

# Letters

## JUICY PRIZE

The main achievement of the London Industrial Strategy (MTNov) is that we now have experience of involving workers and consumers in initiatives through which they directly influence the outcome of events. The US concentrates on those parts of strategy which can be democratised in the sense of being based on active mass participation.

A democratic economic strategy, albeit fragmented and incomplete, has been developed and partially tested. Broader concerns are of course important, but is it reasonable to think of national and international policy being democratised in quite the same practical way as local initiatives?

The second major achievement is that we now have an example of a large 'local state' initiating processes which feed back and change the nature of the local state itself. The LIS opened the GLC to new democratic pressures, and all departments, officers and councillors experienced this to some extent. We now have a little more experience of ways in which the capitalist state may be democratised and transformed. As even the Tories are unable to abolish ideas, this may prove to be the juiciest prize.

John Fairley, Edinburgh

## SERIOUS FLAW

The language of 'involvement', 'initiative' and 'empowerment' has gained wide currency and appeal. Robin Murray (MTNov) instances the wealth of community and other initiatives that homed in on the GLC. But does not the GLC story illustrate the fragility of this strategy? Involved also is the question of scale: an elephant-sized ant is an impossibility. Can the GLC, with its limited remit, be translated into national terms?

He gives a few lines to 'new systems of investment appraisal' to 'meet non-market as well as market needs'. But these are basically incompatible under capitalism as long as firms and credit institutions are not under public control. But that is 'abstract' and, by implication, the electorate won't have it.

He cleverly links his proposals to the question of restructuring, but does not ask to what extent the new computerised 'flexibility' is inextricably enmeshed in the consumer Euro-centric society, although he does not go as far as the Italian Communist Chiaromonti who, in the same issue, speaks in sinisterly familiar terms of 'standing up to American and Japanese levels of innovation and competition'.

Any ideas for getting us out of the

impasse are welcome, but the Left needs to ask searching questions before committing itself to a strategy which may prove seriously flawed.

Dorothy Friedmann, London

## ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

In the middle of what was a useful summary of the Greenpeace 'affair' (MTNov) I was intrigued to see the caption '... and victim of the Greenpeace affair' under the 'sale gueule' of Charles Hernu

This opens up endless possibilities: 'Margaret Thatcher, victim of the sinking of the Belgrano'; 'Sutcliffe, victim of the Yorkshire ripper case', etc.

G Traynor, Toulouse, France



## INDUSTRIAL LOGIC

Mr Freestone's piece (MTNov) on union mergers throws little light on the issues. The real merger craze is that of the employers as they build conglomerate empires. In face of this and mass unemployment, trade unions have had to adjust and to recognise that changes in technology increasingly blur distinctions between occupations. There are no tidy solutions but there are guidelines.

Firstly there are political considerations. No amalgamation which strengthens the entrenched right should find favour; the suggested merger between the UDM and the EEUPTU may have industrial logic but it attacks the heart of class based organisation. Secondly amalgamation must respect the autonomy of sectors while strengthening industrial power. TASS has achieved this.

TASS's policy has industrial logic. All the unions involved are in manufacturing and most are

members of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and deal with the same employers. The Tobacco Workers, who are yet to ballot, face conglomerate employers and their members operate machines designed to TASS members.

Tom Sibley, Hounslow

## MYOPIA

If Anna Coote's article (MTNov) was intended to provoke then it was a success.


There are many criticisms that may be made of the policies of the Left and the TUs with regard to women. However, the denial of any progress in the last 100 years and the implication that women's real needs are absent from deliberations and policies is so inaccurate that any valid

points made are certain to be lost. After reading the article I went through my union journal for the last 10 years and picked off the shelf at random Labour 'manifestos' and TUC publications and I found it quite impossible to match what I read in the article about the attitudes of the Left and TU leaders with such evidence as I have for what has actually been taking place.

This myopia is matched by some of her statements at a more theoretical level. Some women come to political awareness through problems arising in their private lives as do some men. Things being what they are this route is probably more common for more women than men. It is nevertheless the case that it is not the only route for either sex. So what is the point in trying to elevate it into the route to political consciousness?

David Pavett

We welcome your letters for the February issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than January 10. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.



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