has been dissected by Brendan Clifford in a new Bevin Society pamphlet advertised in this issue.

Like Halliday, Cosin is an academic and has been connected, if less prominently or explicitly, with the School of Thought embodied in the *New Left Review*. The *New Left Review* pretended to be a development within British socialist politics, and the articles it published frequently, if not invariably, included injunctions addressed to 'socialists', indicating to said 'socialists' the positions they should adopt, as Cosin indicates to 'socialists' that they should if necessary choose the *Pax Americana*. In reality, *New Left Review* was merely a development within British academia. But it added the minds of an entire generation of British socialists who found themselves, as they transited through university, at the mercy of lecturers hooked on the NLR.

Like Halliday in bygone days, Cosin is conscious of the intellectual vigour and coherence of the Bevin Society's thinking but is unable to subscribe to it and is therefore disposed to engage in futile polemics with it. He is unable to subscribe to it because it leads directly to 'positions' which are not functional in academia. This is not at all his fault, and he has my sincere sympathy.

When I first took up my lectureship at East Anglia, I made no secret of my views and naïvely supposed that I would be able to persuade some of my leftwing colleagues by mere force of argument. I soon found this to be a ludicrous misconception. One or two of them listened to me intently at first, aware that I might conceivably be the harbinger of a new academic fashion. But they soon realised that this was not the case, and treated me thereafter as an amusing eccentric at best, or an intolerable irritant at worst. For someone who subscribes to the Bevin Society's views, but who earns a living as an academic in the humanities and social sciences (the problem does not arise for real scientists), there are only two options: to keep one's political views to oneself in the academic milieu, or to leave this milieu.

This dilemma did not always exist. It exists today as a consequence of the collapse of British socialism as a political force.

It is not the business of academics to think out for themselves the political premises upon which they conduct their teaching and research. These premises are laid on for them by the political forces in the society at large. British liberalism (with a small 'l') and the several tendencies in British Conservatism are powerful forces in British politics and society, and academics oriented by these political philosophies have no problem in functioning effectively in academia.



The New Left Review
- a smorgasbord of exotic Marxism

British socialism became a powerful force in society in the first few decades of the century through the medium of Labour politics. But the intellectual content and foundation of the socialist current in Labour politics suffered a massive collapse in the 1950s, when the 'Revisionists' led by Anthony Crosland demonstrated that nobody on the Labour Left had serious answers to the awkward questions they were raising, and this collapse had become patent by the mid-1960s, when Harold Wilson's government was getting nowhere and the NLR was getting into its stride.

Since then it has been impossible to function academically on the intellectual ground of democratic socialism. The only exception to this has been the élitist, narrow-minded and spiritually impoverished prescriptive policy thinking associated with what the Fabian Society has been reduced to and freshly embodied today in Lady Blackstone's Think Tank. British socialist academics who are understandably dissatisfied with this meagre fare as a source for the 'positions' their work requires them to adopt have had nothing else to turn to where British socialist politics is concerned, and have inevitably been

forced to orient themselves to the political world beyond Britain.

The NLR met this need for three decades by purveying attractively wrapped intellectual imports. NLR in its heyday was a smorgasbord of exotic Marxism. Like the dishes in a Swedish buffet, the food NLR offered for academic thought was invariably cold, because it was wholly detached from any vital interest in British society. And although the Marxism of the NLR displayed an endless surface variety, its varieties all had two things in common. They were premised on an absolute rejection of the native intellectual and political traditions of British socialism, upon which anathema after anathema was hurled, and they were premised on the massive fact of the existence of the Communist world.

Through the NLR a couple of generations of British socialist academics found an orientation outside British politics on which they could construct their pedagogic, literary and postprandial 'positions'. The basis of this orientation was the sheer political success of Stalinism in constructing an alternative order to that of Western capitalism and one which for sixty-odd years rivalled it in its moral appeal and universalist ambitions. The NLR could never endorse the Stalinist politics which produced this. A wide variety of non- or anti-Stalinist Marxism was exhibited in its pages. But underlying the NLR's project was the unacknowledged and unacknowledgable fact that the intellectual appeal and commercial viability of all academically fashionable varieties of Marxism were predicated on the practical achievements of the unfashionable variety.

The collapse of the Communist world order has deprived British socialist academics of their bearings. They can either make the massive spiritual effort required in re-orienting themselves to British politics through the thinking pioneered by the Bevin Society. Or they can seek a make-shift substitute for the Communist lode-star in some brand of local and particularistic revolutionary politics in the Third World. Or they can follow Fred Halliday's lead and capitulate to their old American enemy and its 'Imperialism', and re-name it the American Friend and its 'World Order'.

I have described Cosin's position as a close relation of Halliday's position because it is not identical with it. Formally speaking, Cosin falls short of explicitly endorsing Bush's New World Order, and looks forward to the development of the European Community and of Japan as countervailing forces which will offer "a reasonable challenge to US laissez faire and litigiousness" and may eventually succeed "in putting the US on better

behaviour". Whereas Halliday now takes his bearings from American power, Cosin prefers to take his bearings from a hypothetical development of European and Japanese power. This enables him to avoid the opprobrium which Halliday has incurred from his erstwhile friends of the New Left. But that is all it does. It is not a position which is functional in politics at all.

It might conceivably be functional if it were true that, as Cosin claims, *"the issue of the war...marks a further (albeit early) stage in the development of (sc. Europe's and Japan's) freedom from the US yoke."* In the case of Europe at least this is the most astonishing claim. The Gulf crisis was the occasion for the most comprehensive political capitulation by Europe to America's hegemony. That is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Thatcher was so enthusiastic about the war from the start, and why there was so much foot-dragging in Germany, Spain, Italy and, if to a lesser extent, in France. America, with England's eager assistance, has pulled a very fast one indeed over Europe, and we are going to be living with the consequences of this for a long time.

It is to Halliday's credit that he sees this and is explicitly dismissive of Europe from the vantage point of his new-found pro-Americanism. Cosin's invocation of a European perspective is like praising the solid virtues of the door after the horse has bolted. It is an evasion of the issue. It will do in the seminar room and at the dinner table, but nowhere else.

Because the Bevin Society has refused to endorse the New World Order, yet has refrained from counterposing to it a lot of wishful thinking about Europe, Cosin supposes that we are taking our bearings from Baghdad and betting on the Saddamite road. It appears to be inconceivable to him that we are merely continuing to do what we have always done, thinking out our political positions as we go along, on the basis of a conception of the British democratic socialist road and an orientation to the British working class interest which we arrived at a long time ago.

Cosin in his musings and meanderings asks the following rhetorical but above all bizarre question:

"If Saddam's Iraq is construed purely negatively - though it has no promise in itself, it is nonetheless a bastion against US dominated world capitalism, that still leaves the problem of what policies should be pursued behind the shield of Baghdad, as well as that of what other shields are available, and could they shelter the social tasks the world needs better than Saddamism? At its most promising, use of Saddam's shield could only uphold Islamic anti-capitalism."

What use is that in Latin America, India or most non-Islamic Africa?"

This rhetorical question is bizarre in at least four ways.

The idea that Saddam's Iraq is a bastion against world capitalism is bizarre. Iraq's economy depends overwhelmingly on exporting its oil to the West and on importing the goods and technology it needs from the West. It is thoroughly implicated in 'world capitalism', and knows itself to be so implicated, and has manifested not the slightest ambition to withdraw from this relationship. L&TUR has never supposed or suggested anything to the contrary. This idea is an extraordinary figment of Cosin's free-floating imagination.

The idea that the choice of policies to be followed 'behind the shield of Baghdad' - whatever Baghdad is a shield against - is a problem for British socialists to bother their heads about is also bizarre.

The idea that 'Saddam's shield could only uphold Islamic anti-capitalism' is also bizarre. Why could not Saddam's 'shield' 'uphold' something else, such as anti-Islamist, state-capitalist, Arab nationalism? This is, in fact, a reasonable description of what it has been and still is upholding.

The idea that there is such a thing as 'Islamic anti-capitalism' is also bizarre. The most Islamic states in the Arab world - Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf states, Morocco - are the most firmly pro-Western and capitalistic. The economic outlook of the radical Islamist movements is in most cases unequivocally pro-capitalist and virulently anti-socialist.

Underlying these bizarre ideas and this rhetorical question is the ghost of an old dogma - that socialists can only support one side or another in a war on the grounds that it is in some sense socialist (e.g. at least anti-capitalist). Cosin assumes or, at any rate, conveys the impression that L&TUR supported Iraq in the Gulf war (in fact we published not one word in support of Iraq in the war) and that we did so on socialist grounds. In reality, we opposed the West's war-mongering from August onwards on grounds which were spelt out in editorials of L&TUR and a series of pamphlets, and which were not specifically socialist. Among the prominent non-socialists who broadly subscribed to them were Edward Heath and Amiral Philippe de Gaulle.

We did not oppose the New World Order and America's machiavellian determination to get the United Nations to wage a gratuitous and terroristic war on Iraq because we supposed that Baghdad is a beacon of socialism, but because we could see that the war-mongering involved a terrible

debasement of the idea of law and was seeking to make inevitable an entirely avoidable war for no good reason, and involved the West in lining up on the side of parasitic, decadent and anachronistic states in the Arab world against those states which are based on and tending to realise the progressive principle of nationality.

We did not conceive of the conflict between America and Iraq as a conflict between capitalism and anti-capitalism, for the very good reason that it was not a conflict of this kind at all.

If we did not publicly take a line of outright support for Iraq, this was because our purpose was to provide effective arguments for the anti-war position in British politics, and we knew better than to confuse the issue of opposition to a wholly unjustified war with support for one of the antagonists. But since what was at stake was the principle that law should regulate relations between states, it has to be said that it was Baghdad which upheld this principle by refusing to bow to the cynical dictates, masquerading as legal judgements, of the Security Council. And in the conflict between the thuggish power-play of Washington, London and Paris dressed up as law enforcement and the spirited defence of national sovereignty conducted by Saddam Hussein, there can be no doubt which side was in the right.

And since an unqualified victory for a New World Order which involves the comprehensive debasement of the idea of law would have been a disaster for the world view of democratic socialism, in so far as democratic socialism envisages a development of socialism within the framework of law, we take some satisfaction from Saddam's success in denying Bush, Major and Mitterrand an unqualified victory, and from the fact that the principle of national sovereignty is still being asserted with spirit in Baghdad.

Baghdad is not capable of being a 'shield' for anything beyond the Iraqi national interest. But it has been and remains an example. In defending the principle of national sovereignty, it is serving the long term interest of humanity in the eventual establishment of a system of international law worthy of the name. Until such a system is established, it is certainly necessary that the structure of arbitrary, self-serving and terroristic power masquerading as law which has been conceived in Washington and endorsed in London be stymied by the tenacious defence of their sovereignty by all Third World states which have the guts to stick up for themselves.

If this reasoning is incomprehensible to our academic readers, or an embarrassment to their peculiar purposes, that is their problem. □

How Not To Write The History Of Ireland

The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland
 Edited by R.F. Foster, 1989, 382 pp, £17.50

Reviewed by Brendan Clifford

The illustrations in this coffee-table book are very good but the history is very bad. If the proportion of text to pictures was less it might be treated as a picture book. Unfortunately there is a great deal of text, and the editor is the fashionable historian of the moment, and the blurb claims that it is *"the most authoritative history of Ireland ever published for the general reader"*. So it must be reviewed according to its pretensions.

The book begins with prehistory and comes down to the 1980s. It comments on current affairs. All histories are in some degree written backwards - they look backwards from the vantage point of the present. Occasionally a historian becomes immersed in some remote period and writes about it apparently on its own ground, but if he writes intelligibly what he does is make that period understandable to his contemporaries even though all organic connection with it may be lost. Even in such a case the present is always the viewpoint from which things are seen.

In the case of a history of an existing society the function must be to show how it came to be what it is - to show the various strands which came to together over time to constitute it and how they interacted on each other, and also to show the strands that were destroyed along the way. The end is given - it is what we are. There can be no question of writing about each phase as if the end was not given. And yet if a history bastes every phase of the past with the fashionable gravy of the present, as Foster's book does, it might as well not have been written.

A history is the story of a people. The fashionable Althusserian Marxism of the seventies and early eighties denied that such entities as peoples existed, or at least denied that they were "subjects of history". But where is Althusserian Marxism now? Peoples are what history is about. Economic statistics come and go but peoples endure.

"The Irish people" are not a subject of history because the population of Ireland has not constituted a single people for a great many centuries, but has consisted of a number of peoples. These peoples can of course be abstracted into a single people by economic statistics, as the French and British might also be. But the substance of things will not be represented in such abstractions, and mysteries will be concocted.

Though peoples last a long time they are not eternal. Comprehensive breaks in social evolution occur. There was a time when the English people did not exist. It has definitely existed since the 16th century, and present-day England is clearly recognisable in the disputes of the later part of Elizabeth's reign. A lesser continuity can be traced back to the reign of Henry II. Beyond Henry II the link with the present becomes very tenuous.

Evolutionary continuity in Ireland goes back to the 17th century at its furthest reach, and for much of the country it only goes back to the early 19th century. The peoples of Ireland were, by comparison with the English people, forged in recent times.

From the 12th to the 17th centuries there were two peoples in Ireland, the Gaelic Irish and the Norman English, both more or less accepting the overlordship of the English Crown. The Normans were then the people of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Gaels had incorporated a superficial Christianity into their culture, subordinating it to the much older culture of the clans. The Norman Invasion of Ireland had been authorised

by the Pope for the purpose of establishing the discipline of the Roman Church in Ireland, but in the event Roman discipline was scarcely established beyond the limits of the English settlement (the Pale).

In some parts of the country, especially in Munster, the Norman lords married with the native Gaelic aristocracy and were accepted as Gaelic lords while at the same time retaining much of the English world-outlook. Then during the Reformation the English in Ireland by and large remained Catholic. And the Gaelic Irish, subjected to intense Counter-Reformationist missionary activity by Rome which was intent on making Ireland a base for operations against heretical England, gradually became more Catholic. On the basis of intermarriage and a common religion the Norman English (now known as the Old English) and the Gaelic Irish merged into a single people in the 1640s, in the situation created by the English Civil War. And during the period of English disruption they formed a Parliament known as the Confederation of Kilkenny. The Confederation raised taxes and maintained armies and supported Charles I against the Puritan fanatics who controlled the English Parliament. The Confederation was technically in rebellion against the Crown, but its aim was to become the King's Irish Parliament. Charles had trod warily in the matter because anti-Catholicism was becoming rampant in England. But in 1646 he negotiated a Treaty with the Confederation by which it would



But for the Counter-Reformationist interference of the Nuncio, Ireland would have been impregnable to Cromwell

become his Irish Parliament (and thereby his main political base) and sent an army to England to defend the authority of the Crown against Parliament. If put into effect this Treaty would have reversed the historic relationship between Ireland and England.

Obviously it was not put into effect. The reason was that in 1645 an ambassador from Rome, a Papal Nuncio, had been sent to the Confederation. Rome did not want a settlement on the basis of religious toleration. It wanted to wipe out the Protestant heresy, and saw Ireland as one more battlefield in the crusade against Protestantism then being fought in Europe (the 30 Years War). The Irish Treaty of 1646, if put into effect, would have been a major step in the establishment of religious toleration and the erosion of spiritual totalitarianism. It was therefore denounced by the Papal Nuncio and the Government of the Confederation (the Supreme Council) was excommunicated by him.

At that moment a great victory had been won at Benburb against a Scottish Calvinist army sent over to defend the Ulster Plantation. The Scots army was comprehensively broken, and Ulster lay open before General Owen Roe O'Neill. But Owen Roe was a Spanish soldier. He had spent thirty years fighting Protestantism in the armies of Spain. In the autumn of 1646, a few weeks after Benburb, the Papal Nuncio called on him to march on Kilkenny and overthrow the Government which had made a Treaty with a heretical king. Owen Roe obeyed without question. The Government was imprisoned and a Revolutionary Government headed by the Nuncio took its place. Three years of Irish civil war followed.

Cromwell's Puritans emerged triumphant in the English Civil War in 1649. But, despite the disruption of the Confederation, the Cromwellians held only a few towns in Ireland and they were under threat. The execution of the King in January 1649 had caused the Ulster Presbyterians to declare against Parliament, and they joined with Catholic forces in putting the city of Derry under siege. (Derry was held by Cromwellians.)

Owen Roe had acted as the Nuncio's agent for three years in disrupting Catholic organisation. The Nuncio returned to Rome in the spring of 1649, leaving Owen Roe disorientated in a chaotic situation. What he did in the summer was make a Treaty with the Cromwellians and attack the force besieging them in Derry. Parliament then disowned the Treaty, and Owen Roe, hearing that Cromwell was coming with a large army to conquer the country, marched south to do battle with him, but died on the way.

Even with the Confederation

disrupted, the Cromwellian conquest took three years. But for the Counter-Reformationist interference of the Nuncio, Ireland would have been impregnable to Cromwell and the Ulster problem would have been nipped in the bud.

The catastrophic history of the Confederation was well known to Catholic leaders in Ireland during the next century and a half, and acted as a spur to their determination to keep Rome at arm's length.

"In the early 19th century a new nation was forged - a very remarkable nation which combined the outlook of medieval Europe with the spirit of the French Revolution. But it would not be possible for the most acute reader to gather this story from this book."

Here is how **The Oxford Illustrated History** relates that event of fundamental consequence for the future of Ireland:

"This interlude [the English Civil War] should have given the dissidents in Ireland the opportunity to mobilise themselves for the final onslaught against the British settlers in Ireland, but divisions quickly appeared in the Irish Catholic ranks. The essential problem derived from the hope of the Old English that they would still be received to mercy by their king; they refused to concede military leadership in Ireland to Colonel Owen Roe O'Neill. Owen Roe...had spent his career in the Spanish army of the Netherlands and knew from his experience with religious conflict on Continental Europe that the Irish lords had now no choice but to make a determined effort to eliminate the last vestige of British power in Ireland. This appraisal was not welcomed by the Old English landowners who stood to lose most, and they constantly refused to provide adequate support to O'Neill in his attempt to confront and expel the Scottish Covenanter Army" (p. 146, in the chapter on 'Early Modern Ireland' by Nicholas Canny of University College Galway).

No mention of the overthrow of the Irish Government by Owen Roe on the orders of the Nuncio; no mention of his treaty with the Cromwellians; no mention at all of the Nuncio except in a blurb to a photograph; no mention of the fact that the Nuncio saved the Ulster Plantation by directing Owen Roe to Kilkenny after the battle of Benburb.

The true history of the Confederation was widely known until the early 19th century. From then until about 1970 it had to be misrepresented by the historians of Catholic-nationalism, and the line was adopted that the division of the 1640s was between the Old Irish and the Old English. I could find no grounds for that view. The division caused by the Nuncio ran through the Old Irish and Old English, who had ceased to regard themselves as separate peoples. The staunchest military opponent of the Nuncio was the chief of the McCarthys and his Roman adviser was Luke Wadding, of the Old English.

Owen Roe's army was recruited from the remnants of the Ulster clans who had their eyes on the Plantation. They followed Owen Roe to Kilkenny in 1646. Then, reflecting that he had cost them their hereditary lands, many of them deserted him in 1648 when the Nuncio excommunicated a second lot of dissident Catholics and ordered Owen Roe to make war on them.

Such things were very awkward for the Catholic-nationalist historians of the century and a half prior to 1970. But those historians came much closer to telling the story of the Confederation than the "revisionist" historians of the past twenty years have done.

The Ulster Protestants survived the 1640s and have had their own distinct history as a people ever since. The Anglo-Irish were inserted as a ruling caste after 1690 and the official history of Ireland centred on them for about a hundred and fifty years. The Catholics formed a distinct community under the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. They were not Catholic-nationalist. Until the late 18th century they were Jacobite in sentiment, but not rebellious Jacobites like the Scottish Highlanders. They would probably have accepted the Ascendancy as a social nucleus if the Ascendancy had not repelled them. But the Irish (Ascendancy) Parliament insisted on aggravating them until Britain bribed it into liquidating itself in 1800, and then for a further thirty years it aggravated them by its monopoly of borough corporations.

In the early 19th century a new nation was forged - a very remarkable nation which combined the outlook of medieval with the spirit of the French Revolution. In the course of the 19th century it eroded the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and came up against the Ulster Protestants, who were not a superior caste but a distinct people.

I don't think it would be possible for the most acute reader to gather this story from **The Oxford Illustrated History**. Roy Foster wrote the chapter on the 18th century and most of the 19th. The story of the United Irish movement in Ulster is not told at all by him,

though it is a remarkable story, and is full of consequence. He does not even mention its great political pamphleteer, William Steel Dickson, or its mass newspaper, the Northern Star.

Nor does he mention the great controversy amongst Catholics on the appointment of Bishops, the Veto controversy, which raged from 1808 until the 1820s, and in the course of which Catholic-nationalism was forged and the basis for the uniquely Irish dominance of Church over State was laid.

He skates over the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s, which was a valiant effort by liberal Protestants and Catholics to head the growing nationalist movement away from the exclusive Catholic-nationalism of O'Connell, and which, though it failed, was the source of the better aspects of nationalism in subsequent generations.

And he does not even mention Thomas Carlyle, who was the philosophical inspiration of the Young Ireland leaders. He was to them much as Marx was to Lenin, and they felt so indebted to him that they even forgave him for editing Cromwell's speeches and praising the great man. And they personally conducted him on a tour of Ireland, which in those days took a long time.

Nor does Foster mention Charles Gavan Duffy, editor of the Young Ireland paper, *The Nation*. In rebel Cork around 1950 I learned (not in school) that Duffy was one of the great men of the 19th century. All I have found out since I was obliged to become a historian confirms that view.

Foster's very poor account of his period is made unnecessarily irritating by flip remarks such as this:

"an Irish Poor Law Act was passed, against the advice of the experts and at odds with the underlying pattern of Irish poverty, but which at least provided a new political force in the Boards of Guardians" (p.197).

The "experts" were agents of the landlords and were against a Poor Law on the grounds that it would ruin "the country", the country being themselves. O'Connell tried to rally Protestant landlords to his Repeal movement by assuring them that he would have no Poor Law in a restored Irish Parliament. Protestant Ulster was also against having the English Poor Law in Ireland, but it could at least plead that it operated its own informal Poor Law, which was not the case in the South.

The Westminster Parliament pressed ahead regardless of Irish (upper class) opposition and set up a country-wide Poor Law system under the 1838 Act and compelled the landlords to fund it. It was a revolutionary measure with ever-widening consequences and the secular lay-out of modern Ireland begins with it.

The other economic revolution with far-reaching social consequences was the Land Act of 1903. It gets half a sentence on page 219 (in a chapter by David Fitzpatrick of Trinity College).

Fortunately I have neither the time nor the space to review the subsequent phases as I did the 1640s. The account of modern Irish history begins badly and does not improve. It is unfocussed and badly informed - the two probably being

connected. The great problem for Irish historians today is that they are uncertain of what the present is. They lack the Catholic-nationalist certainty of the recent past but they have not had it in them to restore what Catholic-nationalism suppressed. All they have really done is bowdlerise the material they inherited from the previous generation.

It is now in fashion to disparage the 1916 Rising, and this book is in fashion. It chastises Pearse for his "blood sacrifice". But it says nothing about the massive blood sacrifice in which Britain was involving Ireland just then, even though it mentions that only 64 insurrectionaries were killed in 1916 while 25,000 Irish were killed in the Great War. It swallows the camel but strains at the gnat.

The Great War is simply accepted as given. Not a word is said about the British decision in 1914 to have a world war. In my view that monstrous decision itself justifies the Easter Rising if only as a gesture of dissent.

James Connolly is said to have joined the Rising out of frustration (page 237). In fact, as he explained in his newspaper in 1915/16, he reckoned that the cause of socialism required a German victory. In 1914 he called for working class revolutions as preferable to the war launched by Britain. When that didn't happen he made a clear statement of support for Germany on socialist grounds, and did what he could to help achieve it. But the readers of *The Oxford Illustrated History* are not told that. □

Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

Gulf aftermath

During the Gulf crisis, President Bush had two options. He could concentrate on getting Iraq out of Kuwait, or he could concentrate on punishing Saddam Hussein for daring to do something that the US chose to disapprove of after it had happened. Bush chose the latter. Even though it seemed certain that Iraq could be removed by ordinary diplomatic means, he insisted on a full-scale war. Even though the Iraqi invasion was a very normal event in the pattern of global politics, he insisted on treating it as totally abnormal and shocking. To justify this, the phrase "new world order" was dreamt up.

It is now clear that the "new world order" is to be exactly the same as the old world order. The most clear-cut case

is East Timor. Not only has it an excellent moral and historical case for being free of Indonesian occupation: it also has an unimpeachable legal case. Its right to be free was even officially recognised by the UN security council, quite as unambiguously as was done in the case of Kuwait. But nothing is being done about it, nor about any of the other cases of nations with a moral and in some cases a legal right to be free.

Meanwhile, the Kurds are being abandoned to their fate. The American military, the people who gave Bush his glory by organising the cut-price slaughter of 100,000 or 200,000 Iraqis, are now disgusted by the part they are being forced to play. As in Vietnam, local allies are treated as wholly 'expendable' once the particular short-

term American purpose has been achieved, or not achieved. In any case, as *The Independent* reported on June 3rd, the US military find that they are not being allowed to rescue those Iraqi citizens who helped them during their time in Iraq.

And what has been achieved? The Iraqi Ba'athist regime has declined America's kind offer of forgiveness if they would merely behead themselves. It is far from clear that the Ba'athists could survive without the man who has been their effective leader during the whole period of their rule in Iraq. And - unlike the Kurds - the Ba'athist elite are undoubtedly shrewd enough to work out that Bush's ambiguous promises of better treatment if Saddam were overthrown are about as valuable as shares in Polly Peck.

Meanwhile, Kuwait is plagued by a shattered economy and an autocratic government that has no better notion of what to do than to persecute the Palestinians and delay democracy for the small minority of fully-fledged Kuwaiti citizens. Kuwait's constitution is

strictly racist, based on descent without regard for work, service or merit. When even South Africa is changing, it is unlikely that this set-up can last for long.

More significantly, a split seems to be opening up between the Saudi dynasty and the conservative religious leaders who up until now have been the most solid basis of support for the dynasty among ordinary Arabians.

Meanwhile, a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians looks increasingly less likely. A majority of Israelis are now definitely unwilling to give up the West Bank. And an increasing number of Palestinians are falling back on Islam, the core of their identity, and are working themselves into a frame of mind where such a solution would be unacceptable even if it were offered.

What was Bush thinking of? Probably, he was thinking of getting re-elected in 1992. And this means, of course, that having sown the winds he will still be in charge when it is time to reap the whirlwinds. How it will end, I have no idea. Probably not well for anybody, but Saddam's chances of ending up a long-term winner should not be discounted. Especially if Bush should do something like invading Cuba, a notion that seems to be being floated now, with drug trafficking as the planned pretext.

Ethiopia

If America hopes to become world power-broker, it should not lightly renege on its own deals. The US could have stood back and let nature take its course, with the Tigreans throwing out the old and discredited military regime. Instead, America helped negotiate a deal between the two sides, and then instantly reneged on it by "urging" the Tigreans to go on in and take the capital anyway. After the Gulf War, such "urgings" were bound to be decisive.

Quite apart from going back on what they had just agreed, this action was decidedly unwise. Ethiopia is a very diverse country, and the only hope of long-term peace lies in some form of coalition government. But what the US did makes such an outcome very much less likely.

The case of Eritrea is also disturbing. After the failure of secession on Biafra, it seemed to have been established that existing borders in Africa would be respected. They may be unnatural and arbitrary, but at least everyone can accept them. Say that the map can be redrawn, and there will be ten thousand rival ideas on how to redraw it, and an unending series of civil wars in a continent that desperately needs peace and development. Eritrea should have

been persuaded to settle for autonomy - independence in all but name, but with the formal principle of fixed borders still maintained. Yet here again, US policy has been in favour of allowing the Eritreans to break away completely - an example that many other minorities are bound to want to follow.

Bush would not be free to make such a mess in the world, if there were large numbers of ordinary American who followed foreign policy and could restrain him. But America's privatised television services give a silly and shallow view of the rest of the world, even though they are often very good on local and regional matters. Britain has not yet sunk so low - but with our own news services being privatised, and already much less independent than they once were, the outlook is not good.

Blue river blues

Mao Tse-Tung began his career as a schoolteacher, and it was only when he saw that no stable state structure was going to be established in China that he turned to politics and came to look for guidance to the only authority that had any useful ideas for China's problems. As a Stalinist Communist, he undertook three impossible tasks during his lifetime, and succeeded in two of them.

The first impossible task was to re-establish a unified and independent China. The Chinese Nationalists never managed it, despite their subsequent economic success on the tiny island of Taiwan. It was Mao's peasant armies that contradicted all conventional opinion and re-established China as a single sovereign state.

The second impossible task was curing China's endemic poverty and corruption. Many Chinese and almost all outside observers were sure it could not be done. China, once seen as a hopeless "basket case", with no more prospects than Bangladesh, is now seen as having suddenly begun to sort out its problems. Despite one period of acute crisis and famine, China was permanently changed.

The third impossible task was to try to stop a Leninist communist party degenerating into a corrupt oligarchy. Mao correctly saw that the process started by Khrushchev would lead to collapse and long-run capitulation to the West. The party hierarchy would throw away socialism but would hang on to party power to the bitter end. Something had to be done about this - but what? He might have opted for introducing Western style pluralism and multi-party democracy, an essentially social-democratic solution. But the whole tradition of Leninism was against this. Sun Yat Sen had had the notion of a long-lasting but limited dictatorship

that would gradually introduce full democracy. Mao, however, tried for a more radical solution with the Cultural Revolution. And he failed. Even before his death, he had been blocked and frustrated by the party oligarchy. His Red Guards had in any case mainly created chaos, without bringing into being any viable new system. And he had used up most of the prestige he had accumulated from his earlier successes.

After his death, Mao's ideas for China's future were officially repudiated through the trial of the "gang of four", his wife and three close associates. Formally speaking, it was pretended that this was nothing to do with Mao - just as the announcement of Madame Mao's recent death omitted the fact that she was his wife. But everyone knew what the real situation had been. As Madam Mao put it, she was Mao's dog, and bit only when she was told to bite. Jiang Qing - "Blue River" - was important only because her views were assumed to be Mao's own. During the trial of the "Gang of Four", it was pretended that Mao had actually wanted something very different. But since the fall of the "Gang of Four" was followed by the rapid introducing of elements of capitalism, it has to be assumed that this was a polite fiction. It was actually a "gang of five", but Mao was left out because he was the founder of the very state of which his rivals had now secured control.

Mao, the frustrated teacher turned politician and general, spent his whole life trying to teach new lessons to his fellow Chinese, changing them a great deal, but not rooting out as much of the past as he would have liked. Tiananmen Square was no aberration, but a logical part of the Khrushchevite development that Mao tried to stop and failed to stop.

Leninism is essentially dead. Its Stalinist branch was the only effective part of it: the Khrushchevites could not keep what they held, and the Trotskyists in Western Europe have presided over a strong decline in the fortunes of the left. Possibly some other form of Leninist development was possible once, but no longer. The Cultural Revolution produced only disorder and disruption.

Socialists in Western Europe have wasted the last 20 or 30 years looking to the rest of the world to show the way to socialism. Plenty of left-wing people have very deliberately blocked possible reforms - most notably industrial democracy - in the expectation that they were preventing a doomed capitalist system from having its life extended. Some of them have learned their lesson even now - while others, like Fred Halliday, have now gone over to the enemy camp, walking away from the mess that they helped to create. But the New Right is also strongly in decline, losing ground to grey pragmatists like John Major. If the left were to stop

The two-party system is what lies at the heart of political democracy in this country. One party in power, the other party seizing every opportunity to become the party in power. Effective opposition is every bit as important as effective government. Indeed, more important.

Effective opposition is what prevents elective dictatorship. The party in power has to constantly watch its step - no matter how large its majority. Because every day is a day in the campaign for the next election.

No system is perfect, and the greatest imperfection in the British system arises when either the opposition is ineffective, or for some reason *decides* not to oppose. We have seen both problems in the last 12 years. For much,

fighting itself and get down to building socialism in Western Europe, almost anything might be possible.

Leningrad and Stalingrad

Thirty years ago, the famous city of Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd by an arbitrary decision of the Communist Party hierarchy. Now, a popular vote has decided that Leningrad will return to its old name of St Petersburg, and Boris Yeltsin has been elected leader of Russia on the strength mostly of being known to be at odds with the party hierarchy. What some of us were saying back in the 1960s has been amply proved - all attempts to draw a distinction between Lenin and Stalin were unreal, and bound to fail. It was Lenin, not Stalin, who destroyed all legal opposition and decided that the Soviet Union was to be controlled absolutely by a party hierarchy commanded by the Politburo. It was Lenin, not Stalin, who decided that all other forms of socialism were to be considered hostile and treasonable to the true interests of the working class. Stalin merely followed through the logic of such decisions.

In the new world that had emerged in the 1950s, there was some logic to the USSR shifting away from Leninist lines of development, which would probably have led to a nuclear holocaust and the collapse of civilisation - perhaps the extinction of humanity. But to do so effectively, the party hierarchy should have frankly accepted the Lenin - Stalin continuity. But they evidently thought that a separation could be made. They were wrong, and in this post-Leninist era, no effective socialism is possible if it tries to repeat their mistake.

Polish Popery

The Catholic Church has always acted as a large self-interested corporate body,

Their Lordships' House

by Ross Carbery

if not most, of that time, the Labour Party was ineffective. On many occasions, and on several issues it *chose* not to oppose. Either because it agreed with the government or (more usually) because it got frightened by some passing bit of political hysteria - the recent War Crimes Bill being an example.

In this event the only brake left on parliament is the Upper House. The Lords is made up of a mixture of hereditary and appointed peers. The

important characteristic of the members is that once they get into the place, they are beholden to nobody, because they cannot be removed. It is this characteristic which allows them to act as a brake of last resort.

Tony Benn, with quite a bit of support, is campaigning to make the Upper House elective. Then the *form* of democracy would exist in both houses. But the only useful function of the Upper House in our democratic system would vanish.

Tony Benn is offended by the existence of an unelected chamber in Parliament. I find the notion a bit off myself. But surely we can put up with a bit of an assault on our aesthetic senses if the cause is making an important contribution to democratic government □



whose guiding principle is that God helps those who help themselves. And, like all such self-interested corporate bodies - including the fallen Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the disintegrating hierarchy of the Soviet Union - the Catholic hierarchy also supposes that its own interests are also the true interests of the whole human race. Thus the Pope's campaign to "re-Christianise" Europe.

Pope John Paul II, the Pope from Poland, is now fighting a battle for the shape of Poland's future - and there are some pleasant signs that he is losing it. The force that actually overthrew East European Leninism was the visible alternative of a prosperous consumer society in Western Europe. Poles want to be free to be as religious or irreligious as they chose, as strict or lax as their own individual consciences dictate. Abortion has been a particular point of conflict - no one likes the idea, but equally most people recognise that women do not seek abortions unless the alternatives are even worse.

It can not be said that the Pope's stand

against abortion is a truly moral stand. Catholic teachings on the subject are equivocal and open to interpretation. The hierarchy was quite willing to suppress its own traditional Latin Mass during a burst of modernist enthusiasm a few years back - imposing the very thing that people were once burnt at the stake for demanding, and imposing it despite the wishes of most ordinary Catholics. But that change was merely replacing one sort of discipline with another. Accepting a woman's right to choose would be abdicating the essentials of Church authority, which the hierarchy is never likely to do.

Several times, the Pope has compared abortion to the Nazi Holocaust - a doubly dishonest argument (as well as an insult to the *thousands* of women who have died as a result of illegal abortions). It is dishonest, first, because the Nazis themselves were strongly opposed to abortion (and also to homosexuality and pornography, despite the various fantasies attached to them by people who know that you'll never get into trouble for telling lies about what the Nazis were and were not).

The second and much more important point is that the Vatican utterly failed to take a moral stance when the Nazis were a real power in Europe. Many individual Catholics were part of the resistance, but the hierarchy as a whole was neutral, leaning somewhat towards the Fascist side. Though in a position to expose Nazi genocide, they never did so. But with Nazism safely defeated and discredited, the Vatican become retrospective anti-Fascists. There has been trouble in Poland about their attempt to annex the death camps by giving prominence to the small number of Jewish converts to Catholicism who died there. This row was defused after vigorous protests by Poland's small community of Jewish survivors. But now he repeats the same trick on the matter of abortion. Hopefully, he is not going to succeed. □

The Ernest Bevin Society

**Labour Party Conference
Fringe Meeting**

***"Ernie Bevin -
The Trade Unionist"***

Speaker:

Jack Jones

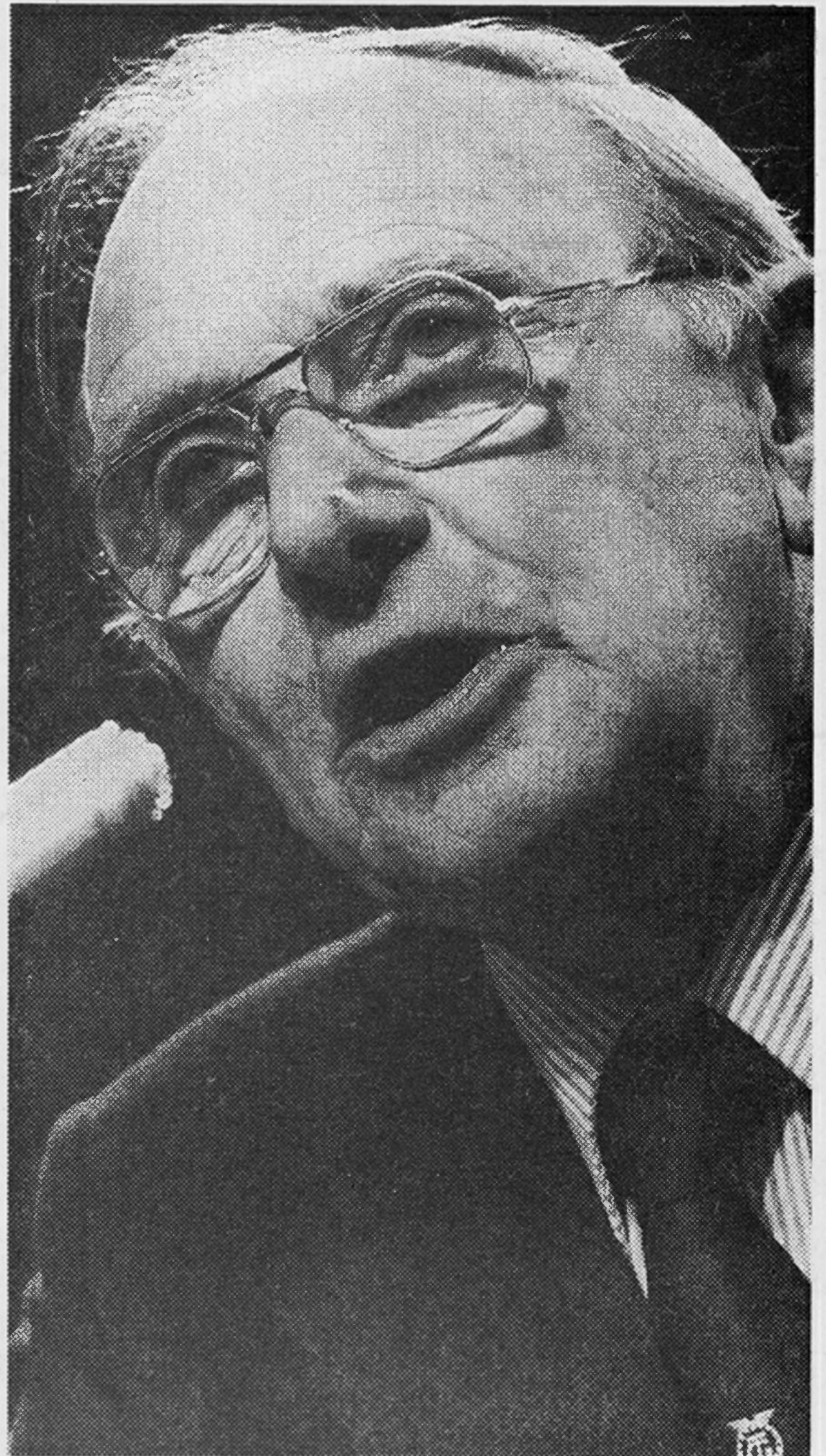
General Secretary, TGWU, 1968-1977

Monday, September 30

at 7.30 p.m.

in

**The Terrace Room, Courtlands Hotel
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New from The Ernest Bevin Society

The New Left Imperialist

A Comment on the imperialist apologetics of Professor Fred Halliday of the LSE

by Brendan Clifford

This pamphlet describes the true character of the United Nations' war against Iraq, which Fred Halliday has justified as a war against Fascism, and traces his apologetics back to the ahistorical Marxism of the New Left Review, of which Halliday was a leading light.

Halliday's new posture is analysed, and the war against Iraq is compared with the real anti-fascist war of 1940-1945. Halliday's view of Kuwait is compared with the observable reality of the Kuwaiti state, and his apologetics examined.

The pamphlet includes an account of the role of the late Bill Warren in contributing to the thinking on Imperialism of the British & Irish Communist Organisation in the mid-1970s, and of Warren's relations with Halliday and the New Left and Halliday's relations with the B&ICO.

It also includes a discussion of the Palestinian question in the light of the UN war against Iraq, and a section on Halliday's writings on Iran.

*Obtainable from The Ernest Bevin Society, 114 Lordship Road, London N16 0QP
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