No such thing as society

By Alistair Tice

Margaret Thatcher, in speech notes preserved from 1984, wrote: “Enemy within but heaven to him. Enemy within and against his interests. Inrides. Leaders, Liverpool and some local authorities - just as dangerous, in a way more difficult to fight.” The enemy within were the Argentinians, digitiically defeated by Thatcher in the 1982 Falklands War, “no enemy within” Liverpools city council. Under the influence of Militant, the Socialist, the government in 1984. But he approves of the 'hard left' Labour councils' capitulation, which left Liverpool isolated. Liverpools council was later 'stabbed in the back' by Labour leader Neil Kinnock in his infamous 1985 conference speech. McSmith does not even mention Liverpool council's achievement. This socialist council mobilised mass popular support; increased its vote in elections, kept its manifesto promises, built 5,000 council houses and created 2,000 council jobs. Can't pay, won't pay WORKS, MCSMITH says that Thatcher's final decimation was not due to the mass anti-poll tax movement but Tory splits over Europe. Like they would have dumped her if she hadn't again become the most unpopular prime minister even; more unpopular than in 1981! Militant, who provided the political and organisational leadership to the 18 million poll tax non-payers, does not even get a mention in the two pages (out of 300) devoted to the biggest movement of civil disobedience in British history, except that Militant MP Terry Fields was jailed for two months for non-payment. McSmith underplays Militant's role, but he is spot on with the Labour Party, which began the 80s being pushed further left. But he says: "by 1989, it took a specialist to tell you where Conservative and Labour policies diverged." Confirming the Socialist Party's analysis of the qualitative change in the Labour Party, McSmith says that "at some point in the 1980s or early 1990s the Labour Party ceased to be socialist." Thatcher was later to claim "Tony Blair" as his greatest legacy. From that viewpoint, Thatcher did "roll back the frontiers of socialism" but McSmith fails short of accepting the neoliberal myth of "the end of history." And with good reason, as he must have written this book during capitalism's worst crisis for 80 years and the re-emergence of class struggle and socialist ideas.

For the older generation this book reminds us of what we went through, for a young reader it's a taste of what's to come. But read The Rise of Militant (available from Socialist Books) straight after to get the politics right.