

Letters

NONSENSE

I read Eric Heffer's article in *Marxism Today*, December 1983, with delight. It was high time that the nonsense being peddled by Communist Party theorists, like Hobsbawm and Rowthorn was exposed.

Hobsbawm's passion for a pact with the SDP would mean the end of any possibility of moving forward to a socialist society, since the SDP is no more left than the Tory Party and the case outlined by Bob Rowthorn before the general election, attacking Labour's policy for withdrawal from the EEC and urging continued membership, would have only added to our difficulties. Eric Heffer was right, of course, in drawing attention to the fact that neither Hobsbawm nor Rowthorn are actually in the Labour Party and, therefore, are perhaps not quite the best advocates in the world so far as the future of our Party is concerned.

Nonetheless, I believe it is important that a debate should take place similar to the one in your magazine and there is no doubt that Communists have a contribution to make to that debate. Happily, the views of Hobsbawm on an alliance with the SDP and Rowthorn on support for the

Common Market are not shared by the Communist Party itself — are they?

Alf Lomas MEP

FACING REALITY

When the chairperson of the Labour Party contributes to the highly successful Communist journal *Marxism Today*, it surely suggests that the CP is far from being in the same situation as the ILP was in its decline. Eric Heffer will have to do better than that if he is to improve on his superficial and inconsistent reasoning.

Eric makes many references to Hobsbawm and Rowthorn, but only one passing mention of Priscott, in his attempt to confuse the concept of united mass struggle on issues, with that of an electoral arrangement with the Liberals and the SDP. In consequence his article concentrates on the electoral support and prospects for Labour and totally leaves out of the picture the mass of the people in action, before during and after elections.

In my experience in Bedfordshire, good mass actions on rents, schools, hospitals etc, have been thwarted, stifled and come to grief when they have been constrained to the short term interests of one political

party. The long term gains that might have accrued were thus discarded at the outset. A highly successful pensioner movement on the other hand has had more positive results, raising morale, isolating the Tories, building bridges that help people to move from one political position to another. Gains on the County Council first by Labour and recently by the Liberals give us a 50-50 position between the Tories and the anti-Tories. Does Eric suggest that we should never take the facts into account and that no arrangements should ever be made to completely break Tory control. Nothing should be ruled out that assists the day to day struggle.

Tom Mitchell, Luton

LABOUR'S FINANCES

In his article on 'Labour's Lost Millions' in the November issue of *Marxism Today* Robin Cook stated: 'the patent inability of our central headquarters to manage the election campaign is revealing about the priorities of those who had been in charge over the preceding years. Our dismal impact on the media was prefigured by our failure to maintain a full-time broadcasting officer in the run up to the election'.

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London

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Letters

When considering this criticism your readers should bear in mind the circumstances in which the number of staff employed by the Labour Party has been reduced. By early summer 1982 it was clear that, unless emergency measures were taken, the Party would incur by the end of the calendar year an overdraft substantially higher than the level authorised by the bank. There were no reserves. The Party was also under an obligation to implement collective agreements negotiated with unions for back-pay. At 31 Dec 1981 unpaid back pay amounted to more than £400,000. This was, in reality, a measure of the earlier low pay of Labour Party staff. The emergency measures, taken during the summer of 1982 and subsequently have included a pay freeze in response to 1982 claims, pay increases in 1983 lower than the national average, staff cuts, etc.

The reduction in staff has been secured almost entirely by 'natural wastage'. Every vacancy that has arisen has been considered collectively by the heads of departments. We have spent many hours discussing staff numbers and negotiating with union representatives. It was in this context that we decided not to replace the broadcasting officer when the former holder of this office sought early retirement.

Even now we are still in real difficulty. In 1982, despite the special measures, our operating deficit for the year was £ 171,000. We are still in overdraft. We have still to meet certain back payments for salaries. There will be no increase in trade union affiliation fees in 1984. The possibility of new legislation on trade union political funds poses a new and grave threat.

I don't wish to detract from the many constructive points that Robin Cook and Michael Meacher make, but it is right I think to put them within the context I have set out above. It is of overriding importance that we should work together for Labour's recovery.

Jim Mortimer
General Secretary, Labour Party

CLINGING TO THE OLD

Tricia Davis' article in October *Marxism Today* set out to depict some of the advances, setbacks and problems facing women in Britain today. Yet Vic Mortimer tells us the old, old story that the important thing is to portray men and women in unity fighting against capitalism'.

As one who for many years, from 1949, loyally tried to 'put political struggle before my sex', until I found this only reinforced

men's paternalistic attitudes, I take exception to Vic Mortimer's belittling of the role which the women's movement plays in the fight for socialism and the liberation of the human race. One of the main obstacles in reaching that goal is the attitude of men who cling to the old and wish the new would go away.

Patricia Mitchell, Luton

LONDON POLITICS

Michael Ward's article on the GLC contains a number of interesting points. However, there are significant weaknesses.

Little attention is paid to the labour movement outside the Labour Party. The campaigning of progressive sections of the London trade union movement to win positive change in the London Labour Party receives no attention. Yet, without this input by London trade unionists, many of them Communist Party members, the climate of ideas and progressive base which created the conditions for the emergence of a progressive GLC would never have materialised.

Michael Ward makes no mention of the Communist Party. This omission is connected to the downplaying of the role of popular movements in general and the labour movement in particular. Discussion of the progressive movements for education, to improve London Transport, to develop campaigns for popular involvement, left and democratic policies and action in London require reference to the role of the Communist Party. Communists have played leading, often essential, roles in all these campaigns. Their work has been informed by the Party's strategy of working for a broad, democratic alliance.

Now, London Communists are deeply involved in the practical campaigning to save the GLC. Our view is that the Tory threats to the GLC can be defeated by Londoners taking mass, united action. A critical test will be the success of the Day of Strike and Demonstrative Action on 24 January in opposition to the Tory plans for London's services. We are sure London readers of *Marxism Today* will be doing all they can to make this Day of Action a day of victory for Londoners and defeat for the Tory Government.

Dave Green and Ivan Beavis, London

BEAUJOLAIS BOLSHEVIKS

Perhaps it is time to change the name of your magazine. How about 'Theoretical and discussion journal of the Beaujolais Bolsheviks, Muscadet Marxists and Ries-

ling Revolutionaries'? Why bother to raise the political level of party members when you can raise their alcohol level? I look forward to future articles on 'Hegel and Habitat'; 'the dialectical relationship between Swedish pine kitchen suites and the colonial revolution'; and 'why Gramsci wore Gucci'.

Steve Davies (hic), Cardiff

We welcome your letters for the February issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday 6 January.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Brian Armstrong is an expert on African affairs.

Nick Raynsford is the director of SHAC (Shelter Housing Aid Centre).

Harry Fletcher is Assistant General Secretary of the National Association of Probation Officers.

Roger Owen teaches at the Middle East Centre, St Anthony's College, Oxford.

Raymond Williams is Professor of Drama at Cambridge University and author of *Orwell*, to be republished in February 1984.

Stuart Hall is Professor of Sociology at the Open University and co-editor of *The Politics of Thatcherism*.

David Edgar is a playwright whose recent play *Maydays* will resume at the Barbican in February.

For participants in the round table see p31.

Melvyn Bragg is a broadcaster and novelist.

Micheline Wandor is a playwright, poet and writer.

Tony del Renzio is an art historian and critic.

Karl Dallas was the first folk correspondent of *Melody Maker*, and is a freelance journalist.

John Cox is a member of the Communist Party Executive Committee.

Nick Kimberley is a bookseller and works for *City Limits*.

Des Walshe and Bert Munro are members of the EEUPTU and the CP.

Anna Coote is a television journalist.