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Against Parliament, For Anarchism

Anarchist Federation

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1997

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This text was first published in the summer of 1997. It has been updated to take into account developments up until the European elections of June 1999, but it also refers to some later events. However its main purpose is to act, not as an historical record of the parties, but as an analysis of their underlying ideas and tendencies. In this respect it is intended to retain its relevance even after particular issues and controversies have ceased to matter.

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freely available or fairly shared out via community stores and warehouses. Goods and services would also become produced in such a way, and such a spirit, as to mean that work was much more congenial and purposeful, as well as less time-consuming. For if the incentive of money was lacking, the incentive of sustaining a free society and one's place in it would also be powerful.

Even within capitalism, where public service is discouraged (at least by the bosses' conception of reward) many workers are still chiefly motivated by the satisfaction of using their skills to help others. And this is quite apart from those who, perceiving a need, act voluntarily, alone or in association, to meet it. There is no reason to suppose that, where a social climate existed that positively cherished such motives, they would diminish. Thus in striving to ensure fulfilling work for all (such that the distinction of work and leisure would become far less sharp), and with material security brought about by the efforts of all, the frustration and poverty that fuel so much anti-social and self-destructive behaviour now would come to lack such combustible material. But this "utopia" would, in the nature of things, still encounter all sorts of challenges and difficulties. This, therefore, would become the overriding incentive to be active and productive: the drive to continue and improve the way of life of anarchist communism.

But there would also be a grim history of which to be aware, so as to actively guard against its return in a new guise. The history of a world riven by internal and external violence, the domination of a few over the many, racial and sexual oppression, pollution. When we are told that anarchism means chaos and communism tyranny, this can only provoke a bitter laugh. The horrific present of global capitalism provides *these* things in abundance. We look to a day when the people of an anarchist world can look back, and relish their freedom.

INTRODUCTION: Why Anarchists Oppose Parliament

We are constantly told that we live in a free society. The guarantee of this "freedom" is said to be the parliamentary system. This allows us to elect representatives who govern the country in our name, and who are answerable to us. That, at least, is the theory.

This system had its beginnings in a body which only represented feudal nobles, and evolved into one which represented land-owning and agricultural interests more generally. There was no pretence that it was democratic, i.e. representing the will of all the people. By the 19th century, with the development of industrial capitalism, the newly-rich owners of factories and mills lacked political power to match their economic strength. Agitation for an extension of the franchise produced the so-called Great Reform Act of 1832, which only granted the right to vote to property-owners like the industrialists despite their reliance on working-class support during the long campaign. The working-class continued to have no significant economic or political voice. Consequences of this situation were the working-class fight for the vote in the Chartist movement and the growth of trade unions. Most significant, in terms of an independent class outlook, was the development during the rest of the century of various forms of socialism, communism and anarchism.

Government: the Way to Freedom?

Anarchists, because of their belief in the strength of voluntary co-operation and mutual aid, were (and are) opposed to the coercive power of government on principle. They therefore denied the notion that the working-class should work to extend the franchise and then vote its own representatives into power, convinced that this could only ever achieve domination by a minority. However the idea was spread by others (often socialists from the middle - class) that capitalism and the many laws required to sustain it could eventually be legislated away once enough working-class parliamentary seats had been gained. Similarly a socialist system, using the power of the State in the working-class' favour, could then be introduced by Acts of Parliament.

Strangely, one of the reasons for taking this line was precisely the repressive capabilities which the capitalist State had built up. Only anarchists anticipated that such standard governmental tools as courts, prisons, police and troops, whoever commanded them, would end up preserving a society of inequality and exploitation, not abolishing it. But parliamentary socialists, believing that any attempt at revolution must resolve itself to the advantage of the ruling-class, took a gradual, reformist approach. By patient legal changes, a socialist utopia would be arrived at, and no-one hurt or aggrieved in the process. Typical of this outlook were the Fabians, an early socialist think-tank still influential in the Labour Party.

Many believed in the reasonableness of such sentiments. With the gradual winning of the vote by all of the working-class, subsequent history has too often revolved around workers giving up their power by electing "representatives". The fallacy has been that, by ceding power to someone or some party claiming to represent you, your interests and those of others like you will be the chief concern of those representatives. This idea has legitimised the election of full-time union officials as well as politicians.

nism would allow for the rotation and sharing of all kinds of work, whilst stressing that any technology used must be as safe and non-polluting as possible. There will be plenty to do in an anarchist world, but the emphasis on individual fulfilment and the achievement of mutually-agreed goals would mean the enhancement of living rather than merely "making a living".

This last phrase translates today as the gaining of enough money to buy desired goods and services. But anarchist communism seeks the abolition of money and the market. In a world scarred by hunger, disease, homelessness and poverty, and the concentration of most wealth in the hands of a relative minority, the notion that these methods of economic distribution are the fairest and most efficient possible is disgusting nonsense. Real wealth lies in the produce of the earth (agricultural, mineral, etc.), the talents of human beings, and their combination in products and techniques which represent the experience of generations. Yet it is the possession, or lack of, piles of metal and paper that assign a person's ultimate status and power in today's world. In fact, owing to the perverse use of computer technology in financial and other forms of speculation, the wealth of the rich has become increasingly abstract. But its concrete effects are clearly illustrated by the poverty of "Third World" farmers and labourers paid less and less for crops, or the homeless on the streets on every capital. This complete mismatch between human need and the actual concentrations of material plenty is lubricated by money and the dominant position it affords.

Capitalism relies on monetary and material rewards (or the hope of them) to ensure that work is done. Creativity is only worthwhile in this view if it ends up producing profit. Reducing human beings as this does to consuming machines, there can be little wonder that so many dislike their jobs or, without them, steal to have the goods with which all are constantly tantalised. Since in anarchist communism the working-class and peasantry are in control of planning, production and distribution, there can be confidence that all necessities will be produced and, according to circumstance, made

approach is also what undermines what currently passes for federalism, as in the EU where it is basically a matter of ruling-class speaking to ruling-class. A delegate, however, is sent with instructions from his or her area or workplace, and any decisions reached at broader bands of a federation (e.g. regional) must be ratified at the narrower (e.g. local). Delegates are also subject to strict rotation, and recalled if they do not act or speak in accord with their instructions.

Certainly all modern methods of communication, such as the imaginative use of computers, will assist in the flow of discussion and decision-making between the various bands of federations. But even then, particular care would need to be taken against the smaller ones not being heard and thus alienated. Though anarchist communism looks to the creation of a global community, it remains rooted in the local and face to face contact rather than today's way of decisions handed down, from apparently untouchable elites.

These organisational principles apply both economically and politically. For in an anarchist communist society these areas of life, rather than the current fragmentation where each has its supposed experts, are seen as what they are, mutually reinforcing and in need of the other. Thus, for example, everyone in a community may come forward with ideas for running the workplaces and what should be produced, without being either "economist" or "politician".

Work and Wealth

This fluidity of roles would similarly apply to work itself. Of course, people have individual inclinations and talents but, under capitalism, many of these are squandered or only fulfilled in "spare" time because they do not fit with their role as an employee doing a particular job in a particular enterprise. Anarchist commu-

It has proved untrue on two counts. Short of the actual deposition of the class of industrialists, bankers, stockbrokers, etc., political representatives are driven to make deals with these people, whose prime aim is to preserve and expand their social and economic privileges, not give them up. And these representatives themselves, when not born into the ruling-class (making connections and assumptions at public school and university to last a lifetime), sooner rather than later adopt its attitudes. Supposedly working-class MPs lose touch with their original background, just as do those elected primarily as women or black; and for the same reasons.

The Ruling-Class

What is it that makes such attitudes so easy to adopt? It stems from the fact that, once existing in a world of large salaries, consultancies and bribes, chauffeurs and private secretaries, politicians become largely divorced from life as most of us experience it. They are also both more and less informed than most people. On one hand, privy to information and the making of decisions which will affect millions, with only a selected portion of that information available for what is laughably termed public debate. On the other, living in ignorance of everyday life and having their information filtered via civil servants, lobbyists and journalists. The contempt for the public thus encouraged is plain in the constant necessity for leaks to enable us to know much at all of this world. There is in addition a basic condescension on the part of politicians, in their assumption that some people (i.e. themselves and their economic counterparts) are best suited to making the major decisions on how society should run its affairs.

The 1996 debates about MPs' pay, with the outcome of increases of 26% (whilst urging 3% or less on everyone else), were especially significant in revealing this gulf between government and the gov-

erned. Once, the argument was that Parliament would work for the working-class through the election of working-class representatives, on the basis of common interest and experience. Now it was said that MPs' wages had to be raised by huge amounts in order to attract the right calibre of person, who would otherwise be lost to a managerial position in industry. Exactly so. MPs and ministers are political middle managers, and their gaze is so frequently turned to the City and the Confederation of British Industry (and their international equivalents, such as the Council of Ministers of the European Union, the World Trade Organisation and the IMF) because these are the people to whom they are really accountable. For their part, they exert firm central control via local councils and also by means of placeperson-packed quangos (unelected bodies like hospital trust boards, responsible for spending millions in public funds). This in turn exposes the hollowness of local "democracy".

Despite the form of a democratic political process which allegedly includes us all, the impotence of national governments before the activities of transnational companies (otherwise known as globalisation or neo-liberalism) has meant that its content has increasingly become concerned simply with devising ways to improve the lot of the well-off or ease their worries. Since its election in May 1997, the Labour government has been at pains to stress how business-friendly it is both to domestic and foreign investors. The proof has been in such measures as its appointments of business-people to head various commissions on aspects of the Welfare State (e.g. the ex-chief of Barclays Bank in charge of a commission on benefits!), its harassment of the unemployed and the setting of a minimum wage based on what bosses wish to pay rather than what workers need. The non-Tory parties now believe in only the most mild reforms of unfettered capitalism, based on the further belief that nothing but a capitalist system is workable. And this conviction unites all of the main political parties — hence the growing ease with which they swop

working through a very different social framework. Whereas these behaviours now are given every encouragement (from education, media and workplace), anarchist communism would mean a hostile climate for them.

Making Progress

It would, however, be unrealistic to imagine that a completely clean break could be made between one form of society and another. Though a revolution is initially a time of crisis, it then continues as a process. The ways in which we work, create, organise and relate to one another will be continually refined. The basis to this will be the quest to fulfil the twin values of freedom and solidarity, as against the self-centred and short-sighted outlook promoted now.

Anarchist communism would depend on mass involvement. This is both to release everyone's inventiveness and ideas, and to prevent the formation of some sort of governing or economic elite. Two forms of organisation are crucial in this context. The first is regular mass meetings of communities and workers, to ensure that full discussion and participation in matters affecting a locality could be achieved. The second is federation, as many issues (e.g. the uses of a river which runs through many communities) need a broader perspective than the local. This can only come from the involvement of all the communities affected. Federalism would run through successive bands — local, district, regional, international — to take decisions appropriate to that band.

Linked here is a further organisational principle, that would apply to all such situations where the immediate physical presence of all those affected is impracticable. This is delegate democracy. This strongly contrasts with representative democracy (such as Parliament) where, an MP having been elected, he/she then takes decisions on personal, party and ultimately ruling-class grounds, with little reference to the working-class part of the electorate. This

the working-class at last attain control over their own destiny to achieve a genuinely classless society.

A prime objection to anarchism is that it is against human nature. A society without leaders, laws and the apparatus to support them is envisaged as “chaos”, as violent, cruel and greedy. Since these are in fact leading characteristics of the present capitalist order — supposedly a world of general wealth and freedom — we should ask if a society founded instead on individual freedom, mutual co-operation and a sensitive use of the planet’s resources is likely to produce the same fruits, whether in human character or the state of the Earth.

Class Consciousness

How can the exploitative values now dominant be supplanted? Without going into a full discussion of how an anarchist revolution might be achieved, its indispensable element is a widespread class-consciousness (A conscious minority that tries to make a revolution simply forms a new elite, as with the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution). This consciousness embraces disgust with the present order, the sense of solidarity, the desire for thoroughgoing change and the knowledge of how to achieve it. It is class-based because it is the lives of the industrial and agricultural workers of the world — individuals but with many things in common — which can only be relieved by this consciousness and its expression in the building of a new society.

It follows that those who are thus capable of making a revolution have struggled to go beyond the mind-set that living in a capitalist world tends to produce. We are not just creatures of our environment: we can imagine something better, and actively strive to realise our ideas. Through all the problems involved in carrying through the revolution, any temptations towards authoritarian or exploitative behaviour would face an alert, energised populace

members. This is the essential “choice” of which they make so much.

None of the above comments should be mistaken for any nationalistic stance. Anarchists are quite clear that the injustices suffered by the working-class are common across the globe. Indeed it is this common character that helps create a working-class that is international, for all its local variations, and makes the need to unite across national boundaries ever more urgent. And this despite the fact that bosses and politicians still play up national differences in order to maintain weakness and division amongst the world’s workers. Those who today complain about Brussels’ interference should simply ask themselves, is a British boss or politician so preferable? The idea that they are somehow more under our control or more sympathetic is a fallacy. No, it is having a ruling-class at all that is the root problem, whether its members are of the same nationality or not.

A Free Society?

For those who cannot be pacified by material goods (or at least the hope of them), the other side of the democratic picture is coercion. This goes both for those who have an insecure hold on work, housing or education, and those who dissent. With the continuing legal and technical tooling-up of the police, detailed and linked government databases, and the widespread use of closed-circuit TV, all the means for a totally authoritarian system are coming into place. Freedom is reduced to mere consumerism.

Crime is the justification for these measures. Anything that might indict the role that the propaganda and pressures of a capitalist world play is disregarded as an excuse for individual weakness. More than this, in a system where the market is held to be supreme, any assertion of the interests of the working-class that is not thoroughly diluted by politicians and union bureaucrats itself becomes

defined as verging on crime. Thus the outlawing or restriction of strikes, demonstrations, picketing, etc.

The point which we have reached today reveals the basic fallacy that has always underlaid the parliamentary road. This is that the working-class can make continuing and permanent gains while another class dominates it economically and politically. The “finest hour” of parliamentary socialism in the post-1945 nationalisations and creation of the National Health Service continued to preserve managerial chains of command and had no idea of how to counteract the harmful inroads of market capitalism other than through subsidies. This may have cushioned the workforces against unemployment for some decades, but by now the truth is plain: the ruling-class drive for profit is the supreme value in a capitalist world. If this means a return to sweatshops, disregard for the health and safety of workers and excessive hours of work, this is the price to be paid to compete in a global market. In the case of public services it means either their abandonment in privatisation, or severe limitations being placed upon their expenditure. The same point is true of all such areas that have been the object of reform by Parliament: if they can be clawed back for profit’s sake, they will be.

Freedom of Choice

In this pamphlet we explore the ideas of many political parties. Most offer some variant of managing capitalism politically. Ultimately this is to resign ourselves to continuing stressful work, unemployment, discrimination, pollution, and wars, whether over natural resources (as in the Gulf War) or regional political influence (as in the Balkans). Naturally, policies for this management vary, as do the gestures towards social justice. But although certain specific policies will change, there are ideological limits to each party which preserve continuity. Thus today’s Labour Party,

THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST ALTERNATIVE

What follows is not a programme, more the sort of principles and practices which we believe would be essential to a free society. [Further discussion of an anarchist communist society can be found in the AF publications *Beyond Resistance* and *As We See it*. See also Peter Kropotkin’s classic work, “*The Conquest of Bread*”].

In some ways there are resemblances to ideas that the political parties put forward (Tories, Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Greens have all put forward variations on the theme of decentralisation, for example). This reveals two things. Firstly, that anarchist communism is not something totally alien to the experiences and desires of many working-class people, for whom political parties have often been the expression of their hopes for a better life, and which must take at least some measures to seem to be fulfilling them in order to retain their votes.

But secondly, these parties have also identified with values and ways of working — those of capitalism and hierarchy — that could not help but prevent the realisation of such aims as social justice, individual liberty, and harmony with the environment. Whether it be managers’ use of “consultation” or employee shares, politicians’ “decentralising” through regional parliaments or neighbourhood committees, there is a common thread. This is the popular desire for more control over one’s life entwined with a deceptive way of fulfilling it, which curiously always manages to keep real power in the same hands as before. Anarchist communism seeks to do away with all such half-measures and intermediaries, so that

Currently, with the first past the post system they are still very unlikely to get any MPs elected. They may well be able to repeat their success in getting a local councillor elected, though. Where fascists have been successful in Europe they have had the effect of driving mainstream parties further to the right, i.e. more power for the police, even less immigration, etc. It is likely that should the BNP start to get big the main parties will shift their policies to try and absorb any support they have, though on the Continent this has not always proved successful in marginalising fascists. The political system in Britain is so entrenched it is unlikely the BNP will ever make a breakthrough into the big time.

while being explicitly more pro-business in its outlook than its early 1980s model, in both cases is part of a tradition that has never envisaged any more than the taming of the market, rather than its abolition. Similarly, its commitment to reformation of the House of Lords will only mean that we can elect more of our oppressors, instead of their simply inheriting the right to do so.

Similar examples could be given for all of the parties. They adapt, change rhetoric, symbols, even their names, but they never shift so much that their own self-importance (the “need” for them or other bosses) is put in doubt. Those claiming to be socialist (rather than social democratic) or communist, while perhaps committed to economic equality, see political equality as a goal that is much further off. They, of course, will benignly rule us in the meantime. Thus they end up on a par with the others, who always seek to offer “strong leadership” when not merely “representing” us. What we are trying to do throughout this pamphlet is highlight some of the parties’ defining ideas, with reference where appropriate to their current policies. But though there will undoubtedly be a future need to update this account, the continuity must never be obscured by the inevitable hype over policy changes, or even party splits.

Anarchist Apathy?

It is often argued that those like anarchists who deliberately refuse to vote in elections are apathetic, and have no right to comment on political affairs if they do not participate in the approved manner. Anarchists vigorously deny this. Even the politicians profess to be disturbed at the mounting lack of participation in the “democratic process”, a worldwide phenomenon. Anarchists in fact argue for constant and general involvement in politics, that is, all of the questions (work, food, housing, transport, education, etc.) which affect our lives. Apathy — and despair — are the by-products of a vote every few years and the chance to sign the occasional petition

to Parliament. They do not come from the refusal to be mocked in a farce. As anarchist-communists, then, we are opposed to parliamentary democracy and capitalism. Neither can we be satisfied with the end of one and not the other. For example, capitalism can thrive in all kinds of political environments but it will still produce similar misery and injustice.

We conclude by outlining some of our positive views of a world in which they have both been superseded. Our starting-point is that individual freedom is best realised in a society without domination, brought together instead by voluntary co-operation and association. The needs of the individual and the needs of society are in a constant tension, but they stand the best chance of being harmonised in a world which has seen the abolition of classes. This means an end to the power of anyone to dominate, either economically or politically. Power would instead be diffused.

One hundred years ago, anarchists chiefly argued against the working-class taking the parliamentary road on a theoretical level. Today we have all too much experience to confirm their original insight that freedom, equality and well-being are not to be achieved via that route. In the 21st century it is more than time to leave behind the political illusions which littered the 20th. This pamphlet is a contribution to the exposure of one still deeply-rooted.

spectability. They hope to emulate the success of the French National Front and the Austrian Freedom Party in making a Far Right breakthrough into the mainstream. In the last General Election they managed to put up more than 50 candidates and so qualified for a party political broadcast on television, as well as managing to retain their deposit in 3 constituencies. Under a system of proportional representation they may be able to get into Parliament, though they failed to make a breakthrough in the 1999 European elections.

Their support still remains very regional, centred in areas of East London. Their main focus at the moment is directed towards working in these key areas. In their report after the last General Election they whinged that if only the Referendum Party and the UKIP hadn't stood their vote would have been even higher. They also openly call for the NDP and NF to merge with them as "their policies virtually duplicate those of the BNP". This is undoubtedly true, but in the small world of big fascist egos a merger is unlikely. In fact, as they have recently deposed longtime Fuhrer John Tyndall and installed Nick Griffin (the Tony Blair of fascism) at the top they may well split themselves.

As to their policies, the BNP are now the most openly fascist party, with no pretence of being the radical centre and rejecting democracy with a call for a government of national unity (i.e. themselves). Other than that they are, as they themselves say, practically identical to the NDP and NF – Stop immigration, more law and order, smash the IRA, get out of Europe and, of course, protect the environment. The only slight surprise in the BNP's programme is that they say they're the only party that supports animal rights. This is shown to be purely cosmetic by their enthusiastic support for the Countryside Marches (they distributed thousands of copies of a special paper, "The British Countryman"), and the fact that the only animal cruelty they're opposed to is ritual animal slaughter methods.

ports, which shows a remarkable lack of understanding of modern capitalism.

Later in the manifesto their politics get even more confused. They want to get rid of hereditary peers in the House of Lords, but retain the hereditary monarch. On the issue of Northern Ireland they want to introduce an oath of loyalty and deport all the people who refuse to give it. Yet in the long-term they want to see Southern Ireland vote to rejoin the UK! Obviously they'd forgotten to take their pills before writing these parts. The renaming of this group has done nothing for its electoral chances, and it hovered around the Monster Raving Loony end of things last time around. If they ever did get into power, something like Spain under Franco's dictatorship is probably the closest historical parallel.

National Front

This is the rump group of the NF who retained the name and most bonehead support. At the last election they were looking pretty dead in the water but have shown some signs of reviving since then. With the BNP abandoning street activity the NF has stepped into the void and had some high profile marches in Dover and London. Other than that they're much the same as their ex-comrades in the National Democrats though they've added the claim, like the Third Way, that their politics are of the centre not the Far Right. They've also found out why the BNP abandoned street activities as some of their supporters got a good kicking the last time they marched in London.

British National Party (BNP)

This is the big one. The only party on the Far Right with any hope of electoral success. They have abandoned all hope of controlling the streets to concentrate on community activity and electoral re-

THE LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party was never "socialist", however you understand that word. From its birth it has been the parliamentary mouthpiece for the trade unions, or rather, their bureaucracies. Early indications of its role can be seen in the First World War. In August 1914 they denounced war as unjustifiable. Soon they had entered the War Cabinet, and condoned the crushing of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland and the execution of the Irish socialist James Connolly. By 1918 the Labour leaders were able to declare that "the Labour Party is not a class party but a National Party".

With the massive increase in the Labour vote in 1922, one might have thought (though not us!) that the Party would have become more adventurous. Henderson, the Party Secretary, said: "Trade unions should undertake not to seek to alter existing conditions by declaring a strike". What fighting talk!

In the November 1922 elections, Labour again made great advances. Another Labour leader stated that a "Labour Government...would not be a class government". He went on to defend the British Empire as something that "we cannot lightly cast...off at all".

By 1923 Labour was able to form a minority government with Liberal support. Its first action as a government was the signing of the Dawes report, the Allied bankers' measure against the revolution in Germany. The 1924 dockers' strike was smashed by the government. In 1925, a successful miners' strike under a Conservative government had the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald spluttering that: "The Government have handed over the appearance at any rate of victory, to the very forces that sane, well-considered, thor-

oughly well-considered socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy”.

In 1929 the Labour Party once again took power with a minority. The incoming government took a leading part in reducing the wages of textile workers. They applied the Tory Trade Union Act to strikers; they passed the Anomalies Act against the unemployed (over 1.25 million at the time). They endorsed the arrest of 31 workers’ leaders in India. By 1930 they had agreed to the arrest of 10,000 Indian Nationalists. Strikes and uprisings in Egypt, Palestine and Nigeria were crushed.

But the heights, or rather depths, of Labour rule came in 1931. The economic crisis had the Labour government considering raising unemployment contributions, cutting insurance benefits to 26 weeks of the year, cutting teachers’ pay, reducing spending on roads and grants under the Unemployment Grants Scheme, and the most crucial, a 10% cut in dole. Some in the Cabinet rejected this, so Macdonald dissolved the government and set up a “National Government” in coalition with Tories and Liberals. In doing so, he and other ministers and MPs split from the Labour Party. An election confirmed them in power. The remaining Labour leaders had been too heavily involved in Macdonald and Snowden’s policies and continued to defend their role in the Labour government. The treachery of Macdonald, rising unemployment and the looming threat of fascism failed to bring them to a more radical position. The prevailing ideas in the Labour Party were “Macdonaldism without Macdonald” in the following years.

Labour won a massive election victory in 1945. Within 6 days of taking office they had sent troops into the London docks to break a strike. Three months later troops were again called out against a national docks strike. The antagonism between dockers and the Labour government came to a head in 1948 when Labour used the old Tory Emergency Powers Act and again sent in the troops. Other striking workers were also subject to strike-breaking by troops during Labour’s term of office. Abroad, Labour helped

strictly segregated. Mass non-European immigration must be halted, limits placed on asylum seekers, and “generously financed, non-coercive resettlement programmes for those non-Europeans wishing to return to the land of their ethnic origin.”

The following section of their manifesto, “National Identity and Independence”, returns to a more traditional Far Right fear with the EU strongly criticised as it “erodes our sovereignty”. However, the law and order section swings back to a more liberal position calling for drug use to be decriminalised and the prison population reduced. In the final chapter they sound like the Green Party, calling for less intensive farming and controls on pollution.

Despite their calls for radical reform they are in fact only tinkering slightly with the present set-up, and when they talk of cultural and national identity their origins as a faction of the National Front become more apparent. This lot are too marginal to have any hope of getting into power come the next election, but if they ever did the best we could hope for would be some populist reforms mixed in with sophisticated racism.

National Democrats

Until recently this group was the official National Front but they decided the name was a liability and have now decided to stress their democratic(!) nature. They have suffered several splits and defections so membership is probably in decline. Despite the name change their politics are pretty much what you’d expect. Make our streets safe again, combat the drugs epidemic, back to basics education (where have we heard that phrase before?) and opposition to the European Union: all standard stuff for the Far Right. They take xenophobia one stage further than most by stating the need for Britain to leave the Commonwealth as well. The usual gloss about protecting the environment and the NHS they all seem to consider obligatory are thrown in. We’re all also going to get back to work by rebuilding our manufacturing base through stopping foreign im-

If any of this stuff sounds familiar to you it's probably because you can remember Thatcher being in power. So a vote for the UKIP is a vote for a return to the 80s, except with us outside the European Union this time. Where this will leave their 3 MEPs the UKIP is so far unclear on.

The Fascist Far Right

The Third Way

The most intellectual of the fascist groups, and not surprisingly the smallest, they describe themselves as the radical centre, something they have in common with a lot of Far Right parties and, of course, Tony Blair. Their politics are less easy to pigeonhole than those of their more boneheaded fellow-travellers, but on closer examination certain suspicious phrases crop up. They talk of the need for the wider ownership of property, with companies serving the needs of "employees, consumers and shareholders alike". This ignores the very real class difference between the employees and the owners of companies and rejects the need for class struggle to overcome them. They talk of the need for more co-operatives and small businesses but not the need to abolish capitalism itself.

Constitutionally they call for "True Democracy". As anarchists we would have reservations about even the best democracy but it's interesting for a Far Right group to be calling for it. However when they explain what they mean by this they don't cite the examples we would expect like the workers' councils, soviets or factory committees formed in many revolutions. No, they mean the system in present-day Switzerland! Whilst it may have a federal structure and hold frequent referenda it has also been one of the most consistently reactionary countries in Europe, so not much to look forward to there.

Then we start to move into the more suspicious areas. They call for "Cultural Diversity", but only if the different cultures are

Dutch imperialism by sending in troops to crush an Indonesian nationalist uprising. They used surrendered Japanese troops to back them up in this dirty business. They again employed Japanese troops to crush the Saigon workers' uprising in 1945.

The re-run of slavish devotion to the needs of capitalism came with the 1964–1970 Wilson government. It put means testing forward in its policies on social services; it pioneered the abolition of free milk for schools; it tried to bring in an anti-strike act; its housing record was appalling, and it backed everything the USA did in Vietnam.

The Wilson and Callaghan governments between 1974 and 1979 proved no different. Unemployment continued to rise; the numbers of the poor continued to increase; public expenditure on roads, transport, housing, etc fell drastically. The monetarist policies implemented by the Thatcher government were pioneered under Callaghan. Wage restraint resulted in a massive revolt among public sector workers.

When Neil Kinnock became Labour leader he presided over a party where changes were already taking place. The old ideas of welfarism and nationalisation which had given Labour some sort of pseudo-socialist veneer were beginning to crumble. Kinnock came out in clear support for Government secrecy during the Zircon-Duncan Campbell episode in 1987. The Labour leadership implied that the US military presence in Britain was OK. Official support to the miners was refused during the Great Miners' Strike of 1984–85. Kinnock also proposed a National Assessment, a repeat of Callaghan's Social Contract which had led to wage restraint and 1.5 million unemployed.

But the changes that spelt a clear end to allegiance to the Welfare State were to be carried through to their conclusion with the new leadership under Tony Blair (elected in 1994). The document Labour into power: a framework for partnership launched in January 1997 completed the changes that have come about within the Labour Party. The reforms outlined in this are part of the "Amer-

icanisation” of Labour, the finishing touches to turning it into a US-style Democrat Party. The annual conference would become a “showcase” rally where the Great Leader gives a stirring soundbite speech, with plenty of happy-clappy loyal supporters. And indeed this was graphically illustrated at the first Party Conference after taking power, in September 1997.

The leadership planned on clipping the wings of the old National Executive Committee (NEC) by stripping it of its powers and blocking what remains of the Labour left from influencing it. This watered-down NEC would zealously support any Labour leadership and never cause it embarrassment. In this strategy the leadership has been blocked by the Left, who managed to capture a number of seats at the 1998 Conference. This victory will be short-lived, as the leadership thinks of new ways of marginalising and weakening the Left. The leadership have to be victorious in this, as the transformation of Labour depends on the defeat of Old Labour.

The union link will be further weakened, and Blair will try hard to get membership of his Party based on individual membership. Indeed, one group of “modernisers”, the 500-strong Second Term group, is pushing for the divorce between the Party and the unions to be final. They hope to capitalise on pronouncements by “left” trade union bureaucrats like Ken Cameron of the Fire Brigades Union, who for their own reasons want a divorce. Phil Woodford, a director of Second Term, said in September 1999 that he believed “the break with the unions will happen in the next five years”. The old Labour left around Benn, Skinner and co. will continue to be marginalised, a minority increasingly unwelcome inside the Party.

The accelerated rotting of old-style Labourism has taken place because, like similar parties throughout the world, it cannot adapt to the end of Keynesian economic strategy, which involved the development of a Welfare State and “full employment”. It can no longer make any promises that it can carry out a reformist programme to transform capitalism into something more “hu-

now become a good capitalist (i.e. he’s died), so we should be free from the danger of being sent Europhobic videos in any forthcoming elections.

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

The UKIP was able to take full advantage of proportional representation in the elections to the European Parliament and now has 3 MEPs. This has done nothing to stop the party’s passion for infighting, and soon after this historic victory they sacked the entire executive committee.

The Party has policies on a wide range of issues, but on inspection of its manifesto it soon becomes clear that Euro-scepticism is not the only thing the UKIP has in common with the right wing of the Tory Party. Their economic policy is for free trade outside of Europe, particularly in South East Asia and with Commonwealth countries. “Job Creation” should be left to the private sector, not state enterprises (so don’t expect more than 3 pounds an hour). Their education policy is more emphasis on the “3Rs” but they accept this is not enough. No, we also need to be taught to be good citizens and “plain good manners”. The Welfare State is costing too much so has to be reformed (i.e. decimated), to discourage dependency and encourage people to return to work and regain their dignity (though how you do this in a McJob is not made clear). Defence spending needs to be greatly increased and a crackdown on crime is imperative. On the question of race they go to great lengths to stress that they are not racist (though of course they reject “political correctness”). This does seem a little odd as they also argue for much stricter immigration and border controls to stop immigrants flooding in from Southern Europe. They finish off their manifesto by telling us how the unity of the United Kingdom must be maintained against Irish terrorists, Scottish nationalist and regional devolutionists, as well as the need to maintain our national institutions like the House of Lords.

THE FAR RIGHT

There have been some changes amongst the Far Right since the last edition of this pamphlet and no doubt there are more to come. Two important factors have affected them:

- The massive defeat of the Tories at the last election
- The launch of the Countryside Alliance.

The Labour majority in Parliament is now so big the Tories are practically irrelevant. This obviously will make people on the Right more open to extra-parliamentary activities. The non-fascist Far Right has so far failed to encourage mass defections from the Tory party and seem to be in the doldrums themselves. The fascist parties haven't yet shown much growth but don't appear to be in decline either. For the moment most disaffected Tories have not looked to join a smaller Far Right party but have instead chosen to spend their energies supporting the Countryside Alliance. All of the Far Right parties have, quite correctly, seen the Countryside Marches as a great recruiting ground, so though they all remain small at the moment there is a large pool of reactionaries out there who may turn to Far Right parties.

The Non-Fascist Far Right

The Referendum Party

They have dissolved themselves after failing to achieve any of their objectives, and their bankroller the billionaire James Goldsmith has

mane" (but still exploitative). But even mild reforms cannot now be granted under capitalism because of the development of the global economy. If the boss class is to stay competitive on a world scale it cannot offer concessions. It has to press ahead with its austerity packages and redundancies, in order to streamline national economies and make them leaner and meaner, able to stand up to a bout in the global economic ring.

Labour, unlike the Conservatives, is fairly united on Europe. A large section of the British boss class realises that its best chances are inside the European bloc. It needs access to these markets. It thinks it can rely on Labour to help this come about. Integration into a Single Market will mean even further attacks on the working-class. The bosses hope Labour can oversee these attacks. Blair is planning more repressive police actions, more people sent to prison for longer, greater State surveillance. He was elected in a situation of continuing mass unemployment and increasing poverty. Indeed the situation has become worse with the worsening economic situation worldwide. Gordon Brown, Labour's Chancellor, has promised that he will not increase income tax on the top 10%. He announced that there would be no "blank cheques" and that public sector workers could expect no more than the graduated 3.3% pay increase already promised by the Conservatives. Labour will need increased police powers as he attempts to carry on the work already put into operation by the Conservatives, the attacks on living standards, wages and benefits against which many may decide to act.

Blair sent out messages via his conference speeches and his comments on redundancies in the North-East that he does not intend to apply state intervention against the "natural" workings of the world market. He signalled in his conference speech that more attacks would be coming on workers in education and the public sector.

We noted before the 1997 election that an incoming Labour government would very quickly exhibit strong authoritarian tenden-

cies. This has come true in various Cabinet pronouncements, particularly those of Blair and Home Secretary Jack Straw. New measures under the guise of “anti-terrorism”, in the aftermath of the 1998 Omagh bombing, will weaken civil liberties and can be easily used against “the enemy within” — anyone who dares to struggle against the measures of repression and austerity that Labour will attempt to implement. The so-called Left within the Labour Party could only muster a handful of votes against these new repressive measures.

Labour has increasingly moved in to occupy the political ground of the Conservatives. This has resulted in a considerable weakening of the Tories. At the same time other parties, in particular the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, and the Liberal Democrats to a certain extent, are moving into the space vacated by Labour in its “Old Labour” guise.

If anything, the overwhelming victory of the Blair leadership has strengthened the hand of the modernisers. Old-style Labour activists are continuing to leave the Party in droves, whilst Blair is aiming at Tory and Liberal Democrat constituencies to replenish its base. He has made several open appeals to these sectors. This will further strengthen the trend towards “modernisation” although the Party, transforming as it is into a US Democrat-style machine, will rely more on soundbites, spin doctors and controlled events than on an activist base.

The Trotskyists in the main have talked about a crisis of expectations with the coming to power of Labour. They hoped that the working-class had voted for Labour with great expectations of radical and levelling reforms. In fact, in some areas there was mass working-class abstention, whilst the victory of Labour depended to a great extent on a willingness to vote out the Conservative government. The Trots hoped that these mythical expectations would be transformed into disappointment and then radicalisation. In this fake scenario, they talk about Labour betrayals. But Labour never betrayed in the first place. The Blair leadership made its intentions

Wales has been hard hit by the crisis of British capitalism and is one of the poorest regions in the whole of Western Europe. It has marked social deprivation and ill-health is on the increase as “New” Labour follow the neo-liberal doctrine of a global capitalist economy. Especially since the defeat of the miners there has been a programme of cuts in welfare, public and social services on a yearly basis.

The working-class of Wales have tended not to support the siren call of Welsh nationalism. Neither, however, have they been won over to anarchist-communism — as yet!

Plaid Cymru make a big fuss of being “socialist”, but in reality they stand for nationalism with a pseudo-socialist tinge, i.e. “national socialist” which attracts a proportion of bigoted anti-English racists. They hope to achieve independence for Wales, albeit within the EU. (Although they deny they are for independence!) Their immediate goal is to turn the Welsh Assembly into a parliament along similar lines to that which exists in Scotland.

The stated aims of the party are:

“To secure self-government for Wales and a democratic Welsh state based on socialist principles”, and to “Safe-guard the culture, language, traditions, environment and economic life of Wales, through decentralist socialist policies.”

Plaid’s socialism amounts to stodgy social democratic reformism. Dafydd Wigley (the party leader), in his speech to the 1995 Annual Conference, claimed “It is Plaid Cymru, not the Labour Party, that inherits the vision of Keynes.” This may be true, seeing that the Labour Party have discovered the “social market”, but it is hardly socialism! Wigley went on to outline his “socialist” vision. Plaid Cymru would be campaigning “to help the people of Wales establish business ventures...and to help those small businesses to develop successfully.”

The Party of Wales promises to defend small local bosses against big foreign bosses. Wigley again: “We take the side of small business against the ravages of big industrial corporations. We will back the small man and woman in their fight against faceless bureaucracy.” Plaid Cymru would not oppose foreign investment in their self-governing Wales: their “socialist” Wales will be an enterprise Wales.

Any Objective One funding from the EU will go to business, with workers still fulfilling their traditional role of wealth creators for the ruling class. There is no difference between an English or Welsh boss, we are still exploited through the system of wage-labour.

clear long before the 1997 election. There were no massive cuts in the arms bill, no repeal of repressive legislation, no moves towards taxing the rich. Even mild reforms, for example a fox-hunting ban, have been abandoned. The Labour government has shown itself an enthusiastic ally of the USA, eagerly assisting in war moves against Serbia and Iraq. The “ethical dimension” to foreign policy of Robin Cook has been shown to be a complete sham with the continued supplying of arms to Indonesia, as well as Bahrain, Zimbabwe, Colombia, Sri Lanka, etc. Labour has continued to maintain strict control over asylum seekers and economic migrants. Blair continues to send out strong messages that Labour is a friend of big business by his many conferences and sponsored meals with businessmen, and the Government’s friendly attitude to the CBI.

In the long-term, the transformation of Labour may well open up new opportunities for the construction of movements based on anti-parliamentarism and direct action. Already growing numbers of people, whether ecological activists or workplace militants, are seeing that they cannot rely on lobbying or pressure on Parliament and are increasingly turning to such tactics. It is up to revolutionary anarchists to do their utmost to help create this movement. The Labour government threatens many grim scenarios for us, the working-class, but also new possibilities for a revolutionary alternative.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Poisonous Roots

The Tories as a political grouping first emerged in the 1680s, the name deriving from the Irish word for a robber – extremely appropriate in view of their subsequent history. Over time they became identified as the party of large landowners and the established church, as the Whigs were identified with the rising industrial interests and nonconformism. This connection with landed interests is one of several threads in Conservative history which can be traced right through to the present day and the Countryside Alliance, which is clearly dominated by the class views of landowners even though it is not a party organisation as such.

A further thread is a consistent advocacy of the rights of bosses over their workforces, thus embracing both industry and agriculture. In its 1980s guise this became “management’s right to manage”. An early demonstration of this bias came in the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 which outlawed “combinations” of workers (i.e. unions). This measure stemmed in part from fear of the potential influence of the French Revolution upon British workers: over 100 years later Britain’s coalition government, dominated by Tories, was prominent in sending forces against the Russian Revolution in the hope of restoring the ruling-class there and stopping “Bolshevism” here (for which read “working-class control”).

more prominent force in Scottish politics: it has also thrust their programme into the public eye. Curiously enough, the leadership has seemed less keen to press the independence message since devolution, and this is creating some dissension within the Party. For his part Alex Salmond has appeared to be of the view that that the electors need to go through the stage of limited autonomy that the parliament represents before they will be ready to go for outright independence. The question naturally arises, how long will this “stage” last?

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru (“Party of Wales”) has a very similar history to that of the SNP. Formed in 1925 by individuals of similar ilk to those of the SNP (including the writer and dramatist Saunders Lewis) Plaid Cymru, however, had to wait 41 years for an electoral victory. Today they have a total of 4 MPs from 38 seats in Wales and claim 10,000 members across the country and beyond.

With the advent of the Welsh Assembly (voted for by only 25% of the electorate, with only 46% participating at all), Plaid Cymru has 15 assembly Members (AMs) out of a possible 60 seats, having made inroads into the traditional Labour areas of the valleys, i.e. Rhondda and Islwyn.

Like other AMs their role is extremely limited and the Assembly is regarded as a talking-shop by the majority in Wales. Due to the fact that it has no powers of primary legislation nor tax variation, the conventional separation of powers between legislature and executive was deemed unnecessary. The annual block grant is already allocated by central government, not to mention a rather unique pro-capitalist fail-safe clause built into its legislative structure with big business having a veto on every single decision made by AMs! (Not that anything vaguely “socialist” has a chance since all the AMs are procapitalist/reactionary.)

Blairite. Outgoing leader Alex Salmond was long a master of the art of empty phrasemongery and sound bites, and in stepping down he will be passing the torch onto his younger cadres. The SNP are extremely image-conscious and never miss a photo opportunity, and have consistently relied upon Salmond's popularity to promote themselves on campaign walkabouts.

As for policy, they have quietly dropped their commitment to renationalise the railways, and SNP-controlled councils have come under fire at conferences for pushing through PFI (Private Finance Initiative) schemes. They talk of investing in "those high growth industries which can generate new jobs and wealth" (SNP Manifesto for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections, 1999). These would presumably include call centres, notorious for paying low wages, having long hours and stressful conditions, and which are rapidly increasing in number, not only in Scotland but across the UK as a whole. Corporation tax would be slashed as a way of encouraging more "high value added operations". All of this leads them to predict that, under independence, Scotland would be the seventh most prosperous nation in the world. But as usual, this prosperity would only be for the elite ruling class and not for the workers.

The fact of this was proved at their 1999 conference in Inverness, which saw exhibition stalls from some of the country's largest businesses: FirstBus, Virgin Trains, Tesco, Scottish Gas, BT and British Energy. Also present were Railtrack — feeling confident of their safety in the SNP's hands — who had a few invited delegates around for tea and scones. And as if the Nats' reactionary streak weren't clear enough, anti-abortion group SPUC were also present, with conference stewards assisting in the handing out of leaflets.

Two elections in 1999 had varying implications for the Party's prospects. In the European Parliament the SNP again ended up with 2 seats, but received over 200,000 less votes than in 1994. But in the Scottish Parliament, which took office in July, they became the second largest party after Labour with 35 seats. (No party has a majority.) Devolution has allowed the SNP to become a much

Economic Tensions

Robert Peel's Tamworth manifesto of 1835, which committed the Tories to moderate reform and a balance of the interests of land, industry and trade, was where use of the name Conservative begins, as they now supposedly aimed to "conserve what is good and change what is bad". This marked an attempt to recognise the growing shift in the economic organisation of society, and therefore political strength, which also stemmed from the 1832 Reform Act when the wealthy in the newly-industrialised areas had acquired the vote. This was accentuated when, as Prime Minister, Peel saw through the repeal of the Corn Laws which for several decades had acted as a guarantee of profitable prices for farmers. These laws were part of a continuing economic argument within the Conservatives, between protection of domestic producers (through duties on imports) and an inclination towards so-called free trade, something especially demanded by industrialists both to allow them easier access to foreign markets as they expanded production and to cut the cost of the raw materials that they imported. The conflict of agricultural and industrial interests has never been fully resolved. Even in the 1980s, when legislation gave much more power to bosses and weakened workers' opportunities to organise and show solidarity, manufacturing bosses bemoaned their fate as businesses closed and the Government's policies favoured the growth of the service economy.

Nonetheless, the argument between those who favour complete free trade and those who want some form of protection for British producers has continued. For example, Joseph Chamberlain resigned from the Cabinet in 1903 because he was in favour of tariffs, and Stanley Baldwin called an election largely over this issue in 1923. Nowadays the theme is repeated under the shorthand term of "Europe", where free trade has become linked to a loss of political and economic independence (independence of the British ruling-class, that is).

Relations with the Working-Class

As with the Liberals, the Conservatives had to recognise during the course of the nineteenth century the developing strength of the working-class as a factor in their political calculations. In parliamentary terms, this first occurred in the Reform Act of 1867, piloted through Parliament by Benjamin Disraeli, which made the qualification for the vote less stringent than before. But as it remained based around the possession of property to some degree, most workers remained excluded (and all women). Not at all coincidentally, the continued expansion of the British Empire and domestic propaganda on its behalf in the second half of the nineteenth century, through such events as Disraeli manufacturing the title Empress of India for Queen Victoria, and the “Scramble for Africa” in which Britain and a number of other European powers participated, were used to reconcile British workers to their position of domestic powerlessness by creating an illusion of superiority over the workers and peasants of other lands. In other words, through nationalism and racism.

The distorted and sanitised history of these days of empire, when Britain was “great”, has left an enduring impression on how many in this country relate to the rest of the world, and continues to underlie emotions in debates on issues like immigration, asylum and trade. Since the Liberals’ ardent imperialism of this period was modified in the 20th century by a greater sympathy for the independent desires of the colonised peoples, the Conservatives’ more single-minded imperialism and nationalism were and have remained both a distinguishing stance in their rhetoric and a stick with which to beat the other parties.

Nevertheless the Conservatives have shown varying attitudes to change, depending on the circumstances. Their instinct is to resist it, but if they cannot do that they strive to steer matters in such a way as to preserve both their basic position and the capitalist system. In addition, their patience should not be underestimated,

The SNP have deservedly been tagged the “Tartan Tories” by their opponents, despite their claim to be a “moderate left of centre” party. This has been due to the class background of their leadership and the bulk of their supporters, particularly in rural areas of Northern Scotland. Since the early 80s they have, however, attempted to present themselves as the left alternative to Labour. They now have a Trade Union Group which competes in a turgid struggle with the Scottish Left, particularly the various Communist Party and ex-CP union hacks. Although most class conscious Scottish workers have viewed this with the contempt it deserves, with the advent of New Labour the SNP has begun to look increasingly like Old Labour draped in a saltire.

Prior to the referendum on devolution, the SNP campaigned on the same “Yes” platform as Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Their aim at the time was to show how well the Scottish Parliament could work, thus making the population of Scotland demand full independence. Since devolution, however, they have taken the easy road of trying to show up the parliament’s limited powers. Their manifesto for the elections to the Scottish Parliament played down independence and concentrated on what they would do if they won power, using lots of business-friendly words such as “enterprise”, “high growth”, “competition” – more of the same old shit, then?

The majority of the Party’s support continues to be in traditional conservative territory and the middle classes, and they enjoy particular support from a number of student-based organisations. However, due to their perceived image of being to the left of Labour, they do have some support amongst the young working-class; older workers, on the other hand, are proving harder to peel away from their traditional Labour loyalties, or are being pulled in by the Scottish Socialist Party.

The Nationalists’ whole attitude towards internal structure is to promote and push forward young, “dynamic” professionals. In this respect the SNP have become progressively more and more

fringe it has always been a strictly constitutional nationalist party. What also united the nationalists was a well-founded belief that the Labour Party, despite a paper commitment to Home Rule, was as Unionist as the Tories.

The original leadership of the SNP were a mixed bunch, including many Gaelic revivalist intellectuals and Scottish cultural figures such as the poet Lewis Spence. The early SNP made little or no attempt to present itself as a working-class party, and even if it had it's doubtful whether it could have made any inroads into workers' support for the Labour or Communist parties. Neither was (or is) the party republican, and its rhetoric was strongly anti-English rather than anti-British imperialist per se. From the beginning, however, the party was very much geared towards fighting elections even if its small size prevented widespread electoral activity.

The SNP's first parliamentary success, however, didn't come until 1945, when they captured (but promptly lost) a seat in the Motherwell constituency. Ten years later the SNP was still only winning about 0.5% of the vote and its rise did not begin until the late 1960s. (It has had continuous representation at Westminster since 1967.) Its electoral high point was in 1974 when the Party took 30.4% of the vote and gained 11 MPs. Much of this popularity surrounded the Party's "It's Scotland's Oil" campaign, where it mobilised around the issue of ownership of this potentially lucrative North Sea resource off Scotland's coasts. Labour's response was to resurrect their commitment to "Home Rule", so sweeping the carpet from beneath the feet of the nationalists. The 1979 referendum, which saw the Scottish electorate narrowly vote in favour of a Scottish Assembly, was a response to this upsurge in Scottish Nationalism. When the British Parliament overturned the decision the response wasn't the mass (peaceful, democratic, constitutional, etc.) rebellion the SNP would have liked, but a dull resignation and subsequent massive drop in support for them.

which sees them envisaging the day when conceded ground can be taken back. Whereas in 1926, with the Russian Revolution still a recent event, the General Strike was resisted with the full force of the State mobilised to take on the strikers, whether through the police or propaganda (the "British Gazette" under the editorship of Winston Churchill), by the 1950s and their restoration to power the Tories were seemingly content to accept the nationalisations of major industries like the mines which Labour had instituted.

This was the period when "consensus politics", over such concepts as a mixed private and State economy, dominated relations between the two parties, the Liberals by this point being thoroughly outflanked by the others. The rise of the consumer society after the austere conditions of the war and immediate post-war years was of course the ideal culture within which capitalism could expand. With low unemployment and rising wages, industrial peace seemed assured. But by the 1980s, renewed economic crisis and the desire to establish political authority meant a renewed struggle to reorganise the working-class: thus the struggles with workers in steel (1981), coal (1984-85) and docks (1989), all of which led to mass redundancies and a loss of established rights at work, as well as wider discouragement and insecurity amongst workers.

Foreign Affairs and Immigration

In foreign affairs a similar pattern holds. Independence movements in all the colonies were at first resisted, often with brutal effect, such as the Amritsar massacre of Indian nationalists in 1919, or the repression loosed on Kenyan nationalists in the 1950s. But in each case the leash was gradually loosened (at least in overt form), and it was the Tories who largely oversaw the transition from the subservience of the Empire to the looser ties of the Commonwealth. This still permitted, on the one hand, access for British investment

and on the other the export of products from the former colonies with no or lesser duties imposed upon them compared to countries outside the Commonwealth. Furthermore, the limited education available to the majority coupled with the conscious training of local political and military elites by Britain were a further way of maintaining a real measure of influence after the achievement of “independence”. This form of connection also helped, and has continued to help, give British companies an advantage, notably in the arms trade.

But it was Britain’s imperial past that in the long-term also led to a range of problems with which the Tories, in power for 35 years out of 52 in the period 1945–1997, had to contend. One of the key feelings living under capitalism breeds is insecurity. Thus even at a time of prosperity, the arrival of new people can come to be seen as a threat. This was exactly the case with the development of immigration from the Commonwealth countries from the 1940s onwards. Indeed this hostility was accentuated by their origin in countries that once were colonies. Black people had lived in Britain for centuries, but after World War Two Britain’s very need for cheap labour in certain fields made black communities more substantial. Particularly ironic was the position of Enoch Powell, who as Minister of Health in the early 60s oversaw efforts to bring West Indians into the lower reaches of the NHS, but who within a few years was warning of race war and arguing for repatriation.

Though they have never gone as far as a programme of repatriation, starting in 1962 with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, all Tory administrations have passed laws whose net effect has been not simply to restrict immigration but especially, because of the way in which they have been framed, to hamper that of the non-white. The instinctive Tory sympathy for authoritarian and fascist regimes is reflected in such laws, and it is their existence and the pronouncements that go with them (e.g. Margaret Thatcher’s 1978 comment about the fear that “this country might be swamped by people of a different culture”) that has generally tended to siphon

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY AND PLAID CYMRU

In Scotland and Wales the electorate continue to be offered the “choice” of voting for their respective ruling classes (or would-be ruling classes!) in the form of the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru. Both parties have presented themselves as the centre-left alternative to Labour and would like to win the traditional working-class vote in Scotland and Wales. In the past 25 years or so they have advanced from being essentially “fringe” parties to major players, particularly at a local government level. Much of their appeal stems from popular resentment on the part of large sections of the Scottish and Welsh populations to remote rule from Westminster by people who have no idea of their specific culture. This resentment has been exploited by the nationalists, who increasingly use the language of socialism whilst pursuing policies which are wholly capitalist in content. The advent of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh National Assembly has been an attempt to head off their influence whilst preserving the form of the U.K., still ultimately controlled from London.

The “Tartan Tories”

The Scottish National Party (SNP) was formed in 1934, from the unification of a number of groups and tiny “parties” who held similar views on the need for a “national renewal” and Home Rule. Unlike their Irish counterparts, the SNP was far from “revolutionary”, and although it has since its foundation had a militant and republican

ist'), the sense of political malaise on the left deepened. It was the political rethink that these experiences triggered that has led the Socialist Party to remodel itself, to Scargill's launch of Socialist Labour, and to the numerous declarations of 'independence' and 'renewal' that have become common left currency. The weakness of all these projects is testament to the depth of the general political slump from which no force on the left will easily escape.

Waiting for disenchantment and frustration with New Labour to grow, the bulk of the left is currently stuck in political stasis. This makes it all the more important that vital issues around the future development of the class struggle are not obscured by a faction fight within the bureaucracy of the official labour movement and its left allies as class conflicts erupt once again.

This politically volatile time is simultaneously a period of risk and of opportunity. In the battles that are to come in the months and years ahead uncompromising, militant revolutionary politics will be indispensable. An important step in asserting our political independence and cranking up our combativity is learning to reject capitalist ideas and agencies in their left wing guises as much as in any other.

off potential fascist support in this country. In the 1990s this tendency led to the Tories' deliberate confusion of asylum seeking by political refugees with the issue of immigration. Naturally making no attempt to explain how the plight of many of these people stems from British and more broadly western backing for repressive regimes, the Tories have once more shown how xenophobia and racism are core parts of their creed.

In the early Cold War era, when Britain had been frozen out of continuing co-operation with the USA in developing nuclear weapons, the ludicrous notion of pursuing a so-called "independent" programme (first begun under Labour) was fully supported. This was seen as the supposedly prestigious behaviour of a "Great Power", something which did not finally fall apart until the early 1960s. After this point, British nuclear facilities were ultimately run to tie in with NATO strategy and therefore American interests.

The resurgence of the Cold War in the 1980s which brought Cruise missiles to Britain saw Thatcher continuing to repeat the fantasy of the "independent deterrent", the notion that potentially invading Russians would swear off such adventurism because they faced not only the nuclear wrath of America but might also be hit by Britain as well. It was a particular instance of how British rulers' vanity had still not accepted that there were two superpowers in the world, and Britain wasn't either of them. Huge sums were consequently spent on both Cruise and Trident missiles, as part of a general upsurge in military spending at this time.

Although no war occurred with the USSR, the traditionally militaristic cast of Tory thinking led to war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982, a campaign which was given much credit for the Tories' 1983 General Election victory. Certainly it was a political rather than an economically motivated war: in time-dishonoured fashion, it served to distract enough people for long enough from real issues like the steady rise in unemployment. This war was also significant for the amount of State control exerted over the media's coverage, lessons from which have been all the

more firmly applied since then. For all the Conservative talk of freedom, they have always slipped quite smoothly into totalitarian behaviour as soon as the so-called “national interest” is threatened : the mass media share so many Tory assumptions that they are for the most part all too willing to cooperate. It is usually far too late to matter when something of the truth as to what went on in a modern-day British war emerges, and it is the Tories under Thatcher and then John Major during the Gulf War in 1991, who really perfected this manipulation. (Partly they needed to as the enemy in both of these wars had previously been sold British weaponry within the previous few years.)

The Home Front

Domestically, as already outlined, the Tories’ have always loathed all working-class organisation which isn’t for the purpose of ensuring more efficient exploitation. During the period of relatively low unemployment in the 1950s and 1960s, the economy was able to provide more in the way of rewards and unions were able to press for better wages and conditions knowing that their bargaining position was strong (unlike, say, in the 1930s Depression). The greater working-class confidence of this period, though limited in its ambitions, was enough to make the government of Edward Heath (1970–74) bring in an Industrial Relations Act. This introduced various measures, such as union registration and compulsory strike ballots, to hamper unions in pursuing disputes effectively (which was of course the motive). Some workers were imprisoned as a result of the Act, but mass demonstrations in their support helped bring about their release.

Even more important in this period for showing that the State is not invincible were the two national miners’ strikes of 1972 and 1974, the latter helping to bring down the Heath government. The Tories never forgot this resistance, and in the years of opposition

nities for electoral work by the nationalist-left. The transformation of the SSA into the Scottish Socialist Party in February 1999 was intended to make it possible to win a left bloc in the new Parliament.

The largest single group in the SSA had always been Scottish Militant Labour (SML), part of the Socialist Party. The launch of the SSP was a declaration of independence by SML, a breakaway from which the Socialist Party has yet to recover. There is no doubt that SML has carried its support base, centred around Glasgow, with it into the Scottish Socialist Party. The SSP’s programme is a mixture of old style leftist prescriptions mixed up with populist nationalist sentiment.

Tommy Sheridan won the SSP’s single seat in elections to the Scottish Parliament in May 1999 — a regional top-up seat reflecting a combined party-list vote in the region of 7.25%. In the Assembly elections it was beaten outside of this base by the SLP, but this situation was reversed in elections to the European Parliament, with the SSP winning just under 40,000 votes. The SSP’s support is localised in West Central Scotland, where it is a small but tangible political force. The party has little organised presence beyond this through which it might break out to challenge New Labour and the SNP nationally.

The reality of leftism

The series of intense struggles that erupted right across the 1980s and after often (though not always) ended in defeat, despite the heroism and determination of many tens of thousands of working class militants. Together with the decline of traditional smoke-stack industries, and the political influence of the unions that ‘represented’ workers in these sectors, this led to the demoralisation of the left in the British labour movement. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the state capitalist systems across eastern Europe (that so many of these groups regarded as ‘social-

ist Alliance project developed a minimal level of coherence and an ability to mobilise.

Three factors seem to have been important. First, this coming together of forces has been the product not out of a sense of left-wing optimism and opportunity, but one of pessimism and uncertainty. Second, the parties and agencies involved have had different sets of expectations about the role of the alliances and their political priorities. Often they have seized up as the novelty of the coalition has given way to the stark reality of conflicting politics. Third, the alliances have lacked a clear campaigning focus that might have sustained a distracting ‘unity in action’. As a result, electoral politics have come to dominate the work of the alliances, pushing out activists opposed to such work, and opening up divisions between the leftists that remain. Poor electoral performances then corrode the ‘logic’ of the electoral alliance strategy.

Only the United Socialist list survived to contest the Welsh Assembly elections. After months of wrangling, the network of Socialist Alliance slates for the EU elections collapsed in disagreement, leaving the field open to a collection of maverick and independent ‘alternative left’ slates. The Socialist Alliance and a lone Independent Labour candidate both contested the West Midlands constituency, while the Alternative Labour List, headed by the deselected Labour MEP Ken Coates, put up candidates in two other regions. That these concerted efforts at alliance building should end up in such disarray is symptomatic of the state that this part of the left has got it self into.

Scottish Socialist Party

The twin referendums in favour of a new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, under a system of proportional representation and with devolved powers, was seen — especially by supporters of the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) — as opening up new opportu-

that followed developed plans for taking on the working-class and its official organisations. For example, Nicholas Ridley, later a minister under Thatcher, was drawing up such a plan (to build up coal stocks and then provoke a strike) to crush the miners in 1978. Thatcher and Keith Joseph set up the Centre for Policy Studies, one of a number of think-tanks which laid the intellectual groundwork for an end to the mixed economy and in particular the installation of a “free market” in labour. This could only be achieved by making it as difficult as possible for workers to organise and act collectively, and in a series of acts this aim was pursued by such means as outlawing so-called secondary picketing and solidarity strikes. Yet another legal ploy was sequestration, the seizure of a union’s assets, which was a key tactic used to attack the miners during the strike of 1984–85. This strike especially faced outright class war, and in the brutal alliance of Government, courts, police and the media against the miners was the conclusive answer to any fantasies that the State is a neutral arbitrator in the “national interest”, or that the class struggle is an outmoded concept.

Parallel to these policies of attacking working-class organisation (leaving aside the great limitations of unions, as the key point here is the Tory fear of them) were others which tried to make workers more individualistic and consciously identified with capitalist social and economic organisation. One major way was by the selling-off of council homes to their tenants. Later came the privatisation of State-owned companies (oil and telecommunications being among the earliest ones) and freer movement of finance capital. For all that these measures might be sold as building a “property-owning democracy”, the reality was that share ownership remained very much in the hands of the rich and of institutions, and homelessness grew.

But the area of taxation more than counter-balanced these measures to supposedly make workers more prosperous. In general, the rates of tax were changed so that the already wealthy retained more of their income and taxes were made more indirect. How-

ever the measure which caused most outrage, to the extent of its eventually being overthrown by mass resistance, was the Poll Tax. This way of raising revenue for local councils, by charging everyone in an area the same with no recognition of their differing incomes, naturally hit the poorest the hardest. Mass non-payment, storming of council chambers, and angry public demonstrations not only led to the tax's demise but seriously affected Thatcher's hold on her party, as they witnessed her ballooning arrogance and lack of judgement in championing the tax.

For those who didn't get to participate in the Thatcherite middle-class bonanza (and even the middle-class were notably suffering from unemployment and "negative equity" on their homes by the early 90s, as John Major continued on the Thatcherite path), there was a gradual dismantling of social security when out of work to go with the increased oppressiveness and insecurity of conditions at work. For it must not be forgotten that conservatism is as much governed by the desire to see that most people remain in their place as by any rational economic imperative. The professed belief in individuality and social mobility — both Thatcher and Major, and much of the rank and file today, are not the classic Tory grandee who felt some sort of paternalistic concern for the working-class but middle-class and "aspiring" working-class — depends on a basic conformity to the capitalist system and its accompanying institutions.

“At the Heart of Europe”

One key development since 1950, but gathering pace during the era of Thatcher and Major, has been the entrenchment of the European Union as a factor in British politics. In the earlier period of its existence the Tories preferred to look to the Commonwealth and America for Britain's main economic ties. However by the early 60s Britain was applying to join, and finally entered membership

performance — eclipsed by independent and far-right parties and nowhere near to challenging the Green Party for the 'top up' Assembly seats may lead the party to reconsider its decision. The SWP is perfectly capable not only of mending its irrevocable 'break' with New Labour, but of denying that it ever even considered parting company from it.

The party is ticking over at present, waiting for an upsurge in trade union led workplace unrest that it can intervene in through the usual bureaucratic channels. It has been pushing its 'Action Programme' through trade union branches, and organising lobbies of the trade union bureaucracy. The party attempted its usual trick of trying to swamp the recent Longbridge demonstrations with its own placards. The SWP toys with the politics of the new protest movements, but so far only as an effort to pull individual militants from the new wave of activists into the committee room politics of trade union routinism.

Socialist Alliances

Repeated efforts have been made in the last decades to weld together 'socialist alliances' out of the existing loose fragments of the far left, to build a more credible political coalition of forces.

During 1996 a number of such alliances were once again set up in different cities around the country in the hope of drawing together left-wing groups, political parties and activist campaigns, better able to pool resources and co-ordinate joint local activity. The willingness of both the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party to now involve themselves in alliance work with other forces was seen by its supporters as giving the project vital additional leverage. Less than three years on, however, the tensions inherent in the socialist alliance initiative have been exposed, and the project has faltered and frayed. Only in London has the Social-

to make this happen by becoming ever more 'appealing' to potential recruits.

At the general election, the SWP backed New Labour, urging a vote for Blair. Though the SWP's propaganda insisted that a New Labour administration would quickly be revealed as little different from its Tory predecessor, the party celebrated the Blair victory as heralding a turnaround in the fortunes of the left. For the SWP's theorists that victory was the product of a 'class vote' cast by millions of class conscious workers now expecting a New Labour government to deliver. As New Labour austerity and authoritarianism began to bite, the SWP expressed its 'shock' and 'disbelief', insisting, against all the evidence, that 'we didn't vote for this', and calling on the party that introduced the attacks to lead the fight back against them. With the party's typical mixture of gall and denial, the SWP announced in the Spring of 2000 that the time 'had come' to 'break with New Labour' and that Labour was now unrecognisable as an agency of 'the left'.

Aware of the growth of left electoral challenges to New Labour, the SWP leadership then decided that, for the first time since the late 1970s, it would put up its own candidates at election time. The party's election posture has remained as conflicted as ever: it has urged support for New Labour and at the same time backed various challenges to it. The party stood five candidates in elections to the Scottish Parliament (winning just over 2700 votes combined) and was part of the United Socialists slate for the Welsh Assembly, were it provided four out of nine candidates, all of whom won only a few hundred votes each. The SWP was set to participate in the Socialist Alliances slates in London and the North West for the EP elections only to withdraw following disagreements amongst its leadership, accelerating the collapse of both coalitions. A tactical reappraisal led the SWP to engage with the London Socialist Alliance electoral campaign for the 2000 Assembly Elections, and to include its own candidates, notably Paul Foot and Mark Steel, on the LSA ticket. The clear disappointment of the LSA's electoral

in 1973. In the eyes of Edward Heath it was a way of maintaining British influence in the world as part of a bloc to counterbalance the USA and USSR. But the political as opposed to the economic dimension of Europe took time to clearly emerge: for many years its official name, the European Economic Community, emphasised the latter, and European Union was only adopted as its name as part of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.

Although there had been misgivings before, it was really in the 1990s that Europe became an issue which caused severe dissension in Tory ranks, with some MPs becoming identified as "Eurosceptics". The fear was a loss of domestic political and economic control to a central government in Brussels along with a European Central Bank. This was deeply ironic, coming from a party which since 1979 had overseen extensive centralisation of power within Britain, and showed that it was not democratic principle but their own loss of power which rankled. Thatcher, although a signatory to the 1985 Single European Act which initiated the process culminating in Maastricht, emphasised the economic aspects such as deregulation and downplayed the political and social. Major, for his part, negotiated opt-outs over the Social Chapter (a granting of some mild concessions to workers in the tradition of European corporatism) and monetary union.

Under William Hague since 1997, the Tories' official policy over Europe has become still more strident . Monetary union has taken place for most member states but Hague says that under the Tories Britain won't join it for many years, if ever. The Tories have also continued to oppose such "interference" as the Working Time Directive: as far as they are concerned we should be "free" to work to the point of exhaustion. The directive is limited in effect because of the many groups of workers exempted from it, but such Tory bile towards even these mild reforms show that they remain the capitalist party.

Summing Up

All in all the record shows them to be friends of exploitation, the protectors of owners against workers, authoritarian, racist, militaristic, corrupt, arrogant. Their lying rhetoric about freedom and reducing the role of the State all depends on ignoring the central issue of class: the net of laws they wove together in 18 years were time and again pointed at working-class organisation, as well as rights of assembly and demonstration. But they also stand in the tradition of the Combination Acts and the Six Acts of 1819. This tradition means freedom is for the ruling-class, and it is their activities in which the State should not interfere in case it damages their wealth and profits. Yet the State will always be called upon to protect the ruling-class with every means at its disposal: one present consequence of this is one of the largest prison populations in Europe. What for Conservatives is a boast is for anarchists a summing-up of just how odious they are: they are indeed “the natural party of government”.

new Scottish Socialist Party. The increasingly beleaguered Taaffe leadership is struggling even to manage the process of decline.

The SP appears to be paying a high price for loosening the binds of ‘democratic centralism’. Yet the leadership’s commitment to its new ‘fluid’ methods of organisation seems as shallow as its concern with the new political movements. The Socialist Party may now be outside Labour and stuck ignored on the fringes of the trade union movement, but it remains besotted by both. The party’s decision to engage with the various Socialist Alliance projects now operating is more a reflection of the leadership’s recognition of the Socialist Party’s own weakness than evidence of a commitment to a new way of working. Alongside the organisational decline, a vacuum is opening up in the heart of the party’s ‘programme’ — the old economist determinism and go-it-alone electoralism discredited, with no tangible ‘marxist’ alternative to take their place. All the indications are that the downward spiral of the Socialist Party has not yet hit rock-bottom.

Socialist Workers Party

The SWP remains the left organisation least affected by the political tumult and dislocation that has impacted so strongly on the left and labour movements around it in the last decade. The death of SWP leader and patriarch Tony Cliff in April 2000 is unlikely to destabilise the organisation or see it lurch in new directions. The SWP has evaded the kind of identity crisis that has engulfed the Socialist Party, weathered the transient challenge of the SLP, and still retains the largest membership claim on the left, though it will have shared the contraction of members common across the party-left spectrum. Its party bosses still believe that a ‘window of opportunity’ has opened up on New Labour’s left side, through which the SWP may soon advance. In the last few years the SWP’s political programme has been turned upside down twice, as it has struggled

posed. The SP did not contest elections to the Scottish Parliament, while its five candidates in the Welsh Assembly poll won just over 10,000 votes between them. In the European elections the SP stood no candidates of its own, but backed Dave Nellist's stand for the Socialist Alliance in the West Midlands, where he won just over 7,300. The SP continue to contest occasional council seats, but exists as an impoverished electoral force at present.

The Socialist Party has now rid itself of most of the trappings that defined its identity as a dour marxist monolith for the decades it existed as the Militant Tendency. Militant waged a long-term 'entrust' struggle within Old Labour, hoping to wrest control of the party from the right-wing leadership caste, or to split the party asunder. But as the 1980s progressed, the Tendency squandered its scant resources and overplayed its influence within the Labour Party in a retreat that turned into a rout. Battered by the attacks of the Labour leadership, implicated by a fond attachment to the state capitalist regimes of Eastern European, and marginalised in the labour movement the Tendency was forced to start over.

The Socialist Party has tried to recruit activists from the new social and political struggles it has been forced to turn to beyond the horizons of trade unionism. In doing so it has been prepared to relax its strict democratic-centralist methods that its bosses recognised were certain to repel activists from these movements. But the process of regeneration has proved unstable and difficult for the leadership to control.

On Merseyside, the old power-base of the Tendency, the Socialist Party has broken apart. Members of the Regional Committee who questioned the strategies of the national party leadership were expelled for their acts of defiance, as the Taaffe leadership began to 'purge' its own 'enemy within'. Breakaways and group defections were also reported in Manchester, Nottingham, London and elsewhere. The best efforts of the leadership could not prevent the biggest single blow to befall the party – the breakaway of its entire Scottish section, which then fused with other groups to form the

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Liberalism as a political doctrine is one that emphasises individual rights, and tolerance between individuals. It is therefore an outlook which has difficulty in adequately accommodating the collective side of human life. Though liberals are agitated by such conditions and attitudes as poverty, racism and homelessness, their commitment to The Individual is in great tension with their social commitment.

This individualism was focused in the economic theory that inspired 19th century liberals, that of free trade or laissez-faire. The idea was that individual manufacturers and traders, unhampered in their inventiveness or price-setting by anything apart from that which other individuals (supposedly just as "free") would be willing to pay for their products, would be encouraged to offer them for no more than the market would bear. This naively assumed that enlarging profits and cutting costs in ways that cheated or exploited the worker or consumer would not occur, they allegedly being free to buy from a myriad of suppliers or work for a myriad of employers. The adulterating food producer, the exacting employer, etc. are simply put out of business under laissez-faire theory by the freedom of workers and consumers to go elsewhere.

If this description sounds familiar, it should, for it sketches the essential delusions underpinning today's mainstream economics. In 150 years, what was liberalism has become conservatism. The Liberal Democrats have their roots in this ideology, though other influences and their need to reposition themselves with regard to other parties have tempered it. The main later development in liberal thought originates in the increase in working-class organ-

isation and electoral strength in the later 19th century, combined with the undeniably widespread problems of poverty and unemployment. All this brought home to the then Liberal Party the inadequacy of unfettered capitalism and individual action in the face of its attendant problems. Having become identified with reform, the Liberal Party originally secured much of the working-class vote as sections of it became enfranchised. But more searching criticisms of capitalism and the legal system upholding it saw many workers move towards a political expression that could result in a decisive changing of laws in their favour, (i.e.) through Parliament and their “own” party, Labour.

Still stressing the classless individual above all, but now with some recognition of the inability of that individual to resolve all of his/her problems alone, Liberal ideology thus ended up being basically social democrat decades before the Social Democratic party (SDP) was created in 1981. The latter was mainly based on Labour malcontents like David Owen and Shirley Williams. Their outlook, favouring employer-employee cooperation, political decentralisation, membership of NATO and multilateral disarmament, was very much akin to the Liberals’. Having allied within months of the SDP’s birth, their 1988–89 merger and change to the name Liberal Democrats were inevitable. However, coming from a Labour/union background, the SDP side brought to Liberal politics a new influx of members and a basis for revamping liberalism so as to claim the centre ground whilst the Tories and Labour could be painted as champions of the Right and Left. (This late 80s scenario has now largely dissolved as all concerned squabble over the increasingly crowded centre).

Wealth and War

Today the Liberal Democrats have a vast programme of reform in view. Yet time and again this reformism conflicts with a

stituencies or concentrated solely in one or two regions, but also in the trade unions.’ With the withdrawal of the Scargill controlled block vote at party conference, Sikorski was ousted just months later. His successor lasted only a few weeks in the post before Scargill moved to sack and expel him.

The refusal to countenance any kind of alliance politics, together with the austere disciplinary culture that defines the operation of the party, has now sealed the reputation of the SLP. Scargill has effectively seen off the entrust raiders he does not want inside the organisation, but has made few inroads within the old labour movement from which he’s so eager to recruit. Increasingly Scargill’s officers and henchmen are drawn from the ranks of die-hard stalwarts. The compound damage inflicted on the party by the now relentless cycle of electoral humiliation is likely to worsen. The immediate prospects for the SLP are bleak in the extreme.

The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party — formerly one of the front-running leftist organisations in Britain — is now in serious and sharp decline. Its national organisation has been reduced to a shadow of its former self, the product both of splits and defections from within its ranks, and the collapse of the party’s ‘political perspectives’ that has further encouraged internal dissent. Indications are that party membership has slumped from the low thousands towards the hundreds.

The slide in the party’s ability to put up council and parliamentary candidates in is all the more telling because of the priority that the Socialist Party always used to give to electoral politics. The Socialist Party could only muster a slate of 19 candidates at the general election, who together won a total of just under 10,000 votes nationally, a third of which came in a single seat. The party’s pretension to be the ‘real’ party of organised labour stood painfully ex-

In the four years since its launch the SLP has come nowhere near achieving any of these goals. There were just over 60 SLP candidates at the 1997 general election – a fraction of the blanket coverage Scargill had publicly committed the party to. The results were the humiliation predicted by everyone except the SLP. Scargill insisted that the risible national tally of votes was some kind of spectacular success. The campaign blew apart the SLP's hollow claim that to be a credible left-wing challenge to New Labour, on its right flank, and the trotskyist diaspora, on its left. Since then its election results have followed the same pattern. The party's combined vote in elections to the Scottish Parliament was just under 52,000, and around 10,700 in the poll for the Welsh Assembly. The SLP vote in the European Parliamentary elections averaged a 0.87% share. In the May 2000 London Assembly elections it finished up with a 0.82% share – coming behind the single-issue left slate the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (a number of whose leaders are themselves SLP defectors) and with half of the, itself negligible, 1.63% total of the London Socialist Alliance.

The SLP has not built any kind of local government, or significant trade union, base. Its activist core is tiny, its membership figures reliant on passive, isolated, postal members. The harsh internal party regime has repulsed important layers of activists and quickened growing numerical losses. Layers of activists have also been torn from the ranks in a pitiless administrative offensive, as Scargill has hunted down dissidents and 'entrist' moles from other organisations.

The founding leadership group of the party has fragmented, as the Scargill autocracy has turned on its former allies one by one. The fate of the previously-loyal party vice-president Sikorski was sealed in November 1998 when a secret critique of the party that he had written was made public. As well as criticising Scargill's leadership methods, the letter detailed the extent of the party's decline that was being hidden from the membership. It revealed: 'the fact is that there has been a serious loss of members, not just in con-

servatism about capitalism and its accompanying politics. So although many things they propose might, if achieved, make life more bearable, they still wish to retain much in the way of institutions and attitudes that generate the problems in the first place. Some examples from current Liberal Democrat policies will attempt to show this.

Outstanding in this respect are their economic policies. They can state "Modern business finds success by motivating everyone involved with the enterprise to work together as 'stakeholders'", yet also "A strongly competitive domestic market is an important ingredient for success in the global market". What competition means in actuality is economic winners and losers or, more concretely, jobs and joblessness, rich and poor and, ultimately, the difference between living well and dying miserably. In a further twist in the spiral of contradictions, Liberal Democrats also back "reform of the world trading and financial systems, to remove discrimination against developing countries". (This dovetails with their desire to more strongly regulate the City).

But the history of capitalism shows that powerful companies will, having attained that position, do all they can in terms of legal mechanisms, cartels or inter-governmental institutions to keep it. Such reforms as are made (e.g. in recent years in GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), while making noises about dealing with poverty, are in the end always an attempt of the already rich to confirm their place. This is "the grain of the international economy"; can it be desirable to try and "work with" it?

The Liberal Democrats' defence commitments make clearer their hankering to preserve the essentials of the domestic and global set-up, even as they perceive many of its faults. They favour continued membership of NATO and reform of the United Nations which would include a larger Security Council and a "permanent peacekeeping force". Of course various factors in global troublespots can complicate the aims of the militarily powerful when participating in "peacekeeping" (e.g. the US in Somalia).

The fact remains that, beyond settling the immediate conflict, the underlying objective is to make the country in question safe for the market. Clearly those who are already prosperous are best placed to take advantage of “peace” through investment, trade tie-ups and cooperative local rulers.

The continuation of NATO, the retention of nuclear weapons and the maintenance of “the current real level of defence spending” jointly raise the question of what is being defended, and against whom? Why this anticipated array of enemies if a reformed international capitalism is going to generate and distribute wealth so fairly?

On the most immediate international level, they are more enthusiastic about membership of the European Union than the Tories or Labour. There is some logic in this: as they point out, “acid rain and water pollution know no boundaries” But this acknowledgement of common regional interests in the environmental sphere continues in the economic in a much more contradictory way. Thus they also advocate “improving Europe’s competitiveness in world markets” at the same time as the laissez-faire of the Single Market “presents great opportunities for the British economy...widening and strengthening (it) so that British industry can compete better”. The confusing logic of these positions, in essence, seems to be: the countries of the EU should compete with each other, but as a bloc compete with the rest of the globe. This allegedly makes for “a fairer and more prosperous world”. This aim of strengthening the cohesion of the European bloc also makes them the most enthusiastic of the major parties about joining the Euro.

Regrettably, for all the fine words about a more united Europe, this stress on competition is tailor-made both to bolster nationalism (because of the variations in national economic circumstances) and, beyond this, the hardening of the world into new regional blocs to succeed those of the Cold War. Where economic interests are concerned, military involvement is never far behind, either to protect economic advantage or to help achieve it. (The gradual de-

The left outside New Labour, which saw in the remaking of Old Labour an unprecedented opportunity for the creation of new expressions of the old ‘party’ form, has been cruelly disappointed. For all their ‘refoundations’, ‘declarations’ and ‘proclamations’ of new beginnings, none have made significant headway.

What remains of the self-proclaimed ‘revolutionary’ left has become increasingly introspective, inactive, and self-doubting as a result of this catalogue of failure and slide. The crumbling of the left has created something of a political vacuum, and in that void lies both opportunity and danger for those committed to genuinely anti-capitalist politics.

Three facts are crucial. First, contrary to their claims, these groups are not the organised expression of revolutionary ideas, but of capitalist ones. Second, these diverse groups share a common set of characteristics far more important than the secondary questions that divide them. Third, and most importantly, encouraging lasting and effective working class resistance to the many offensives of the ruling class requires us to break free of the constraints of ‘left-wing’ capitalist politics and to mark out a truly independent political existence.

The Socialist Labour Party

The coterie of supporters that rallied behind National Union of Mineworkers’ (NUM) president Arthur Scargill when the new Socialist Labour Party (SLP) was launched in the spring of 1996 were adamant that the new party would ‘break the mould’ of British left politics, and reclaim the ‘socialist project’ now set aside by New Labour. The SLP’s founders insisted it would sweep the decks of the existing left outside Labour, regrouping all behind its banner. The SLP was to be the rallying cry for the left in the trade unions, and a bulwark against the rise of credit card unionism.

THE LEFT

Anarchists recognise that the idea of ‘revolutionary’ left-wing politics is a contradiction in terms. ‘Left-wing’ ideologies are exactly that – a set of beliefs on the left-end of a spectrum of ideas about the ‘best way’ to run the capitalist system and state. All the left groups jostling for position in the political market place, whether they are loyal to New Labour or independent from it, are not promoting revolutionary challenges to capitalism, but alternative versions of the same miserable set of oppressive and exploitative social relationships that we are struggling to overthrow.

The election of the first Labour government in nearly twenty years quickly proved to be a hollow victory for the peripheral forces of the British left – a political current which had invested great hopes in the arrival of Blair in Downing Street. None of the left’s predictions about what ought be happening over half way through the first term of a New Labour government have come to pass.

The scattered remnants of the left inside New Labour – which pledged they would call off their unofficial ceasefire and unleash fierce internal opposition to the austerity and authoritarianism of the Blair leadership – are nowhere in sight. Demoralised, inchoate and lacking strategy or credibility, the New Labour party machine has faced no serious threats to its absolute authority from within. The left around New Labour, but in its orbit, which insisted that political opposition would rise up within Labour’s ranks, and substantial layers of its activists break away leftwards, now acknowledges that the plan is on permanent hold.

velopment of common EU positions on foreign and defence policy is part of this process).

Reform...but not too much

But the Liberal Democrats tend to envisage social and political reformation rather than the conservatism apparent in the defence field, usually attempting to mingle the two. Undoubtedly this is seen as being commonsensical and practical. Thus more money would be allocated to the NHS, so as to reduce waiting-lists and abolish eye and dental check-up charges, but not those for prescriptions, which would merely be frozen. Thus 2 billion pounds more is pledged for education, but university students would still eventually have to repay what they had been granted in living expenses. And thus local councils would have restored freedom to build new homes and use the money from council house sales to this end, a mortgage benefit would be granted to low-earners, and so on, but this desire that housing should be affordable for all clashes with the drive for profit and the preservation of private landlords. Most builders would rather obtain lucrative contracts for offices and shopping centres Profit is increased by the scarcity of a commodity in relation to demand: when the demand is for such a basic human need as housing, it is naturally very high, a capitalist’s dream that these proposals would not end.

This split between seeing the need for change but being too committed to the old ways of capitalism and political hierarchy runs throughout liberalism : it almost defines it. Liberal Democrats see the injustices produced by centralisation and so propose decentralisation throughout Britain at all levels; but there remains a ruling-class, economically and politically. They propose a Freedom of Information Act; but there remain politicians and bosses with secrets to conceal and the power to do so.. They suggest sound measures for tackling pollution and waste; but their opposition to nuclear

power has grown ever more diluted. More broadly on the environmental front, though opting for measures like a carbon tax on energy sources, they will not seek the end of an economic system that favours short-term gratification and therefore a short-sighted use of natural resources.

Beyond the General Election

For the Liberal Democrats the 1997 General Election was their most successful for many years in terms of seats won (46, a rise of 26 since the 1992 election), though in fact their overall share of the vote fell slightly. The chief factors in this were tactical voting by both Liberal Democrat and Labour voters (lowering their sights simply to getting the Tories out of office), and the former's concentration of limited resources on their most winnable seats. The boost to Liberal confidence made the leader, Paddy Ashdown, pursue a policy of "constructive opposition": taking a stance of being a potential coalition partner (hardly required by Labour with its immense majority) but at the same time stubbornly continuing to demand a PR electoral system. Despite a continuing stream of dissent which felt Labour could happily go it alone, given its success via the first past the post system, Tony Blair has pursued a course begun in the later years of the Major government in an agreement on constitutional reform brokered by Robin Cook and Robert Maclennan. This led to the setting up of a commission to consider reform of the voting system, its symbolic choice of head being a Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Jenkins: in another life this was Roy Jenkins, one of the Labour renegades who founded the SDP.

Blair's perspective on this has been the idea that the Tories can be kept out of power for decades by making it easier for parties of the so-called centre-left to get candidates elected. But the price of this is that those self-same parties must co-operate more than they have ever done before. For the Liberal Democrats this has meant

The problems they have faced brutally highlight those faced at a less immediate level by the Greens in Britain, a party which calls for radical change but won't go so far as to oppose capitalism and its institutions altogether. (Even the World Bank and the IMF still have a place in the Green world.) Because such change does not go with the grain of capitalism and its media cheerleaders and is so hard to achieve, efforts are made to temper the message and render the organisation more like that to which people are already accustomed. Unfortunately it is precisely the established ways of thinking, acting and organising that have created the ecological and political swamp in which we are sinking. The more this process of adaptation occurs, though it may make for survival within the world of parliamentary and capitalist politics, the worse it bodes for real improvements in our lives. It also diminishes the Greens' claim to have a thoroughly fresh perspective, especially as the other parties have in recent years all applied a Green gloss to themselves. What the Green Party's experience ultimately demonstrates is that a parliamentary road-building programme, like that for cars, wastes energy and resources.

the virtues of direct action and decentralised power. Yet this has been confronted by influential advocates of centralisation and “professionalism”, who have interpreted the lack of electoral achievement as a sign that they have not been enough like a “grey” party. For example, giving the media a recognised figure to speak to (not, of course, a leader) would allegedly make it more credible and electable. Well, perhaps, if you want to reproduce the structures and thus the practices of what is already established. There are echoes of the Labour Party’s continuing struggles over image and appearing “fit to govern”. But the election of two Green MEPs in June 1999 as a result of the PR voting system will be taken by the Greens as confirmation of the rightness both of advocating PR and the long-term approach of taking an electoralist approach to realising Green politics. (This has also resulted in a sprinkling of Green local councillors, notably in Oxford.)

In addition, over the past few years the growing number of countries with Green MPs has given fresh heart to the Green Party here, though its own performance in the 1997 General Election was generally as woeful as ever, an average of 1.38% of the vote in contested seats. Notable recent examples have been France and Germany, where Greens have gained access to the corridors of power through joining coalitions. But the German example has been especially instructive. One of the key Green demands, an end to the nuclear power industry and any associated deals, immediately ran into the protests of the German nuclear business and the British government, more concerned that Sellafield should continue its polluting activities than in retaining its already shaky pro-environment reputation. Faced with this opposition, the German Greens have seemed unable to press home the “credibility” of being in government. Furthermore, the 1999 NATO bombing campaign in Serbia and Kosovo brought about a bitter split in the party, between those clinging to its pacifist roots and the “realists” who supported the war and thus helped the Greens cling to power — only at the expense of Green politics.

a particularly difficult struggle. Seeing the chance to influence the Government of the day on some issues they have often watered down or abandoned any principled criticism in other areas, most cravenly when they failed to oppose the highly repressive and illiberal “anti-terrorism” law that was rushed into existence following the Omagh bombing of August 1998. Yet the contradictory impulse, to assert an independent political existence, has for instance led to continuing explicit calls for higher taxes to fund public services which New Labour’s rhetoric at least has condemned.

This impulse led delegates at the September 1998 conference to reject ideas pushed by the leadership which were close to Labour thinking (e.g. accepting a lower rate minimum wage for 16–20 year olds), and must surely have influenced Ashdown’s decision to stand down as party leader in 1999, finally defeated by the contradictions of bringing his party much closer to Labour and opposing political “tribalism”, and yet in the next breath criticising such tendencies as Labour’s authoritarianism with classic liberal complaints about centralised power and lack of belief in the citizen.

In the short term the Liberal Democrats are unlikely to improve their standing much. They are currently treading a delicate path between coalition with Labour, through which they sniff influence if not outright power, and the continuation of ineffectual independence. This applies not only at Westminster but even more so in the Scottish Parliament. In the latter, their 17 seats have been critical in achieving a share in power with Labour, though fighting talk over the issue of student fees was watered down as the possibility of losing this degree of influence became apparent. Their share of the vote in the June 1999 European elections (13%) was in fact less than they tend to get in national elections, although as these were held under Proportional Representation (PR), they still achieved representation in each constituency. PR remains a prime goal for them at all levels of British politics, but Blair’s commitment within the period 1997–2002 is only to hold a referendum on a system of PR, not to actually institute one. After Labour’s drub-

bing in the European elections, the party in general has even less appetite for such a reform than ever. But if Ashdown's successor, Charles Kennedy, (elected in August 1999) makes a strong effort to differentiate the party from Labour, it may pay off if the degree of unpopularity that already exists for the Government on various issues grows worse, which is most likely if the economic strategy fails. However the bedrock Liberal commitment to no more than a caring, cleaned-up capitalism cannot really address the injustices which stem from such a system.

The Individual and the Class Struggle

Anarchism arguably grew, in part, from the liberal tradition. There is a common belief in the value of the individual and individual freedom. But whereas anarchists see freedom realised in society, through the interwoven activities of individuals, liberalism cannot reconcile the contradiction between its commitment to economic individualism (which cannot help but create an elite) and its professed concern over the social and economic privileges and injustices which flow from this. Anarchism looks deeper into the roots of oppression, and finds them not in the defective workings of the system but integral to it. This is the class struggle, and it can only be ended in the abolition of classes, not the pretence of partnership. This is why anarchists go much further than liberalism: beyond reformism, towards revolution.

quaking. They have therefore stressed their success at gaining district council seats, but in an era of massive centralisation these victories have been rendered somewhat hollow. (As with the Liberal Democrats, there is democratic principle as well as political self-interest in their consequent support for proportional representation.) They have also gained a degree of influence by helping to frame some parliamentary measures in recent years, (e.g.) the Road Traffic Reduction Bill which Dafis presented in Parliament. Also, with this year's European elections due to be held according to a form of Proportional Representation there is a certain optimism, remembering 1989, that this could translate into British Green MEPs although there are doubts as to whether the party has enough money to really push the campaign.

Electoralism appeals to some Green Party members more than others. The tension in this sphere is indicative of something that runs through much of its history, thought and practice. The early days of being forecasters of doom unless their ideas were put into practice via an Ecology Party government made little impact (though a note of potential apocalypse continues to be sounded). The party's character also changed as people from various political and personal backgrounds were drawn towards it, aware that the environmental crisis needed some thoroughgoing political expression beyond the activities of pressure groups.

Some were originally "pure" environmentalists, previously uninvolved in politics; some were socialists and even anarchists. Disappointed in their revolutionary hopes of the 60s and early 70s, the latter group could yet see in the Green critique of industrial society confirmation of their own class-based version, with much fresh factual support. Both groups hoped that the parliamentary route would prove the practical way to achieve desired changes.

The very fact that, in the course of over two decades, it has not, (though "The Environment" has become a totem before which all politicians bow), plus the extra- or anti-parliamentary roots of many activists, has produced a continuing appreciation of

the other), the police and the armed forces are envisaged as continuing to exist.

But the desire for “a just society, one where wealth is shared fairly” is not reconcilable with one where economic and political hierarchies continue, as these examples show they would. The existence of an organised state, as mentioned above and as is implied by the whole project of a Green government (rather than society), highlights this point. Whether openly favouring the rich or claiming to act on behalf of the weak and the poor, the state is an instrument which depends for its life on the legalised domination of some by others; that is, class rule. Since anarchists seek an end to all such economic and cultural domination, they necessarily seek an end to the state and government too.

There are nevertheless many Green objectives and values with which anarchists agree, and as well as contributing to the development of ecological thought (e.g. the works of Murray Bookchin), they have also learned from the Green movement, of which Green parties form only a fraction. But the Green Party’s anxiety to be seen as having broken free from “grey”, growth-biased politics, and its apparent belief that the history of State capitalism (in its “Socialist” or “Communist” variants) invalidates communism as such, pulls it inexorably back towards the more reactionary position of a clean, Green capitalism.

The Victories of Electoralism

What of the Green Party’s political record? Its electoral successes have been few. The most prominent examples are the European Parliament elections of 1989 (where 15% of the vote was won, though without a seat being gained), and Cynog Dafis’ 1992 election as a Plaid Cymru MP in alliance with the local Greens. In 1997 their best result was to gain 4.25% of the vote in Hackney and Stoke Newington — hardly a performance to set the other parties

THE GREEN PARTY

The Green Party began life in 1973, growing out of slowly mounting public concern about pollution, rising global population and depletion of the Earth’s resources. Its original name, People, (changed to the Ecology Party in 1975, then the Green Party in 1985), symbolised two qualities which have largely continued to inform its politics. These are an evasion of the issue of class, and a belief that ecological politics are a decisive break with previous ideologies: “neither left nor right, but up front”.

Certainly the recognition that humanity is part of Nature, not its emperor, is vital. So too has been the accompanying realisation of interdependence, (e.g.) human beings cannot pollute the environment, particularly through their economic activities, without affecting their health and that of other living things. To make these the foundation of a political/philosophical outlook, when other parties still think in terms of economic growth as a cure-all, has led to a degree of true distinctiveness for the Greens. (Though the Liberal Democrats have come to adopt some of their ideas, and Gordon Brown’s 1999 Budget includes a version of some of their ideas on taxation). Among their notable policies, therefore, are:

1. A sustainable, “zero growth” economy, which would emphasise local production, organic farming and taxation on energy and raw materials;
2. Extensive use of renewable energy sources (e.g. solar), with a phased reduction in the use of fossil fuels and the abolition of nuclear power;

3. Massive investment in public transport to discourage the wasteful car culture;
4. Decentralisation of power, strengthening district and local councils;
5. Population stability, with clear implications for limiting new births.

These policies are linked to anti-consumerism, whereas consumption and the excitation of new “needs” form the very motor of capitalism. (Environmentally-conscious entrepreneurs will supposedly resolve this contradiction). There is also a realisation that the distribution of the world’s wealth is grotesquely unjust and has profound ecological consequences. Thus far greater local and national economic self-reliance is supported, which would simultaneously free farmers in the Southern hemisphere from giving over so much of the best land to growing cash crops for the benefit of Northern consumers. However on this question there remains a worrying emphasis on applying population control techniques to Southern “overpopulation”, even though it is also recognised that the North needs to radically change its ways of living and working.

Green Economy: Green State

In this respect, a key policy is the Basic Income Scheme. This would allot everyone a guaranteed weekly amount to cover housing, clothing, food and fuel costs. Thus it would resemble but go beyond the benefits system, as it would not have a cut-off point in time. The answer to the objection that no-one would then work is that people have motives other than that of financial gain for working, (e.g.) to be socially useful or creative, or for social contact. In addition, the Scheme would mean that a financial incentive

to work would remain, that of raising the individual’s living standard above that of mere subsistence. Overall, this is said to reconcile “a degree of social justice” with giving “free enterprise market forces — in other words, wealth creators — as much freedom as possible within the rules necessary to protect the global environment”. These rules are a web of taxation measures, such as high taxes on finite resources to discourage their use and promote renewable or longer-lasting alternatives.

But this expectation — that the “free market” will continue in a Green society, yet governmentally shorn of all the characteristics that make it environmentally disastrous — exposes the contradiction that pollutes the Green mainstream. For the free market depends on greed: the greed that is the profit motive, and the greed that capitalists need to stimulate in consumers to both make and increase their profits. Additionally, with this motive, there have always been capitalists who will make and sell anything, no matter how destructive, in order to make profits. It is therefore greatly opposed to values that seek to cherish the inhabitants and resources of the Earth.

Anarchist communists believe that, with considered use of technology, work can be shared so as not to be onerous and yet productive of all the necessities of a decent life, in much the same way as Greens. There would also be agreement on the need to make localities and regions as economically self-sufficient as possible. However the Green vision does not extend to a complete diffusion of economic and political power throughout society. This is borne out by the continuing role envisaged for unions, as this must mean that there will continue to be employers with whom to carry on negotiations. Furthermore, rights to strike and to picket peacefully would be enshrined in a Bill of Rights, which implicitly recognises that all will not be well while some can control the livelihoods of others. Finally, though constituted on a more liberal basis than before (e.g. local accountability for the one, no nuclear weapons for