

Letters

LEFT MORALITY

Rose Shapiro (*MT* February) missed out a major factor that explains the impact made by the 'moral Right'. They do distort evidence, use unscrupulous tactics and have friends in high places. But there is more to it. Their impact stems from the fact that the issues they take up all touch upon real anxieties that many people experience.

The contraceptive pill has for the first time in human history breached the 'natural' link between sex and procreation. This gives rise to moral questions which affect all of us individually and socially. What the 'moral Right' do is to take up those problems in the name of a backward-looking defence of the idea of 'the family', against the unknown, the new and the threatening.

When the Left responds it all too often seems to portray the view that there are no moral problems involved. But such issues as teenage sex and surrogacy do raise deep moral problems. Teenage sex sharply poses the problem of a society which inhibits the moral and intellectual independence of young people whilst their sexual maturity arrives earlier and earlier. Surrogacy involves moral issues about protecting women who lease their wombs from exploitation and about who should regulate and what regulation should govern this new form of human reproduction.

In the absence of a well thought-out progressive morality I did not like Rose Shapiro's jibes about the 'liberalism' of the FPA and the BMA. The Left needs a morality which can seriously oppose that of the 'moral Right' and is not just an undisguised permissiveness.

Alan Hunt, London.

MALE VIOLENCE

Rose Shapiro's article (*MT* February) very clearly identifies the ways in which the Right has managed to steal the thunder in the debate over morals. This is an area which the Left has failed to tackle, but which has caused much debate within the women's movement.

Most sexual abuse of children is perpetrated by adult men, usually fathers or others to whom the child is known and has been entrusted. This is a far cry from the sexual experimentation of young teenagers, for it involves a coercive element which neither Right nor Left care to consider. Could it be that it is because women are all too familiar with sexual coercion that we do seek to protect our daughters for as long as possible?

The Left will never gain ground in this debate while it continues to make hypocritical promises about a

socialist future for women and children and yet is not prepared to tackle the problem of our oppression as it is now. It should be conceded that it is in most men's interest (Right or Left) to keep the status quo unchanged.

The 'moral Left' could begin with the premise that all women should be entitled to a self-defined sexuality and that every woman (fifteen or fifty) should be allowed to live her life without the reality or threat of men's sexual violence. This would mean a commitment to the removal of all economic or ideological factors which make women and children dependent on individual men.

Is this perhaps why we can't get our act together?

Cathy McCarthy, Peckham, London.

WORKER-FARMER ALLIANCE

Hywel Francis's inspiring article (*MT* February) on the Wales Congress in Support of the Mining Communities did miss one feature of the situation in Wales which opened up many minds to the potential breadth of support we could achieve. This was the supplying of free milk to the miners by the Dyfed Farmer's Action Group who were themselves fighting a savage cut-back in production imposed by the EEC and the UK government.

Small family farmers, many of whom had recently been conservative Liberals or even life-long Tories, suddenly made common cause with the working class in the course of the sharpest industrial conflict of recent times.

Amongst the farmers the electoral spoils have gone to Plaid Cymru, who were in on the ground from the beginning. Regrettably, some good Labour activists have stood back, influenced by the 'pure class struggle' approach into seeing only supposedly rich farmers who were not getting beaten up by the police as the miners were. Within the labour movement it was the communists, such as Cliff True from the Rhondda, and Hywel Francis himself, who first saw how important support from the rural communities could be.

One moral: sometimes alliance builders need a little optimism of the intellect to avoid paralysis of the will!

John Lane, Aberystwyth.

WRONG PARTY

Terry Eagleton (*MT* February) advances an extraordinary reason for joining the Labour Party when he claims that this was because the Trotskyist organisation he previously belonged to 'hadn't really taken account of Gramsci'.

If he is suggesting that the Labour Party has taken account of Gramsci I'd be interested in the evidence. If not, is he merely justifying moving from a difficult and oppositional practice to an easier one?

George Davey Smith, Cardiff.

NUCLEAR DEBATE

Ken Gill's assertion (*MT* February) in response to David Thomas's review of my book on Sizewell that 'Nuclear Power no thanks is not the position of the Left or the labour movement' raises far more questions than it answers. Many unions do oppose nuclear power; so do many other left organisations. Can it really be the Left's position that nuclear waste should pile up with no technology for disposing of it? Or that plutonium should accumulate with no means for keeping it out of the hands of bomb-builders? Or that new, clean coal-burning methods should have less funding a year than the UK Atomic Energy Authority gets in a week? Surely not: but these are among the effects of the UK's nuclear power programme.

In practice, Gill's support for nuclear power may have more to do with TASS's urge to recruit and hold members in the electricity supply industry. The electricity industry unions have always supported the industry's plans even though the expansion of British nuclear power goes hand in hand with massive reductions in the industry's workforce. Gill must know that on any sensible timescale, a major nuclear programme in the UK cannot coexist with spending on coal-fired electricity generation. It also does little to get warmth to the poor. By contrast, technologically known options include combined heat and power (CHP) using clean urban power stations. A programme of CHP plus insulation could create tens of thousands of jobs, eliminate fuel poverty and add about 30 million tonnes a year to British coal demand. What has nuclear power got to offer the Left by comparison?

Martin I nee, London.

CRAZY ECONOMICS

Ken Gill's letter on nuclear power (*MT* February) merely reiterates the position of a number of labour movement organisations, ignoring the groundswell of public opinion and the more progressive position of numerous other bodies.

He ignores the fact that the Communist Party changed its position at the 38th Congress and is now committed to a deeper analysis and debate about the entire question, which Gill clearly wants to avoid. How can we ignore the powerful representations at Sizewell, the

effects of the Wmdscale pollution exposed by Greenpeace, the crazy economics highlighted by the miners' strike, the threat to coal or the military connection with plutonium production?

David Thomas' January review of the Sizewell saga was a well researched and thoughtful contribution. Ken Gill's letter is a blatant distortion of it. His attempt to stifle debate will not succeed, thanks to *Marxism Today*. Policy should be progressively created from the base upwards and not arbitrarily imposed from the top.

Bill Ward, Manchester.

REVOLUTIONS WANTED

There are millions of us in working class and middle class homes today waiting for the day when Tony Benn's statement: '...that what Britain needs now is a comprehensive, peaceful, and democratic revolution' (*MT* January) will be brought right into the open and put into action. It cannot come too soon and would have an immediate effect.

John McEwen, Blairgowrie, Perthshire.

ALLIANCES

Instead of confronting Bea Campbell's argument Tariq Ali (*MT* January) tried to score a demagogic point by saying that Campbell '...would prefer a radical alliance based on the rejection or exclusion of any class definitions'. Nothing can be farther from truth.

In fact, she rejects the conception of politics that assumes that all politics is class politics; that non-class politics is either non-existent or peripheral; that the class struggle is the only struggle that takes place in society; that non-class struggles (gender, ethnic, national) can be subsumed under the hegemony of class struggle. She rejects it because this conception of politics generates the idea that alliances are 'natural', pre-determined by the class logic or historical necessity; that the leadership of these alliances necessarily goes to the working class or the party of the working class.

Campbell rightly rejects this archaic notion of alliances and replaces it by one which can be summarised as follows: first, a plurality of struggles take place in society. Class struggle is one of them. Second, political alliances are not given: they are constructed. Third, they are not determined *a priori* by class logic, but follow from strategic conjunctural considerations.

Fourth, the leading role is not pre-given either. It is won through political struggle.

This conception of alliance is

Letters

March 1985 Marxism Today 47

open-ended and does not necessarily exclude 'class definitions'.

Yousaf Sani, Leicester.

HOT POTATO

It should come as no surprise that the foreign exchanges aren't playing ball Mr Lawson's way. It is clearly an instance which vindicates John Grah's concern that the role of finance should be clearly thought out in current Left strategy. (MT December).

Henry Neuburger, in replying to John, (MT January) presents a curious defence of existing 'left policies', insofar as he remains ominously reticent on the details of finance. A glance at Labour's performance in office shows that projects of structural change have come into conflict with both the strategic desire to reflate and with the problems of inflation and the balance of payments. Both the DEA and the NEB were rendered anaemic by the threatened or actual flow of money out of sterling. This 'hot' money had to be kept in Britain as it was a precondition for the increased public borrowing necessary for reflation and for the maintenance of an exchange rate level high enough to keep down the prices of imported goods.

So, how will structural change be made consistent with financial strategy? Will overseas funding of government borrowing, or exchange rate levels, be important? How central will capital inflows be to the balance of payments? Will 'hot' money be encouraged or discouraged?

Rob Stones, Colchester.

HIGH FIDELITY

At the risk of the Dansette sticking on this well-worn disc, lets give the Costello soundtrack another spin.

My plea (MT November) was not that Costello should not be criticised. Nor was I suggesting that 'Socialist Music' (music liked by some socialists?) has to be boring. But I was saying that you don't have to be writing or performing 'Socialist Music' to be valued.

There is no particular reason why someone like Costello should bend what he is doing directly to a socialist purpose, rather than a simply humanitarian one. He has never set himself that agenda. Being admired by the Left does not mean that there is an obligation on you to follow a particular package of values. But Simon Lockwood wanted to jettison Costello's whole style, manner of performance, his personality in effect.

In the words of Nick Kent, concluding a critical review of a Costello concert last year: 'For the present

(his) shortcomings should be acknowledged. . . but he remains one of the precious few honourable forces in contemporary music. His aim may be off but his worth stays constantly true'.

Dave Slater, Rochdale.

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

Whilst welcoming John Sender and Sheila Smith's reassessment of the political significance of NGOs (MT January), I was a little surprised they made no mention of Oxfam's new 'Hungry For Change' campaign. Launched last autumn with the express intention of focussing public attention on world hunger, the campaign constitutes an important new departure for the country's best known aid agency. This is the first time Oxfam has set itself the task of reaching primarily not for money, but for people.

The campaign is still at a formative stage. But its attempt to propagate a broad message about the causes of hunger, which encompasses debt, agriculture, trade, aid and the role of the arms trade, is surely to be applauded.

Anyone on the Left interested in eradicating famine should find out what 'Hungry For Change' is doing in their area.

Mark Davenport, Cambridge Hungry For Change

GREEN DIFFERENCE

There is increasing discussion of ways in which the Left can work with Green political movements. However, as a member of the Ecology Party I would like to draw attention to two key areas of difference.

Firstly, that of economic growth. The Labour Party is committed to vast increases in GNP to solve mass unemployment. Since the earth's resources are finite such a process has no long term credibility and will further destroy the earth. This involves the question of social justice not merely now but for future generations.

Secondly, the issue of population growth is not taken sufficiently seriously by the Left. It is certainly true that is social and economic development which causes people to have smaller families, but the extremely high rate of population growth in the Third World is contributing to the serious difficulties of even maintaining an adequate food supply for much of the population. A birth control programme should therefore be globally implemented along with radical political change to ensure that much of the world's population is not literally condemned to death.

Matthew Candy, London

DARK DIALECTICS

Stuart Hall (MT January) is deluding both himself and the readership in asserting that his own pessimism is beside the point. 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' is admissible only so long as that intellect does not transform the will. By its very nature his article precludes any benign transformation such as that attempted by Tony Benn.

Even were his characterisation of Tony Benn as merely 'whistling in the dark' accurate, it would still neglect the effect of such an action, which is to transform both whistler and darkness. If all we do is describe the darkness in its direst detail then not only do we act positively to confirm it, but we deepen the gloom.

Gramsci's prison was physical, but that confining today's British Left is of the intellect. Examine the list of contributors to *Marxism Today* and you define the middle class. We write, and confirm ourselves by the pen, whilst the miner in his struggle is understanding and transforming the world in praxis. He does not even need to know the word.

The duty of the intellectual is to recognise that he is also one of the troops. If such a transformation is not effected we only confirm the prison with each word produced.

Richard Wallis, Chesterfield.

SORE POINT

According to Tony Benn (Mr January) Britain remains in Northern Ireland because 'it is a convenient place to prepare for domestic repression in Britain'. If that statement were true now it was also true under the Labour Government of 1974-79 of which Mr Benn was a member throughout. Perhaps you could allow Mr Benn some further space to explain why he was a party to preparations for domestic repression.

Richard Heller, London N5.

MASS SUPPORT

How can McLanie Beresford (MT January) claim the MPA is 'confined to a few outer islands'.

I have spent nearly 20 years as a catholic missionary in the Philippines. The NPA in 1976-77 began to make its appearance in the parish where I worked in Mindanao. Since then through education, seminars, sharing people's experiences, they have been able to organise every *barrio* in the area, up to 90% of the people. Only the *centro* (town centre) is not yet under their jurisdiction. The police cannot stay in the *barrios* after 2pm; the military only go there in large patrols.

The town of Tabina in Zamboanga del Sur was briefly occupied by

the NPA in early January 85. This was reported in the *Guardian* on January 7. The movement of up to 200-strong groups of NPA to achieve this was witnessed by large numbers of missionaries who work in Mindanao. Other priests, nuns, church workers report similar growth of the NPA in Negros, Samar, Luzon - all over the Philippines.

Many church officials oppose and preach against the NPA, but none will deny its growth and influence all over the Philippines.

Anthony Rice, London.

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

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Terry Eagleton teaches at Wadham College, Oxford.

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Lucy Bland is currently writing a book on the history of female sexuality.