

The picture is uneven. On balance the Left has advanced. But the forms are unexpected.

Eric Hobsbawm

The State of the Left in Western Europe



The situation of the Left in Europe is at present so uninspiring, that it is as well to begin by reminding ourselves of the substantial achievements which it has to its credit since the beginning of the 1970s. Ten years ago anti-democratic, largely military regimes of the reactionary Right, long estab-

lished (as in Portugal and Spain) or more recent (as in Greece) were in power over much of southern Europe. Except for the reversion to military rule in Turkey, this is no longer the case today. Though the long domination of much of the continent by governments of the Right (France, Italy,

West Germany) or by 'national coalitions' including the Right (Austria, West Germany) had shown signs of weakening for some time, it was still strong. Left opponents of joining the EEC in Britain could still plausibly argue that to do so would put potential British Labour governments at the mercy of a Community in which the Left looked like being in a permanent and powerless minority. This is no longer the case. The victory of the Left in France in 1981 was a dramatic proof that far-reaching political changes were possible. Since Europe is not separable from the rest of the globe, it is also worth pointing out that fundamental changes have taken place elsewhere. The last colonial empire — that of Portugal — has been liberated in Africa. The white settler regime of Rhodesia is now an African Zimbabwe. Feudal empires have been overthrown by major revolutions in Ethiopia and Iran. The empire of the USA was defeated in South East Asia, and has been notably weakened in Central America.

Whatever the prospects for the future, it is impossible to deny that the position of the Right in the countries of Europe has been weakened over the past ten years. Few governments have moved sharply to the right. Unfortunately Britain is one.

Weakening of Western alliance

So much for national politics. As for international politics, the major developments directly concerning Europe in the 1970s were the growing difficulties within the 'Western alliance' and the revival, at the end of the decade, of a politically significant anti-nuclear movement. The second of these is an unquestioned plus for the Left. We have only to think of the feebleness of these movements in Britain in the earlier 1970s to be convinced of this. The international peace movement has already succeeded in postponing the installation of the new US nuclear weapons in Europe by some years. The first is a plus for the Left, insofar as it has long been the policy of the Right, and in particular the extreme Right, to present every international issue essentially as part of a life-and-death ideological battle between the 'free world' and 'communism', that is to say to define anyone who draws back from 100% alignment with the likes of President Reagan as some kind of a red. Today, when West-West tension is much more common and unmanageable than East-West tension, and the major international disputes (as in the Middle East) can hardly be classified in simple East-West terms, this is no longer a plausible scenario. Insofar as it is no longer realistic to analyse world affairs in terms of the cold war crusaders, even a good many



photo: Frank Spooner Pictures

Pandemonium at the 'bourse' (Paris Stock Exchange) after the election of Mitterrand. Faced with a selling stampede the Bourse authorities suspended dealings in quoted French companies.

governments and parties which regard themselves, in principle, as on the US side in any possible conflict with the USSR, are no longer shackled by the conviction that, in public, they have to make a sales pitch for the entire Washington package deal, whatever it may be at any given time. And they don't. To this extent the new situation weakens the crusading Right and consequently strengthens the Left. Ten years ago, in spite of the general talk of detente, the situation was gloomier in this respect.

There are thus a number of credit-entries on the balance-sheet of the Left. Unfortunately it cannot be denied that the debits are at present more prominent.

The world capitalist crisis

We may begin with the obvious fact that world capitalism is in its deepest crisis since the 1930s. Indeed the present crisis is in its way as serious as it was then. For many years after the war orthodox economists thought the problem of capitalist crisis had been overcome — largely, they felt sure, owing to their own advice. This confidence was based partly on the extraordinary period of boom and secular growth through which the world economy passed in the 1950s and 1960s, and partly on the undoubted fact that the most typical fluctuation of the capitalist economy,

the so-called 'trade cycle' of alternating boom and slump, seemed to have become extremely attenuated. It still functioned mildly, but did not make any serious inroads into that 'full employment' which became a reality in many — but not in all — capitalist countries during those decades. With very few exceptions, the orthodox economists, and with no known exceptions the governments of capitalist countries, overlooked the periodic plunges of the world economy into lengthy periods of crisis and difficulty, which have marked the history of capital-

the age of the 'economic miracles' of the 50s and 60s is past

ism; for instance in 1815-1848, 1873-96, 1920-48, give or take a few years either way.

We have once again plunged into such a period; possibly — some might argue — since 1968, undeniably since about 1973. It has already lasted the best part of ten years, and (except in the immediate neighbourhood of Thatcher and Reagan) the predictions of imminent recovery and return to growth are no longer heard. Most serious observers would be surprised if this period of global depression did not last for the rest of the

1980s. Whatever the short or long term future of capitalism, the age of the 'economic miracles' of the 1950s and 1960s is past. Mass unemployment is here again on a scale unimagined for more than a generation. Even the richest of capitalist countries, used to fending off social unrest by very expensive systems of social security and other supplements to income, are squeezed between the slowing of economic growth, which used to make these expenditures tolerable to business, and the end of full employment, which used to make the commitment to social security that much less onerous.

Meanwhile hard times are returning to the peoples of countries which had forgotten about them, and harder times to those which never had a chance to. Even Mr Lee, presiding over the fat-cat economy of Singapore, predicts lean days. Governments see their finances collapsing. Economically, the international monetary and credit system is walking along the precipice of a major collapse, from which it has so far been preserved by a tacit agreement to pretend that a number of governments, major banks, major corporations and other enterprises, are not bankrupt: for in the ordinary sense of accountancy many of them are. The international economy may still, as in 1931-2, fall over that precipice. Politically the world once again finds itself torn by apparently uncontrollable conflicts which look like bringing it closer to a third world war. What is more, capitalism and its governments have no policy for overcoming these enormous problems which seems plausible or practicable. The confident chorus of the economists, those theologians of an age which believes in statistics rather than Providence, has fallen silent.

So why no shift to the Left?

Ought we not therefore to expect a major shift towards the Left, and especially towards the Socialists, whose claim that capitalism cannot manage its contradictions now sounds much more convincing than it has done for a long time? Do we even need much theoretical analysis to tell us that capitalism is not keeping its promises? But there has been no major shift. In the extreme case of Britain — which is only a more dramatic version of the troubled state of the Left elsewhere — the Labour Party is so disrupted, demoralised and on the defensive that most of its members act as though they had written off the chance of defeating a government which has visibly pushed the country deeper into a spectacular economic depression and is unparalleled for its reactionary views and economic failures. Other major parties of

the socialist and communist Left are hardly happy about their present state either. Nor can the smaller groups of the various ultra-lefts be said to flourish, whether or not they try to recruit mass support. As always a few exceptions can undoubtedly be found, swallows which alone do not, alas, make a summer. Thus the encouraging advance of the Workers' Party in the Irish Republic cannot change the generally discouraging picture.

The only evident advances of the international Left in recent years underline this general failure to confront and draw strength from the crisis of capitalism. They are the movement against nuclear war and for environmental improvements (the 'green' movements which are of greater political significance at present on the continent than in Britain).

Both are certainly initiated by the political Left, though both, in different ways, cut across the old political dividing lines, insofar as they are *alternatives* to confronting the crisis. This is not so clear in the case of the peace movement, partly because it is plainly a response to the increasingly menacing international situation which is one aspect of

Even Dallas' JR is not likely to welcome oil-drilling on his ranch, especially by somebody else

the global capitalist crisis, partly because these movements have not set themselves up in rivalry with the political Left, which provides them with the main body of their support. However, the recent debate around what seems to be EP Thompson's thesis that the main political issue is not capitalism or socialism but the fight against 'exterminism', suggests that there are potential tensions here. One hopes they can be relaxed.

Such tensions are more obvious in the 'green' movements, since some of these have set themselves up as political parties which weaken the Left (eg in Germany, the Social Democrats), by diverting part of its support to themselves. Moreover, 'green' movements have much less relation to the present crisis of capitalism than to the present fragmentation of the international Left. In any case, improving the environment — which we must all support — is a programme equally directed in principle against capitalist business which opposes it in the name of profit, and planners (including socialist ones) who oppose it in the name of raising output, creating jobs or on some other grounds. Conversely, specific ecological campaigns are quite likely to be supported by the prosperous middle classes whose

interest as consumers lies in unpolluted nature, far from motorways, smog, nuclear power stations and mass tourism, even though this may conflict with the interests of some of its members as business entrepreneurs. Even Dallas' JR is not likely to welcome oil-drilling on his ranch, especially by somebody else.

What the Left can't offer

Nevertheless, both the peace and ecology movements belong to the Left, and have shown a good deal of dynamism. But what they do not reflect, except very indirectly indeed, is any mass response to the economic failures and social problems of capitalism in its time of crisis. There is such a mass response, at least passively. A recent Italian public opinion poll shows that the percentage of citizens who expect a solution from revolution is as large today (26% in both cases) as that which expects anything from the existing parties. (*The Times* Aug 9 1982). But they do not seem to expect such a change from the parties of the Left.

For, unlike the 1930s, the Left today can neither point to an alternative society immune to the crisis (as the USSR seemed to be) nor to any concrete policies which hold much promise for overcoming it in the short term (as Keynesian or similar policies seemed to promise then). Unlike the 1930s the socialist economies suffer from crises of their own, sometimes very acutely, and, in a number of cases, are themselves so interlocked with the world economy as to be vulnerable to the crisis of international capitalism. Moreover, while the free-market policies of Thatcherites and Reaganites are patently failing — we have not heard any cries of triumph lately from Professor Milton Friedmann — the most obvious short term alternative, a return to some form of neo-Keynesian expansionism, offers only modest prospects at the moment. For the immediate future the Left can offer to defend men and women against the combined ravages of economic depression and the reactionary inhumanity of Thatcher and Reagan. In the longer term it has very much more to offer. What it cannot promise with much plausibility is a quick and certain solution to the crisis, such as seemed available 50 years ago. This undoubtedly deprives it of some of its potential appeal.

A longer term view

This disappointing situation of the Left in the midst of a great opportunity must be seen against the background of difficulties which have developed over a much longer period. The core of the Left, since the decline of nineteenth century Liberalism,

consisted, and still largely consists, of the working class parties and labour movements which developed on a massive scale in most of Europe before the First World War, splitting into Social Democratic and Communist parties after the October Revolution. They grew up essentially as proletarian parties, a tendency intensified in the Communist parties after 1917. That is to say, while also attracting — and seeking to attract — support from other strata and groups (for instance intellectuals), they were primarily based on manual wage-earners, heavily preoccupied with the specific demands of this class, and they expected to achieve their triumph over capitalism essentially through the action of the working class. They saw this class as inevitably growing in numbers and socialist class consciousness, as inevitably destined by history to rise and triumph, carrying with it the rest of the people, except for a steadily diminishing number of capitalist exploiters. And, in fact, such parties grew and became mass forces, and attracted support from non-workers, inasmuch as they were seen as representing all that was progressive, and no other major parties existed around whom the alliance of workers and other progressive forces could rally. To this extent their historical confidence did not seem misplaced.

Obviously the split between reformists and revolutionaries, anticipated before 1914 but formally institutionalised after the October Revolution, complicated matters by dividing these movements, except in some countries where either the Social Democrats, or more rarely the new Communists, enjoyed the virtual monopoly of mass support. Nevertheless, the ability of a united working class movement to act as mobiliser and leader of other classes and progressive forces was even more clearly demonstrated in the period of anti-fascism between 1934 and 1947. The large movements of anti-fascist unity were not merely formed round the nucleus of the Labour movements, nor did they only express the need to unite against the threat which fascism posed for the entire Left, from liberal democrats to communists. They also mobilised for major social changes, for the hope of a new and better society, under the leadership and slogans of the parties of the working class. That, after all, is why Labour in 1945 rallied so great a wave of by no means only proletarian support. That victory over fascism failed to lead to the expected new society, or where it did, produced disappointment as well as achievement, is another question. It was still possible to have some confidence in the historically inevitable rise of labour, which would eventually overcome capital-



Environmentalists and police in confrontation during the campaign to prevent expansion of Frankfurt airport.

ism. The argument was not about this, but about the strategy and tactics of labour movements, and whether the leaders of some actually still wanted to overcome capitalism.

A picture of change

This is no longer such a plausible prospect. The late Rab Butler records in his memoirs that Aneurin Bevan told him in the 1930s, 'You represent a declining class: I represent a rising class.' It is not easy to imagine many young working class militants expressing such opinions with genuine conviction today. The manual working class, core of traditional socialist labour parties, is today contracting and not expanding. It has been transformed, and to some extent divided, by the decades when its standard of living reached levels undreamed of even by the well-paid in 1939. It can no longer be assumed that all workers are on the way to recognising that their class situation must align them behind a socialist workers party, though there are still many millions who believe this. In Britain today a large sector of the 'affluent' or skilled workers, once the strongest supporters of Labour, are today politically unstable, as public opinion polls and electoral analyses demonstrate.

Furthermore, the ability of the traditional working class parties to rally round them broad alliance for progress has been weakened, as has, unfortunately, their own internal cohesion. The situation of the classical parties of this kind, both social-democratic and communist, reflects these difficulties. Often they can still rely on a great deal of traditional support, but in many respects

they live on the accumulated political capital of the past. And, insofar as they represent exclusively or primarily the sectional interests of organised workers — which of course, they must represent — they face more complex problems than in the past.

Thus the traditional Social Democratic Parties (we shall consider the novel phenomenon of 'neo-socialist' or 'Eurosocialist' parties below) have almost all lost some ground, even where, as in Scandinavia, they were the automatic parties of government for some forty years. What is more, even where they once rested on the solid loyalty and faith of a labour movement, the ties which bound the workers to them have loosened, especially among the younger generation. This is very much the case in one of the rare countries where such a party is still, or can be expected to be, singlehanded in government, eg Austria. The situation of such parties whose support has been slowly eroding, is not usually as critical as the Labour Party's affairs have become in recent years, but the general tendency is not in doubt. Indeed we have seen some such parties split (as by the nationalist quarrels in Belgium) or collapse, as the old French Socialist Party did until it was reconstructed on a new base in the early 1970s by Mitterrand.

Communist parties

The situation of the Communist parties is complicated by their very varying situation in different countries, and by the fragmentation of the international communist movement in the past 25 years. They fall into three groups: small parties which, while sometimes significant forces in the labour

movements of their countries, play a minor role in politics, mass parties since at least 1945, and new parties which entered legality in the 1970s as potential or actual mass parties.

The situation of the small parties varies so widely that it is impossible to generalise about them. The Swedish, Dutch, Belgian and Austrian parties have little in common except being small. What little could be said about the British CP in the context of a very general article, would in any case be familiar to readers of *Marxism Today*.

The older mass Communist parties succeeded in the difficult task of holding most of their influence, and working class loyalty, during the prosperity decades. In Italy they even extended it slowly. But they could not be content with the status of a large, but apparently permanent minority which doomed them to survive in a sort of political ghetto; and they failed, on the whole, to break out of it. Indeed, in France the CP entered a period of considerable difficulties and markedly declining support in the 1970s. Though it is in government today, it is at present a junior partner of a revived Socialist Party, a situation which would have seemed inconceivable in 1970. The Italian CP has a less discouraging record. Indeed in the mid-70s it looked as though it had actually succeeded in decisively widening its mass support among a people fed up with a particularly incompetent, inactive and corrupt political régime. However, the impetus of this major breakthrough was not maintained, though some of the advances of those years have not been lost, particularly in regional and local government. Since then the Italian CP has also been slowly retreating, fighting to maintain its admittedly strong positions rather than expecting immediately to resume its advance. Neither party has succeeded in turning the crisis of capitalism to its advantage so far. Why they failed cannot be investigated here.

Of the new mass parties, the Portuguese, having failed to establish decisive revolutionary power in conjunction with the military revolt of 1974, seems to have settled down as a solid party based on the working class, representing about 15% of the electorate, rather like the French and Italian parties of the 50s and 60s. The Spanish CP, which entered legality with the prestige of its unparalleled resistance record and at the head of a fighting union movement built up under Franco, established itself as a strong force in some regions, but has since virtually collapsed under its internal divisions. The latest polls suggest that its electorate has mostly abandoned it.

This rapid sketch suggests that the tradi-

NEW BOOKS FROM ZED

Clyde Sanger
SAFE AND SOUND: Disarmament and Development in the Eighties

A popular and timely version of the new official UN report on disarmament, this book provides a practical, understandable basis from which to consider the pros and cons of world disarmament.

128pp Hb 0 86232 122 0 £4.95

Azar Tabari and others
IN THE SHADOW OF ISLAM: The Women's Movement in Iran

Put together by three Iranian women, this is a book about the women's movement in Iran since the Revolution of 1979. It focuses on the relation between Islam and the struggle for women's emancipation.

224pp Hb 0 86232 022 4 £15.95 US\$29.50

Miranda Davies (Editor)
THIRD WORLD - SECOND SEX: Women's Struggles and National Liberation

A significant compilation, made for the first time, of the experiences and perspectives of women's organizations from over 20 Third World countries.

256pp Hb 0 86232 017 8 £14.95 US\$26.95
Pb 0 86232 029 1 £6.50 US\$11.50



Zed Press 57 Caledonian Road,
London N1 9DN Telephone 01-837 4014

now available

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

COLLECTED WORKS

Volume 18: 1857-1862

This volume is largely made up of articles written by Engels, most of them on military matters, and confirms his reputation as an expert in the field, the first writer to approach military science from a materialist perspective. With absolute mastery of his subject, he treats topics as diverse as the history of the rifle, the development of strategy during different historical periods and the course of the American Civil War. Articles written for *The New American Cyclopaedia* by Marx — some of them in collaboration with Engels — include a number of biographical essays, mostly of military figures. Engels' articles *Burmah*, *Algeria* and *Afghanistan* condemn the expansionist policies of imperialist powers and describe the struggles waged against the invaders.

680 pages maps illustrations indexes cloth £8.50

Volume 38: letters 1844-1851

The publication of this volume marks the beginning of a major new stage within Lawrence & Wishart's project of publishing the Collected Works of Marx and Engels, as it is the first of thirteen volumes which will bring together all their letters. Covering the early years of their friendship and the maturing of their political philosophy, this volume included the revolutionary year of 1848 (a crucial one in the lives of both men) and the early years of their long exile in England. As well as providing fresh perspectives on their political development, these letters offer exceptional portraits of the writers and their families and closest collaborators.

712 pages illustrations indexes cloth £8.50

Collet's

Penguin Bookshop

52 Charing Cross Road London WC2H 0BB Telephone 01-836 2315
Hours of business: Monday — Saturday 10am to 6pm

MARX IN PENGUIN

CAPITAL, VOLS 1, 2 & 3

**PLUS 3 vols of Marx's
political writings**

**PLUS, just re-issued,
The Marxists
C Wright Mills £2.95**

**WE ALSO STOCK A LARGE RANGE OF
SECOND-HAND PENGUINS**



Lawrence & Wishart
39 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LQ

tional socialist or communist working class parties cannot rely on either the slump or on long term tendencies of social and political development to guarantee automatic progress. It even suggests that such parties can no longer always rely on maintaining their solid traditional support. They will have to find new ways of mobilising their peoples for a better society.

The rise of new-style parties

How then are the advances of the political Left in the past ten years to be explained? Let us look at one interesting and ambiguous development: parties which have grown, sometimes with great and unexpected rapidity. Most of these can be described as 'neo-socialist' or 'Eurosocialist' parties. They are in effect *new* parties, either because they did not previously exist (like PASOK, which today forms the government of Greece), or because they were built on the ruins of traditional working-class socialist parties which had virtually gone out of business (as in France) or had only a paper existence (as in Spain). Today the new French Socialist Party, after winning the greatest triumph of any single party in the history of the French Left, dominates the government of France, and the Spanish Socialist Party may well — if the army lets it — preside over the next government of Spain.

These new parties mainly belong to the Left (though one has considerable reservations about some, eg the Portuguese Socialists), and some of them — in spite of growing largely in competition against the Communists — are committed to the united action of all the Left, including notably the Communists. This is obviously the case in France, where both Socialists and Communists form the government. However, the point is that, whatever we may think about them, they demonstrate the potential power of the Left to rally a majority of the people. In the case of the two most successful among them (Greece and France), they have mobilised sufficient support for electoral victory on the basis of a radical left wing programme. Thus in France Mitterrand won both the presidency and a decisive parliamentary majority by offering a programme which, at least on paper, is probably more radical than that of the Labour Left at present. To this extent there are lessons to be learned from these experiences.

Popular coalitions

These new parties are not so much mass parties of the old type, supported by an organised *movement*, and still less parties of organised workers: the neo-socialists have tended to lose what organic connection with

the workers their predecessors had. They are rather groups of politicians raising electoral banners under which a wide and heterogeneous range of discontented voters can be brought together. This has advantages and drawbacks. On the plus side they can have an extremely wide appeal, and hope to mobilise not only people disappointed with their old political affiliations, but the hitherto non-political, and find room for a variety of interests. On the minus side, their support may lack cohesion and fluctuate rapidly, and their leadership may have no policy (other than getting into office). In the worst cases they may merely redistribute the forces of a split and disillusioned Left in their favour, without extending much beyond it. They may even — in the absence of a sufficiently large and firm social base — opt for recruitment in the centre and on the right.

However, one might observe secondly, that they tend to be drawn towards a Left alignment. The rise of President Mitterrand illustrates the reasons for this clearly, since this very able politician recognised the logic of his enterprise with unusual clarity. In the first place victory depended on mobilising all possible support against a reactionary

The first conclusion, which unfortunately needs restating, is that unity is strength

and anti-democratic regime which was unpopular *as such*, and not only because it also seemed in its last years to be unable to cope with its economic troubles. It depended on mobilising the forces of progress against reaction and corruption. The most striking examples of Left advance in the past ten years have occurred in such circumstances.

The French experience

In the second place the success of this mobilisation depended on *uniting* opposition, not only because it is good strategy to concentrate forces against one target, but also because the very fact of unity is itself a powerful force, which can mobilise people who may neither understand nor be much interested in, the issues which divide the forces allied against the same enemy. (Conversely, in France, the régime of President Giscard was badly weakened by the division between his supporters and the old Gaullists). In the third place unity is a particularly powerful instinct in that part of the Left represented by the working class movement; and for good reasons. Without such unity victory was inconceivable. With it, it was

less difficult than it seemed. For in France, and for that matter in most of the rest of Europe, even in bad times, the political forces of the Left (in its broadest sense) are fairly evenly balanced against those of the Right, and relatively small shifts of support can give it the preponderance. Often, indeed, they *are* the majority, though this is concealed by internal divisions. Thus even today in Britain the majority of potential voters are opposed to the Conservatives.

The victory of the Left in France was won by unity. Against both sections of his own party and leaders of the Communist Party, Mitterrand insisted on the unity between Socialists and Communists around which alone the full potential of the progressive vote could be mobilised, because unity alone promised victory. And even after his party had won a single-handed majority in Parliament, he insisted on bringing Communists into the government, for unity is the best safeguard against that crumbling of support which easily threatens progressive governments. And though the French government faces severe economic problems, which are not likely to disappear quickly, it has in its first year carried out a large part of its programme. But what it has shown above all is that the Left can regain the initiative, mobilise a majority of the people for a radical programme, and win.

Some conclusions.

What conclusions can be drawn about the state and prospects of the Left in Europe from the experience of the past ten years?

The first conclusion, which unfortunately needs restating in spite of being obvious, is that unity is strength. Without it, the Right cannot be defeated. A divided Left, and especially a divided socialist Left, will not advance. It is far more likely to tear itself apart to the benefit of the Right.

A second conclusion would suggest that the role and perspectives of the traditional Socialist/Communist working class parties in the fight for a better society, require some careful reconsideration. These parties, singly or jointly, are still the core of the Left, and often by far its strongest organised component. Their capacity to be its leading force is not, in principle, to be doubted. But in practice they have not generally shown an ability to mobilise the entire potential support for democracy and for a better society. This is indicated by the fact that other organised forces on the Left have appeared, and play a significant and sometimes dominant political role.

We have already noted the appearance of the 'neo-socialist' parties, which are not working class parties in the traditional sense.

Moreover, a good deal of the Left now consists of movements and special campaign organisations pursuing particular objects such as peace or ecological improvement, or the interests of special sectors of the people, such as, most notably, women, which may overlap with the traditional Left or be allied with it, but have an existence separate from its traditional parties and refuse to be identified only with them. Some such special interests or groups have actually organised their own separate parties which are in competition with the traditional Left, as in the case of some 'green' parties and some regionalist or nationalist movements. Conversely, some traditional parties have probably tended to narrow their appeal by concentrating, in practice, on the special concerns of the workers organised in unions or other sectional groups of the working class. This must, naturally, remain an essential task of working class parties, but experience has shown that, say, concentrating on union militancy alone does not necessarily generate a broad political advance of the Left, or even political radicalisation in the working class as a whole.

Unwise to generalise

A third conclusion is that neither the long term social and political developments nor

the short term crisis of the world economy, *automatically* favour the Left today. Whether they do or not depends on its political action. Fortunately for it, the situation does not *automatically* favour its opponents either. Capitalism is plainly incapable in the short term of overcoming its present crisis. Its internal and international contradictions are more clearly visible. Moreover, unlike 50 years ago, it has not so far found a political strategy against the Left as effective as fascism was then. Nobody, especially in Britain, will underestimate the potential of the politics of the radical Right, but its weak-

Parties are no longer so firmly rooted in 'the movement'

nesses should not be underestimated either. Three years after Hitler took power in Germany, unemployment had been largely liquidated; three years after Mrs Thatcher came into office, it has reached the highest figure ever recorded in this country. Reaction so far — except where it has relied on straight military regimes — has relied on splitting the Left, not without assistance from the Left, rather than destroying it.

Another conclusion follows from what has just been said. At present it may not be realistic to generalise about the prospects of

the Left for the whole of non-socialist Europe. Unlike the 1930s, which saw a general advance of fascism or the 1940s which saw a general advance of the Left growing out of anti-fascism and resistance, there are today no equally clear continent-wide trends. There are merely possibilities. The situation of the main parties of the Left, on which its prospects must depend, varies enormously. Some Socialist parties are in government; alone, in combination with Communist or other parties, or as minor parts of bourgeois coalitions. Some (as in France) can look forward to several years in which to face their problems, others (as in West Germany) are visibly weakening. Others are in opposition with or without good or even any prospects of winning elections, but their future is variable. While the Swedish Socialists, if they need to rely on anyone, would almost certainly seek for the support of the Communists, it is anybody's guess what, if anything, the Spanish Socialist Party would want to or be able to do. Some are gaining, others losing ground, and in both cases internal fragmentation may weaken the Left as a whole, or its major parties, to a greater or lesser extent. While it is reasonable to assess the prospects of the Left concretely for each country, there is little sense in looking for general trends.

Every fifty years women are required to reinvent the wheel, for every generation of women is initiated into a world in which women's traditions have been denied and buried

Women of Ideas And What Men Have Done to Them From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich

With characteristic energy, humour and learning, Dale Spender traces three hundred years of women's ideas. She uncovers not only the ways and words of women, but the methods of men. While men control knowledge, she argues, they are in a position to take women's ideas. If they like them, they use them; if they don't they lose them.

£11.95

Routledge & Kegan Paul
39 Store Street, London WC1

RKP

Introduction to Feminism

A Communist Party Education Pack

WHAT DOES HE KNOW ABOUT THE WAY I FEEL?
HAS HE TRIED LIVING THE WAY I LIVE?
SUPPOSING EVERYTHING HAD BEEN
THE OTHER WAY ROUND?



Introduction to Feminism is a lively and provocative discussion pack for all those who want to find out about feminist politics. The 40-plus pages tackle a range of issues from employment, black women, sexual politics, domestic labour, to health.

Copies (75p, incl postage) available from Education Dept, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY.



Macmillan campaigning during the 'You never had it so good' years.

Nostalgia will change nothing

However, as distinct from the prospects of the Left, it is possible to generalise about its situation. It is, as we have seen, more fragmented than it used to be. The problem is how to unite these fragments — parties of the old kind and of the new kind, special interest parties, independent campaigning movements, so as to mobilise the full potential of the Left, and those who can be inspired by it to hope for a better future. While that *potential* support is immense, has certainly not diminished, and may well be growing, the actual support for the main parties of the Left, old and new, has shown considerable volatility. Probably more so than in the past. Even the oldest of the mass parties can no longer always rely on holding the bulk of their traditional supporters, and still less the mass of newly politicised or re-politicised citizens who may from time to time flock to their banners. The social basis of their support has changed, generally becoming more heterogeneous, and the strong organic links which bound their traditional supporters — especially the workers — to them, have been loosened. Parties are no longer so firmly rooted in 'the movement'. This weakening of strong and committed mass organisations linking the ranks

with their leadership is evident both when the Left is in government (and notably in France) and where it is not. It is not enough to deplore the decline of 'the movement' from the great old days, whenever the militants situate them (General Strike, the time of Maurice Thorez, Togliatti or Vienna in the 1920s). Nostalgia will not bring them back. They have gone for good. We must build on the foundations of the past, but the building must be new. This situation is common to the Left throughout Europe, and certainly to the socialist Left.

To utilise the possibilities before the Left is not easy. Its forces are divided, and their leadership is unreliable. Some of the old Social Democratic parties have been content to administer the existing mixed economies in a liberal spirit, but few such economies are still prosperous enough to allow them to do even this without problems. It is by no means clear what else they aim to do. Some of the neo-socialist parties have been primarily concerned with building themselves up as candidates for office by any means available, and it is sometimes by no means clear what their leaders represent, other than, say, a handsome face with great public relations potential or a particularly formidable and unscrupulous political manipulator. Both

kinds of socialist party belong to the Left (as indeed do most British Social Democrats) and all have left wings within them, but leadership is not to be expected from them, though it may, as in the case of Mitterrand, emerge in such quarters. The special interest campaigns, parties and groups inevitably concentrate too much on their particular fields to provide or even sometimes to aim at leadership for the broad political advance. The Left in Socialist parties, which has sometimes captured decisive influence in them, has often failed to be aware of the need for broad unity, or of the danger of narrowing the appeal of their parties. The record of Communist parties, complicated by their own internal and international problems, has been uneven and sometimes disappointing. It is difficult to deny that the leadership of, say, the French, Italian and Spanish CPs have taken some mistaken decisions in the past ten years, for which they are still paying.

So where do we look?

Nevertheless, if the initiative to unite for advance and the leadership in that advance is to be expected from any quarter, it is from the Marxists. Not from the Marxism which is exhausted in a few agitational phrases or a few simplified formulas and denunciations, but from the Marxism whose strength lies in the realistic analysis of the historical situation, the developments in capitalism — and socialism — and the actual state of the movement, however unexpected or unprecedented. The Left today cannot simply set out to replay the past, this time avoiding its errors. The game and pitch are no longer the same, nor are the teams. It cannot rely simply on the resources or, for that matter, the slogans it has inherited from the past. The old resources alone are no longer sufficient and not all the old slogans have the same meaning as they once had. It would be too much to say that the great potential reserves of the Left only wait to be mobilised if unity can be achieved and leadership provided. The situation is much too complicated and difficult for inspirational rhetoric. But the resources are great, they are there, and they can be mobilised. But it is probable that in the course of doing so the Left, and especially the socialist Left, will find that it has changed its style, form and structure. For it will represent not only a working class which is different from that it once mobilised, but also other social strata, and groups whose interest in replacing a capitalist society (not to mention in the survival of the human race) is today not inferior or less urgent than the workers'. □

c. Eric Hobsbawm 1982

Kenneth Leech

IS THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND REALLY MOVING TO THE LEFT?

'For heaven's sake, hands off the Church of England!' cried an MP during the debates on the revised Prayer Book of 1928. 'It's the only thing that stands between us and Christianity.' Today, according to the *Daily Express*, that church is involved in a 'drift to socialism', and the danger of disestablishment therefore looms high.¹ In recent weeks the spate of writing, and of utterances from Tory MPs, on the alleged left wing shift of the Church of England has reached at times bizarre proportions. What is the background to this extraordinary phase?

A series of unconnected incidents has combined in recent weeks to induce an almost unparalleled manifestation of fury from those who have discerned a leftward shift in the Church, or at least a widening gulf between the Church and the values and policies of the present government. There was the Falkland Islands service, with the debate which preceded it. It was well known that there was a desire in government circles for a 'victory-service', and that many voices in the churches were hostile to this idea. In the event, the Church won. Denis Thatcher was quoted as saying that 'the Boss' (the Prime Minister, not God!) was 'hopping mad' while another version spoke of her 'spitting blood'.²

The few days after the service on 26 July saw reports of violent attacks from the right wing of the Tory Party. Sir John Biggs-Davison spoke of 'cringing clergy' who were 'misusing' St. Paul's to call the war into question.³ Julian Amery called the service disgraceful and complained specifically of the absence of martial hymns such as 'Fight the good fight' and 'Onward Christian soldiers'.⁴ The Archbishop's sermon came under heavy fire, because, while the first few paragraphs contained a strong expression of support for government policy, there was a strong attack on the arms race, and criticism of those who wished to 'wheel up God to endorse some particular policy or attitude rather than another'.

National anthem

Scarcely had the controversy died down than an innocuous hymn book, produced by a group of fairly conservative evangelicals,

was the subject of attack because it contained a new version of the national anthem in which 'Send her victorious' was replaced by 'Guard us in liberty'. In fact most of the critics failed to notice that the old version was published alongside it, and John Stokes, Tory MP for Halesowen, complained, 'It is typical of the trend among some bishops and clergy. These people are ashamed of being born Englishmen and are full of guilt and want to water down everything they can.'⁵ In fact, the compilers of the book did not come from the political Left, or even from the radical wing at all. Lord Cranborne, Tory MP for Dorset South, complained that the Church of England was now 'peopled by buffoons, rather like social democrats.'⁶

A few days later, a report of a working party on nuclear disarmament was leaked by

the danger of disestablishment looms high

two papers, and the anger reached a new climax. Clergy should stick to 'souls and sin', advised John Stokes, and leave 'matters temporal' such as disarmament to parliament.⁷ The list of utterances provoked by the various incidents is long, amusing and revealing. Perhaps the most eccentric was an article by Tony Dawe in the *Daily Express* on 17 August entitled 'The bishops rocking the Church to its foundations' which claimed that concern with race, disarmament and the Third World was replacing 'the Glory of God and his relevance to our lives', attacked Dr Runcie for preaching 'a sermon on the morals of war' instead of 'thanking God for our victory' and spoke of 'allegations of a "Militant-Tendency"-style take over of Church committees.' It ended with the warning that disestablishment might be the result of the 'Church's drift to the left.'

In fact, the unease among some Conservatives with the Church of England goes back some years. In recent years there had been criticisms of government policy over immigration, child benefits, housing, nationality and a number of other issues. In 1978, after Mrs Thatcher's notorious TV interview about immigration, Eldon Griffiths, MP for

Bury St. Edmunds, attacked some of the bishops who had criticised her. 'Is it any wonder that some of our cathedrals are empty if those who preach in them are so out of touch with what large numbers of British people are thinking and saying?'⁸ Two years later *The Guardian* claimed that the Ministry of Housing was trying to persuade Dr. Runcie 'to stop the Anglican Church's public criticism of the housing cuts.'⁹ The strong opposition to the Nationality Bill from both the House of Bishops and the General Synod was known to cause serious concern in Whitehall. Throughout the period, some politicians were stating their own view of the Church's role. It was primarily spiritual, said Patrick Jenkin, who went on to express anxiety that the Church was now exerting political pressure over child poverty.¹⁰ Clifford Longley of *The Times*, commenting on Mrs Thatcher, noted 'the gulf between her conception of the Church's duty and their own.'¹¹

More political

In fact, it is certainly true that during the 1970s the Church of England as an institution, through its synods, boards and working parties took political issues with an increasing degree of seriousness and sophistication. A simplistic interpretation of this sees it simply as a capitulation to 'trendiness' (an umbrella term covering an enormous range of views), to 'liberalism' and to the 'spirit of the age'. A more serious and informed approach will see it as a conscientious grappling with political realities, informed by Christian theology and the study of the available data.

A recent study of *The Church of England and Politics*¹² has surveyed the Church's political involvement in six areas — race and community relations; men, women and sex; health and sickness; violence, peace and war; work, industry and prosperity; the political process itself. There are other important areas where considerable expertise has been built up. While one should not exaggerate the changes, it is clear that the involvement in political issues by the Church, nationally and locally, is very considerable, and this is not seen as a kind of 'dabbling', or an alter-