

# Letters

## POLL PREJUDICE

Without taking anything away from the excellent *British Social Attitude Survey* conducted by Roger Jowell and Colin Airey of SCPR, I must say that Gregor McLennan (*MT* December) exposes his naivety about what attitude research is all about.

He says this 'is the first attempt since Mass Observation studies to sift through sampled responses on, not just political and economic policy, but views about class, race and gender'. He goes on to explain that 'since it is not an electoral poll, there is no predictive or self-fulfilling element to cast doubt on'. Being responsible for the opinion poll which predicted the last election precisely to the decimal point, and having been, on average, half of one percent away from the share of the vote for all the parties in the 1979 election and having been spot on in the EEC Referendum, I wonder why Mr McLennan seems to think there is anything upon which to cast doubt.

Every survey we do analyses age, sex, social class, trade union membership, region of the country, educational attainment, telephone ownership, etc, etc. If McLennan had ever looked at the outpourings of one of the major polling organisations for more than two minutes or thought about it for one, he would be aware of what we do rather than his own prejudices.

Opinion research has a great deal to offer to the dialogue that is going on today about the future direction of British socialism. Heretofore *Marxism Today* has made a substantial contribution to raising the level of this debate. If future authors can start from a more knowledgeable platform than Mr McLennan, it would be a salutary step in the right direction.

Robert M Worcester, *MORI*.

## BAND-AID

May I offer a small correction to the article about famine (*MT* January). The World Development Movement has not itself raised a penny for relief or development work in Ethiopia or anywhere else in the Third World. While not opposing the work of voluntary agencies that do, WDM's particular contribution is to educate and campaign for political change in Britain. Even under the Tories more than ten times as much is spent by the Government on aid as has been raised by public appeals.

We want to see that £1,000 million a year devoted to helping poor people and not diverted to subsidise British companies, doled out to 'friendly' regimes such as Turkey or wasted on the Falklands/Malvinas. Why should British taxpayers have

to finance the Tory aid programme and give to Oxfam as well?

In my view the Left's contribution to preventing future famines must include pressing for controls on multinationals (such as the coffee companies paying rock bottom prices to Ethiopia), for reform of the World Bank (which in 1983 took back in repayments more than it lent to Africa) and for an end to South African attacks (in Mozambique and Angola) as much as for cease-fires (in Ethiopia or Chad).

As ever political change not 'band-aid' is the only lasting answer.  
John Tanner, *ex-chair, WDM*.

## IMPERIALIST AID

Sender and Smith argue (*MT* January) that it is lack of investment and international trade that cause poverty in the Third World. This may be rephrased as lack of capitalist development. They suggest cautious support for the World Bank etc. However, it is precisely the long engagement with the West - colonial and post-colonial - that has produced the present poverty of the Third World.

One does not have to resort to conspiracy theories to appreciate that the popular masses in the Third World are exploited by Western monopoly capital. In the direct sense, Western monopolies have expropriated large tracts of prime land to grow cash crops for export. Indirectly, aid has been given in such a way as to increase power and wealth differentials, by providing resources controlled by large local landowners. Aid has also been used strategically to destroy the food independence of Third World states and to create markets for Western surpluses.

The World Bank and similar imperialist institutions promote capitalism, not socialism, and in terms favourable to the Western powers, not Third World nations. We as Marxists should not in any way support them. Aid will only decrease hunger and landlessness when it is given on the terms defined by the mass of poor people of the Third World, both women and men, landless and small landholders. It is this that some of the non governmental organisations are working towards.

Derrick Purdue, *Cambridge*.

## ANNUAL APATHY

As a first time reader of *Marxism Today* I found the 'Prospects for the Left' debate (*MT* January) very stimulating. I would, however, like to pick up on a point made by Mr Benn who wrote 'If people had the vote more often that would offer a better way of controlling those in

power'. Mr Benn used that statement to advocate an annual parliament.

First of all, I would like to suggest to Mr Benn that he resigns annually to force a by-election. Whether he continues to be the member for Chesterfield is immaterial (except to Mr Benn) but more importantly, I believe the turnout for those elections would dwindle as apathy increased. If people had the vote more often they would use it less. What could a government achieve in a mere 12 months - set against a background of civil service obstruction and media manipulation.

On a completely different subject, I hope I am not the only one to object to the title of Mr Benn's article 'Who Dares Wins'. Not only did it have militaristic overtones but it also typifies the macho, confrontationalist-style politics practised by many of the Labour Party and trade union movement, perhaps a more apt title would have been 'Who Cares Wins'.

Andy Harrison, *Otley, W Yorks*.

Note: *Marxism Today* was responsible for the title.

## WORDY

The only clear statement in Stuart Hall's article (*MT* January) is that the GLC and the metropolitan boroughs will be destroyed. Open defeatism, united to wordy confusion, are just what the labour movement does not need. The clarity of Tony Benn's 'if you fight you win' is what we need.

Will Podmore, *Dalston, London*.

## UNFAIR VOTES

Like most Labour MPs Tony Benn, (*MT* January) tries to make out that proportional representation is irrelevant to democracy. His idea of yearly general elections ignores completely the fact that under our present electoral system we could vote for a new parliament every week but it would still only be worth voting if you happen to live in a marginal constituency. Last time 26% of the electorate did not bother to vote.

The figures from the 1983 general election speak for themselves. The Tories got 42% of the votes cast but 61% of seats - a 'landslide' 397. Labour's share of the vote was 27% but they got 32% of seats (209 in number). The Alliance with 25% of the vote got 3.5% of seats - a grand total of 23!

I am not an Alliance supporter, but I think it is time Mr Benn realised that democracy is giving people what they voted for. If he feels seriously about democracy he should be advocating an electoral

system which makes everybody's vote count the same. And if he also believes that people in high places should be made more accountable, he should support the Green idea of rotation of MPs. Legislation which prevented MPs standing for consecutive terms of office, and stopped MPs and local councillors holding more than one elected office simultaneously would greatly increase the range of people involved in government, both local and national, maybe even for that much under represented majority - women.

Karen Gunter, *Stoke-on-Trent*.

## AGITPROP HEGEMONY

To blame the *leadership* of the Labour Party for its 'failure to politicise and generalise the miner's strike' (Stuart Hall, *MT* January) is partly to evade the essential question: why is the political consciousness of the British working class at such a low level? Only if the working class is encouraged to produce its own counter-ideology or hegemony can it emancipate itself from the shackles of bourgeois modes of thinking, and these are responsible for the inability of the Left to build on the impetus of the miners' strike, which, as opinion polls show, is unpopular with many working class Labour Party voters. The consciousness of the working class is raised through its economic struggles, but not only through them. The Left must turn its attention to other, additional, forms of ideological and political work to counter the effects of the bourgeois mass media, which work at many levels - a diet of *The Sun*, Coronation St and Dallas does not lead to new ways of thinking. . . Therefore there must be support for worker-writers, alternative theatre groups, even agit-prop groups; in other words, cultural work must not be ignored.

Ian Towers, *London W3*.

## HOUSING CONFLICT

Beatrix Campbell's otherwise unerring demolition derby (*MT* December) on Tariq Ali style refurbished vanguardism skidded momentarily out of control on a slick of over-simplification, when she censured the non-GLC 'socialist eldorado' for being both bad employers and bad landlords. A closer inspection of the situation on the ground, especially in the field of housing, reveals that it is precisely because left councils wish to become better landlords that they are often forced into being less than exemplary employers. In the London boroughs of Hackney, Islington, and Camden, for example, manifesto commitments to decentralise housing services, so as to make them

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more accessible and responsive to the needs of tenants, have floundered in the face of local government unions' determination to protect the narrowly perceived interests of their members. In Walsall the pathbreaking establishment of neighbourhood offices was only carried through *after* suspensions were held over the heads of non-cooperating housing officials.

Of course, everything would be sweetness and light if councillors, unions, and tenants could all agree on what constituted a radical response to the often appalling indifference of most local authority housing departments towards their tenants. But, when it comes to the bottom line, socialists should stand steadfastly behind their councils' commitments to overhaul the archaic practices of their housing departments rather than fall prey to calls of loyalty to the unions. At the same time activists within the unions should be campaigning among their membership to get them to see that an improved service will lead to the public falling in behind them in their defence of local government autonomy and expenditure.

Charles Searle, Whitehaven.

## NUCLEAR POWER

*Marxism Today's* use of slick journalism as a substitute for serious political analysis is becoming increasingly tiresome. David Thomas's review, (*MT* January) is the latest example.

Thomas is badly informed and has not bothered to check the facts. 'Nuclear Power no thanks' is not the policy of the Left or the labour movement unless you exclude the position of the Communist Party, the Labour Party, the TUC and, more modestly, my own union AUEW TASS. All these organisations currently support the cautious development of nuclear power as part of an integrated energy policy which has coal at the centre.

All demand the most stringent safety standards and urge caution about the rate of development. All support the British developed AGR rather than the American PWR on safety and industrial strategy grounds. All agree that electricity generation should be mainly and substantially based on British coal.

AUEW TASS is not and never has been 'virulently pro-nuclear'. It does, however, support the development of advanced technology and the preservation of a British nuclear power industry. Like the Communist Party it demands democratic control of the industry and the strictest possible safety standards. Like the rest of the Left it also supports the NUM's demands for an expansion

of coal production as the key to meeting Britain's future energy needs.

Is it too much to ask that the editor demand higher standards of his contributors? Misrepresenting, by omission, the position of the Communist Party as well as that of progressive mass organisations really is not good enough for the theoretical journal of our Party.

Ken Gill, London.

## OMISSION

That's funny, comrades, I thought there were *three* people in the picture on page 16 of the January issue. . .

Kathryn Tattersall, London N8.



Apologies: the mystery figure is Nina Temple.

## PHILIPPINES

Melanie Beresford's article on the Philippines (*MT* January) simplifies a complex situation to the point of being misleading.

The pro-American, right wing official opposition to Marcos and the banned radical left organisations associated with the new Communist Party (CCP) existed throughout the martial law period. The assassination of Aquino in 1983 gave rise to a massive urban protest movement, which the article virtually ignores. This movement comprises industrial and clerical workers, students, and a small but rapidly growing women's movement, as well as some sections of the clergy.

The article's emphasis makes it appear that the old Communist Party (PKP) is a major force in organising industrial workers. Although the PKP was legally allowed to organise after coming to an agreement with the Marcos regime, the main trade union opposition comes from the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May 1 Movement).

Finally, if as the article says, American 'assistance' can probably manage the 'transition to a parliamentary style democracy', the US State Department would love to know how. The Reagan administration's biggest problem with the Philippines is that they have nobody to back as an alternative to Marcos. The official opposition does not

have enough popular support to survive parliamentary democracy, while the majority of the opposition wants the US military bases removed.

Mark Stakovtch, London.

## INACCURACIES

Melanie Beresford's report on the Philippines (*MT* January) contains some serious inaccuracies.

She writes of a 'split' between the 'new' Communist Party (CCP) and the 'old' Party (PKP). Of these it is the CPP and its military wing, the New Peoples Army, that have provided the main resistance to the Marcos regime over the last decade. The PKP which was active in the 1940s subsequently declined. In 1974 its jailed leaders struck a deal with Marcos which secured their release. In return the PKP has supported Marcos as a 'progressive' and 'nationalist', a position which has stripped them of credibility.

Beresford also claims that the CPP 'has accepted Christians onto its Central Committee'. She obviously confuses the CPP with the National Democratic Front (NDF). The NDF is the underground United Front organisation which includes the Christians for National Liberation, the CPP and other revolutionary groups. The NDF is the largest and most influential force within the present Peoples Movement.

The New Peoples Army is described as 'being hitherto confined to a few outlying islands away from the main stream of Philippine development'. This is simply wrong. According to Francisco Nemenzo, a respected political scientist who was formerly detained as a leader of the PKP, 'The NPA operates in 56 out of 73 provinces. . . It has established 36 guerilla fronts in the *major* islands'. (Oct 1983). The Pentagon estimates present NPA strength at 17,000. In 1984 US analysts described the NPA as the fastest growing insurgent army in the world and estimated that it could challenge for power within three years.

It is clear, in contradiction to Beresford's assessment, that a broad based mass movement and a growing revolutionary army do now pose a serious threat both to the Marcos regime and US bases and interests in the Philippines. This movement needs and deserves our support.

Geoff Nettleton, Secretary,  
Philippines Support Group.

## POP MARXISM

There is a time and place for pop music and the same can be said of classical music. Those who understand, appreciate and enjoy music and favour the latter might have

some reservations about including pop in the category of music at all, in the sense that it does not stimulate the listeners' desire to a better understanding or appreciation of music *per se*.

I am afraid that is how I see the new look *Marxism Today* ie, 'pop' marxism. No doubt your sales will increase in direct proportion to your neglect of the 'classical'.

How long can anyone who has any knowledge of marxism at all pay but scant attention to your magazine's contribution to a serious marxist analysis of the world at large? This is my dilemma when I come to renew my next subscription.

John P Mathieson, Glenrothes.

We welcome your letters for the March issue. They should be no longer than 250 words and arrive at the office not later than 8 February. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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**David Green** is a member of the CP's London District Committee.