

## Halfway To Heaven

**Inside Left:**  
**The Story So Far**  
 Derek Hatton  
 Bloomsbury £3.95

**Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight**  
 Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn  
 Fortress £6.95

'When I talk about marxism or Militant I am talking about an exact political science, not what someone would, or would not, like to do.' Thus spake Derek Hatton, although it has to be said that the 'exact political science' referred to makes no further appearance in the text except in the form of references to Militant.

Similarly, Taaffe and Mulhearn refer frequently to the 'ideas of marxism' and to the people won over to them, but like Hatton they really mean Militant. It is presumably the assumed identity of Militant and marxism - with the latter understood as an exact science - which makes all three authors so cross with every other shade of opinion within the labour

movement. The 'loony Left', as Hatton calls it, is 'more concerned about black mayors and gay rights than serious issues and so is automatically disqualified, as is the soft Left.

**Inside Left** provides many of the reasons why Militant is so disliked on the Left. Hatton is forever 'despising' and 'hating' other socialists. John Hamilton for example, ostensibly the leader of the Labour group in Hatton's time as a Liverpool councillor, is put down as 'a nowhere man', a 'Mr Magoo', and 'a sad misguided little man', in order to indicate that his differences with Militant posed no serious threat.

Mrs Thatcher, on the other hand, is clearly admired as a real leader and Hatton, in search of an appropriate comparison, quotes Julie Burchill, of all people, to the effect that if Mrs Thatcher is the only man in the cabinet, Militant have the only men in the Labour Party. Pick the socialist values out of that!

When things Liverpoolian enter the narrative, Hatton's tone changes to pure schmaltz but like the verbal vitriol it has the effect of exposing his real standards.

He who has 'never given a toss for coming second at anything' tells us of the 'wit and arrogance with which most Scousers are blessed' and of his 'more than generous helping' of these 'innate' qualities.

The local chauvinism which colours many passages of Hatton's book is harnessed to explain why so much talent emerges from Liverpool: 'It breeds in them a determination that if they are going to do something they will do it better than anyone else. It's that philosophy which produced the Beatles, the Cilia Blacks, the Jimmy Tarbucks of this world... It's a natural spirit of competition coupled with a belief that you're not simply as good as anyone else. You are better.'

The Mersey psyche would appear to be Tory if Hatton is to be believed. Even Taaffe and Mulhearn, who generally prefer 'the terminal decay of British capitalism' as an explanation for Militant's successes in Liverpool are not immune to Hatton's parish-pump excesses. Thus they transform the Heysel stadium tragedy into 'the incident which most clearly highlighted the conscious policy of denigrating Liver-

pool because of its political stance'. But this is typical of their lack of judgement and sense of proportion. In their version of events Militant was opposed by: 'All the forces of the old society, the strategists of capital, the Labour and trade union leadership and the so-called "soft Left"'. In this titanic struggle, as they see it, great victories were won, such as the launching of *Mersey Militant*. Indeed the memory of Patrick Jenkin's climbdown suggests nothing less than Wordsworth's 'bliss was it in that dawn to be alive'. Yes, and no doubt to be in Liverpool was very heaven.

But, to be fair, Taaffe and Mulhearn see the Liverpool affair as the forerunner of bigger struggles to come and I for one don't doubt Militant's ability to survive the present purges. As for Derek Hatton, socialism seems to be for him a society, or rather a city, where all the Cilia Blacks and the Jimmy Tarbucks are organised by Militant and where Everton and Liverpool win all the football trophies: and you can tell by his tone that he thinks he is more than halfway there.

John Callaghan



## Reading The Reflections

**Soviet Freedom**  
 Anthony Barnett  
 Picador £3.95 pbk

It is too soon to say whether Gorbachev's *perestroika* will succeed in revitalising the Soviet economy, or whether *glasnost* is here to stay. But they are certainly contributing to Soviet hard currency earnings. Westerners are flocking to the Soviet Union to see for themselves. Air-

lines and travel agents can scarcely cope with the demand. Intourist and the Soviet consulate clearly cannot: hotels are booked up, visas are delayed and information from either about either is scarce. Or perhaps it is just that *perestroika* and *glasnost* have not yet reached them.

In the summer of 1987 Anthony Barnett went with Nella Bielska to see whether reconstruction was faring better inside the USSR. *Soviet Freedom* records his impressions of Moscow and Leningrad and his subsequent reflections on Soviet history, society, present reality and future prospects.

In 59 vignettes, some only a page or two, others more substantial, Barnett ranges freely from prices and peasants to the role of rock and the role of women, dipping in to Leninism. Stalinism,

Khrushchevism and Brezhnevism to investigate the reasons for, and nature of, the present reform. His book is easy to read, his observations are often acute and both his verve and the pace at which he darts from topic to topic convey some of the flavour of *glasnost* (but not of *perestroika* which, despite Barnett's optimism, appears to be moving at a slower tempo than it can afford). And even when he is misguided or plainly wrong, the form he has chosen imposes a brevity that prevents him labouring the point. His reproduction of the open letter by Medvedev, Sakharov and Turchin to Brezhnev provides an ironic, timely counterbalance to the view that Gorbachev's ideas about socialism are entirely novel. Written in the early 1970s, it could be an extract from a 1987 Gorbachev speech.

Barnett has a good ear. Authentic voices resound in the conversations he reports. And perhaps unintentionally, the didacticism that so often characterises both official and unofficial Soviet people (insisting that the student of the Soviet Union must always be an apprentice, never a specialist) also seeps through.

His anecdotes are well chosen. His analysis of the absence of civil society and of politics is penetrating. It is a pity that Nella Bielska did not check all his translations and transliterations (*Novy Mir* is not new 'Times' though there is a journal called *New Times*). But reading **Soviet Freedom** is an interesting way to while away the time waiting for a visa. Or to read at home if the hotels are full or the plane leaves before the visa arrives.

Margot Light