

VIEWPOINT

Politics Begins At Home

In the July issue, Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques argued that Bob Geldof and Sport Aid had succeeded where the Left had failed in making aid a major national issue. We asked Paddy Coulter from Oxfam; Michael Palmer, campaigns officer for the World Development Movement; Carl Wright, director, Commonwealth Trade Union Council; and Joan Lestor a member of the steering committee of One World, to respond.

PADDY COULTER By-passing the Left

A new popular movement, as Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques rightly detected, has emerged under the unsuspecting nose of the Left. This was evident in last October's mass 'Fight World Poverty' lobby of parliament which derived its political impact from the very inexperience of the lobbyists. Since then the number of Oxfam's 'Hungry for Change' campaign groups has doubled to a nationwide total of nearly 300 and the number of MPs supporting the early day motion on famine prevention has swollen to a near record level - a tribute to the mailbags of constituents' letters on the issue.

Hall and Jacques are perhaps a shade too hard on the Left - there have been some trade union initiatives and earlier this year Glenys Kinnock helped launch One World specifically geared to the labour movement. But it has been Geldof and not the Left who has opened the eyes of a younger generation to the cause of internationalism. Millions have followed the transition from Band Aid's concentration solely on emergency relief through Live Aid's emphasis on longer-term development work to Sport Aid's focus on the role of governments and the wider causes of hunger.

There have, of course, been extraordinary public responses before to Third World suffering - eg, to the plight of Kampuchians in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge. But there are two new



features. Firstly the sustained nature of public interest. It looks as though African famine has successfully defied the media law of gravity which allows for a story to be built up as a disaster movie, then knocked down again on the lines of 'aid-goes-astray' and thereafter treated as 'old news'. But exactly two years after Michael Buerk's

first tv reports from Ethiopia, Geldof continues to occupy headlines - and the *Daily Telegraph* creditably leads its front page with reports from its correspondent in southern Sudan.

Secondly, the crisis has been correctly perceived as not just 'out there' but something which has a direct relation to us at home. Famine has been juxtaposed with the absurdity of EEC food mountains and has brought into public question the generosity of official British aid - and not only aid but trade, debt and arms policies as Sport Aid sought to make clear.

The challenge is there (especially given the limitations of popular media in providing adequate explanations) to retain this newly receptive audience whose interest was sparked by Band/Live/Sport Aid. The development agencies are already picking it up - see War on Want's recent ad exhorting Sport Aid runners to 'take the next step' and the World Development Movement's titling of their new book *Change The World*. But the Left appears so far to be passing up the opportunity - perhaps it does not really believe that international causes can be genuinely popular any more?

MICHAEL PALMER The party political agenda

One of the most significant comments arising out of last October's 20,000-strong mass lobby of parliament to fight world poverty was that 'for the first time, aid is on the party political agenda'. It is something which most of the traditional agencies have acknowledged as the distinctions between charity and politics have become increasingly blurred. Clearly, much of the underlying cause of developing countries' problems is rooted in political actions; *ergo*, it is going to require political solutions and a willingness by all aid agencies to address those who would be responsible for such political decisions.

But let's not kid ourselves. Sport Aid did increase that process - it mobilised millions for the day. Without it, how much

attention would have been paid to the deliberations of the UN in New York the following week? But what now? Sport Aid is no more - rightly it has served its immediate purpose magnificently. But what is to become of the millions who ran the world and invested in Africa?

Some of those millions clearly joined because their mates were there or because it made a fun day. So it was. Others ran for traditional charitable motives - they had been moved by the reports of Michael Buerk and those who followed and, if a tenner could help, all well and good. Yet others both cared charitably and were moved politically. They understood what the agencies and the World Development Movement were telling them: thanks for what you are doing but your greatest contribution would be to persuade the British government into taking action on debt relief, on promoting small-scale agricultural production, on improving access for African goods to European markets.

And there is a long way to go. Realistically, aid by itself will never be an election-winning card. But Band Aid/Live Aid/Sport Aid and the lobby of parliament have shown that there are enough people concerned. The strength of the movement is its lack of sectarian roots - while it may have been nurtured by the adversity of the present administration, its wrath will be greater if a more sympathetic government also fails to deliver.

Sport Aid continued the process of politicising overseas aid and development. It was itself a populist phenomenon. But would Terry Wogan have given so much air time without Bob Geldof's presence? That is the challenge of the Sport Aid phenomenon - to ensure aid emerges from its Channel 4/*Guardian* ghetto.

CARL WRIGHT **Labour Aid**

It is quite right to assume that the Band/Live/Sport Aid phenomenon challenges the underlying assumptions of Thatcherite political dogma. It has also mobilised popular feeling in a way no other mass movements have done.

That this should happen at a time of growing concern about Third World issues is a credit to Bob Geldof and the idealism he has generated. It is equally a sad commentary on the failure of the labour movement to put itself at the head of the new youth culture and growing internationalist feeling.

The record of the Labour party and the trade union movement on international issues is not a bad one. The labour movement has strongly supported a fairer deal for the Third World and has been leading the fight on key political issues like Chile, South Africa and Nicaragua. This contrasts with the Conservatives' mean-spirited and ideologically blinkered policies and the Alliance's woolly 'good-doer' approach, incapable of tackling the real economic problems.

The trade unions too, have been engaged in practical solidarity work. This has been strengthened with the establishment of the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC) in 1979, which assists Third World unions and encourages self-reliance, operating on a strict non-aligned policy.

What the labour movement has failed to do is to fire the imagination of their members and of the wider public. Their case for a fairer world order has therefore largely gone by default. As a result the racist poison of much of the mass media - most recently demonstrated over the Commonwealth Games' boycott - has been allowed to condition public responses.

There are now signs that the labour movement is waking up to the challenge. The Labour party will soon be releasing a major policy document on international aid and cooperation which will put it firmly in the vanguard on Third World development. The TUC and the individual unions are also contemplating important new initiatives in response to a 1985 TUC resolution which called for the resources of some 9m trade union members to be tapped. A recent suggestion is that union members should donate an hour's pay to a 'Labour Aid' fund, and this kind of initiative will be made easier by new rules on charitable donations which come into effect in 1987.

What is needed now is an intensive education campaign to inform the membership of the issues and to motivate their support. In 1985 the CTUC and the TUC started a modest educational programme to raise the awareness of Third World issues among union activists. Within the Labour party the Labour Aid and Development committee has been trying to do the same. More recently, the One World campaign, spearheaded by Glenys Kinnock, has sought to raise significantly the profile of Labour's Third World commitment. These long-overdue initiatives must be built upon and extended to the voters and their families: it is necessary to

adopt a real campaigning approach if 'Labour Aid' is to be given a genuine political commitment.

JOAN LESTOR **Out of touch**

It would, of course, be foolish to pretend that the labour and trade union movement has given a high priority to Third World issues. But it is equally foolish for Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques to imply there has been no response to recent development issues particularly when a previous issue of *Marxism Today* carried a long interview with Joan Ruddock and Glenys Kinnock about the emergence of the campaigning organisation One World. Perhaps Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques will read it and then correct their comments accordingly.

The activities of One World would be impossible without the financial help and other support we have received from the trade union movement. One wonders how many union leaders the authors have discussed the campaign with or whether they are actually in touch with the thinking of many trade union leaders on this issue? We have had, or will have, a presence at trade union conferences as well as at the TUC; and the launch of One World included well known trade unionists as speakers and sponsors.

Nuclear power has clearly attracted a large number of resolutions for this year's Labour party conference and this is understandable and necessary in view of recent events. Resolutions on the Third World are small in number but the requests we are receiving from all over the country are perhaps a greater indication of the interest from the movement in this area and a desire to correct the mistakes of yesteryear in not recognising the relationship between Third World issues and socialism in Britain.

As someone who, like Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, has often deplored the lack of concern and priority given to aid and development within the movement in the past, I rejoice that the contribution made by people like Judith Hart is now bearing fruit and that there has been a fundamental change in the attitude and thinking within the movement as a whole. We need to keep this interest alive, recognising our responsibilities to the Third World on the one hand, and the mutual dependence of the rich and the poor nations in the struggle for survival on the other.