

# Letters

## CRASH ECONOMIES

Undoubtedly Jeff Randall (*MTOct*) was right in seeking to put this year's alarming rise in airline disasters in perspective. But he failed to pose any searching questions as to why 1985, so far, has proved so costly in human lives and suffering.

During the first half of the 80s airlines in the Western world faced dire financial troubles. Those belonging to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) lost no less than \$ 1,800m in 1982. Several airlines went bankrupt, others are still in trouble, and the majority have only recently reached break-even point.

Airlines have striven to cut costs to the bone. Staff reductions have been considerable (BA have shed 20,000 personnel in 3-4 years). Every effort has been made by every airline to speed up maintenance and maximise the number of hours which aircraft are flown.

While there is no obvious evidence of any neglect of safety factors by airlines, the rise in the rate of accidents calls for in-depth studies regarding the possible long term effects of the economies effected.

*Peter Richards, London NW5*

## NO CHANGE EUROS

James Freestone (*MTNov*) grossly over simplifies the political battle which took place over the proposed merger between the CPSA and the SCPS. To simply state that the merger was aborted just as a result of what he sees as an unholy alliance between the right wing and the Militant-dominated ultra left is a gross distortion. Must we presume therefore that the campaign for a merger pursued by Alistair Graham in alliance with the Communist party was any more principled?

It disturbs me immensely that he ignored the genuine fears of the ordinary members of the CPSA who did not want to be in the same union as their managers and supervisors. It is not mergers that we require, but an effective left wing in the unions firmly rooted in the branches. Neither Militant nor the CP have this as their aim. Rather both of you seek to control the union by bureaucratic means, inherent in organisations that see themselves as the 'leadership' of the working class.

*Marxism Today* has been quite innovative in recent years in breaking down long held beliefs on the Left in order to get away from the sterile debate of the traditional Left. This article suggests to me that if I scratch a Euro all I'll find is the same old CP of the past.

*Howard Fuller, Brixton London*

## NATIONAL HINDRANCE

Naomi Wayne's review (*MTNov*) indicates that the term 'new realism' has become a cheap means of dismissing any break with sterile thinking.

The book does not come close to suggesting that 'Catholics are the authors of their own misfortunes'. It merely rejects simplistic nationalist dogma which holds that Unionist opposition to a united Ireland is based on a mass deception perpetrated by Britain. In outlining the bare essentials of an internal political strategy aimed at disarticulating Unionism as a political bloc, Bew and Patterson are much more hopeful than the reviewer, who seems to feel that all is hopeless until the Brits get out.

Irish republicanism is a failed political entity and the Left's continued acceptance of its dogmas merely hinders the development of a socialist strategy.

Bew and Patterson's book is a step in the right direction and as such deserves a more serious treatment than the review gave it.

*Gary Topping, Hackney, London*

## STERILE GROWTH

Perhaps Fred Steward (*MTNov*) should have developed his critique of the 'sterile fundamentalism' of the 'anti-growth school of the early 1970s.'

In common with its conservative opponents the traditional Left has floundered on its slavish adherence to a concept of economic growth which is no longer tenable. Instead of regarding the growth rates of the 50s and 60s as unique and temporary, both Left and Right marched blindly into the future (and still do) on the premise that high economic growth represented the status quo. Saturation levels in the demand for consumer goods combined with static or declining populations do not portend well for the proponents of growth. The desperate hope placed in nuclear energy, then information technology and now, perhaps, biotechnology only serves to illustrate this sad scenario.

Fred Steward is correct in pointing to the bandwagon effect that the Green movement has had on mainstream politics. Taking green values on board may be good marketing but will do little to change the sterile growth fundamentalism of both Left and Right. A Green movement which takes on board socialist values would be more a hopeful alternative

*Kristain Schnack, Shepley, W Yorks*

## NEW BARGAINS

As reflected in Bea Campbell's article, (*MTOct*), we continue to treat collective bargaining in a 'results-only' way. This misses out important areas of politics associated with collective bargaining.

In no way would I contest that collective bargaining can and has divided people, ghettoised many into low pay and weakened links between those who may have common interests. But it does nevertheless represent an important place for workers to confront issues which are not narrowly economic.

At the time of writing Vauxhall workers have combined a wages negotiation battle with a campaign

out more about lesbianism.

As another point of information: a large proportion of the feminists from the West who attended the conference were in fact Black women, so be careful how you criticise 'Western women'. White Western women were in the minority, and were received perfectly cordially by the other women at the conference. There was no Western/non-Western split, something that came as no surprise to anyone who has actually been listening to what Third World feminists say instead of wanting to believe that feminism - or lesbianism - is a Western idea.

*Alice Henry, London*



over General Motors' policies for sourcing less work in Britain; they are also fighting a company programme on work reorganisation, and its consequent job-loss and control-loss effects. Similarly the Ford workers' struggle over the Dagenham Seamstresses' pay confronted long-term company plans for wages system reorganisation, which contain important non-wage issues.

Let us not place these and many other struggles into a narrow cul-de-sac of sectional interest. Our task is not to condemn collective bargaining out of hand, but to seek to improve its scope and sensibilities.

*Mike George, London N8*

## THIRD WORLD FEMINISTS

Unfortunately for Samiha Qatani's thesis (*MTLetters*, Oct) that lesbianism is one of the 'psychological deformities found in women victimised by industrial society' there seems to be an awful lot of it in the Third World too. And Samiha is woefully misinformed about the Nairobi UN conference, misled, presumably, by the British press reports.

Not only were lesbians not 'put on a plane back home', but there was a large lesbian caucus every afternoon and the lesbian workshops were so popular that women who couldn't fit into the rooms had to meet on the lawn outside. There were many Third World lesbians present - and even those women, for example local Kenyan women, who weren't lesbian showed a great interest in finding

## NEW BEDFELLOW

Martin Jacques' assessment of the Labour Party conference (*MTNov*) was, in my view, seriously at fault.

It is worth recalling that it was a section of the Right and not the traditional Left who broke away to form the SDP and thus created a public perception of enormous disunity in the labour movement. It was the Right who attacked the policy of the party during the last general election. It was also the Right whose policies earlier had led to increased unemployment under a Labour government, who initiated cuts in the social services, who described inflation as the main enemy, who were responsible for the discredited Morrisonian structure of public ownership, who gave Mr MacGregor his first public appointments, and who supported the USA in Vietnam.

Public disillusionment with a Labour government and a disunited labour movement led not to a strengthening of the Left but of the Right. The answer of the parliamentary leadership to all this has been to direct their attack against Benn, Scargill and others representing a more traditional Left view. And for this, regrettably, they have the support of Martin Jacques.

*M Fountain, London*

*We welcome your letters for the January issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than December 2 because of the Christmas holidays. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.*