NEO-CONSERVATISM AND THE STATE

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> 'This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortal1 God, to which wee owe under the Immortal1 God, our peace and defence. For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-Wealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutual ayd against their enemies abroad.'
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> —Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan II:17 [1651]

If there is one characteristic of the neo-conservative political hegemony in America and Britain in the 1980s upon which both enthusiasts and most critics seemingly agree, it is that Reaganism and Thatcherism are pre-eminently *laissez faire* attacks on the state. From 'deregulation' in America to 'privatisation' in Britain, the message has seemed clear: the social democratic/Keynesian welfare state is under assault from those who wish to substitute markets for politics. Ancient arguments from the history of the capitalist state have risen from the graveyard to fasten, vampire-like, on the international crisis of capitalism itself. Once again the strident Babbitry of 'free enterprise versus the state' rings in the corridors of power, in editorial offices, in the halls of academe.

Marshall McLuhan once offered the gnomic observation that we are fated to drive into the future while steering by the rear-view mirror. Or, as Marx wrote in regard to the French Revolution, revolutionaries '. . . anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.' Nor is there any shortage of well-paid 'gladiators' to find 'the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they need in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles[7].' Thus a public policy research institute in Washington opens a major study of ***The Reagan Experiment*** in 1982 with the following preamble:[8]

> A counterrevolution is underway, after a half century of growing federal efforts to stabilize the economy, insure individuals against misfortune, redistribute income and opportunity. . . The nucleus of this counterrevolution is a philosophy of more limited government. Its articulation by a popular new president has

sparked a fresh debate about the purposes of government and the ability of individuals and institutions to advance in an environment of diminished federal assistance.

Yet the deception of 'more limited government' is increasingly difficult to sustain when the US government under Reagan sends the deficit over the two hundred billion dollar mark—the highest amount ever recorded and in constant dollars the highest ever attained in peacetime.[3] The deception is equally difficult to sustain in the face of a government which prepares and executes a series of re-invasions of the state into civil society and the private behaviour of individuals. In the same way the deception of Thatcherism as an anti-state movement is as difficult to sustain in the face of the deployment of police like an army of occupation against striking coal miners, their families and their supporters, and the savage use of the Official Secrets Act against dissenters.

It is certainly not a 'more limited government' which invades Grenada, shells Beirut, bombs Tripoli, harasses Nicaragua, carries out the most massive arms buildup in US history and plans the staggering multibillion dollar Strategic Defense Initiative, or 'Star Wars' project. Nor is it a 'more limited government' deployed by the Iron Lady to wage war on Argentina, nor anti-statism which infused the high ritual of the victory celebrations in which Church, Crown, and Nation were assembled and displayed like a talismanic Holy Trinity.

The State under Neo-conservatism

Neo-conservative régimes have been in office in Britain since 1979 and in America since 1981. Enough time has now passed to assess the impact of promises to 'get government off our backs'. To begin with the crudest of statistical indicators, have Reaganism and Thatcherism actually reduced the overall size of government? In the United States, total government expenditures as a percentage of the GNP *rose* from just under 30 per cent in the late 1970s under the presidency of Jimmy Carter to reach 32.5 per cent in 1985 in the first year of Reagan's second term. By a somewhat different indicator—government final consumption expenditures as a percentage of GDP by type of expenditure—government was spending at just below the rate of the late 1970s, but this followed an increase in the early 1980s.[4] The number of persons employed by government as a percentage of the total non-agricultural workforce has marginally tailed off from the Carter to the Reagan presidencies, from 17.9 per cent in 1980 to 16.8 per cent in the autumn of 1985 (although this has to be placed in the context of a decline in private sector employment).' In Britain, by four different measurements of public expenditures as a percentage of the GDP, Thatcherism has resulted in a larger state than existed when the Tories took office in 1979, and indeed government

expenditure under Thatcher is slowly regaining the historic dimensions reached in 1975/76.[6] Public sector employment as a percentage of the employed labour force was 29.4 per cent in 1979 and had declined to 26.9 per cent in 1985, but if employment in public corporations is excluded (where privatisation has been taking place), the percentage of the employed labour force in direct government employment was slightly higher in 1985 at 21.7 per cent than it was in 1979 when it was 21.2 per cent.' The overall size of government has certainly not been reduced in any significant way by neo-conservatism.

Gross size is not much of an indicator of the nature of the neo-conservative state. What about the allocation of resources within big neo-conservative governments? At the level of campaign rhetoric and party manifestos, there is no question that the intention has been to reallocate expenditures away from welfarelsocial security programmes in the US, and from welfare and direct government presence in production in the UK, toward defence, policing and defence-related research and development programmes. The record in office partially bears out these intentions. In the US, defence outlays as a percentage of GNP rose from 4.7 in 1979 to 6.4 in 1985, an overall increase of 117 per cent in six years. Moreover, these figures do not include indirect defence expenditures. In this regard, outlays on defence-related R & D increased by 150 per cent over the same years, while non-defence related R & D increased by less than 19 per cent. Federal government outlays on 'science, space and technology' increased by 65 per cent in the six years from 1979 to 1985, and in the same period expenditures on a budget category suspiciously called 'international affairs' shot up by 117 per cent. The function of 'administration of justice' increased by over 50 per cent over the same span.[8] In Britain, Thatcher has presided over a similar pattern: defence accounted for L6.8 billion in 1977178 and E17.1 billion in 1984/85; 'law, order, and protective services' L1.8 billion in 1977178 and E3.6 billion in 1984/85.[9]

Neo-conservatism has delivered on its promises to put more tax dollars into defence and policing. The reverse side of this coin, the promise to slash spending on social programmes, presents a more obscure and contradictory record. Of course there have been well publicised assaults on particular programmes, and fierce cutbacks of funding: no one in a social service capacity at the street level in either Britain or America would dare to deny the reality of the attack, or the very real human costs. Yet the bare statistical record suggests a more ambiguous interpretation. While US defence expenditures rose by 117 per cent from 1979 to 1985, as noted above, during the same period expenditures on 'human resources' (education, health, social security, income security) rose by 76.4 per cent. Expressed as a percentage of GNP, human resources expenditures by the federal government rose from 10.9 per cent in 1979, before Reagan, to 12 per cent in 1985, into Reagan's second term—almost double the 6.4 per

cent of GNP accounted for by direct defence expenditures. In Britain, the figures are yet more perplexing. From 1973-74 to 1984-85, we find that spending on health and personal social services increased by 41 per cent and social security expenditures by 74 per cent. In 1977178 the proportion of defence to social security expenditures in the budget was 48.9 per cent; after six years of Thatcherism it was 45 per cent.[10] Of course, the early 1980s were years of deep recession, high unemployment and heavy claims on existing social programmes. Social democratic or overtly Keynesian governments might have run more deeply into red ink on social spending (although the record of the Socialist government in France in the same period offers little support for this). Yet the failure of the neo-conservative 'revolutionaries' to reverse significantly the existing patterns of warfare/welfare functions is nevertheless a telling confirmation of the tenacity of the welfare state, a point which has been made strongly in recent years by Göran Therborn.[11]

If traditional forms of state expenditure have shown surprising persistance in the face of anti-welfare state rhetoric, the point of course remains that neo-conservative governments have attempted—with some success—to shift priorities towards coercion and accumulation and away from legitimation. Certainly in the face of high unemployment, the net redistributive effects of neo-conservative government have been regressive. In the US, the reallocation towards the rich has been dramatic. During Reagan's first term, the average real income of the top 10 per cent increased by over $5000, while that of the bottom 40 per cent declined by over $400.[12] Yet the stubborn inflexibility of established social security programmes is a continuing irritant to the 'revolutionaries' of the Right and of course, a fiscal limitation on their own agenda. Reagan has carried off a bravura performance of political dissimulation by running deeply into debt and financing a government-led recovery by what looks suspiciously like Keynesian stimulation (or more precisely, Keynes-in-khaki). This remarkable performance has led to bitter charges of 'the triumph of politics' by the failed true believers in supply-side economics like former Budget Director David Stockman—which is both to make and miss the point at the same time. Reagan has been able, so far, to have it both ways: to redirect the agenda toward coercion while avoiding the odium of undermining the legitimation functions of the American state to a dangerous degree.

There are reasons for this ambiguity. As a close analysis of US opinion surveys over a number of years makes very clear, the much touted turn to the Right of the American people is largely a myth. Americans on the whole remain attached to 'New Deal' programmes, have become less, rather than more suspicious of government regulation of the private sector during the Reagan years, have not realigned themselves in partisan terms in any fundamental way, and have been more peaceful with regard

to foreign policy and less interventionist than their leaders.[13] The new conservatism is perhaps more a phenomenon of impressionable elites whipping themselves into a trendy lather than a genuine grass-roots movement of popular protest. If so, it would not be the first such example in American history.[14] More to the point is the way the party system in the US reinforces conservatism. The Reagan Republicans, elected by less than one out of three eligible electors, have a solid class base among the wealthy. As the political analyst Thomas Byrne Edsall points out, they have a party elite which directly reflects and represents the class interests of their electoral base, turning out public policy finely tuned to the interests of their supporters. The Democrats on the other hand suffer a severe disjuncture between the 'left' demands of their poor, working class, ethnic and minority (and often non-voting) constituency and the more conservative, special-interest demands of the unrepresentative élite which dominates the party. The result is a fatal diffusion and disorganisation of opposition to Reaganism, and a forceful, coherent, and sharply focused base of support for a programme which actually commands only minority allegiance in the country, but an effective majority in the political process.[15]

In Britain, Thatcherism as a political project has shown some of the same qualities as Reaganism, but on a sharply constricted base. Although her core support rests on the southern, middle-class 'Conservative nation', insulated by class and geography from the worst of the ravages of de-industrialisation and unemployment, the opposition to Thatcherism, despite the third party challenge of the SDP–Liberal Alliance and the internal ideological struggles of Labour, presents a more viable electoral alternative than the swamp of muddle and incoherence which is the Democratic party, and is much more likely to succeed in bringing down the neo-conservatives at the polls. Before her famous adventure in the Falklands, Thatcher had in one term become the most unpopular prime minister in this century. The **1983** victory was only possible because of the division of the opposition (about ***60*** per cent of the electorate voted for Labour or for the SDP–Liberal Alliance), and because of the public disunity of the Labour party itself. This is not to suggest that the opposition will generate a viable policy alternative to the Thatcherite project. The Alliance is of course premissed on the denial of class politics as much as the Democrats in the US. Even in the Labour party, the leadership is committed to distancing itself from class conflict and reinventing a corporatist 'consensus'. Yet the very structure of Labour and its popular base ensures that in Britain class politics remains alive on both Left and Right, while in America it reigns mainly on the Right. Yet despite these differences, neo-conservatism in both countries has stopped short of a real revolution of the Right, whether out of fear of the more sharply defined electoral threat in Britain (especially after the local elections of 1986), or from a prudent wish to pre-empt the opposition from taking

coherent shape in America.

This said, the more important question of the positive content of the neo-conservative state remains to be explored. There are three major areas of conservative concern which point directly away from *laissez faire* toward a Leviathan state. These are the military powers and resources of the National Security State (NSS); the internal policing and surveillance powers of the NSS; and the demands for censorship of expression and control of private behaviour inherent in 'moral majority' conservatism. Already in Reagan's America many of these elements of Leviathan are well in place: indeed, many of them have been in place for generations, but have been greatly extended and strengthened during the Reagan administration. Thatcher's Leviathan exhibits some variations on the same theme.

The National Security State

The modern NSS was not created by the Republicans. It was shaped initially by the Roosevelt Democrats to fight World War II, and found its most perfect expression in the Manhattan Project, an ultrasecret programme to mobilise collectively scientists, technicians, administrators and soldiers to build the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. Both the development of the weapon and its use to incinerate tens of thousands of human beings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were decisions which were completely out of the control either of the democratic electorate or the taxpayers who unknowingly funded it. It was the Truman Democrats who carried through the transition of the NSS to peacetime; with the consolidation of the Cold War in the late 1940s and the Democratic administrations of Kennedy and Johnson which prosecuted the Cold War most directly through armed interventions in Asia and Latin America. The Republican administrations of Eisenhower were rather more circumspect concerning interventions abroad, and the Nixon/Ford administrations presided over the beginnings of detente. Even under the Reaganite-directed new Cold War, the Democrats in Congress have attempted on the whole to establish positions only marginally more moderate than those of the administration or even on occasion to push for a yet more hawkish stand.[16]

There can, however, be no question that the Reaganites represent an ominously new phase in Republican commitment to the expansion of the NSS. A pledge to spend no less than one and a half trillion dollars on defence is not only a vigorous claim on the continuation of endless global conflict for the foreseeable future, but in domestic terms represents the triumph of the Sunbelt of the Southern and Western states over the older industrial 'Rustbelt' of the Northeast in US national politics and *within* the Republican party itself. The Sunbelt development based on defence-related high-tech industries has been parasitic upon the NSS, as well as on oil depletion allowances and agricultural subsidies." There can scarcely

be found an example of a more yawning (and hypocritical) gap between rhetoric and reality than the disjuncture between the free enterprise ravings of the Reaganites and the thoroughly *étatiste* prosperity of the defence porkbarrel in which the same Reaganites are pleasurably immersed. What had been the patronage opportunities of a vast defence budget linked to a political process which gave equal representation in the Senate to the less populated states of the Southwestern hinterland, has been effectively transformed into a system in which the governing party directly ladles out billions to the very constituencies which keep it in office. In one sense this is no more than a modernised version of the oldest and sleaziest model of straight patronage politics; in another sense it is a chilling embodiment of the material basis of the logic of the NSS and its economy of death.

The 'Star Wars' megaproject condenses and clarifies this logic. Apart from its positively lunatic science-fiction basis and its appallingly de-stabilising potential for the arms race, consider the following. First, SDI is a 'system' yet to be developed or proven, let alone deployed, to counter a 'threat' which is conjured up by the same group of interests which stand to profit from its development. This is surely the ultimate triumph of politics over markets: the state defines the demand in terms of the suppliers' needs. Second, in 1983184 45 per cent of space-weapons prime contracts went to California, which just happens to be the home state of the retired Hollywood actor who sits in the White House and directs the 'Star Wars' extravaganza. 77 per cent of the prime contracts went to districts or states represented by Congressmen or Senators who sit on the armed services and defence appropriations committees.[18] Third, most of the SDI funds disbursed to date have gone to corporations among the top twenty aerospace contractors, many of whom were also of course among the strongest lobbyists for approval of SDI funding. In other words, the military-industrial complex has resolved the potential insecurity and risk attendant upon forward commitment of resources within a genuine market context by virtually eliminating the market in its own industry. The state creates the demand, in close consultation with the producers, and then buys the product. This is an ironic fulfilment of the Supply-Side economists' fundamental theorem, Say's Law, that 'supply creates its own demand'!

Even with the Gramm-Rudman 'automatic' controls on government expenditure, Reagan has budgeted for just under $5 billion for SDI in fiscal 1987 (a 75 per cent increase over 1986).[19] The result, apart from the small matter of the effects on the fate of the earth, is to keep the new heartland of Republicanism, southern California, in what E.P. Thompson has called 'a state of permanent affluent economic erection for the next twenty years'. What all this has to do with free enterprise and reducing the role of the state might be best left to the overheated computers and

impoverished sensibilities of the whiz-kids designing 'Star Wars' in the federally-funded Livermore Laboratories. Or as one of Jules Feiffer's cartoon generals has it, SDI should be renamed SFI—the Strategic Funding Initiative.

Star Wars does not however, stop here. Its prototype, the Manhattan Project, not only built the atomic bomb, but also ushered in with it the whole sorry internal apparatus of the NSS; secrecy, surveillance, loyalty/security checks, purges, spies, defections, treason trials, witch hunts, McCarthyism.[20] Star Wars is similarly more than a project to zap Soviet missiles with death-rays; it is a project to create a Star Wars society.[21] Physics is to be militarised, scientific research mobilised throughout the universities, criticism silenced by the carrot of funding and the stick of 'national security'. Of course, forty years on after the successful outcome of the Manhattan Project, most of the NSS machinery for internal repression is well in place, needing only to be activated in concert. What Seymour Melman calls 'Pentagon capitalism',[22] the replacement of the market by the command economy of the Defense Development, has, like all command economies, ways of dealing with those who will not do their assigned tasks. The Under-Secretary of Defense in charge of research and development has recently told university scientists that anyone who criticises SDI should have any Defence-related funding cancelled. Nor will the results of SDI research be permitted to enter the free exchange of scientific knowledge, since they will constitute heavily fortified state secrets. There has of course been resistance. Most spectacularly, 6500 scientists and postgraduate students, representing a majority of physicists in leading university departments, and including among their number fifteen Nobel laureates, have publicly pledged to refuse all traffic with SDI. The Behemoth of the state and its command economy have enormous resources to bring to bear in any internal war with dissidents: one can await further deployment of coercive mechanisms, given the investment of the Reaganites in the SDI programme.

The Cold War comes home again

'Star Wars' is only an extravagant (perhaps extravagantly loony) example of a deeper truth about the neo-conservatives in Washington. The pushing of the arms race (not to speak of the deficit) into the stratosphere and beyond is merely one side of the growth of the coercive state. An administration which drops bombs on small children in Tripoli, and finances through 'humanitarian aid' the murder, mutilation and rape of Nicaraguans, has its internal equivalents to control opposition. To the Reaganites' annoyance, these democratic forms of repression are sometimes tied down by the US Constitution and its bill of rights, as well as by a Congress and press which, ever so fitfully and sporadically, recall from time to time that liberal freedoms are supposed to be part of the

American Way.

The Reagan administration has acted forcefully to invoke 'national security' as a means of restricting various liberal freedoms. The infamous McCarran–Walter Act of the McCarthy era has been dusted off and given new life to bar or control the movements of foreign visitors to the USA on political grounds (the Nobel prize-winning writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez being a notable target) as well as to deny citizenship to applicants. The Immigration and Naturalization Service has become a major police, intelligence and prison operation as millions of illegal migrants (many fleeing the devastation of US-operated wars or brutal US-backed dictatorships) are apprehended, many rounded up in detention centres and a good number deported.[23] Within the government itself gag orders have been enforced on public employees which reach into the future as well as the past. The Freedom of Information law is restrictively administered, and the declassification of public documents is turned into the re-classification of documents once made public, now secret again. Serious attempts have been mounted to suppress 'political' statements by civil servants—and by nongovernmental groups which receive any government assistance, however minimal. A systematic attack has been undertaken to shut down sources of statistical information upon which informed discussion of public policy can take place, or in some cases, even informed discussion of the effects of the market on the economic welfare of individual Americans. A test case has been successfully prosecuted to transform the Espionage Act of 1917 into a vehicle for restricting public debate over defence policy.[24] The list of authoritarian actions undertaken in the name of national security is long,[25] and threatens to lengthen yet further as the menace of 'international terrorism' is skilfully deployed to buttress the powers of the state. The Supreme Court, increasingly conservative and increasingly under the direct inspiration of Reaganism, has at the same time been bending further and further in the direction of granting the benefit of the doubt to the state whenever 'national security' is allegedly at issue.[26]

The right wing of the Republican party, now for the first time established firmly in power, has from the origins of the NSS and the Cold War advocated more guns and more militarism abroad along with illiberalism and political intolerance at home. The McCarthyism and scourging of 'un-American activities' a generation ago was a right wing Republican exploitation of the internal repression fostered and tolerated by the Truman Democrats to promote the Cold War abroad. In 1954 a young William F. Buckley, Jr. (today the ideological patron saint of those Reaganites who read) co-authored a full-scale defence of McCarthyism which celebrated the apparent triumph of intolerance and a new conformity in America: 'We are at war. . . McCarthyism is a weapon in the American arsenal. . . America is rallying around an orthodoxy whose characteristic is that it

excludes Communism; and adherents of communism are, therefore, excluded from positions of public trust and popular esteem. . . Some day, the patience of America may at last be exhausted, and we will strike out against liberals.'[27] Buckley was simply being the *enfant terrible* who says outright what many of his elders think, but choose not to say. At the time the McCarthyites challenged an established liberal Republican president, and were suppressed. Thirty years later the McCarthyites are in power. Times have changed, the style of the 1950s is gone, domestic Communism, as such, is not much of a credible target any more, but the McCarthyites of today are striking out against liberalism, just as Buckley predicted.

Some of this has taken the classic form of McCarthyism—that is, informal sanctions exercised outside the state system proper. The assault on the television networks for the alleged liberal bias of their newscoverage has been led by Mr Reed Irvine's Accuracy in Media, a kind of vigilante pressure group backed by some capitalists with interests of their own in media. An offshoot of this group has tried, without a great deal of success, to establish itself on university campuses as Accuracy in Academia to attack radical professors.[28] Along side these excrescences there have been a whole host of Moral Majority groups denouncing permissiveness, the rotting moral fibre of America, the need to restore the stern, puritanical virtues of the past, and all that sort of thing. Senator McCarthy has been replaced by the Jerry Falwells and Jimmy Swaggerts who unleash their jeremiads against liberalism and un-Americanism in regular TV slots and from the pulpits of lucrative, cross-country evangelical crusades.[29]

Intolerant moralist crusades can reach only so far within the social sphere. Social pressures in small towns, or in particular work settings, may be highly effective, but the restoration of the moral fibre of America requires decisive state action, extensive government intervention, and unflinchingly willingness to use coercion to enforce at least external conformity to Moral Majority standards. Most of the major moral issues of the new Right—anti-feminism, anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality, anti-pornography, compulsory school prayers, anti-rock music, etc.—require extensive state intervention in the family, in the classroom, in the bedroom. Far from shying away from such an Orwellian state invasion of society, the Reaganites have shown positive enthusiasm for carrying out such 'reforms' which carry a low dollar tag, but a high symbolic return for their ideological followers. Navarro quotes a key member of the Reagan transition team in 1980:[30]

> **In the history of man everyone has talked about expanding rights, having more and more freedom. But we have found that if you let people do what they want to do, you have chaos. We can't restore moral values, that's hopeless. What we have to do is restructure society, set minimum standards of respect and order. Frankly, we need a more authoritarian state.**

Robert Nisbet, since the early 1950s a leading academic conservative, writing in the twentieth anniversary issue of *The Public Interest*, the respectable forum for neo-conservative academics, pondered the meaning for conservatism of the authoritarian streak in the evangelical populist backers of Reagan. Traditional conservatives have always, he suggested, been suspicious of fundamentalist crusades to endorse their own moral standards on the 'non irrational conviction that such enthusiasm was unseemly in the public square and definitely threatening to businesses'.[31]

> Conservatism in any recognizable manifestation aims at 'getting government off our backs', to use the phrasing of one recent American conservative. But the primary, sweeping thrust of Moral Majority has come to be that of, quite bluntly, getting more government on our backs, through proposed laws and constitutional amendments to cover abortion, Baby Doe cases, school prayers, and, whoever knows in these matters, also contraception, pre-marital sex, liquor again?

Another neo-conservative of some renown, Daniel Bell, writes in the same anniversary issue that 'Reaganismus' is simply self-contradictory:[32]

> On the one hand, it espouses a populist individualism, anti-elite and anti-authority, emphasizing a ground of rights but justifying these largely in the economic sphere, but in the cultural realm defending a moral tutelage, based on 'traditional values' and an unlovely notion of cold virtue. Reaganismus is a political hippogriff.

(Bell helpfully adds that 'a hippogriff is, of course, the mythical animal with the foreparts of a griffin and the body and hind parts of a horse. But the griffin itself is a beast that is half-eagle and half-lion. Hollywood can do anything with mirrors'.)

Rambo nationalism

When doubts have penetrated so far as The Public Interest crowd,[33] one has to conclude that the *ktatisme* of the Reaganite project is a serious matter indeed. Yet is this authoritarianism as contradictory as it appears to Bell, an oldtime liberal, or Nisbet, a philosophical conservative? Of course, Reagan presides, like any other American president, over a pluralist coalition of forces under no obligation to sort themselves into logical coherence for the sake of philosophers and social scientists. The New Deal coalition, whatever theoretical claims have been made on its behalf by Roosevelt's intellectual *epigoni*, was an ideological madhouse of Northern workers, Southern racists, Blacks, ethnics, Catholics, Jews, Texas oilmen. Reagan's coalition has its disparite elements as well. Yet there are *leitmotivs* to be traced amid the cacophony.

One such *leitmotiv* is that of nationalism. It is curious that American critics of Reaganism have not pointed more frequently to the pervasive ideological uses of nationalism by the Right: perhaps from America it

is harder to grasp what appears to be ubiquitous to foreign observers. The age of Reagan is also the age of Rambo. One era of Hollywood Americanism blends imperceptibly into another. But nationalism is always of course a chameleon. The pertinent question is what kind of nationalism draws together the varied elements of the conservative coalition. What are the uses of nationalism?

A significant set of clues can be gleaned from examining Reagan's first official presentation of himself to the American public. The first inaugural in 1981 was an opportunity for the man whose entire previous training had been in movies and public relations to orchestrate a piece of historic theatre on prime time television. This form of political discourse demands serious consideration; one must assume that events and appearances are managed for effect. And indeed these effects are vivid enough. Two themes struck almost all the reporters covering the events. First, the incoming Republicans were ostentatious, even flagrant, in their displays of personal wealth. The style was brassy and loud: George Babbit, after affluent years poolside in Orange County, had come to Washington to pick up some defence contracts. The second theme was that of America's renewed strength. At last, after the humiliation of the inept and too-peaceful Carter, a strong man was at the helm and America's enemies would have to back off. The linkage between these two becomes clear in Reagan's inaugural address.[34] Reagan affirmed that with a bit of help from America's old ally, God, 'we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. . . After all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans'. Still, salvation was not simply a matter of ***deus et populus ex machina.*** Sacrifices would have to be made, and heroes too.

> We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say that we're in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look. You can see heroes every day going in and out of factory gates. . . You meet heroes across a counter. And they're on both sides of that counter. There are entrepreneurs with faith in themselves who create new jobs, new wealth and opportunity. They're individuals and families whose taxes support the government. . . Their patriotism is quiet but deep.

Reagan then went on to pay tribute to the multitude of America's war dead, from the Revolution of 1776 to Vietnam. He zeroed in on one such, Martin Treptow, 'who left his job in a small town barbershopin 1917' to die under enemy fire in France in 1917.

> We're told that on his body was found a diary. on the flyleaf under the heading, 'My Pledge', he had written these words: 'America must win this war. Therefore I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will tight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone.'

If one can step aside for a moment from the comic book morality, it is

evident that Reagan is trying to make a point about class and nation. America is strong because of its wealth; its wealth is represented in its riches which were being flaunted by the invited guests at the inaugural. But all Americans share in this strength. The people going in and out of factory gates, the shop clerks and the small town barbers—they are heroes too. They do their share by dying in the trenches. Even if they just do their job, they are still heroes, because they are Americans. They may be at the bottom of the scale, they may be (to import a Marxist term which would never pass Reagan's lips) workers, not entrepreneurs (creators of wealth in Reagan's language) but they can 'dream heroic dreams' so long as America is boss of the world. America will reassert its hegemony when the process has begun of 'removing the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity', in short, by deregulation and reduction in the amount of government interference in accumulation by the rich.

When the Cold War came to America in the late 1940s, it came as a package. To the American working class, the combination of material incentives (employment through the defence budget) and the ideological appeal of American chauvinism was crucially important—and profoundly devastating to class consciousness. Reagan represents a continuation of this tradition. Of course the old bread and butter issues are still important, and neo-conservative economics will never speak to many of these. But in the face of the thoroughly disorganised state of the opposition and the ideological incoherence of the Democratic party, the hard nationalist thrust of Reaganism clearly has a deep resonance in a land which is surely one of the most chauvinist and self-centred in the world. Neo-conservatism has succeeded in wrapping itself in the Stars and Stripes—the last and safest refuge of scoundrels. Reaganomics, which is in reality little more than what David Stockman in an unguarded moment called 'feeding time at the hog trough', occludes the naked class interest of the rich by a red, white and blue cloud of American nationalism. When Reagan speaks it is always to the quickening drumbeat of a John Philip Sousa march; even if the front ranks of the marchers are always the super-rich, it would be folly to deny that there are indeed humbler ranks behind, the Martin Treptows fanning out of the barber shops of the nation to join the parade.

Socialists, and even liberals, have always had a difficult time coming to terms with nationalism, especially when it is a recruiting platform for reaction. There is always a tendency to try to explain away the power of nationalist appeals to the working class. Yet the facts speak for themselves: among the most widely popular of Reagan's actions have been the invasion of Grenada and the bombing of Libya. To an extent, given America's undoubted power, there is an agenda here which the administration can control and manipulate. Yet there are limits as well. All evidence would indicate that while Americans unfailingly applaud quick, dirty but

relatively low casualty (that is, among Americans) interventions, they are not at all prepared for American boys being bogged down in another Vietnam—and they are certainly not prepared to run the serious risk of being barbecued in a nuclear holocaust. The Reaganites have shrewdly limited themselves to interventions which run neither risk but which allow for maximum venting of low-cost patriotic bombast. Thus Nicaragua is as yet uninvaded by US Marines; the declaration of martial law in Poland was countered by nothing more dramatic than a TV special; and the Pentagon awarded more medals for the Grenada invasion than there were soldiers who ever set foot on the island.

Even in the well orchestrated Hollywood chorus backing the old Tinseltown alumnus there lurks a certain ideological incoherence. The movie industry experiences persistent difficulties in coming to terms with the role of the state. This problem surfaces in the recent spate of perfervidly anti-Soviet movies featuring either Communist invasions of the USA or American *revanchist* assaults against Reds or Arabs. (Perhaps betraying a deeper historical consciousness than she is generally given credit for, America often reverts from the Crusade against the Hammer and Sickle to the more venerable Crusade against the Crescent.) In 'Red Dawn', which kicked off the genre, America falls under Commie occupation due to the negligence and bureaucratic bungling of Washington. The cause of liberty then falls to a bunch of all-American kids who take to the hills to battle the Reds free-enterprise style. 'Rambo', the iconic distillation and the most profitable of the genre, is a psychopathic loner who is undermined at every turn by the pointy-headed bureaucrats of the Cold War, until he single-handedly invades the scene of America's most humiliating defeat and spatters the blood of yellow Reds across the screen in a spasm of sado-masochistic release. The *rhetoric* of Reaganism carries the ambivalence over the state even into the heart of Hollywood *agitprop*.

But then not even the all-American pornographers of violence have been willing to mount a celebration of a real war—bureaucrats pushing anti-Communist buttons in NORAD's hollow mountain, initiating the impersonal incineration of millions and the death rattle of the earth in the darkness of the nuclear winter. Presumably 'Radioactive Dawn' would not be box-office smash. Nor would it play at the polls. Thus Reagan's Washington, while building up the arsenals of death and the bureaucratic machinery for their launching, confines itself to quick and cheap interventions like Libya which can be packaged and sold on two minute clips featuring Reagan as Rambo, somehow representing both the might of the American state and the lone gunslinger at the same time. As the slogan of the ultra-right has it: 'Let Reagan be Reagan.'

Let us not fall victim to the cognitive dissonances of neo-conservatism. Whether predominantly right wing or left wing, whether genuinely held

or manipulated by cynical politicians, nationalism is now and always has been, a statist discourse. The staggering public sums spent on defence; the invasive, illiberal apparatus of secrecy, surveillance and control which surrounds this business of death; and the patriotic celebration of the exercise of the centralised and bureaucratised power thus amassed by a small group of state officials irresponsible to electors or taxpayers in the planning and execution of their earth-shattering actions: all these not merely bring into question the *laissez faire* pretensions of the American neo-conservatives, they reduce them to derisory rubble. Reaganism is to the limited state as Christianity is to brotherly love: often asserted, the relationship is merely honorific.

The Iron Lady's variant

To turn to the Thatcherite experience in Britain is to recover some of the same ground. The Falklands War was, of course, the *pièce de rksistance* of Thatcherism:[35] at the cost of a couple of hundred British lives, the pain, suffering and lost limbs of others, and the expenditure of hundreds of millions of pounds, the Tories were assured of re-election. Who can forget Mrs Thatcher's television appearance the night of the Argentine surrender when, suffused with an inner light of satisfaction like a vampire whose lust had been sated by a bloodly feast, she declared that 'Britain is Great again'? And who can deny that this nasty little war served to mobilise considerable jingoistic support in Britain, much of it cross-class? At the same time, like Reagan's Grenada or Libya, Thatcher's Falklands was carefully selected for exploitation. Recalling ancient Imperial memories, fought against a tinpot army of Wogs (unfortunately armed with Exocets) far away from Britain itself, the Falklands was a relatively safe campaign ploy. Like Reagan's America, Thatcher's Britain also knows where to set prudent limits on foreign adventurism. The capitalist El Dorado of Hong Kong was realistically bargained away to the Communist Chinese hordes shortly after Mrs Thatcher was hurling her defiant *'no pasaran!'* (or the Grantham equivalent) at General Galtieri in defence of what one British veteran expressively called 'a pimple on the arse-end of the earth'.

There is however one striking weakness in the Tory deployment of British nationalism. The Falklands were an anachronism; there are no more military World Cup matchups against Third World pushovers on the horizon. The normal expression of militaristic nationalism (apart from Ulster, which is simply a headache with no redeeming electoral value) is the Atlanticist ideology of NATO and the special relationship with the Americans. Certainly the Iron Lady has left no stone unturned in uncovering all the slugs and locusts of anti-Communism in British life. But they are put to work mainly as branch-plant employees of the US State Department. This too is an old story going back to the late 1940s, and the acquiescence of the British bourgeoisie in the junior partner

status accorded it within the Atlanticist framework is a matter worth deeper study than it has yet been given. But the subservient use of anti-communist British nationalism is a slow-working poison which eats away at the heart of the Thatcherite project. The invasion of Grenada was not received with warm enthusiasm in Whitehall (the object was no doubt acceptable, but an American invasion of a Commonwealth country, albeit Communist, was galling). The installation of cruise and Pershing missiles under American control on British soil has not turned out to be of positive political benefit to the Tories. Then came the twin blows of Michael Heseltine's resignation over the helicopter row and the ferocious reaction to Thatcher's complicity in the Libya affair. The sight of Heseltine turning in his flak-jacket and abandoning his campaign against the women of Greenham Common for the mantle of anti-American Little Englander is, of course, not without its slightly ridiculous side: perhaps no more than a sign of bewilderment and unease on the Right. The Libya affair is quite another matter, indicating as it did that British opinion is capable on occasion of being not merely divergent, but utterly different, from that of Reagan's America. Under such circumstances, Mrs Thatcher finds herself, and her neo-conservative cohorts along with her, in a peculiar position. Instead of the Iron Lady, she is seen instead as the Lady in the Iron Cage, singing for her supper.

The Thatcherites have been much more successful at internal intimidation. Unencumbered by a bill of rights and with a governmental tradition which allows for a degree of administrative secrecy and discretion rather higher than that of the United States, spurred by the higher level of class conflict and the rioting which has torn predominantly immigrant areas of British cities, the spirit of military command of civilians has spread from Northern Ireland to England itself to a degree which has begun seriously to alarm many moderate, let alone left wing, observers. In fact the Prevention of Terrorism Act, renewed annually by Parliament since 1974, has its origins in the Irish conflict. This legislation, which permits a form of preventive detention often without the accompaniment of criminal charges, and has been used to prevent the entry of Irish Republican spokespersons into Britain, has proven to be something of a model for Thatcherite internal security practices. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act now permits police to hold suspects for up to four days without charge, and for a shorter period without counsel, and to prevent the travel from one part of Britain to another of persons whom the police suspect intend to commit a criminal act (this being a codification of a practice employed during the miners' strike). The miners' strike also saw the secret centralisation of policing under the control of London, which is now to be institutionalised in the Public Order bill. The latter will severely restrict peaceful assembly and protest. The police are in effect being militarised and safeguards for individuals in

the face of these powers are being systematically stripped away. While this has been happening, police officials themselves have made increasingly partisan interventions against trade unions, and even against Labour party policies.[36]

It is against this background that the Thatcher government's ready use of 'national security' as all-purpose excuse for crushing opposition must be measured. The arbitrary exercise of this nostrum in the banning of the trade unions at the Cheltenham General Communications Headquarters is a classic case in point, particularly in light of the remarkable decision of the Law Lords on appeal. This decision, reversing a lower court ruling that the ban violated natural justice in that the union members were never consulted, spelled out the absolutist logic of the National Security State more decisively than any other legal judgment. Yes, the Law Lords agreed, natural justice was violated in the case. However, natural justice must always yield to the higher claims of national security. And in answer to the crucial question of who determines when national security is salient, the Law Lords revealed the dark truth underlying the supremacy of Parliament: the sole judge of whether national security is at issue is the government of the day, which is to say, of course, the Cabinet, or to take the matter to the very centre of the spiderweb, the Prime Minister herself. There you have it.

Under the Official Secrets Act, the creaky vehicle still plying the streets of Britain, public servants have been prosecuted with enthusiasm. Sarah Tisdall, the young clerk who blew the whistle on some of the activities of Mr. Heseltine (Mark I) went to prison for her pains. Clive Ponting, who blew the whistle on the cover-up of the Belgrano affair, would certainly have been sent to prison by the presiding judge (who echoed the nation = Cabinet logic of the GCHQ decision) were it not for the jury which apparently took the un-Thatcherite view that civil servants could be responsible to an elected Parliament as well as to the Cabinet.[37] Such acts of 'espionage' have not, except to the likes of Chapman Pincher, anything to do with the sort of trading of state allegiances in which the Philbys, Burgesses and Macleans of the Cold War past, indulged themselves.[38] Rather they are acts of conscience on behalf of a larger concept of the public good. Against this is the apparent Thatcherite view that the state is all, the society nothing.

Beyond these headline events, there is the business-as-usual of **MI5** surveillance of the peace movement, the unions, and even the National Council for Civil Liberties—along with the intriguing revelation by ***The Observer*** that BBC employees have for years been officially, if secretly, vetted to weed out leftists and that the state broadcasting agency has a cosy working relationship with both **MI5** and the intelligence service. These relationships predate Thatcher but they take on a new significance

when set beside the strident Tory calls for greater management of the news, and charges that the media are contributing to terrorism and public disorder by reporting other than official propaganda.

The statist thrust of Thatcherism is further strengthened by the drive to centralise power over all the operations of government within the Cabinet, and even within 10, Downing Street. This centralising drive has extended to local governments, the autonomy of which has been effectively destroyed by the ruthless use of the national government's potent financial weapon. Where this proved an insufficient deterrent, the Thatcher government has simply abolished the offending local body, as in the notorious case of the Greater London Council.[39]

In the advance of neo-conservative statism, Britons are at least spared the distinctively American excesses of Moral Majoritarianism. Even here, however, the grocer's daughter and her supporters have not been free of a certain unpleasant tone of lower middle class self-righteousness concerning the sins of others. This has come to the fore as the Tories attempted to fasten on law and order as their main theme in the fall of 1985. Mr Norman Tebbit, Chairman of the Conservative Party, made manifest the logic of this in the larger context of Thatcherism in his Disraeli lecture delivered in November 1985. After the expected ritual bows in the direction of Tory fidelity to the 'freedom' of the market and aversion to the socialist road to serfdom, Mr Tebbit then allowed that 'it would be wrong to blame all our ills upon collectivist policies'. The *real* villain is rather the 'politics of the permissive society'. Even with the reversal of collectivist economics, the legacy remains in the form of crime and public disorder. The cause is not unemployment or other social results of Thatcherite policies; it is 'deeper': 'it lies in the era and attitudes of post-war funk which gave birth to the "Permissive Society" which, in turn generated today's violent society.' Having firmly fixed his sights at the ideal, rather than the material target, Mr Tebbit then enunciated a litany of the ills of permissiveness:[40]

> **Bad art was as good as good art. Grammar and spelling were no longer important. To be clean was no better than to be filthy. Good manners were no better than bad. Family life was derided as a outdated bourgeois concept. Criminals deserved as much sympathy as their victims. Many homes and classrooms became disorderly—if there was neither right nor wrong there could be no bases for punishment or reward. Violence and soft pornography became accepted in the media. Thus was sown the wind; and we are now reaping the whirlwind.**

Citing some of the stern law and order measures already taken or planned by the Tories, Mr Tebbit then looked optimistically toward the 1990s when

> **we shall see the effects of a revulsion against the valueless values of the Permissive Society. The public are demanding stiffer sentences for criminals—and in the end**

> **they will get them. They will demand that television producers think twice about the effects of what they broadcast upon impressionable people—and in the end it will happen. . . I know that at the front of that campaign for a return to traditional values will be the Conservative Party: for we understand as does no other party that *the defence of freedom involves a defence of the values which make freedom possible without its degeneration into licence.***

It is perhaps unlikely that Mr Tebbit has been reading the debate between Stuart Hall and Bob Jessop *et al* in the pages of ***New Left Review*** on Thatcher's 'authoritarian populism', but he does show an instinctive understanding of the concept.[41]

Coercion and legitimation

When the evidence of nationalism and authoritarianism surrounding the neo-conservative project is gathered, a major question still remains. For all the statism of neo-conservative discourse on defence, internal security, and the legislation of morality, the fact is that the rhetoric of freedom and individualism, and the priority of markets over politics is affirmed in the practices of Reaganism and Thatcherism regarding de-regulation and privatisation. How is the ideological circle to be squared between rampant liberalism in the economic sphere and rampant statism in other areas?

The most common explanation on the left has been that the economics of neo-conservatism create conditions of such public misery and desperation that the use of state coercion is required to maintain order. In this view economic liberalism is the main thrust, and coercion is an adventitious policy necessary to mop up the negative results of this liberalism. This is true enough at one level, but it does not probe deeply enough into the nature of the neo-conservative project.

It is evident from the public expressions of neo-conservative intentions that ***accumulation*** is the central concern, which is scarcely surprising. What distinguishes neo-conservatism from other capitalist strategies is the open emphasis upon upward redistribution and the consequent stress upon ***coercion*** over ***legitimation.*** The conversion of treasury departments throughout the Western world to monetarism in the mid-1970s (this happened with as much alacrity in Britain under Labour as it did in countries with professedly conservative governments[42]) was an initial step in this direction. Under the pressure of the deepening international crisis of capitalism, the apparently intractable persistence of high levels of inflation and unemployment, and the deep fears generated in business circles by what was perceived as the growing weight of trade union demands and of welfare state claims (what was being called in the US the 'revolution of rising entitlements'), forces further to the Right were able to capture both the Republican and Tory parties from the traditional moderate leadership. These forces were not wedded to monetarism, as

such, but rather to an amalgam of economic strategies (including, not without glaring contradictions, monetarism), often referred to as 'supply side economics'. Based loosely on Say's Law ('supply creates its own demand'), supply-side economics obviously inverts the theoretical focus of Keynesianism from demand to supply, and tends to concentrate its practitioners' energies on removing or reducing perceived barriers to productive efficiency: state ownership, regulation, trade union powers, welfare state entitlements, public attitudes which have in the past penalised governments which allowed high levels of unemployment, and egalitarian disincentives in the tax system and wage structure.

Leys ably sums up the thrust:[43]

> This package of policies can be described in terms of redistribution: an accentuation of personal income inequality through taxation changes; a shift in the share of national income from wages/salaries to profits and in the distribution of power from labour to capital. Thatcherite tax policies have had an unambiguously 'upward' redistributive effect.

Redistribution in the Keynesian/welfare state sense was not only downward (in theory at least) as a stimulus to demand, but it was above all a *political* device, executed through the state and the political process. Neo-conservative supply-side economics turns the logic of redistribution on its head, and also attempts to remove it from the political agenda by selling its redefined upward redistribution as a 'natural' economic process required by market demands for productive efficiency. As George Gilder, the best-selling Reaganaut guru of capitalism as a moral system, puts it:[44]

> To get a grip on the problems of poverty, one should also forget the idea of overcoming inequality by redistribution. . . To lift the incomes of the poor, it will be necessary to increase the rates of investment, which in turn will tend to enlarge the wealth, if not the consumption, of the rich.

Hence the 'trickle-down' theory whereby quenching the thirst of those below depends upon the imperfect plumbing of those above.

Inequality lies at the heart of the neo-conservative project. There are a few conservative intellectuals in Britain with their older predemocratic Tory traditions who are refreshingly explicit about this (Mr Peregrine Worsthorne is an example who comes to mind), but they are usually shunned by Mrs Thatcher and her politician acolytes, not because they disagree, but because they prefer the obfuscation and dissimulation of economic 'science' as a public relations front. In America, the publicists are even more disingenuous, employing the rhetoric of democratic equality as a screen for what Tocqueville a century and a half ago called an 'aristocracy created by manufactures. . . one of the harshest that ever existed in the world.[45]

To carry out this programme of upward redistribution it is first necessary to clear the market place of 'politics'. Some of this can be done through the market itself: persistently high levels of unemployment, 'rationalisation' and 'deindustrialisation' do tend to depress wage demands and trade union militancy. But head-on confrontations between the state and entrenched union rights are inevitable. This is especially true in Britain where the organised working class had previously established a greater leverage than. its American counterpart. Consequently the confrontations have been more visible in Britain, and the role of the Thatcherite state in striking at the roots of trade union rights has been more flagrant. But in the more dispersed and fragmented political process in America, the assault on unions has been proceeding apace: deregulation of certain industries, for example, has led to their virtual de-unionisation. And Reagan's savage sacking of the entire membership of the air traffic controllers union and the smashing of the union itself through the courts was an extraordinary public exercise of his authoritarian populist role as Boss. In the case of both countries, neo-conservative regimes in power have moved sharply to abandon any pretence of corporatism, in contrast to their predecessors. Corporatism smacks too much of weak-kneed 'co-operation' with labour. Neo-conservatives prefer direct assault to reduce the influence of unions. The miners' strike in Britain was thus a kind of paradigm of neo-conservatism—a paramilitary campaign, a domestic Falklands against the enemy within. It comes as no surprise to discover that it had been a campaign chosen and planned by the Tories themselves.[46]

Unions are the most formidable of civil associations tied neither to capital or the state, but they are not the only such. Neo-conservative governments have also attacked other kinds of associations which mediate between citizens and the state outside the market. This is especially the case with those grass-roots organisations which represent and focus the demands of relatively powerless groups dependent upon the welfare state and its social security programmes. In a truly Orwellian exercise of Newspeak, these associations of the weak and the poor are denounced as 'special interests' by governments dedicated to enriching the rich and empowering the powerful. Avenues of attack are many: cutbacks in funding are at the core, but de-regulation and the emasculation of state agencies upon which popular movements or groups can focus their demands is an effective weapon (Reagan's perversion of the Environmental Protection Agency suggests a sinister model). The apparatus of police surveillance is often involved, and when all else fails, democratic local governments which fund such groups, such as the GLC, can simply be abolished by a central government under neo-conservative control. And in the case of issue groups, such as environmentalists and the peace movement, which directly challenge neo-conservative public policies, an extensive coercive

orchestration of bugging, infiltration, public slander, and, on occasion, arrests and head-bashing is normal practice. Edward Nell has put it well when he refers to the institutions of democratic control as having evoked[47]

> a kind of capitalist Luddite response—to destroy the machinery that is replacing them and controlling their lives. Just as the followers of Ned Ludd broke up the machinery that threw them out of work, or worsened their conditions, so capitalists are now hell bent on wrecking the institutional machinery that, in populist or revolutionary hands (sometimes even in liberal hands), could come to dominate. . . them.

In the present conjuncture of the capitalist state, its legitimation functions are clearly in disrepute on the Right. The significance of this should not be missed. I pointed out earlier that Thatcherism and Reaganism have been unable to roll back decisively the welfare state. Nor has Mrs Thatcher been able to eliminate the scorned 'wets' even from her own cabinet; indeed, they have been making something of a comeback in 1986. This is one side of the story. The other is the very ideological rage which has driven the neo-conservatives to attack the manifestations of the welfare state with such sound and fury. Both indicate that the welfare state is stronger, more resilient, less brittle than many both on the Right and Left appear to have believed. This helps to explain why neo-conservative regimes have been driven to place as much emphasis on coercion as they have. The turn away from legitimation entailed an equivalent increase in coercion. If the welfare state, and its supporters in the civil society, had been weaker and more acquiescent, coercion would not have been required at the level it has attained.

Yet hidden within the rising tide of coercive state action, there is another form of legitimation practised by neo-conservative régimes. Nationalism, already alluded to in some detail, is a form of legitimation quite different from the more material forms of legitimation inherent in the concept of the welfare state. As long ago as 1969 Miliband wrote that[48]

> contemporary conservatism, whether of state or party, has relied much less on traditional religion than on that most powerful of all secular religions of the twentieth century—nationalism. From the point of view of the dominant classes and the state in advanced capitalist countries. . . this has long been the supreme 'integrative' and stabilising force in society, the 'functional' creed par excellence. . . It is particularly in the competition with their opponents on the Left that conservative parties have exploited national sentiment, insisted on their own patriotic dedication to the nation, and regularly, often vociferously, opposed this national dedication to the allegedly less patriotic or positively unpatriotic and even anti-national concerns of left-wing parties.

The rise of neo-conservative régimes in the 1980s and the conjuring up

once again of the Soviet Threat (the indispensable bogy to scare up nationalism in the post-war world) offers textbook confirmation of Miliband's general point. To critics who might question the efficacy of nationalist legitimation to the neo-conservative project, one need only point to the fierce and insistent emphasis that Reagan and Thatcher have given Cold War themes. Apart from the material benefits of industrial supporters (not of course a motive to be sneezed at), the ideological functions certainly seem to have commended themselves to the neo-conservatives. Nor does the ferocity of their Cold War nationalism appear to be slackening; indeed it seems to grow with the years.

There is an interesting counterpoint to the American and British experience to be seen in Canada. Here a Conservative party won a landslide electoral majority in **1984** over a Liberal party which had dominated national office for years and had been widely denounced by Canadian capital and its mouthpieces as 'interventionist' and even 'socialist' (as Keynes said, business confidence is not about facts, merely about what business men *think* are facts). All the usual conditions prevailed: a fiscal crisis of the state; a relatively high level of strikes; and as well an economy peculiarly vulnerable to foreign competition. And of course to the south there was the model of Reagan's America. In one province, British Columbia, a right wing provincial government had successfully launched a violent neo-conservative programme in **1983** which had brought on a near-general strike. Yet the new Tory government in Ottawa has shown no inclination whatever to take on the direct leadership of a Reaganite or Thatcherite offensive against the welfare state. Surreptitious nibbling at the corners of social programmes is about as far this government has gone, or is likely to go.

When one casts about for explanations of this deviant behaviour, there is one difference which stands out. The Canadian state, divided as it is between two nations, English and French, has always enjoyed a relatively low level of national identification in its citizenry. When Reagan and Thatcher appeal to the 'national interest' as justifying this or that atrocity against some group of citizens, they are calling up tribal demons of national chauvinism. As boastful Glendower learned, these spirits do not always come when called, but often enough they do. The Canadian state can call up few such demons from its national past. Nationalism as legitimation is a weak, derisory ploy in Canada. Consequently, even a Tory government, the mental universe of which is drawn from the same Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club roots from which Reaganism flowered in the US, is loath to employ the degree of internal coercion which Reaganism has happily overseen.

Nationalism as legitimation had definite limits in Britain as well. The war against General Galtieri was altogether more successful at the polls than the war against General Scargill. After a first flush of popularity

following Thatcher's declaration of war against muggers and disorderly yobs, Tory standing has slumped yet further. A blatantly class-divided society is some proof against the facile inversion of national chauvinism. As I suggested earlier, nationalism in its current Cold War guise is a card which in a sense only Americans can play with confidence in the domestic sphere, free from the contradictions sometimes set off in allied nations which are, when all is said and done, usually mere accessories after the fact. Even so, the significance of this form of legitimation, and its close linkage to the neo-conservative reliance on coercion, is worth some emphasis.

If Reaganism and Thatcherism are both specific forms of 'authoritarian populism', it is obvious that there are inherent limits to the exercise of state coercion in the aid of upward redistribution. Neither Britain nor America is becoming fascist, despite exaggerated fears in some circles. But here one must read carefully to avoid the liberal error of identifying coercion exclusively with the state. Those who have argued that neo-conservative régimes must fall back on coercion because of the negative effects of enlarging the scope of the market have half a point. The other half is to recognise frankly that coercion is an essential feature of the market itself. The institutionalised violence of unemployment on individuals and the family (that totem of neo-conservative heraldry); the destruction of local communities (more ersatz totems) by 'rationalisation' and the forces of competition; the dull compulsion of mindless work for worthless pay; the desperate struggles with employment and social agencies which punctuate periods of submission to the iron cage of the factory: all these are the coercive face of the 'impersonal' market. When neo-conservative régimes seek to enlarge the scope of the market, they usually clothe their intentions in the language of Lockean rights. There is a certain amount of philosophical confusion in this, for in the next breath they also assert the priority of 'the Good' over rights when it comes to censorship and state enforcement of behaviour. Philosophical consistency is however a fetish of philosophers, not of politicians, and in any event, the rights associated with the great wheel of commerce have always been those of its beneficiaries, never of those whose shoulders are put to the wheel. The rampant market, freed of state interference (the expression, it should be remembered, only of an ideal towards which neo-conservatives strive, but never consummate) is a field in which the rich may aggrandise their fortunes while workers are subjected to the compulsion of necessity unmediated by protective non-market institutions or even state agencies which administer, however imperfectly, to their needs. There is thus no *political* inconsistency in the Right's appropriation of the language of rights. Nor is there (as some American critics have argued) any contradiction, other than apparent, between an 'old Right' focused on enlarging freedom of action in economic policy and a 'new Right' fixed on coercive answers to social and moral questions. The main coercive thrust of neo-

conservative doctrine is embodied in the economic policies themselves.

The Anglo-American tradition of political discourse does not lend itself to philosophical clarity of intentions. For a sharp insight into the deeper but inarticulate roots of what neo-conservatism is about, I would like to draw the reader's attention to a country which has always prided itself, with some justice, on remorselessly pursuing arguments to their logical (if sometimes absurd) conclusions. France has just witnessed a conservative revival, beginning with the rising ideological and cultural hegemony of *la nouvelle droite*, recently capped by the election of M. Chirac to the premiership flanked by the *camelots de roi* of *M.* Le Pen's neo-fascist *Front national.* The philosophers of the French new Right mince no words, and conceal no knives, in expounding their aims. They are for a society of rigorous inequality, a hierarchy of wealth, power and prestige unashamedly based upon degrees of racial and national purity, in which celebration of strength and contempt for the weak are among the prevailing values. With ruthless logic, some have even denounced Christianity for having introduced the poisons of pity and charity into the vigorous muscularity of Western civilisation. The 'respectable' Right of M. Chirac and M. Giscard has gone some distance toward accommodating itself to these ideas (the leading newspaper, *Le Figaro*, is a forum for *nouvelle droite* writers), and especially to the specific racist demands of the *Front national.* The respectable and neo-fascist Rights are at one on the question of the economic role of the state: both demand a neo-liberal attack on state ownership, intervention and regulation. At one level this is odd, given the traditional veneration of the French state on the Right, and given the extensive coercive powers for law and order which the Right is currently demanding. In fact there is no inconsistency. As M. Claude de Brie makes clear in a very interesting report on the new alignment of the Right:[49]

> **From an historical point of view, there is nothing surprising about the way that the far right's nationalist tendency and the 'neo-liberalism' of the 'new' and traditional right have converged. 'Liberalism', when actually put into practice, has never displayed the virtues claimed for it by its advocates, and has on the contrary often been characterised by a total lack of liberties for the majority.**

The coercive state will guarantee the freedom of the market where the 'natural' hierarchy of the strong can prevail, secure from fear of an 'artificial', that is, political, combination of the weak. That was, in effect, what Hobbes said three centuries ago; it is certainly what the Reagans and the Thatchers (and Chiracs) of today mean when they use the Lockean language of rights.

It is then coercion which is the most characteristic means employed to realise the neo-conservative project, whether that coercion is exercised through the state directly or through markets. But there is one final ambiguity in this analysis which must be confronted before I conclude.

The traditional liberal definition of the state, even during the nineteenth century heyday of *laissez faire*, emphasised the formal monopoly of the state over the legitimate exercise of coercion. As I have tried to make clear, Reaganism and Thatcherism have certainly not shrunk from wielding state powers to coerce citizens, and certainly to terrorise foreigners. Yet there has been something else going on in recent years which seems to challenge even this formal liberal definition of the state. The means of coercion are themselves being progressively privatised. There are now more individuals employed in private security in America than there are in public policing. A similar trend has been quietly taking place in Britain as well. Nor are private security firms limited to night-watchman or gate-keeper roles: industrial espionage, strike-breaking and infiltration of unions, and the meting out of what amounts to private justice and private sanctions are among the habitual tasks of private security agencies.[50] In America, this trend has been taken one step further. Prisons are being privatised, with profit-making corporations spccialising in 'detention services' contracting with the state for a non-unionised labour force (which can be vigorously disciplined for low productivity).[51] Once again, it is coercion itself which is important. Whether it is exercised directly by capital or indirectly through the neo-conservative state is surely a matter of some indifference to those on the receiving end as it is, one suspects, to those on the dispensing end.

In conclusion: Redrawing the maps

These trends are not perhaps surprising in neo-conservative times. But they call into question the nature of the capitalist state itself. Even on the Left, theories of the state have tended to replicate liberal notions of the boundaries between the public and private sectors. At first blush neo-conservatism, with its loudly proclaimed attack on the state, seems to confirm the meaningfulness of these boundaries. Opposition to neo-conservatism has often coalesced around defence of this or that institution or programme of the state against privatization or gutting, and this tends to confirm the traditional identification of socialism with the state and conservatism with the free market. But it must be obvious by now that politics versus markets is a duplicitous choice imposed by those whose own interests are enhanced by the prolongation of th duplicity.

The need for taking another theoretical look at the question of boundaries between state and private sector is manifest in the US military-industrial complex. As the 'Star Wars' scenario illustrates, the question of the autonomy of the state in relation to the aerospace industry is one which yields no sensible answer. Is 'Star Wars' nothing more than a puppet show manipulated by the aerospace contractors? Perhaps, but this ignores the enormous vested interests within the state sector, bureaucratic and military as well as political, which are served by SDI. On the other hand,

when the biggest aerospace contractors are largely dependent for their 'market' on a single buyer—the United States Defense Department—in which direction do the lines of influence run? Or could it be that they run in more than one direction at the same time? And could it then be that the 'relative autonomy' of the state in relation to the hegemonic fractions of capital is a rather more complex phenomenon than many have believed? And a yet ruder question: does it matter that much in the end? Could it be that the old boundaries between 'public' and 'private' sectors are of as much relevance as national boundaries were in preventing the spread of radiation from the Chernobyl nuclear accident?

To condense this into a concrete example, take the Thatcher government's privatisation of the Vickers shipyard. ***The Guardian,*** with its usual liberal scruples, averred in a leader that 'privatising shipyards may sound fine; but not when those yards depend for their very existence on one customer, the Government wearing another hat'.[29] On the contrary, privatising Vickers to sell its products to the state is a veritable paradigm of neo-conservatism. After all, it was Vickers as a private firm which made staggering profits from sales to the Admiralty in the years during and preceding World War I, and then managed to make itself effectively bankrupt by the mid-1920s when state orders dried up. Perhaps the career of the Krupps armaments firm within the womb of the Kaiserist warfare state offers the true model. Did someone just hear the voice of Mrs Thatcher declaiming that 'we are all Bismarckians now'?

The gathering opposition to neo-conservatism must avoid too close an identification with the state, as such. The necessary defence of state welfare functions often tempts the Left into an association of its aims with the state, in and of itself. This is less true today, perhaps, than it once was in the days when nationalisation and the enlargement of the welfare state were together the ***summum bonum*** of socialist politics. Yet to continue the traditionally statist bias of the anti-conservative discourse will only contribute to the confusion already promoted by the false polarity of 'free enterprise versus the state'. Both Left and Right sometimes have recourse to the state, and sometimes find themselves in opposition to it; the ideological division simply does not match the putative boundary between public and private sectors. The enlistment of the state on behalf of private profit necessarily involves the enlargement of the state, as such. The coercive and policing powers essential to the neo-conservative project of inequality and redistribution upward are exercised through both the state and the market. Under these circumstances, it is sometimes progressive to advance the state as an instrumentality to combat the reactionary thrust of private economic power—but it is just as often progressive to attack the swollen state Leviathan with its invasive powers, in defence of the so-called 'private' space of individuals, groups, and associations of civil society.

The terrain to be contested is not then the old familiar battlefield of years gone by. It is one which has been significantly transformed by the experience of neo-conservatism in office. The Left needs to begin the difficult process of redrawing its maps.

NOTES

1. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*
2. John L. Palmer and Isabel V. Sawhill, eds., *The Reagan Experiment* (Washington DC 1982), p. 1.
   Even under the Gramm-Rudman legislation which purports to force the government to ultimately eliminate the deficit, the Reagan administration is budgeting for a deficit of $143.6 billion in fiscal 1987, including a projected 12 per cent increase in defence expenditures, 8 per cent above the inflation rate: *Congressional Quarterly* 44:6 (8 February 1986).
   Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables: Budget of the United States Government* (Washington 1986); OECD *Quarterly National Accounts* 3 (1985).
5. *Monthly Labor Review* 107:7 (July 1984) and 109:1 (January 1986).
6. Peter Stibbard, 'Measuring public expenditure', *Economic Trends* (Central Statistics Office) 382 (August 1985).
   I.G. Richardson, 'Employment in the public and private sectors, 1979 to 1985', CSO *Economic Trends* 286 (December 1985), p. 90.
8. Adapted from figures in Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables, op. cit.*
9. Adapted from Table 108 in Stibbard, 'Measuring public expenditure' (these figures are based on the so-called 'planning total definition').
10. Figures adapted from the same sources as in nos. 8 and 9, above. It might be noted as well in this regard, that during a period of overall decline in the percentage of the total employed labour force in government employment, the category of-government employment to show the largest increase was that of 'local authorities social services' which went up 9.3 per cent from 1979 to 1985, while police work increased 6.2 per cent: Richardson, *op. cit.*
11. Figures from same sources as in nos. 7 and 8, above. See Therborn, 'The prospect of labour and the transformation of advanced capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (May/June 1984), pp. 5–38 and 'Classes and states welfare state developments, 1881–1981, *Studies in Political Economy* 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 7–42.
12. Bureau of the Census, *Money, Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States: 1984* (August 1985).
13. Everett Carll Ladd, 'The Reagan phenomenon and public attitudes toward government', in Lester Salamon and Michael Lund, eds., *The Reagan Presidency and the Governing of America* (Washington DC, 1984), pp. 221–249, with comment by Daniel Yankelovich, pp. 250–53; Vicente Navarro, 'The 1980 and 1984 US elections and the New Deal', *Socialist Register 1985/86* (London, 1986); Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, 'The myth of America's turn to the Right', *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1986), pp. 43–53.
14. In the early years of the Cold War, the hysteria of McCarthyism appears to have had a flimsy foundation in public opinion, as opposed to élite opinion: see Reg Whitaker, 'Fighting the Cold War on the home front: America, Britain, Australia and Canada', *Socialist Register 1984* (London, 1984), pp. 25–33.
15. Edsall, 'Republican America', *New York Review of Books* (24 April 1986),

pp. 3–6; see also his ***The New Politics of Inequality*** (NY, 1984).

16. See, for instance Walden Bello, 'Little Reagans': Liberal Democrats re-enlist in the Cold War, ***The Progressive*** (January 1986), pp. 25–7 and Frank Donner, 'Rambo plays the Capitol', ***The Nation*** (2 November 1985), pp. 437–40. Mike Davis, 'The political economy of late imperial America', ***New Left Review*** 143 (1984), p. 13, cites evidence that the South and the West, which had accounted for only 27 per cent of prime military contracts in 1952, controlled 56 per cent in 1976.
18. Statistics quoted in E.P. Thompson, 'Folly's comet' in Thompson, eds., ***Star Wars*** (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 133.
19. ***Congressional Quarterly*** 44:6 (8 February 1986).
20. In an interesting, but overly brief, examination of the relationship between 'Nuclear secrecy v. democracy', ***Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*** (January 1984), Robert Karl Manoff argues that 'the epistemological structure of the nuclear regime is incompatible with the epistemological structure of democracy itself'.
21. For an excellent discussion of this, see Matthew Rothschild and Keenen Peck, 'Star Wars: the final solution', ***The Progressive*** (July 1985), pp. 20–26.
22. Melman, ***The Permanent War Economy American Capitalism in Decline*** (NY, 1985), pp. 20121: 'a full-fledged centrally managed industrial system. . . a concentration of power hitherto unknown in American experience—industrially or politically. Only Soviet-type societies have had comparable centralization of top economic, political and military authority.'
23. It is estimated that there are over six million illegal aliens living in the US; 1,265,000 were apprehended in fiscal year 1985, an increase of 11 per cent over 1984. The vast police operation which operates with little regard for civil liberties (since the objects are not US citizens), has raised demands from the Senate for additional expenditures of over one and one half billion dollars in 1987–88 to finance expansion of the surveillance, apprehension and detention net: 'Controlling illegal entry', ***Congressional Digest*** (March 1986).
24. Scot Powe, 'Espionage, leaks, and the First Amendment', ***Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*** (June/July 1986), pp. 8–10.
25. Walter Karp, 'Liberty under siege: the Reagan administration's taste for autocracy', ***Harper's*** (November 1985), pp. 53--67.
26. Morton H. Halperin, 'Never question the President', ***The Nation*** (29 September 1984), pp. 285–8.
27. William F. Buckley, Jr. and L. Brent Bozell, ***McCarthy and His Enemies*** (Chicago, 1954), pp. 311, 335, 333.
28. Jon Wiener, 'Reed Irvine rides the paper tiger', ***The Nation*** (5 April 1986), pp. 479–82, and Saul Landau, 'Dress rehearsal for a Red scare', pp. 482–4.
29. This phenomenon is not without contradictions. The evangelist Billy Graham now interleaves his fundamentalist appeals with friendly visits to the Soviet bloc countries and pleas for worldwide nuclear disarmament.
30. Navarro, ***op. cit.***, p. 190.
31. Nisbet, 'The conservative renaissance in perspective', ***The Public Interest*** 81 (Fall 1985), p. 138.
32. Bell, 'The revolt against modernity', ***ibid.***, p. 60.
33. Perhaps as a group largely made up of reformed ex-liberals, these men were suspect from the start. A rival journal, made up of less deviationist conservatives including the dreaded Jeane Kirkpatrick, has now made its appearance, entitled, significantly, ***The National Interest.***
34. Congressional Quarterly, ***President Reagan*** (1981), pp. 113–5. Analysis of a Reagan speech in cold print is no easy task. H.L. Mencken described Warren

Harding's Inaugural Address in 1921 as 'an army'of clichés moving over the landscape in search of an idea'. In Reagan's inaugural sixty years later we meet the same army, but it appears to have abandoned the search.

35. The best account is Anthony Barnett's, 'Iron Britannia' special number of the *New Left Review* 134 (1982), later published as a book.

36. The annual volumes of the *Review of Security and the State* (London) are a good general source here.

37. These affairs have been discussed by Mr David Caute in a book which bears the provocative title *The Espionage of the Saints* (London 1986). The Pontingaffair, turning as it did on the question of whether a civil servant had the right to apprise an MP of the fact that a minister was lying in response to his parliamentary question, recalls an old Soviet joke about the man who was given twenty years in the Gulag for calling the Minister of Culture a fool: ten years for slander and ten years for revealing state secrets.

38. MI5, of course, continues its age-old practice of inventing lvans under every dissenter's bed, as wimess the latest stream of accusations from their (Charlie) McCarthy: Chapman Pincher, *The Secret Offensive* (London 1985).

39. A good summary of the attack on local government, prior to the abolition of the GLC, can be found in Colin Leys, *Politics in Britain* (Toronto, 1983), pp. 287–99.

40. Norman Tebbit, 'Back to the old traditional values', *The Guardian Weekly* (24 November 1985).

41. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London 1983); Bob Jessop *et al.*, 'Authoritarian populism, two nations, and Thatcherism', *New Left Review* 147 (1984), pp. 32–60; Hall, 'Authoritarianpopulism: a reply', *ibid.*, 151 (1985), pp. 115–24; and Jessop *et al.*, *ibid.*, 153 (1985), pp. 87–101.

42. Recently Mr Peter Jay, 'In search of the Thatcher factor', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 May 1986) has noted that the speech which Milton Friedman 'has most frequently quoted with approval of any delivered by any politician anywhere' was that of Mr Callaghan to the Labour Party Conference in 1976.

43. Colin Leys, 'Thatcherism and British manufacturing', *New Left Review* 151 (1985), p. 10.

44. George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty (NY*, 1981), p. 67.

45. *Democracy in America* v.2, 2:20. The blessed St. Gilder stands Adam Smith on his head by actually arguing that love and altruism constitute the essence of capitalism (no doubt he also believes in flying saucers). Robert Heilbroner sardonically attributes the new enthusiasm of his fellow (upper middle class) economists for supply-side arguments to simple material self-interest of the better-off. 'To be sure, like all policies, the *ultimate* objective of supply-side economics is said to be the improvement of the condition of everyone. Just the same, I do not think neoconservative economic policies would adduce quite the same fervour, or quite the same dulling of critical sensibilities, if their *immediate* aim were the improvement of the poor and their *ultimate* aim the betteringof the rich: 'Capitalism as Gestalt: a contrast of visions', in Edward Nell, ed., *Free Market Conservatism: a Critique of Theoryhnd Practice* (London, 1984), p. 9.

46. John Saville, 'An open conspiracy: Conservative politics and the miners' strike 1984–5', *Socialist Register 1985/86*, pp. 295–329.

47. Edward Nell, 'Cowboy capitalism: the last round-up', in Nell, *Free Market Conservatism*, p. 234.

48. Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London, 1969), pp. 206, 208.

49. De Brie's report originally appeared in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (April 1986); the English quotation is from a translation in *The Guardian Weekly* (11 May 1986).

50. See, for example, C.D. Shearing and P.C. Stebbing, 'Modem private security: its growth and implications' in M. Tonry and N. Morris, eds., *Crime and Justice—an Annual review of Research*, v. 3 (Chicago, 1981).
51. Jean Mullen *et al.*, *The Privatization of Corrections* (US Department of Justice, 1985).
52. 'Ships passing in a Whitehall fog', *The Guardian Weekly* (16 March 1986).