

Sexual Moralism

From Anna Marie Smith of *Feminists Against Censorship* Suzanne Moore's reservations regarding the non-sexist man phenomenon (MT October) are well-justified.

The Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship, which has the active support of many of these 'male feminists', seeks to introduce legislation which would have serious implications for alternative art, feminist and lesbian and gay publications. Members of this group assure us that they have no intention of promoting censorship. They would like, however, to introduce new laws which would enable women to sue the producers and distributors of 'pornography' wherever it 'causes' 'harm'.

Their definition of 'pornography' is dangerously broad and vague. It includes, for example, images of women 'posed provocatively inviting sexual penetration and arousal... (and or) portrayed as sexual objects'. Exactly what does this mean? Many of the images produced by women, especially by lesbians, could be interpreted in this way.

This group supports Labour MP Dawn Primarolo's Location of Pornographic Materials Bill. Other supporters of this bill include Labour MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Brian Sedgemore. It would allow the sale of 'pornography' only in

licensed premises. It also has a broad and vague definition of 'pornography' which refers to both images of women and images of men.

Primarolo has stated that the bill did not originally refer to pornographic images of men, and that this amendment was later added, ostensibly to avoid sex discrimination. She has also expressed concern about the possibilities of anti-gay applications of this amendment. Such concern, however, would be of little use if the bill were indeed passed. Virtually every establishment which sold mainstream gay male magazines such as *Him* and *Gay Times* would risk prosecution under this legislation.

Even if the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship is truly interested in defending all sexually explicit material which is not sexist, however exotic or strange, from censorship, they cannot guarantee that any legislation which they proposed would not be amended and interpreted against their original intentions. In the anti-gay and anti-feminist atmosphere in Britain, it is naive in the extreme to suggest that such a reinterpretation is impossible. The Primarolo bill itself should cause concern in this regard.

The National Council for Civil Liberties has withdrawn its support for this group's protest. When Andrea Dworkin

led several attempts in the US to enact legislation similar to that proposed by the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship, her initiatives were met by resistance from feminists, civil libertarians, artists, alternative publishers and lesbians and gay men. British men who are truly interested in supporting a democratic, rather than authoritarian, feminism should also reject this group's claims.

Suzanne Moore's distinction between feminist sexual politics and sexual moralism is of central importance. The anti-pornography crusade offers, for men, a high-profile platform for confession and recantation. For both women and men, it provides an illusory solution to sexism. Men's support is needed for feminist work on the more intractable, and perhaps less glamorous, problems of unequal pay, job discrimination, sexual violence and harassment, and the unequal distribution of childcare and housework.

It is both ironic and unjust that well-intentioned 'pro-feminist' men are attracted to a campaign which will make absolutely no contribution to these feminist struggles. Their only 'achievement' would in fact be the further restriction of alternative, and non-sexist, discourse on sexuality. And for this we are supposed to award them feminist points?*

elude just about everyone else on grounds of gender, sexuality, race and class. At least if we are fighting each other it shows that there is dissent within patriarchy.

It is easy to criticise 'self-flagellating men' who are often so consumed with guilt as to render themselves intellectually and emotionally impotent, but many of these men are so needy that they require a lot of emotional support. I think it is better that we try to build a network where other men can support those in this state. This work at present is carried out by women.

I have also bemoaned the lack of practical commitment many so-called anti-sexist men actually give to others. In short, I think it fair to assume that most men have just never grown up, in the sense of having to make decisions alone and take personal responsibilities seriously. However, I would rather spend time with men such as these than others

who seem content to hide their insecurities behind an ideological facade, call it socialism, ecologism or whatever.

What bothers me about Suzanne's suggestion, that men should simply step aside for women, or 'give women more space', is that this is patronising in the extreme. Any oppressed group has to take power for itself. The purpose of all anti-sexists everywhere might be to make men realise that there are other expressions of power than the ones we at present monopolise.*

Jeremy Killingray, London

Critical Studies

I read Suzanne Moore's article (MT October) with great interest, and would like to give some additional information. The new Unwin Hyman series she referred to is called 'Critical Studies On Men And Masculinities' rather than 'Men, Masculinities And Social Theory', which is the title of one of the books just published in the series.

The series as a whole is concerned with *critical* studies on men, which includes a critique of men, and a critique of 'men's studies' as it has been developed in some instances. For example, *Men, Masculinities And Social Theory* includes several chapters that are very critical of 'men's studies'. It is also important to add that this book brings together writing by both women and men; that women and men are involved in the international advisory board of the series; and that we are keen to publish further work on men by women authors and black authors.*

Jeff Hearn, Bradford

Graffiti

Being retired can either be darkness at noon, or seeing new visions and reading more of everything, including *MT*. Sometimes, I feel, to qualify as a reader I ought to be 23, half out of college, wearing a yellow-and-something t-shirt with a highly improbable logo. You can't please everybody!

There is no doubt in my mind of the contribution this magazine has made to the political and social advances worldwide, but sometimes I feel it ought to have a couple of graffiti pages where two-line comments and cartoons from the readers interrupted the flow of intellectual debate.*

Dave Davis, London

Men Take Issue

I certainly don't grudge Suzanne Moore her space in October's *Marxism Today*, but it's a pity that she went for the easy targets among anti-sexist men.

Given the development of feminism over the past 30 years, it would be surprising if some men weren't consumed by guilt or envy towards women. But if Suzanne doesn't enjoy hearing about all this, she should take the trouble to look further than the stereotypes.

What *Achilles Heel* shares with academic studies of masculinity and men's consciousness-raising groups is an interest in dismantling the monolith of 'natural' masculinity. It's no secret that we've cribbed the idea from earlier work on femininity, but feminists themselves have quite properly believed that they have more important things to do.

Taking issue with the stern dictates of manliness and mach-

ismo doesn't arise from guilt or altruism, but from self-liberation. Obviously this carries a tendency towards obsessive navel-watching of no interest to outsiders. But the outcome is likely to be significant not just for men.

Once masculinity ceases to be experienced as an inexorable code, there can be a relaxation of that sense of personal inadequacy and the compulsion to over-compensate which have such unpleasant consequences for women. Rather than the media mirage of the new man any day.

John Tosh, London

Not Grown Up

According to Suzanne Moore (MT October) 'men are against men again'. If this is so, then I welcome it. Since time immemorial we men have gone to extraordinary lengths to ex-

End Of An Era

'Goodbye To All That' was an apt headline for Eric Hobsbawm's article in October's *Marxism Today*.

Unlike most other historians of his substance, he writes well and lucidly. His style is captivating. But why, after his highly informative and interesting analysis of the 70-odd-year period of the October Revolution, does he say, 'So let us wish eastern Europe luck as it ends an old era and is about to enter the 21st century. We shall need luck...?'

This is the nearest to a lament that I have read in the pages of *MT*, and I earnestly hope that Hobsbawm is not consciously singing a swan-song.

His writings are always so valuable, his guidance in political matters of the immediate future well-headed. It would be calamitous if that discontinued.

Admitting the richness of this informative essay, I feel it is as eloquent of the political features Hobsbawm omits as of those he includes. He appears constricted by the moribund political structures of the 20th century, which seems strange for a historian of his excellence, more aware than most of us that political structures come and go.

Why does he, for instance, make no reference to the United Nations? Why does he not acknowledge the worldwide anti-nuclear peace movement - probably the most visible and persistent political activity since world war two? Indeed, the politics of survival as a whole, manifested in the green movement, does not seem to merit a mention.

Yet these are bound to be historical instruments of the future. If we do not address them seriously now, we shall kiss goodbye not only to the October Revolution era, but to the 21st century as well*

Donald J Wood, Wimbledon

Mo Change

When, earlier this year, *Guardian* columnist Hugo Young, commenting on events in eastern Europe, suggested that the views of western fellow travellers about the communist past might make 'fascinating reading', there was little or no response. Welcome though Eric Hobsbawm's analysis of the collapse of communism in eastern Europe is (*MT* October), it is difficult to conclude, as he seems to, that the reasons were almost entirely economic.

The issue seems to me to be more fundamental. Communist practices and structures, much of the world over, have been at odds with its claimed values and ideology since its inception.

Talking to east European communists on tv recently, Michael Ignatieff suggested that there was, on their part, an 'inability to grieve' and an 'absence of honourable pain' - words given greater significance when, in the summer, Vaclav Havel told the US Congress that he shared with his fellow citizens 'a sense of culpability for our former reprehensible passivity'.

I admit unreservedly, like Hobsbawm, to having also been 'proved wrong'. While no one expects self-flagellation, it would do the CPGB no harm to listen and respond to the likes of Ignatieff or Havel. For can anyone be really expected to believe they have some future when they display no humility or feeling of culpability about their past?

It will never be known what effect perestroika and glasnost might have had in the Soviet Union or eastern Europe had it been introduced in, say, the 60s. Communism brought about its own demise - by the inability of communists to change, rather than the failing of an economic system alone. O Bert Munro, Rouillac, France

Engine Of Change

Martin Pawley's entertaining article on the motor car (*MT*

September) dealt squarely with one half of the problem of the car, namely that 'personal mobility is a priceless freedom', and that the car is therefore here to stay in some form for as long as we can imagine.

He miscued on the second half, however, in proposing that 'cars cease to be exotic products of material culture and become again simple artefacts like ballpoint pens or quartz watches'.

As a Citroen BX enthusiast, he should know this to be psychologically impossible. The car is too libidinated an object, too ready a vehicle for our dreams and too close to our own bodies for this to be possible.

Hence the Trabant is not a feasible starting-point for designing the car of the future, at least not without a new body by Giugiaro and new mechanics from Wolfsburg. A more likely starter is Pawley's dinosaur - a multi-valve turbo model - but perhaps running on vegetable oil.

The total disappearance of the petrol engine may be impossible, but its substantial replacement by one with much less destructive emissions is not, and on that possibility the future of the car depends.*

Barry Richards, Reading

Military Myth

As Fred Halliday and Joe Stork made clear (*MT* October), there is an immediate danger in the Gulf and also an interlocking set of long-term problems. The immediate danger is of the outbreak of a major war in which the full array of modern weaponry would be used - up to and including chemical and modern weapons.

We can all agree with Fred

Halliday that bringing down the Iraqi regime is in the interests of all the peoples of the Middle East and that the use of armed force by strong states to take over weak states is to be opposed. The question is whether making war on Saddam Hussein would achieve those aims.

The quick, surgical strike is a military fiction. A war aimed at dislodging Iraq from Kuwait would be a bloody and destructive affair with many civilian casualties.

Even if such a war were 'won', what would we then do? Maintain an indefinite force of occupation in Kuwait? Drive on to Baghdad? Build up a huge Saudi military machine as a surrogate instrument of Western interests, just as we did with the shah?

Just beginning to list the problems is to demonstrate the uselessness of offensive military action.

There is a strong case for a defensive United Nations peace-keeping force to deter further Iraqi aggression. We then have to work hard to make sure that sanctions work, rather than making the odd pious genuflection in their direction while tacitly assuming they will fail.

US and British tanks are not the only ones that need constant, expensive maintenance to function in the desert. The Mirage needs men and materials to keep it flying. With no more imported spares, foreign technicians or training, let alone new weapons, the Iraqi military machine will become progressively degraded. There is the message for other would-be aggressors.

Yes, that may well leave Kuwait in Iraqi hands as a short-term pyrrhic victory for Saddam, but it is at that point that the world can begin to deal with the longer-term, overall problems of the Middle East - something that lies outside the scope of a short letter.

We have to get rid of the notion of a military solution before we can begin to address the real problems.*

Lionel Trippett, CND, London

Editorial Note:

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