

CONTEMPLATIVE AFTERNOONS

I was incensed to read Ron Collins' letter on fishing in *Marxism Today* (March issue). He defends his sport on the ground of its 'impeccable working class credentials'. Surely this is no case for practising wanton cruelty on a national scale. If it were, then surely we could make a similar case for bullfighting — a most gruesome ritual which is kept going largely through the patronage of large numbers of British tourists of 'impeccable working class credentials'. Perhaps the practice of bear-baiting could once have been justified on the same grounds? I think not.

Mr Collins wonders if it is 'too much to hope that the Broad Left will speak with a united voice and defend the contemplative afternoons of so many working people'. Well, the answer is yes, the Broad Left will speak with a united voice, and if you would care to read what Marx had to say about *unnecessary* cruelty to animals, you will see that they will one day speak to defend the contemplative afternoons of *all* living creatures, and for them to live their lives in peace along with the rest of mankind.

Paul Watts, Bootle

CND AND THE WORKING CLASS

According to Richard Jewison (March MT) CND demonstrations and meetings are largely middle class.

In my CND group, the most active members include workers in the post office, British Telecom, health service, local government and railways — hardly middle class by any definition. My limited experience of CND at regional and national level leads me to believe that this is not untypical.

Richard Jewison seems to have fallen into the trap of thinking that because the *organised trade union movement* is not active enough in support of CND and its aims, that means that individual members of trade unions are not playing a part in the movement. The problem is to knock down the wall that exists in the minds of many between their work as trade unionists and as peace activists.

Only when these rank and file trade unionists start to campaign for their unions to come in decisively behind the aims and activities of CND at both national and local level, will we move beyond the passing of resolutions at trade union

conferences (valuable as this is it is only part of what is needed), and bring the full force of the organised working class movement into action against Cruise and Trident missiles and for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Margaret Woddis, London

TRADE UNIONS AND YTS

Dan Finn's article about the YTS ('Britain's Misspent Youth', *Marxism Today*, February 1984) should be a spur to us in the trade union movement to consider how the scheme can be used to our best advantage. There can be no doubt that the general trade union response to the YTS has either been docile acceptance or outright rejection. An alternative approach needs consideration. It is all very well to talk of the TUC policy to negotiate improvements, to recruit trainees and to monitor the impact, but this fails to recognise a new opportunity that has opened up to the labour movement. This is the direct access to hundreds of thousands of young people when we can put across our ideas and listen to theirs.

It is stated in the article that the YOP (and I expect the same for the YTS) found many of its placements in small, low-paying, non-unionised workplaces — the very areas in which we find it difficult to have influence. With official TUC involvement with the MSC we can and must demand an input in the off the job training courses — and not just during the induction courses. This is a challenge to the trade unions, and for all the excuses we hear it is one we must accept and therefore develop the skills to make ourselves understood by these young men and women.

In the past few months I have spoken in my capacity as an official of the shop workers' trade union to a few hundred young people on the scheme, and I have found that they had a very clear understanding that the YTS is a very second-rate alternative to a job. Indeed the more the MSC gild their lily the clearer the young people see that Thatcher's promises sent to them via the Commission are bankrupt — experience is a good teacher.

In urging the participation of trade unionist in the YTS I am not dismissing the dangers which exist, particularly its use to depress wage rates. The YTS is an active policy to reduce wage rates. Considering it along with the Young Workers Scheme, which subsidises low-paying employers, and Thatcher's

plan to take young people out of the scope of the Wages Councils it may become another means toward the pauperisation of the working class. It is our job to stop this but at the same time to use the advantages which exist.

B. Rowlands, Ely

QUESTION MARKS

'Labour: Rump or Rebirth?' (*Marxism Today*, March issue) attracts question marks in the margin as did 'Labour's Lost Millions'. The biggest appears next to that part where Eric Hobsbawm tells of a golden age, the first half of this century, 'when we could rely on a growing number of workers accepting the equation: class = support of the workers' party=for socialism'. But today, he continues, 'we can't rely on the automatic growth of class consciousness with these implications'. Could anyone ever do so?

Electoral support for the Labour Party in the period does not support the concept. Using the equation as a guide, the fall in the Labour's vote by 2 million in 1931 is inexplicable. The slight recovery of 1935, deep in the heart of the depression when class consciousness should presumably have heightened and brought the implications into full operation, poses another difficulty — why wasn't it better?

There never is automaticity. It always takes hard work to free workers' minds of ruling class ideas. It helps when those aiming to do so work correctly. The overall question asked by so many after the first article—has Hobsbawm charted the proper course for modern circumstances?— remains unanswered.

Peter Pink, Uxbridge

NOTE

Over 600 people attended the *Marxism Today*/Labour Co-ordinating Committee debate, on 'Labour's Lost Millions' at Friends House, London on 7 February. Eric Hobsbawm, Robin Cook, Harriet Harman and Beatrix Campbell introduced the meeting with their contributions, and this was followed by a discussion. The audience was predominantly young, including many Labour Party constituency activists and Communist Party members.

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

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Entries for the May Update should be sent as soon as possible (latest date Friday 6 April) to Maria Loftus, Marxism Today 16 St John Street London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 or 01-607 3344 (evenings).