# the next step

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# Get ready for the new Tory leader

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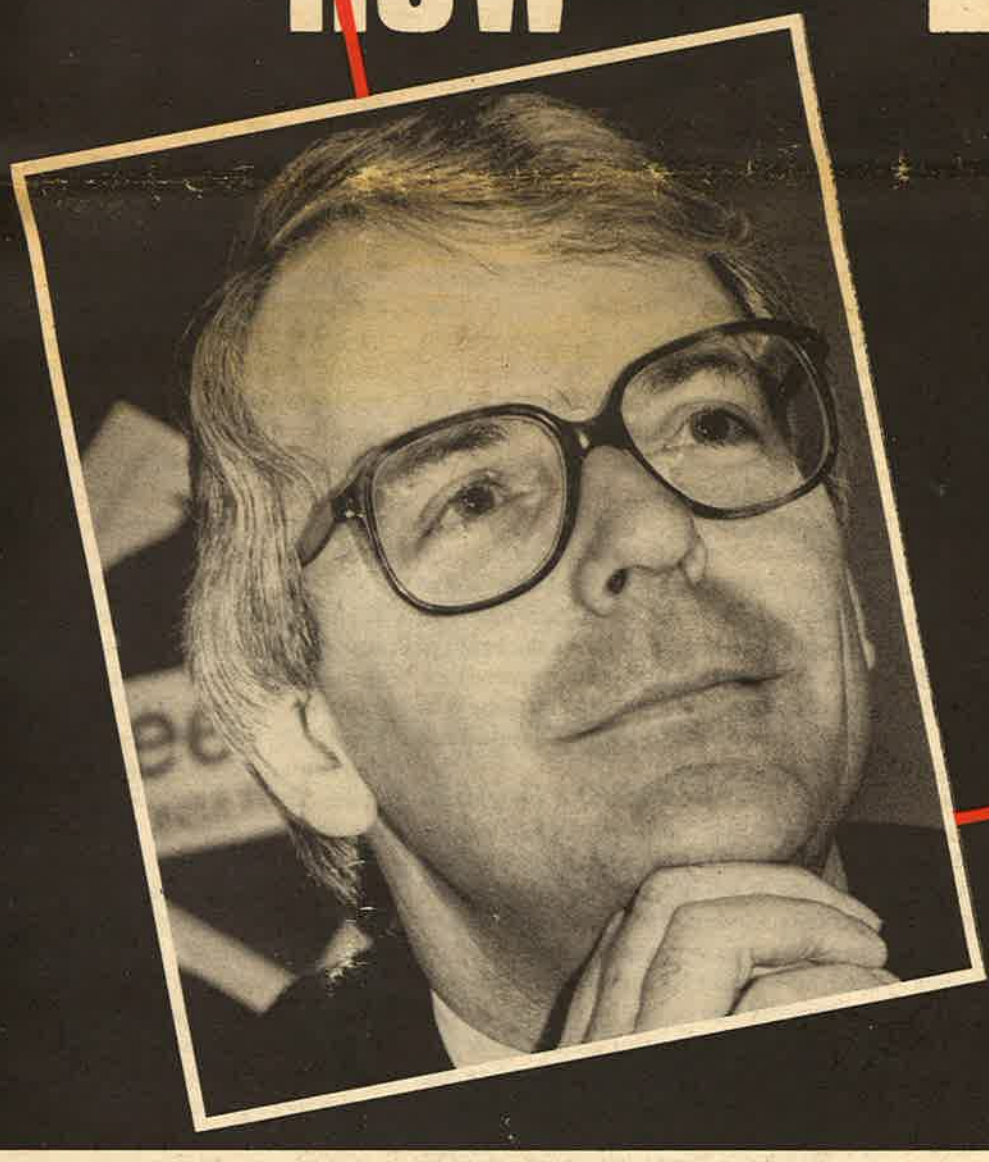

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# Editorial

30 November • No 38

## THE NEW THATCHER IN No 10

**THE 372 TORY MPs in Westminster have ousted Margaret Thatcher only to replace the 'Iron lady' with her poodle. The election reflects the panic and disarray within Tory ranks and their fears of a general election.**

**Tory panic was deep enough to overthrow Thatcher, the longest reigning prime minister this century and one whom most Tory MPs regard as their greatest peacetime leader. But the Tory sheep were not bold enough to defy the men in grey and go for the more flamboyant figure of Michael Heseltine. Instead they settled for the dull grey of a Thatcher clone. The election of John Major represents a loss of nerve by the establishment as it is faced by the gravest crisis in the post-war period.**

**In the election campaign the new prime minister was careful to try to distance himself from Margaret Thatcher and to portray himself as his own man. He emphasised his proletarian origins and his support for the National Health Service and state education. But the notion that the election of John Major as prime minister will mean a return to 'one nation' Toryism underestimates both the legacy of Thatcher and the scale of the economic crisis Britain faces in the nineties.**

**The most important aspect of the Thatcher decade was the establishment of a new consensus around capitalist values (see pages 4 and 5). There is wide support across the political spectrum for Thatcherite ideas such as the efficiency of the market, the necessity for privatisation, the need to muzzle unions, the value of the family and the importance of creating a law and order society. Major has shown over the past decade that he is as determined as Thatcher to impose the measures necessary to try to rescue British capitalism (see page 7). He made his name as a protégé of Nigel Lawson and a tight-fisted treasury secretary. As chancellor he has followed much the same policies as did his predecessors, Lawson and Sir Geoffrey Howe. He is a Thatcherite through and through.**

**What will determine Major's policies is not his dullness or the fact that he left school at the age of 16, but the needs of British capitalism today. The problems faced by the ruling class are even graver than in 1979. The economic crisis is far deeper than when Thatcher first took office. The moves towards the creation of a new international order have marginalised Britain on the world stage. The new occupant of No 10 is faced with a recession already here and a Gulf War set for the new year. The policies of 'Majorism' are likely to be very similar to those of Thatcherism. The insipidness of Major may make him less of a threat to Neil Kinnock, but by consolidating the Tory Party and the establishment behind his policies, he is set to be an even bigger threat to the working class.**

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## WHO GOTCHA?

**THE DOWNFALL OF Margaret Thatcher and the spectacle of the Tories tearing themselves apart in public has been welcomed by millions. Trade unionists, the unemployed, black people, women, lesbians and gays, Irish people and the countless others who have suffered under the savage offensive of the Thatcher regime must have all rejoiced.**

**Over the past two weeks the Conservative Party has looked by turns incompetent, inept and downright ridiculous. Most satisfying of all was the humiliation of Margaret Thatcher. Her squalid, undignified exit at the hands of her closest, most sycophantic supporters exploded the myth of the invincibility of the 'Iron lady' that many on the left have propounded over the past decade.**

**At the same time we need to be clear that she was not overthrown by the strength of the anti-poll tax campaign, a growth in working class resistance or any of the other reasons the left is putting forward. The 'Gotcha!' attitude of the left who want to claim responsibility for Thatcher's demise is patently absurd (see page 3). Thatcher was ousted by the men in grey suits, sections of the same establishment that had brought her to power in the first place, and not by an upsurge in class struggle. They got her, not us. And they got her so that she could be replaced by someone who is better placed to carry out Thatcherite policies. Indeed what the leadership crisis has revealed is not a new wave of resistance but rather the *lack* of class pressure on the Tories. The fact that the Tories can experience their most intense crisis in recent times and still gain in the opinion polls now that John Major is in No10 shows the dangers of the left's fantasies.**

**By claiming responsibility for Thatcher's demise, the left is seeking to create a sense of self-importance by taking credit for events that are clearly beyond its control. It is also trying to evade the responsibility for creating a new movement that can resist the coming Tory offensive. We must reject the wishful thinking and self-delusion that now grips the left. We can only begin to tackle the problems we face if we start with an honest appraisal of where we stand.**

## A BALANCE SHEET FOR THATCHERISM

**WE NEED A balanced assessment, not just of the demise of Thatcher, but also of the main features of the Thatcher decade. Just as in the past the left exaggerated the influence of Thatcherism so it now underestimates the impact of a decade of Tory rule. The key success of the Thatcher years was the destruction of Labourism and the transformation of the Labour Party. The key failure was the inability of the Tories to revive the fortunes of British capitalism.**

**A decade of Thatcherism has reduced the trade unions to a shell and transformed Labour into a middle class centre party with a capitalist programme. But while the most dramatic legacy of Thatcherism has been its impact on the organised labour movement, it is a legacy the left refuses to acknowledge. 'The main aim of the Thatcher government to fundamentally weaken the power of the trade unions has not been achieved', claims the current issue of the Socialist Workers Party journal *International Socialism*. Such a head-in-the-sand attitude reveals how much the left has lost touch with the realities of working class life.**

**The number of workers in trade unions has fallen by three million in the past decade. More importantly, the failure of trade unions to defend their members from the Thatcher onslaught in the eighties has ensured that even those who are in unions have little faith in collective action solving their problems. Union leaders have responded to the decline of their organisations by adapting to Thatcherite policies. Every union accepts that it has to remain within the law, holds ballots before taking action and forswears secondary picketing. The engineers are negotiating wage cuts and have abandoned the fight for a shorter week. John Edmonds of the GMB offered to negotiate a wages policy with the Tories—and was rebuffed. The left is so desperate to portray itself in a positive light that it refuses to see the impact of the Thatcher years on the lives of working class people.**

**At the same time, the onset of the recession demonstrates the failure of the Tory government to reverse the decline of the British economy. Soaring inflation and interest rates, a yawning trade gap, record bankruptcies, plummeting investment and productivity and the decimation of manufacturing industry have all exposed the myth of the Tory 'economic miracle'. Britain is now even more exposed to the vagaries of the world economy. Entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism and closer ties to the dynamic German economy can only exacerbate problems for Britain.**

**For John Major, the only response to economic decline will be the imposition of more austerity and repression. The new Tory government will inevitably breed resistance. This demonstrates both the possibility and the necessity for a new opposition movement to take on Thatcherism in the nineties. Such a movement will not be built through talking up struggles that do not exist or pretending that working class resistance has been responsible for Tory problems. Rather we need to recognise the failure of Labourism and the movements of the past and the need to build a new opposition on new foundations.**

## LABOUR SHADOWS

**PERHAPS THE BIGGEST loser in the Tory leadership contest, apart from Margaret Thatcher herself, is Neil Kinnock. He has been unable to exploit the slightest advantage from the Tory turmoil. His lamentable speech during the no confidence debate last week must go down as one of the most insipid and inept parliamentary performances in recent memory. The Labour Party might as well have not existed for all the impact it has made in the past month. The contrast between Labour's performance as the Tories tear themselves apart and the glee with which the Tories stuck the knife in when Labour faced similar problems in the mid-eighties is striking.**

**Kinnock's manifest failure has led to questions about his own leadership. If the Tories can divest themselves of their electoral liability, many Labour MPs are asking, why can't Labour do the same? Bryan Gould—the Heseltine of the Labour Party who has been sidelined by Kinnock—has been loudest in grumbling about Kinnock's performance.**

**The replacement of Kinnock by shadow cabinet heavyweights like John Smith, Gordon Brown or even Gould himself would give Labour a bit more substance. All three could probably give the invisible Major the runaround in parliamentary debate. But they would not be able to solve the fundamental problem facing the Labour Party—its inability to find a clear identity in today's political climate. Under the impact of Thatcherism Labour has ditched its Labourist heritage but it has not established a new role for itself. It has stolen the Tory programme and resurrected itself as a junior capitalist party. But in doing so it has made itself virtually indistinguishable from the Tories. Labour's one claim to support was that it was not led by Margaret Thatcher. Now that the Tories are no longer led by Thatcher either, public support has swung back to the Conservatives.**

**The abysmal performance of Labour confirms the point made in past issues of *the next step* that while the leadership debacle has been very damaging for the Tories it has not necessarily boosted the fortunes of the Labour Party. Indeed with the Tories' surge in the opinion polls, they could be even better placed to win the next election.**

**The Labour Party is not alone in its narrow anti-Thatcherism. For the past decade the left has defined itself through its opposition to Thatcher. Now that she has departed the scene, the left has found itself floundering. At the same time the left has pinned its hopes on a Labour victory at the next election. That too is looking much less likely now.**

**The narrow anti-Thatcherism of the left and its failure to break from the Labour Party has meant that the working class has been forced to sit on the sidelines during one of the most intense periods of political debate in Britain in recent years. The debate about the policies of 'post-Thatcherism' has taken place entirely within Tory ranks. Our task is to broaden the debate and tackle the real problems facing our class today. That is the only way we can help to resurrect working class resistance and ensure that we can begin to take advantage of the crisis now gripping the British establishment.**

# After Thatcher

THATCHERISM AND THE LEFT

# MAGGIE, MAGGIE, MAGGIE

**The left's capacity for self-delusion has reached new heights, writes James Heartfield**

SIMON NORFOLK


**The left celebrates outside Downing Street—is this the campaign that faced down Thatcher?**

'Gotcha!' declared the front-page headline in last week's *Socialist Worker*. Most people thought that Margaret Thatcher had been brought down by the men in grey suits. The British left thought otherwise in its eagerness to claim credit for itself. According to *Socialist Worker:* 'The last three years have seen a growing mood of resistance to the government', and this 'has been an important factor in bringing the Tory crisis'. (24 November 1990)

*Militant* was even more explicit: 'The All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, with *Militant* supporters in leading positions, has done what Labour's leadership never did over 11 years—ended the reign of the evil Empress of Downing Street.' (23 November 1990) At last week's rally against the threat of war in the Gulf, Tony Benn delighted the crowd by reciting a litany of struggles from Greenham Common to the miners and printers, to which he attributed the defeat of Thatcher.

For any objective observer of British politics it would be difficult to discern the upsurge in the class struggle in recent months that is supposed to have deposed the Tory leader. Strikes are still at a low-point and even the anti-poll tax campaign has lost momentum since the introduction of the tax in England in April.

**It is fairly obvious that Thatcher's departure was the result of panic in the Tory establishment and a loss of confidence in their erstwhile leader by Tory *MPs fearful for their seats* in the forthcoming general election.**

The left's childish rejoicing in the outcome of parliamentary cabals is typical of its long-established desire to reap where it has not sown, to take credit for events which lie outside its influence. In its recent invention of an upsurge in the class struggle it has reached new depths of self-deception. Before looking at the contribution of the poll tax to Thatcher's downfall, it is first worth recalling the left's own role in Thatcher's decade-long domination of British politics.

## Academics

The term 'Thatcherism' was coined by sociology professor Stuart Hall, writing in *Marxism Today* before Thatcher's 1979 election victory. Hall characterised Thatcherism as a hegemonic ideology whose popular appeal explained its promulgator's ascendancy over British society. Hall argued that Thatcher's distinctive synthesis of economic liberalism and traditional conservatism won widespread resonance among working class people who were enjoying rising living standards and wider consumer choice, buying houses, owning shares and abandoning old-style collectivism for upwardly mobile individualism. Hall's thesis was supplemented in the same journal by historian Eric Hobsbawm's argument that the declining proportion of manual workers explained growing working class indifference to Labourism.

On pages 4 and 5 we assess Thatcherism's claim to ideological distinctiveness. Here we question its popular appeal. Numerous opinion surveys, culminating in the recent British Social Attitudes survey, have failed to demonstrate any significant increase in the popularity of some of the key propositions of Thatcherism (R Jowell, S Witherspoon and L Brook, (eds), *British Social Attitudes*, 1990). For example, the survey shows a decline in support for tax cuts which are at the expense of increased public spending on welfare, growing opposition to privatising measures in health and education, and little enthusiasm for entrepreneurial philosophies in general. Thatcher's election victories were achieved on a minority of the electorate, thanks to a divided and ineffectual opposition, not as the result of a tide of popular enthusiasm for her programme. Hobsbawm cannot explain why a shift from manufacturing to services should lead workers to reject Labourism, or why a parallel change in the structure of the working class in France should coincide with a decade of Socialist rule.

**The real reason why Thatcher came to power in 1979 and stayed there for the next decade was working class disillusionment with Labour.**

The experience of Labour in power in the seventies and in opposition in the eighties made workers question the capacity of their traditional organisations to defend them against the impact of recession. It was disgust with the Labour Party and the trade unions, not enthusiasm for Thatcherism, that led workers to withdraw support from Labour, some in favour of centre parties, some in favour of the Tories. The real function of the theory of Thatcherism was that it enabled the left to evade responsibility for this debacle.

It is important to recall that it was the left, especially academics around *Marxism Today*, who formulated the 'left alternative economic strategy' which became Labour's programme in the seventies and played a central role in the demoralisation of the working class that followed. It is also worth recalling that the same left wingers who embraced the theory of Thatcherism in the early eighties carried on spouting the same old programme of economic nationalism, state planning and withdrawal from the EEC right up to Labour's 1983 humiliation at the polls. The advantage of the Thatcherism theory for its proponents is that, rather than blaming Labour and the left for the success of Thatcher, it allows the radical intelligentsia to blame the working class for voting Tory. This also explains the popularity of the theory among those sections of the liberal middle classes who have become alienated by the abrasive policies of the Thatcher regime.

## Burning effigies

In the mid-eighties the left discreetly abandoned its old programme and began to select elements of a new one—from Thatcherism itself! By 1988 Hall was advising readers of *Marxism Today* to 'learn from Thatcherism' about the 'greater flexibility, flow of information, the maximisation of choice which the market signals'. Hall and his editor Martin Jacques have encouraged the Labour Party down the road towards Kinnock's final abandonment of all its distinctive policies in favour of a modified Tory programme. In the current issue of *Marxism Today* Hall and Jacques link up to congratulate Kinnock on holding an annual conference which is now 'more effectively disciplined and stage-managed than the Tory conference'.

**Thus the theory of Thatcherism has played its part in the transformation of Labour into a pale image of Thatcher's Conservative Party.**

The theory of Thatcherism was never universally accepted on the British left. The Socialist Workers Party, for example, recognised that, far from being popular, the Thatcher government was widely detested:

'There is real hatred for this Tory government. At the same time this hatred is accompanied by a very widespread impotence. There is a fantastic abyss between the feeling and the action. And to bridge this abyss it is necessary to raise the level of hatred to a higher level.' (Tony Cliff, *Socialist Worker*, 17 May 1980).

Rather than trying to redirect workers' hatred of the Tories into a wider rejection of capitalist society, however, the SWP restricted it to burning effigies of Thatcher. Whenever resistance erupted against the Tory government, the SWP gave out more anti-Thatcher placards and ignored the continuing influence of old-fashioned Labourism over the direction of the action. The miners' strike was the classic example. The result was that the abyss between feeling and action widened and the sense of impotence intensified.

## Backing Heseltine?

In an attempt to explain Thatcher's success, the SWP produced its own version of the Hall/Hobsbawm thesis—the theory of the 'downturn'. According to this interpretation, the recession undermined working class confidence, reducing the scale of industrial action and thus giving the political initiative to the Tories. In 1987 Donny Gluckstein explained that 'as the political effect of the miners' strike waned and the industrial downturn deepened once more, Labour resumed its weak position in the opinion polls' (*Socialist Worker Review*, 1 June 1987). With this theory it is difficult to explain how Labour has managed to stay way ahead in the opinion polls over the past 12 months despite a record low level of industrial action. The more important consequence is that the SWP blamed declining militancy rather than the politics of Labourism for the continued ascendancy of Thatcher.

Earlier this year the SWP gave up waiting for the upturn in the trade union sphere and identified the wave of protests over the poll tax as the long-anticipated revival of the class struggle. Militant too turned to make the poll tax the central focus of its work. There was certainly virtually universal public hostility to the poll tax and demonstrations against it attracted growing crowds. Yet the very breadth of the hostility to the poll tax reflected its political softness. The fact that people resented paying an onerous tax did not necessarily imply any wider opposition to the capitalist system. Indeed opponents of the tax included dissident Tories, the police federation and many other staunch defenders of the existing order. In the absence of any influential anti-capitalist movement capable of giving political direction to this diffuse sentiment it was inevitable that it would be dissipated. The big Trafalgar Square demonstration in March ended in a riot, but it did not lead to any wider movement against the tax. Indeed the existing movement fragmented and lost momentum; the recent follow-up march was much smaller and less militant.

**The revival of the poll tax as an issue in the course of the Tory leadership election is not the result of any upsurge in the anti-poll tax campaign.**

On the contrary it is in decline. Before the leadership crisis erupted it was announced that more than 90 per cent of people have paid at least some of their poll tax. In many areas the rates are even higher and in some of the inner London boroughs, where payment rates are lowest, notices have only recently been sent out. Though people were already being intimidated by summonses and threatened with bailiffs and fines, local protests have declined. The left too had begun to recognise that, though the poll tax remained unpopular, as an issue it was in decline. After the recent demonstration Militant announced it was putting off further national protests until March. The SWP acknowledged that 'there may not be any obvious focus for that anger [against the Tories] as there was...with the poll tax in the spring' (*Socialist Worker,* 13 October 1990).

Yet once Heseltine had taken up the poll tax to broaden his platform in the leadership struggle, the SWP discovered 'signs of renewed protest against the tax around the country', and concluded that 'it's this anger that's behind the Tory splits' (*Socialist Worker*, 24 November 1990). In fact, the revolt of the Tory voters of Eastbourne in the October by-election, delivering a safe seat to the Liberals, had a bigger impact on the leadership than all the left's anti-poll tax demonstrations. All the Tory leadership candidates have since committed themselves to a review of the poll tax, but their concern will be to reassure Tory voters rather than to make local government taxation more equitable.

On the night of Thatcher's resignation 300 left wingers gathered in Trafalgar Square to celebrate their part in her downfall. The fact that a change from one reactionary representative of the ruling class to another should be an occasion for celebration is a measure of the left's desperation and its capacity for self-deception.

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## Mike Freeman argues that there was nothing i in destroyin

According to their prejudices, commentators are mourning or celebrating the end of the rule of the most 'ideological' Tory leader of modern times. But if there is to be a return to some form of consensus politics under her successor, it will not be a return to the consensus of the seventies, but to one remoulded through the Thatcher years.

For the Tory right Margaret Thatcher's departure is perceived as a bitter defeat. Thatcher was long the hero of the Conservative Party's constituency members and of right-wing MPs like Norman Tebbit, Nicholas Ridley, David Waddington and Teresa Gorman, who articulate the reactionary views of Essex Man and Woman in the house of commons. With her roots in that grocer's shop in Grantham, Thatcher instinctively identified with the petit-bourgeois prejudices of the Tory Party conference—all the way to her personal endorsement of hanging. Not only was she pro-market and anti-trade union, pro-British and anti-foreign, and in favour of law and order against all sorts of deviants, but she was also determined to force through the agenda of the right against resistance from any quarter. Bereft of a real successor, the right is now obliged to rally round the insipid figure of John Major as the inheritor of the Thatcher mantle.

### Old guard

The Tory mainstream, by contrast, is relieved to see the back of the prime minister of 11 years. Thatcher was never really accepted by grandees like Peter Carrington and Willie Whitelaw or by centrist figures like James Prior or Geoffrey Howe. The hostility stemmed partly from their distaste for her abrasive style and partly, as Prior quite openly concedes, because they could not abide being subordinate to a woman. The men in grey suits claim to promote a different brand of Toryism, one which is ready to temper economic liberalism with traditional paternalism, and which emphasises consultation and conciliation instead of confrontation and conflict. There is considerable resonance for this approach in the institutions of the British establishment which have felt harshly treated by the Thatcher regime—from the Whitehall machine, through the Church of England to the BBC, the universities, and the legal and medical professions. Douglas Hurd, old Etonian and career diplomat, is the old guard's natural candidate for the succession and for a return to pragmatism and the pursuit of consensus.

However, before we can pursue further the question of the future of the Tory Party, it is necessary first to clarify the legacy of Margaret Thatcher. How distinctive was her philosophical and political outlook? How far was she successful in implementing her radical programme? What was the secret of her success? What precipitated her downfall?

### Old consensus

Thatcher was not such a unique political figure. In terms of her broad political programme there was little to distinguish her from any Tory leader this century and her differences with mainstream Toryism were much more of style than substance. Indeed policies very similar to those of the Thatcher government have been implemented throughout the world over the past decade, by socialist governments in France and Spain as well as by conservative regimes in the USA and West Germany. All Western governments have presided over mass unemployment, imposed cuts in public services and introduced privatisation. They have tightened up law and order, curbed trade union activities and promoted traditional moral values. The capitalist offensive is not the property of any nation or party or individual. It is the consequence of the economic crisis which has afflicted the capitalist world, with varying degrees of intensity for close to two decades.

**Thatcher was distinguished by her forcefulness and her effectiveness and by the fact that her crusade was a radical departure from the norms of post-war Britain.**

In the post-war decades the Tories were constrained by the legacy of the thirties and forties. As a result of slump and war, the capitalist system and the Conservative Party, which was largely responsible for running it through these years, were gravely discredited. The Tories were forced to acknowledge the necessity for extensive state intervention in industry and social services and to acknowledge too the need to consult with organised labour. The British establishment managed its affairs through a political framework which brought together representatives of the state, the employers and the unions in a variety of institutions designed to establish joint responsibility for running the system. Consensus politics relied upon the involvement of labour in the management of British capitalism.

In return for supporting the broad objectives of the capitalist class, the leadership of the labour movement received concessions and status. In these years the employers and successive governments built up the trade union leadership as a means of containing conflict in industry. The aim of consensus politics was to forge a common approach on most of the key political questions facing British capitalism and to limit class conflict to the narrow sphere of wage negotiation. This arrangement suited the official labour leadership perfectly. The TUC established a cosy relationship with the employers, and the union leaders became closely involved with the promotion of government policies. The establishment accepted the official labour movement as a legitimate institution of the realm, and union leaders won unprecedented status for services to the state. This newfound influence had a profound effect on the labour leadership, which became increasingly reliant on its connections with the state. All its demands—for nationalisation, incomes policy and welfare reforms—assumed state intervention.

### Decisive break

Consensus politics reached their peak under the 1974-79 Labour government. However, the failure of the 'Social Contract' to enable British capitalists to overcome the effects of long-term decline and the onset of recession forced them to seek a new strategy. At the same time workers' experience of declining living standards, rising unemployment and welfare cuts provoked growing disillusionment with the trade unions and the Labour Party. Disgust with traditional Labourism helped Thatcher to victory in 1979. Thatcher's victory represented a revival of the authentic voice of Tory reaction which had been muted in the post-war world.

**The election of the Conservative government in 1979 and the subsequent deepening of recession led to a decisive break with consensus politics.**

The capitalist class could no longer afford to let the state prop up unprofitable enterprises or maintain social services. Thatcher's programme corresponded to the employers' need to shake out industry and cut welfare spending. The labour bureaucrats now became an obstacle as the establishment moved to bring compromise to an end in favour of a more direct form of class rule. Thatcher was the personification of this approach.

### 'Iron lady'

Many politicians who were used to the old methods could see little sense in Thatcher's aggressive class approach. Even Tory wets brought up on the culture of 'one nation' were shocked by the callousness of her government. The leaders of the labour movement were stunned—after more than 30 years of being made welcome in the corridors of power they were now given the cold shoulder. Thatcher's approach shattered a generation of union officials whose whole world was defined by consultations and negotiations. Thatcher's harsh demeanour as the 'Iron Lady' reflected the extreme solutions required to overcome the precarious state of British capitalism.

In fact Thatcher moved cautiously, concentrating her forces against one target before going on to the next. Her first main set-piece battle was against the steelworkers in 1980 and the last major showdown with the miners in 1984-85. In between there were disputes with civil servants, printworkers, the ban on trade unions at GCHQ and a series of anti-union laws which prepared the ground by strengthening the appeal of reactionary solutions.

**One of the Tories' major achievements in the early eighties was in making 'union power' an object of public animosity and in generally cultivating a chauvinistic and individualistic outlook.**

While unemployment soared, the government managed to deflect criticism by setting an agenda of public debate about the trade unions, law and order and extremism in the Labour Party. Thatcher's defeat of the miners marked the triumph of the new form of class relations. For the first time since the Second World War the state intervened directly to break a strike, using the full powers of the police, the courts and even the social security system.

Speaking in a television discussion with Tory and Labour politicians and industrialists on the night after Thatcher's withdrawal from the leadership election, Norman Tebbit observed that it was a great tribute to the Thatcher era that there was no representative of the TUC around the table as there certainly would have been in 1979. In the Thatcher decade the unions lost one third of their members and much of their former status. Whereas in 1979 more than 29m working days were lost in strikes, in 1989 the figure was four million. Though Thatcher leaves office with the economy in an even worse state than it was when she came in, she can legitimately claim the subjugation of the unions as her greatest achievement on behalf of British capital. How did she manage it?

The key to Thatcher's success over the labour movement was her effectiveness in defining the political agenda. It was not just that she beat Labour in three general elections. She also forced Neil Kinnock and his team to accept many of her policies. The endorsement of the policy review document *Looking to the Future* at the 1990 Labour conference signalled the final abandonment of the radical 'left alternative economic strategy' of the seventies. Labour has abandoned nationalisation, unilateral nuclear disarmament and opposition to Europe—its three distinctive policies up to 1983. Kinnock now accepts the need for indefinite mass unemployment, anti-union legislation and tougher law and order measures. He supports the police, Nato and the armed forces (even armed with nuclear weapons).

In fact, Labour's responsibility for the promotion of Thatcherism goes far beyond adopting Tory prejudices in the eighties. Even as Labour promoted the policies of consensus in the sixties and seventies it played a vital role in preparing the way for Thatcher. For example, it was Harold Wilson's Labour government in the sixties that first stirred up anti-union prejudice by blaming militancy for Britain's poor economic performance. Things went further under the Wilson/Callaghan governments in the seventies. The idea behind the Social Contract was that working class people should accept responsibility for the future of the British economy. Labour and union leaders promoted the view that working class action would damage the economy unless the unions accepted the need to make sacrifices. By introducing cuts in public spending, Labour helped to create a climate in which the legitimacy of state intervention in welfare could be questioned. Labour ministers began to identify the capitalist market with freedom of choice, thus opening the way for the rhetoric of the 'right to buy' which Thatcher pursued from council houses to GP surgeries.

Nor did Labour confine its propaganda initiatives to economic issues. In 1974 it introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was used to harass thousands of Irish people and helped to foster the atmosphere in which the fiction of 'international terrorism' could gain currency. In 1977 the Labour government drew up a green paper demanding tighter controls over immigration, which Thatcher subsequently implemented as the 1981 Nationality Act. The Victorian values which Thatcher was to make her own were originally a central theme of James *Callaghan's appeal for public sympathy.* In 1977 he declared that his aim was 'to strengthen the stability and quality of family life'. Thatcher's morality was already firmly on the agenda long before the Tories were elected to office.

After T

# A NEW CONSENSUS

## unique about Thatcherism—except its success
## g Labourism

**By softening up the working class, Labour enabled the Thatcher era to get off to a flying start.**

Thatcher could not simply carry on where Labour had left off. The scale of the problems facing British capitalism demanded a more aggressive attack on the working class and a shift in the balance of class forces in favour of the employers. From the outset Thatcher understood that the kind of drastic austerity programme required was likely to provoke hostility and resistance. She concluded that to minimise the instability caused by her policies, it was necessary to mobilise as much popular support as possible around selected themes—trade union power, left-wing extremism, law and order, British chauvinism and family values. Thatcher's propaganda war skilfully exploited fears and insecurities arising from the recession.


Despite the devastating impact of *industrial collapse in the early eighties*, Thatcher succeeded in cultivating a climate of reaction around her chosen issues. However, she did not get things all her own way. The pace of de-industrialisation and rising unemployment provoked a storm of protest and by 1981 even sections of the Tory Party were expressing alarm at the scale of the devastation. Thatcher herself became deeply hated and mistrusted not only by workers but also by many middle class people. Yet, she managed to keep a grip on the situation. For this she owes a debt of gratitude to the Labour Party.

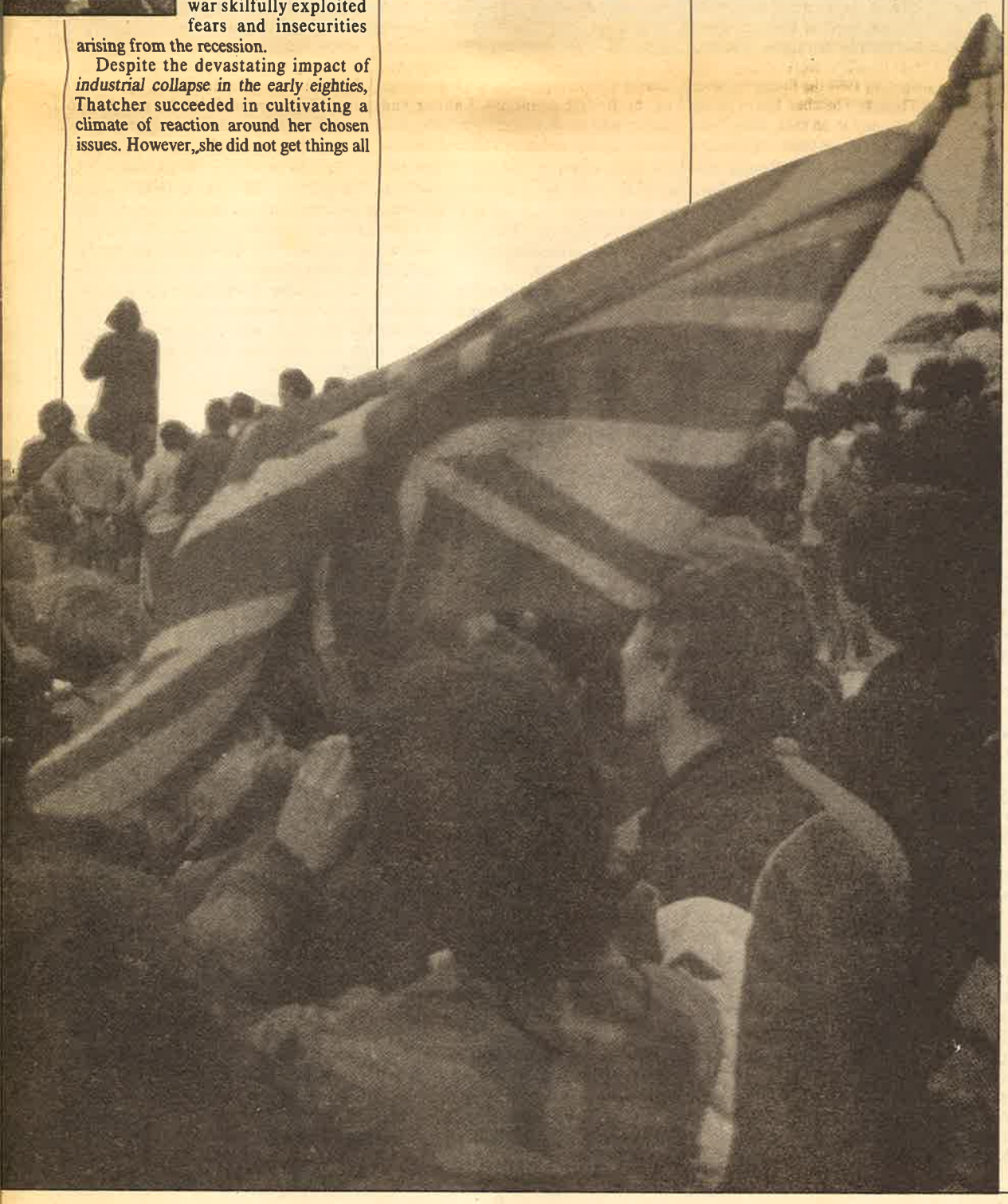
Although Thatcher faced widespread criticism she never faced a coherent alternative. The Labour Party could do nothing to make unemployment or welfare cuts into a political issue. Labour's criticisms of the Tories lacked conviction because Wilson and Callaghan had carried out similar measures with similar results when they were in office. Labour's alternative policies had been so far discredited by experience that the Tories had no problems in savaging them. In the absence of any apparent political alternative, unemployment was increasingly accepted as an unpleasant fact of life.

The opposition's arguments against Thatcher's policies had the effect of confirming their legitimacy. Labour based its criticisms of the Tories on the grounds that their policies violated the 'national interest'. Instead of putting forward a strategy which sought to defend the working class against the capitalists, Labour spokesmen argued that it was possible to revive British industry and at the same time protect the interests of workers. Labour suggested that profits could be restored, living standards maintained and jobs preserved—all at the same time.

**In fact, capitalist industry could only achieve profitability if it made workers redundant, forced those remaining in work to work harder and cut back welfare benefits and services.**

By suggesting that it was possible to reconcile the interests of workers and capitalists through a different set of policies for running industry, Labour persuaded workers to identify with the state of their industry instead of class interests. Unions which took responsibility for the future of their industry were disarmed when they were told that the survival of their factories required job losses and redundancies.

From Norman Willis to Arthur Scargill, from Denis Healey to Tony Benn, all sections of the official labour movement could only speak in terms of the national interest. But appeals to the interest of the nation, even from the left, could not challenge the Tories. This approach could only strengthen the nationalist outlook in the labour movement and weaken class identity. It also played into Thatcher's hands: she could simply declare that the trade unions were the divisive force in the national community and announce new anti-union measures in the national interest.



## 'Enemy within'

While the opposition protested ineffectually that Thatcher's economic policy was devastating the nation, she pressed ahead with her propaganda campaign. The Falklands War in 1982 provided the perfect opportunity to consolidate the emerging reactionary consensus. At a time when Thatcher was leading the nation into battle, Labour whines about her supposedly unpatriotic policies sounded pathetic indeed. The new spirit of national unity against Argentina allowed Thatcher to ride the storm of protest about unemployment and win a landslide electoral victory in 1983. It is important to emphasise that the influence of what became known as the 'Falklands Factor' cannot be reduced to one episode of militarism. Thatcher was able to use the war to good effect because of her earlier promotion of chauvinist prejudice on a wide range of issues, and because of the popular nationalistic culture encouraged by the leadership of the official labour movement. The 'enemy within' already existed in the popular consciousness long before Thatcher pinned the label on the striking miners in 1984.

Thatcher's twin-track strategy of forcing through the unpopular measures dictated by the needs of capital while deflecting opposition by promoting a new reactionary consensus carried her through to victory again in 1987. During the election campaign Labour was forced to keep quiet about defence in case its patriotic credentials were challenged by the Tories.

**Even though millions feared for a future of rising unemployment and growing poverty, they were also distracted by scares about 'loony left' councils, crime and hooliganism, child abuse and Aids and a host of other diversions popularised by the Thatcher government.**

Three years after her third electoral triumph, the re-emergence of recession exposed the exhaustion of the Thatcherite project. Back in 1985 she proclaimed her goal in characteristically direct terms:

'I have always regarded part of my job as—and please do not think of it in an arrogant way—killing socialism in Britain.'

After 1987 she discovered that 'killing socialism', destroying the influence of the official labour movement and discrediting collective solutions to social problems, was not enough to revive the fortunes of British capitalism. With some assistance from her good friend Mikhail Gorbachev, Thatcher achieved the goal that had eluded her predecessors, only to discover that Britain could still not compete on the world market and was forced to renegotiate its relations from a position of weakness with an increasingly powerful Europe.

## Out of step

Thatcher's policies at home became increasingly irrational continuations of earlier successes. But what was the point of more anti-union legislation when everybody could see that the unions had been reduced to a harmless shell? What was the purpose of privatising water and electricity if this would not reduce monopoly or stimulate enterprise or competition? Why pursue the vendetta against local government to the extent of introducing a poll tax that is almost universally resented? Thatcher's promotion of market reforms in education and health seemed both to professionals and to consumers more likely to make existing problems even worse. Thatcher's crass chauvinist outbursts at European summits and her constant over-politicisation of negotiations over steps towards closer integration not only antagonised European leaders and ministerial colleagues, but appeared increasingly at variance with the interests of the British capitalist class and the mood of the middle classes.

**All these problems resulted in a growing fear that the Tories might lose the next election and created such a panic in the Tory leadership that the events leading to last week's dramatic resignation acquired a momentum of their own.**

As Thatcher leaves office, it is not yet three years since Nigel Lawson's budget speech proclaiming the 'economic miracle' of the Thatcher years. Yet her failure to arrest the long-term decline of British capitalism is inescapable. In 1979 the growth rate was 2.8 per cent; today it is 2.1 per cent. Both inflation and interest rates are higher. Then 3.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) was invested in manufacturing, now the figure is 2.4 per cent. The trade deficit has soared from £549m to £19 billion. After all the rhetoric about tax and public spending cuts, she leaves a tax burden of 37 per cent of GDP, compared with 34 per cent in 1979, and even higher public spending. Even allowing for all the fiddling of the figures, unemployment now stands at 1.67m, compared with 1.09m in 1979. Thatcher presided over the stock market boom and the stock market crash, over the rise of the yuppie and the estate agent and the return of beggars and vagrants to city streets on a scale not seen since the end of the Napoleonic wars.

## The new consensus

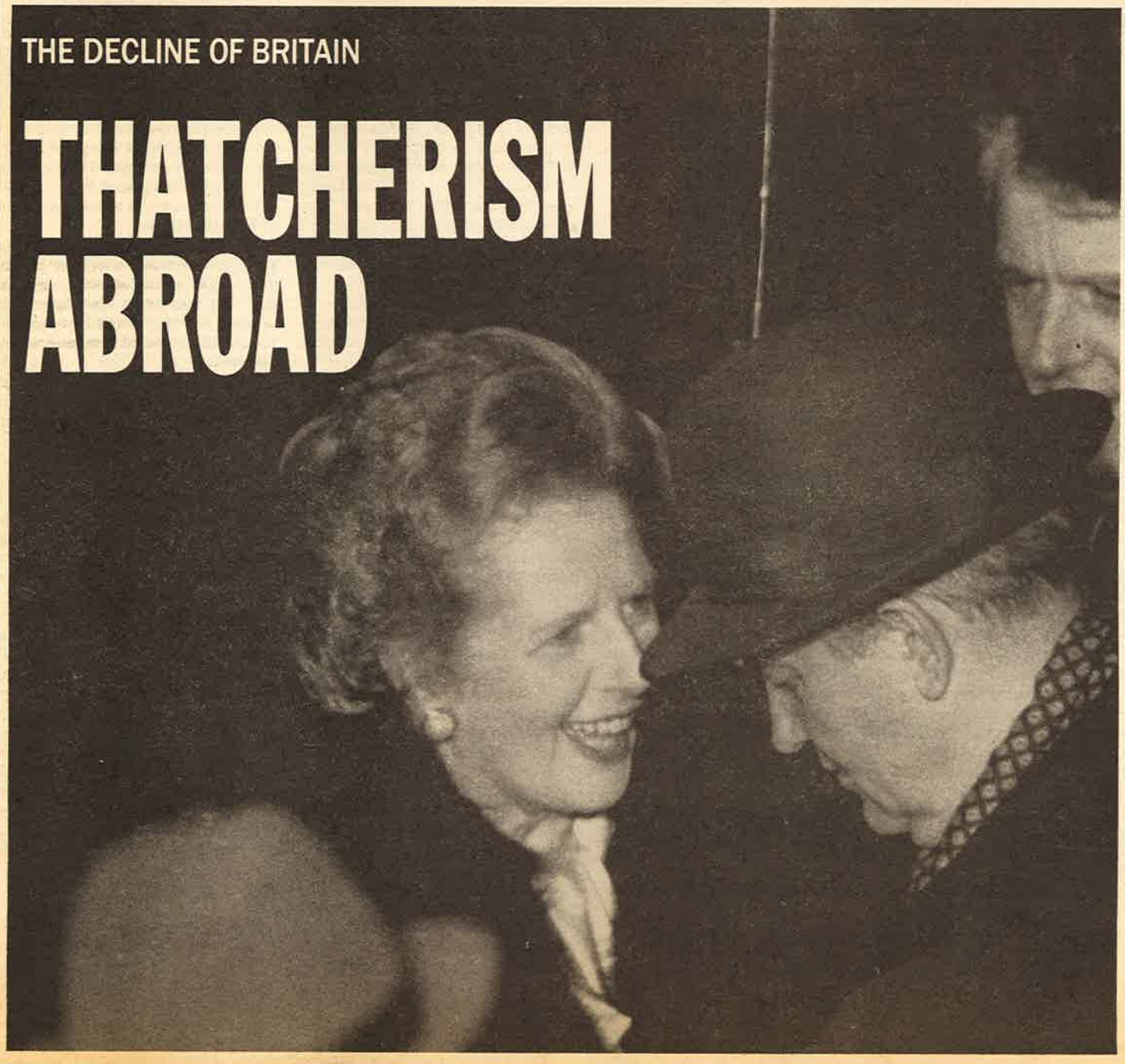
All the contenders to the Thatcher succession proclaim a commitment to unify the party and the nation. All the commentators who felt uneasy about Thatcher's abrasive style hail a return to consensus politics. In the sense that there is little policy difference among the three front runners, and the fact that both Margaret Thatcher and John Smith have identified close similarities between Labour's programme and that of Michael Heseltine (though some observers consider Heseltine more left-wing than Kinnock), consensus does indeed seem about to break out in British politics. But this is not a consensus that would be recognised by Harold Wilson or Edward Heath, let alone by Hugh Gaitskell or RA Butler. Under the new consensus, all parties accept the ascendancy of market forces over state intervention, the inevitability of mass unemployment and growing poverty, the criminalisation of trade union militancy, the legitimacy of British military intervention in the Middle East and a general shift in public morality away from the permissiveness and experimentation of the sixties towards the more repressive and austere values of the eighties. This consensus is the legacy of Thatcher, bolstered every step of the way by the spinelessness of Labourism, to the 1990s.

Thatcher succeeded in killing socialism in so far as she destroyed the strategy of alleviating the miseries of capitalist society through piecemeal reforms introduced through pressure on the capitalist state mediated by the institutions of Labourism. These institutions are now moribund and this strategy utterly discredited. Yet the fact that Thatcher ultimately failed to revive British capitalism means that her successors, notwithstanding their emollient statements this week, will have to return to this task with a renewed offensive against the working class.

'Popular capitalism' has proved a grotesque failure; capitalism is certain to become more and more unpopular in the 1990s. This tendency creates the objective potential for the revival of socialism, not in the sense of a return to Labourism but as a strategy for overthrowing capitalist society through the agency of the working class, led by a revolutionary party. Though Thatcher triumphed over the old labour movement in the eighties, she has cleared the decks for the emergence of a new working class movement in the nineties. The rest is up to us.

THE DECLINE OF BRITAIN

# THATCHERISM ABROAD



***Margaret Thatcher's megaphone diplomacy was a last-ditch attempt to stave off the consequences of British decline, argues Kenan Malik***

## After Thatcher

'Beyond these shores', said the *Daily Telegraph* of Margaret Thatcher, 'she is the most admired British leader since Sir Winston Churchill' (23 November 1990). Many share this view of Thatcher as a 'colossus that bestrode the modern world'. Over the past week politicians and pundits have painted a picture of the former prime minister as a leader of world stature, who restored Britain to its rightful place in the international arena. Without Thatcher in No10, they say, Britain's international standing will be diminished. 'We will not see her like again', waxed the *Telegraph*.

There is an element of truth in these claims. A prime minister for more than 11 years, Thatcher was by the end of her decade in power the most senior of world leaders. Her longevity and her domination of domestic politics allied with her forceful style gave Britain a louder voice in international affairs than might have otherwise been the case. There is little question that whoever takes residence in No10 this week will lack both the authority and the conviction that made Thatcher such a powerful international figure.

That being said, however, Britain's diminished role in the nineties will have little to do with Thatcher's departure. The end of the Cold War and the transformation of international politics that has taken place over the past year have already deprived Britain of its former role on the international stage. It is not that Thatcher's departure is undermining British interests abroad. Rather it was her inability to respond to Britain's changing role in world affairs that helped undermine her.

**During the Thatcher years, Britain made a last-ditch attempt to maintain its inflated position in the world.**

The international order built after the Second World War gave Britain an influence in world politics out of all proportion to its real economic power. Britain's elevated position within organisations like the International Monetary Fund and Nato, its 'special relationship' with America and its ties with the Commonwealth all gave the impression that Britain was a world power, second only to the USA.

### Xenophobe

By the late seventies the view that Britain was a power of the first rank had already been gravely undermined. Japan and Germany were the new aspiring superpowers. Britain had all but lost its influence over the Commonwealth. In Europe, France and even Italy began challenging British influence.

Thatcher personified Britain's attempt to cling on to the vestiges of power. Four aspects of British foreign policy over the past decade exemplify the Thatcher approach: the pursuit of the Cold War, the 'special relationship' with America, the obdurate refusal to countenance European integration, and the aggressive response to Argentina's invasion of the Falklands. Each was a product not of Thatcher's personality traits but of Britain's attempt to stave off the political impact of economic decline.

No other Western leader in recent years, with the possible exception of Ronald Reagan, has been so identified with the Cold War. Even before she came to power in 1979 the Soviet press had dubbed Thatcher the 'Iron Lady'. Thatcher was belligerent in her defence of Nato, even more so than US spokesmen. She was hawkish in her refusal to consider arms reductions or nuclear disarmament. Her insistence on the deployment of American Cruise missiles in Britain reinforced her image as *the* Cold Warrior.

**The 'Iron Lady' posture was a recognition of the importance of the Cold War in sustaining the post-war order and Britain's position in it.**

British strategists knew that so long as the world was divided into East and West the post-war institutions which underpinned British influence would survive. The close relationship with America was underwritten by similar considerations.

Many have attributed the warmth of the relationship between London and Washington to the warm rapport between Thatcher and Reagan. Others have argued that it was the continuation of the historic 'special relationship' between the two countries. In fact it was a pragmatic response by two countries both of whose fortunes were on the decline.

Like Britain America too was a beneficiary of the post-war order. It entered the eighties still the unquestioned leader of the Western world, but with its power on the wane. The 'special relationship' of the eighties was the product of the attempt by both countries to prolong their political privileges. The decline in America's economic power meant that it had to militarise international relations, rallying its Western partners through the promotion of the Cold War and the arms race. It was a strategy that provoked dissent in Europe, where Germany in particular was establishing new links with the Eastern bloc. America used Britain to shore up support, thus cementing the relationship between London and Washington.

In her refusal to countenance European integration, Thatcher expressed a visceral dislike of foreigners in general, and of Germans in particular. But Britain's tense relationship with Europe was not simply the result of the prime minister's xenophobia. It was a product both of Britain's decline and of its attempt to come to terms with the consequences of that decline.

The 'Europe debate' has raged in British ruling circles throughout the post-war period. It is in essence an argument about where Britain's future lies. Britain was no longer a world power of the first rank. How should it create a new role for itself? Should Britain maintain its old ties with America and the Commonwealth? Or should it forge new ties with Europe? This was the question that the British establishment has wrestled with for the past half-century.

**The inability of the ruling class to find an answer to British decline lies at the heart of the current turmoil in the Tory Party.**

The weakness of Britain's position has drawn it inexorably into the European orbit. But this in turn increased resentment about the subordination of British interests to a German-dominated Europe. Thatcher expressed this resentment through her fierce advocacy of 'British sovereignty'. Thatcher's unwillingness to submit to dictates from Brussels and Bonn demonstrated Britain's difficulty in coming to terms with its new and humble status. However, Thatcher's refusal to compromise over Britain's loss of political power undermined its ability to gain economic benefits from Europe. The conflict between Britain's economic needs and its political interests has created a bitter feud in establishment ranks, contributing to Thatcher's downfall.

### Falklands War

For many people, the crowning glory of Thatcher's foreign policy was her victory over General Galtieri in the Falklands War. The conflict in the South Atlantic demonstrated Thatcher's recognition of the need to defend British interests against third world opposition. The Falklands War fits a pattern of constant Western intervention in the third world throughout the eighties—such as the US invasion of Grenada and Panama and its covert wars in Central America, southern Africa and South-east Asia, the French invasion of Chad and New Caledonia and the joint US/British air-strike on Libya.

Britain, like the other major imperialist powers, was desperate to maintain the status quo on the international stage and to rebuff any challenge to Western domination over the third world. Maintaining control in the third world became even more important as the post-war order began to unravel. Britain's loss of international power meant a loss of control over events in areas it once dominated. At the same time failure to deal with any challenge would have further eroded Britain's authority in the world. Hence Thatcher had little choice but to send a task force to the South Atlantic.

Britain's response to the Gulf crisis demonstrates how Thatcher's style of megaphone diplomacy fitted the needs of the British establishment. The Gulf conflict was the product of America's need to find a military focus around which to assert its world leadership. As in the Cold War in the eighties, the USA has militarised international relations in an attempt to rally the Western powers behind it. Britain has been the most forceful advocate of this strategy. US policy in the Gulf has helped sideline Germany and Japan and allowed British politicians to act as if they still possessed influence in international affairs. The militarisation of the Gulf has slowed down the moves towards a new order. The fact that all three leadership contenders back Britain's Gulf policy demonstrates that 'Thatcherism' abroad has less to do with Thatcher's personality than with the objective needs of the British establishment.

### Marginalised

In her vitriolic Cold War fervour, in her warmth towards the USA, in her suspicions of Europe, and in her defence of British interests in the third world, Thatcher was undoubtedly expressing her own natural prejudices and those of her political constituency. What elevated these prejudices into a crusade to 'restore Britain's role in the world' was the fact that they coincided with the needs of the ruling class to cling on to its international power.

**What ensures that Britain will no longer be able to 'stand tall in the world' is not the demise of Thatcher, but the fact that changing world relations have already undermined the old Thatcher strategy.**

The shape of the new world order is still unclear. But one thing is certain: Britain has lost out in the restructuring of international relations. In Europe Germany has been confirmed as the dominant power. America no longer needs such a close relationship with Britain. Washington is more interested in strengthening its alliance with Germany. In the short term the Gulf crisis has provided a new lease of life to the 'special relationship'. But the increasing marginalisation of Britain on the world stage has reduced the benefits of the relationship with Britain for the USA.

In the new era of international relations Thatcher's tactics were not only outmoded—they were often detrimental to Britain's interests. Her continued Cold War rhetoric—and her attempt to portray the Labour Party as the inheritor of Stalin's mantle—made her look ridiculous and out of touch. Her belligerence over Europe isolated Britain further. But whoever takes over in No 10, Britain will still be faced with the same problem as it was under Thatcher—a decrepit economy that has deprived it of a real voice in the world.

TORY POLICY FOR THE NINETIES

# THE POLITICS OF THE POST-THATCHER ERA

**Kate Richardson examines the shape of British politics in the nineties**

They've dumped Thatcher. Can they dump Thatcherism? That is the key question that commentators have been discussing over the past week.

The predominant view is that the demise of Margaret Thatcher has brought the curtain down on the era of Thatcherism. Several different reasons have been advanced to back this contention. The most crass argument is that Thatcherism was the ideology of the eighties; the nineties will produce a new set of policies. The idea that turning a page on the calendar somehow dictates a new political agenda is patently absurd.

Scarcely more credible is the view that Thatcherism was simply a product of Thatcher's personality. 'The Thatcher era will be [remembered as being] different', Hugo Young wrote in the *Guardian*,'and nowhere more so than in the evidence it offers that personality can be the single most potent contributor to the pattern of events'(23 November 1990). Now that she has been removed from the scene, argue such commentators, politics will return into the old groove.

The most sophisticated argument has been put forward by sections of the establishment. 'The


Thatcher revolution has run its course', claimed the *Financial Times*. 'It is out of date.' (24 November *1990) All the leadership candidates want, in the* words of the *Financial Times*, 'to shave off Thatcherism's rougher edges'.

**The demise of Thatcher, it is argued, marks the end of confrontational politics and heralds a new period of consensus.**

The common thread to all the arguments about the 'post-Thatcher' era is the belief that Thatcherism was in some way a unique phenomenon. In fact, as we show on pages 4 and 5, there was nothing particularly distinctive about the policies followed by Thatcher. Her programme was broadly similar to that of traditional mainstream Toryism. What made the past decade distinctive was not the creation of Thatcherism but the destruction of Labourism. The gravity of the economic crisis forced the ruling class to abandon the consensual policies of the post-war years for a more direct approach to class relations. Again there was nothing unique about such a strategy. Every major capitalist nation, from socialist France to conservative America, has been forced to pursue 'Thatcherite' policies in response to the economic crisis.

To understand the nature of the post-Thatcher era, we need to look not at the special nature of Thatcherism in the past 10 years but at the particular needs of British capitalism over the next decade. Two key features of the Thatcher years have set the framework for ruling class strategy and will shape the politics of the nineties. The first is Thatcher's success in establishing a new consensus in Britain. The second is her failure to reverse the decline of British capitalism. Whoever takes over at No 10 will have to use the first to tackle the second.

All three candidates in the leadership contest stressed the need to unite the party and country. But the new consensus in the nineties will be very different from the post-war consensus of the sixties and seventies. Today's consensus is based on the acceptance by all political parties of the basic tenets of capitalist rule.

**Even the Tories' political opponents in Westminster now accept Thatcherite policies on issues such as the market, privatisation, the unions, the family and law and order.**

Michael Heseltine, John Major and Douglas Hurd all played a significant role in establishing the Thatcherite consensus. Their record in office suggests that there will not be much difference between their policies and those of Thatcher:

• Michael Heseltine has been portrayed as the outsider and the candidate most hostile to the Thatcher legacy. His opposition to the poll tax has won him widespread support. His backing for greater state intervention has been widely applauded. His support for greater European integration is seen as progressive. Even many on the left are sympathetic towards his candidacy. According to Heseltine himself, however, he is the best placed of the three candidates to build on the Thatcher era.

In both domestic and international issues Heseltine has shown himself to be as, if not more, reactionary than Thatcher. Far from being the champion of a 'caring capitalism' Heseltine supports the introduction of workfare—the forcible conscription of the unemployed into slave labour schemes. He might advocate an enlarged role for the department of trade and industry, but he also supports the privatisation of British Rail—a step even Thatcher baulked at. In throwing his weight behind the Heseltine campaign, Sir Geoffrey Howe scotched the idea that Heseltine was a closet Keynesian. He pointed out that he and Nigel Lawson, the two 'driest' chancellors of the past decade, would hardly approve of Heseltine if they thought he would follow interventionist policies.

On international issues too Heseltine has demonstrated his Thatcherite credentials. He might have taken issue with Thatcher's defence of British sovereignty in Europe, but he has shown himself to be just as gung-ho. It was Heseltine the defence minister who introduced cruise missiles into Britain and who, dressed in combat jacket, masterminded the campaign against CND. During the Gulf crisis he has been even more hawkish than Thatcher. His proposer in the leadership contest, Sir Neil Macfarlane, claimed on Monday that 'Michael Heseltine is perceived as the best war leader for Britain'.

• John Major is supposed to be the 'man of the people' who believes in the creation of a 'classless society'. The fact that he was born in a rundown district in Brixton apparently endows him with the common touch. Major has asserted his support for state education and for the national health service. 'The NHS saved me when I was born and it saved my leg when I was a young man', said Major, explaining his caring credentials.

In October the 'man of the people' called on the workers to moderate their wage demands and accept settlements below the rate of inflation; otherwise, he warned, they would end up on the dole. One of Major's principal supporters, employment secretary Michael Howard, has gone even further and advocated wage cuts. He has pointed to the workforce at Toleman Holding, the country's leading car transporter firm, who accepted a 25 per cent reduction in wages, as an example that others should follow.

Today's defender of the NHS built his reputation as one of the most tight-fisted treasury secretaries in recent memory, one who relished forcing the 'spending ministries' to slash their budgets. The endorsement that Major has received from Norman Tebbit and the Thatcherite No Turning Back Group is hardly evidence that he is a 'wet'. Whatever the NHS might have done for Major's leg, the health service is unlikely to be any safer in his hands than it was in Thatcher's.

• Douglas Hurd is now regarded as patrician, 'one nation' Tory, on the left of the party and soft on social issues. But as home secretary he was responsible for one of the biggest clampdowns on civil liberties witnessed in modern Britain.

Hurd presided over the criminalisation of an entire generation of black youth following the Broadwater Farm riots. The frame-ups culminated in the show-trials of Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite. He was responsible for the 1986 Public Order Act whose draconian measures have been used to criminalise political protest and which has allowed police to introduce South African township-style policing in black ghettos like Liverpool 8. He imposed a major clampdown on immigration, deporting hundreds of Tamil refugees, imposing visa restrictions on visitors from black Commonwealth countries, and drafting the 1988 Immigration Act. He put on to the statute book the 1988 Official Secrets Act, imposed the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and fostered a culture of censorship and repression.

As foreign secretary, Hurd has spearheaded Britain's response to the Gulf conflict. He has supported the militarisation of the crisis and urged the use of force against Iraq.

The records of the three leadership contenders show that they might wish to 'shave off Thatcherism's rougher edges' but they have no quarrel with the Thatcherite project of promoting reaction and repression.

**At the same time all three have shared in Thatcherism's principal failure—the inability of the Tory government to restore Britain's economic fortunes.**

Britain today is at the threshold of the deepest recession since the 1930s. Having decimated British industry, Thatcher has left it a lot leaner but no fitter than it was in 1979. Rising inflation, soaring interest rates, mass unemployment, a yawning trade gap, stagnating productivity and a falling pound are the legacy of the Thatcherite 'economic miracle'.

The only answer the Tories have to Britain's economic problems is the same as in 1979—an onslaught on working class living standards at home and increased intervention abroad. With a recession already here and a Gulf War on the way the post-Thatcher era will be characterised by much the same features as the Thatcher years—austerity, repression and militarism.

The Tories aren't about to ease their repressive hold on British society

SIMON NORFOLK

# the next step

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HANDS OFF THE MIDDLE EAST!

# West sets deadline for a bloodbath

New Year's Day. That's the deadline US president George Bush has set for a bloodbath in the Gulf. The US resolution to the United Nations demands backing for a military onslaught if Saddam Hussein does not withdraw from Kuwait by 1 January 1991.

The resolution is the culmination of months of warmongering. The West has despatched a task force to the Gulf, organised an air and sea blockade of Iraq through the UN and prepared for a military strike. Last week Bush toured Europe and the Middle East drumming up support for war and underlining US determination to impose its will on the whole of the Middle East.

Among Bush's house calls was one to Syria's president Assad. Syria remains on the US state department's official list of 'terrorist states'. According to human rights organisation Middle East Watch Assad has killed at least 10 000 political opponents to shore up his bloody regime. Last month Syrian troops went on the rampage in Beirut with American blessing. 'I have no problem sitting down with him talking about this common objective', said Bush (*Independent*, 22 November 1990).

The 'common objective' for the West and its Middle Eastern stooges is ensuring their domination of the region. Washington threatens to have 400 000 troops in place by the 1 January deadline. For the troops already in the Gulf there is little confusion about their role. One US military adviser made clear his contempt for the Saudis, the people whom the Americans are supposedly defending: 'Either we walk all over them or the Iraqis walk all over them.' A US marine added that 'We're not afraid to fight for America, but there ain't no one here wants to die for no Saudis' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 25 November 1990).

Britain has given full backing to Bush's deadline for war. All the contenders for the leadership of the Tory Party have backed the belligerent stance already set by Margaret Thatcher. Far from causing Britain to falter in its determination to invade Iraq, the Tory leadership contest launched the candidates into a competition to prove they would be the best 'war leader'. Defence minister Tom King has already announced that Britain will double its contribution to the invasion force to more than 30 000 troops by transferring to the Gulf its fourth armoured brigade from Germany.

The new drive to war underlines the need to build an effective anti-war movement. We need to match the warmongers point for point:

• **Break with the war consensus** The overwhelming agreement of establishment politicians with the goal of defeating Saddam Hussein makes war likely. Tory and Labour politicians agree that Saddam must be beaten. Even some opponents of a military engagement—like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—prefer to see Iraq crippled by economic sanctions, a policy that can only pave the way to war.

• **No Western intervention in the Gulf** Neither the Western powers nor the United Nations has a positive role to play in the Gulf. While Washington, and its most loyal ally in Whitehall, lead the drive to war, the UN has argued the West's war aims in the language of peace. In fact the United Nations has promoted every Western escalation of the conflict, from sanctions against Iraq, through the military blockade, to the present threat of invasion. We need to oppose the soft face of Western intervention in the UN as well as the open militarism of Britain and America.

• **Solidarity with the Arab people** The source of conflict in the Middle East is the West's determination to subordinate the region to its interests. The only sure way to prevent war is to take sides with the Arab people in their struggle to rid the region of Western imperialism. We should support any action against the Western forces in the Gulf.