

PAT ON THE BACK

Congratulations on February's issue. It was one of the most stimulating and interesting reads I've had in ages. Channel 5's coverage of popular culture is unique on the Left, and the piece on the possibility of a hung parliament and how the Left can use such a situation to best advantage was thought-provoking.

It was a shame that it wasn't made clear that PR is also Communist party policy and not just something the Left should use as a bargaining counter with the Alliance.

Sam Aaronovitch's article on economic strategies was the best thing I've read since Eric Hobsbawm's 'Labour's Lost Millions' and I bet it will be just as influential on the realignment of the Left as that was. I've often wondered why on the British Left one's attitude towards withdrawal from the EEC is held up as a litmus test of one's socialism, whereas Communist and Socialist parties elsewhere in Europe are quite happy to radically reform it.

My only criticism would be the same as Harry Solomon's (MTLetters, Feb). Please ask your writers to express themselves in good, clear, simple language. We've got to make our ideas accessible.

John Crossland, London

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Harry Solomon (MTLetters Feb) is not the only reader who was bewildered by Stuart Hall's use of prose. I am sure that besides myself, a good many other readers must have read parts of his article, scratched their heads, re-read and then given up.

Bearing in mind that *Marxism Today* is supposed to be a discussion journal as well as a theoretical one, it is hardly helpful to stifle debate by confusing people. Intellectual capabilities are certainly very welcome when they are used to initiate serious discussion on the Left, but alienating people by using over-complicated language is not something to be encouraged. So please, in future ensure that contributors remember that the people who they are writing for may not all be on the same wavelength. The message is, keep it as simple as possible.

Geraint John, Eastleigh, Hants

NEW DEALS

Mike Rustin (MT, Feb) does not go far enough. A hung parliament will result from an election Thatcher has lost but Labour hasn't won. The Alliance may well be able to claim this situation as

their success. They will be looking to install a government of their 'moderate' persuasion.

A lot will depend on the internal politics of the Alliance, which curiously Rustin doesn't mention. The SDP, and above all Owen, must be banking on a deal with the Tories. Many Liberals, especially outside parliament, would obviously prefer Labour, but could be pulled by Steel into an OwenATory coalition.

Instead of allowing this to happen, Labour should be starting now to stress the issues on which the Liberals are closer to Labour and divided from their SDP allies. This would have the extra benefit of helping to pull back possible Labour voters from voting Alliance. One of the reasons Labour lost in 1983 was failing to attack the Alliance, eg, for its defence divisions. Remedying that now might even help avoid that hung situation altogether.

Martin Shaw, Hull

IMPROPER RESPONSE

Tony Moss (MTJan) paints an unbelievably optimistic picture of the Anglican Church in the light of the report 'Faith in the City'.

Two forces lie behind this report, which has been widely acclaimed by the Left. First, we have the genuine (although paternalistic and charity ridden) concern of some members of the commission for the inner city and those who live there. Two years of visiting inner cities has clearly been something of an eyeopener. If the report manages to bring the majority of suburbia to this point then it will have done some good. But that doesn't make it the proper Christian response to the inner city.

Secondly, the report has generated hope in the inner city amongst the disaffected parts of the Church. Yet this is not the liberatory hope of the gospel but hope embodied in an institution, the Church.

It is the Church, the institution, that has benefited most to date from this report. Hope which induces silence and acquiescence is the only kind of hope which the leaders of the Church of England delight in.

David Ford, London

CHRISTMAS PUPPIES

Sam Aaronovitch's timely obituary of the AES (MFFeb), whilst discussing the very real problems of resource allocation and inflated expectations which will confront the next Labour government, comes perilously close to advocating a voluntary incomes policy.

Voluntary incomes policies are like puppies given as Christmas presents,

they grow into vicious, snarling brutes which are eventually abandoned after much heart-rending and lengthy public arguments. It is all very well to point out that the fight for wages is not an industrial strategy, but it remains the primary *raison d'etre* for the unions in a capitalist economy.

Any policy which relies on rank and file union members abandoning the defence of their immediate, short-term interests under capitalism is unlikely to succeed on anything other than the most temporary basis. On past form the demise of such a policy will coincide with the collapse of the government which implements it.

Is it not possible for a Left economic strategy to start from the legitimate aspirations of working people? Sam Aaronovitch points the way with his prioritisation of childcare facilities and social services, but a government which presents these as a *quid pro quo* for wage restraint is unlikely to win the second term he implies they would require.

Jon Rogers, Brixton, London

NO JOKE

Two items in December's *Marxism Today* show how little is understood of the experience and political position of lesbians and gay men.

The *Marxism Today* Desk Diary 1986 featured an appalling cartoon about AIDS. No one with the slightest understanding of the medical, political and personal significance of AIDS could possibly joke about people catching the disease. Gay men, haemophiliacs, and other currently 'at risk' groups live with this possibility.

Alice Henry's letter patiently argues against Samiha Qatani's, which branded lesbians as 'psychological deformities'. All good democratic debate?

Would *Marxism Today* publish a letter full of racist stereotypes and insults? Clearly not. Why then are lesbians fair game for this type of bogus debate and abuse?

Where are your articles about lesbian and gay issues, and where the

positive images of lesbian and gay men who contribute so much to progressive politics and movements?

Why is the dismantling of homophobia and heterosexism so visibly not an integral part of your political project?

Both your 'sins' of omission and commission speak volumes.

Phil Barnett, Clapham, London

NO EXCUSE

The first thing I do with my newly-purchased copy of *Marxism Today* is to check the gender balance of contributors to the magazine. Disappointment at the continuing preponderance of men has finally given way to anger.

Looking back over the last 10 issues produces some damning statistics. In this period 4 out of 5 contributors were men, 9 out of 10 lead articles were by men, the July and Dec '85 issues had only one woman writer (out of 18 and 20, respectively) and, of 13 participants in round-table discussions, only 2 were women. Need I say more?

Is it not embarrassing for *Marxism Today* to propound new politics based on a powerful critique of the 'traditional' Left for its sexism and racism, but which flow overwhelmingly from the pens of white, male, middle-class intellectuals? Or are feminism and anti-racism being exploited (yet again) in order to fight the internal battles of the male Left?

This is written in sorrow as well as anger. The magazine is excellent in many respects, but nothing excuses the consistent exclusion of women's voices from its pages.

Lesley Wood, London

SHORT N SHARP

The February issue of *Marxism Today* consisted of 46 pages of which 5 were written by women.

Please could you try to do better next time?

Mary Browning, Mary Joannou, Cambridge

