



● **Hugo Young and John Ross consider the significance of 'Thatcherism Mark 111'.**

the Conservative Party- the shifts in the Tory vote are shown in the graph below. Even if one were (wrongly) to treat the Tory votes of 1931 and 1935 as 'abnormal', then the downward shift over the post war period is still perfectly clear.

These trends are crucial because they factually refute the basis on which *Marxism Today* has rested its analysis of Thatcherism - namely that Thatcher has succeeded in cementing behind her some crucial new social bloc. On the contrary Thatcher's is a party in long term historic decline - which of course does not make any less threatening the damage it unleashes on its path.

The trend of Conservative support becomes still clearer if we go beyond averages to the social processes involved. The first shift is a collapse of the traditional preferential Tory support among women. Until 1955 consistently 8% more women than men voted Conservative. By 1979-83 that relative advantage had declined to an average of 0%.

The second trend is a sharp decline of the Tory vote in certain of its traditional regional, and national, areas of strength. Between 1955 and 1983 the Conservative vote declined by 7% in the 'United Kingdom' as a whole but by 22% in Scotland, 11% in North West England, 11% in the North of England and, by a somewhat different process, its support was totally eliminated in the North of Ireland. The third process has been a collapse of Tory support in the big cities. Between 1955 and 1983 Conservative support fell by 29% in Glasgow, 24% in Liverpool, 20% in Edinburgh, 20% in Manchester, 14% in Sheffield, 12% in Leeds, 12% in Birmingham etc.

These three shifts account for the decline of Conservative support shown in the graph. These processes evidently represent the *break up*, not the consolidation, of the Tories' system of social alliances.

What makes this point important - apart from factually refuting the line of argument of *Marxism Today* - is that it poses an evident major problem for British capitalist politics. As Andrew rightly puts it, Thatcherism is not about 'political ping pong'. It is about fundamental

**JOHN ROSS:
Thatcherism Mark III**

Andrew Gamble's 'This lady's not for turning' is a very welcome publication in *Marxism Today* - because if its analysis is thought through it rejects the entire previous line of the journal. As space is limited we can only concentrate on the most important points.

The June 1983 election confirmed a long term decline of support for

changes which are intended to be irreversible. Thatcher, however, has merely recharged the Tories' batteries in terms of support. She has not been able to arrest the long term fundamental decline. How then can the changes wrought by Thatcherism be safeguarded under conditions of the decline of the Conservative Party itself?

The answer is that a capitalist class rules not by staking all its cards on one government but by exercising its *hegemony*. Within a hegemonic system, which necessarily includes a *system* of political parties, opposition and real struggle is possible. But it must be opposition remaining within acceptable limits - in this case the particular structural limits established by Thatcherism. As regards how this is to be achieved, Andrew sets out the situation almost perfectly - but the 'almost' unfortunately contains the nub of the matter.

Andrew writes: 'If a social market consensus is to be durable, then

either the Labour Party must be brought to accept it, or the Labour Party must never govern again. . . No-one really expects the Labour Party to head down this road, which means that if a social market consensus is to be established the Labour Party must cease to be a serious contender for government office. Otherwise many of the measures of the Thatcher government, however long it lasts, could at some stage be reversed.'

The only error that Andrew makes in this is that his first sentence should end, 'the Labour Party must never govern again *alone*.' Because if Labour could be pushed by capital into accepting that it *would* be allowed into office, provided this were in coalition with a pro-'social market' SDP/Liberal Alliance then of course matters would be splendidly arranged for capital. The *Economist* put the matter with its customary clarity and élan in its issue for the 1983 election. It is important that there should be a believable

and democratic left-of-centre force in parliament towards which by-elections and a future general election can swing. It is desirable that it should be of a sort that can form an effective parliamentary force with right-of-Foot Labour. . . The worse Labour does in this election, and the better the Alliance does, the more possible such a desirable coalition of the Left (and the dismantling of the Labour Party under its present constitution) will become'. More important than stated intentions is that this is a course dictated for capital by the necessities of ensuring that the structural changes of Thatcherism are permanent in a situation of profound long term decline of the Conservative Party.

The alternation of Conservative government with a Labour-Alliance coalition which undoes none of the works of Thatcherism (and with sometimes a Tory-Alliance coalition thrown in for good measure) is a perfect hegemonic system for bourgeois politics. We are sure that no serious capitalist politician would mind if what the *Economist* terms the 'desirable coalition' of 'northern Labour and southern Alliance' were rechristened Eric Hobsbawm's 'anti-Thatcher alliance'.

It is delightfully ironic that *Marxism Today*, the journal which more than any other likes to use the term hegemony, in fact proposes the most corporatist political strategy imaginable. Perhaps Andrew's article will help the necessary rethinking!

