

# Economic crisis fed Tories' election loss

by Mary Burdman

Claims based on opinion polls in Britain over the past months that Prime Minister John Major is the most popular British leader since Winston Churchill, should be taken with a huge grain of salt, as the March 7 "by-election" (mid-term election) in the district of Ribble Valley showed. Major's Conservative Party took its biggest electoral defeat in the past decade, demonstrating that even the purging of Margaret Thatcher was not sufficient to appease British voters after a decade of Thatcherite economics. Major and his party are attempting to dismiss the election results as simply a by-election rebellion, but they should take warning.

Long-suffering British voters kicked Winston Churchill out of office in 1945, even before the end of World War II, despite Churchill's nominal popularity. The lesson, U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche pointed out recently, is one that George Bush, as well as John Major, should take seriously. U.S. conservatives were reportedly outraged at the Tories for unceremoniously dumping Mrs. Thatcher on America's Thanksgiving Day 1990, without a national election.

## One of the 'safest' seats

Ribble Valley was considered one of the "ten safest" election districts for the Tories, and the resounding defeat there is the latest in a string of disastrous by-election setbacks the Tories have suffered in the past months. What this shows—and here again, George Bush should take heed—is that the so-called "Falklands effect" of the Gulf war, the attempt to bolster Tory popularity through a "nice little colonial war," is very thin. Even the docile, and generally pro-Gulf war British population, cannot tolerate the calamitous effects of Thatcherite "free market" economics, the Thatcher poll tax measure, and the decline of British infrastructure.

For example, although London propagandists like to downplay the matter, the fact is that several observers in the U.K. have drawn attention to the fact that British pilots can fly the most sophisticated and destructive modern weaponry against a Third World country, yet in Britain itself, the railways collapsed last month because they were not able to cope with snow that was of a texture too fine for the current locomotive model.

Mrs. Thatcher's poll tax, a medieval head tax that is costing Britain's poorer citizens hundreds of extra pounds a

year, is the most obvious target of the voters, but everything from skyrocketing interest rates and mortgages to collapsing health care is hitting the British population. Perhaps the most obvious effect of the depression is "Calcutta on the Thames"—beggars and homeless young people are now as common in London as in New York City.

The best advantage the Tories have, is the disastrous condition of the opposition Labour Party, although even that may not be enough in the future. It was the third party, the Liberal Democrats, which won so resoundingly in Ribble Valley, their second win against the Tories since the party was founded two years ago. Ribble Valley, which the Tories won very big in the last election, voted strongly for the Liberal Democrats this time, despite the supposed popularity of Prime Minister Major and the ousting of Mrs. Thatcher. The Liberal Democrats won 22,400 votes and the Tories only 17,700, with the Labour Party far behind.

The vote, and the fact that she is now "safe in the bosom of her American admirers," as the London *Guardian* observed March 9, led Thatcher to vent her spleen against the "frightened" Tories who abandoned her last year. The British population should beware: Could Maggie be trying to muster an American force to punish them as she did Saddam Hussein?

## Attacks on the monarchy

The best indication of the mood in Britain, is the growing public disaffection with the monarchy. The Queen and her family have long been more admired in the United States than in Britain, where letters to the editor regularly appear in the tabloid press denouncing the worthlessness and greed especially of the younger generation of the Windsors. But now even Her Majesty is in for it.

Royal indifference to the war—with the exception of the Queen's unprecedented speech on Feb. 23 announcing the beginning of the ground offensive, provoked even the establishment *Sunday Times* to publish an attack on the royal family's callousness.

But more fundamental is the economic crisis. A report in *Harpers* magazine that the Queen earns £2 million a day on her vast investments, and of course pays no income tax at all, raised such an outcry that she had to issue a denial Feb. 20 claiming she had no property overseas and estimations of her wealth are "wild speculation." In a poll following the revelations, 80% of Britons said they think the Queen should pay taxes and over 50% now think the monarchy will not survive the next generation.

Possibly taking her cue from Thatcher, who seems to be much more popular in the United States than in Britain, the Queen is expected to visit Washington, Texas, and Kentucky in May, shortly after she celebrates her 65th birthday on April 21, according to the public relations package accompanying a new biography of her, *Sovereign, Elizabeth II and the Windsor Dynasty*, by Roland Flamini.