LETTERS

Factual Errors

Can I correct the factual errors in John Ellis' article about ITV *(MT* November)?

I do not want 'to abolish programmes for pre-school children'. My argument was with the IBA over our scheduling difficulties in the mornings, which we have now largely cured. The audiences for pre-school programmes, now that they have been re-scheduled, are significantly higher. The irony remains that they are overwhelmingly made up of households without any pre-school children - but that is not surprising given that such households constitute a tiny percentage of the audience able to view tv in the mornings.

The commercial arrangements between the 15 ITV companies have not broken down. We have just renewed those arrangements, though the government's white paper leaves a large question mark hanging over them. As for the 'flex-ipool', the result is far from 'bedlam'. ITV as a whole is now able for the first time to plan its output nearly two years ahead and to know precisely the cost of the network schedule.

I do not know where John derived the notion that Thames might 'dump the burdensome London weekday franchise in order to concentrate on turning into a lean and hungry production and facilities house'. I cannot imagine circumstances in which we would voluntarily give up our franchise. Of course, come 1991, under the government's present proposals, we could easily be outbid for our franchise by a company with a larger cheque book, even if it had no production capacity or track record at all; in which case, having become a highly efficient production house will be the best protection for our staff and our programme-making interests.

As for 'the current near-collapse of the ITV system', I see no evidence of it. It is true that many ITV companies are making investments in other media ventures, including competitive satellite operations, but these are a natural consequence of the rapid expansion in commercial delivery systems.

The only crisis that we face is collectively trying to deal with a series of government proposals which could substantially affect our businesses, starting with the long-threatened change in our tax regime, all the way through to the possible auctioning of our franchises to the highest bidder. • •

David Elstein, Director of Programmes, Thames TV

Post-Thatcher Reconstruction

A decade of Thatcherism, the Govan by-election, the nurses' action and the Charter 88 initiative for constitutional reform, all highlight the need for a radical rethink. That's the strength and spirit of *Facing Up To The Future (MT* September).

On many issues, Thatcher's government is out of step with the majority of British people. On the poll tax, on more resources for the NHS, on the queen visiting the USSR. But the opposition parties are in crisis. Divided internally as well as against each other, they remain uncertain about their future and lack credibility as each claim to be the next government-in-waiting.

We should respond by acknowledging that a majority Labour government is not on the immediate agenda. So we must declare that our overriding objective for the next stage of British politics is the displacement of this regime through an anti-Thatcherite alliance.

Labour, Democrats, Nationalists, Greens and others should seek agreement around a minimum post-Thatcherite reconstruction programme. Its main features would include interventionist economic modernisation, social renewal, a safe environment, disarmament and democratic reform.

This would be a basis on which to establish a single anti-Thatcherite candidate in each of the marginals, if not all the constituencies, in the next general election. Central to securing this would have to be agreement for the new government to introduce proportional representation.

This will shock some or produce contempt from others. But it's the only responsible or feasible way to halt a fourth victory for this ever-more authoritarian regime. All democratic and progressive forces at home and abroad require a new course. To the doubters, the question is: 'What's your alternative?'

Tony McNally, Coventry

Cultural Identity

David Held's article on the plight of the nation state *{MT* December) provided a useful analysis of 20th-century international relations. However, one glaring omission was the question of nationalism and the individual's reaction to continental/global decision-making and consequent feelings of alienation and powerlessness. While traditional cohesive forces, family and religion, disintegrate under modern social pressures, people become increasingly aware of challenges to their security, predominantly from environmental and economic decline.

The reassertion of cultural identity and belief in a nation's common history and destiny result from individuals refocusing their loyalties to a clear and simple ideology, applicable to all people in all situations, through which they can express dissatisfaction of state and interstate actions. This has been seen most prominently in Eastern Europe, but West Europe is experiencing similar stirrings, albeit on a smaller scale in Belgium, Spain and most recently Scotland.

The trend to regional co-operation and integration can complement the rise of nationalism, enabling groups to assert their cultural uniqueness while remaining economically viable units and restraining the excesses which aided the development of 1930s' fascism. The Left could possibly gain from addressing itself to this issue at a European level. However, Labour's dismissal of the Govan by-election as a psephological aberration means they will probably not.

The nation state as an autonomous unit is definitely on the way out, but nationalism with its inherent tendency to increase social tensions and global conflict is not. •

Jennifer Tankard, Stoke on Trent

Global Solutions

David Held says much that is undeniable in his 'Farewell Nation State' *(MT* December), yet his arguments rest on unquestioned assumptions that may appear objective but which reflect the experience, practices and aims of developed capitalist countries.

In an increasingly interdependent world it is more than the relations between states that have to change. At the moment the rich industrialised states dominate much of the world through terms of trade, 'debt', control of technology, arms exports, nuclear power etc, which have caused most of the global problems facing humanity today.

Maybe a different set of values and goals would produce a different relationship between independence and interdependence. But it means that those who have historically enjoyed rather too much sovereignty at others' expense will have to accept a genuine equality and sharing. Why should I have to prove my internationalism by accepting the European Community? It is not the model for 'pooling sovereignty' or achieving genuine co-operation. Its essential purpose is to protect and restore a position for West European capitalism in competition with Japan and the USA. The sooner it is drastically reformed, the better.

Global problems require global solutions, and that means giving equal status to the needs and proposals of those nations and countries whose development has been distorted and held back by Western power and Western goals. That means making the international bodies more democratic; eg, why should five nuclear powers have the right of veto in the UN? •

Gerry Pocock, London

Canny Scots

I eagerly unwrapped my *Marxism Today* (December) with its 'Crisis Of National Sovereignty' headline. As a Scot in post-Govan Glasgow, I think I can be forgiven for making a wrong assumption as to its contents. However, David Held, in his excellent article fully describes the interconnections and interdependence between states. But he commits a real gaffe by confusing state and nation, which, in Britain, is certainly not the same thing.

I am sure that what appeals to many 'canny' Scots about the Scottish National Party's platform is the advantage of going it alone, but within the European context. Surely this option deserves mention? •

Kay Carr, Glasgow

LETTERS

Pure Utensil For Liberation

What a parody of ourselves we on the Left become when we choose to elevate such as the filofax *(MT* December) - that great symbol of bloated consumerism - to the point of inclusion in an apparently serious article about consumerism versus utilitarianism in patriarchal society.

I was given a filofax several years ago. It was a lovely thing. I fondled it and gazed at it for days. I am a disorganised person - this was just the thing. But to use it properly, one has to be an organised person in the first place.

I listed the 'things I must do today', but forgot to consult the list. The 'projects' section depressed me; I was bereft of ideas and it remained unused.

What's wrong with all functions being dispersed into diary, notebook and address book? I managed in my own disorganised way before. In fact, it was easier. Nothing was ever as bulky as this great lump of leather and paper.

Scargill's use of it as a symbol was crude. But that's about all. The gentle ribbing one gets as a filofax owner is well-placed.

Sheila Jones, London

Breakaway Politics

In the November issue of *Marxism Today* the Communist Party ran an advert stating a 'belief in alliances . .. and rejecting the politics of sectarianism', whilst on the letters page a CP member, former EETPU member, and supporter of *Flashlight* (an anonymously-written broadsheet circulated in the EETPU), extolled the credentials of a breakaway union - the Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union (EPIU). What economies of truth.

Firstly, there is the role of the Communist Party which has recognised the EPIU, despite its support for alliances and non-sectarianism and the derisory response to the breakaway union (2,700 members, who have largely been misled).

Secondly, there is the role of Ken Gill, leader of MSF and one-time CP member. Gill has vehemently argued for the importance of abiding by the rule book and for expulsion from the TUC of the EETPU on this very basis. Despite his union being £3m in the red, Gill found resources to support the EPIU's breakaway even *before* the result of the TUC's vote on expulsion.

Thirdly, Stan Davison's letter claims that the EETPU has been 'the most undemocratic and oppressive union in Britain'. Yet, the new general secretary of the EPIU, John Aitken, was able, within the EETPU, to stand for election every five years. He failed equally often to win the support of a majority of EETPU members.

Flashlight has been a sectarian hard-left rump within the EETPU for a long time. It has failed year after year to gain support within the union and deserves no support whatsoever now it's outside.

The EETPU has done trade unionism more good than it knows. We don't need more unions, we need better ones. Yes, we need a united TUC but unity around policies that are realisable and fair and face up to a UK and European economy nearing the 21st century.

As a Communist I look forward to a merger between the EETPU and the AEU and the removal of the ban on Communists holding office. I look forward to revisions of the Bridlington agreement. And I look forward to evidence that my party's belief in alliances and rejection of sectarianism is more than an gimmick. •

Bert Munro, London

Curse Of The Poet

Poor Howard Brenton, suffering the 'curse of the poet' *(MT* December), and forced to look on as events more and more demonstrate his prescience in writing *The Churchill Play* all those years ago!

Perhaps you could tell him of a great idea I've got for a play, which only needs a real artist like himself to bring to fruition? It's about a large, institutionalised 'national' theatre company which is economically geared to a highly marketable concept of the heritage industry. Underpinned by capitalist juggernauts, and sucking in grant-aid while smaller operations go to the wall, it dreams up the brilliant scam of employing left-wing writers (once 'young turks', now firmly established as 'leading playwrights') to rewrite political parables of a previous time.

In my play, the dramatist wakes up one day, and realises. . . ©

Derek Paget, Malvern

Owning Up

As an unashamed owner of a personal organiser, I was pleased that the article by Bea Campbell and Wendy Wheeler *(MT* December) finally gave me ideological justification for owning mine. Then I thought: 'But why should it be an article in *MT* that "allows" me to have one? Why isn't it ok anyway?'

I realised I've always used excuses to imply that personal organisers had always been an ordinary part of my life. For instance, my father was given one in the 1960s, and he kept his sermons in it - though in those days we had problems getting six-holed paper!

But I finally got one simply because I noticed that everyone who had one had a togetherness that I wanted to emulate. And that's the crux of it. If personal organisers were just yuppie fads they would have gone the same way as cabbage-patch dolls and pet rocks.

Instead they've proved their worth, as Wendy and Bea pointed out: for anyone who hasn't got an array of servants or secretaries, a personal organiser makes the difference between juggling and staying on top of your life. And it's not as if they're that exclusive. Woolworths, BHS, WH Smiths and Jones Brothers all sell them or replicas - and who can tell the difference? Even if the puritans among us aren't buying them, it would appear that a hell of a lot of people are! •

Sioned-Mair Richards

Ostentatious Display

I would suggest that the symbolic meaning of the filofax is somewhat different from the 'loadsamoney' one Campbell and Wheeler *(MT* December) suggest. The filofax rather represents an ostentatious display of self-importance. It says: 'Look how full my life is, how in demand I am, how important I am; and how organised I have to be, to fit it all in.'

The opponents of filofaxes are embarrassed by such displays of self-importance, suspecting that those who really do have full lives have better things to do than flashing and fiddling with their filofaxes. •

Jill Waterson, Herts

Footnotes

I would have thought Jos Boys *(MT* Dec) would have made more connection between classical revivals and right-wing anti-democratic politics. Or does she think that the tv appearance of Roger Scruton extolling the virtues of Greek columns was an accident? •

Henry Wood, Sutton Coldfield

Pity old Karl Marx didn't have a personal organiser really - might have stopped him leaving a mess of incomplete doodles and scribbles. Now I have greater understanding of the term 'organised working class'. •

Neville Shakespeare. Herts

Editorial Mote: We welcome your letters to add to discussion. Please send them to *MT* Letters Page, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Brevity means you are more likely to be published. We reserve the right to cut. •

PS