

A Dog's Life

From Jytte Juul Jensen and Ole Langsted in Aarhus, Denmark James Runcie writes that the British do not like children, but prefer dogs (MT March). We must say that the Danes do like children.

If you state the opinion publicly in Denmark that you hate children, people will find you interesting - maybe a little weird. But you cannot similarly say that you hate pets. You will be met either with furious reactions or with total silence, frozen out. But anyway, we love our children.

The welfare state here provides good childcare. When a mother works - and in fact 95% of all mothers of 0-6 year-olds do work - most of the children are in public daycare services with well-educated staff and well-equipped facilities.

In many public places you find that children have been thought about: you only have to go a few hundred metres to find a public playground, which is well-supplied with play equipment and well-maintained (repairs some-

times have to be done because of destruction by adults).

When you visit a restaurant, you will always find a children's menu. And when you go to the toilets, there are special small toilets for the children (making life difficult for adults when all the other toilets are occupied!). If you have to travel, you can order a special family compartment on the train, which is specially fitted-out for children.

These are just a few examples of the 'humanisation of childhood' in Danish society. Children are no longer seen only as adults in miniature or an inarticulate beings.

And this humanisation is even reflected in legislation. More and more laws are directly about or for children, unlike in earlier times when children were seen only as an appendage of families in the eyes of the law.

In the private sphere too, one can see many small signs of the humanisation of childhood. For example, if, 20 years ago, you had come to the front door of a family house where there

were children, you would have read on the name-plate: 'Mr Jensen'. Ten years ago, you could have read the names of both husband and wife. But today you can't arrive on the doorstep without being presented with the names of the whole family, even very young children. The way a family portrays itself to the outside world has changed, so nowadays children see themselves and are seen as independent human beings.

In most Danish families, children are no longer brought up to be silent, obedient and well-behaved. On the contrary, they are encouraged to give their opinions and intervene in discussions, to a degree where it can be difficult for adults to have a conversation without being interrupted by children.

As you see, in Denmark we love children, maybe even more than dogs. But we admit there are things we love even more than children. For example, more people are employed here to take care of our money than to take care of our children! •

Vive La Difference!

A few points for your 'New man and childcare' section.

Avoid Marseilles airport. There are no changing facilities at all for babies and very few loos for adults. Avoid Provencal towns. The pavements are broken, covered with cars and strewn, pleasantly for most, with cafe chairs and tables.

Avoid Air France. They do not provide extra safety belts for babies and toddlers. Amazingly, British Airways do. Do not expect to find much in the way of public transport.

If you stay in practice, a sling can be used on long journeys much more easily than a push-chair, even with heavy babies.

Muslin and terry nappies are much cheaper in the not-very-long run and environmentally streets ahead. French nappies still appear to be bleached. If MT would like a short article on nappies I would do one any time.

Personally, I find the French and British equally enthusiastic about babies and dogs, although I am only keen on the former.

But I agree with James Runcie that financial and practical help for parents and babies is rock bottom in this country. •

Amanda Norrie, London

Liberating Theology

From Elizabeth Stuart, lecturer in theology and convenor of the RC caucus of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement There will be many Roman Catholics who, like me, can identify with Rex Wockner's disgust and despair at the way in which the Church authorities treat lesbian and gay people and those who are HIV+ or suffering from Aids (MT March).

Many of us also feel betrayed by those priests who are gay themselves but continue to propagate the Church's teaching that homosexuality is an intrinsic moral disorder. Whilst it is now well-known that a large proportion of Anglican clergy are gay, a wall of silence surrounds the sexuality of Catholic priests. This is because of the law of celibacy, which results in priests acting and being treated as non-persons, without sexuality. It is little wonder then that the Church authorities have such difficulty in understanding sexuality.

However, one of the most helpful ideas to emerge from liberation theology (which owes not a little to marxism) and to be taken on board by the Catholic Church at the Second

Vatican Council is that 'the Church' is not the pope, bishops and priests. Rather, it is the whole people of God who stand equal before him.

Liberation theology also insists that God is on the side of the powerless, oppressed and marginalised and that the clergy are there to listen to and serve these people.

This model of the Church - which is nothing new, one has only to read the New Testament to realise that - has given many gay Catholics, clergy and lay alike, the courage to remain in the Church, despite its potentially homophobic teaching and bishops, to fight for change from within.

In the United States, Dignity, an organisation for gay Catholics with over 5,000 members, and in Britain similar organisations like Quest and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, challenge the Church's teaching by exposing the bad theology behind it.

They seek to break the wall of silence surrounding gay priests and an increasing number of priests are prepared to 'come out' and tell their stories. Most impor-

tantly, these groups try to reach out in a Christ-like manner of unconditional love and affirmation to the gay community.

New Yorkers may have to put up with Cardinal O'Connor, but they are also blessed with Fr Bernard Lynch, who openly works with the gay community and those suffering with Aids, despite repeated attempts by the Church authorities to prevent him doing so.

In Britain, work has begun on setting up a respite centre in Cornwall for those with Aids, in the grounds of a convent, which has received generous donations from the Catholic Church. The staff are committed to total acceptance and care, regardless of the sexuality of the client.

All over the world, Catholic priests and people are affirming the goodness of gay love and relationships. The fact that some of those who think they are at the top are not doing so, is unfortunate, and I would say a betrayal of the gospel, but their behaviour is not sufficient reason to dismiss the whole Church as Mr Wockner does.

The real Church is to be found in gay bars and homes, in hospices and hospitals, where Christ would be.

Shopping Trouble

How children feature in society's considerations and planning is very important but really neglected.

For example, shopping. We all have to do it but it is made hell for parents and children alike. A friend says, 'most people would rather starve than take the kids shopping'. Usually, I wouldn't rather starve so mine come with me. I am a wreck after shopping in Sainsburys with twins aged two. So is the shopping! After they've rampaged down the aisles rearranging the wine section and munching through packets of assorted biscuits, I grab them and put them both into the trolley. I rush around like lightning, knowing I have only a few minutes before they are climbing out, having broken into the eggs and the yoghurts.

It would not take much imagination, organisation and finance to provide equipped play areas in these shops.

By contrast take McDonalds. Terrible food but hoards of people eat there. How much of their success is due to simple things like supplying high-chairs and attempting some degree of child orientation? •

Jackie Heywood, London

Gloss Dross

The great debate over the future of tv (*MT March*) has settled down into a confrontation between makers of the 'popular' and the defenders of 'quality'.

Neither side seems inclined to define terms but it has become a truism that 'quality' tv is, to use Mark Lawson's phrase, 'ruinously expensive'. He goes on to cite the examples of *She's Been Away* and *Summer's Lease*.

I've no idea in what sense the word 'quality' is being used here, unless it is a reference to the good breeding of the people involved in these productions - certainly I remember one dear old peer sitting, apparently stuffed, throughout the former and a couple of knights knocking round both of them.

If you sugar a show with dukes etc, of course it is going to be expensive. This does not mean it is going to be any good.

I'm sure Mark Lawson realises this. What he might not be aware of is the way these expensive tranquilisers and *folies de grandeur* have furnished the men with the cheque books with the perfect get-out clause.

Time and again these days they use the fact that they patently can no longer risk that kind of money as an excuse for not risking their necks.

Innovative, challenging tv need not be expensive. But it will always involve taking a chance, making a stance. I'm not just talking here about the *Mahabharata* or *Ghosts In The Machine*; lots of 'popular' series bombed first time out and were kept alive by the courage of their commissioning editors. *Brookside* for one. *Minder* for another. Both these programmes set out to be popular, watchable tv that could surprise you by occasionally catching light or turning themselves upside down.

By enforcing the distinction between quality and popular, and by landing the 'quality' end with gloss dross like *She's Been Away*, the current debate is helping the advertisers to define and isolate two mutually-exclusive markets. And this will be to nobody's benefit but their own.

Frank Cottrell Boyce, Liverpool

Editorial Note:

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

Marxism's Mileage

The Left is coming of age. Nowadays people seem to demand that ideology satisfy the test of personal experience before it is accepted as appropriate to political action. We no longer allow ourselves the hypocrisy of suggesting to others what we do not live ourselves - or at least we try.

But in this zeal for ideological independence Gareth Stedman Jones goes a little too far (*MT February*) in dismissing the wisdom of the Left's father.

Our own studies have led us to conclude that the theory underpinning the whole of Marx's intellectual endeavour - that of alienation - is still little-understood: a position which Stedman Jones confirms with his reference to the whole theory as 'cryptic utterances' and his suggestion that nobody else understands it either.

Marx's assertion about a higher form of society is simply based on the idea that if 'bosses' no longer interfere in our natural learning processes then we will become more aware of our individual potential, and in un-alienated exchange of what we produce, also more aware of each other.

In terms of material production and its role in human development, Marx showed the underlying mechanism of how capitalism distorted learning and psychological growth.

What he failed to theorise was the relationship between personal fears and aversions that keep people socially apart (racism, sexism, etc.), and political and social formations. Nor could he consequently elaborate a relationship between economically-mediated exploitation and more direct interpersonal exploitation.

There is a richness of un-

derstanding yet to be gleaned from Marx. For some of us there may be something to be gained by returning to Marx, not with belief but with critical analysis, so that we may separate the wisdom of our socialist father from his rather impatient and dictatorial instruction.

C Allets & M Weiss,
East Sussex

I have never been influenced by Marx's views and bought your highly-esteemed magazine only because I was curious to know what you made of events in Eastern Europe and was encouraged by the cover of Marx with egg on his face (*MT February*).

Your leader seemed admirable (junk Marx!) and left the question of the future of socialism open, and I was impressed by Zygmunt Bauman's analysis, equating the bankruptcy of socialism with the demise of modernity. Much of it coincides with the thinking of non-socialists like myself.

Though communism has been repudiated more spontaneously and decisively in Eastern Europe than fascism was in the West after the war, Bauman still concludes, 'It is up to the socialist counter-culture to make sure that the emancipatory potential of post-modern values comes true...' Is this not to persist in error, like the neo-Nazis in Germany, who believe that even if Hitler could not pull it off last time, it is still worth a try?

Do we need a socialist counter-culture in the post-modern world? After all, who said history repeats itself - once as tragedy and then as farce?

JB Da Silva, Surrey

Feminist Realities

Lucky Sarah Mower (*MT February*), to be able to see feminism as just a part of growing up, a girls' adventure to be regarded with smug complacency in later years.

Her article displays little understanding of the very real struggle most women still face today, enmeshed in a society where patriarchal values constantly force damaging limitations on our lives.

Instead, she presents a highly unconvincing attempt to justify the actions of certain women who are prepared and determined to succeed at the expense of the majority of their sex.

Mower is right when she argues that the betrayal of women cannot all be blamed on patriarchy. Women who consciously collude in the oppression and exploitation of other women must themselves share the blame and responsibility.

Such women should not be regarded as 'real' feminists or role models. Nor should feminism be viewed as a triumph if it maintains the exploitation of one group of women by another.*

Carol Willard, East Sussex

Andrew Neil is mistaken (*MT Mar*) if he thinks that, 'the British people resisted a large part of the Thatcher agenda because it involves making life tough for people, and this is a country of complacent paralysis.'

The millions who voluntarily give their time and efforts to serve their community is proof of their lack of complacency in the face of government underfunding and neglect. In fact, the British people have resisted a large part of Thatcherism because it springs from a brutal philosophy which asserts that 'there is no such thing as society'. Such a philosophy with its emphasis on selfish individualism is alien and morally repugnant to them, and therefore they reject it*.

EM Passes, London

False Impression

If someone sold me dogfood instead of steak I would complain. Similarly I am annoyed when I open a magazine called *Marxism Today* and read on the first page a leader rubbishing marxism. I suggest a change of name to avoid offences under the Trades Descriptions Act.*

John Shaw, Battersea

