



ARMS TRADE

Let me say how warmly I agree with Grahame Thompson's point that the armaments industry is socially useful (February issue). Many examples can be given to attest to this fact:

1. It provides the army with weapons without which there could be no firing practice.
2. It is one of the most important outlets of state revenue, which would otherwise be lying around in great heaps, gathering dust.
3. It provides an alternative to butter.
4. It ensures that Britons never shall be slaves (in a formal sense).
5. When weapons become obsolete, they can be placed in the Imperial War Museum, to amuse the unemployed in their spare time.
6. It is a potential source of cheap and efficient heating.
7. Without it, the recent National War of Liberation would have been impossible.
8. It preserves an important meaning of the word 'arms' without which nobody would have the slightest idea of what Hamlet was talking about in his famous soliloquy. There are approximately 137 other examples, but since quality has already turned into quantity I shall desist from naming them.

Peter Bendall, Cambridge

POPULAR VIBES

Surprisingly, Hobsbawm makes little attempt to analyse patriotism beyond 'popular vibes', 'genuine feeling', 'instinctive reaction' — as if patriotism were inborn.

This ignores the flag-wagging, adulation of the 'royals', Services propaganda and (even today) history books through which Britain's superiority becomes enshrined as 'common-sense', with macho excitement as a bonus.

Historically EP Thompson has shown that the upsurge of patriotism in the early 19th century was related to the (partly illusory) concept of the 'freeborn Englishman', heightened by the Napoleonic threat. Later, with expanding empire, the idea of 'top nation' came to preponderate — 'God . . . make thee mightier yet' rather than 'Britons never shall be slaves'.

The Left cannot 'recapture' patriotism as such. The French could, because the *couleurs de France* are Republican colours. The Union Jack is too tainted by oppression. Nor can we emulate the adrenalin-boosting appeal of dishy princes in deeds of daring-do, victory parades etc. But the 'free-born Englishman' concept is still there to be activated — notably against the EEC and against US control of our defences — albeit less stirring stuff. But let us take heart. EP Thompson describes how the anti-Jacobin 'Church and King' mob faded until a commentator could note 'the mob dislikes all but a thorough Reformer'. It could happen again.

Dorothy Friedmann, London

SIERRA AND THE BOILERHOUSE

I was very interested to read the article about the Ford Sierra and The Boilerhouse (*Marxism Today* January 1983 pp.35-38) and would not want to quibble with many of the views expressed, but I would nevertheless like it to be on record that—whether or not the actual effect of the exhibition amounted to 'advertising'—the entire venture was conceived and executed by us and not by Ford.

In fact, there were senior personnel at Ford who were unsympathetic to the idea of an exhibition about their new car; so far from being beneficial to the company, some people argued that the exhibition could be potentially damaging in that it took maintenance of the corporate image out of the hands of the professionals who are paid to tune the public's awareness of the company's character.

I am much too close to be able to judge the perceived effect of the exhibition, but if it appeared to promote Ford then we made a mistake. I make no excuses: I think Ford's products are exemplary, but our intention was not to advertise nor to promote. Instead, we wanted to analyse in detail an important part of the process which brings everyday objects to the consumer.

I am surprised that the novelty of this did not interest your correspondent more.

*Stephen Bayley
(Director, Boilerhouse Project,
Victoria and Albert Museum)*

REGIONALISM

I was very surprised that Mike Rustin's otherwise excellent article 'Power to the Provinces!' (January 1983) completely omitted to include any analysis of the Liberal position. The Liberal Party has been the most aggressively regionalist of the parties for many years.

The Liberal Manifesto of 1964 committed the party to elected regional authorities and in 1967 the party presented detailed—and costed—evidence to the Redcliffe-Maud Commission on Local Government on the need for, and practicability of regional government.

The Liberal Party has continued to argue the regional case, in particular stressing that the metropolitan counties are too big to be local authorities but too small to be strategic bodies. It is, for instance, a nonsense that because of the present top tier strait jacket, Bristol (population 400,000) cannot be an education or a social services authority whereas Calderdale (population 200,000) can be.

If we are ever to regain democratic accountability for the health service, for water and sewerage, and for regional economic planning it can only come through creating elected regional authorities, abolishing the county councils and re-allocating functions.

Cllr Michael Meadowcroft, Leeds

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Dave Cook's question (February issue) on proportional representation and the election and sustenance of a left wing government in the face of extra-parliamentary opposition is important.

Socialists like Peter Hain argue that government in this position could survive if it had the support of the electorate. This would be obtained at an election by presenting a clear socialist manifesto. But under the present electoral system a Labour government would not have majority support.

Peter Hain's answer therefore is that a radical Labour government might not need the 'requisite electoral majority'. Once in office it would build the socialist conscience that would lead to an electoral majority. But would not this be mere 'tinkering with' and not 'tackling Britain's crisis'. Proportional representation will bring about the realignment of political allegiances at grassroots level that Peter Hain believes a Labour government could do.

STV is not perfect, it can distort results. This less obvious defect was overlooked by Dave Cook. Since second preferences will vary from voter to voter the choice of those selected for redistribution is crucial. The question to be answered is *who* decides *which* votes are in the excess over the quota.

Sean McGuinness, Hayes

We welcome your letters for the April issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday, 4 March.