



Class and poverty

Is it because the government's Industrial Relations Act has been widely seen as class legislation, that there seems to be a growing concern with class again in this country? Or is this to confuse cause and effect?

Is it, too, a curious question to raise at a moment when the Liberals, for whom class is certainly not a matter of central concern, have just been having a good party conference, and have been sniffing potential Orpingtons again in the air? This is also a moment when the Labour Party is about to have a conference at which blood will be shed, if it is shed, on a question—that of EEC entry—which is not primarily a class matter, either.

But just as an etymologist, in despair, once decided that the Latin *lucus* (a grove) was thus named because it did *not* shine (*lucere*), one can see the power of class in some of the arguments deployed against it. This week, for example, Roy Jenkins's recent series of speeches is reprinted, with some new material, as *What Matters Now* (Collins/Fontana 30p). It is an attractive and liberal collection, with two complementary themes. And one of these is what Jenkins sees as the need for the Labour Party, despite temptations, to keep class in its place. For Jenkins, "a political party does not simply reflect the attitudes of the society around it . . . A nationalist party can keep alive the memory of ancient wrongs . . . A racist party can whip up fears and hatred . . . [And] a party that appealed exclusively to class interests and class emotions would be almost certain to keep class bitterness artificially alive."

What Matters Now has a distinct cousinly resemblance to Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*. Like that earlier work, it has confessedly stemmed from intelligent discussion and consultation with a range of specialists. And unlike the 1964 Wilson collection of speeches, *The New Britain*, it is less concerned with means (white-hot technology and other elements of Mark One Wedgwood-Bennism) than with ends. For the other main theme of *What Matters Now* is poverty, and the need to set about, even more strenuously, the attempt to drive it out of our society. Why this complements the attempt to counter class is the fact that poverty draws a line through the working class—not between the working class and the rest of the population. Jenkins does not, therefore, see class solidarity as necessarily the antidote.

Yet it is hard to see how the Labour Party can succeed electorally if the trade unions do not feel that it is their party (other people's, as well, perhaps, but also theirs). And trade unions, despite the static proportion of the working population that

they represent and despite the growing role of white collar workers in the union movement, remain the prime example in this country of class solidarity. One effect of the IR Act is likely, paradoxically, to be to bring unions and party closer together before too long. Confrontation is not ultimately a very fruitful game, in the teeth of an act of parliament. And if the unions do, in fact, want the act repealed, and/or replaced by a better drafted statute, they are going to have to work through a parliamentary party.

The latest, and extremely interesting issue, of *The Sociological Review* (vol 20, No. 3, University of Keele, £1) has a special clutch of five articles on problems of class in the British Isles. Derek Birrell emphasises how, even in the Ulster conflict, the Catholics can be regarded as a deprived "class"; other authors tease out the complexities of whether workers are bourgeoisified or not (and bring out the importance, for social mobility, or clerical occupations); Anthony Giddens demonstrates how efficiently the same groups seem to stay on top in British society.

All of this underlines the fact that, whether or not class really is as important as the British often seem to maintain, it is certainly perceived as important. And, as has been rightly said, such perceptions can become real in their consequences.

It may be that the concept of class solidarity can be tied to an idealistic attack on poverty. But no one should be, by now, in any doubt how difficult such an attack is to mount. If they were in any doubt, Jonathan Bradshaw and Isabel Wakeman document it again in the new issue of *Political Quarterly*, with an article entitled "The poverty trap updated." This goes into further detail on the way in which poor families are penalised, by the withdrawal of benefits or allowances, as they try to raise themselves out of poverty, so that they can actually end up worse off than when they started.

We do not yet know the details of the government's proposed tax credit scheme; so it is too early to judge the effect that this might have on the trap. But the *Political Quarterly* article underlines how, so far, the trap has been getting harsher, not better. And not, one should really add, through any malice or malignant class-hostility emanating from the Department of Health and Social Security. It is not a subject where magic wands work—though a very great deal of money might.

Only "might" because there are psychological traps as well as financial ones. But money is, by and large, the only wand that politics has. Despite such research as that by Professor C. V. Brown at Stirling ("Negative income tax and the incentive to work," *NEW SOCIETY*, 1 June), there is a strong tendency for discussion about "incentive" to go round in circles. Can the particular money self-interest of both the middle class and the better-off working class be modified towards helping the poor more? The answer is important to more people than the former deputy leader of the Labour Party.

Observations

Populist vote

Harold Wilson is likely to have read the result of the Norwegian EEC referendum with considerably more glumness than Edward Heath did. For the government, the main worry must be the possible snowball effect on Denmark—a much more important trading partner for Britain. For the opposition, the Norwegian vote increases the chances of populist dissension at next week's party conference at Blackpool.

Till that conference it is too early to make elaborate predictions, but it does appear that populism is about to succeed pacifism (in its unilateralist variant) as the cross on which the Labour Party risks crucifying itself. Like most "isms," it has the temptation of simplicity; and one must not slip into the leader-writer's posture of offering pointless advice to the juggernauts that have their own momentum. The Labour Party will, no doubt, work out its own salvation, just as the present government has had to work its own way out of its own early ideologies.

What would be good to have would be more knowledge of how this thread in our political fabric emerged. One might then have a clearer idea of where it might lead. Academics are often attacked for "impracticality" (on page 618, Laurie Taylor, a university teacher himself, reports this feeling among prisoners' union activists). But one of the first people to spot this emerging interest must have been Ghita Ionescu, now professor at Manchester, then of LSE—with the very interesting conference he put together on, precisely, populism. The papers later came out as a book, edited by Ionescu and Ernest Gellner.

At that point, the discussion was chiefly outward-looking. Britain didn't come into it much. Perhaps it is time for a second edition?

Beyond price

How many votes for Nixon at the "Talk of the Town"? Probably more than you might think. The audience the other night seemed at least 85 per cent American, and Pearl Bailey was right in there pitching for her favourite candidate. She seduced a young German company representative into joining her on stage, and handed him a photo of Nixon, Willy Brandt and herself, a picture that she just happened to have handy. Then she happily located a doctor from the American Heart Institute, and she got him up to. He was so articulate that they sounded like a professional double act, though he did make a rather endearing slip of the tongue by saying that Miss Bailey

had won the "Heart of the Ward Ayear."

He helped with still another Nixon plug by telling the public how she had taken off her watch-necklace and hung it around Nixon's neck. (Considering Nixon's moment of near-panic at being embraced from behind by Sammy Davis Jr, it might have been a nice moment to be present at.) "Why," said Nixon, "this watch is ten minutes fast." "That's 'cause I want you to keep ahead of the times, honey," said Miss Bailey. And it all, it says here, was completely unscripted.

Pearl Bailey is the third "name" performer to defect from the Democrat ranks over to Nixon. Frank Sinatra, a former Kennedy stalwart, went over to Nixon, but that figures; they made him an offer he couldn't refuse. Then Sammy Davis Jr. He asked for, and got, a private jet plane to fly him to the Republican convention in Miami, and was then put up in the Penthouse Suite at the Playboy. (Anomaly here: Hugh Hefner is a McGovern man.) But why Pearl Bailey?

The clue can be found in her book, *Talking to Myself*. She describes the time when she sang at the White House, and her description does much to illuminate the wit of Richard Nixon as well as that of Willy Brandt.

"The program was a huge success," she writes, "those 96 people cheered like a thousand. I did a number with the wonderful Ben Sanger, the wonderful Fiddling Marine. We had three good musicians behind us all evening. Bernie, Milt and Mousie. Just enough sound for the East Room. At the finale, the President jumped up on the stage and gave me his chair so that I could climb up on to the piano. He did it in a very appropriate, spontaneous way. I have found Mr Nixon to be a man of good humour and excellent timing. I just completely disagree with those people who claim that he is humourless. Anyway, the audience loved this gesture and they roared."

"I remarked to the Chancellor [Willy Brandt], 'See how much fun we have over here. You must come over more often. Maybe when you get a chance you'll autograph my program.' The Chancellor is no slouch when it comes to wit, either. After that number, someone handed me a program at the edge of the stage. Brandt had signed a card, 'The Chancellor.'"

Later she describes how she was invited to the second floor of the White House, the President's living quarters.

"I'm giving you that chair [Nixon says to her about the chair he handed her during her show]. It's fragile but it's yours."

"We walked down the hall toward the elevator. Mrs Nixon (frail and lovely) walked alongside her husband, smiling but saying little. What a strong woman."

"I said, 'I wish Mama could have seen this.'"

"Mr Nixon said, 'She did, Pearl.' Then he repeated it with great warmth."

Shaw said that you convert socialists to monarchists by giving them titles. *Autre temps, autres chaises*. In the States, they do it with chairs.

SOS dig

"The unrecorded history of Dover, Kent and Britain lies buried here," says the sign above the newly excavated Saxon and Roman remains in the centre of Dover. This week, the same people who uncovered these remains are filling them in, to make way for a planned bypass road.

Those concerned are in archaeological rescue corps, called CIB, which is taken from initials of a Roman cohort found on tiles at their first excavation in Reculver, Kent. CIB is supported by donations and consists of about five professional archaeologists, 350 volunteers, and five caravans. Mobility is all-important, because the rescue corps is ready to dash across Britain if news comes of anything of archaeological interest being unearthed during road construction. They work ahead of the bulldozers—digging, filming and recording.

The find at Dover has been the most important so far. The corps was able to halt work on the proposed new road for a short while. With time against them, they were all out excavating in the snow last new year's day. One of the discoveries at Dover has been the painted plaster walls of a Roman house. Most of the plaster has disintegrated, but one of the archaeologists has hit on the idea of using a computer to help restore the original pattern. The walls, at least, won't be re-buried, but will be removed to a museum.

Until quite recently the site was full of yellow-helmeted volunteers, digging furiously. "When I started," said one of the female ones, "I thought archaeology was all digging up gold coins and skeletons: then I found it was mostly hard work. There's complete equality, though," she added ruefully, looking at her hands. "Women use everything from pickaxes, down to tooth-brushes" (for delicate work). And what's next? "Anytime a call might come through," she said, "and we'll be off."

Next week

Next week, *NEW SOCIETY* marks its tenth anniversary, having been launched on 4 October 1962.

As well as its usual features, by both new and regular contributors, next week's issue will contain certain special items. There will be independent assessments of the magazine by, for example, Professor David Donnison. Sir Keith Joseph and Mrs Shirley Williams look ahead at the priorities for the next ten years in this country. Professor John Rex opens a new series on social stratification: he writes about "Power." And the artist, John Holmes, has designed a striking birthday cover for us.

There will also be a special questionnaire survey for readers—an attempt to pin down what sort of Britain you think we have been, are, and are becoming. We think you will find it interesting to fill in, and we look forward to the eventual results.

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