

Letters

WRITE TO US : Send Letters to 155a, Drummond Street, London NW 1.

BERUFSVERBOT—BRITISH STYLE

With reference to the article 'West Germany—Konsensus in Kommand' and especially the comment 'the berufsverbot is coming closer' referring to applicants for EEC jobs, I am enclosing a civil service sheet which shows similar probing into the political sympathies of prospective employees.

Here are some extracts from the document 'General Information for Candidates': 'Civil servants are subject to certain restrictions... on national or local political activities, including candidature for Parliament or a local authority; holding office in party political organisations; expressing views on matters of political controversy in public speeches or public writings; and canvassing on behalf of candidates in parliamentary or local government elections.

'... no one may employed in the Civil Service in connection with work the nature of which is vital to the security of the State if he is or has recently been a member of the British Communist Party or of a fascist organisation; or if in such a way as to raise legitimate doubts about his reliability, he is or has recently been sympathetic to communism or fascism, or is susceptible to communist or fascist pressure.'

Melanie Selfe
London N19

LONDON HEGEMONY

I'm disappointed with the paper, both the subjects covered and the political attitudes seem to me to be just too "independent", too "objective". Nothing is really being said. And, despite your hopes, the agitprop pages are just going to confirm and reinforce the hegemony of the south east. Nevertheless, best of luck.

Nick Sherington
Aberystwyth

TOLMERS BOOK AUTHOR

I'd like to add a small aside to your review of the Tolmers Square book (December issue)

The author 'launched' the book with a big party, inviting establishment as well as alternative figures, the book being marketable to, hopefully, both groups of people.

An invitation was sent to the place I work, where the book was typeset. Who was it sent to? The women who spent weeks each doing the work?

No it was sent to the boss.

Before I even pick up that expensive book, this tells me something about where the author's priorities really lie.

Ramsey Margolis
NGA
Dahling Dahling Ltd.

BRUM BOMBINGS—POLICE SUED

YOUR ARTICLE on the prisoners convicted for the Birmingham pub bombings [issue 1] was misleading in that it implied that no further remedy remained for them in this country.

In fact all six are to take legal action against the police officers who they claimed assaulted them. Because no legal aid is awarded for private criminal prosecutions, these actions will be civil ones to claim damages.

The prisoners hope that if these actions are successful, it will lead to a reopening of their case and doubt will be thrown on the way their so-called confessions were obtained.

If this fails then the only recourse will be to the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg.

Jacqueline Kaye
Prisoners Aid
Committee, London

Fight the 'Mish-Mash' Menace!

Don't you think that there is a danger that a magazine like *The Leveller* may hide more than it reveals? The news, reviews analyses that it gives us come from different points of view and put forward different opinions. There is no relation of one thing to another, beyond an implied consensus of "the left" that all of us, readers and writers, share certain common beliefs and assumptions.

This may be so and it may be that "the left" can unite for certain limited objectives. But what are these and under what circumstances and between what forces could such unity be obtained? These are questions that your magazine does not ask and hides the need to ask.

For instance, in your accounts of the liberation struggle around the world - from Southern Africa to Cambodia and Ireland - the largest questions of the relation of these struggles to the overall world struggle for Socialism are unasked. Is the main trend in the world today towards revolution and war, or is it towards evolution and peace? Is the Soviet Union the "natural ally" of the liberation struggles, as it says it is, or is it, as others say, a capitalist country and therefore (in today's world) an imperialist country?

And what about China, is it capitalist or socialist? And what is socialism? Is the Labour Party a socialist party or is it, as some of your articles imply

but do not state, a party representing the interests of state monopoly capitalism in this country?

In which case the Tory party, far from the old bogey that all "the left" can love to hate, is representative of an outmoded private monopoly capitalism and less dangerous. Who above all make up the working class that "the left" claims to defend? Can any groups or individuals put forward even a tentative outline of the social classes in Britain and, based also upon their practical experience, claim to know what they are talking about?

Unless you allow some discussion of these and other issues in your magazine, you are in danger of presenting your readers with only a mishmash of opinion, in which the common ground between all the different points of view is reduced to the lowest common denominator. Not to be negative in my criticism, which is intended to be helpful and raise questions, but to offer a positive example. The American weekly paper, *The Guardian*, while agreed on a certain anti-imperialist stance, opens its pages to a regular "fanning of the flames" feature, in which outstanding questions being debated in the US Marxist-Leninist movement are discussed. Your magazine might well attempt the same open exchange of views and thus raise the level of understanding of its regular news and reviews.

Pat Ainley
London E1

Need for policies —not just analysis

THE THREE contributions to "Understanding The Crisis" (*The Leveller* December 1976) offer some useful observations on Britain's current economic situation. But they are decidedly weak when it comes to the critical question of the left's response to the crisis and the kinds of alternative economic policies we should be fighting for.

This emerges most clearly from the piece by Ben Fine and Laurence Harris. Having acknowledged that the effect of working class struggle is ambiguous because "it can hinder capitalist accumulation but it thereby harms workers' living standards under capitalism", they fall back on the old socialist nostrum about the need for the development of working class consciousness to resolve this unpleasant dilemma.

But nothing in their analysis suggests how such a development might be set in motion.

If working class resistance to public spending cuts, pay restraint, high unemployment, rationalisation of the labour process and the rest will impede economic recovery in Britain, why should people not accept the logic of "pay now live later"? Why should anyone believe that things would be better under a different social order?

The multiple crises which, after a long maturation, came to a head in Britain in the train of the general world capitalist slump, exposed the political underdevelopment of the British left. During and since the political turning point of the EEC Referendum the organised left has signally failed to offer any credible alternative to mainstream definitions of national economic objectives and policies. Broadly speaking, the left has either worked for a revival of the halcyon days of mass economic militancy, or has engaged in political advocacy of abstract socialist aims.

The main exception to this general pattern has been Tony Benn and a section, though not all, of the *Tribune* Group, who have been seriously grappling with the questions of what kind of industrial regeneration we should be aiming at and how it can be achieved this side of a re-run of October 1917. The weakness of Benn's position has been the absence of any large scale organised self-activity outside Parliament and the various structures of the Labour Party to complement the struggle within these arenas.

Not that the ground has been completely barren. There have been the initiatives of the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards and of non-denominational bodies such as the Socialist Environmental Resources Association and Women and Health Groups.

But the organised left has failed to align itself with either kind of development. Demonstrating a poorer grasp of the conjuncture than its bourgeois opponents, the left has written off Benn and his policies as a left reformist cover for the Labour right, and as yet only imperfectly grasps the full significance of workplace and community action around positive programmes of democratic social control informed by rigorous technical expertise.

It does not follow automatically that if the economic aspects of the class struggle are pushed to a point of decisive showdown with the ruling class, a revolution in which it becomes possible