

Goodbye To All That?

In the February issue, Sam Aaronovitch in 'Goodbye to All That?' argued that the alternative economic strategy is effectively dead. His contribution was part of a wider economic debate launched by the Communist party at the end of last year. Below we publish two responses.

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Steady as you are



Sam Aaronovitch (February, *MT*) is right to call for more discussion of Britain's membership of the Common Market. At the moment it does not seem likely that the withdrawal demand will feature in a big way at the next general election.

It is equally the case that there is widespread scepticism about the EEC in Britain, more than in any other EEC state save Denmark. This scepticism is dismissed as parochialism. In my view, though, it is totally justified on two grounds: the actual experience of EEC membership; the whole concept of the EEC and the grandiose but anti-democratic plans for supranational policymaking.

The British Left's opposition to the Common Market was and remains well grounded. Its original criticisms have stood the test of time much better than the grand promises we were fed about the benefits. For these reasons I do not agree with Sam's third option that we should stay in the EEC and work to change it. He argues the need to work with all the forces available to change EEC policies, but this needs to be made more precise. What attitude should the Left in Britain take to actual EEC policies now, and the effects they have on the British economy, before we have brought about any change?

Current EEC policies ban state aid to public enterprises; nationally-owned industries have to be run like privately-owned ones, based on profitability, no protection, no preferential treatment. Even the alternative economic strategy as it exists offends against the EEC. In my view we should actively campaign for a strategy and policies that we consider appropriate to the circumstances of Britain, even if these are in conflict with the EEC.

It may be, as Sam suggests, that the EEC would give in. But in any case, it will not give in if the challenge is not made in the first place.

I agree that we need to discuss and work more closely with other left forces in the EEC for change. But change in which direction? Experience is not very encouraging. Many of the left forces in Western Europe are in favour of a more integrated and centralised EEC. Their conception of desirable reform is different from ours, many are in favour of a stronger European parliament with increased powers which can only be at the expense of national parliaments.

We should oppose this. In my view we should go further and insist that all EEC legislation, while we remain in membership, must be subject to scrutiny and approval at Westminster. (I am well aware that the workings of our parliamentary democracy require overhaul, but elevation of the European parliament would remove decision-making even further away.)

Few would disagree that international co-operation is an imperative, for governments and trade unions. This can take many forms, but there is no imperative that says supranationality has to be one of them. Nor should co-operation be restricted to just a few states in one part of the European continent.