

## Labour's stunted growth

IT'S NOT QUITE TRUE that there's nothing new under the sun - but some things do have a dreadful similarity. Take this explanation of why the poor, if only they were educated properly, would learn to be grateful for the existence of the rich:

"... the people would readily be brought to understand that the accumulation of capital ... was a blessing to the workmen ... Then also would the poor more readily learn that the possession of large estates, not used merely for the purpose of luxury and private gratification, was a blessing to the poor, in promoting the establishment of Schools, churches and other institutions calculated to ameliorate our social condition."

Readers of *Flypaper 2* might recognise more than an echo of the *Economist's* advice to the beneficiaries of the Lawson budget - that "the highly paid should be thinking of using some of the freedom that their extra money gives them to support charities, finance a small business, sponsor or employ bright kids, buy computers for a school."

Before I reveal the source of the quotation, here's another from the same vintage. Update the trappings, and what could be a more thoroughly modern explication of the "trickle-down" effect and of the merits of the deserving rich?

### Old, old story

"Would the poor be more benefited if the rich did not keep carriages, which leads to the consumption of iron and wood, and glass, and cloth, and silk and leather, and of articles of every variety ... employing hundreds of workmen? ... nothing can be more delusive, nothing more unjust, than to be telling the poor man that the rich are robbing him. The fine horses, the fine parks, and the splendid equipages, have been the result of labour of days and nights and of frugality."

The old, old story! 140 years old, in this case, though the sentiments are more familiar now than they would have been ten years ago. They are not the words of economists nor even politicians. They are what the judge said to the jury in two of the numerous state trials staged towards the end of the eventful year of 1848, and are quoted in John Saville's *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge University Press 1987).

Saville goes some way towards solving one of the great puzzles of labour history - what happened to the militancy of the British working-class after 1848? Why, after over fifty years of turbulent protest, culminating in the great mass movement of Chartism, did things go deathly quiet for the next twenty or more years?

Some would argue, indeed, that things went



A Chartist meeting by moonlight

quiet permanently. Consider the grand Chartist ambition to instal an annually elected working-class government which would end all class legislation. Compare it with the extreme modesty of subsequent Labour programmes - hardly more than trying to manage the bourgeois state a little more equitably.

Well, as Saville shows in some detail, one of the things which happened was straightforward

repression. 1848 was the year which shook the established order throughout Europe and saw wide-spread, menacing ferment in Britain and Ireland. By the end of it, most working-class leaders in Britain and the most important nationalist leaders in Ireland were securely behind bars or transported on trumped-up charges of sedition, riotous behaviour and unlawful assembly, after trials before packed juries of the alarmed bourgeoisie, with judges whose impartiality is fairly indicated by the quotations which begin this article.

And it worked. Hardly any of them reappeared as political leaders after serving out their sentences. By then, in any case, the political and economic climate had changed completely. The great mid-Victorian boom was under way, working-class political disillusion was complete and there was no longer a mass movement to lead. For the next fifty years, any demand for labour representation was channelled into the Liberal Party. (Some writers have argued, in fact, that the very existence of the Labour Party is the result of a mistake by the Liberal Party.) A lot can be done

## Richesse oblige

THE *ECONOMIST* IS SERIOUSLY worried about Britain's newly rich. Worried that they might not do the decent thing, but will spend all their lovely new money on themselves instead, with potentially disastrous consequences (the return of "an unThatcherite government" - and what could be worse than that?). So worried that the April 9th editorial returned to this topic only three weeks after it was first broached (see *Flypaper* 2, page 4).

In a piece of futurology called "Growing rich again", the *Economist* argued that, for the first time since before the first world war, considerable wealth is about to descend on Britain's middle-classes, partly from tax changes, partly from inheritance, when the first generation to invest widely in home ownership dies off and bequeaths homes to middle-aged children who already have them.

What will they spend their money on? Second homes, holidays, servants ("Already... teenaged girls from Yorkshire earn more as nannies in Kensington than their dads do in Castleford"), education, health care.

The *Economist* cheerfully concedes that, in "Mrs Thatcher's great social experiment, to give people more control over their own lives" (remember when that was a left-wing slogan - applied to a rather different social group), "newly rich Britain will be a less egalitarian country. Those that have jobs and homes will do better than ever before: those that have neither will do, relatively" ("relatively"? "worse").

And everything should then be marvellous - "Unless, that is, the bourgeoisie misuses its new wealth". And how might it do that? By selfish consumption, rather than by practising "the qualities of social responsibility and thrift which once characterised the British middle classes... The new British bourgeois are setting out on their road to riches mocked by brahmins who think

by eliminating a movement's leaders, as the South African government is well aware.

This is an important point, because historians have either been ignorant of or have evaded this simple, awkward fact. It has been more in keeping with our British image of ourselves to attribute the collapse of Chartism not to ruthless repression by the state (we don't have that sort of state, do we?) but to inept leadership, unrealistic demands, the unreadiness of the people to rule themselves, dramatic improvements in the economy and the generally benign progressiveness of the British constitution which gradually democratised the state to the point where any form of revolutionary change was unnecessary and absurd.

## Poverty of ambition

When we despair of the British labour movement for the poverty of its radical ambition, we should remember that we are witnessing a historically stunted growth, a flower whose head was sliced off almost as soon as it appeared above the soil. ■

that only the state should pay for a revival of culture, urban redevelopment, better education and new hospitals. For new rich and old, the coming challenge is to prove these brahmins wrong".

This is perhaps a slight misrepresentation of those who think the state has a role in the life of the community. "Brahmins", in case you were wondering, are intellectual and cultural snobs - not a description readily applicable to most trade unionists, or to the bulk of Labour Party members and supporters among whom most opponents of the enterprise culture may be found.

Still, the *Economist* has a point. It will be interesting to see how the newly rich and responsible Nottingham bourgeoisie improves on the Playhouse, the Theatre Royal, the Royal Hall and the Queen's Medical Centre; to observe its nouvelle largesse descending on schools other than the City Technology College and the already amply endowed High Schools; and to watch vast, beneficial transformations in districts like Radford and Hyson Green when private enterprise revives the philanthropic traditions of its Victorian predecessors who built them in the first place. ■

## Blue notes

BUT SOD THE *ECONOMIST*! Jazz has been one of my enthusiasms since I first picked out *Bad Penny Blues* on the front-room piano and went to see Louis Armstrong at Leicester's De Montfort Hall (few major American tours stopped off in Nottingham before the Royal Hall was built). My record collection ranges from Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver through Duke Ellington, Lester Young, Charlie Parker and John Coltrane to Wynton Marsalis, Stan Tracey, Loose Tubes and Courtney Pine. I like jazz because I like jazz, though there is a tiresome left critique which likes jazz because it's the music of an oppressed people (so it is - but above all, it's marvellous music).

Now, courtesy of the *Economist*, which pronounces with supreme confidence and occasional

idiocy on just about everything, I learn that jazz is essentially a right-wing phenomenon. At least, "The resurgence of jazz appears to have simple causes. Since the political and economic climate of the 1980s has stressed freedom rather than equality, the times are good for competitive independence in music too. The rock culture of the 1960s and 1970s sought a social, even tribal effect; it aimed shamelessly at instant community... The individuality of the jazz musician is the nobler face of self-interest... The voice of Thatcherism, perhaps?"

This was published a week late for April 1st, but was surely the product of some kind of warped tomfoolery. Do we need to comment on the quality of thought which ascribes a complex musical and social phenomenon to "simple causes", or on the casual decoupling of freedom and equality (one of the ideological triumphs of the Thatcher years)? I will say just two things to restore my innocent enjoyment of jazz.

(1) Among the most popular contributors to the current "resurgence of jazz" is Loose Tubes, a band of stunning virtuosity which recently infuriated a *Times* critic for some interesting, non-musical reasons: (a) because it operates, on principle, as a collective; (b) because in between numbers its members like to deliver short statements on such topics as their (collective) opposition to nuclear weapons and nuclear power; (c) because among its repertoire is an anti-Apartheid hymn, *Sād Afrika*.

Not quite "the voice of Thatcherism".

(2) Rock music, via blues and rhythm & blues, is a blood relation of jazz. Many enthusiasts, many musicians, like and play both, free of ideological distinction. It takes some pretty perverse special pleading to tear them apart. (There's also jazz-rock fusion, which ideologically must be very messy.) But let's just quote one key figure: Charlie Watts, Rolling Stones drummer, brilliant jazz drummer and leader of the Charlie Watts Big Band - a jazz band, of course. ■

## Dogs' dinners

WHETHER OR NOT the proposed £4 billion Canary Wharf development ("Europe's largest-ever office complex") is the architectural essence of Thatcherism (see *Flypaper* 2), it neatly encapsulates the way the present régime polarises opinion - to the point where the developers and the critics are scarcely speaking the same language.

According to the developers, Olympia and York, the skyline of London will be "dramatically enhanced... Our aim has been to create an integrated scheme of great quality... we have a particular responsibility to ensure that the project both reflects the architectural heritage of one of the world's greatest cities, and represents the highest achievements of contemporary design and construction."

Equally euphoric was Cesar Pelli, architect of the 800-foot pyramid-topped tower which will form the centrepiece of the mega-complex. His skyscraper, he said, "is the simplest, most pure,



Cesar Pelli and his archetypal obelisk

most basic form I have designed... It is archetypal: a square prism ending in a pyramid. An obelisk, one of the earliest vertical structures... In steel it will shine in sunlight and gleam softly under your white English sky... I hope this tower will be a building of which Britain can be proud. I believe it will be very beautiful."

Utterly unimpressed, however, was Francis Tibbalds, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute (the town planners' professional organisation):

"The layout is simplistic and banal, the architecture lumpy and mediocre - the whole looks like some chunk of some ageing, tired and dreary US downtown dropped from a great height on the Isle of Dogs... As a piece of urban design it is simply abysmal."

And never the twain shall meet.

But architecture is as political as everything else nowadays (it always was, of course, but not so crudely and obviously - we can at least thank Thatcherism for making the lineaments of money and power so much more visible). The most blatant example recently has been the treatment of a selection of 50 representative post-war buildings recommended by English Heritage for listed building status. The government, in the person of the "heritage minister", Lord Caithness (it's hard to believe this is the late twentieth century, isn't it?), accepted only 18 of these for the final list.

An indignant member of English Heritage protested: "Anyone can see that as a balanced list it is a complete dog's dinner, which makes no sense at all. It is shot through with politics.

Anything with a pitched roof is OK; the only modernist buildings there are the ones that could not be omitted."

These include Coventry Cathedral and the Royal Festival Hall, but otherwise, according to *Architects' Journal* of 6th April, "all of the obvious candidates that might have represented public housing or social building are conspicuous only by their absence". The list, said *AJ*, was "a travesty... The minister claimed that much post-war architecture 'failed to match design to function' or 'give proper weight to aesthetic qualities'. Such reasons for not listing buildings are philistine and feeble in the extreme. Behind them one detects more than a hint of political prejudice, economic expediency and an unwillingness to irritate the Government's friends in industry."

Pleasingly enough, one of the favoured 18 is Nottingham University's Cripps Hall, though the Nottinghamshire volume of Pevsner's *The Buildings of England* doesn't see it as anything special, lumping it in with half a dozen other halls of residence and remarking merely that it is "the most rigidly formal... with segmental window heads, the same *leitmotif* as on the Education Block".

Doesn't *sound* like one of the best 18 post-war buildings in England, does it? ■

## The Ego Has Landed

FORTUNATE READERS OF THE *New Statesman* last week received an unexpected bonus - a publicity leaflet for "Maxwell - The Definitive Biography by Joe Haines". Not content with trying to suppress all alternatives, Captain Bob is vigorously promoting the official version published (and, most reviewers seem to think, effectively ghostwritten) by himself. The promotion is costing £½m - according to *The Bookseller*, "surely the largest ever UK campaign for a single title".

The modesty of the *NS* insert is also less than overwhelming. With graphics of pistols, military decorations and wads of banknotes, the pitch is pure Jack Higgins and Frederick Forsyth (*The Ego Has Landed*, maybe). *Maxwell*, we learn, is "an exploration of the life of one of the few truly larger than life characters in the world today... Insufferable, Ruthless, Rude... Calm, Charming, Caring... Fighter in the Czech Resistance: as a courier, he risked his life to save others. Sentenced to death: captured and tortured by the Nazis, he told them nothing. Awarded the British Military Cross: even as a British officer, his was a personal war. Makes a fortune: in war-torn Europe, the seeds of his fortune were planted. Becomes a Labour MP: as a new MP, he rapidly won friends - and enemies. Head of an International Publishing Empire: one of the richest and most influential men in the world. NOW READ THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MAN."

And there's more! If you order via the form attached to the leaflet ("Please send me [large space] copies of 'Maxwell' by Joe Haines at £12.95 each"), you could be lucky enough to receive "A SPECIAL SIGNED COPY - LIMITED EDITION". Moreover, "in addition 200 people will receive an invitation

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to a special lunch with Robert Maxwell as host".

And that's almost a tempting offer. Given the number of *New Statesman* readers likely to take it up, the odds on being one of the lucky 200 should be quite high. But is there such a thing as a free lunch? Anthony Delano, co-author of one of the unofficial biogs, warns: "Maxwell land is a very strange country - nothing there is quite the same as it is on the outside." ■

## Late Post

*Evening Post* editorial, 5th March 1987:

"Doctors giving evidence to the all-party Commons social services committee last night said the anti-AIDS campaign should be directed at the people it almost always affects - homosexuals and drug addicts.

"When the *Post* had the temerity to make this very point a couple of months ago, we incurred the wrath of the left-wing intelligentsia and a local AIDS support group."

*Evening Post* editorial, 9th March 1988:

"... there is a new spectre on the horizon.

"Aids.

"And that is something which simply cannot be shoved under the carpet.

"It is not being alarmist to warn our children of the dangers of the disease - how it can be spread and how it can be prevented ...

"Which is why yesterday's decision by Nottinghamshire's education committee to allow the showing of a controversial video on Aids to the county's 14-to-16 year olds was a sensible one." ■

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