

## „Iron Lady“ Thatcher Abdicates

LONDON, November 27 1990 —After more than eleven bitter years, during which she viciously ground the faces of workers and minorities into the ground, the „Iron Lady“ of British politics is finally gone. On November 22, Margaret Thatcher resigned as leader of the ruling Conservative Party and therefore as prime minister. The new Tory leader, Chancellor of the Exchequer John Major, a previous nobody, was elected today, in anticipation of a general election some time next year. So now the prospect is one of a „reformed“ Tory government or a Labour government under right-wing scabherder Neil Kinnock.

Discontent with the Thatcher government was massive. Trade unionists, minorities and the poor have always despised her. The middle classes are reeling under skyrocketing inflation and mortgage rates, top ruling echelons are worried by her attempts to sabotage „European integration,“ and everyone hates the soak-the-poor poll tax. In Scotland, used as a guinea pig for the tax and sharply hit by the Thatcherite devastation of industry, the Tory party is almost irrelevant, running a poor third behind Labour and the bourgeois- nationalist Scottish National Party.

Thatcher's longevity in office was in large measure due to the grovelling loyalty of Neil Kinnock's Labour Party and the Labourite Trades Union Congress (TUC) leaders. Twice since she took office in 1979, Thatcher and her government were in some danger of being toppled through sharp class struggle: first, during the bitter three-month-long steel strike of 1980, then four years later as the militant miners union waged a heroic year-long battle against mass layoffs and union-busting which galvanised workers and minorities throughout the country.

So isolated and widely hated was Thatcher in the course of the miners strike that the IRA achieved a peak in popularity among the British population when it planted a bomb at the 1984 Tory party conference that nearly blew away the Iron Lady and her entire government. Yet the Labour/TUC leaders sabotaged every class-struggle challenge to Thatcher's rule, coldbloodedly knifing the miners.

In the end, Thatcher's downfall was engineered by those who seek to restore an effective bourgeois authority. She was ousted by the „men in the gray suits“ (big business and the City of London financial moguls). The executive committee of the British bourgeoisie decided that her services were no longer required as they seek to politically rearm in the face of depression and impending war. A bitter Conservative power struggle has been out in the open since Sir Geoffrey Howe, until recently the sole Cabinet member left from her original 1979 Cabinet, resigned as foreign secretary over Thatcher's opposition to „European economic integration“ and then launched a sharp attack in a parliamentary speech.

After former Cabinet minister Michael Heseltine's challenge for party leader received 152 votes to Thatcher's 204, forcing a second ballot, her Cabinet let her know that her time was up. Shortly before her resignation, the Tory Sunday Times (18 November) bade „A reluctant goodbye,“ as its editorial was titled, to the Thatcher regime: „It now presides over an economy mired in stagflation. The poll tax—the conception of which was a mistake, its birth a mess and its infancy an expensive embarrassment— has proved to be the most unpopular tax in modern British history. All the perfumes in the government's boudoir cannot make it smell sweet.“

For many dissident Tory MPs, naked self-interest was motive enough to back the internal revolt. Crushing by-election defeats in Eastbourne, Bradford and Bootle, as well as umpteen public opinion polls, made it abundantly clear that Thatcher was an electoral liability. Not surprisingly, Thatcher & Co. sought to whip up a „Falklands factor.“ „Thatcher Plays the Gulf Card: 'War Leader' Warns Off Heseltine,“ headlined the [London] Guardian (8 November).

But it largely came to nought. Kinnock has screamed louder than the Tories for war in the Gulf. Former defence minister Heseltine, no slouch himself when it comes to beating-the imperialist war drums, has close ties with the officer corps and presided over the proliferation of NATO nuclear weapons as defence minister in the early 1980s. Richard Cheney, U.S. defense secretary, vouched for him: „I happen to be a fan of Maggie Thatcher's.... But Mr. Heseltine's policies towards the Gulf have basic - ally been the same“ ([London] Times, 19 November).

Above all, what triggered massive revolt against the government, from the Tory shires of southern England to the working class and plebeian poor of the large cities, was the gratuitously cruel poll tax. In March, 200,000 protested against the poll tax in London, repelling a police rampage. Ever attuned to the wishes of the Labour Party leadership, which denounced and sought to stifle any struggle against the poll

tax, the legalistic Militant Tendency leadership of the anti-poll-tax federation initially offered to finger protesters to the cops. Again last month hundreds of protesters were beaten up and dozens arrested by rioting cops who attacked a picket of Brixton Prison, where four anti-poll-tax activists are serving sentences.

Fake-left groups such as Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party or Workers Power fill their press with militant sounding anti-Thatcher rhetoric. With Heseltine on the scene, the SWP said, „Take Advantage of Tory Splits—Get Them All Out“ (Socialist Worker, 17 November). Workers Power crowed that „Tory woes are good news for the workers“ and worried that „a swing to the Liberals...would damage Labour's victory chances.“ The Labour entrists of Militant and Socialist Organiser drone away with identical pro-Kinnock „Kick them all out!“ appeals. But anti-Thatcherism does not equate to anti-capitalism. As we wrote last March, at the height of the anti-poll-tax protests:

„The poll tax is likely to be ephemeral, with the strong probability that its chief architect and advocate will shortly go down the tubes. While there are large numbers of people who despise both Kinnock and his henchmen for enforcing this onerous tax, on a national level public opinion polls show the Labour Party has a huge lead over the Tories. But that could rapidly change if the Conservatives dump Thatcher before the general election. In fact, there wouldn't be much difference between a Tory government headed by Heseltine, and a Kinnock Labour government.“

—Workers Hammer, March/April 1990

This was clearly something the British electorate recognised as well. Immediately after Thatcher's resignation, Labour's 16-point lead in the opinion polls vanished, with Heseltine and the other two Tory contenders, Cabinet ministers Douglas Hurd and John Major, vaulting ahead of Kinnock. As the New York

Times (25 November) observed, „Labor's policies sound not much different from those of the Conservatives.“ The weak British economy, ravaged by decades of capitalist neglect and devastation, offers no easy options to the bosses, industry has been cut to the bone, rail and transport starved of investment, and industrial murder has become commonplace, from the North Sea to the London Underground. For the working masses the choice between the boot of the Tories or the knife of Labour is no choice at all.

Kinnock showed his colours during the miners strike, when he supported Thatcher's demand for a scab ballot while denouncing the miners for defending their picket lines against strikebreakers. Had class struggle toppled the

Thatcher government during the strike it would have created a pre-revolutionary situation, posing point blank the question of which class shall rule. So, Kinnock, Willis and the Labour „lefts“ worked overtime to knife the miners.

Since then, Kinnock has amply demonstrated that he is an enemy of working people and the oppressed. It is starkly clear that to wage a class fight against unemployment, union-busting, wage-slashing and warmongering a political break must be made from the Labour traitors, right and „left.“ Our task is to forge a revolutionary party through splitting Labour's working-class base from its pro-capitalist leadership and regrouping those forces outside and to the left of the Labour Party under the banner of authentic communism.

It is too bad that Margaret Thatcher was only kicked out of No. 10 by her Tory cronies. The sacked miners, homeless youth, impoverished pensioners, families of the Argentine sailors of the Belgrano which she maliciously ordered blown away during the 1982 Falklands/ Malvinas War, the oppressed Catholic minority in Northern Ireland and victims of racist cop rampage—to name but a few—are certainly celebrating her departure, but they are no closer to redressing the devastating injury she and her ruling-class cohorts have inflicted on them. Real justice will come with proletarian revolution, which will sweep into the dustbin of history the bourgeoisie along with the parasitic Labour fakers.

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