

Letters

FUNDING OBSESSION

Why should those trade union members - in a majority or a minority - who have no current desire to support the Labour party, vote to establish a political fund which, in electoral terms, would be used in support of that party alone?

Is there not a better logic in arguing, accurately, that the threat to the quality of life of most union members is so fierce that abandoning exclusive support for Labour and thereby making it possible to give financial aid to other parties, if members so wish, would make a ballot victory for the establishment of a political fund in every union far more likely?

Labour's jealous obsession with the need to secure the whole loaf may well result in it getting no bread, to the detriment of trade unionists generally.

Michael Meadowcroft MP, House of Commons

FUNDAMENTALS

We were glad to see you turning your attention to the big business of creating fashion, in your interview with Jeff Banks of the Warehouse

[MT November] but very disappointed with the absence of any examination of what fashion is, how it influences us, and why it earns Jeff Banks such a lot of money.

Maybe some of Jeff Banks' Warehouse designs are viewed as revolutionary within the fashion world, but to get a picture of any depth, you need to stand back from that world and examine the image-creating promises which keep the fashion industry thriving, and keep women (us) anxiously observant of what it's doing. If Jeff Banks makes money out of selling clothes to women, he is undoubtedly conscious of these promises; and of the converse side too: the threat of losing out socially and sexually if our vigilant observation of fashion is too relaxed. Some questioning on these fundamentals would have been appropriate, since the interview appeared in *Marxism Today* and not *Vogue* magazine.

Terry Vermeulen,
Women's Media Action

PASSING COMMENT

Kinnock states [MTOctober]: 'Mrs Thatcher is irrational. Public enterprise is the guy with the black hat on

and private enterprise is the guy with the white hat on'. It seems that for the Labour Party leadership black is definitely *not* beautiful.

Dorothy Grey, Enfield, Middlesex.

BORING DIRGE

The criticisms of Simon Lockwood's Costello article [MT August] seem to hinge on two premises: why bother to criticise pop music when its sole function is to provide escapist fun; and in any case the artists are doing their best so leave them be!

In the first place there seems to be a contradiction inherent in these two positions; if it is only pop music, there is surely no way that a pop artist, in this case Elvis Costello, could become a hero figure of the Left.

To ignore pop music and its political implications leads us straight into the trap of thinking that politics is about Parties and Bad News, fit only for the humourless minority, whilst the sensible majority pursue their happy and fun-filled lives.

It is precisely *because* Costello is so revered on the left and has written some (excellent) overtly political

songs that he is a worthy subject of criticism.

Dave Slater's assumption that 'socialist' music will necessarily be a boring dirge is countered by the wealth of exciting entertaining 'socialist' acts around today - John Cooper-Clarke, Popomatics, See You In Vegas, Redskins, Everythink But The Girl, Wyatt to name but a few.

Mary Dyson,
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

COSMIX-UP

I have recently returned to Britain after a long time abroad and resumed my reading of the *Morning Star* and *Marxism Today*. Well, you can imagine my amazement when I learnt that Elvis Costello, the pop singer, had been appointed as the *Star's* industrial correspondent. This comes as no surprise to me because, unlike some, I still think that the base and superstructure are not so autonomous and that there is some kind of dialectical relation between them. Anyway, with Elvis working for the *Star*, no one can accuse that paper of being guilty of living in the world of past dogmas.

Which brings me to the savage

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Letters

attack, nay, hatchet job, on poor Elvis [MT August]. I am sure that most of us realise, unlike Lockwood, that with all the goodwill in the world, some lose touch with their audience and with the times. Only recently have I myself discovered the government's new approach to industrial relations. I mean, who would have thought that horses could actually be used to help us get to work? Anyway, as Dave Slater reminds us, the pop world is a difficult enough place and it cannot come as such a big shock to realise that the workplace has spilled on to the streets. Which is why it is necessary not to ignore the class struggle but to widen the concept of class in such a way as to help us to successfully intervene in the class struggle. Rock and roll is no longer enough, Elvis. We have to improve our songs.

Stuart Weare, Watford

IMPRESSIONISM

Someone must have been pulling Paul Marshall's leg [MT December]. Anyone who knows anything about Welsh trade union history knows that 'Scotch Cattle' is not an epithet for Scottish blacklegs. It was the name taken by an illegal organisation of militant trade unionists devoted to making life miserable for blacklegs.

I lived nearly ten years in the Rhondda and never discovered the unerasable hatred of the English that Paul Marshall speaks of. The passions that may still be stirred by memories of 1910 are of a class political character; not purely nationalistic.

But even apart from these factual criticisms, I don't personally feel that articles of this kind have a place in *Marxism Today*. The problem of getting Paul Marshall's 'Little Britain' to recognise what the miners' strike really means for them requires serious analytical treatment, not superficial journalistic impressionism.

Dave Priscott, Leeds.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Marxism Today, and all who took part in the organisation of Left Alive, deserve the warmest congratulations on the outstanding success of the weekend. The consistently high level of the discussions together with the intensity of concentration and involvement by those attending made it for me by far the most striking event of this kind since the war. Those attending seemed mostly young (by my standards) - between the early twenties and early forties, though there were of course many older than that; but Left Alive clearly appealed to a very broad range of young people across the political spectrum on the left.

One aspect that deeply impressed me was the broad range of those taking part as speakers in the various sessions. Alongside Communist Party speakers and chairpersons were very many well-known figures such as Raymond Williams, Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn. The tone and character of the discussions were warmly cooperative and friendly in a common concern to identify problems and search for their solution. Although the session that I was involved in ('Breaking School Rules') was small compared to some, the discussion again was deeply serious and positive, involving some well-known Labour figures as well as Communists and others. Further, the organisation (with the possible exception of the creche) seemed to operate without a hitch, while the facilities at the City University fitted the Conference requirements splendidly.

I believe that the extraordinary success of Left Alive opens up quite new possibilities for the future.

Brian Simon, Leicester

LEFT ALIVE: ONE VIEW. . .

I write to thank all those involved in the organisation of Left Alive. It was — from the visitor's point of view — an extremely interesting week-end, full of discussion of high quality and very purposeful and important. It was also a very successful shop

window for the CP. The only criticism I would raise is that it was perhaps a pity that the 'Marxism For Beginners' session did not take place, and I believe it would be worthwhile attempting on future occasions.

Rupert Simon, Somerset.

. . . AND ANOTHER

Before everybody gets too excited about Left Alive and its success, I'd like to make a couple of critical points about it.

Firstly, I felt that the fact that you were in effect only able to go to one session per half-day only served to reinforce the traditional priorities of the Left. Despite the many potentially interesting and controversial sessions on offer, everybody understandably crowded those with the big-name speakers.

Surely a wider audience should have been aimed for than the City Limits/ New Statesman / Guardian readership, many of whom will go to such events year in year out without ever getting round to doing anything. And do we really need such clever-clever little titles?

Left Alive? It left me feeling politically dead depressed.

John Crossland, London.

LEFT LAMENT

I've had another response to the Left Alive event - it's been in the air ever since:

Such a lot of concern on how to reach the masses on how to convince the working class to join their struggle.

Such an unconvincing concern it seems to me, to discuss and debate this dilemma, then to leave the conference chamber all furrowed over a solution and leave behind our intention, squashed juice cartons screwed up chocolate wrappers,

for guests who to clean up.

Leanne Radokovich, London

We welcome your letters for the February issue. They should be no longer than 250 words and arrive at the office not later than 11 January. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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