

MY AIM HERE is to explore an issue which is central to the strategy for the renewal of the socialist project, about which, however, I detect considerable confusion among socialists. This is the issue of *the state*. Now a great deal has been said about the role of the capitalist state by the Left, especially in recent times. It has almost acquired the status of a fashionable political topic. My purpose is not to review this already complex literature, but to come at the problem from a slightly different angle. I believe that the status of the state in current thinking on the Left is *very problematic*. Many socialists now stand in a very different place, on the question of the state, than they would have taken up ten or twenty years ago. And yet, I believe that we have not fully confronted or explained to ourselves why we have changed our minds or how this new thinking about the state is likely to influence strategies for the Left.

I am well aware that this kind of exploration is a dangerous exercise. One of our present dilemmas on the Left is the habit of thinking that *we already know* what the content and future of socialism is. We talk of socialism as if it were an already completed agenda: the script of a play which is already written and only waiting for someone to put it on stage. Of course, there is a tradition of socialist thought and struggle to draw on. But, tradition is a tricky concept, especially for the Left; a two-edged sword, more diverse and contradictory in reality than we make it appear when we construct it retrospectively. Our thinking about socialism must also reflect the history and experience of socialism as it actually exists – with all its vicissitudes. It must also ground itself in current realities, take the pressure of our time, reflect the world around us in order to transcend it. Paradoxically, socialism will perish unless it is able to grow out of the very soil of modern capitalism, which despite everything, is still expanding, still revolutionising the world in contradictory ways.

I do not, therefore, believe that 'we have always thought about the state' on the Left will necessarily *do* for the next ten decades; or that posing ourselves difficult questions is necessarily a sign of the weakening of faith. We should leave Faith to The Believers. Indeed, that other way – socialism as an already finished project – is one of the most powerful sources of, and an excuse for, that profound sectarianism which has always had a strong presence on the Left and which I detect rising like the smog once again, as those who dare to put a question mark over our received wisdoms

Where does the Left stand on the state? Straightforward. . . or is it? Not any longer. Ten years ago, the Left was broadly for state intervention and state agencies – of the appropriate kind. But postwar experience, and Thatcherism, are forcing a major rethink.

The State~



Socialism's Old Caretaker

Stuart Hall

are instantly accused of treason, labelled as the enemy, or dismissed as 'pink professors misleading the Left' (in Tariq Ali's recent, immortal phrase) and despatched into outer darkness.

So why the problem?

So, braving the terrors of excommunication from the newly appointed guardians of orthodoxy, let us pose once more the question of where we stand on the question of the state. It is not difficult to see why the state has become problematic in recent years. This must reflect, on the one hand, our response to the whole experience of 'actual-existing socialism' where, instead of progressively withering away, the state has become a gigantic, swollen, bureaucra-

tic force, swallowing up almost the whole of civil society, and imposing itself (sometimes with tanks), in the name of The People, on the backs of the people. Who, now, can swallow without a gigantic gulp the so-called temporary, passing nature of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? On the other hand, the very same period, since the end of World War II, has witnessed a parallel, gigantic expansion of the state complex within modern capitalism, especially in Western Europe, with the state playing an increasingly interventionist or regulative role in more and more areas of social life. It has become far and away the largest single employer of labour, and acquired a dominant presence in every sector of daily existence. What are we to make of *that* unexpected development, never adequately predicted in the classical Marxist literature?

Even more difficult to work out is, what is our attitude towards this development? On the one hand, we not only defend the welfare side of the state, we believe it should be massively expanded. And yet, on the other hand, we feel there is something deeply anti-socialist about how this welfare state functions. We know, indeed, that it is experienced by masses of ordinary people, in the very moment that they are benefiting from it, as an intrusive managerial, bureaucratic force in their lives. However, if we go too far down *that* particular road, whom do we discover keeping us company along the road but – of course – the Thatcherites, the new Right, the free market 'hot gossellers', who *seem* (whisper it not too loud) to be saying rather similar things about the state. Only they are busy making capital against us on this very point, treating widespread popular dissatisfactions with the modes in which the beneficiary parts of the state function as fuel for an anti-Left, 'roll back the state' crusade. And where, to be honest, do *we* stand on the issue? Are we for 'rolling back the state' – including the welfare state? Are we for or against the management of the whole of society by the state? Not for the first time, Thatcherism here catches the Left on the hop – hopping from one uncertain position to the next, unsure of our ground.

Perhaps it might help if we knew how we got into this dilemma. How *did* we get here? This is a vast topic in its own right, and I propose to look at only four aspects here. First, how did the British Left become so wedded to a particular conception of socialism through state management, the essence of what I want to call 'statism' or a 'statist' conception of social-

ism? Secondly, I want to sketch some of the reasons why the very expansion of the state, for which so many on the Left worked so hard, turned out in practice to be a very contradictory experience. Third, I want to confront head on the confusion caused on the Left by the 'libertarianism' of the Right – the way Thatcherism has exploited the experience of welfare statism and turned it to the advantage of the new Right. Finally, I want to consider some aspects of the changing social and economic relationships today which have influenced spontaneous attitudes on the Left – what I call the growth of a left libertarianism. In conclusion, I can only roughly indicate some directions in which our thinking needs to be developed.

The history

First, how did the British Left get so deeply embedded in a statist conception of socialism? After all, it was not – as many people imagine – always like that. The state did not have that central, all-pervasive role in early socialist thinking. Marx and Engels understood the role of the capitalist state in developing a whole social and political order around a particular mode of exploitation and spoke briefly but vividly about the need to destroy it in its existing form. But their thinking about the *future* role of the state in the transition to socialism was extremely sketchy. Other radical currents of thought in British socialism were, if anything, more anti-state than pro-state in their general tendency. Even in the key period, between the revival of socialism in the 1880s right through to the 1920s and the emergence of the Labour Party in its modern constitutionalist form as *the* majority party politically representing the working classes, a statist-oriented brand of socialism within Labourism and the labour movement, had to contend with many other currents, including of course the strong syndicalist currents before and after World War I, and the ILP's ethical Marxism later with their deep antipathy to Labour's top-downwards, statist orientation. One of the many tricks which the retrospective construction of Tradition on the Left has performed is to make the triumph of Labourism over these other socialist currents – the result of a massive political struggle, in which the ruling classes played a key role – appear as an act of natural and inevitable succession.

And yet, it was precisely in this critical period – between 1880s and the 1920s – when the parameters of British politics for the following 50 years were set for the first

time, that statism took root in British political culture. In those days, what we now call 'statism' went under the title of 'collectivism'. What is crucial for our analysis is the fact that there were *many* collectivisms. 'Collectivism' was a highly contradictory formation, composed of different strands, supported in different ways by the Right, the Centre and the Left – if, for convenience, we can use those somewhat anachronistic labels. Collectivism was regarded by many sections on the Right, and by some influential sectors of the leading classes, as *the* answer to Britain's declining fortunes. The country – the new collectivists believed – required a programme of 'national regeneration'. This could only be undertaken if the old shibboleths of laissez-faire were finally abandoned and the state came to assume a far greater role of organic leadership in society. A 'populist' bloc of support, they believed, could be won amongst the dominated classes for such a project, provided the latter were 'squared' by state pensions and other Bismarck-type benefits. This was the programme of both the 'social imperialist' and the 'national efficiency' schools, and of the highly authoritarian populist politics associated with them. And though they did not carry their programme in detail, they were extremely influential in pioneering the shift in the allegiance of British capital from its former commitment to laissez-faire, to its newer link with a certain type of capitalist state interventionism.

Statism equals socialism

There is no space to deal with the links between collectivism and the 'centre', but it is a critical link in the story to remember that it was also on this very question of 'the state' that the 'old' Liberalism transmuted itself into the 'new' Liberalism: and that the new Liberalism was, in its own time, the pioneer of the thinking which lay behind the early installment of the welfare state (in the 1906-11 Liberal administration) and, in our time, is really the political force which created that space in British politics which we would now call 'social democracy'.

But the key factor for our purposes was the progress which collectivism made, under essentially Fabian inspiration, inside the labour movement and in the Labour Party. In this period Fabianism established its ascendancy as *the* philosophy of socialism for Labour. Collectivism became, to be blunt, what the Webbs and their many followers *meant* by socialism. That is, progressive legislation, social wel-

fare, a measure of redistributive justice, pioneered through the state by a political elite legislating on behalf of the working classes, (who were required to elect 'their government' to office but who were, of course, too inept to rule on their own behalf); resulting in a gigantic state complex, administering more and more of society in the interest of social efficiency, where the experts and the bureaucrats would exercise a 'benevolent dictatorship' through the state, servicing society's many and complex needs. It was in this formative period that the statist conception of socialism became rivetted in place, as the dominant current within Labourism and the British Left.

We have no space to sketch the long, torturous route which led from the emergence of this statist conception of socialism in the 1920s to the much-transformed reality of the modern state and state interventionism as we know it since post-1945. Suffice it to say that the path from one to the other was by no means straightforward. Nevertheless, the welfare state was constructed after 1945 on those earlier foundations, and is rightly regarded as the crowning achievement of the postwar Labour government, the high tide of the spirit of popular 'war radicalism', and the most advanced achievement of the reformist tradition of British social democracy.

The logic behind this development in the second half of the twentieth century is not difficult to understand, even though we may not subscribe wholeheartedly to it nowadays. The argument ran as follows: capitalism has a thrust, a logic of its own – the logic of private property, capital accumulation, possessive individualism and the free market. This logic 'worked', in the sense that it created the modern capitalist world – with, of course, its necessary 'costs': exploitation, poverty, insecurity for the masses, class inequality, the many inevitable victims of its 'successes'. The Left, it seemed, had only one alternative: to break the 'logic of the market' and construct society around an alternative logic – a socialist one. But to do this, it needed an alternative centre of power, an opposing rallying-point, to that of capital and the market. This opposing force was *the state*. Either the state could be used to make inroads into the 'logic of the market', to modify its excesses, abate its extremes, graft alternative goals (eg, needs not profits) on to the system, impose a redistributive logic on the unequal ways in which capitalism 'naturally' distributes its goods and resources: this was the *reformist* alternative. Or else, the power of capital

and the market, installed behind the capitalist state, had to be actively broken – ‘smashed’ – and the major social processes ‘socialised’ or made public by being progressively absorbed and taken over into the state: this was the revolutionary road. Both, it is clear, involved, to different degrees, massive inroads into the ‘logic’ of the market by expanding the role of the state.

The two great blocs

I believe this crudely drawn political landscape, blocked out into its two, great, opposed ‘continents’ – the domain of capital and the market versus the domain of the logic of social needs, imposed through the state – is how the vast majority of us first entered into basic political thinking. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that these remain the two fundamental formations in British political culture – more inclusive, in a way, than the traditional division into Left and Right. They have helped to set the parameters within which British politics have fluctuated since the turn of the century. An essential part of the ‘historic compromise’ between the classes struck in the interwar period was the new balance established between ‘state’ and ‘civil society’. On this basic ‘settling of the boundaries’ much of the stability of Britain as a

capitalist democracy has depended. It was the shifting of these boundaries, in some sectors, away from the free play of market forces, and closer to the reform-through-the-state pole, which constituted the ‘revolution’ of the Keynesian welfare state and the post-1945 settlement. This new consensus, basically, lasted up to the advent of Thatcherism in the mid-70s. It is this ‘settling of boundaries’ which the new Right challenged. Restoring the free market principle to its former ascendancy is once again the fulcrum of politics, the key dividing line between Right and Left. That is why the question of the Left’s attitude to the state now matters so profoundly.

All this makes it sound as if the balance of forces on this question has been steadily moving in the reformist direction. Why, then, has this development of the state been so problematic for the Left? One reason is that the state has gone on expanding and developing powered, so to speak, by *both* the Right and the Left. We still speak of the ‘capitalist state’. But, in fact, we no longer behave as if it had single, monolithic class character. The Left, despite its rhetoric, has *its* part of the state too: the welfare state, which distributes benefits to the needy; serves society’s needs; redistributes resources to the less well-off; provides amenities – and all on a universalistic basis, rather than on the market terms of ‘ability to pay’. The NHS is the classic example. Despite its dependence on the private sector and the inroads into it made by private medicine, the NHS is still generally regarded and experienced as having broken the logic which connected health and medical care to wealth and the private ability to pay, and installed in its place the idea of medical need served by a universal provision. The history of Nye Bevan’s struggles to install the NHS demonstrate, not only how bitterly the market forces resisted this inroad into their territory, but how impossible it would have been without an alternative centre, capable of organising a materially different system of provision – the state.

How could anyone who understood the material difference which this has made in the lives of countless ordinary people regard this development as contrary to the logic of socialism? We – rightly – want to see *more* of this, not less: more aspects of life organised on a similar principle. The Social Affairs Unit of the Centre for Policy Studies, the Thatcherite ‘think tank’, proposed in its pamphlet, not simply to cut back the welfare state on pragmatic grounds of cost but to ‘break the spell’ of

the welfare state. And those boys – Sir Keith Joseph’s shock troops masquerading as an independent research unit – know what they are doing. This centrality of the state to the Left is not confined to the area of welfare and benefits. We have tended to think that the nationalisation measures of the 1940s and 1950s and the Keynesian interventions in economic life, which increased rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, failed, not because they went too far, but because they did not go far enough. The Left is still basically wedded to a *positive* view of the state’s role in socialist construction.

The two-edged state

Matters are not quite so simple. Few areas of the welfare state are as clear cut in their positive image as the NHS. Also the welfare and benefit side is not the only form in which the state has expanded in post-war society. We have seen the parallel expansion of the *warfare* state, too. And of the repressive, ‘policing’ aspects of the state: the state as coercive agent, defending the social order, punishing the deviant, extending its surveillance into civil society, disciplining the citizenry on to the straight and narrow, its operations increasingly shrouded in secrecy, beyond all normal forms of accountability. The ‘Orwellian’ state is alive and well, not only in Eastern European socialist democracies, but in Western European class democracies, alongside the welfare state. The state which gives out benefits also snoops on its recipients. Then there is the size and scale of the administrative side of the state, coupled with its bureaucratic mode of operation. People, when they are being ‘done good to’ by the state, increasingly *experience* it, in reality, as being ‘put in their place’ by it: by ‘experts’ who always know better, or state servants who seem oblivious to the variety of actual needs on the other side of the counter. The feeling is very deep that the *way* the welfare state works makes people into passive, greedy, dependent *clients* much of the time, rather than people claiming rights from a state which is supposed to be *their* state, representing them against the logic of the market.

Then there is the awareness that welfare states have become general throughout capitalist systems, with levels of benefit which have long since outstripped ours, and performing functions not only imposed on capital by the working class but necessary to the survival of capital. Free secondary education is, after all, *both* a long standing radical demand *and* a reform



imposed on the idea of an educational market place *and* the degree of training and skilling a modern capitalist system requires. The welfare-reformist and the re-productive aspects of the state are increasingly difficult to distinguish. As state functions multiply, so more of us are working in state-related jobs. The changing composition of the working class and the changing pattern of industrial conflict have moved increasingly to these contested sites within the state. Even there we are aware of the *double-sided* character of our work. The slogan which most accurately expresses our dilemma and captures this contradictory reality is 'In And Against The State'. Increasing numbers of us are, regularly, *both*.

New Right libertarianism

This brings us to the 'libertarianism' of the new Right. Because it is exactly this contradictory experience of the state on which Thatcherism capitalised. It rooted itself in these dissatisfactions, and inflected them into a whole broadside against the very principle of welfare *as such*. The new Right harnesses these popular discontents to its cause, converted a dislike of the bureaucratic features of statism into a full-scale assault on the 'creeping tide of socialism' and the 'nanny state'. On these negative foundations it built the new positive gospel of the market as the universal provider of goods and of The Good; launched the savaging of public expenditure as a testament to Virtue; initiated the privatisation 'roll back'; and raised the war-cry of Freedom and its identity with the free market. The new Right presented itself as the only party committed to oppose the exponential growth of the state, its penetration into every corner of life. This was one of the key ways in which Thatcherism cut into the territory of the traditional Left, disorganised its base and made itself 'popular'.

The problem for the Left is that the dissatisfactions with the state are real and authentic enough – even if Thatcherism then mis-describes and mis-explains them. Thatcherism did not invent them – even if its remedies for the problem are fictitious. Further, it exposed a weakness, a critique, of the existing system which the Left had made too little of: the deeply *undemocratic* character of state-administered socialism. Most disconcerting of all, this revealed that the Left and the new Right share, on this question, some of the same ground!

This was particularly disconcerting because the Left believes that ideology marches in exclusive blocks of ideas, each block attached to its appropriate class or political position. It is therefore extremely odd to find the Left sharing with 'the class enemy' a critique of statism – even if, when the conclusions from that critique are drawn, the two sides radically part company. Of course, the problem here lies in the fact that ideology does *not* function in blocks. The idea of liberty, on which the whole anti-state philosophy was predicated, does not belong exclusively to the Right. They appropriated a certain version of it, linked it with other reactionary ideas to make a whole 'philosophy' and connected it into the programme and the forces of the Right. They made the idea of Freedom equivalent to and dependent on the 'freedom of the market' – and thus necessarily opposed to the idea of Equality. But freedom or liberty – in the wider sense of social emancipation – has always been a key element in the philosophy of the Left. Within this chain of ideas, emancipation *depends on* equality of condition. It is the equation with the market and possessive individualism which limits it. So what the Left urgently needs is to reappropriate the concept of freedom and give it its real expression within the context of a deepening of democratic life as a whole. The problem is that *this* socialist conception of

Freedom is not compatible with – is in fact deeply undermined by – the idea of a state which takes over everything, which absorbs all social life, all popular energies, all democratic initiatives, and which – however benevolently – governs society *in place* of the people.

Choice

Perhaps we can all agree about 'emancipation'. It has a resonant feel to it, and touches very deep chords – as the new Right correctly understood. But what about another, trickier aspect of Freedom: the question of *choice*? I am not sure the idea of 'choice' has so far played a very central role in thinking on the Left. And yet the most widespread and basically correct 'image' of actual-existing socialism among ordinary working people is the drab lack of diversity, the omnipresence of planned sameness, the absence of choice and variety. Our concept of socialism has been dominated by images of scarcity. The trouble is that on the question of choice, capitalism and the free market seem so far to have the best tunes. But *is* the idea of choice, which is intrinsic to the whole critique of statism, an *essentially* reactionary, right-wing capitalist idea?

I suspect this is partly a generational matter. Socially, culturally, in everyday economic life, younger people set enormous store by choice and diversity. And they see as the principal enemies of diversity *both* big, corporate capital *and* the big state. They know what Thatcherite economists do not seem to know – that the maximisation of popular choice does *not* flourish in the storehouse of corporate capital, with its carefully calculated marketing and financing strategies. And they do not naturally associate it with the equally corporatist 'bureaucratic' modes of operation of the state. But, unfortunately for the Left, they *have* found a measure of choice in what we can only call the inter-

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stices of the market. At the small end of the market, where the big battalions and competition to the death do not entirely dominate, small initiatives sometimes have a chance, and a degree of entrepreneurship can create openings, or recognise a new need, even a new *social* need, and experiment to a degree with satisfying it. I certainly don't mean to paint a rosy picture of the degree of openness which exists here: *all* markets are constrained above all by inequality. But most of the innovative trends in everyday life with which younger people spontaneously identify – in music, clothes, styles, the things they read and listen to, the environments they feel comfortable in – operate on what one can only call an 'artisan capitalism' basis. These things are in constant danger of being regulated out of existence by the state or ripped off by the big commercial providers.

Left libertarianism

Nevertheless, inevitably, the actual daily cultural experience of diversity has come to be identified with a certain conception, or rather, a certain experience of *the market*. And this is by no means confined to non-political people. Culturally, where would the Left be today without initiatives like *City Limits* or a thousand other small, 'independent' publications; or Gay Sweatshop and hundreds of other little theatre groups; or Virago and History Workshop and Readers and Writers Cooperative and Compendium and Centreprise and Comedia and – you name it? Young people on the Left or Right do not expect to hear the new sounds which speak to them of their time on either BBC or ITV, though they might catch them from the 'independents' clustered around Channel Four, from Radio Laser or even, God help us, the dreaded, arch-commercial, 'pirate' Radio Caroline. Much of this is radical initiatives operating precariously in the margins of the capitalist market. But even when you move from the margins of the market, the positive sentiments of younger people on the Left, post-1968, instinctively gravitate to those local or 'grass roots' initiatives, where people, by their direct self-activity, can be persuaded to supplement or develop new struggles around the existing bureaucratic forms of provision of the state. The libertarianism of the Right has been unmatched, I believe, by a steady and unstoppable, slow but strong current of 'libertarianism' on the Left – mirroring, in its own way many of the broader social and economic trends at work in society, transforming daily life and everyday attitudes,

including those of the younger generations on the Left.

Does all this then add up to a covert invitation to give up another set of 'old' socialist ideas, lie back and learn to love the free market? Not at all. But it is an invitation to open our minds and fertilise our imaginations a little by direct infusions from the contradictory reality of what Marx, in his simple way, used to call 'real history'. For one thing, we know that, wherever in Eastern Europe, under the actual-existing socialism, the system of rigid economic planning of life, from steel factories to hat pins, has been relaxed a little, the first – though not necessarily the final – form which this has assumed is a return, within the framework of socialist planning, of some 'free market mechanisms'. This is not a problem to be left to left economists and experts on Eastern Europe since the image and reality of actual-existing socialism is a problem for *all* socialists and has been such a trump card in the Right's struggle against the very appeal of socialism in the West. The second lesson we might draw is linked with this re-evaluation of a whole historical experience, though not in a directly organisational way. It is simply the re-examination of the new impetus towards choice, the new spirit of pluralism and diversity, which has become such a driving force of the masses under advanced capitalism and which will have to be more centrally reflected in our thinking about socialism if we are ever to convince large numbers of people that socialism is a superior 'way of life' to that which, with all its ups and downs, they already know. Why else should the toiling masses under capitalism ever commit themselves to an alternative which offers them *less* than they can currently get?

No room for naivety

I don't think we can afford to be *naive* about the state. Negatively, though the state is a contradictory force, it does have a systematic tendency to draw together the many lines of force and power in society and convert them into a particular 'system of rule'. In that sense, the state *does* continue to organise and orchestrate the space of capital accumulation in its broad societal aspects, and hold a particular, exploitative social order in place. This is *not* a neutral function – though it is not the state's only function, either. But insofar as it is its role, the state has to be dismantled, and another conception of the state put in its place. The lesson I think we can draw here is that we have as yet a wholly

inadequate conception of how a socialist state would operate in ways which are radically different from that of the present version.

We can't afford to be naive about the market either. It is the principal exploitative mechanism of a capitalist social order when set to work in the context of private property and capitalist economic forms. I am not sufficient of an economic expert to know whether some aspects of the market can be combined with socialist economic forms but I am sure we need to ponder the idea more deeply. Certainly, I feel sure that socialism cannot exist without a conception of *the public*. We are right to regard the 'public sector', however little it represents a transfer of power to the powerless, as an arena constructed against the logic of capital. The concept of 'public health' is different from the idea of private medicine because it deals with the whole environment of health, which is more than the sum of individual healthy bodies – a *social* conception of health as a need, a right. 'Public transport' is not simply a practical alternative to private transport because it embodies conceptions of equal access to the means of mobility – to movement around one's environment as a publicly-validated right. The idea of 'public space' signifies a construction of space *not* bounded by the rights of private property, a space for activities in common, the holding of space in trust as a social good. In each case the adjective *public* represents an advance in conception on the limits of possessive individualism, of liberal thought itself. In this conception of the public and the social, socialism is *still ahead*. And the public can only be carved out of market space, capital's space, by the engine of state action.

The state and society

On the other hand, 'the public' cannot be identical with the state. Once the logic of capital, property and the market are broken, it is the diversity of social forms, the taking of popular initiatives, the recovery of popular control, the passage of power from the state *into* society, which marks out the advance towards socialism. We can envisage a 'partnership' between state and society, so long as the initiative is always passing to society, so long as the monopoly over the management of social life does not come to a dead halt with the state elite, so long as the state itself is rooted in, constantly draws energy from, and is pushed actively by popular forces. One of the reasons why some of the things which have developed around the GLC are

so exciting, so pre-figurative for the Left, is precisely that one begins to see here and there a glimmer of a local state transforming the ways in which it 'represents' society politically; being *more* dependent on the passage of power, through the state, to the constituencies than it is on monopolising power; hence, of how a new principle, centralised through the instrumentality of the state, can then yield space to a wide variety of different forms, social movements and initiatives in civil society. What is no longer tenable or tolerable is the state-management of society in the name of socialism. Pluralism, in *this* sense, is not a temporary visitor to the socialist scene. It has come to stay.

We could put all this another way by reminding ourselves that what Marx spoke of when he referred to socialism was the *social* revolution. The democratisation of society is as important as dismantling the bureaucracies of the state. Indeed, perhaps the most important lesson of all is the absolute centrality to all socialist thinking today of the deepening of democracy. Democracy is not, of course, a formal matter of electoral politics or constitutionalism. It is the real passage of power to the powerless, the *empowerment* of the excluded. The state cannot do this for the powerless, though it can enable it to happen. They have to do it for themselves, by finding the forms in which they can take on the control over an increasingly complex society. Certainly, it does not happen all at once, through *one* centre – by simply 'smashing the state', as the sort of socialist thinking which is fixated on the state would have it. It has to happen across a multiplicity of sites in social life, on many different fronts, including, of course, the state itself, whose tendency to concentrate power is precisely what constitutes it as a barrier to socialism. Gramsci advanced the profound idea that hegemony is not constituted only by the state, but in the multiple centres of civil society. It follows that an alternative conception of socialism must embrace this struggle to democratise power across all the centres of social activity – in private as well as public life, in personal associations as well as in compulsory obligations, in the family and the neighbourhood and the nursery and the shopping centre as well as in the public office or at the point of production. If the struggle for socialism in modern societies is a war of position, then our conception of socialism must be of a society of *positions* – different places from which we can all begin the reconstruction of society for which the state is only the anachronistic caretaker. □

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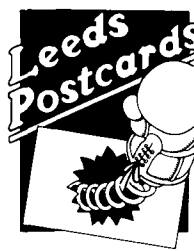
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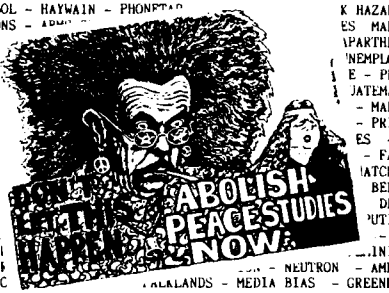
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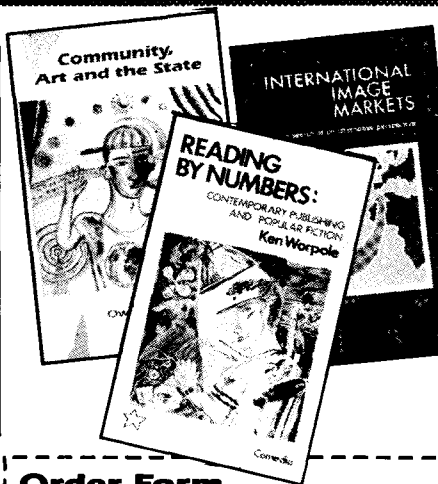
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Drug-taking is on the increase. What can be done about it?

Britain's DRUG Problem

Bent Gordon

'We will treat the victims, and we will warn the vulnerable, but must tackle the evil itself. It is the Government's urgent priority to cut off the flow of drugs and hit supply.'

With these words Health Minister Mr Kenneth Clarke addressed the Conservative Party Conference, summing up the Government's strategy to reduce drug abuse — or, at least, to reduce mounting concern over drug abuse.

The new measures include an extra £5m for drug treatment and rehabilitation services, a campaign of public information, more customs officers, organised in mobile squads and life sentences for heroin traffickers and dealers. These measures are perhaps the least that a Conservative administration, alert to pressures from the grassroots, could be expected to mount. Not since the 60s has a political party conference debated drugs. Both the Conservatives and Labour parties recognise that whilst there is a degree of overstatement and misinformation about drugs doing the rounds, there has been some increase in levels of drug use — especially heroin use (today often smoked rather than injected). Each party paints the problem in ways familiar to it, Labour emphasising unemployment and the cuts for the increase in drug use and for inadequate facilities for a response, whilst the Tories pose the issue as a moral one.

The issue of drug abuse is addressed in a climate of concern for law and order. And the stage has perhaps been reached where the Government's credibility is at least partly bound up with the question of its ability to *translate* its success in redefining crime as a central political issue, into an

equal success in reducing crime — or at least reducing the appearance of crime.

This is the context within which policy about drug misuse now mainly falls. Earlier this year, for example, the 'policy lead' on drugs passed from a DHSS-led informal network of civil servants in the DHSS, Home Office, DES and Scottish Home and Health Department, to a more formal, standing ministerial group chaired by Home Office minister David Mellor. It is also the Government's intention, announced earlier this year, to bring in legislation during the present Parliament for life sentences plus confiscation of assets for drug traffickers. Whether this will have the hoped-for effect remains to be seen. Labour MP Clive Soley has suggested that such penalties will not be effective, and

what is needed is a firm response

mean that criminals will be more ready to use arms in order to evade capture. But as a party, Labour has a history of joining with Conservatives in seeking a solution to the drug problem through the imposition of higher and higher penalties for suppliers. There is no fundamental break between the drug policies of the two parties as far as their attitudes to suppliers are concerned.

The new anti-trafficker plans may serve to take the heat off the Government in respect of a rising panic over crime at the other end of the market — the young user who reportedly indulges in occasional property crime. There has been sustained press reporting of an alleged link between heroin use and crime, especially in the local press, and it seems now to be almost a

conventional lay wisdom that heroin use leads to crime.

It is not difficult to see how this perception might arise and make sense to millions warned about youth, crime and the coming apart of familiar patterns of economy and culture in Britain — particularly in areas of high unemployment. People see many bad things happening, and they put them together in ways that make sense to a British sensibility. There is an enemy without — dirty foreigners who are sending us their filthy drugs and making victims of our children. Yes, our children do sometimes steal from mother's purse, in the street or from cars and property — but this is because they have been led astray not only by outsiders but also by an enemy within (permissive, pot-smoking social workers and the like), and hence been trapped into expensive vices. Yes, we cannot communicate with or control our children — but that's not our fault, we always did our best. Yes, there is more crime nowadays, but the causes are not intrinsic to the society to which we have given our consent — the causes lie in our softening as people.

What is needed is a firm response. As pop star Pete Townshend put it to a meeting at the Conservative Party Conference: 'There can be no shilly-shallying. Children have to be shoved, pushed and bullied'. It's common sense!

There are signs that this populist perception of the problem has now run considerably ahead of the Government's intentions. Whilst a stress on nationality and domestic law and order has been a cornerstone of the Government's general appeal on policy issues, and whilst the drawing of parental responsibility into the centre of debate is welcomed, there is some feeling that the present wave of anxiety might go too far. One concern is around proposals put forward by Conservative MP Teddy Taylor amongst others that a large-scale anti-drug advertising campaign be mounted (*Sunday Express*, April 29).

This raises two questions. First, would any such campaign work, in the sense of causing a diminution of drug use and associated problems? Second, whether or not drug use actually declined, might not the decline be immeasurable or minimal, and might not the campaign have the grossly counter-productive effect of whipping up yet more public anxiety over drug use? Might not drug use become such a *bête noire* that more and more social ills become attributed to it — and the Government criticised for not eradicating this menace?