

● Tariq Ali returns to fundamentals,

● Henry Neuberger finds merit in established economic models.

TARIQ ALI Politics and pyramids

I would like to reply to Beatrix Campbell's demagogic attack on my interview book with Ken Livingstone, *Who's Afraid of Margaret Thatcher?*

She is made uneasy by Ken Livingstone's concept of an alliance of the dispossessed, or as he puts it in the book, 'a coalition which includes skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed, women and black people as well as the sexually oppressed minorities.' She would prefer a radical alliance based on the rejection or exclusion

of any class definition. She then seizes on this political difference to caricature and amalgamate all who refuse to accept her rejection of class politics. Can she really suppose that I am in league with the white male power holders in the labour movement, or that Kinnock feels 'wonderful' about the support for Benn, Scargill and Livingstone in the wider movement?

She only forestalls a sense of the ludicrous about all this by attributing 'tawdry elitism' and 'fundamentalism' to her opponents and denying the capacity for transformation through struggle in the labour movement. Has not the miners' strike shown her the mistake she made in her book, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, where she

portrays the NUM as incapable of rising above economism and male chauvinism? And in the very week her article appeared the women machinists at Fords, many of them black, were also belying her pessimism concerning the inherent limitation of the labour movement - 'the men's movement' as she insists on calling it - by leading a vital struggle for equal pay, and obliging their male union leaders to choose whether or not to support them.

The attack on fundamentalist elitism is demagogic because even the most radical libertarian has to try to be more enlightened, active and organised than the mass of citizens. The only way to avoid this charge would be to sink into complete passivity and agnosticism. The vital point is whether the activist has a basic and informed commitment to socialist democracy and popular sovereignty. Mandel, whose pamphlet on Leninism Campbell distorts so wilfully, makes it quite clear that the revolutionary vanguard must learn from mass resistance to capitalism and must encourage the building of genuinely democratic institutions of proletarian power.

In Mandel's schema the 'revolutionary nuclei' are actually on the bottom and the masses on the top - the 'pyramid' to which Campbell refers is actually upside down and illustrates the impact of class action on consciousness. These days Leninist organisation is not fashionable in many areas of the Left and no doubt Campbell's ignorant jibes about revolutionary 'schooling' will find a receptive audience. Yet these supposedly elitist Leninist organisations, whatever their imperfections, have been real schools for their working class membership, allowing them to develop themselves as organisers, speakers, writers and leaders, to become, in fact, working class, socialist intellectuals.

As an alternative to Leninism and the labour movement Campbell recommends the popular planning projects and commit-



tees of the GLC. She declares that the women's committees have done more for millions of women in London than those she calls the 'Three Musketeers' - one of whom is Livingstone - and people like Mandel who support them. This is wrong not simply because she fails to acknowledge the political battles which made the GLC possible - the 'boring' struggle of the new Labour Left. It is also wrong because the 'new politics' of giving money to autonomous groups, if divorced from a wider anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-sexist project, would soon resemble the rather familiar 'old politics' of clientelism as practised by any bourgeois politician in the United States or Italy.

Of course, the GLC is right to fund women's groups, black groups, gay groups and workers' co-ops. But it would be truly elitist to suppose that this is the only way to

mobilise or to believe that such projects can be long sustained without class politics and general socialist advance. Such funding is bound to be very limited while capitalist governments remain in power, and will reach only a minority.

No doubt all the above will seem the sheerest fundamentalism to Campbell. Anyone seriously opposed to capitalism, it appears, is a fundamentalist and must be vigorously denounced. The fact that Livingstone is prepared actually to talk to 'fundamentalists' is cause for deep worry and suggests to Campbell that he is a crypto-fundamentalist himself.

Campbell finds the new Labour Left and its struggle 'boring' and feels that the interviews reveal a 'promiscuous alliance' between myself and Livingstone. She fears that the Labour Party, under the influence of Livingstone, Benn and Scargill may be

about to become a fundamentalist party, and that this will be a betrayal of the cultural revolution on the Left in the last decade. Evidently she has failed to register that, to differing degrees, the 'Three Musketeers' have been influenced by the new movements for social emancipation - but without losing their commitment to the politics of socialism and class struggle. No doubt this progress is uneven but let us salute the fact that the NUM, alone of the major unions, actually supported the demands of women, blacks and gays at the latest Labour Party conference.

While I disagree with Bea Campbell's politics I remain a great admirer of her talents as a journalist and writer. I look forward to the day when these talents, themselves nourished by work for the labour movement, are used to promote the cause of all the exploited and oppressed.