

## Sixth Form Colleges

I would agree with Andy Green (*MT* Jan) that sixth form colleges (or some sort of tertiary education) could be as good as existing sixth forms, or possibly even better, but how wise is it to advocate the abolition of sixth forms at the present time?

Evidence from Newham suggests that even when they are small and offer a poor range of courses they remain popular with students (65%). Where courses are offered as A levels by both colleges and the schools an astounding 95% choose sixth forms.

In the post-Baker world of choice this matters. Attempting to abolish them by diktat will antagonise both parents and teachers and will be a potent catalyst of opting out, particularly for higher-status comprehensives with large sixth forms and many middle-class parents.

If local authority schools are in competition with the 11-18 City Technology Colleges, they will lose in terms of resources, quality of teachers and continuity of education if pupils are compelled to leave at 16.

### Student Grants

As a student teacher I agree with Andy Green (*MT* Jan) in almost every respect but was surprised to read towards the end of the piece his 'heretical' view of student loans. If student loans are introduced many students will be faced with enormous repayments

### New Tide Of History

Jon Bloomfield expresses himself with his usual clarity (*MT* Dec) but his pragmatic analysis omits one big factor: the intellectual unsustainability of the nuclear deterrent theory. The acceptance by pro-deterrence advocates that the theory depends on the vulnerability of both the USA and USSR to nuclear attack logically means that SD.I, in the words of both Liberal and Social Democratic parties, 'destabilises deterrence'.

The problem for those who are conscious of the difficulty of persuading the electorate that deterrence is quite simply unreliable is that the vast majority of dedicated people within the peace movement regard such argument as superfluous. Nuclear weapons are

Community education is a much better policy. In the present climate there are two political arguments in addition to the educational ones for this. The first concerns building a broad alliance to save education. This must be more than a coalition of educational vested interests and their organised allies and must reach into the communities.

Community education, by giving adults personal insights into their local schools and encouraging co-operation between teachers and adults, naturally creates the necessary channel of communication. Secondly, community schools tend to be more responsive to their local communities and provide examples of democratic local involvement.

They set up an ideal of schooling and democracy different from and superior to the Conservatives' aim of establishing schools responsive to market forces.

The way to counteract Baker is to counterpose accountability to money with a truly interactive idea of education. • *R B Thomas, Newham*

just as they are starting their chosen careers.

There is no way, as a probationary teacher, I could afford to repay a loan. Yes, we must make education more democratic but this must include making education more accessible, not less. • *John Hayes, Middlesex*

immoral and obscene and should not be contemplated by any country anywhere. End of argument. The problem with that position is that every possible vote for it has already been extracted and still the Tories have a majority of 100 plus.

The INF agreement is certainly a turning point for European countries and the opportunity is clearly available to argue in its wake that British and French nationalistic intransigence runs counter to the new tide of history. Our future lies in Europe and not across the Atlantic. We dare not miss the opportunity to begin to close the chasm that for 40 years has divided our continent - however carefully we need to move. •

*Michael Meadowcroft, Leeds*

### Liberating Women

For one so allegedly intent on liberating women to the full extent of their capacity for sexual pleasure, Beatrix Campbell (*MT* Dec) seems extraordinarily deterministic and censorious. Orgasms 'don't' happen in certain places; penetration is 'unnecessary'.

For the past twenty years or so, women who *do* have more than one sort of orgasm, and who do have orgasms during penetrative sex (though not necessarily with men), have been made to feel at best liars and 'uncle Toms' and at worst anatomical freaks. But the fact

is that, admittedly for a few women, vaginal orgasms do exist. Such women are fortunate. But we are not fakes, and we are not freaks.

To limit oneself to only one sort of orgasm seems as narrow-minded and illogical as limiting oneself to being a heterosexual or a homosexual. Why *not* have it all? The 'clitorati' should not fall into the trap of pronouncing any sexual pleasure not known personally to them as abnormal. Leave that sort of neurotic dogmatism to the people who invented it, and who do it best - heterosexual men. O

*Julie Burchill, London*

### Fetal Handicap

What was worrying about the useful discussion on 'Whose Right to Life' was the absence of any real consideration of the viewpoint of people with disabilities. I am concerned at the way negative generalisations about disability slip in when talking about pre-natal screening. How can we have real choice when there is still so much ignorance and prejudice towards disabled people? With decreasing support and facilities, parents are going to see any handicapped child as much more of a burden. It is not the disability that causes 'family stress' but the lack of help available and society's attitudes.

Not all handicapped people suffer endless pain; many lead happy, useful lives and make a positive contribution to their families. It is too easy to see handicap as a medical problem requiring medical solutions and forget all the progress that can be made through good care

and education. Such negative attitudes do not encourage creative ways of dealing with handicap or make allowances for individual differences within each handicap, which can be considerable as in Down's syndrome.

Should diagnosis of fetal handicap automatically mean abortion? Could it be a means of preparing parents and society to expect a child with special needs and of mobilising help? By choosing abortion we may be colluding with a government that wishes to cut services - it's cheaper to abort. There will also be less pressure for real preventive work.

Where do we draw the line? Will we eventually abort because of minor disabilities? And what does this do to the status of those children who slip through the net?

So 'no' to Alton's Bill, certainly, but let's not use negative attitudes towards disability as a means to fight it. •

*Sylvia Gutteridge, Grimsby*



PS