Labour & Trade Union Review

November-December 1992 No.32

Price £1.50 (IR£1.80)

Labour After Kinnock

The Future of Coal

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The Struggle for Democracy in Northern Ireland

plus

Notes on the News
Adam Smith

LABOUR AFTER KINNOCK

REBUILDING THE WORKING CLASS PARTY

The political complexion of the Labour Party is at present uncertain. But it seems at least to *be* a Labour Party again. The decision not to be a Labour Party has not been taken. The moment of decision has been deferred and the suicidal impulse has abated. A couple of effective Parliamentary performances by the new leader have acted as a miracle cure on minds and spirits which had been brought close to the end of their tether by the vacillating and inopportune opportunism of the old leadership. It has been rediscovered that the proper atmosphere of British party politics is conflict, not accommodation.

In the doleful Kinnock era every sign of combativeness was suspect. Combativeness was declared to be the sign of the Militant Tendency, and witch-hunters were put to work to disembowel the party. Kinnock had a left-wing past to live down. His rhetoric during his rise had scarcely been distinguishable from that of the Militant Tendency. In scourging the Militant Tendency he was exorcising his own past. And as he debilitated the Labour Party he looked to the Tory leadership to pat him on the head and tell the public that he was now fit to be trusted to take power away from them. Thatcher had punctured his hollow Bevanite rhetoric. And this had impressed him so deeply that he craved a Thatcherite seal of approval.

Some Tories noticed that the atmosphere at this year's Labour Party Conference would have been more appropriate to a party that had just won an election than to a party that had just lost its fourth election in a row, and they took that to be an unhealthy sign. In fact it was a sign that health was returning. The exorcist who had brought the Party close to suicide had been exorcised, and distinct signs of life were again discernible.

Even Socrates, for all his philosophising, would have felt his spirits perk up if the Athenian democracy had changed its mind at the last moment and decreed that he need not drink the cup of hemlock after all. So how could the Labour Party not have felt that the loss of an election which averted a loss of life was not the ultimate tragedy?

The Tory chickens are coming home to roost. The Tories are having to cope with the inevitable effects of thirteen years of Thatcherism instead of being able to blame those effects on

a Labour victory. Imagine, if you care to, what the situation would now be like if Kinnock had gained the small majority he had hoped for. We prefer not to imagine it, beyond saying that it would have made Labour a scapegoat for Thatcherism while leaving it bereft of either the policies or the political will to do something drastically different from what Major is doing.

A nightmare has ended. And that is cause for celebration.

We do not mean to imply that we agree in detail with all that John Smith has been doing. We are very doubtful about his tactics in the Maastricht debate, which were opportunist. But competent opportunism has been such a rare thing in Labour politics for such a long time that we have no hesitation about praising its reappearance, rather than criticising it, as we might do if opportunism could be taken for granted.

Opportunism, as we understand it, means taking advantage of an opportunity to make some political headway in ways that may not be entirely compatible with basic principle. The term was not properly applicable to Kinnock. He merely relinquished his principles: he did not make political headway. Functional opportunism requires political ability. Kinnock's only political ability was the ability to mutilate his own party.

Trotsky, the ancestor of that politically disabling ideology called 'political science', saw the "zig-zag" as a sure sign of political incompetence or outright betrayal of principle. In fact the zig-zag is the usual mode of political progress. Friction against a dense medium of resistance is the condition of movement for a political party no less than for an army, and the possibility of direct and unimpeded movement towards an object is the rarest of occurences.

John Smith has zigged. When he completes a full zig-zag we can be certain that what is called the Labour Party, and has scarcely deserved either part of the name for ten years, is once again a political party capable of movement.

And once Labour is visibly a party in movement it will be possible to rebuild it down to its branches without fearing that every sign of life in the membership is bound to be hostile. We do not dispute that Kinnock was well advised to fear every sign of life in the party and to police it to extinction. Political vigour in the working class was not something he could harness and give direction to.

Party political life based on class ideology is inherent in the social structure of Britain - or at least of the English part of Britain, which is the major part of it. Other societies may have strong material cultures which give purpose to life at all levels regardless of party politics. England does not.

The mass of English society was once intensely religious and was organised in churches. But religion was superseded as a form of social organisation over one hundred years ago. For a couple of generations Imperialism was a widespread secular ideology giving a universal purpose to English life. But the Empire has virtually gone, and what remains of it is a sick joke.

England has been structured by class politics ever since the great Imperialism of the Liberal Party foundered in the First World War. And for thirty years after the Second World War it achieved a remarkable degree of social harmony through the conflicts of class politics.

The dream of the "end of history" - of humanity in general homogenised into a harmonious suburbia - is only a hallucination. The ideal of a classless society in England, if made the basis of actual politics, is a recipe for mayhem. It *was* made the basis of actual politics in Kinnock's adaptation to Thatcherism, and the result has been mayhem in a number of major cities.

The logic of the classless society is the competition of each against all. "What's wrong with trying to give your children a better chance in life than other peoples' children?" Mrs Thatcher asked. (If those were not her precise words, that was undoubtedly her meaning). All that's wrong with it is that everybody's children cannot be given a better chance than everybody else's children. By the standards of commercial meritocracy most people must be failures. Each successful millionaire necessarily implies a thousand who failed to make it. Even in America - a society where the law of the jungle is the generally accepted framework of life - the thousand who fail do not accept failure with equanimity. (Why should they? What moral force has the law of the jungle?)

The great cities of England lived orderly lives under the influences of class culture and class politics. The poor were not merely poor - failures in the struggle for existence. They were the working class. And the rich were not merely rich - they were the bourgeoisie. Class culture had a civilising effect on both rich and poor and eased relations between them. Commercial relations were not the only social relations, nor even the most important ones.

But Kinnockism abolished the working class by depriving it of its political skeleton. And what emerged in its place was a disoriented proletariat which had no good reason not to engage in looting when the opportunity presented itself.

The Labour Party needs to be reconstituted as the party of the working class, not for exclusively socialist reasons but for general social reasons - one might even say for capitalist reasons. (The idea that capitalism flourishes best in a social medium of atomised individualism has been comprehensively disproved over the past quarter century by the greater efficiency of Germany and Japan, where there are very substantial pre-capitalist social forms, as against America and Thatcherite Britain.)

In 1951 British Labour, having just

constructed the welfare state, shifted its political orientation away from the political position which had enabled it to construct the welfare state. It ceased to be Bevinite in tendency and became Bevanite. Ernest Bevin had just died when Aneurin Bevan, supported by Harold Wilson and Michael Foot, resigned from the Government on the "teeth and spectacles" issue, and began to depict the old leadership of the party as a hostile force. (The Militant Tendancy of later times might be described as Bevanism without the double-think).

Throughout the fifties Bevanism was on the ascendant - supported outside the party but within the trade union movement by the Communist Party. And from the death of Gaitskill thirty years ago, until this summer, the party leadership has been Bevanite, apart from the brief interregnum of James Callaghan. (Kinnock was Foot's protege).

One can understand why vigorous trade unionists and socialists in the fifties were dissatisfied by the conservative plodders in the trade union leadership who were seen as Bevin's successors. But Bevin had no real successor in either the trade union movement or the Labour Party - Bevan saw to that by attracting the upwardly mobile intelligentsia of the movement to himself. However Bevan's flashy rhetoric was sadly inadequate to the conduct of Labour as a major party in the state.

The Bevin Society was formed by the British & Irish Communist Organisation in an effort to counter the Bevanism that was leading the Labour movement to disaster. It was at first seen as a right-wing tendency. But as the Bevanites at the end of their tether - the Kinnockites - embarked on their bureaucratic cempaign to suppress all forms of thought in the party, image-making being their sole hope of salvation, the Bevin Society began to be seen as subversive merely because it attempted to form a connected chain of reasoning.

Labour & Trade Union Review

Volume I Number 32 November-December 1992 ISSN 0953-3494

Address- editorial and subscriptions:
114 Lordship Road, London N16 OQP. Tel. 081-802-9482

Subscriptions: UK: £11.00 (individuals), Europe: £13.00 (individuals), Rest of World: £15.00 (individuals); rates for institutional/multi-user subscribers available on request.

Back issues: available at current subscription rates.

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We know that we helped to maintain a residue of thought in the Party at a moment when it was on the verge of becoming extinct. We know that this magazine was widely read despite the disspproval directed towards it. A series of positions which it argued for when they seemed to be lost causes have suddenly become respectable - anti-PR, election of the leader by the Parliamentary Party, etc.

At last year's Party conference a certain Parliamentary candidate whom we knew would not accept a copy of **Labour & Trade Union Review** from us, and he hurried away lest he be seen talking to us. This year he sought us out effusively. And he was eager to discuss some items published during the past year in this magazine which a year ago he affected to have no time for. We mention this as a straw in the wind.

The Bevanite reign of terror has lifted and the Bevanite spirit is no longer operative in the Party leadership. To that extent our work has been done. We are therefore adopting the cheaper format you now see. It was necessary in the Kinnock era to be glossy in order to be seen at all. But as we have no funds beyond the sales of the magazine, the strain of being glossy brought us to the edge of bankruptcy.

As for the future, we are considering our position. □

The future of Coal

British Coal's announcement last month that it was to close 27 pits and mothball four more, has resulted in the most searching inquiry into Britain's energy policy since Tony Benn's Energy Commission's study in the late 1970s. The Energy Commission was abolished by the incoming Conservative government in 1979. Thirteen years later, in 1992, the Conservatives wound up the Department of Energy and placed responsibility for energy policy within a revamped Department of Trade and Industry.

It is tempting to suggest that the proposed closure of 60% of Britain's coal industry can be traced back to the miner's strike of 1984/85. Although the Government 'won' that conflict, the memories of the miners standing up to Thatcher and her government still linger with many Tories. The current proposals, however, have little to do with the events of eight years ago=. Their origin is much more recent than that.

When the last Conservative government published its proposals to privatise tthe electricity industry in 1989, a number of energy experts said that they were unworkable without further radical changes. One of the objectives of the proposals was the introduction of competition into electicity generation. Under the previous system the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) had a monopoly on generation in England and Wales. (In Scotland the South of Scotland Electricity Board actied as both generator and distributor). Privatisation split the CEGB into two parts - Power Gen with 70% of fossil fuel plant and National Power with the remaining 30%. The nuclear component, which provided up to 20% of electricity supplies, remained in public hands, cushioned by a generous levy (tantamount to a subsidy) worth £1,200m a year.

On the distribution side, the twelve Electricity Boards became Regional Electricity Companies (RECs) and, like the generators, were expected to make a profit. To compound matters, the 1989 Electricity Act laid a duty on the RECs to seek the most economically priced electricity, not all of it necessarily from the generators. As a result most of the RECs have entered into contracts with other private companies to build gas-fired plant (Combined Cycle Gas Turbines) which require less capital outlay than conventional fossil fuel plant and can be constructed quickly, thus ensuring a quick return on investment, providing, of course, that the product can be sold.

So far 10,000 MW, out of a planned total of 23,000 MW, has been completed or is under construction, but there are doubts over the balance. In recent weeks 6,000 MW of proposed plant have been cancelled and other projects may be mothballed because they are believed to be uneconomic. It now looks as though the so-called 'dash for gas' has been halted, if only temporarily.

The 'dash for gas', embarked upon in the main by the RECs, was perhaps the single most important factor responsible for the projected fall in demand for coal. Currently, Power Gen and national Power take between them 65 million tonnes of coal under contracts which expire in April 1993. Thereafter, under new five-year contracts yet to be finalised, their coal take will fall to 40 million tonnes in the first year and to 30 million tonnes in subsequent years.

Wheter gas is cheaper than coal is highly debatable. Even Power Gen, who are planning to build gas-fired plant, have estimated the cost of new gas-generated electricity at 2.6 p/Kwh, somewhat higher than coal which ranges from 1.9 p/Kwh to 2.4 p/Kwh when fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment. The true comparative costs, however, are difficult to determine as the critical figures on which the price of gas- generated electricity are based are a commercial secret. Coal's costs on the other hand are gradually being reduced by remarkable improvements in efficiency by the industry in recent years, and further cost reductions are expected as improvements continue to be made.

If further improvements in the industry's efficiency are made resulting in British coal becoming increasingly competitive with imports (a number of pits are already producing coal that can compete with imports) then there is no case for closing down a substantial part of the industry. On the contrary, the pits should be kept open, not only to provide for base-load electricity in Britain, but also to compete with imports in the European coal market, which accounts for around 120 million tonnes a year. Given the opportunity, British coal could take up to 20 million tonnes of this, with further inroads to be made as price and quality improve.

Earlier this year the House of commons Select Committed on Energy argued very strongly in its report *Consequences of Electricity Privatisation* that British Coal should be given a fair opportunity to compete in the generation market; and as recently as October Lord Wakeham, who, as John Wakeham, piloted electricity privatisation through the House of Commons, told the House of Lords that it was the government's policy that coal should compete on a level playing-field in the energy market. Yet it is the unique structure of the electricity industry, set up by Wakeham and the Government, which is preventing coal from competing fairly with gas.

The pit-closure announcement could not have come at a worse time. With the economy in deep recession and unemployment, even on official figures, close to 3 million, further job losses would be catastrophic, not only for the miners and their families, but also for the workers in coal-fired stations and ancillary industries dependent on British coal. The 30,000 jobs which would disappear following closure, could expand to 100,000 or more and the cost to the tadxpayer in unemployment pay and other social benefits would be enormous. It would certainly be cheaper to pay the miners to produce coal, rather than pay them to do nothing.

Britain has at least 300 years of coal reserves. Much of it is accessible, is relatively cheap, and can be made as environmentally- friendly as gas. Research into clean coal technology, for example, could be abandoned if the closures go ahead. It the industry is allowed to decline Britain will become a net importer of energy a lot sooner than is necessary. This will have a negative effect on our balance of payments as import prices rise. We would also be exposing ourselves to the dangers of supply constraints, spelling disaster for British industry. This time the miners must win, or we will all be losers.

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Labour's Lack of a Foreign Policy

Text of a talk given by Hugh Roberts at the **Bevin Society** *meeting at the 1992 Labour Party Conference*

I want to start with an observation, which is that for some time now Labour has had no foreign policy of its own. Its foreign policy has been the government's foreign policy. That this is so has been made very clear recently in relation to three crucial events that are defining the new world we live in, the post cold war world.

The first event was the Iraq crisis, which began just over two years ago. Labour went along with the policy of the UN issuing ultimata to Iraq. It went along with, and supported Operation Desert Shield, and then went along with, and supported Operation Desert Storm. It did not oppose Bush's continuation of the war after Iraq had announced its intention to evacuate Kuwait. It did not criticise the 'turkey shoot'. And after the war it supported the British government's policy of creating what they called 'safe havens' in Iraqi Kurdistan. It has now gone along with - I certainly have not heard it criticise, and it can therefore be taken as supporting - the new policy of establishing an exclusion zone in southern Iraq, denying the Iraqi government the right to fly over its own air space. Not a word, as far as I am aware, has been said against any of this, nor has a word been said by Labour against the continuing policy of maintaining an economic blockade against Iraq, and the whole panoply of economic sanctions, which I noticed in an item in **The Independent** is killing Iraqis today, two years later, at the rate of about 50,000 people per annum. Over 4000 Iraqi men, women and children are dying every month as a direct result of the policy of maintaining sanctions, which has Labour's support. I am not passing any judgement on that. I am simply pointing to a series of facts which indicate that Labour has no foreign policy different from that of Douglas Hurd.

The second defining event which has been playing a large part in shaping the post cold war world is what is going on in Yugoslavia. Labour did not, prior to the onset of the fighting in Yugoslavia, propose any initiative to maintain Yugoslavia as a federal state after the collapse of the communist regime there. It did not take any initiative to propose that the European Community should seek to preserve Yugoslavia as an integral state. Nor did it take any initiative to propose that the UN should act to preserve Yugoslavia as a state. That is worth saying, because we now all take it for granted that Yugoslavia has fallen to pieces. But Lebanon has not fallen to pieces. There has been violence in Lebanon for 16 years, what is misnamed a Lebanese civil war, but everybody is agreed that Lebanon, as a state, with at least the nominal properties of a state, is maintained in being. It is clearly in the interests of all Lebanon's neighbours that Lebanon, even though it does not really function as a state internally, that it continue to function externally, insofar as a vacuum of nominal sovereignty is not allowed to exist there. Labour did nothing to prevent the disintegration of Yugoslavia. One might say that it is not Labour's business to prevent it. But it is worth pointing that out. Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, an event which both the European Community and the UN has allowed to happen, when it, arguably, could have acted to prevent it, Labour has endorsed the position that has been crucial to the UN stance there, that the boundaries of the old constituent republics of the Yugoslav federation should be the frontiers of the newly independent and sovereign states that are being established in warfare. But there is no obvious reason why the internal boundaries of a federal state should have any significance whatever when that federal state collapses. Those internal boundaries were established by Tito. They were an important element of the state that has since disappeared. Yet a decision has been taken by the Security Council, which has been endorsed and supported by all and sundry, that those defunct boundaries of a defunct federal state should be sacrosanct. And it is in virtue of their being sacrosanct that violations of them are condemned. My point is that Labour has gone along with all that. At no point has it differed with that development of UN policy in which the British government has taken a very active part. It has also gone along with the policy of sanctions against Serbia, the naval blockade employed to enforce these sanctions and the subsequent UN intervention in Sarajevo, and so on. Thus Labour has had no policy of its own on the Yugoslavian crisis as it has evolved. Whether that is a good or a bad thing is a matter of opinion, and I shall come back to that. But it simply has not had anything to say which has been at variance with what the British government has been promoting.

Finally, there is the question of Europe itself, and Maastricht. The official Labour position is to support Maastricht. That is something the Bevin Society welcomes. But since the crisis of confidence in the Maastricht process following the result of the French referendum, Labour has gone along with John Major's shameful manoeuvre of waiting for Denmark, of saying that we do not need to complete the process of ratifying the Maastricht treaty to which Britain is a signatory until the Danes have resolved their own problems about it. What is interesting is that, while John Smith has in other respects appeared as quite a strong and firm supporter of Maastricht, and has acted quite firmly in relation to dissident views in the shadow cabinet, he has crucially endorsed John Major's manoeuvre over Denmark. On what is, arguably, the crucial matter for the actual prospects of the Maastricht Treaty, Labour is once again simply mimicking the Conservative government.

There has also been substantial agreement with the Conservative government - either by echoing or by

silence on the part of Labour - on other matters. Eleven days ago there was an item in **The Independent** headlined, *"Hurd urges UN to take "imperial" role"*, by Anthony Bevins, the Political Editor. The crucial feature of Hurd's conception of the UN is of it quite openly usurping national sovereignty in countries where this is deemed necessary by the UN, putting, as Douglas Hurd proposed it, "UN blue on the map to prevent countries being run by corrupt warlords, as in Somalia". This vision of an imperial UN arrogating to itself, and thereafter exercising, the right to usurp national sovereignty of countries that it deems to be run by corrupt warlords, or perhaps other categories of corruption or other categories of warlords who fall into disfavour, this vision is basically saying: you can forget about national sovereignty, when we choose to usurp it, we will usurp it. This vision has not been repudiated by Labour. There has been no response to those extraordinary remarks by Douglas Hurd. In his speech to Conference today, John Smith, while not employing Hurd's imperialist terminology, did, however, call for a strengthening of the UN's powers and a broadening of its agenda, to include economic and social issues as well as the existing issues of peacekeeping, conflict resolution, environmental protection, and so on. Hurd could not have been clearer. National sovereignty is to be overridden by the UN whenever the UN sees fit - the UN is of course the Security Council - and Labour does not disagree. Hurd was however only making explicit the logic of the Iraq affair. In the course of the Iraq affair it was demonstrated that Iraqi national sovereignty was subordinate to the overriding authority of the UN, and that was already present in the very idea of ultimata by the Security Council to a member state, ultimata backed by the threat of war, which was a real threat, as we now know. But it was made even clearer after the war in whole 'safe havens' affair in Kurdistan, which was a very obvious intrusion or infringement of Iraqi national sovereignty, not warranted by any of the UN Security Council resolutions which preceded the onset of the original war. A further resolution had to be passed on France's initiative referring to human rights violations in order to warrant that intervention.

What is interesting about this is that Labour, having gone along with the Iraq affair, and having accepted its implicit logic, now does not choke when that logic is made explicit. That is a very interesting fact. It means that Labour is quite calmly, or perhaps unthinkingly, in a state of total forgetfulness, de facto repudiating a major aspect of what used to be its world view. Throughout all the time I have been active in the Labour Party, up until two years ago, Labour was identified in world affairs, amongst other things, with the cause of national liberation. Labour had, on the whole, a proud record of having supported movements in the colonies for independence, in India and Africa, and so on. It was that tradition that prompted a younger generation of people in the Labour Party to take such a keen interest in causes such as the Polisario in the Western Sahara - I see they have a fringe meeting here this Conference - Nicaragua, and so on. The issue of the national sovereignty of young,

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post-colonial, or in other senses third world states, was something that Labour tended very strongly to identify with and to have a clear position on. That has now simply been abandoned, without any discussion whatever in the Party about that point of principle, none at all. The whole question of Labour's support for the national sovereignty of newly-independent, post-colonial, states, has simply gone out of the window without any audible debate that I am aware of. That is a very major change. Labour has gone along with an extraordinary change in the principles on which world affairs are conducted, and it has done so without thinking about it.

Other aspects on which one can very briefly mention an effective Labour agreement with, or endorsement of, or echoing of, Government foreign policy, is the Libyan affair. The pressure being brought to bear on Libya over the Lockerbie affair is now out of the news. As far as I am aware Labour at no point expressed any difference with the Government on that, despite the fact that virtually all informed opinion in Middle East opinion knows that Libya was being framed. Lockerbie was not something that could be pinned on the Libyans at all, and therefore an affair quite different from the invasion of Kuwait. There was no doubt about Saddam Hussein's guilt in invading Kuwait. There is very real doubt about the responsibility of Libya in the Lockerbie affair, and yet Libya was being very thoroughly quarantined, having sanctions applied to it, and so on, and Labour had absolutely nothing to say about that.

More recently, and in a way more remarkably, there have been at frequent intervals statements by Government ministers that have been encouraging a resurgence of xenophobic - usually anti-German, but sometimes anti-French - nationalism in this country. We have seen it over the devaluation of the pound, the reflex of blaming the Germans that Government ministers immediately demonstrated. To some extent Labour has differentiated itself from that. It has not gone along with blaming the Germans, fair enough. But I was particularly struck a couple of months ago when there was a conflict involving Cornish fishermen, one of the conflicts they have often had with their French counterparts. The main contribution of the relevent Minister, John Selwyn Gummer, to that affair, was to bring to the attention of the Cornish fishermen, that what was almost certainly their routine spat with their rivals from across the Channel, was to be seen in the perspective of 1000 years of emnity with France. If the Cornish fishermen had a narrow-minded and short-sighted view of their conflict, they were to see it in a grand historical perspective and its true perspective. All this is preparing British public opinion for the eventuality of fighting in Europe. And what is remarkable is that Labour is not challenging this at all.

Another matter on which Labour has wholly failed, or has perhaps not even tried or thought of differentiating itself from the Government, concerns a very important issue in foreign affairs, and that is the whole question of the role of NATO. NATO is a classic cold war organisation whose role has come to an end with the end of the cold war. It is clearly determined to outlive its role and can count on Anglo-American determination to preserve it,

organisation is now needed. Instead you are having a kind of sliding over of NATO into a inadequately defined new role. NATO is sliding over into becoming part of a redefined vision of the UN's role, a process of redefinition to which Hurd has recently contributed, as I have mentioned. This is quite clearly a deviation, and arguably a perversion, of NATO's original purpose and function. It precludes, as I say, the development of other, possibly more appropriate, organisations, being set up by genuine agreement in response to genuine need. And Labour is going along with all that.

In short, Labour does not have a foreign policy at all. It has abdicated its responsibility to oppose the Conservatives in the sphere of international affairs. The Conservative world view is the Labour world view. That is a fact, and an important fact. What I want us to discuss is the reasons for this, and the implications of it. One of the reasons, I believe, for this abdication of responsibility, this absence of a world view, this absence of a foreign policy, is an underlying ideological complicity between Labour and Thatcherism. For we are still living under a Thatcherite government. There has been a certain amount of flux. But I have been surprised how much of the Thatcherite spirit survived her departure in a lot of the internal domestic policies promoted by John Major: the Citizen's Charter, the continuing privatisation, the rather confused and very ideological agenda for education, and so forth. Thatcherism involved, amongst other things a major innovation in foreign affairs, given the traditions of the Conservative party. Prior to Thatcher, in fact prior to the mid-eighties, the Conservative tradition was to be robustly and in a self-satisfied way, realists about foreign affairs, pragmatic: The United Kingdom has no principles, merely interests. That would be a formula which would sum up that not dishonourable tradition. One could argue that that is what foreign policy has to be about: preserving the interests of the state in question. It was on the Labour side that one found a penchant for ideologically-motivated foreign policy, particularly on the Labour left. The arguments I grew up listening to were arguments between a pragmatic, would-be realist Labour right, and an idealistic Labour left. The latter would say, "We must do this. It is right." To which the former would reply, "We can't do this. It is not on".

What is interesting is that Thatcher changed everything round by developing from the late 'eighties onwards what increasingly came across as an ideologically-motivated, and highly moralistic, foreign policy. That was a way of stealing Labour's traditional clothes, particularly the clothes of the Labour left. It certainly left the Labour left with very little to say. One aspect of this, which we have only begun to see since the Iraqi affair two years ago, is government insistence on the role of the UN, enormous emphasis being placed by this Conservative government on the UN since August 1990. That was one of Labour's traditional tunes. Things should be referred to the UN rather than be dealt with by unilateral action or bilateral interaction. If you cast your mind back to the Falklands affair in 1982, Thatcher's position was that this is a problem between Britain and Argentina, and Britain is going to sort it out in the traditional way by sending a task force down there. Labour's reflex was to say we should refer it to the UN. With the Conservative Government making a virtue of putting the UN at the centre of the picture all the time, that has deprived Labour of one of its main lines in foreign affairs. It has been unable to react to this, but has simply found itself echoing that discourse. The other element is the way in which, thanks to Thatcher, and thanks in particular to the Iraq affair, this Conservative Government, in its reshaped foreign policy, has appropriated the entire discourse on human rights. It had begun to to that, as had the Americans, prior to the Iraq affair, in relation to Eastern Europe. You can see this in a sense dating from the Helsinki Accords, as a development that goes back to there, and that, particularly in the American case, is given a big boost by Jimmy Carter. This emphasis on the rhetoric of human rights is very much targeted on the Communist world. What we have now seen is a development of that, and in one sense a diversion of it, or a deviation of it. It is no longer targeted towards the Communist countries, which no longer exist, but towards third world states. The rhetoric of human rights is now a kind of lasar beam being focussed very sharply on third world states that are in difficulties or in internal turmoil of one kind or another. Indeed, it is much more likely to be focussed on states in internal turmoil, than states with an appalling human rights records that are nonetheless stable. Stable vicious dictatorships are not much in the limelight. Somalia, on the other hand, is very much in the limelight. A tacit criterion of selection is being applied. It is the weak states that are being put into the picture, with human rights being the motif.

In both respects this emphasis on the UN and the use of human rights rhetoric has completely disarmed Labour. Labour has been completely incapable of criticising Government foreign policy expressed in these terms. The obvious way of criticising it is to pour withering scorn on the Government's credentials, particularly in the matter of human rights. One could challenge the right of any Conservative government to wave these banners at all, refuse to take any of the rhetoric at face value. But Labour has not even had it in it to do that. This extraordinary failure of Labour is evidence of the profundity of the demoralisation that has hit Labour in the course of the 1980s. Not only was it open to Labour to challenge the good faith of Conservative governments singing these tunes, but it was also open to Labour to take a stand on the issue of its traditional support for national independence in post-colonial states.

The other aspect of Labour's failure is that it has not even asked the question of itself, let alone provide a serious analytical answer, the question of what interests are served by this highly moralistic foreign policy of Her Majesty's Government. The failure to ask this question, let alone answer it, is part of a wider failure in the Labour party to understand the contemporary Conservative Party. It does not understand what that Party represents in British society, and why it has the world view and foreign policy that is now has. At the moment is is possible for the Labour Party to take a certain amount of short-term satisfaction from the spectacle of the Tory Party in a certain amount of dissarray over the Europe debate. But it may be a mistake for Labour to over-emphasise the significance of this division within the Conservative Party. In fact there is fundamental agreement within the Conservative Party on the most important aspect of their world view, ie, the centrality of the UN, and the centrality of Britain's

role in the UN. There is a consenus within the Conservative Party, and all who sail in her, in respect of the UN, that whatever happens Britain's position as one of the privileged five vetoist powers on the Security Council must be preserved. That is absolutely fundamental, the keystone of the arch of Government foreign policy, which means that, given that there is complete agreement about that, one can, to some extent, afford to disagree about a secondary matter. The disagreement in the Conservative Party over Europe is actually explicable in terms of a genuine difference of opinion - it goes deeper, I am sure, than, if you like, clinical or dispassionate differences of political judgement. I am sure there is a lot of emotion involved as well - about which is the best strategy for preserving the political power of the social interests represented by the Conservative party. They are all agreed that maintaining Britain's UN role is vital. Given that that is vital, that is the keystone. Does it make sense to compromise British power in Europe, suffer some dilution, or some cramping of freedom of manoeuvre, whatever the Maastricht process eventually promises, or does it make sense to preserve our freedom of action, while accepting that the cost of doing so - isolating ourselves from Europe and perhaps suffering the loss of power in a different sphere. We have to lose power in one sphere or the other, and I think it is perfectly understandable that the Conservative Party should be split over which loss of power is more congenial. That is the substance of the disagreement within the Conservative Party. There is real thought occurring within the Conservative Party as to what are their strategic options. And I don't think there is any thought occurring in the Labour Party about why there is an argument going on in the Conservative Party, and how that argument presupposes a complete consensus over the UN.

What we have in the Labour Party is a rhetoric that does not formally give priority to the European dimension, but tends to put that at the front of the picture. Labour postured as the European Party in the European elections in 1989, which was very effective in electoral terms. It is now, once again, thanks to the fact that we have John Smith as leader, able to sound credible on the Europe issue, at least with the element of firmness that we have heard in John Smith's approach to the current problem over Maastricht. What is not at all clear is how this position on Europe is thought about in relation to the position on the UN. Certainly, there does not seem to be any willingness to recognise that if Labour were to follow through as a supporter of European integration, this would sooner or later raise questions about either Britain's role in the UN, or the present structure of the UN. It would raise questions over the compatibility as one of the five vetoist members of the Security Council, with its participation in a progressive pooling of sovereignty. All these questions are going to be raised sooner or later. They are already being mooted in relation to the question of a common European foreign policy, and that of moving to a common European defence capability. Labour has not begun to clarify the options. It is wholly fuzzy about what its notional committment to Europe involves, and what the relationship of this is to Britain's UN role as it conceives it to be.

One of the things that struck me in John Smith's speech today was that in talking about foreign policy he made the remark that it was Labour's aim for Britain to be strong so that it can have influence.In order to have influence it must be strong. This was part of linking up with what he had earlier said about domestic policy in terms of the real economy, and so on. What struck me about that was that the conception was that Britain must be strong in order to have influence, having influence being almost an end in itself. The influence in question is an influence for moralising purposes, or for doing good, or for humanitarian purposes. In other words the business of having influence is not connected with the business of making Britain strong. We get strong by hook or by crook, and then we use our influence for good out there. There isn't a circle, or congruence or reciprocity in the conception of the relationship between foreign policy and domestic policy. The Conservatives want Britain to have influence, not so that it can improve the lot of mankind or do good, but so that the social interests that they, the Conservatives, represent in Britain, will preserve their social power, whether or not Britain is strong. Britain can be quite weak, and obviously the strength or weakness of Britain is negotiable so far as the Conservatives are concerned. It is quite clear in the policies they have been following that they are quite prepared to see the British economy be progressively weakened so long as its influence in world affairs is maintained, and thereby the social power of the forces they represent in British society.

There is an interesting contrast between the Conservatives' and Labour's attitude to what influence is for. Labour's concern for Britain to have influence abroad is devoid of any tangible political purpose because it is is not based on any clear project at home. This lunch time I attended a fringe meeting organised by a group called Peace Through NATO. One of the speakers was an American who held some official position. Early on in his speech he made what was, to him, the very obvious remark that "foreign policy flows from domestic policy". That was taken by him as being self-evident. And of course it should be self-evident. There is no doubt at all that the foreign policy of America flows in general terms from its domestic policy. It is understood in Washington that foreign policy serves ends connected with domestic policy. But it seems to me that Labour does not understand that; does not understand that the function of foreign policy is to complement domestic policy and help towards the attainment of the aims of a unified programme.

Labour did once understand that, namely in the days of Ernest Bevin. I make no apology for reminding my audience that that was the case. Ernest Bevin had a foreign policy, Labour had a foreign policy between 1945 and 1951. And because Bevin was subsequently virtually written out of history, forgotten, and what survived, insofar as any recollection of Bevin survived in Labour Party circles, or at least those circles which discuss policy, tended to be a negative impression of him derived from the Communist party.It seems to me that Bevin was simply seen in retrospect as a kind of right wing cold warrior, who very happily embraced American anti-communism, and was a willing agent of it. That, of course, is a complete travesty of what Bevin was doing and why he was doing it. Bevin's policy was to harness American power for his ends, for Labour's ends, because Labour between 1945 and 1951, had a very serious and substantial programme of ideas to realise in Britain. It had a project for Britain. And what Bevin understood was that that project needed a

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Bevin's policy was clearly linked to the fact that Labour had a project at home, because that project required a friendly international environment, that is, an environment of democracies. Those democracies were to a considerable extent social democracies. One of the important innovations that Bevin made as Foreign Secretary, was to insist that in every British Embassy, in addition to the Defence and Naval and Commercial and Cultural Attaches, there is to be a Labour Attache. Bevin was very clear about the importance of encouraging the redevelopment of trade union movements in those countries that had been subject to German or Italian fascist power, and that as part of foreign policy in Bevin's day, there was a policy of actively promoting the reconstruction of trade union movements. The reconstruction of the trade union movement in Germany was done under the supervision of the TUC, with Vic Feather being sent there to play a key part in that. And I can remember being very intrigued twelve years ago, when I found myself in Jordan, working as a consultant for the International Labour Office with the Jordanian Cooperative Movement, to discover that the Jordanian Cooperative Movement had been founded in 1951, on British impetus. There was obviously a connection there with Bevin's influence.

Bevin once remarked that he was a turnup in a million, which was clearly an underestimate, because he was clearly a turnup in many many more than a million, for it seems to me that since his day, there has been a gradual loss, that has now become total in the Labour Party, of the idea of what a foreign policy is for. And as Labour has less and less been able to claim seriously to have a coherent social project internally, it has had less and less idea as to what its international outlook should be. This reached its apogee, or nadir, if you like, in 1990. Under Neil Kinnock is was made clear that Labour had no alternative vision to Thatcher's vision for Britain. Labour only quibbled over the details and offered to manage this vision more effectively, a claim that did not carry conviction with the electorate. Not opposing Thatcherism on any ground of principle at home, it was clearly incapable of opposing it on any ground of principle abroad. Unless Labour has its own social project, unless it has a clear conception of the Britain it wants, and the Britain it wants to defend, and the Britain whose interests it wants to secure and promote abroad through a strategy of alliances and all the other things that foreign policy involves, it will not have a foreign policy, it will not put an end to its own abdication of its responsibilities in this matter.

May I end with two comments about the implications of that? There are all kinds of terrible implications for people in other countries. But there are two implications at home. One is that, given Labour's complete absence of a coherent alternative to the Conservative world view, we are now getting a situation in which British public opinion is being deluged with propaganda in the guise of news: absolutely deluged. As someone who works in relation to foreign countries and is sometimes invited on to the World Service to comment on developments, I know how totally subject to the propaganda function and the propaganda purpose the BBC's news programmes now are. This has gone a very long way indeed. This is not only objectionable in itself. It means that the British public is no longer being informed. It means they are being misinformed and misled very seriously, on issue after issue. The other terrifying thing about it is that this propaganda is very largely ignorant propaganda. The propaganda lines that are being laid down for the newscasters in BBC television and radio are being laid down by people who do not know what they are talking about where foreign countries are concerned. That I know for a fact. It is getting quite alarming. And all this happens because Labour has no foreign policy, no alternative view. That is a very worrying development when one considers that we are talking about what is happening to the quality of public opinion in a military superpower.

A final reflection. Today I listened to John Smith's speech and was quite struck by the extent to which when Smith spoke about the responsibility of government, the need for government, the role of government in a democratic society, there was a philosophical coherence in what he was saying which came as a breath of fresh air, a relief, after nine years of vacuuousness. Therefore I do not want to end in a totally gloomy way. There is that spark there. If that is developed - and the Bevin Society will certainly do its part to help that to be developed in a constructive fashion - it will need to be developed also on the foreign policy side. There is mountain to climb. There is an enormous amount of work to do. □

Notes on the News
by Madawc Williams

Clinton

A second Bush administration would have been a disaster for the world. Bush's world was the world of the Cold War, two rival camps engaged in bitter strife. When the USSR fell apart, he tried to cast the Muslim world as an alternative. Had that lacked credibility, who knows what he'd have tried next. Possibly German-led Europe would have been the new target.

All such dangers are now vanished. Even if Clinton does nothing except play his saxophone, that is a step up. There are all sorts of sensible things he could do at home. US medical care costs twice as much as the British NHS, provides an unreliable service and can bankrupt even the moderately rich; reforms can hardly make it worse. It could even be that the USA will start regenerating itself. Who knows?

A Major enigma

At the time of John Major's election as Tory leader, I remarked that he seemed to have the wisest wisdom teeth in British politics. Trouble with his teeth kept him out of events while Thatcher was being ousted, and he came to power as her choice.

For several months he was seen as a weak Thatcher puppet by most people - I was one of the few who doubted this. Gradually it came to be seen that he was inching hi way away from Thatcherism.

Sterling's fall from the ERM was a disaster beyond Major's control. More than likely it was a form of industrial action by currency speculators who know that sensible European money would deprive them of many of their most profitable hunting grounds. Yet somehow Major may have turned things around.

The storm that suddenly blew up over pit closures was not necessarily beyond Major's control, nor was it particularly bad for him. Hesaltine was up until that moment a very strong contender for the leadership. The self-made peacock-fancier was doing no more than carry through the logic of Thatcherite policies. Gas and nuclear power had been boosted, with little regard for cost, as part of a long-term strategy for breaking the miners. Suddenly Heseltine and Major were being criticised for still doing Thatcherite things, with Heseltine suffering most of the damage. And Thatcher and Tebbit were left with nothing to say.

Having won the Maastricht vote, Major is now free to quietly retreat for the most damaging of Thatcher's policies.

Nowhere-lands

Bosnia was never a nation, and Serbs have never been ruled by Croats. These two basic facts were ignored by the people who encouraged the break-up of Yugoslavia. Certainly, the Serbs began it, particularly with their suppression of the Albanians of Kosovo. But outside powers should have used their power to try to moderate Serb nationalism and preserve federal structures in an ancient and complex multi-ethnic land.

Once the break-up began, 'ethnic cleansing' was inevitable. It was very much a case of 'cleanse or be cleansed'. Neighbours belonging to some other minority posed a deadly threat just by existing, given that each small portion of land was now bound to become the property of one nation state or another.

Had the Serbs of Bosnia practiced Gandhi-like self-restraint, there would today be no Serbs in Bosnia. Once the Federation began to break up, something like the present mess was inevitable. □

British citizens or UK customers?
by Dan Ackroid

"King Coal" is scheduled to be beheaded. Large chunks of British Rail are due to be sold off to almost anyone who may want them, including French Railways. The NHS is being whittled away and basic social security rights are under attack. All this from a party committed to preserving British distinctiveness.

The Tory party's latest round of 'reforms' go a long way towards abolishing British society. Accepting the Maastricht treaty is fairly minor by comparison. The original six EEC nations have made it clear that they will go ahead with some sort of union no matter what Britain does. The core of Western Europe is united on the matter, and Russia is no longer an alternate centre of power. Tory bungling - and also some Labour bungling, it must be admitted - have ensured that Britain will be part of the periphery rather than part of the core. But Britain is no longer strong enough to disrupt the core, or even do much to affect the way in which it is developing. The French referendum reflected various forms of discontent at the way Europe was integrating, rather than rejection of integration as such.

Europe is in crisis because its strongest member, West Germany, was obliged by national fellow-feeling to take over East Germany when the Soviet Empire fell apart. Also because it was done at an unreal exchange rate, in a way that made most of East German industry worthless, even those sectors that had been successfully exporting to Western markets. But Europe is not in any worse a crisis that the rest of the advanced world, so Europe cannot be said to be failing. Yugoslavia has given a hellish example of what can happen when old nationalisms are revived, and the rest of Europe seems to have profited from their example.

Rejecting Maastricht would not mean restoring Britain as a distinct and sovereign state. Too much has already been destroyed for that, during the Thatcher years. Rejecting Maastricht would mean a total social void, a road to nowhere. The anti-Maastricht Tories are also, by and large, the Tories who have been the most enthusiastic for the demolition of many essential elements of British society.

What does it mean to be British? Lord Tebbit recently defined it as willingness to cheer on a particular sports team. Lord Tebbit is a lout. He has never at any stage in his career understood what it was about Britain that made it a decent and admirable society, a society that foreigners used to be very impressed by. For the benefit of those who grew up in the Thatcher era, British society up until maybe the 1970s did receive genuine and sincere cries of admiration from a wide variety of foreign visitors. Things had rather come apart in the 1970s. But the Thatcherite 'restoration' did nothing to restore the decent, honourable or likable elements in the social mix. Quite the reverse, in fact.

Cheering sports teams is the very lowest level of social awareness, a simple tribalism. This simple tribalism may be combined with all sorts of other higher qualities, or it may not. In Tebbit's case, it is not. He has nothing of the feeling of solidarity and community that you find among workers. But he equally has nothing of the sense of proper conduct and decent behaviour that used to be the core of ruling class values, and which are not quite extinct in most Tories. Tebbit's sense of Britishness amounts to nothing more than a simple dislike of foreigners. (My computerised spell-checker hadn't heard of 'Britishness', and suggested 'Brutishness' as an alternative. The gap between the two is very much smaller than it was in the days before Thatcher.)

Tebbit shouts loudly about his love of British uniqueness. The joke is that Tebbit was by trade an airline pilot, before he became 'upwardly mobile' through Tory party politics. This dedicated preserver of British distinctiveness was part of an industry that has done an astonishingly large amount to erode national barriers and bring the peoples of various nations into contact with one another.

Thatcher and Tebbit have been sidelined. They overreached themselves when they tried to do to Western Europe what they have done to Britain. Particularly since they did it at a time when the spurious boom that they had produced was falling apart. Never forget: things started to go wrong with the stock market crash. Dithering over European Monetary Union made matters worse - the 'Iron Lady' showed her feet of clay by her repeated failure to make a decision and stick to it. But productive industry had in any case continued to decline under Thatcher, with most growth coming from consumption based on dubious credit. The stock market crash showed up the underlying weakness. Things have got steadily worse since then.

The latest 'reforms' are in social security. Like most Thatcherite measures, they are a mad monkeying with institutions that have actually worked quite well, and which a proper Tory would have left strictly alone. Proper Tories know, even if Thatcherites do not, that the nation is basically a vast accumulation of established habits. Radical seeking to 'build a new world' may, very sensibly, disrupt things so as to undermine the old order. Thatcherites seem to want to disrupt things so as to preserve them, which is mad and stupid, and has failed to work. Thatcherites have spread greed and reduced social feeling. The old-fashioned feelings that they hoped to see restored are even less respected now than when Thatcher came to power.

The Welfare State had a simple formula for the nation. Everyone was a part of the community. If you did well within that community, you compensated by paying more income tax. You might or may not have earned that prosperity, but it would certainly not have been possible without the whole community, past and present, who kept the particular society in being. You could think of income tax as a sort of rent or fee. If you stay in the best room at an hotel, you pay more than you would for an ordinary room.

Communities must also protect their weak, young, old, sick or unfortunate. In traditional society, when people lived in small settled communities, this was often done on a personal basis. It was also sometimes not done at all. People in great need would often simply starve to death - a Victorian Value that the Thatcherites seems intent on reviving.

Thatcher was an unsuccessful research chemist who had the good luck to get herself a rich husband. Tebbit was a very ordinary airline pilot. Both of them had the good luck to be in the right place at the right time in Tory politics. Had Heath been wise enough to step down quietly after his second election defeat, Whitelaw would almost certainly have been elected, and Thatcher would never have been a contender. Yet these pampered beneficiaries of pure good fortune show a total callousness to those whose luck has run the other way. They blame unemployment on the moral failings of the unemployed.

No one has ever accused the miners of being afraid of hard work. You might have thought that after their victory over Scargill, the Thatcherites would have tried to turn coal into a model industry, a determined hard-working labour force producing a vital national resource. Such a policy could have many patriotic overtones. British prosperity was in large measure built on coal. For a time things did seem to be going that way. But now *they've killed the coal industry.* World markets can for the moment offer fossil fuels below the price that most British mines can manage. The privatised power industry is being allowed to burn our finite reserves of natural gas. Therefore a whole section of British identity and heritage is being shut down.

The other foundations of British industrial greatness were the clothing industry, steel and the merchant fleet. All of these are very nearly gone, destroyed by foreign competition. How much is left of Britishness, apart from the crude tribalism of the soccer hooligan?

Did someone mention the "sunrise industries" that were supposed to make up for the loss of older trades? Sorry, most of those had a very short day indeed and are now suffering their own sunsets.

Are we British citizens, part of a community with much shared history and many common roots? Or are we customers of 'UK Ltd'? Tory social policies are rooted in the assumption that we are customers, entitled to expect a decent return for what we pay. Even the so-called Citizens Charters are rooted in this belief. Yet it is logically at variance with the deep and often rabid nationalism that is the other pillar of Tory thinking. With one hand they salute the flag, with the other they saw down the flagpole! □

A UNIONIST CHALLENGE TO THE CAMPAIGN FOR LABOUR REPRESENTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A Belfast Correspondent analyses the emergence of the **Democracy Now** *organisation led by Kate Hoey MP*

The advertising stands in the entrance hall to the Labour Party Conference cost from £1000 upwards. Amongst them this year, in a prime spot, was a stand bearing the legend "Democracy Now". Its advertising literature did not live up to its location. It was ill-written and scruffily produced. But it was just about possible to glean from it that it was about Labour Party organisation in Northern Ireland.

Outside the Conference, in their usual spot, were members of the Campaign for Labour Representation in Northern Ireland (CLR). The CLR has been lobbying Conference for fifteen or sixteen years, and has ensured that all delegates are informed of the fact that although Northern Ireland is formally part of the United Kingdom it is the only part of the world whose residents are not allowed to become members of the Labour Party.

Initially it might have been assumed that Democracy Now was acting in conjunction with the CLR, the one inside and the other outside the building. But it quickly became clear that this was not so. Democracy Now did not acknowldged the existence of the CLR. It had, in fact, been established in antagonism against the CLR by Kate Hoey MP, a Northern Ireland Protestant who is the member for Vauxhall.

The CLR held an outstandingly successful fringe meeting on the Tuesday evening. The platform included three MPs (Tam Dalyell, Harry Barnes and Nick Raynsford), a trade union leader (Alan Johnson, General Secretary of the UCW) and a Parliamentary Candidate (Irene Hamilton). And MPs and trade union leaders spoke from the floor. The principle of the CLR case was not disputed. Every conceivable argument against it has been comprehensively refuted over the years by the CLR. The meeting focussed instead on the practicalities of the matter, i.e. whether it was possible to establish Labour Party organiation in Northern Ireland in such a way that it would tend to overcome the sectarian conflict in the province instead of falling into an alignment with one or other side of that conflict.

It was noticeable that none of the people who staffed the Democracy Now stand was present at the CLR meeting. And Democracy Now held no meeting of its own.

A Coventry MP, speaking from the floor, said he saw the logic of the CLR argument as a principle, but before he committed himself he wanted to see evidence that there was a real possibility on the ground in Northern Ireland that the Party could be a class party operating across the sectarian divide.

The Secretary of the CLR, David Morrison, was unusually tentative in his reply to this point. He agreed that, though the CLR case was irrefutable on the ground of principle, the extension of the Labour Party to Northern Ireland would be futile at best if in practice it became aligned with one side in the sectarian conflict. And he did not give a categorical assurance that all was well on that score.

The main reason for his hesitancy was the appearance on the scene of Kate Hoey's Democracy Now, which is an intensely Unionist grouping.

The CLR was formed about sixteen years ago. It was from the start a cross-community organisation and it has grown on a cross-community basis. It includes socialists and trade unionists from both communities, some of whom are Republican in sentiment and others British, but all of whom are in earnest about pursuing class politics through the Labour Party while Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom.

The CLR has never argued the merits of Unionism versus Republicanism, or the merits of being British as against being Irish. It has concerned itself only with the *de facto* situation, that the entity called Northern Ireland has for seventy years been a subordinate part of the United KIngdom state but has been excluded from the party politics by which the United Kingdom is governed. It holds this state of affairs centrally responsible for the persistence of sectarian politics in the province, and holds the Labour Party boycott especially responsible for the persistence of the sectarian divisions in the working class.

The option of the "normal politics" of the United Kingdom has simply not been available to the people of Northern Ireland.

Unionists and Nationalists have tried to disrupt the CLR, the Unionists by describing it as Nationalist because it accepts Labour Party policy, and the Nationalists by describing it as Unionist because it would allow people in Northern Ireland to participate in British party politics. And the Communist Party - which continues in Northern Ireland, though dissolved in Britain - whispers it both ways, depending on who it is whispering to. But the CLR has easily survived these pressures.

Those who are lodged in traditional ruts - Unionist, Nationalist (SDLP) or Communist Party - are convinced that because there are Catholics and Protestants in the CLR one or other of them is being hoodwinked, taken for a ride, subjected to a confidence trick. But their efforts to disrupt the CLR have come to nothing because there is no confidence trick.

The actual effect on the politics of the Border of the development of a cross-commmunity Labour movement in Northern Ireland within the Labour Party is something that it is impossible to foresee. This is demonstrated by the fact that neither Unionist nor Nationalist propagandists and politicians have supported the CLR.

The Labour Party policy (or aspiration) of achieving the political unification of Ireland with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, as amplified by various Party spokesmen since its adoption in 1981, is not only acceptable to the CLR but is almost ideally suited to the task it has set itself. The Party recognises that it is futile to expect consent to unity in Northern Ireland until there has been considerable social and secular reform in the Republic.

The issue is thus left open. Protestants need not fear incorporation into the Republic as it stands and Catholics would not face the prospect of exclusion from anything like normal politics until an all-Ireland state is achieved.

This is, we think, a fair summary of the CLR position. We would go farther than it only to say that the growth of a strong cross-community Labour movement in Northern Ireland within the Labour Party would be likely to have a stimulating effect on Labour politics in the Republic, where Labour has been a static minority party for seventy years and has only ever been in government as the minor Coalition partner of Fine Gael which is the right wing party of the state. Under Fine Gael influences the Irish Labour Party has fallen into a Nationalist routine. It has on the whole not only been less liberal than Fianna Fail but also less connected with the working class. Its view of Northern Ireland is purely Nationalist, therefore it is very happy with the SDLP even though a very substantial part of the Catholic working class in the North is not. The development of a strong labour movement in the North based on the policies of the Labour Party could not fail to have a beneficial effect on politics in the Republic, particularly on the Irish Labour Party. But how this might affect Border politics, again we cannot say.

The chief function of the CLR has been to lobby the Labour Party on the issue of principle, both at Party Conferences and by addressing Party Branches throughout the year. For ten years or so it made headway slowly, but a few years ago progress speeded up. The CLR then encouraged the establishment of a network of labour groups around Northern Ireland in preparation for the moment when the Labour Party ended the boycott. About a year ago a Council for Labour Representation was formally established. This is a federal body with connections all around the province. It includes three groups functioning as Constituency parties in Foyle (Derry), East Antrim and South Belfast - and it intends to field a slate of candidates around the province in the local elections next May. The Council, like the CLR, transcends the sectarian division. And the impetus behind it came from the Catholic side at least as much as from the Protestant side.

And so the situation seemed to be well prepared for a useful and progressive development, when Democracy Now appeared on the scene. It was established by Kate Hoey MP in the course of the summer. Its existence was made public in a late night Radio 5/Radio Ulster broadcast on July 12. It was launched at a House of Commons meeting on July 15, from which the CLR was rigorously excluded by Kate Hoey. And it went into action at fringe meetings during the week of the Labour Party Conference, though boycotting the CLR meeting.

The character and purpose of Democracy Now have to be deduced from the Radio 5 broadcast and its conduct at Conference fringe meetings. And on that evidence there is little room for doubt that its function is to be a Unionist counterpart of the Nationalist Labour Committee on Ireland.

The personnel selected by Kate Hoey to be Democracy Now at Conference were Dr Boyd Black, Erskine Holmes, Jeffrey Dudgeon, Mrs Pat Black, John Cobain (the 'South Belfast Constituency Labour Party') Ben Cosin, Tim Hegarty and James Winston. There is only one Catholic among them: Tim Hegarty, a wealthy playboy from Derry who runs a pop group in London and describes himself as a "Catholic Unionist", which must be the rarest political species ever heard of. Cosin is English, and is a member of the Hampstead Labour Party. All the others are Ulster Protestants, not active in any kind of Labour politics in Ulster.

Dr Black used to be an active member of the CLR. But he grew increasingly Loyalist in outlook over the years and about three years ago he finally resigned from the CLR specifically on the ground of disagreement with Labour Party policy on Northern Ireland.

This Democracy Now group, while boycotting the CLR meeting, attended fringe meetings and socials run by Nationalist groups within the Labour Party and disrupted them, giving free vent to Unionist feelings in the process.

We do not say that the formation of a Unionist group in the Labour Party is wrong in itself. We suppose that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If it is OK to have Nationalist pressure groups it cannot be outrageously wrong to have Unionist pressure groups. And we do not suppose that Democracy Now is the only group whose object is to change Party policy. But we say that Kate Hoey has done serious damage to a worthy cause by the way she set up her group and by the *carte blanche* she gave them to rampage around the fringe meetings.

Having been lobbied by the CLR over many years, Kate Hoey joined it a few years ago. She clearly decided earlier this year to leave the CLR and to form a Unionist group in opposition to it. The actual conduct of Democracy Now leaves room for no other interpretation of her actions.

Many Labour MPs have over the years admitted the logic of the CLR case. But those with front bench ambitions have been obliged to keep their support for it private. That is entirely understandable. A political party is not a debating society. Party policy is against admitting Northern Ireland residents to membership. It is reasonable to require front bench MPs not to campaign against Party policy. And it would be unreasonable to expect all MPs who see the logic of the CLR case to remain on the backbenches because of that. Northern Ireland has a low priority in the hierarchy of causes pressing on MPs in England, Scotland and Wales. MPs are largely preoccupied with matters arising within the process of representative government, and Northern Ireland is not within that process. However important the Northern Ireland problem may appear to abstract consideration, it is not a problem that arises in the relationship between Labour MPs and their consituents. That is its Catch 22. Labour MPs must concern themselves primarily with the government of Great Britain even though Northern Ireland continues to be systematically misgoverned. It was therefore a very remarkable achievement by the CLR to put Labour Party organisation in Northern Ireland so centrally on the Labour agenda.

During the past year, two MPs who had admitted that there was no answer in principle to the CLR case were appointed to the Labour front bench. One of them, George Foulkes, argued that case very lucidly in a Radio Ulster discussion in late summer. It was put to him by the Party leadership that this was inconsistent with his front bench status, therefore he could not appear on the CLR platform at Conference. But the other, Kate Hoey, formed Democracy Now, apparently with the blessing of the Party leadership. We will not speculate on the significance of the exception made in her favour in this regard, but there can be no doubt that it

signifies something.

When forming Democracy Now, Kate Hoey represented it to sympathetic MPs as a lobby group on behalf of the CLR. But in discussion with CLR representatives in early summer she said that a large number of MPs - she mentioned the figure of 47 - were ready to declare in support of extending Party organisation to the province but were put off by the excessively aggressive tactics employed by the CLR in putting its case. This duplicity of approach only came to light at the Party Conference.

In forming Democracy Now she chose as her agents James Winston, who was designated General Secretary, and Tim Hegarty. Winston, a member of the Labour Party in Brent, had been a nominal member of the CLR for a couple of years but had never taken part in the Conference lobby. Hegarty, the playboy "Catholic Unionist", had taken part in a couple of Conference lobbies, where his conduct was both aggressive and eccentric and had to be restrained by the CLR. It seemed, at best, a strange choice of operatives to conduct a sophisticated lobbying process.

Kate Hoey used her influence to get a slot on Radio 5/Radio Ulster on July 12 to reveal Democracy Now. Winston appeared as General Secretary of Democracy Now along with Erskine Holmes, a Belfast property millionaire. Winston and Holmes wiped the CLR out of the history of the issue and concocted an alternative history with no basis in reality, thus demonstrating that comprehensive falsification of history is alive and well despite the demise of Soviet Russia.

Despite this, the CLR and the Council tried to maintain friendly and co-operative relations with Kate Hoey. They understood that Democracy Now was to have a stall at Conference, and a week or so before Conference they contacted her in an effort to ensure that there would be effective collaboration between the two bodies to advance the common purpose. They suggested that CLR literature should be on display at the Democracy Now stall and that CLR members should help to staff it. She replied that only Democracy Now literature would be on display at the stall (though up to that point no Democracy Now literature had been seen) and that only members of Democracy Now would staff the stall. (The latter point was puzzling as Democracy Now had always been spoken of as a strictly Parliamentary group with Winston as its Secretary, and it was hardly to be expected that MPs would staff the stall.) And she particularly emphasised that nobody from Northern Ireland would be part of the Democracy Now lobby.

In the event Democracy Now was revealed at Conference to be Winston and Hegarty plus a group from Belfast associated with Erskine Holmes. Erskine Holmes, Boyd Black, etc, all appeared with Democracy Now badges and Conference passes got for them weeks in advance by Kate Hoey.

If this had been just an attempt by this group of people to steal the clothes of the CLR at the eleventh hour and claim the glory for the work done by others, it would hardly be worth mentioning. (In the case of Winston that is probably what it was.) And most members of the CLR would have been relieved rather than upset if Democracy Now had actually taken over their work and completed it only provided that Democracy Now actually did take over the work of the CLR.

Unfortunately the CLR's clothes are not easy to steal. Neither the character of the CLR as a cross-community political group nor the skills it has developed over sixteen years could be casually reproduced in a period of months by a rival group for the purpose of stealing its clothes. And anyhow the group of people selected by Kate Hoey did not even want to do what the CLR had been doing. If they had wanted to do it, they would have done it as members of the CLR. Most of them had kept their distance from the CLR over the years. And Boyd Black, who had for many years been active in the CLR, had resigned from it on Unionist grounds.

The CLR had constructed itself against the gravitational pulls of the two sectarian blocs in Northern Ireland. Democracy Now was a collapse into Unionism. And it is not conceivable that Kate Hoey would have selected its personnel as she did if that had not been her purpose.

After all the lecturing to which she had subjected the CLR about its supposedly aggressive lobbying, the very least to be expected from her organisation is that it should be very suave and subtle in its conduct. But General Secretary Winston shepherded his little group around fringe meetings they disagreed with and they behaved like hooligans. The culmination of their week was when they disrupted an Irish Society social attended by Kevin McNamara and dragged down their sound equipment.

But deplorable though their manner of behaviour was, the political sentiment they gave voice to in the course of it was worse. What came out of them was raw Unionism.

When disrupting Peter Hain's meeting on the Monday evening, they denounced him as a Nationalist. It is well known that Peter Hain has sympathies with the Nationalist cause. A great many people in the Labour Party do. The CLR, not being Unionist, has nevertheless engaged in fruitful dialogue with Peter Hain over many years.

The excuse for disrupting the Irish Society social was the provocation of a Tricolour. The CLR includes many people who rather like the Tricolour, and so will the Labour Party if it ever becomes a functional party in Northern Ireland. And anyhow under CLR influence people quickly lose the Pavlovian conditioned-reflex towards flags, whether Tricolours or Union Jacks.

It is an open question whether the Democracy Now group planned their Conference activitiy or extemporised it on the spur of the moment. They are a narrow, middle-class Unionist group, unpracticed in the ways of the great British world to which they imagine they belong. It is possible that they were just responding to the intolerable provocation of being in the same room in which people of the other persuasion were expressing their opinions freely. Such things do not happen in polite society in the better suburbs of Belfast.

But Kate Hoey chose them to represent her at Conference. And she selected them so carefully, not to say secretly, that she must be presumed to have made an informed choice.

Turning now to the 'South Belfast Constituency Labour Party', the existence of this group came to light in the autumn of last year when it applied, through a firm of London solicitors, for affiliation to the Labour Party as the South Belfast Constituency Labour Party and threatened to sue the Labour Party in the Court of Chancery if its application was refused. This 'South Belfast Constituency Labour party' was a legal fiction. It had no public existence. It did not advertise for members. It had no publications, no agitation, no public presence at all. Attendence at its informal meetings was by invitation only,

and people who asked awkward questions were not invited back. It was a middle class Protestant coterie of lawyers, property owners, etc, with not the slightest intention of functioning as a Labour Party. When the CLR discovered its project of suing the labour Party it pointed out that this would damage a cause that was advancing by political methods, and pleaded with it to desist. The response of Erskine Holmes and his friends suggested that they did not think it would be a bad thing to damage the cause.

The CLR exerted enough oblique pressure on Holmes and his friends to cause the Court action to be delayed. The formation of the federal Council of Labour for the province was speeded up. In the hope of diverting them from their legal project into Labour politics, the Holmes group were invited to join the Council as its South Belfast component, even though there was a real Labour group in the Constituency which was both public and active. They refused to join the Council, declaring their total independence, so the other group was affiliated as the South Belfast component. It would seem that Kate Hoey approached Holmes and his friends soon after this (in the spring of this year) to be the Northern Ireland contingent of Democracy Now. She knew of their Unionist disagreement with Labour policy and of their project of suing the Labour party And in the radio programmes in which he appeared with General Secretary Winston, Holmes stated the intention of suing the Labour party and this did not disturb the perfect harmony existing between them.

Thus far the writ has not been issued. Perhaps the disruption achieved through the Democracy Now performance at Conference has satisfied for the time being the Unionist impulse to ward off a CLR type of development.

As things stand at the moment Democracy Now is identified with the narrowly Unionist middle class group in the wealthier part of South Belfast (which revealed itself to the Constituency the week before the Conference in an ad for members but has not yet shown any sign of activity) and the CLR is associated with the province-wide Council of Labour. But there is more to it than that. Though Kate Hoey was at great pains to exclude the CLR from participation in, or influence on, her organisation, the conduct of Democracy Now provided Kevin McNamara, the SDLP and other opponents of the CLR with ammunition for use against it, and they are making use of it. The momentum of the movement has been sapped. In a region where confidence and trust are all-important, Kate Hoey has provided opponents of Labour Party organisation with a semblance of evidence that the project is Unionist and that its methods are intimidatory. Her chosen associates in Northern Ireland have no intention of developing a Labour movement there - if only because a Unionist Labour project is impracticable - and she has done great damage to those who are in earnest about a cross-community Labour movement. The Council of Labour is, however, doing its utmost to preserve the basis of what has been achieved so far through the approach pioneered by the CLR. □

Adam Smith - anti-American philosopher

By Madwac Williams

Adam Smith saw the future, and he hated it. He was a clever Scot, the son of a customs official and the grandson of a Scottish MP, always in a small way part of the establishment. And he was always very flattered by any attention from the real establishment, the rich and titled oligarchs who ran 18th century Britain. As far as he was concerned, this system of oligarchy was fine. He reckoned it to be perfectly compatible with the *laissez faire* economics that he is best remembered for. Like many other people since his day, he was horrified when the economic changes he had promoted produced drastic political consequences he had not expected.

Smith has been systematically doctored to hide his opposition to the American War of Independence. No British edition of **The Wealth of Nations** has Book Five of this work, apart from the very scholarly and expensive Glasgow edition of 1976. None of his biographers speak plainly about his views, even though they are as clear as one might wish for.

"In their present elevation of spirits, the ulcerated minds of the Americans are not likely to consent to any union even upon terms the most advantageous to themselves. One or two campaigns, however, more successful than those we have hitherto made against them, might bring them perhaps to think more soberly upon the subject of their dispute with the mother country."

This comes from a confidential memorandum to the British government written by Smith in 1778, two years after the Declaration of Independence, three years before America won decisively at Yorktown and five years before the Peace of Paris formally recognised American independence. It can be found in the Glasgow Edition of the **Correspondence of Adam Smith** (page 381), but you would be very lucky to find it or see it referred to anywhere outside this heavy, scholarly and expensive volume. (A volume that does not even offer English translations of several rather interesting letters discussing complex ideas that are written in late 18th century French.)

Smith had a fairly consistent view of the struggle. In **The Wealth of Nations**, which actually appeared in the same year as the **Declaration of Independence**, he says *"The colonies may be taxed by their own assemblies, or by the parliament of Great Britain"* (Glasgow Edition, p 619). Also *"Stamp-duties, it is evident, might be levied without any variation in all countries where the form of law process... are the same or nearly the same."* (Ibid, p935).

The *laissez faire* future that Adam Smith was hoping for and predicting was 18th century Britain writ large. Only a great deal of judicious cutting and filling-in made him seem to be the prophet of the various subsequent world free market systems that actually emerged. The American War of Independence was the point at which things began to go wrong, from his point of view. Thus:

"The Americans, it has been said, when they compare the mildness of their old government with the violence of that which they have established in its stead, cannot fail both to remember the one with regret and to view the other with detestation. That these will be their sentiments when the war is over and when their new government, if ever that should happen, is firmly established among them, I have no doubt." (**Correspondence of Adam Smith**, p 384). He did seriously believe that the North Americans would view the government established by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson as being a great step down from the benign rule of Lord North and George III.

Nor was there the least inconsistency or alteration in his views. He had been a close friend of Charles Townsend, who pioneered the policy of trying to impose taxes on the North American colonies. This was a policy which shrewder observers prophesied would lead to the loss of those colonies, and did indeed start the process that led to the War of Independence. Though there is no direct evidence that Smith was involved in this policy, it was very much in line with his beliefs, and he continued to uphold the principle even with the benefit of hindsight.

This is not the only link. Lord North used **The Wealth of Nations** as a source of ideas for new taxes to finance the continuing war, and gave Smith a nice well-paid job as a Customs Commissioner as a reward.

Adam Smith was no democrat. He did propose that the North Americans should be given parliamentary representation. But he never said they had a right to be given such representation before they were taxed. He made no protest at the curtailing of a well-established local autonomy, the process that sparked off the revolt. Nor did he wish to alter the constitutional balance. In his schemes for American representation, his hope and expectation was that *"the monarchical and democratic parts of the constitution would, after the union, stand in exactly the same degree of relative force with regard to one another as they had done before."* (**Wealth of Nations**, p 625).

Later on, after George III's government had clearly lost the war, Smith's main hope was that trade might be resumed with *"our revolted subjects"*. But *"I have little anxiety about what becomes of the American commerce. By an equality of treatment to all nations, we might soon open a commerce with the neighbouring nations of Europe infinitely more advantageous that that of so distant a country as America."* (**Correspondence**, p 271).

Smith had no objection to the considerable increase in royal power that had been occurring under George III. This increase had been fiercely denounced by Edmund Burke, who did support the War of Independence. Royal power was effectively curbed and limited by the successful revolt of the North Americans against this increasing power. It was on this basis that Burke supported the establishment against the much more radical challenge of the French Revolution.

Adam Smith was altogether more consistent. He was at all times wholeheartedly on the side of George III and his ministers, though he was naturally disappointed by their actual performance. In June 1776 he wrote *"The American Campaign has begun awkwardly. I hope, I cannot say that I expect, it will end better"*. He was reacting to the retreat of General Howe from Boston, which the British government had tried to abolish as a port and commercial centre, in retaliation for the 'Boston Tea Party'.

Smith's friend Alexander Wedderburn was more optimistic. *"I have a strong persuasion that in spite of our wretched Conduct, the mere force of government clumsily and unsteadily applied will beat down the more unsteady and unmanageable Force of a democratic Rebellion."* He was very nearly right, too. Washington only won by a very small margin, and had he lost, there would probably have been no subsequent revolution in France. A very different world might have developed as a result.

In 1788 a Frenchman called Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours wrote to Smith congratulating him on his contribution to the work of the French Economists. This group are nowadays referred to as the "Physiocrats", but Economists is what Smith called them, and what they called themselves. Dupont foresees that France is about to experience a "useful revolution", to which Adam Smith's work has contributed. He was to spend most of the rest of his life in exile, having only just escaped the guillotine in the revolution as it actually happened.

Adam Smith has been set up as an icon for several subsequent world orders, with his actual opinions ignored when they did not happen to fit the needs of the day. But those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. *Laissez faire* economics would be best translated as *let-it-be* economics: you let the society follow its own direction, without trying to control the result. And if you do this you will not, of course, control the result. This might seem a mere platitude, except that time and again people ignore it. Governments unleash market forces, thinking that the effects will be merely economic with no social impact. And it's never yet proved true.

Non-market societies can remain much the same across the centuries. The Chinese Empire was much the same for 2000 years, until Western power broke it up. But any society that allows full freedom for market forces had better take an attitude of 'let it be'. Because there is no knowing what other sorts of freedoms a free market will bring, or what traditional values it will overturn. You can merely be confident that nothing will stay the same.

Some things are predictable. Market forces are *homogenising* - they make different groups of people ever more similar to each other. Thatcher & Co. signed away British sovereignty when they agreed to Europe becoming a single market. Despite all of the present troubles, only the breaking of trade ties with the rest of Europe could stop Britain from becoming just one more region of a developing European superstate. And since any such move would leave to a massive slump in living standards, a thousand times worse than the present recession, it just isn't going to happen.

Had the New Right properly studied Adam Smith, rather than covering up his anti-Americanism and using him as a cultural icon, they might have foreseen how dangerous their economic policies were to their other objectives. They have damaged state socialism, vandalised the work of the post-1945 consensus, but by they have not actually *built* anything. Every one of their social goals is further away than when they came to power at the start of the 1980s. Families count for less, nations are less sovereign, and Britain and America have continued to lose ground to the state-orientated economies of Japan and continental Europe. □

Denis Winter: **Haig's Command: A Reassessment.** Penguin, 1992, 362pp, £8.99

Reviewed by **BRENDAN CLIFFORD**

Thirty years ago Alan Clark's book on the command of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914/15, **The Donkeys**, caused a bit of a sensation. This boigraphy of Haig is a sort of continuation of Clark's book. And it would have caused a sensation this year but for the absolute loss of coherence in Britain's public life which has happened since the early sixties.

I read Clark's book thirty years ago. In those times I also read books by academic historians. Around 1970 I pretty well stopped reading current academic history, concluding that the art of writing narrative history had been destroyed by the form university life had taken, and that only monstrous footnotes stuck in some tedious 'methodological' goo could now be produced in the academic rat race.

But the art of narrative history survived in the military form. I suppose the reason for this is that military historians did not form part of the intelligentsia, usually being military men in the first instance, and were therefore immune to the Marxist malaise which infected British intellectual life, and the liberal malaise which preceded it. Perhaps it also had to do with the nature of the subject. A battle is a very definite event, though a complex one. It has technical, social and theoretical pre-conditions and consequences. Warfare can be scientifically organised up to a point, the point being the moment of battle. In battle the outcome frequently depends on the ability of the commanding general to clear his mind of all he has learned, taking it for granted, so that he can see what is happening and act as if on impulse to take advantage of opportunities which only become generally visible after he has taken advantage of them. More often than not generals commanding in battle only see confusion and they keep going by remembering some rules and applying them arbitarily.

The battle, then, is a complex but definite event. It usually has a definite immediate outcome. And the way that outcome is handled is a precondition of the next battle.

Much of this can be represented in game form, which is why I consider the war game to be the only useful sociological model.

One of my great weaknesses as a Marxist was a need to understand the part wars played in history as something other than "the continuation of politics by other means". Dealing with Irish history it seemed more sensible to say that politics was a continuing of war by other means. War was a catastrophic sort of activity that easily got out of hand, and it was as likely to subvert the politics which set it in motion as to be its continuation. But politics must function in the situation which is the outcome of war.

It used to be said that the defeat of the British and French in France in 1940 was the result of moral decay in France and the spirit of appeasement associated with Chamberlain in Britain, on the one hand, and an extraordinary military vigour communicated to the German army by Nazism on the other. That was the first war I ever tried to understand in detail. I was surprised to find I could follow it. And it was crystal clear that this was a pure military event. The well-prepared and superior Allied armies were broken in the field in the course of a fortnight by a new military tactic devised by an element of the German army under pressure of the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. Britain and France were organising their superior force with a view to suffocating Germany at leisure when Guderian punched a hole in the line, poured his forces through it on the instant, and ended the career of the Allied armies by getting behind them. And that was that. On the experience of the 1914 war it was something that was assumed not to be possible. And it is unlikely that it would have been attempted if the prospect for Germany in a conventional slogging match was not so poor.

The long-term outcome was not determined by anything that Britain did in defeat, but by the capacity for mobile warfare developed by the Red Army. Britain's twenty year war against the French Revolution was a case of "the continuation of politics", in that a settlement was made at the end of it which corresponded with the declared purpose at the outset. Whether one sees that purpose as good or bad, it took great durability of character to stay with it over twenty years.

In the greatest possible contrast with this, Britain a hundred years later made war on Germany and lost itself in the process. In this amazing war the British ruling class did not merely get the working class killed by the hundred thousand: it also threw itself into the furnace.

Britain in 1914/18 resembles a great blundering giant - a kind of Frankenstein monster programmed with high ideals but lacking a feedback mechanism, an apparatus of perception that would enable it to see what it is doing, and therefore wreaking havoc in the world and on itself - a Don Quixote who has been made Commander in Chief and has dismissed Sancho Panza.

Alan Clark's book begins: "This is the story of the destruction of an army - the old professional army of the UK that has always won the last battle, whose regiments had fought at Quebec, Corunna, in the Indies, were trained in musketry at Hythe, drilled on the parched earth of Chuddapore, and were machine-gunned , gassed and finally buried in 1915... Again and again they were called upon to attempt the impossible, and in the end they were all killed. It was as simple as that".

The Donkeys is chiefly an account of the Battle of Loos in September 1915 in which the old professional army was marched against barbed wire and machine guns to be killed. "One of the German battalion commanders spoke later of the revolting and nauseating impressions made on them as they watched the slaughter; so much so that after the retreat had begun they ceased to fire. Before them was the 'Leichenfeld (field of corpses) von Loos' " (p 160 of the 1967 edition). There were no German casualties.

Clark describes how the professional army was wasted in 1915. (The mass cannon fodder of the New Armies was wasted on an even grander scale at the Somme nine months later.) And he describes how Sir John French and Douglas Haig rose to the top command much more

through their social connections and skills than through military ability.

Denis Winter's book on Haig also does both of these things, carrying the story right through the war. But it does more than that. It demonstrates how comprehensively the supposed documentary record of events, kept daily by those in command in war and politics and made available to future generations through the Public Record Office, has been doctored.

It became the fashion about twenty years ago to write history from Government and private papers put in the PRO. The way it was done rather put me off that sort of public record. Before I encounered that approach I had already begun to deal with historical events according to a "method" that nobody had taught me - that is, through newspapers, Parliamentary reports, pamphlets, and the major actions of the time, political and military. I could not see that, for the last two hundred years in Britain, private papers in the PRO would be likely to add much to that real public record of events. At best they would supply some footnotes. At worst they would stir up a dust of trivia that would obscure the real public record. And the worst is what they tended to do.

I thought if I had the handling of a group of history students I would put some of them to making summaries of those collections of papers so as to make them more usable, and in the process they might learn to read. Then I saw that these new historians were in fact only overgrown students who had become lecturers. Having to make books for career purposes, and being without experience, they could not take the great sprawl of an actual event as their subject. These collections of papers were ideal material for them. But what they did was much less useful than unpretentious summaries would have been because they felt obliged - perhaps the academic situation is such that they actually were obliged - to indulge in grand theoretical displays using this material as an ingredient.

While I was fairly sure that I was missing nothing vital with regard to British and Irish history by spending little time on private papers, I was certain that when it came to Anglo-German relations the private "public record" was fatal to understanding. For one thing the German state archives have twice in the past eighty years been thrown open to scrutiny by the dedicated enemies of Germany, while the British state archives have remained securely closed. And for another thing the British civil service has been for four hundred years perfecting the art of falsifying the current record kept by the State of its deliberations. The policemen who have recently been caught doctoring their diaries only did what the higher levels of the state have been doing as a matter of course ever since the time of the Cecils. And that doctored record is then carefully weeded before any bits of it are let into the PRO. The German state, on the other hand, seemed to have been naively honest in the way it kept its records.

I'm not saying that the German practice is better than the British. I'm only saying that there is such a great difference in the two ways of keeping the record, and such a massive difference in the way that the two records were made public, that if you hope to gain any realistic sense of what lies behind each you must discount an awful lot of the apparent wickedness revealed by the record of the Kaiser's Germany and treat the impeccably virtuous record of Asquith's Britain as a whited sepulchre.

A few years ago a Lord who had been a Brigadier General in 1945 brought a libel action against Nikolai Tolstoy for saying that the forced repatriation of Cossacks across the Iron Curtain for killing was a war-crime. (It was naturally found not to be a war-crime because the Nuremberg procedure laid down that only Germans and Japanese were allowed to be war-criminals.) A man who had been a company officer at the time gave evidence that his men were sickened by their task of herding Cossacks into trains and sending them off to virtually certain death. He said this in his company report. The report was given back to him for re-writing on specified lines. Under orders he wrote out a pack of lies which then became the official truth. All that was unusual about the incident was that he should not have known to do that in the first place.

Denis Winter's book is largely about the British "public record" of the Great War, and how the history of the war can only be written despite it. For example:

"Checking Haig's diary...I noted a substantial discrepancy between the typed version (invariably used by historians) and the handwritten original. On top of that, entries in both sources were sometimes at odds with contemporary documentation elsewhere. This meant that it was unlikely that all Haig's entries had been written when they were supposed to have been". (p 3)

Realistically supposing that it would be pointless to raise this matter of falsification with the official keepers of the truth in Britain, Winter went off and looked at the public record kept in Australia and Canada, both of whom sent armies to fight in the Great War, and used it to monitor what had been done in the way of falsification and destruction of the record in Britain: "Three conclusions emerged...The first was that Haig had systematically falsified the record of his military career...the second...was that the official record of the war - political as well as military - had been systematically distorted both during the war as propaganda and after it, in the official history...the third was that huge gaps in the war's documentation remain. Some of the most important in this area include the record of Britain's preparation for war with Germany which began with the setting up of the Committee of Imperial Defence...a decade or so before the war. A miserably thin fragment of the CID's papers at the Public Record Office continues to distort our understanding of that crucial institution. Another gap covers political discussion in the Cabinet during the war and the memoranda on which decision was based". (p 3/4)

A very strange thing happens here. If you look up Committee of Imperial Defence in the Index you are referred to pages 4 and 303. I have just given the page 4 reference. Page 303 is in Appendix I "Sources Used: An Evaluation". In the copy sent for review by the Publisher page 303 is blank. So I went to a bookshop to have a look at it. The shop had a dozen or so copies in stock and in all of them page 303 was blank. So we phoned the publisher to ask for a copy with writing on page 303. but the person we dealt with could not find such a copy.

Page 302 ends in mid-sentence and page 304 begins in mid-sentence. Finding a blank page between them you naturally assume that there is piece missing and that page 304 does not follow from page 302. But it does.

Perhaps there is an innocent explanation of this, but I can't imagine what it might be. And there is nothing in the Appendix about the records of the CID before the war.

Thus the most important material of all, the detailed preparations by the state over many years for precisely the military operation which it set in motion on August 4th, 1914, is off the record.

The record of the actual conduct of the

war by the generals and the politicians - a thing of much less interest to the world at large - is on the record after a fashion. Winter suggests that many of the orders for battles which are on the record were written after the battle. Monthly reports from fighting units to GHQ were burnt wholesale: "The last stage in the holocaust came in 1945, when Edmonds began sorting all documents into three files - for the Public Record Office, for valuation in the Cabinet Office and for burning as "of no permanent value". The end result was...that any real check on Edmonds's Official History volumes today is all but impossible. The strongest evidence for this fact is in the thickness of war diaries. The rule here is that the more important the unit, the greater the destruction and the thinner its surviving records. Corps diaries are thus about twice the thickness of army diaries - a preposterous state of affairs". (p 308)

Edmonds was James Edmonds who served the Committee of Imperial Defence before the war, was commissioned to organise the record at the start of the war and the writing of the Official History after the war, and finally to weed out the documentation. "Only a profoundly knowledgeable man could have produced an Official History so misleading in detail and yet with a ring of plausibility which led to a general acceptance for so long". (p 273/4)

And at the political level: "In September 1917, for example, the Germans offered peace terms so attractive that even Lloyd George hesitated before pressing ahead with the policy of military victory. The Cabinet's agenda on the 24 and 27 September indicates that the German proposal was discussed, yet minutes on the shelves of the Public Record Office relate only to German air raids. In the same way, Hankey's handwritten secretarial notes for 28 December 1917, though consecutively numbered, have pages missing. Broken sentences prove as much". (p 305/6)

Maurice Hankey was secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence before the war, when he drew up plans for putting public administration on a war footing the moment war was launched, and Cabinet Secretary during the war.

Winter's account of the war itself is no less interesting than his account of how it was recorded. For example, he explains the Battle of the Somme, which I had supposed to be a simple act of insanity. The attack on the Somme was planned as a feint to draw the German reserves down from Flanders, where the real attack would be launched: "The Flanders battle...was to start fourteen days after a short-lived diversion on the Somme, hence the meagre scale of preparation for the Somme". (p 52)

Haig had 15 divisions for the Somme, which was nowhere near enough to cause the Germans to move their reserves from the North. The French offered to put in three times that number: "Joffre's promise of 45 divisions made when the planning began must have seemed promising, and 45 plus 15 might have seemed enough to accomplish what Haig hoped. Unfortunately...all the indications are that Joffre was never serious about committing a large French force, that his promises were pure deception and that they were made only to get the British fighting on a large scale, somewhere in France". (p 55)

Joffre gradually reduced the French contribution until it was finally no more than the British, but held Haig to the time-table of July 1st. Thus instead of being a diversionary thrust, the Somme became the main battle for the British Army for the rest of the year, soaking up British resources after the ill-prepared opening, and leaving the Germans ample time to reinforce without moving reserves from Flanders: "Nevertheless 1 July was a day of two battles. The French in the south gained all their objectives at a cost of 7000 causualties. The British to the north failed to make any significant impression and lost 60,000 men in their failure". (p 59) And Winter reckoned that "the French sent as many troops to the Somme as the British and took on about the same number of German divisions". (p 66)

The attack continued until November, by which time the British casualties were 361,000 according to Haig and 600,000 according to the War Office estimate, and the French casualties were 181,000.

Among the factors accounting for this difference Winter gives first place to the fact that French artillerymen were trained to aim their guns and the British weren't. British artillery was under order not to shoot at anything less than 300 yards from their own infantry, which meant that it had to shoot beyond the German front line. French artillery could fire as close as sixty yards to French infantry, and therefore could shepherd the infantry forward behind a creeping barrage. And the French had twice as many guns for a given stretch of front, as well as making ten times better use of them.

There was also a difference in the mode of infantry advance. The British advanced in a series of rigid lines a few yards apart and were mown down by the undamaged line of German machine guns. This was officially laid down in a 1915 manual. Experience taught that in an attack "infantry burns away in this furnace like bundles of straw", and therefore "to keep them at their duty" they must be made to walk in orderly lines towards the machine guns in the hope that eventually a line of infantry will get there. Winter quotes as follows from the training manual of the 4th Army issued just before the Somme: "the men must learn to obey by instinct without thinking. The whole advance must be carried out as a drill". (p 61)

Otherwise the attack would break up in chaos.

In earlier times it used to be a British attitude in Ireland or India or Africa that great slaughters enacted there were not nearly as bad as they might seem because those peoples lived in a sort of collective consciousness in which individuals did not greatly mind being killed. On the evidence of the Somme and Paschendale one is tempted to conclude that it was British culture that induced people not to mind being killed.

The French infantry line, shepherded close to the German line by artillery fire, changed into smaller formations for the final charge.

Neither Winter nor Alan Clark goes into the reasons why the old professional army in 1915, Kitchener's Volunteer army in 1916 and the conscript army in 1917/18 were handled so wastefully. It seems to me to hinge on the fact that in 1914 Britain launched itself into an unnecessary war, which was therefore a catastrophic war. It could probably have prevented the war by declaring at the outset of the crisis its intention to declare war on Germany if Germany went to war with France. Or it could have stayed neutral in terms which limited the scope of the war and ensured that it was not endangered by the outcome either in its national existence or in its imperialist dimension realistically conceived. What it did was give grounds for thinking it would stay neutral, and then declared war on Germany "in defence of civilisation".

Britain in the generation leading up to 1914 was ultra-imperialist. This culminated in the Liberal Imperialism of the Asquith Government. Its culture was intensely militaristic. But its militarism had no basis in necessity. Though immensely stubborn it was also very incompetent, and the political world outlook guiding it was profoundly unrealistic. Therefore we get Loos, the Somme and Paschendale.

Now that the aberration of the Cold War is out of the way, it is being realised that August 1914 remains the great watershed in modern civilisation, hence the flood of books on the subject in the last few years. The best one by far that I have come across is by another military historian: Corelli Barnet's **The Collapse of British Power** which it would be useful to review in a future issue.

Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

Privatisation - Strictly Cash Gov!

Following British Rail's decision to axe 5,000 jobs, the Post Office is now proposing to cut at least 16,000. The Post Office blames the recession.

The Post Office union believes that it is a preparation for privatisation. This is the only reason that makes sense. There is no overwhelming commercial pressure on these bodies to cut back on staff.

Ten or more years ago the Tories embarked on a programme of privatisation primarily for ideological reasons. They saw their mission in life as the abolition of socialism and they saw state ownership of industries and utilities as one of the cornerstones of socialism.

(Another was state provision of services where their attempts at privatisation came unstuck and they pretty well came unstuck themselves.)

Of course, there were other factors - primarily greed. Tory friends in the private sector eyed the state concerns like sharks. And one couldn't help noticing the nice little earners for people like Norman Tebbit at B.T. and Lord Young at Cable and Wireless.

But the method of privatisation - the widest possible share ownership - demonstrates that ideology was the main motive.

John Major may retain a very small amount of this ideology. I doubt if Michael Heseltine, Kenneth Clarke, and the rest, give a monkey's one way or the other.

There are now two reasons driving forward plans for privatisation. Firstly, the government is skint. While it was flogging off its assets and coining it in from North Sea oil it could cope with the consequences of unemployment. Now it desperately needs cash.

Secondly, there is a demand from the senior managers left in the state sector. Because of the wide share ownership, B.T., the water boards, gas and electricity were not taken over by large private companies.

Therefore such companies could not bring in their own managements from the private sector. The existing managements stayed on, played at being great business tycoons, and paid themselves accordingly.

They should beware. The government is only interested in getting in the money quickly. They are prepared to sell to the first buyer to come along.

If, as is rumoured, Sante Fe takes over Intercity, or RTZ or Hanson get their hands on the coal industry, surely the present idiots who 'run' these organisations don't think they will last very long!

For their own selfish reasons their real long-term interests do not lie with the government. They lie in an alliance with the unions (and, increasingly, with the feelings of the general public) in opposing any cutbacks or other measures in the preparation for privatisation.

No Say - No Pay

The Transport Union has reduced its affiliation fees to the Labour Party by £1/2 million. It claims that this is due to lower numbers of levy-paying members.

Union affiliation fees rarely, if ever, bear a direct relation to memberhip. The unions hand over as much as they feel they can and sort out the relationship to members later.

The suggestion that this action is a shot across John Smith's bows is almost certainly accurate. John Smith has been quietly, quickly and efficiently dropping Kinnockism and its related plans, and has been restoring the Labour Party to health.

In the recent past, Labour politicians were forced, or felt obliged, to make public utterances which conformed with the Kinnock appproach to political matters. (Some, like John Cunningham, still haven't escaped the 'Dalek' mental straightjacket.)

the problem with John Smith was that he sounded a bit too convincing on the subject of the union block vote. Bill Morris is no doubt putting him right, and choosing a year when party spending is unlikely to have to be very high.

Germans - Our Duty

Some issues back we explained the public sector strike in Germany, and the threatened private sector strike. The unions objected to the workers bearing the brunt of re-unification costs, while Chancellor Kohl needed to establish how far and how fast he could go.

The matter was settled pretty well to the satisfaction of both sides - though you wouldn't know that from British reporters.

That settlement is now being followed by a government/employer/union pact formally agreeing a development plan for the East and a pay and conditions programme as the Eastern workers begin to catch up with the standards of those in the West.

We have remarked in the past that the British media longed for industrial unrest and decline in Germany and repeatedly report German events in wish-fulfilling manner.

This applies also to their reporting of German Neo-Nazis. The implication is that the Germans are up to their old tricks and the less we have to do with them, the better.

Mrs Thatcher swore that Britain wouldn't spend a cent to help with re-unification, though it was a policy British propaganda and British spies worked to bring about for over forty years. The present government refuses to help Germany with its refugee problem and gives every indication that it is enjoying Germany's difficulties.

It was a British Labour government which did most to re-establish democracy in Germany. It was the British trade unions which re-established the German trade unions and gave them the vigorous and far-seeing shape they have today.

While admitting that our unions have expressed dismay with government and press attitudes to Germany, it is urgent that they go much further.

Government policy and press comment is tailor-made to encourage fascism in Germany. Most Germans are enthusiastic about closer and closer unity with France, Britain and the rest of Western Europe.

But such unity is not *essential* to Germany. If we turn our backs it can look elsewhere - it is obviously keeping an option open in the East.

If we shun Germany we will be the losers. It is in the interests of British workers to have greater unity (at both national and union levels) and to have a strong, healthy, democratic Germany at the heart of Europe. That message should be going out loud and clear from our unions and from the Labour Party. □