

Letters

LEFT AID?

Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (*MT* July) argue that the Left failed to recognise the importance and political potential of Live/Band/SportAid. They are right, but it could also be argued that these movements' success owes much to the fact that the Left was not organisationally involved.

They were popular, but escaped the left/right tag. The media therefore felt able to promote the events more or less freely without the constraint of political balance.

SportAid was a simple yet imaginative idea which captured popular support. Because of its essentially apolitical nature it generated pre-publicity which aided and created the build-up. Breakfast TV showed Selena Scott working out with the Beverly Sisters and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Had the event been either *or* *or* with the Left in fact or in the perception of the media, I am sure this would not have happened. People and other organisations often steer clear of *CND* and the peace movement because it is too political - by which they mean too left wing. This is a constant problem not of our making.

We are a genuinely broad-based organisation with concerns which surely affect everybody. It is a problem the Left would do well to think about: not which causes it gets involved in but how it does it. The batteries of newspaper sellers in the subways leading to the Anti Apartheid march or to any *CND* event are profoundly alienating to many people who would otherwise be sympathetic.

We can learn much both organisationally and promotionally from *Band/Live/SportAid*. The peace movements should be able to promote simultaneous world actions for, eg, a comprehensive test ban: so far we have failed to do so. Our marches in October 81 and 83 approached this, but lacked the

universal appeal.

Geldof himself appeared to retain his integrity and principles throughout. His idea may be dismissed as naive, but he has clearly learned fast through travel, working with aid agencies and in the process of the campaign. He did not discard his denim jacket or unbrushed hair, but nor did he back down in the face of Margaret Thatcher or the UN in promoting his demands for cutting through the 'crap' of the political talking shops.

If the Left is to get involved, I hope it will learn the lessons - organisationally, promotionally and politically.

*Meg Beresford London
(in a personal capacity)*

UNION RULES

Helen Hague (*Mf* June) suggests that the 1984 Trade Union Act stipulation that all voting members on union executives must be chosen through secret, individual membership ballots appears, from evidence so far, to be helping redress the imbalance of years of ingrained male domination.

She goes on to say that an analysis of recent elections in four unions which have changed their rules to comply with the act reveals a swing towards increased representation by women. One of the unions mentioned is my own.

I would point out that the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers has, for more than 30 years, chosen its general officers and executive board members through secret, individual membership ballots. We did not have to change our election procedures to comply with the 1984 Trade Union Act.

It is not the rule changes that have heightened the political awareness of my union's members and contributed to record involvement in our electoral procedures in recent years. Rather it is in part due to our own efforts to encourage greater involvement in the

union's affairs by its members as a result of the present Tory government's concerted attack on trade unionism and working people.

Clothing workers are bearing the brunt of the government attack. More than most, they have very real reasons for putting themselves forward for and participating in their union's electoral machinery in a bid to combat the excesses of the present government.

*Alec Smith,
General Secretary, NUTGW*

CHANGING SOUNDTRACK

A small comment on Frith and Street's excellent article on Red Wedge (*M7* June): the 'empowerment of young (cultural) producers and activists' is surely enabled by a *state* policy on pop culture which directs resources to local cultural initiatives, thus making the technology of producing and performing music more widely available.

The revenue from a blank tape levy would obviously be better spent supporting this kind of infrastructure, creating a genuinely popular and democratic music culture, rather than pouring back into the coffers of multinational music companies (as the Tories intend).

But who would redirect this levy towards a more socially useful end? An elected majority Labour government, of course (assuming Red Wedge's influence on the party manifesto is pervasive enough). The success of the GLC and Sheffield Council music projects only goes to show that good socialist pop policy is about *actual* intervention - and if you're abolished, rate-capped, *or in opposition*, your ends are limited by the means at your disposal.

Far better to try to copy the drum pattern on your bootlegged Janet Jackson track than buy the single, certainly - but the shift from passive consumer to active producer can only happen through a more 'enabling

state'. From this angle, the expediency of Red Wedge as 'the soundtrack to an advertising campaign' for the Labour party might be its most important use - if it can 'enable' a Labour victory.

Patrick Kane, London NW5

HEIGHTENED WORRIES

The publication of the Joint Alliance Commission report (*MT* Viewpoint, July) has greatly heightened the worry of those who joined the Liberal party for its opposition to nuclear arms.

The party's opposition to an independent nuclear deterrent dates back decades and it was probably only sheer confusion at the choice of alternatives that led the 1984 Assembly to put Polaris on the negotiating table instead of scrapping it. Nevertheless the party still overwhelmingly voted against the independent deterrent concept and members won't be too pleased about leaving replacement options open.

Another major problem that will beset Steel in his attempts to get Liberals behind him is the report's ready acceptance on continuing US military involvement in Britain. The Liberal Assembly in 1984 defeated the idea of putting Cruise under 'dual key' control as a red herring.

One suspects that the continued intervention of the US in other countries' affairs and use of the British bases to stage the bombing of Tripoli will lead to English and Welsh Liberals joining their Scots counterparts in calling for the establishment of a non-nuclear European defence structure under European political control and the phasing out of US bases in Britain.

The disagreement with Dr Owen over Polaris is only the beginning of David Steel's difficulties if he insists on backing a defence report that is clearly lacking in credibility whatever side of the defence spectrum one happens to be on.

Kevin White, chair. Liberal CND

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