

# The Tory Opposition

**Michael Heseltine** has for long been seen as not a true Thatcherite. His resignation from the cabinet over the Westland affair was one of the most spectacular governmental rows since 1979. Here, in an exclusive interview for *Marxism Today*, he expounds his particular brand of Conservatism with *John Lloyd*

**I want to concentrate in this interview on your particular brand of Conservatism. Much of the spring of your action is what one might call patriotism and a love of seeing your country doing well. Yet, at the same time, your constant concern in speeches and your practice as a minister has been to see Europe as the conduit by which Britain retains some of its greatness in a post-imperial age. Is that right, do you see Europe in that way?**

Yes, absolutely. The background to the attitudes I have is pride in past achievements. The British instinct has always made it seek a role in whatever the power configurations of the time were. We have a record of success which is equalled by hardly any other nation in human history. The circumstances have changed, the power scale has increased and in the world of tomorrow, as I perceive it, the idea of a nation state of the size of Britain holding its own on the world stage of superpowers is not realistic. So, one has to decide whether we are going to display the same imagination and courage and adventure in our generation as our ancestors did in theirs. I come to the conclusion that the only prospect of Britain playing a significant role is within the European Community. You have logically to pursue a British destiny within a European framework.

**Is there, implicitly at least, in what you say, and also in your pro-Europeanism, the questioning of United States leadership? Do you see, potentially at least, a powerful and more united Europe (especially after the internal market reforms) challenging the United States?**

I think there will be areas where there is a legitimate European interest which will not be the same as that of the United States. But no-one should in any way try to see that as divisive or unfriendly. The Nato alliance is a community of self-interest. It is the self-interest of the Europeans, who are not strong enough to defend themselves and not co-ordinated enough, and of the Americans, who see the frontier of their freedom as the iron curtain. The best political agreements are those of self-interest, because they are noted for their survival. But there is no doubt that within the European nations there is a growing thirst to play a more influential role in the conduct of their own destiny.

My analysis, which would be the classic British Tory analysis, is that the more effective the role that Europe can play, the more effective the Atlantic alliance will remain. I think this reflects the American concern that we should do more. I don't run away from the fact that within both Europe and America there will be differing interpretations on this theme: in Europe there will be those who actually see a path for Europe as a way of getting America out, while within America there will be those who say the Europeans should do more and there-

fore we should do less and hopefully we can go home. Democracies are about a horizon of opinion in every case, but the main thrust of the intellectual judgement that I would subscribe to is one that sees a more co-ordinated European endeavour, in order to create a more effective partner within the Atlantic alliance. And I believe the more effective the partnership we can contribute to by our own endeavours, the more likely it is the Americans will stay here. I think that, to take the classic example of industrial capability, there is an American attitude that the more divided we are, the smaller our companies, the more America will be able to trade on American terms with those companies, and there's something in that argument. But I think the wiser American view would see that the stronger the European companies, the more co-ordinated the European endeavour, the bigger the deals that Europe will be able to negotiate in partnership with the United States.

**So you're for industrial restructuring, not just in military helicopters, for instance, but in a whole range of products, across European boundaries?**

It's going to happen anyway. It's a question of how much encouragement we give it and how much one sees the opportunity for it, based upon the models of competition which we have to recognise from Japan and America. And who knows, if Mr Gorbachev's reforms from Russia get under way seriously, then the Soviet Union and China too. In all these countries the high technology world of tomorrow will be partnerships between their industries and their governments. And we as a nation alone cannot compete with that. In Europe we can.

**Do you think we, as a nation, culturally speaking, are not European enough; are not European in the sense that France, Germany and Italy are?**

There's a very interesting cultural, or perhaps psychological, difference. The Europeans start with the premise that they are European. They talk about Europe as an entity, as a goal, as a vision, as an horizon. So every judgement is coloured by the fact that they will start the conversation with an acknowledgement of the European purpose. We start with questions about the problems, and when we've solved the problems, then we're prepared to concede the European objective. But, of course, psychologically you put yourself poles apart because you appear to be carping and grudging, and unimpressed and uninspired by the vision. I've seen that distinction drawn time and again in our relationships with Europe and it's bound to have an unsettling effect upon one's European colleagues who always see us as the reluctant bride.

**I wonder how your quite fervent Europeanism, compared to the stance of**

**the present government, at least in the recent past, sits with another major strand of your policy-thinking, which is to use industrial strategy, to use the Department of Trade and Industry as a much more interventionist and therefore presumably national tool to select which industries should be developed.**

Over a long period of time we have neglected industrial policy in this country. And it isn't just about which particular company you believe is important, about the nature of regional policy or whatever. It is a much wider cultural issue that I am preoccupied by, much of which this government has addressed. You have to be preoccupied by the educational system and the qualifications and training that come out of that process. Is it orientated to wealth creation? Does it train people for the demands of the market place and give them the sort of psychological outlook that makes wealth creation and enterprise attractive? It hasn't done. You've only got to look at the statistics of other nations, where a relatively higher proportion of their kids go into higher education, for example, to realise we've been content to put up with intolerably low standards. And even within the standards themselves, it hasn't been a wealth-orientated process. It's been an issue since the late 19th century. It should have been addressed and it's part of industrial strategy to address it.

The research and development resources of government in this country are unco-ordinated. They are dissipated across Whitehall, each with their own particular little pool which they spend in their own narrow ways. There's no way in which someone stands back. My own feeling is that we ought to have had a much more powerful Department of Trade and Industry to counter the power of the Treasury. The power of the Treasury is based on a misunderstanding of Britain's industrial excellence in the last century and we've let the assumptions of the rather finance-orientated Treasury prevail too long, whereas other countries have been much more co-ordinated and sophisticated in the way that they've marshalled their national resources.

**This does seem to speak of national planning, though I've read interviews where you've denied it is planning. How does it differ from planning, how does it differ from Harold Wilson and the Department of Economic Affairs, for example?**

I think that even to use the word 'plan' is to misunderstand the nature of the capitalist system and the nature of the market place, and indeed to misunderstand what planning means in an industrial sense. I think that the Left heard of a thing called the corporate plan in a company and said, 'oh well, there's a plan, each company of any size has got one, we've got to aggregate those and we've got a national plan'. If

you've ever been in industry you'd realise that that would be a form of unmitigated disaster. A corporate plan is a discipline to make people ask questions about tomorrow. And that can't be wrong. It is constantly revised, it is never given the ark-of-the-covenant type of sanctity that the word plan implies, but it does make people ask questions. Now I go back to the point: if there had been a dialogue along the lines of, 'what's British industry's role, what's it going to be doing, how can the government help it?', we would have realised there was going to be a desperate shortage of skilled people. And we should have done something about it. Now if you try to say, 'we need x engineers, y scientists and z mathematicians', you're going to be in dead trouble, certainly if you try and give it that degree of precision, because the market won't come the way you think. But the broad thrust would have been very clear.

**You have suggested a beefed-up NEDC with the secretary of state for industry in the chair rather than the chancellor?**

Yes, and the representatives of the owners of capital...

**...and of labour?**

Yes, they're already there now.

**Right, but so are the representatives of capital to some extent, the CBI is there...**

...they are not the owners, they're the managers. It's very important that the City of London, the share-owners should be there, they're important.

**So the capitalist side of the equation would be broadened and made more representative?**

Of course.

**But you'd also, in that, be going back to some kind of corporatism, wouldn't you?**

Well, these labels are always produced and the moment that you get them there's a pejorative implication about them. I'm not prepared to associate myself with any of the labels which immediately turn people off. I know when it comes to the practice of all governments, and the present one is the same in this sense, they become involved in a detailed discussion about the problems, but in this country rather later, and usually in reaction to a crisis. Whereas in other countries, they are trying in a very relaxed and informal way, realising all the pitfalls that come from this sort of approach, to effectively manage a partnership. They are recognising that the decisions of government impact dramatically, through its procurement programmes, through its public expenditure programmes, through its fiscal policies, on companies. And they try to have a more effective dialogue with their companies than we do.

**You don't think that style of interventionism, through a tripartite body like the**

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**NEDC, calls for a more social-democratic way of running the economy than we've been used to in the last eight years.**

Well, I'm not sure what you mean by that. When I look at the Social Democrats and their attempts to reach a policy agreement, I'm not sure I can answer what they can't.

**No, I'm not getting into Mr McLennan's travails, I meant more an economy like West Germany which, whether run by the Right or the Left, actually runs along similar lines. One could not imagine Japan, if the Socialist Party won power, changing very much.**

If you say that you have got to have a consensus about the need for a capitalist ethic, then of course you do. We've got that. I think that's one of the huge achievements of this government, and indeed it's one of the remarkable changes of world opinion, that socialism has turned out to be one of the shortest-lived panaceas invented in the political debate – and it has run its course. Unless there's a dramatic reversal, the concepts and the assumptions of socialism are disappearing in virtually every society on earth.

**Do you think that consensus now reaches into labour, so that trade unions, for example, as say in the States or even Japan, are now broadly market-orientated institutions who could be dealt with and brought rather more into the system?**

I think it varies from union to union and from country to country. But I think that there is plenty of evidence that major trade unions in this country today are now interested in creating the cake and then dividing it, rather than arguing about who owns the cake.

**One comment made about you in the Financial Times, when your book came out, was that you were advancing ideas about the NEDC and so on that didn't differ very much from John Smith who was then shadow industry secretary. Do you think that's right?**

I'm not concerned with what John Smith is calling for, I've no idea. All I know is that what I'm calling for is a recognition of what Conservative governments do and that's the important point. Once you get to the stage where Conservative governments recognise what they are doing, and say so, then you have closed any intellectual gap, which others have tried to suggest, separates me from parts of the Conservative Party.

**So what you're saying is you're making explicit, clear and precise what is in a way happening, but happening rather shiftily...**

Not shiftily, but happening rather ineffectively often. The European fighter aircraft deal is a classic example of how government and the higher technology industries have to work together. The European Space Agency, which I was responsible for setting up in 1973, is another classic example of such co-operation.

## Michael Heseltine

Michael Heseltine was born in 1933 and educated at Shrewsbury and Oxford. After losing money in property in the early 1960s he made a substantial fortune through his ownership of the Haymarket press. After failing in 1964 to win a seat in Coventry he entered the House of Commons in 1966 as MP for Tavistock. When the boundary commission abolished this seat he transferred to Henley in 1974.

He held junior ministerial appointments in the Heath government, first in the Department of the Environment (transport) 1970-2, then in the Department of Trade and Industry (aerospace and shipping) 1972-4. After the defeat in 1974, and Margaret Thatcher's election as leader in 1975, he became a member of the shadow cabinet and attracted notoriety for picking up the mace in the Commons and waving it at the government benches. He also began to build a reputation for his speeches at the party conference.

After the election victory in 1979 he became Secretary of State for the Environment, and, in 1983, Secretary of State for Defence in succession to John Nott. In both roles he showed a talent for publicising himself and the work of his department, and as a result emerged as one of the most flamboyant and prominent members of the government. His relationship with Thatcher, however, was always strained. It was Michael Heseltine who is supposed to have first had the distinction of being labelled 'not one of us'.

At the Department of the Environment he spearheaded reductions in his budget and the number of civil servants, and applied a new management system for cutting costs known as Minis. He also continued the central squeeze on local authority budgets initiated under the Labour government. The Treasury regarded him as too lenient with overspending councils, and further evidence of his unsoundness came when he disagreed with the prime minister over the causes of the 1981 riots.

He was transferred to Defence in the run-up to the 1983 general election, partly to counter the propaganda successes of CND against the stationing of cruise missiles. His career as a minister was ended by the Westland affair in 1985-6. Heseltine's open clash with the prime minister led to his resignation when he walked out of a cabinet meeting in January 1986. ●

Andrew Gamble

**You must feel somewhat betrayed that Britain has withdrawn from that.**

I don't use such harsh words, but I am, of course, deeply concerned.

**Another area which looms large in the public mind has been your involvement in the inner cities. Again it would seem much more interventionist than most of the members of the government which you served.**

But what I did, I did as a member of that government.

**Indeed, but you took a very high profile. You began the urban development corporations, did you not, both in London and Merseyside. Your profile when you were minister for Liverpool was extraordinarily high. You focused attention upon it, you led rather than simply served a government in those instances. Why were you so concerned with inner cities? Was it perhaps you saw there that Toryism or the free market must prove itself, or was it more humanitarian – this is terrible, something must be done?**

The conditions in the inner cities were scandalous and you have to work out whose responsibility it is. And if you believe you belong to a party that doesn't subscribe to the view that it's always the state's responsibility, that it's always someone else's fault, then you have to do something about it. I had no doubt that the conditions were a product of forces that had been at work over a long period of time, and forces which were within the control of the capitalist society if it wished to control them. But it would only wish to do so, and be persuaded to do so, if it was given the incentives, encouragement and leadership. After all, the capitalist system is about making profit and nobody should try and confuse that, because it's rather good at making profits, much better than any other system, so don't confuse it with trying to tell it it's got to run great social works or anything of that sort, that's not its responsibility. It can and should make a contribution at the margin, but it's not mainstream. But if you can create conditions in which it can make profit in the urban areas, then the market will talk and the capitalist system will flow in. Now believing that, and believing the responsibilities that come from the privileges of capitalism, in which I profoundly believe, which is a very Tory attitude, there was a very clear way for me to go.

**In an interview, you compared British politicians to French politicians and said that many French politicians are mayors of major cities, but have also taken governmental or senior national office. I guess you won't say we should change to that, but what you did seem to be proposing is that cabinet ministers should take a direct interest in cities in distress, Manchester, Liverpool and so on.**

There is an interesting set of questions in all this which I have not addressed in public, but have worried about a great


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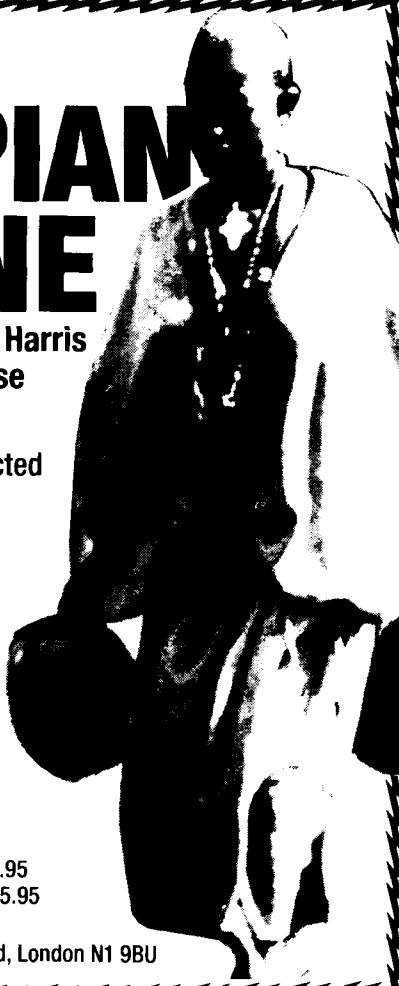
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deal. In a sense we are becoming a rather monopolistic political society. I don't say that in the narrow party sense. I say it in terms of the domination of Britain by the City of London, in terms of ownership of wealth. I say it in the terms of the lack of obvious roots of power outside the major political parties and the increasing location of the major corporate headquarters in London, the drift south of the public sector, of the military. In a sense you can't disassociate from this the frustrations about the relative failures of local government to deliver high standards. We have to ask ourselves whether we accept this monopoly of power. Now there are two sorts of reasons why the monopoly of power could be justified. One is that it's more efficient, the other is that the elected government feels that its views are being politically frustrated, even though it has a national mandate, in a way that was never anticipated when local government was given its delegated powers in the 19th century. If we had a consensus about the need to pursue a market economy, then there is a powerful argument for a freeing up of politics to give local government a greater opportunity, but I think you could only do that if you were to create a power structure at local government that was meaningful. I don't think that the present system of local councillors is meaningful, and that's where you start looking overseas, where you not only have alternate centres of power politically...

**...often in federal systems you mean...**

...in federal systems, but there is also a degree of entrepreneurial opportunity for politicians operating locally. You get directly-elected chief executives, for instance, in the American system. They are very powerful people. There's no comparison in our society with the sort of opportunities that a directly-elected mayor of Birmingham, for example, would have. You'd be back to another generation of Chamberlains.

**He certainly comes to mind, though Chamberlain, in his own day, was an exception rather than the rule.**

I think it is something of that spirit which is now missing. If you look at the Manchesters, the Newcastles, the Liverpools, the Glasgows and the Edinburghs – less in Scotland, but in England certainly – there is an erosion of that power base. Tax systems destroyed it, a lot of other things have destroyed it. There isn't a way of showing a real career pattern to people locally who can get things done, so they tend to get sucked into the national parties, get drawn to London.

**Like David Blunkett from Sheffield and Christopher Chope from Wandsworth? What you're after then is a consensus. But assuming that is more or less operative (with exceptions), which I think you do assume, what you're then after is a radically changed system of local govern-**

**ment, local democratic control, elections and so on.**

Yes I would like to give local governments a bigger sense of opportunity, a bigger sense of responsibility. Now the problem is, you say we've got consensus: well there's consensus on a national scale, but not on a local scale.

**Aren't these areas of lack of consensus becoming smaller?**

They are, but they are also in the most acute areas of the country. The government is having to do a whole range of things to break into that power structure. I don't want to separate myself from what the government is doing, because no-one did more than I did with the urban development corporations and the extension of urban policy. They were designed to break through the log jam. But there should have been no need for governments to create them. It should be perfectly within the gift of Manchester, or Liverpool or wherever, to say to their leading industrialists and their academics, 'look we have got to make this city again what it was, and we're going to do it exactly like the people in the 19th century did it. We're going to do it again, now let us sit down and get at it'. Now if they want powers of the sort that the UDCs have got, well they ought to be able to have them. Why not?

**Just to make it absolutely clear, what you're saying is there are some authorities which in your view are still determined to frustrate government. But even if all the authorities, Conservative or Labour, were concerned to work with government, the structure is wrong and that has to be changed. So there are two levels of problems, one is a short-run one, the other is a longer-run structural question.**

That is right. There is no way in which you can expect amateur, part-time councillors to stand up to bureaucracies of well-paid, deeply-entrenched, producer-orientated, local government employees. Imagine trying to run the great ministries with politicians who were part-time, unpaid and who had the very limited experiences and powers of councillors. We don't make such a good fist of it, where you've got very talented, energetic, ambitious and highly professional politicians in charge of government departments. We're not that good at running the civil service, but in local government what chance have you got? I would like to see a directly-elected chief executive of Birmingham. That would be a very exciting innovation.

**Let me shift to another aspect, which I think belongs in the cities, namely your championing of workfare for the long-term unemployed. It would be coercive to the extent that if they refused reasonable work over a long period of time, their benefit would be reduced or taken away entirely. Is that based on seeing it work in the States, or just a hunch it will work?**

It is working in the States, but it is a

**'I think David Owen made a classic misjudgement in leaving the Labour Party'**



judgement about a social problem which I think is large, unacceptable and incurable within the techniques that are available today. Within a decade, of course, it won't be controversial. Do you remember the great row over YTS? Who's fussed now? We've taken away the social security underpinning of 16-18 year-olds, which was going to be some great draconian, stalinist revolution or something. Now no-one's complaining.

**You think then what we've touched is a larger revolution or change throughout the Western democracies concerning the relationship between the citizen and social security? In the past, the welfare state, in different ways, even in the States, gave as of right to the poor, the dependent. Are we seeing a general withdrawal from that principle in this country?**

I wholly subscribe to the view of the Churchillian net, below which no-one may fall. Now we have, for whatever reason (largely economic growth), transformed the expectations of citizens. Of course, you've got poor and rich, those terms are relative, there'll always be those divisions in any society, but poverty today does not mean what poverty meant in the 30s. Many of these concepts were evolved then, quite understandably and often admirably, by people who said, 'this is absolutely intolerable and we've got to end this'. I hope I would have said that, as many of the people in my party did at the time.

Now we've moved on and we have a number of problems. First of all, the type of work for which demand is most buoyant is increasingly removed from the less skilled, the less energetic, because that's what technology is doing. Secondly, you have concentrations of relative poverty in a seemingly intractable way. Thirdly, you have a trade-off between what people earn and the social security system at the low end of the income groups which basically removes a lot of the incentive to take a job. Fourthly, you have a black economy. Then you have second incomes and so on.

All these things produce a new range of questions. We could turn our backs on it and say, 'well, that's too bad, we've got two million unemployed and that's the nature of the society we're living in.' You can, but that's a decision with consequences. You will get unemployed parents bringing up unemployed kids, a whole sub-culture which is very unhealthy. I don't subscribe to any of the views that suggest you can pay your way out of it, for all the obvious inflationary reasons. And so there's only one other way to go, and that is to recognise, in a very Tory way, that those who receive have obligations in the receipt. What sort of obligations are they? The most attractive one would be, 'thank you, I've got my national insurance or whatever it is, I want to be trained to be part of this thriving economy'. That would be the



best option: training, education.

### **...and work experience?**

...work experience. But if the person says, 'I don't want to do that', then, in time, you say, 'we realise you don't want the stress and pressure of being trained and educated, and maybe you know it isn't going to help you much, what would you like to do? We've got 24 other things you can do.' But if they don't want to do any of those, then at the end of the day, I'm afraid you have to take a lonely decision and you say, 'if you won't be trained and educated, and you won't do any of the things that are on offer, many of them very socially desirable and necessary in our society, I'm not sure we can go on fulfilling our obligations to you'. That is quite an intellectual hole to jump, but I would jump it.

**Yes it is, because it takes issue with a basic assumption, common in practice to both parties since the war. Namely that there was a residue of people who couldn't find work, which in some sense was the fault of society, who wanted to work and should therefore be sustained until they found it. You're saying things have changed. Not just that poverty is different, which it is, but that there is a much larger number of people who may not want to work.**

Well no, they may themselves have a black economy income, which added to their social security is more profitable than anything they could get from the market. That's a huge problem.

### **You reckon it is?**

Oh yes, everyone knows it.

### **Has the black economy ever been quantified?**

How do you quantify it? But who questions it? Our whole experience, everyone's knowledge, you go and ask the lads in Liverpool, they'll tell you about it. It's not just around the good burghers of Henley that you find this sort of conversation. I've heard the lads talk, and they all tell me what goes on. So of course it is a problem. The second thing is that the growth of the second income has changed attitudes. If you've got one person earning and you draw social security yourself, then the marginal improvement in the family of working may be small. I use the analogy, and I think it's right, there is always a threshold of what people will do. When we had 98p in the pound tax, the rich went to the tax havens; when you've got a benefit close to what you could earn, an increasing number of people say, 'what's the point?'

### **I noticed you gave the Macmillan lecture at the last Tory conference. Do you see yourself as an heir not to Macmillan personally, but to that tradition in the Conservative Party?**

I think that it's an arrogance to assume one is an heir to anything, in a personal sense. You're associating me with one of the most distinguished members of

the party's history. If you say to me, 'do I subscribe to what I think he believed?', certainly.

### **How do you define that? It's often defined as paternalistic.**

I am a paternalist, if by that you are saying that for those who enjoy the privileges of a free society, there are obligations, yes.

### **It's very significantly different to what the prime minister's brand of Toryism is?**

I don't wish to find myself trying to define divisions and distinctions of that sort. You have to realise I was a member of this government for seven years and I would claim I was one of the more enthusiastic and not unsuccessful members of the government in car-



rying out the sort of policies which the government is proud of. You can't realistically try to put me into a compartment apart from the government.

**But clearly you are an extremely major figure in Conservative politics and politics generally. Many of the things you're posing now, and have posed in the past, are at least significantly different in emphasis to the way in which policies are presented by this government, to put it as diplomatically as I can. I think you'd probably agree with that?**

Well, the fascination of the party is that it is a kaleidoscope of opinions, and every member of the government will present his own views in his own way. I present my views in my way, but what is important is that there is a summation of those views within the collective disciplines of the party. I've never found the slightest difficulty in reaching such a position. I have, dare I say it in a quiet voice, sometimes influenced the way the party has gone and that's very satisfying.

**Let me tempt you on the present state of opposition politics. The Alliance at the moment is way down in the polls, is split and has left or may leave the centre ground, which you may feel the Conservatives should get into, or you may fear Labour may get into. How do you see Alliance politics?**

The Alliance has been revealed for what it is, which is a gathering of unlike people without any clear idea of what politics is all about. That's an understandable situation, particularly faced with a resolute and powerful Conserva-

tive administration. You get reactions. There will be those who find disagreements. They coalesce in the centre ground, not prepared to go to the Labour Party which they perceive as doctrinal and perhaps out of date. I have no views about how they are going to survive, I'm not that interested because I know full well that what really matters is the reaction on the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party is doing things that I believe to be necessary in this country and if, having succeeded in much of that, we find the public mood changing, the Conservative Party will do what it's always done, which is to reflect the democratic instinct of the time and change. The one thing I know about the Conservative Party is that it's the most successful political force in the history of mankind, and it's that because it has an infinite capacity to command the continuing allegiance, by and large, of the British people.

### **It needs an opposition though clearly, in a democracy.**

It would be a lot better if we had an opposition, but we can't create our own.

**The largest opposition party is still the Labour Party. You've often said that socialism is on the decline, on the way out perhaps. However you still have socialist parties running Australia, New Zealand, Spain and so on, often with policies that don't differ too much from the present British ones. Do you think then, that if these parties aren't going to say, 'Michael Heseltine is right, we're no longer in existence', that socialism, what's called socialism, social democracy, labour, will change into something else whilst still calling itself socialist?**

It had never occurred to me that in distant parts, on the other side of the globe, I might feature in the strategic assessment of foreign labour parties. The interesting thing in most of the countries you mention, is that they've found they get better results from a market-orientated economic policy and political philosophy. In this country, the Labour Party is tearing itself apart on that very issue. How long it will take to resolve it and in which direction, I do not know. I suppose our electoral system makes it harder to handle.

### **What has to happen?**

For the Labour Party to resolve the difficulties it's got over this issue? If there was a proportional representation system in this country, I have no doubt that the Labour Party would have broken up by now. You would have had two very different types of representatives on the Left.

### **Do you support PR?**

I don't. The present system gives us a form of government which we know works.

**So what you're saying then is that you would probably put your money on the**

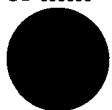
development of a non-socialist but leftist, or left of Conservative, opposition which was no longer doctrinairely socialist?

Yes. It'll never succeed until it does move on to our ground. In world terms and domestic terms, our ground is now the ground which broadly defines electoral ambitions. I have no doubt that that will be. I have always been a Labour Party recovery man, and it's based upon...

...you mean since the early 80s when it seemed as though it might go down the tube...

Absolutely. I think David Owen made a classic misjudgement in leaving the Labour Party. I think he'd be incomparably more powerful today if he was in the Labour Party, rather than where he is. But my reasons for believing that the Labour Party in the end will find a way out of its difficulties are based on the view of what human beings in pursuit of power do. And I think within the unions and parliamentary party, there are enough energetic, talented and ambitious people to realise that if ever they're going to have a chance to achieve even a fraction of what they want, they are going to have to meet the ambitions of the electorate, and when that happens they could become a formidable parliamentary opposition. Indeed my whole feeling is, I know nothing about Labour internal politics, that Kinnock would be incomparably stronger if he faced up to the Left and

**'The fact that he's running rings round the public relations of the Western world is a huge tribute to him'**



kicked them out.

**You are well-known in the public mind for your involvement on defence issues and your opposition to CND. After the INF deal, how do you see things going? Do you see the situation in a different light to previously?**

No.

**No change?**

If you've seen a city state grow from a tiny enclave like Moscow for 400 years, an endless extension of its frontiers, you're a very foolish politician to think that one man, who's come up through the system, in his tenure in office is going to change all that. The fact that he's very sophisticated in how he deals with it, and the fact he's running rings round the public relations of the Western world, is a huge tribute to him.

**Running rings round the prime minister?**

I wouldn't say that.

**Charming her anyway.**

I've sat in enough meetings of powerful people to know how it works. The only basis on which Gorbachev will be able to command the politburo is if he can sit there and say, 'look boys, I'll show you a better way of doing it, I'll show you how to get what you want', and if he can persuade them of that, he'll win.

**But he has constraints too, of a sluggish even sclerotic economy, he's got to make**

**deals, he can't simply be an old tartar lord who pushes, pushes, pushes the boundaries forward.**

That's the point I was making. He's got to explain to three groups of people in the Soviet Union who matter – the army, the bureaucrats and the party – that he's winning, and actually what he's doing is undermining all three of them. And that puts him in a very, very dangerous ice-thin scenario.

**Do you think he'll pull through?**

I don't know. That's the honest answer. But you're not going to get me to make policy judgements or changes based on the assumption that he will.

**Final point: your own future. The polls show you as a popular, perhaps the most popular, potential leader of the party. Do you see yourself in that light still? You pound round the country, you write books, you make speeches, it isn't what a normal backbencher does. It isn't a quiet life, it isn't what you could do.**

I've never sought the quiet life, I'm a politician and interested in a political career. And I'm inundated with invitations, even *Marxism Today*.

**But you do see yourself as a future leader?**

No-one can foresee the circumstances that will confront one, but I've always enjoyed political power and if I have an opportunity to exercise it in the interests of the Conservative Party and the country, of course, I'll take it. ●

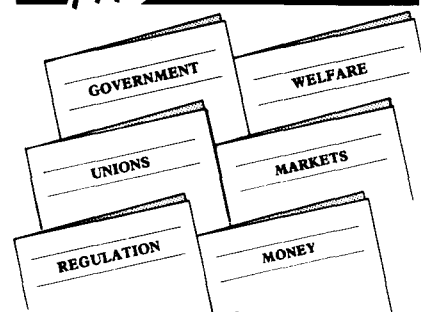
## The names

FRANK J. SUTHERLAND  
Karl Marx  
Mao Tse Tung  
W. H. Auden  
Patrick Minford  
Adam Smith

## The faces



## The issues



## The magazine

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# Thatcher's Lessons

We are now in the era of 'rethinking'. It is the new buzzword. Some think there is nothing to rethink.

Others see it as little more than adapting to Thatcherism. **Stuart Hall** argues a radically different view

*'Ten lessons from Madame LaZonga;  
She does the rhumba, and she does  
the conga'*

**T**he process of 'rethinking' has begun – many would say, not before time. Admittedly, it is taking some peculiar forms – the 'Labour Listens' campaign being one of the most bizarre. Is it really useful to listen to all and sundry about the future of socialism without, at least, first formulating some themes or propositions of your own? Are there no policy directions or tendencies already emerging inside Walworth Road? No matter. Even this muddled exercise should be seen as part of a wider process – painful, contorted, but an absolute prerequisite to any possible renewal of the project of the Left.

The issue, now, is not whether but *how* to rethink. The temptations for the Left will be either to fall back on The Faith as we know it or to race forward to embrace the new Thatcherite 'consensus'. Another, more radical, proposal is that we could do worse than to start the process of rethinking with a little thought. What the 'Thatcher revolution' suggests is that good ideas, or what the political commentators were calling, in the aftermath of the election, some 'Big Themes', don't fall off the shelf without an ideological framework to give those ideas coherence. By framework, we mean a perspective on what is happening to society now, a vision of the future, a capacity to articulate these vividly through a few clearly-enunciated themes or principles, a new conception of politics. In short, a political strategy. In this, as in much else, the Left could do worse than begin by 'Learning From Thatcherism'.

Now, nothing is more calculated to drive the Left into a tizzy than this scandalous proposition – especially when advanced by MT. The very idea of Thatcherism is anathema to the Left. Decent people everywhere hate and revile it. Where Thatcherism is, there the Left cannot be. They inhabit two, not only different and hostile, but

mutually-exclusive worlds. What on earth could the Left possibly *learn*? Besides (shades of 'Gouldism') isn't this slogan simply a cover-up for the attempt to shift Labour irrevocably to the right – an injunction to cuddle up to the 'enterprise culture', on the if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them principle?

It is a sign both of the defensiveness and the residual sectarianism afflicting many parts of the Left that it mis-reads an injunction to analyse 'Thatcherism' for a recommendation to swallow it whole. It is time to correct this fatal confusion, most of all because it is now so politically disabling. Unless the Left can understand Thatcherism – what it is, why it arose, what its historical specificity is, the reasons for its success in redrawing the political map and disorganising the Left – it cannot renew itself *because* it cannot understand the world it must live in if it is not to be 'disappeared' into permanent marginality. It is time, therefore, in the context of rethinking, to make clear exactly what is meant by 'learning from Thatcherism'. And we can do this, not only in general terms, but in relation to a concrete example: the current crisis surrounding the NHS.

**The first thing Thatcherism teaches us** about the NHS is that crises always present opportunities as well as problems. The problem here is not only how to reorganise the NHS but *how to turn the crisis to our political advantage*. It is not only a chance to defend the NHS but an opportunity to construct a majoritarian politics of the Left. If the Left cannot develop an alternative long-term political strategy it cannot save the NHS. What most distinguishes Thatcherism's wide-ranging conduct of ideological politics from Labour's narrow, tactical parliamentarianism, is exactly this unremitting attention to the long-term, strategic, political 'pay-off' of apparently short-term crises.

The present uproar around the NHS is, after all, the most protracted crisis affecting the welfare state of Mrs Thatcher's reign. We always knew – and she always knew – that it was her

Achilles heel: the area where popular opinion would be most stubbornly resistant to the project (to which, despite tactical retreats and statements like 'the NHS is safe in our hands' (sick) she remained steadfastly committed): that of 'breaking the spell of the welfare state'. Such a goal has been the consistent motor of the Thatcherite revolution in welfare, and was previewed by the Institute of Economic Affairs as long ago as 1981 (Anderson, Tait and Marsland, the Social Affairs Unit, 1981. I give the reference and date for the benefit of those political commentators, like Peter Kellner, who comfort themselves – and us – by the ludicrous proposition that, because Thatcherism is tactically adept, it has no consistent ideological driving force apart from that so beloved of psephologists – the lust for power). So, what we have now is a crisis that refuses to go away, unremitting (and often critical) media coverage, widespread and varied popular support for a change, and the government temporarily on the ropes. How could the Left and the Labour Party *fail* to profit, politically, from such a conjuncture?

And yet, the more the crisis unfolds, the more the Left's political and ideological gains seem, at best, 'passive' ones. Mrs Thatcher has personally taken charge of the crisis – always an ominous sign. 'The impression which the prime minister was trying to create was that she was pleased that talk of crisis by the opposition and health professionals had opened up the NHS to her radicalism. Her spokesmen countered the impression of government panic by stressing that she was "seizing the tide of public perception"' (*The Guardian* Jan 27). The talk is now exclusively about 'alternative ways of funding' (which every post-Thatcherite child of nine knows is a code-phrase for the massive expansion of private medicine and privatisation within the NHS) and 'breaking the barriers to greater efficiency' (which we know is a code-phrase for destroying COHSE and NUPE).

**H**aven't we been here before? A great, thundering crisis – and then, inexorably, as it unfolds, the tide beginning to turn, the ideological advantage shifting to the other side, victory snatched from the jaws of defeat...? Politics, waged by Thatcherism as a relentless 'war of positions'? Crisis as a God-sent opportunity to radically restructure society (or, as Gramsci put it, 'reconstruction already under way in the very moment of destruction')? Why do we still find it impossible to believe that this could happen, when it has been happening to us, steadily, since 1979?

**There are several reasons for this reluctance.** The Left keeps telling itself that 'the postwar settlement is over': but we still find it difficult to think politically in a world where its terms can no