

Equal Opportunities

Beatrix Campbell's comments on Haringey council's lesbian and gay rights policy (*MT*, Feb) are surprising. The dichotomy she seems to accept between 'extremist' councillors and the 'confused' community is a fictitious one, propagated by the media who refuse to acknowledge the support the policy has received. Further, opposition has not been initiated by concerned parents, but by far Right groups, such as the New Patriotic Movement. Such groups are exploiting the situation to gain support for their own causes, and as a weapon to attack the Left.

Likewise, it is too simplistic to say that black socialist councillors are in agreement with local Tories in criticism of the policy. Black people, like white people, are divided in their support; but the differing opinions within the black community have been manipulated to try and frustrate a growing community-council anti-racist strategy.

Beatrix Campbell argues for consultation and strategy. We agree. Both have happened, are happening, and will continue to happen. Lesbian and gay rights policies are the result of community involvement, and pressure on the council. Haringey's lesbian and gay sub-committee is also unusual in having a 2:1 ratio of co-opted members to councillors. The co-opted members in turn are accountable to women, black, disabled and trade union sub-groups.

I agree that a rights based

Education Alliance

Beatrix Campbell asks: 'what has gone wrong with municipal socialism?' (*MT* Feb) So long as Labour councils, including some on the Left, remain hermetically sealed from their electorate, as well as from most of their employees, more crises like Brent will occur. So long as local trade unions react in an equally intransigent way, in defence of one of their members, the main political issues will be lost.

Nor can we rest with the critique that 'the traditional institutions of labourism within civil society, primarily the trade unions, have inured themselves from this process' renewal and radicalisation. The question is, how do we help this process?

The handling of the recent national Nottingham/Coventry

approach, imposed by the local state, has limitations. But if statism is replacing consciousness raising as a means of change, we must call on leftwing parties for the politicisation and consciousness raising. They are in a better position than councils to realistically transform attitudes, not just towards lesbians and gay men, but in questioning the role compulsory heterosexuality has played, and continues to play, in our society.

As for many of us, our primary concern is not a radical review of heterosexuality, or expanding energy to proudly mould the first reconstructed heterosexual. What we demand from the local state is the opportunity to enjoy life without discrimination and harassment - both of which are plentiful; for parents an assurance that their children's education will not negate their home, but recognise its value; and for lesbian and gay youths a supportive, informative school environment.

As a responsive (and responsible) local authority we have a duty to implement equal opportunities for everyone, accepting that it is a first step of perhaps limited effect. As far as education is concerned, young people need the freedom to make decisions about their sexuality and choose the lifestyle they want. The choice is not yet an equal one, but we must attempt to offer it.*
Cllr Davina Cooper,
Vice-chair, Haringey lesbian & gay sub-committee

agreement, between the local authorities and some (unfortunately not all) of the teacher trade unions, is a case in point.

The agreement resulted in Baker's bill, which is now set on being law in March. The bill empowers Baker to override the local authorities and impose pay and conditions on the teachers. This necessitates the local authorities and unions acting in unison. If we don't get our act together this time, the Left will have scored yet another home goal. Realignment of the labour movement, and involvement of the people at local level, is vital to the future of education. Education is high on the Tory political agenda; let's make it ours.*
Charley Hall, Birmingham

Tabloid Blues

One of the laziest and, sadly, most common types of journalism is that which accepts a 'line' and serves as an uncritical cypher. No searching questions are asked. No assumptions are challenged. Patrick Wintour's piece about *News on Sunday* in your February issue fits that category; and, knowing his work, I must say I was surprised.

'The Pilger episode', wrote Wintour, 'was undoubtedly a short-term public relations disaster and was as much about personalities as principles ...' *News on Sunday's* able public relations officer could not have put it better than that. Since I resigned as editor-in-chief the paper's considerable bureaucracy has gone to extraordinary lengths to obscure, if not to obliterate, the fundamental journalistic principle which led to my departure just before Christmas. The paper's 'line' is that the upheaval was superficial: merely a 'clash of personalities'; and the implication is that I couldn't get on with the editor, Keith Sutton. This is dishonest nonsense.

Wintour describes the job of a *News on Sunday* employee, Tony Cook, as developing the regional committees into the papers 'eyes and ears'. Whatever this may mean, Cook's role lately has been that of propagandist and director of re-education. Cook has been sending out reams telling the paper's supporters and workers not what happened over my resignation, but what to say when asked what happened. In January, Cook set up a 'training session' in London during which minds were retrained on the 'personality clash' line and coached on how to reply when asked, 'Well, why *did* Pilger go?'

I hardly knew Keith Sutton personally. But what my 20-odd years in tabloid journalism told me was that *News on Sunday*, under Sutton's editorship, was taking on board the Murdoch 'tradition', as Sutton called it. It was Sutton who described the paper of his dreams as a 'leftwing *Sun*'. He went into considerable detail, most of which ought to have been

Elitism

Re: 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (*MT* Feb): Thatcherism, socialism, feminism, labourism, statism, racism, sexism, god-fatherism,



Pilger's proposal

anathema to journalists who understand the insidious and not unsuitable effects of Murdochism on the craft. He did this frequently enough to drive away some of the best and most promising national and regional journalistic talent in Britain, several of whom would have taken salary cuts to join us. The paper he made clear he wanted could never trust the readers' intelligence and be a commercial 'success'. I believed such trust was crucial for us to succeed in every way.

Patrick Wintour wrote that the row over my resignation 'also showed that the paper's structures were capable of resolving differences speedily'. This is more of the same handout. Had Wintour bothered to enquire among the many supporters, workers and small investors disturbed by the emergence of yet another version of Murdochism - even a bland 'leftwing' version - he might have understood the deep sense of loss many of us share.

Nothing was 'resolved speedily' or 'democratically'. Those who are long experienced in manipulating committees won out in an old-fashioned, utterly undemocratic power play. And carpetbaggery filled the vacuum. The fact that almost everybody agreed that the editorial direction of the paper was a distortion of all that we had set out to achieve, was no longer deemed relevant: *News on Sunday* had to 'succeed' regardless.*

John Pilger, London

workerism, economism, trotskyism, Stalinism, proceduralism, moralism, pluralism, leftism? Loonyist elitism.*
Meredith Thomson, London

Broadcasting Policy

The British Left has no intention of standing idly by in the debate over the future of broadcasting which Brian McNair describes (*MT*, Feb).

However the dilemma he poses for the Left - either to 'defend a system (public broadcasting) of which it has historically been suspicious and critical' or to support it as a 'lingering bastion' of a humane and liberal consensus - is a false one, for it presumes the status quo in public broadcasting.

The Labour Party proposes an expansion of the public sector which will transform broadcasting and take the debate far beyond its present central concern with the BBC into a variety of different forms of public broadcasting.

Channel 4 already offers an additional form of regulated public broadcasting, allowing a range and diversity of independent producers to work within a framework of social responsibility. We will be developing community radio stations which may also operate in different formats.

The case for a strong and much

more democratic and accountable public sector in broadcasting is made most persuasively by the schedules of Sky Channel satellite with its mix of pop and pap, with minimal original production.

The next Labour government proposes a vision of broadcasting which offers choice for the public and opportunity for producers. We believe that such an expansionist and pluralist policy defends the purpose and ideals of public broadcasting, and addresses the challenges of technology and ownership.

With the new technologies, such as CB radio, 4-track recording or low-tech neighbourhood radio, the opportunities for breaking down the historical distinctions between producers and consumers becomes a real possibility.

That is the real challenge for a socialist broadcasting policy. It cannot be achieved without democratically agreed and accountable regulation.*

*Mark Fisher,
Shadow Minister for the Arts*

Trade Union Resources

There is too much truth in Tony Lane's article on trade union research and organisation (*MT* Feb) for there to be any comfort. A radical programme of economic democracy would indeed place demands on union resources that either aren't there, or are poorly developed.

But in overstating the problems in present union structure, he fails, I think, to see the resources on which we have to draw if local economic planning is genuinely to extend democratic control over work.

First, there is a fair degree of exchange of economic information between the research departments of unions organising in the same sectors. Some of it is informal. But it includes such examples as the agreement on a common data base on privatisation in the health service between four unions, tied to an agreement regulating organising between the unions. As computerisation is extended to union offices across the country, information on contracts and companies, collated nationally, will be available locally.

Union research, however, is geared mainly to national bargaining (largely, of course, over pay) and policy. If a

framework for economic democracy was introduced, making it possible to bargain at company or plant level over product development, budget plans, marketing and so on, quite different resources would need to be tapped.

Links are required between workplace unions and a range of local institutions: polytechnics, colleges and universities; council economic departments; trade union resource centres, etc. A crucial role for unions is both in facilitating these contracts and drawing on the resources of their own members.

Secondly, this does mean changes are needed in union structure. But while joint union committees need support, there remains an important tension between national and local organisation. In many ways one of the best developments in recent years has been the joint national union campaigns, reducing the scope for internal competition and providing the framework for local co-ordination.

Not the least attractive of Labour's economic programme is the spur that it would give to democratic activity within trade unions.*

*Peter Morris,
research department, NUPE*

Sexual Politics

After heated arguments in private about the virtues or otherwise of sexual advertising in *Marxism Today*, with some trepidation I accept that the issues should be debated in public since they touch on what principles and values a modern marxist journal should voice.

The hesitation about saying anything comes from the fear of being dismissed as a moralist or a repressed bigot. Such a climate does not encourage people to speak out about what they really feel.

A *Marxism Today* heartlands column is a practical response to the reality of social isolation and emotional deprivation. It is a valuable service providing a link up between people who are more likely to have values and interests in common than would be the case in chance encounters.

Then there is the public information campaign on Aids. This has been in the form of adverts by the Terence Higgins Trust which have been sponsored among others by *Marxism Today*. The Trust provides reliable information on Aids confronting awkward and embarrassing questions which have not been dealt with elsewhere, so its advice is welcome.

However, as a feminist, I was struck by the difference between the advert for the *Women and Aids* pamphlet, directed at women, in the November *MT*, and the one in January's issue, ostensibly directed at everyone. This proclaimed safe sex for all and gave advice about protection but was couched in male terms and male language, and was concerned solely with male pleasure. The fact that the Trust

has given so much support to gay men in this health crisis should not deter feminists from voicing their criticism about the attitude to sex and to women which it implies. *Marxism Today* should similarly bring a feminist consciousness to the information campaigns it sponsors.

However, the most disturbing adverts in the journal are those in the personal columns for escorts and masseurs. Again because they concern gay men, they appear immune from criticism. While I cannot find any basis for distinguishing between one person's desire for silk and another's for leather - each to their own fetish - there is a basic principle governing sexual relations which is not a question of taste or choice, and that is that they are voluntary. Voluntary, not only in the sense of not engaged in under the threat or use of violence, but freely chosen.

In all forms of prostitution one contracting partner would not choose to have sex with the other were it not for economic inducement or gain. I am fed up with the dismissal, as moralism, of a feminist and egalitarian morality of truly voluntary sex under conditions of mutually expressed desire. This is not to make any value judgement about the duration of relationships, or whether they are gay, bisexual, heterosexual, monogamous or multiple, but about sexual partners being on an equal footing.

Along with openness, it seems to me that the voluntary principle is fundamental to sexual equality for all of us. *Marxism Today*, even in its personal columns, should not promote sexual inequality. That is the least we can ask. O
Jude Bloomfield, Birmingham

