

Thatcher's Lessons

We are now in the era of 'rethinking'. It is the new buzzword. Some think there is nothing to rethink.

Others see it as little more than adapting to Thatcherism. **Stuart Hall** argues a radically different view

'Ten lessons from Madame LaZonga; She does the rumba, and she does the conga'

The process of 'rethinking' has begun - many would say, not before time. Admittedly, it is taking some peculiar forms - the 'Labour Listens' campaign being one of the most bizarre. Is it really useful to listen to all and sundry about the future of socialism without, at least, first formulating some themes or propositions of your own? Are there no policy directions or tendencies already emerging inside Walworth Road? No matter. Even this muddled exercise should be seen as part of a wider process - painful, contorted, but an absolute prerequisite to any possible renewal of the project of the Left.

The issue, now, is not whether but *how* to rethink. The temptations for the Left will be either to fall back on The Faith as we know it or to race forward to embrace the new Thatcherite 'consensus'. Another, more radical, proposal is that we could do worse than to start the process of rethinking with a little thought. What the 'Thatcher revolution' suggests is that good ideas, or what the political commentators were calling, in the aftermath of the election, some 'Big Themes', don't fall off the shelf without an ideological framework to give those ideas coherence. By framework, we mean a perspective on what is happening to society now, a vision of the future, a capacity to articulate these vividly through a few clearly-enunciated themes or principles, a new conception of politics. In short, a political strategy. In this, as in much else, the Left could do worse than begin by 'Learning From Thatcherism'.

Now, nothing is more calculated to drive the Left into a tizzy than this scandalous proposition - especially when advanced by *MT*. The very idea of Thatcherism is anathema to the Left. Decent people everywhere hate and revile it. Where Thatcherism is, there the Left cannot be. They inhabit two, not only different and hostile, but

mutually-exclusive worlds. What on earth could the Left possibly *learn*? Besides (shades of 'Gouldism') isn't this slogan simply a cover-up for the attempt to shift Labour irrevocably to the right - an injunction to cuddle up to the 'enterprise culture', on the if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them principle?

It is a sign both of the defensiveness and the residual sectarianism afflicting many parts of the Left that it mis-reads an injunction to analyse 'Thatcherism' for a recommendation to swallow it whole. It is time to correct this fatal confusion, most of all because it is now so politically disabling. Unless the Left can understand Thatcherism - what it is, why it arose, what its historical specificity is, the reasons for its success in redrawing the political map and disorganising the Left - it cannot renew itself *because* it cannot understand the world it must live in if it is not to be 'disappeared' into permanent marginality. It is time, therefore, in the context of rethinking, to make clear exactly what is meant by 'learning from Thatcherism'. And we can do this, not only in general terms, but in relation to a concrete example: the current crisis surrounding the NHS.

The first thing Thatcherism teaches us about the NHS is that crises always present opportunities as well as problems. The problem here is not only how to reorganise the NHS but *how to turn the crisis to our political advantage*. It is not only a chance to defend the NHS but an opportunity to construct a majoritarian politics of the Left. If the Left cannot develop an alternative long-term political strategy it cannot save the NHS. What most distinguishes Thatcherism's wide-ranging conduct of ideological politics from Labour's narrow, tactical parliamentarianism, is exactly this unremitting attention to the long-term, strategic, political 'pay-off' of apparently short-term crises.

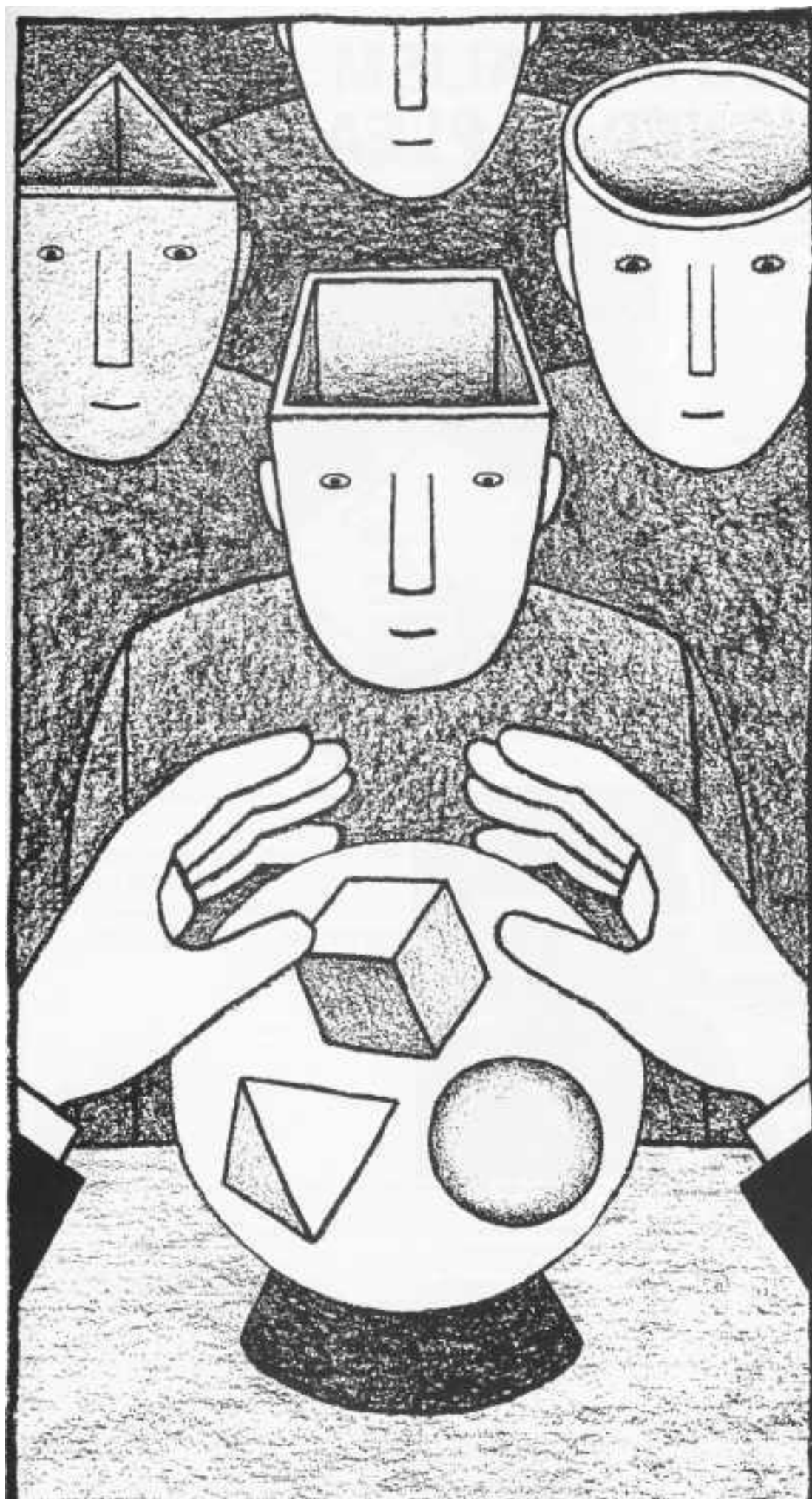
The present uproar around the NHS is, after all, the most protracted crisis affecting the welfare state of Mrs Thatcher's reign. We always knew - and she always knew - that it was her

Achilles heel: the area where popular opinion would be most stubbornly resistant to the project (to which, despite tactical retreats and statements like 'the NHS is safe in our hands' (*sick*) she remained steadfastly committed): that of 'breaking the spell of the welfare state'. Such a goal has been the consistent motor of the Thatcherite revolution in welfare, and was previewed by the Institute of Economic Affairs as long ago as 1981 (Anderson, Tait and Marsland, the Social Affairs Unit, 1981. I give the reference and date for the benefit of those political commentators, like Peter Kellner, who comfort themselves - and us - by the ludicrous proposition that, because Thatcherism is tactically adept, it has no consistent ideological driving force apart from that so beloved of psephologists - the lust for power). So, what we have now is a crisis that refuses to go away, unremitting (and often critical) media coverage, widespread and varied popular support for a change, and the government temporarily on the ropes. How could the Left and the Labour Party *fail* to profit, politically, from such a conjuncture?

And yet, the more the crisis unfolds, the more the Left's political and ideological gains seem, at best, 'passive' ones. Mrs Thatcher has personally taken charge of the crisis - always an ominous sign. 'The impression which the prime minister was trying to create was that she was pleased that talk of crisis by the opposition and health professionals had opened up the NHS to her radicalism. Her spokesmen countered the impression of government panic by stressing that she was "seizing the tide of public perception"' (*The Guardian* Jan 27). The talk is now exclusively about 'alternative ways of funding' (which every post-Thatcherite child of nine knows is a code-phrase for the massive expansion of private medicine and privatisation within the NHS) and 'breaking the barriers to greater efficiency' (which we know is a code-phrase for destroying COHSE and NUPE).

Haven't we been here before? A great, thundering crisis - and then, inexorably, as it unfolds, the tide beginning to turn, the ideological advantage shifting to the other side, victory snatched from the jaws of defeat ...? Politics, waged by Thatcherism as a relentless 'war of positions'? Crisis as a God-sent opportunity to radically restructure society (or, as Gramsci put it, 'reconstruction already under way in the very moment of destruction')? Why do we still find it impossible to believe that this could happen, when it has been happening to us, steadily, since 1979?

There are several reasons for this reluctance. The Left keeps telling itself that 'the postwar settlement is over': but we still find it difficult to think politically in a world where its terms can no



longer be taken for granted. We find it easier to be righteously moralistic about Thatcherism ('isn't she a cow?'); harder to grasp its logic as a political strategy. Another reason is the Left's defensiveness. It is as though the moment we stray, even for a moment, from the straight-and-narrow path of conventional left wisdom, the big, bad wolf of Thatcherite revisionism is waiting to gobble us up. Our sectarianism is often a product of fear - the changing world is seen as a strange and threatening place without signposts. It is also symptomatic of the way our thinking has become stuck in a particular historic groove, of how our agendas are fixed by the circumstances (the 1930s, 1945) in which they were originally formed.

It is also due to a certain notion of politics, inhabited not so much as theory, more as a habit of mind. We go on thinking a unilinear and irreversible political logic, driven by some abstract entity we call 'the economic' or 'capital', unfolding to its preordained end. Whereas, as Thatcherism clearly shows, politics actually works more like the logic of language: *you can always put it another way if you try hard enough*. Current campaigning on cuts in the NHS *could* lead to a leap in public spending. Alternatively, it could lead to the argument that - since the NHS is underfunded but the demand is potentially limitless, taxpayers are looking to pay less in taxation and there is money swilling around in the private sector - the only solution is value-for-money and privatisation. The difference between the first and the second scenarios is not determined by some inexorable 'law of history' but by the effectiveness of our political-ideological intervention, above all in the 'theatre' of popular politics and popular conceptions.

Let us stay with the question of 'popular conceptions' for a moment. The popular defence of the NHS is genuine. But so is the demand for lower taxation. (In the same way, the commitment to the state education system is widespread. But so is the sense that, in some places, it is beginning to fall apart). These interests genuinely conflict. They collide inside the heads and hearts of many ordinary folk who aren't hundred-and-one-per-cent, committed 'Thatcherites' - people who we will have to win over if the *principles* underlying the NHS or state education are ever to prevail again in a new form. This conflict of loyalties and desires is what precipitates chaos and unpredictability in the ideological field: precisely the rupture on which Thatcherism capitalises.

So, the balance of ideological advantage slowly turns Thatcherism's way, because the specific issue of the NHS is secured for the Right by a deeper set of articulations which the Left has not begun to shift. These include such propositions as: the public sector is bureaucratic and inefficient; the pri-

vate sector is efficient and gives 'value-for-money'; efficiency is inextricably linked with 'competition' and 'market forces'; the 'dependency culture' makes growing demands on the state - unless ruthlessly disciplined - a 'bottomless pit' (the spectre of the endlessly desiring consumer); public sector institutions, protected by public sector unions, are always 'overmanned' (*sic*); 'freedom' would be enhanced by giving the money back to the punters and letting them choose the form and level of health care they want; if there is money to spare, it is the direct result of Thatcherite 'prosperity'; and so on. In short, the familiar Thatcherite litany which is indelibly imprinted on the public mind and imposed on public and private discourse everywhere.

The unpalatable fact is that, despite the crisis, Thatcherism continues to hold the high ground because, among large sections of the population (including Labour voters) the political-ideological *thematics* of Thatcherism remain in place.

So, one thing we can learn from Thatcherism is that, in this day and age, in our kind of society, politics is either conducted *ideologically*, or not at all. Thatcherism has put in play a range of different social and economic strategies. But it has never for a moment neglected the ideological dimension. Privatisation, for example, has many economic and social pay-offs. But it is never advanced by Thatcherism without also being constructed ideologically ('Sid', the 'share-owning democracy' etc). There is no point giving people tax cuts unless you also sell it to them as part of the 'freedom' package. In this sense, Thatcherism is always, and consistently, multi-faceted. It always moves on several fronts at once. It moulds people's conceptions as it restructures their lives as it shifts the disposition of forces to its side.

This is what is sometimes called a 'hegemonic political project'. A simpler way of putting it would be thinking and acting *strategically*. This word is constantly bandied about by the Left. But do we know what it means in practice? In his recent pamphlet on *The Politics Of Prosperity*, Charlie Leadbeater argued that 'thinking strategically' implied 'recognising the enormity and significance of the changes which have taken place in the last decade. It must not simply modernise past policies ... There must be some vision of what kind of society this strategy would create... It must be built up from the foundations of the cultural identities and lifestyles it sanctions and approves ... through the institutional mechanisms which promote and maintain these ... to the higher political ideology.' These aspects need to be spelt out more.

The 'enormity and significance of change' does not only refer to the consequences of Thatcherite cuts and restructuring. There are deep-seated underlying, eco-

nomie, sociological and cultural trends which are profoundly reshaping Britain. Thatcherism did not create these, though it appropriates them politically and harnesses them to its own strategies. But any left-of-centre government will have to deal with them too. In that sense, whether we like it or not, we exist in the same universe, and are subject to some of the same conditions of existence. This is not the place to elaborate on what these trends are. But broadly speaking, organised capitalism, the industrial proletariat, the labour movement and the very idea of socialism itself were all brought to their mature modern forms alongside and in conditions (around the turn of the century) associated with the 'Fordist revolution' in the organisation of modern production. 'Fordism' stands for the large-scale, flow-processes of the modern factory, the skilled factory proletariat, the intensification of management, the rise of the corporate giants, the spread of mass consumption, the concentration of capital, the forward march of the technical division of labour, the intensification of world competition and the further spread of capitalism as a 'global system'. This was never only an 'economic' revolution. It was always a cultural and social revolution as well (as Gramsci, who discussed the connection of 'Fordism' with the reorganisation of sexual life in his classic essay, *Americanism and Fordism*, perfectly understood).

Now we are beginning, in the usual highly uneven and contradictory way, to move into a 'post-Fordist' society - what some theorists call disorganised capitalism, the era of 'flexible specialisation' (See Robin Murray, 'Benetton Britain', *MT* Nov 1985). One way of reading present developments is that 'privatisation' is Thatcherism's way of harnessing and appropriating this underlying movement within a specific economic and political strategy and constructing it within the terms of a specific philosophy. It has succeeded, to some degree, in aligning its historical, political, cultural and sexual 'logics' with some of the most powerful tendencies in the contemporary logics of capitalist development. And this, in part, is what gives it its supreme confidence, its air of ideological complacency: what makes it appear to 'have history on its side', to be coterminous with the inevitable course of the future. The Left, however, instead of rethinking *its* economic, political and cultural strategies in the light of this deeper, underlying 'logic' of dispersal and diversification (which, after all, need not necessarily be an enemy of greater democratisation), simply *resists it*. If Thatcherism can lay claim to it, then we must have nothing to do with it. Is there any more certain way of rendering yourself historically anachronistic?

'The significance of change' also has a more practical meaning in relation to

'The postwar settlement is over: but we still find it difficult to think politically in a world where its terms can no longer be taken for granted'



this crisis. We cannot simply defend the NHS as it is, as if nothing had happened since it was first introduced in 1947. In practice, the Left can only seize the political advantage by *mounting its own critique of the NHS* - since, as everybody quietly recognises, things were not hunky-dory in the NHS long before the advent of Thatcherism; and not all the problems are of Thatcherism's making. Steve Iliffe long ago convincingly argued in these pages (*MT* Oct 1986) that, in fact, there is not one, but 'two interconnected crises within the health service. One is a direct consequence of the economic recession and Conservative attempts to escape from it' (coupled, we would add, with Thatcherism's project to restructure the welfare state). The second is a long-term structural crisis of medicine itself running over decades and common to the industrialised world.'

There is a deeper side to this as well. We may have to acknowledge that there is often a *rational* core to Thatcherism's critique, which reflects some real substantive issues, which Thatcherism did not create but addresses in its own way. And since, in this sense, we both inhabit the same world, the Left will have to address them too. However, squaring up to them means confronting some extremely awkward issues. One example is the fiscal crisis of the welfare state - the ever-rising relative costs in the NHS as the average age of the population rises, medical technology leaps ahead, health needs diversify, the awareness of environmental factors and preventive medicine deepens and the patterns of disease shift. The fiscal crisis of the welfare state is not simply a Thatcherite plot, though of course Thatcherism exaggerates it for its own political ends.

The Left's answer is that there *is* more to spend if we choose; and this is certainly correct, given Britain's pitiful comparative showing in terms of the proportion of GDP spent on health amongst the industrialised countries. But only up to a point. At the end of this road, there are limits, which are not those set by Thatcherism's artificial 'cap' on spending but those limits set by the productivity of the economy itself. What the Right argues is that, once this limit is reached (even at the USA's 10.7% rather than the UK's miserable 5.9%) there is then not much to choose between rationing by price (which they would prefer) and rationing by queue (which is what has been going on in the NHS for decades). Naturally, they prefer rationing by price, since it increases the incentive to the patient to save on costs and puts pressure on the 'health market' to become more efficient. We have rooted objections to this path: but this must be because we have a different game-plan, not because we are playing in a different ball-park. But have we spelt it out? Do our supporters and the public know what it is?

One thing, for certain then, that we

'Thatcherism moulds people's conceptions as it restructures their lives as it shifts the disposition of political forces to its side'



mean by 'strategic' is thinking in a sustained, interconnected way - right through to that painful point where one policy cross-cuts another. The point, for example, on the one side, where simply 'spending more on the NHS' comes up against the barrier of the failure of the Left so far to elaborate a strategy for an expanding economy. On the other hand, where it hits the road block of the unpopularity of higher taxation in the form of that entrenched figure (which, at the moment, belongs exclusively to the Right) - the 'sovereign taxpayer'. Thatcherism is also held in place by this ideological figure of 'economic man', the measure of all things, who only understands cash-in-hand, readies-in-the-pocket, and who apparently never gets ill, doesn't need his streets cleaned or his children educated or to breathe oxygen occasionally. Clearly, the NHS issue cannot be won in terms of the NHS alone. If Thatcherism wins the argument about 'wealth creation', 'prosperity' and 'taxpayer freedom', it will, sooner or later, win the argument about privatising the NHS.

Of course, you only get a clear sense of strategy going among the people you are trying to win over to your side, if they can see clearly how it is counterposed to the strategy of the other side, what are the underlying organising principles, the perspective, the 'philosophical themes', which distinguish them. Successive encounters at the dispatch box are small beer when compared with a systematic form of ideological contestation, which polarises every topic between 'their' way of conceptualising it, and 'ours', and drives home in popular consciousness the clear, distinction of principle between them. (Mrs Thatcher 'set the scene' for her ascendancy in exactly this way in the late 1970s, remorselessly punctuating the world into a series of vividly contrasting images - Labour's 'statism' against her 'freedom', making the flat earth of consensus politics into a contested battle-zone.) We have to find ways of dramatising the difference between the public and the private definition of social need, between medical care by income or by need, between a first-rate service for the few and a second-rate one for the majority, between paying for health by universal standard contribution and paying for it by privatised insurance. These are organising principles, pertinent to but not restricted to the NHS (they apply, *pari passu* to education) because they are the bare bones of a social philosophy we are attempting to unfold by articulating it.

Contestation, however, is not enough, because by itself it is too negative. Thatcherism did not simply mount a principled critique of 'statism'. It unfolded a positive conception of the 'enterprise culture', which has taken root, despite the Left's scepticism, to an astonishing degree. This suggests that,

whilst much of it is political hype, some of it connects with real issues in the popular mind (its 'rational core?'). For example, Britain's relative 'backwardness', its sluggish performance even as compared with other capitalist countries, its suffocating traditionalism, which is linked with one of Mrs Thatcher's favourite targets - the power of entrenched vested interest.

To develop this more positive perspective, means *thematizing* the NHS crisis in terms of wider ideological debates: for example, around 'the politics of choice' or the question of the market versus the state. The popular theme of 'choice' has no 'necessary belongingness' to Thatcherism. It can just as well be understood as belonging to Ian Older, deeper, complex of attitudes: 'Why shouldn't ordinary people have a piece of the action too?' Put this way, 'choice' is as much part of the political repertoire of popular radicalism as it is of the populist radical Right. The problem is that Thatcherism *articulated* this popular desire to the 'free market' and the very powerful idea of 'freedom' - which in reality can only satisfy it in a certain form, at a certain price: and the Left, having accepted this linkage (secured, not by Nature but by the politics of Thatcherism) consequently abandoned choice. It nevertheless remains possible to reconstruct the idea of 'choice' in relation to such themes as the growing diversity of society, the widening of access, the empowerment of ordinary people through their 'right to choose' (even if it is only, to start with, choosing their GP, or having a wider range of therapies and community support services available at health centres or simply the right to know what is wrong with you or see your own medical records); or in terms of the contrast between negative and positive freedom. In short, dramatising the NHS crisis in relation to the concepts Thatcherism has *not* managed to appropriate: democratisation, rights and the expansion of social citizenship,

However, the Left should not expect to get very far on this issue until it has clarified its mind on the underlying issue of strategic principle - that of 'market or state'. The Left had a critique of 'statism' - whether of the Stalinist or fabianist varieties - long before the neo-libertarianism of the new Right. But, in part because of Labourism's complicity with the latter variant, we never pushed that thinking past the point where the free-marketisers could hijack it. The so-called 'rediscovery of the market' is *not* a phenomenon exclusively of the Right (as any Hungarian, Soviet or Chinese economist will soon tell you). And the greater flexibility, flow of information, the maximisation of choice which the market signals is part of that 'dynamics of change' which we identified earlier.

However, 'the market' in this generic sense, is quite different from the 'free

play of capitalist market forces' (another Thatcherite elision). And both are different again from the 'religion of the market' - 'value-for-money' as the sole criterion of the good life or of social need. In their unregulated forms, 'market forces', now as always, create wealth and dynamic at one end, and gross inequalities and deprivation at the other. As for value for money as the only measure of the social good, and Mrs Thatcher's 'New Benthamites' who 'take the modern shopkeeper, especially the English shopkeeper, as the normal man' and apply 'this yard-measure to past, present and future', surely Marx said the last word on Mr Tebbit, Mr Baker, Lord Young, Mr Ridley and this tribe of philistines: 'geniuses in the way of bourgeois stupidity'. In a proper conception of modernity, they are cultural primitives. They have hardly come down from the trees.

Just as we have not thought through what the Left 'appropriation' of the market means - what forms it can take, how far it should go, what are its necessary limits - so our critique of 'statism' remains at an extremely primitive level. If 'the state' is no longer to be the monolithic caretaker of socialism, what is it? What are the institutional forms of a responsive (rather than a prescriptive) state? Of a regulative (rather than a centralising) state? Of a state whose function is not to curtail but to expand civil society and the democratic character of social life? And (the joker in the pack) how, if not through the state in some form, is the 'social interest' to be formulated and represented? Can the Left abandon the ideas of the rational planning of resources and the rational choice between priorities in a society of scarcity, together with the 'grand narratives' of Reason and Progress? Can we combine a greater use of the market mechanism with greater regulation (rather than with 'deregulation')? We raise these awkward thoughts to drive home the point that a Left in quest of a strategic position in political life must *launch this debate, take command of this agenda*, itself, rather than being dragged along in the slipstream of the Adam Smith Institute.

The move from a monolithic 'state', the omnipresent provider, to a pluralised 'civil society' also entails giving value in our thinking to areas of social life and arenas where we put in play new social identities which classically the Left has much neglected. For example, in relation to the NHS, the role of consumers of health care in defining needs and how they are met; or our 'rights' as citizens of an increasingly 'well' society, alongside our place as producers and suppliers. This marks the coming into play, within the discourses of a contemporary socialism, of the politics of the private as well as the public; of domestic, familial and sexual life as well as the life of the republic; 'the personal as political'.

Where better to see how, in modern society, these so-called 'separate spheres' increasingly interpenetrate than by looking at the arena of health, medical care, illness and the body? Where better to open up the exciting challenge of trying, in the context of the NHS debate, to think them together? This is one of the elements which anyone who has listened attentively to the radio phone-ins on the NHS will have heard being enunciated with remarkable clarity.

This shift in the postwar period from the ever-expanding state to a more diverse, democratised 'civil society' state (and a 'withering' state) is one of the most profound advances to have taken place in the thinking of the Left this century. It transforms the very meaning and image of socialism. It is to begin to think socialism anew from the perspective of some of the major themes of the agenda of feminism and sexual politics. (Is anybody in Walworth Road ready for that?) And it is startlingly new (allowing us therefore to appropriate many themes which our commitment to 'statism' precluded) because it has taken on and been transformed by the modern experience of contemporary society. The whole 'experience' of the deformations of both Stalinism and fabian social democracy are inscribed in that shift.

We have been concentrating, so far, on question of 'popular conceptions'. However, 'strategy' cannot be a matter of ideological politics alone. It is also a question of how to construct around those conceptions, a popular politics or, to put it more simply, the difficult business of constructing alliances. The Left needs to build a majority around the NHS, not passively reflect the fragile consensus which is already there. Since this is composed of such heterogeneous social interests as are those represented by the BMA, senior consultants, junior doctors, nurses and ancillary health workers, it is an extremely unlikely alliance, destined to fall apart at the first touch of Thatcherism's magic wand if not consolidated around some common points of unity, welded into a 'bloc'. Any broader alliance in favour of some form of free, universal health care will have to be constructed across classes. That is, it will have self-consciously to be the result of a politics dedicated to speaking to people in quite different social positions. The great majorities of the dispossessed, for whom a publicly-funded NHS is a life-line; the low-wage, unemployed and single-parent families who could not manage without it; the overwhelming bulk of working people, whom Edwina Currie recently invited to forego their fortnight's holiday in order to be able to afford 'adequate' private health insurance; but also teachers and public sector workers and people in the service economy and those in the middle class, who *might* be

able to afford some sort of medical premium (especially if Mr Brittan has his way and those moving to the private sector got rebated) but who value a service within the 'enterprise culture' where the best goes to those who need it most rather than to those who earn or possess the most. This is a politics which is at last face-to-face with, and knows how to address, the great diversity of contemporary society.

The idea of using the crisis to construct a majority means giving up the illusion of a built-in, permanent, automatic majority for the welfare state. It is better to start by assuming that there are no 'natural majorities' for anything. Class, the great back-stop of the Left, has certainly not disappeared. Indeed, nowhere is it so powerfully etched as in the class distribution of illness, types of health care, and death which, for example, the Horizon programme, *Death Of The Working Classes*, so perfectly demonstrated. But the underlying social, economic and cultural forces which are bringing the era of 'organised capitalism' to a close, coupled with the vigour of Thatcherite restructuring, have decomposed and fragmented class as a unified political force, fracturing any so-called automatic linkages between economics and politics: if, indeed, any such 'unity' or 'automatic linkage' ever existed (which I beg leave to doubt). The multiplication of new points of antagonism, which is also characteristic of our emerging 'post-industrial' societies, while making available new potential sites of intervention, further fragments the political field, dispersing rather than unifying the different social constituencies. These processes have unpacked the old majorities (which were, of course, never 'natural' but politically constructed) and eroded the old agendas of the Left.

The stubborn truth is that social interests *are* contradictory. There is no automatic correspondence between class location, political position and ideological inclination. Majorities have to be 'made' and 'won' - not passively reflected. They will be composed of heterogeneous social interests, represented through conflicting social identities - like the ones emerging around the NHS. Unless they are unified by some larger political project which overrides, without obliterating, their real differences, they will fall apart (more likely, Mrs Thatcher, who *does* know how to recognise and exploit differences, will blow them apart).

As well as trying to unify the existing social interests and identities, the Left also has to put itself 'on the side of the new constituencies. For example, the greater involvement of mothers in the hospital care of children; the social movements for a healthier diet, for a better care of the body, for greater control by women over their fertility and reproduction; for a less unequal relationship between patients and the

This shift to a more diverse, democratised "civil society" state is one of the most profound advances in the thinking of the Left this century'



medical profession; for more preventive medicine, a healthier environment, a programme of health education that is not at the mercy of the industrial lobbies, the pharmaceutical companies or the homophobic and anti-abortionist bigots of the 'moral minority'. If it knew how to articulate these new forces within the great levelling experience of illness, which hits everyone sooner or later irrespective of wealth or class, it would soon discover that society, *looked at this in a more diversified way*, not at all 'passive' about new needs in the field of health and medical care. People think the NHS needs more funds. But they are also willing to do something about it, as the public health movement and 'Health Alert' suggest. The link, so often forged willy-nilly by the Left, between welfare and passivity has been disastrous. But it is not inevitable.

If this is to be part of a wider, popular political strategy, it has to be fought in the end as 'a struggle for popular identities'. That is, it must draw to itself the widest range of popular aspirations about health, enable different sorts of people to see themselves reflected in this emerging conception of health and thus come increasingly to identify with it. Once you give up the idea of an automatic identification with the welfare state which is guaranteed by class position, you are obliged to address the subjective moment in politics because, unless people identify with and become the subjects of a new conception of society, it cannot materialise. Thatcherism has a perfectly focused conception of who its ideal subjects are, who best personify its sacred values. It has used its moral agenda as one of the principal areas where these identities are defined - the respectable normal folk who people the fantasies of the new Right in relation to current debates around abortion, child abuse, sex education, gay rights and Aids. It is above all through this moral agenda that the new Right has become a cultural force. Significantly, all these issues of 'moral hygiene' explode directly into an expanded definition of social health.

Labour has no moral agenda of its own except an inherited conservative one. Consequently, it is not a force that is actively shaping the culture, educating desire. The paradox is that, banished by the front door, the politics of identity and desire returns by the back door to exact a terrible, regressive revenge ('the London effect').

It should, by now, be crystal clear that 'learning from Thatcherism' is neither an easy nor simple task and is light years away from trying to do what Thatcherism does, only with a bit more 'caring'. It is a painful exercise since it plainly involves the Left squaring up to its own past in a radical way and confronting head-on the forces which are undermining the very ground on which it has traditionally stood.