

## Meltdown

**The Iron Ladies:  
Why do Women Vote Tory?**  
Beatrix Campbell,  
Virago £4.95 pbk

Beatrix Campbell has written a very interesting book about women and, more particularly, women in the Conservative Party. At times she almost emerges as an open admirer.

It has one great fault: the attempt to impose a theory on disparate forces, but I shall keep that till last. First, I want to go into the book's considerable merits. These are threefold: Ms Campbell's historical researches, her talents as a journalist - especially in her use of the interview - and her psychological insights. I shall take them in order.

The book really begins with the Reform Act of 1867 and the Conservative reaction to it. The Act introduced at least partial democracy. The Tories responded to it by trying to form an alliance between the aristocracy and the urban working class. They did this partly through the Primrose League and the use of women who went out in great numbers and campaigned on behalf of their menfolk for the Conservative Party. But, as Ms Campbell rightly points out, it was not a women's movement in the modern sense. In no way did it take a stand/or women; on the whole it simply supported the *status quo*.

When the suffragette movement developed, the Primrose League neatly ducked the issue by declaring itself agnostic. If women wanted the vote or even a seat in Parliament, as some Tory women did, they had to pursue their objectives by other means. Meanwhile, the League went on using women to keep men in power. This has been a cardinal feature of the Tory approach to politics, at least until the last decade or so.

In the early 1920s, when the Labour Party had become part of the political scenery, Mrs Neville Chamberlain, the wife of the future prime

minister, told a mass meeting of Conservative women: 'We must go into the back yards and into the little alleys, where people live, often in the greatest hardship and distress, and where nobody goes but the Socialists.'

All that, and there is a lot more of it, is excellently chronicled. Ms Campbell is very good, too, when it comes to interviewing her contemporaries: the Tory women candidates or aspirants. She seems to have a particular rapport with Edwina Currie. But there are other, lesser known figures who have talked to her very freely. For example, there is the divorced Kay Wood who has two passions in life, her son - at private school - and her parliamentary ambitions, and who reckons that she spends £5,000 a year trying to get a seat. It is the divorce that gets in the way. 'There's plenty of divorced men,' Ms Wood says, 'and men who have just walked out of their commitments, and nobody bothers, but if you are a divorced woman it's a different issue. It counts against you.'

Not least, women candidates say, is the problem of the clothes: what to wear for the interview and, worse still, at the induction weekend for those who have been enrolled on the parliamentary list. Some of them buy five separate outfits: for men it is only a question of a couple of suits, which they have already. The dislike among Tory women for young male merchant banker candidates seems to be very strong. If the Conservative Party Central Office is serious about wanting more women MPs, it ought to take these strictures to heart.

Ms Campbell scores again with her psychological insights, particularly in relation to Margaret Thatcher. She notes that it is for her father, the Grantham grocer and alderman, for whom Mrs Thatcher reserves her praise and sheds a tear, not for her mother, who appears to have been utterly subordinate. 'The daughter honoured her

father and she repudiated her mother. That's not in the rules: she is supposed to honour her father and *become* her mother.'

So the young Margaret Roberts rebelled again when, as the mother of twins, she resolved to carry on with her career in law and her search for a parliamentary seat. Ms Campbell writes: 'She rebelled in theory though never in practice against the dominant ideology of her own party, and her rebellion remains at odds with her own rhetoric. That means that there's something corrosive at the heart of the Iron Lady: all these years she's been faking it.'

There is something in that of the literary critic analysing the real motivation of Lady Macbeth. And, in the same vein, one could go on to suggest that Mrs Thatcher did not so much repudiate her mother as repudiate her mother's condition and determine that women in future should not live in such servitude. That would be my interpretation, though Mrs Thatcher has not articulated it directly. But I think that Ms Campbell's approach is very interesting. She is right that there is a contradiction in Mrs Thatcher: the woman who married a rich (and divorced) man and who could therefore afford to keep down increases in MPs' and ministers' salaries because she did not need them herself, and could afford to be an ambitious working mother. Not all that many people are in her position; very few manage the cost-effective and time-saving measure of producing two children at once.

Where I think that Ms Campbell begins to stray is in being overwhelmed by the Conservative Party. It is implicit - sometimes explicit - throughout the book that she really rather admires Tory women. Victoria Gillick, Mary Whitehouse, Olga Maitland and even Sara Keays are given quite a lot of space not just as phenomena, but as if it is natural that women activists should be in the Tory ranks.

One particular comment re-

veals a lot. What was 'extraordinary' about the Cecil Parkinson-Keays affair, she writes, was that, 'Sara Keays' strength derived from her deeply middle class respectability'. But that was not extraordinary at all. The entrenched middle classes can be very self-confident.

It must have been class that made Tory women such a force in the first place. The women who supported the Primrose League were better off, better educated and had more time to spare than those from the lower classes whom, politically, they sought to woo. It did not occur to them that they were inferior to men - just different. Between the sexes in the upper classes there was a sense of mutual deference. Suppression of women was much more a characteristic of the working class.

The fault in Ms Campbell's book - and it is, I think, fundamental - is that she tries to argue simultaneously for feminism while thinking that all women should have the same views. Manifestly they do not. Even within the Tory Party they disagree sharply.

Ms Campbell may be right when she concludes: 'Conservative women's feminism is rooted in liberalism and... therefore tends to end where contemporary feminism starts.' But there are worse things to be rooted in than liberalism, and anyway the choice is there. Some women go one way, some another - like Joan Ruddock and Olga Maitland on defence. Some women vote Tory, some men vote Labour. A lot of people of both sexes may not want a greater say in politics in the conventional sense of the term. Ms Campbell, like many political writers, takes politics too seriously. Life goes on; for women in Europe it is improving, through technology as much as anything else. If it were not, there would be a crying need for a women's party. Not even Ms Campbell thinks that. I suspect that while writing this book she came to believe that the Conservative Party has not managed the transition too badly. •

Malcolm Rutherford

## Job Count

The Geography of  
**De-industrialisation**  
Ron Martin and Bob  
Rowthorn (Eds)  
Macmillan £8.95pbk

Every Friday, ITN's *News at Ten* gives its own, curiously anodyne account of Britain's de-industrialisation: week after week, almost without comment, its 'jobs count' reveals massive losses from manufacturing and the only very partial compensation of growth in jobs in the service sector. What the figures of this weekly routine don't reveal, of course, is the social and personal dislocation which lies below the statistical surface. This reality is also largely absent from **The Geography of De-industrialisation**. However, Ron Martin and Bob Rowthorn have put together a set of essays which succeed in both revealing the causes of the de-industrialisation of the British economy and in demonstrating the wide disparities in experience of this process in different areas of Britain.

Three points emerge with

particular clarity. Firstly, the severity of Britain's economic crisis surpasses that of comparable economies. Growth has been slower, the loss of jobs from industry has been greater, unemployment has risen more sharply and levels of prosperity have been lower than in other capitalist countries. In part, it is this relative severity of the current crisis which distinguishes it from earlier ones.

Certainly, in contrast to the later 1920s and early 1930s, de-industrialisation is now being felt over far greater areas of the country. Not only is it the peripheral heavy industrial regions which have experienced economic collapse, but also the conurbations (London in particular) and even what has been for much of the postwar period Britain's industrial heartland, the northwest and the West Midlands.

Secondly, this pattern is based upon trends which are more deep-seated than is implied by analyses which attribute all Britain's ills to the advent of Mrs Thatcher. Thatcherism is as much a *consequence* as a *cause* of the economic crisis. This is

not to say, of course, that state policies since 1979 have not intensified the problems. As a number of contributors show, there has been a sharp 'Thatcher effect', involving the dramatic worsening of unemployment.

Equally, whilst the rhetoric of state withdrawal from economic management has belied the reality of the Thatcher years, there have been changes in the objectives of that management. The drive toward the renewal of profitability for key sectors of industry, based upon increases in labour productivity and consequent cost competitiveness, has implied not only the attempt to undermine the trade unions, but also far-reaching reorganisation of production itself. Corporate investment in new technology has gone hand in hand with the growth of 'casualised' employment - part-time and temporary contracts, sub-contracting, home-working and so forth - much of which has been associated with the increasing participation of women in paid (albeit badly) work. Whether this strategy will be successful in its own terms is doubtful; what is clear,

however, is that it will generate even more intense inequalities between different parts of Britain and, indeed, between different classes and other social groupings.

This leads me to the third of the general issues which I want to highlight. Although a relatively minor theme in the book, the failures of previous Labour governments to improve Britain's economic fortunes emerge clearly too. Some of the contributors demonstrate how characteristically Labourist and interventionist forms of economic policy themselves contributed to the deepening of employment problems.

The book's achievement, then, is to spell out rigorously the dilemmas currently confronting the Left. Centrally, there is a need to develop a strategy of economic management which acknowledges the exigencies of Britain's role within the international capitalist economy, but at the same time rejects the insensitivities and inequalities of the market. Any simple return to the interventionism practised by earlier Labour governments is not a realistic option. •  
Gareth Rees

## Distant Thunder

Truth Tales:  
Stories by Indian Women  
*Kali for Women* (Eds)  
The Women's Press Ltd,  
£3.95 pbk

India has for too long been interpreted by either the English writer, essentially a visitor, or by those Indian writers who write in English. The major part of Indian literature is, of course, written in the regional languages - one thousand at last count - but, due to an absence of translators, it is unknown outside the boundaries of their respective states. *Kali for Women*, India's first feminist publishing house, has made a step towards correcting this imbalance by bringing out a collection of short stories by women written in different Indian lan-

guages under the Women's Press imprint in England. I applaud their joint venture and regret that my applause is not as thunderous as I would wish. The translations are of uneven quality, wavering from fair to dreadful, and leaving one with the impression that the English language is inadequate to convey material that is culturally so complex and multifaceted.

The collection has a certain homogeneity since all the stories deal with women's lot in India. Lakshmi Kannan in Muniyakka and Ismat Chughtai in Tiny's Granny both present pictures of traditional Indian womanhood - the widow, outcast of the family, used for as long as she is capable of serving, then thrown out like garbage.

Ila Mehta in *Smoke* and Suniti Aphaie in *The Dolls* present the modern Indian woman - a widow and a spinster standing on their own

feet, proudly earning their own living. But in both stories the uneasiness of style reflects the state of such women, torn between duty and independence, orthodoxy and individuality. Society does not appreciate their gifts or qualities but only uses them leech-like.

The Bengali and Hindi contributors, Mahasveta Devi and Mrinal Pande, have been fortunate in finding translators who have attacked their task with vigour and inventiveness and conveyed much of the style and humour of the original. Yet one cannot help regretting what is lost in translation, which can capture only a third or at best one half, of the true spirit of these stories. The exercise can be likened to reducing the variety and richness of flavours in a full Indian meal to a packet of dry powder on a department store shelf.

This analogy is particularly appropriate to Mahasveta Devi who has created not merely a family but an entire village in Bengal with its welter of superstitions, prejudices, customs and orthodoxies. What is remarkable in this story is the dry, crackling wit of Mahasveta Devi's pen, the kind of scathing humour that not only keeps the downtrodden alive but also makes their world ring with laughter.

Finally, Mrinal Pande writes of a very different world - that of a comfortable middle-class family - which fills the teenage daughter with disgust and comic despair. She laments. A lesser writer would have reduced it to a cliché but Pande has a command of that cryptic, ironic wit that comes straight from the college cafes, the bus stops and roadside tea stalls of India. •  
Anita Desai

## Unlikely Heroes

There has yet to be a comprehensive history of the political and military action by Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas during 1982. *Jimmy Burns' The Land That Lost its Heroes: the Falkland, the post-war, and Alfonsin* (Bloomsbury £12.95) goes some way to filling the gap and brings the Argentine crisis up to date.

The social and economic problems that prompted a declining military dictatorship to look around for desperate gestures that would reverse the slide have been well mapped out. But what made General Galtieri and friends think they could succeed with such a crackpot scheme for reclaiming the Malvinas? And however did they hope to win a war with an army of conscripts, many of whom had no more than three months of training, often limited to chauffeuring corrupt colonels from torture chambers to assignments with mistresses?

Jimmy Burns, Buenos Aires

## Questions of Sexuality

Sexuality seems to be an issue surrounded by questions - about gender, differences, deep and dark desires, identity ... the asking is endless. But as *Susan Ardill* and *Sue O'Sullivan* comment in their contribution to *Sexuality: a Reader* (edited by *Feminist Review* Virago £6.95): 'We approach our sexuality to capture it. But is it ever steady enough to capture? To haul into the political arena?' The questions in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* edited by *Pat Caplan* (Tavistock £9.95) equally capture the dilemmas. What indeed are we trying to do in talking about sexuality?

Both books weigh towards the academic, but there is a sharpness and energy about *Feminist Review's* Reader that is largely absent from *The Cultural Construction*. Many of the articles in the Reader (written over a period of seven years) were intended as interventions into uncomfortable and continuing debates - on pornography and male sexual violence, on lesbianism and women's desires, and on other sexual choices and oppressions. Often controversial, the articles held in common an attempt to open up the debate on differences and divisions between feminists.

In contrast, the volume edited

correspondent of the *Financial Times* during the Falklands war, makes little contribution to understanding the military history of the conflict, despite interviews with some of its key actors. But he does, in a rather wordy book, provide historical gems. Amongst these is the arrest in Spain of Argentinian officers on a sabotage mission against British ships at Gibraltar. And he fuels the fantasy by indicating that the military considered using Montoneros guerrillas on suicide sabotage missions.

Burns is best when exposing Argentina's superficial nationalism and chastising the press in Buenos Aires, a task in which he feels the pain of criticising friends. He is generous to President Raul Alfonsin, for whom he betrays considerable admiration. One achievement of *The Land That Lost its Heroes* will be to replace much of the nonsense published in Argentina with serious reportage. •

Andrew Graham-Yooll

by Pat Caplan arose from a series of anthropology seminars at Goldsmiths College. Its reference point is less a politics of sexuality, within the cultures being observed, than sexuality as it has been elaborated in the 'developed' West. Not that this is new. The problem of whether anthropological studies cast more light on 'us' than on how to take on board issues pertinent to (the usually Third World) 'them' has always been of issue.

But anthropology is pertinent in providing examples of other sorts of behaviour and other ways of conceptualising categories like sexuality, which, having become fixed, seem natural and inevitable. Within our culture it is difficult to envisage the possibility that factors which make up sexuality could be transformed and reordered into new configurations.

Perhaps identity need not be yoked inextricably to sexuality, nor gender directly mapped onto a heterosexuality marked by uneven power relations. *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* gives sight to such possibilities - the Swahili Moslems of Mombasa, for instance, scarcely stigmatised homosexual and lesbian relationships partly because gender is not defined by appropriate sexual behaviour. •

Janice Winship

## Family History

The development of industrial capitalism was dedicated to and made possible by a commitment to sexual difference. If in the late 18th century 'the family' was the reason why men set out to make fortunes, it was the silent and unacknowledged labour of the women members of the family which enabled them to succeed.

In *Family Fortunes* (Hutchinson, £10.95 (pbk)) *Leonore Davidoff* and *Catherine Hall* show how religion, morality and fiction in the period 1780-1850 fostered the idea of the family as the fundamental 'natural' social unit. During this period the middle-class home gradually became a

place where women were encouraged to practise a proper feminine dependence, and men, of course, learned a corresponding dependability.

Drawing on a great variety of letters, diaries, novels, moral treatises and manuals of instruction, *Family Fortunes* demonstrates that subjectivity, defined by class and gender, is acquired and developed in accordance with changing social values and conventions.

Though the accounts of individual families are combined with a wealth of context, the book wears its considerable learning lightly. *Family Fortunes* is not only good history, but also a good read. •

Catherine Belsey

## Early in Arcadia

*Early in Arcadia* (Richard Drew £9.95), *Naomi Mitchison's* stories about the first inhabitants of the Orkney Islands have just been published to celebrate her 90th year. Through tales of individual lives she tries to catch the beginnings.

She shows us Hands, fashioning a boat of skin to take him to the 'Shining' he sees over the water. His wife, Metoo, realises that sheep can provide more than meat: the first murky imaginings of the uses of wool. Generations pass: a girl child learns the women's sec-

rets of pot-making. Later, a boy child chastised for his unruly, dangerous tongue, grows up, dies, enters mythology as a powerful story teller.

Skills are learned, lost, rediscovered. Superstition became religion. The power of the Moon Woman is eclipsed by the power of the Sun Man.

Naomi Mitchison has published over 70 books. Here she has turned from the enormously wide range of her political and social interests to look closer to home and heart, to create a legend for herself and also for us. •

Sarah Lefanu



## Ordinary Conflicts

A Union Jack flies from a tree. Coloured paint on kerbstones maps a sectarian social geography. Paul Graham's photographs in *Troubled Land: The Social Landscape of Northern Ireland* (Grey Editions £8.95 pbk)

produce images of eerie calm as children play amidst political graffiti and election posters fade above flowers. An exhibition of Graham's photographs is now showing at Cornerhouse, Manchester, and is due elsewhere in the autumn. •