

## POLITICAL BOOKS

# New Chapters

1987 has marked the beginning of a third term of Thatcherism, with the 21st century firmly in the Right's sights. For the Left the year has closed with the start of a much vaunted period of rethinking. **Andrew Gamble** charts the books, left, right and centre which represent this important political year.

1987 has been another glorious chapter in the annals of Thatcherism. It produced the third Thatcher victory, and a spate of obituaries for socialism. The subtitle for Peter Jenkins' new book on **The Thatcher Revolution** (Cape, £12.95 hbk) is 'the end of the socialist era'. Some people may be surprised to learn that they have been living in a socialist era, but there it is. What Jenkins understands by 'the socialist era' is the period now ended in which governments and ruling classes had to treat socialism as a serious threat.

Jenkins thinks the Thatcher revolution only a half revolution, but also judges it irreversible, because it is the continuation of social and political trends which can be traced back to the 1950s. This perspective is shared by Dennis Kavanagh's study, **Thatcherism and British Politics** (OUP, £5.95 pbk) which provides the most comprehensive survey yet of Thatcherism and its impact.

Tackling Thatcherism from a quite different angle is Bea Campbell's book **Iron Ladies** (Virago, £4.95 pbk). This adds a new dimension to other studies by looking at the support conservatism has achieved among women. This is an original and arresting study. It is one of the really new books of 1987.

Despite the socialist era now being officially over, there is still a great deal of writing on socialism and how to achieve it. Three election defeats have brought introspection, but surprisingly little despair or pessimism. There have been positive gains from the Thatcher years, not least the insights into what the Labour Party must do in order to renew itself and the experiences gained from resisting Thatcherism.

One such permanent gain

has been the revival of local socialism. There have been several significant contributions to the literature on this during 1987. Especially noteworthy are David Blunkett and Keith Jackson's **Democracy in Crisis** (Hogarth Press £6.95 pbk), Hilary Wainwright's **Labour: A Tale of Two Parties** (Hogarth Press £5.95 pbk), Ken Livingstone's **If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It** (Collins £12, hbk), and the report on the GLC edited by Maureen Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright: **A Taste of Power: the politics of local economics** (Verso £7.95 pbk). These books generally avoid making exaggerated claims for local socialism. They are more concerned with analysing the political and economic conditions under which public enterprise can be successful. If socialism is to revive, this has to be one of the most necessary tasks.

Other valuable contributions to the debate on Labour's future have included Roy Hattersley's **Choose Freedom** (Michael Joseph, £3.95) a new essay by Bernard Crick, **Socialism** (OUP £4.95 pbk), and a major study by Patrick Seyd of a crucial dimension of Labour Party politics, **The Rise and Decline of the Labour Left**, (Macmillan £6.95 pbk).

What appears to have been shattered beyond repair is not socialism but labourism. It seems unlikely that the old labourist tradition can be revived sufficiently to put Labour back into office. But socialism has a brighter prospect. The breakdown of social democracy in the 1970s to which Thatcherism was one response has created other opportunities also. To take advantage of them requires study of the changes through which capitalism is passing. A good place to start is Scott Lash



Thatcher's third victory produced obituaries for socialism

and John Urry's **The End Of Organised Capitalism** (Polity £9.95 hbk) and Charles Leadbeater and John Lloyd's **In Search of Work** (Penguin £3.95 pbk).

If socialism has a future it will have to develop practical proposals for strengthening citizenship rights by redistributing power and extending democracy. This will undoubtedly require some fundamental constitutional reforms. But it will also require the development of a credible economic programme. David Coates and John Hillard's edited collection **The Economic Revival of Modern Britain** (Edward Elgar £9.95 pbk) brings together key contributions from all parts of the political spectrum. The importance of these debates is underlined by the 1987 report on **British Social Attitudes** (Gower £12.50 hbk) edited by Roger Jowell, Sharon Witherspoon and Lindsay Brook, which presents evidence on how important the optimism of the voters about the economy was for the Conservatives' electoral success in 1987. In other respects there appears to be a pronounced shift away from Thatcherite values.

1987 saw the Thatcher government confirmed in office and apparently secure. But elsewhere the forces that sustained Thatcherism in

Britain - the new cold war and the American boom - are unravelling. For a good sombre read I recommend Peter Jay and Michael Stewart's cautionary tale **Apocalypse 2000** (Sidgwick & Jackson) £12.95 hbk). Published at the height of the glee about the economic revival, Jay and Stewart's analysis of the explosive consequences of the political and economic situation in the world economy that has been allowed to develop during the Reagan presidency has been vindicated by the crash and its aftermath.

Much the most enjoyable read of the year, however, if also possibly the most alarming, is Gore Vidal's superb book of essays **Armageddon?** (Andre Deutsch £11.95 hbk). The book is full of memorable passages, but especially good are his assessment of the decline of the American empire, his analysis of Ronald Reagan's Christian fundamentalism which has potentially terminal consequences for all of us, his partial rehabilitation of Richard Nixon (you'll have to read it), and his devastating ridicule of the American neo-conservatives. The brilliance, the intelligence, and the occasional savagery of these essays is something to savour. There is nothing like it in England. O