



Letters

Cultural movement

SIR: I have been moved to long hard thought by the stimulating essay of my friend, and sometime mentor, Lincoln Allison ("The English cultural movement," 16 February). He will forgive my taking issue with two essential points.

The first I call the dilemma of the urban romantic, and it is one I share. Allison, for example, cites that most urban of activities—watching football—and that most urban of painters—Lowry—as evident culturalist goods. Yet it is to Morris and Yeats he turns, to show that the "culturalist spirit" rejects the urban existence, *and all its works*.

He cannot have it both ways, and I suggest it is Morris and Yeats who must go. The orthodoxy of rural idylls is only too easily a descent to "the idiocy of rural life" the *Communist Manifesto* so deplored; it is certainly, in its own way, an impoverishment of culturalism.

Similarly, Allison rightly cites "those commendable fanatics whose energies are devoted . . . to re-establishing steam railways" as heroes of the movement; which surely proves "that values change too quickly to inspire confidence in the worth of any orthodoxy." William Wordsworth regarded railways as the ultimate destructive force for the rural scene" (Allison, *Environmental Planning*, page 125).

Herein lies the second difficulty. To allow the urban romantic dilemma to trick us with ruralist visions is to lose a grip on good and bad in any change. And it is this which is the ultimate question.

Unlike Lincoln Allison I have no difficulty finding enemies: they are the careless, the deterministic, the pedlars of their souls who man so much of private enterprise and public administration.

One example will suffice. At a recent road inquiry I attended, the Department of Transport frequently defended the scale of their scheme with the specific argument that 100 years ago the railways were disliked. Now, to my mind the fact that it takes generations for something smaller, quieter and less obtrusive than a motorway to be liked is an argument *against*.

The Dr's argument can only be used against "culturalists" if they prefer to dream dreams rather than facing tough issues of good and bad.

Personally I must turn to preparing the *We reserve the right to cut letters; please be brief. Monday is next week's deadline.*

case for my local amenity society to put to an examination in public.

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Asians in business

SIR: Tom Forester's ethnography of Asians in business ("Asians in business," 23 February) contained an implication that is false and could be very dangerous. He stated that "Asians in Britain have turned to self-employment and entrepreneurial experimentation" and your subhead over the article likened them to the Jews in this regard.

The PEP report, *Racial Disadvantage in Britain*, indicated quite clearly that the proportion of Asians who are self-employed is substantially lower than for the population as a whole and that for Asians only 8 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women are self-employed.

Even if Tom Forester's statement were pre-fixed by the words "a few," the general impression would remain that self-employment was a specially Asian or Jewish characteristic.

Even if the proposition were true for Asians and Jews that they had a higher than average proportion of self-employed, and Krausz suggests it is not even true for Jews, the vast majority of people in these groups would be **employees and in the case of Asians they would be disproportionately manual workers and hence low paid.**

The picture presented of hard-working, successful, if slightly dishonest Asian and Jewish businessmen is a false, racist stereotype which Forester and *NEW SOCIETY* should not propagate.

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Bouncing Czechs

SIR: Albert Hunt wants us to accept that 1968 will not come again and all that matters now in Prague is the vitality of the theatre (16 February). One could wish that the suppression of a country's freedom with foreign tanks in the streets, the censorship, the dismissals of teachers, officials and factory workers as well as writers, were irredeemably a thing of the past. But there are fairly obvious connections between the state of Czech theatre and what has happened since 1968 which it seems Hunt wants us to tactfully forget.

Shall we no more remember what Jan Palach died for? Is it ungrateful to remember the roles played by Brezhnev or how Husak came to power? After all they are the ones handing out the travel grants now, and what is a little liberty when the play's the thing ("but did you enjoy *the play*, Mr Dubcek?")

I suppose there is some value in your presenting us with the sort of ideological hypocrisy of which Hunt's self justification is such a fine example so that we may the more readily recognise it, but it sticks in the gullet just the same.

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Crime, police, courts

SIR: If Clive Davies's survey findings "Crime, police and courts" (23 February) will "hardly surprise anyone who is reasonably well-informed about the facts of inner city life," how does he explain their "considerable" effect on his own, albeit stereotyped, "social protest position"?

Indeed, the conventionalism, authoritarian aggression, and anti-intracception components of most of his respondents' attitudes are, by open measure, a clear echo of Theodore Adorno's work of some 30 years ago.

What concerns me is that a professional sociologist does not seem to discuss the authoritarian personality without developing sympathetic authoritarian traits himself; about birching, certainly, but also, perhaps, about "class conflict theorists" and "millenarian revolutionaries"?

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Race, truth and school

SIR: "Race, truth and school" was the title of your editorial (9 February) about the decision of the Schools Council not to publish, without substantial editing, the report of its project on "Education for a Multi-Racial Society." What a pity that the editorial itself was so careless about the truth of that particular matter.

The writer attributes all kinds of statements and attitudes to the NUT, for which there is not a shred of justification—for example, "the NUT refuses to admit that schools are anything but perfect," "the NUT does not believe in telling its members they are inadequate," "what is the point of the NUT backing projects on multi-racial education, if it is only going to refuse publication of the results," and so on.

That last statement is based on a grotesque misrepresentation of what happened when the Schools Council refused to sanction the publication of the "race pack" produced by the Humanities Project. It was not the NUT which "blocked publication" of material, any more than it was the NUT which "blocked" publication of the multi-racial project report. In each case, the operative decision was taken by the whole programme committee, with the other members of the committee taking much the same view as the union's representatives.

The next inaccuracy is to say that the proposal for the multi-racial education project, made in the name of the NUT, NAME and the NFER was a response to the rejection of the "race pack." It was nothing of the kind. It arose from a desire to assist teachers and schools to meet the need to educate pupils for life in a multi-racial society. The present discussions with NAME about a further curriculum project are based on the same purpose. More recently still the union's actions against the efforts of the National Front to propagate racist propaganda in schools stem from its determination to promote harmonious race relations and education for a multi-racial society.

Your editorial might at least have given the union some credit for what it is trying to achieve in these matters.

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A smell of trouble

SIR: The executive of Black Arrow, a black organisation operating in the Wolverhampton area, would like to correct certain inaccuracies in Mike Phillips's article on Wolverhampton ("A smell of trouble," 9 February).

1. The march held on Saturday afternoon 4 February 1978 was not "run by white anti-racists." It was organised by us in conjunction with Wolverhampton Anti-Racist Committee. All the major black organisations in Wolverhampton: the West Midland Afro Caribbean Association, Indian Workers Association and Indian Workers Association (GB) were represented at the meeting that called for the march.

2. There were at least 1,000 people on the march of which approximately 80 per cent must have been black. We counted at least 400 black youths of West Indian descent. Scenes shown on *Panorama* and *Left Right and Centre* show conclusively that the assertion that black attendance was "sparse" is false.

3. Phillips is wrong, too, in claiming that two black youths were arrested on the march. No one was arrested except a white man who threw a brick at us. We find it difficult to understand why a journal with a reputation for social scientific articles could publish such a superficial analysis of the Wolverhampton situation, given the seriousness of the political position here. Phillips at no time spoke to the black organisers of the march. We wonder why. Does he think black youth are incapable of political activity?

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Women lag behind

SIR: If only trade unions and Labour politicians could have shared the doubts expressed by Sue Ward ("Women still lag behind," 2 February) about the morality of an earnings related pensions scheme in a blatantly unequal labour market, before enacting the new deal for pensioners. What's wrong with a high flat-rate pension?

This is most important as it affects women. We will simply have to acquire a well-paid man to be solvent in old age—women are never going to earn the same as men in a society organised as ours is. Even my best 20 years will not be as good as those of a man in the same profession—because I have "forfeited" promotion by taking time off for childcare (for which I will get flat-rate credits which will entitle me to no more than the supplementary benefit level).

More important still, why should your writers think it is so tremendous for women to get credits for caring for children and invalids? Unless men too can get these credits, it will tie our hands for ever—in any couple, the man will be forced into the traditional breadwinner role and the woman into unpaid caring. And surely it's against EEC legislation to pass laws discriminating in this way?

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Informal class

SIR: "Admittedly," according to Herbivore (23 February), "the 1960s classroom was too informal, too little structured." Actually, it wasn't. Bennett's study of primary schools in the north east showed that there were fewer than 10 per cent of primary school teachers

whose classes were informal to any substantial degree.

Throughout the sixties and seventies the informal classroom has remained a comparative rarity. It seems likely that it will soon be rarer still. Which, for some of us, is just what the matter is, and has been all along.

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Self-help for parents

SIR: After the publication of the article "Self-help for parents" (12 January) suggesting a National Register of people wishing to support local *Parents Helpline* groups, we have so far received just under 500 offers of help. Before the article we were only aware of a tiny handful of such groups here, though we knew of many in the USA.

Doesn't this meet the general point your correspondents raise? I argue that we need a national focus so that people can learn from and reinforce each other. And also to help press for general reforms—in housing, taxation, employment, social work, health, education—so as to reduce the numbers of parents under stress who act violently towards their children. But we also need local groups where parents and professionals can talk out feelings and situations.

It is not an either-or situation. Both tactics support and feed the other, exactly as they have done in previous areas (from ending eleven plus to spotlighting childminding) where we have witnessed the inextricable nature of local and national initiative.

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Seebohm question

SIR: Olive Stevenson (2 February) chose not to draw together some strands of her arguments on the Seebohm question. In expressing her predilection for "genericism" in generic terms, that is, with specialisation within the teams, she only touched on what actually happens to those social workers who acquire expertise in special areas.

She referred to "advisers" as a consultancy resource necessary in social services departments and then spoke of their remoteness, lack of credibility and isolation from live management. This is the nub of a serious fundamental and pretty general problem—that the experts soon get promoted out of the field and hoisted up the hierarchical ladder where their skills are less available.

A useful alternative model is provided by the medical profession.

Patients commonly see their (generic) GP in the first instance and are mostly treated by him, but may be referred on to a central point where more specialised treatment is available (ie, the district general hospital). The specialist is employed by a different arm of the service and does not have to be involved in "intake"—at which he might not be particularly good or particularly interested.

A case can certainly be made out further for two arms of social work, that concerned with community/family problems and that concerned with illness, psychiatric and medical, separated to the extent that they do not have to compete for resources and status.

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Tailgunner Parkinson

One simple question represents for me all that is awful in casework. Up to about 1968 almost all clients were at some point offered this question in its crude unalloyed form and, I suspect, to their credit most managed to avoid the stupidity of a straight answer.

It all followed such a predictable path that any example may be randomly selected. Into the caring situation would totter a battered and bruised "matrimonial" and the usual tale would unfold: the waiting up night after night, the hot meals going dry in the oven, then the warrior's return, the abuse, the smashed plates, the paranoia and the punches.

Masked by a look of intense concern, the caseworker would await the moment—his moment—for the putting of the question. Like a first cross between the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth and a nervous fart, out it would finally come: "How do you feel about that?"

Some clients spontaneously blurted out: "Bleedin' sore!" Others, perhaps taking a leaf out of the caseworker's book, would throw back the problem, "Well how do you think I feel?" A few would clearly believe they had totally failed to communicate their problem by the use of language and would promptly start undoing blouses and pulling up skirts to reveal the clear stigmata of matrimonial hate. Yet others would remain silent and allow a "What on earth made me come here?" look slowly to swallow them up.

The brilliant Barbara Wootton was, I think, the first to point out the humiliation implicit in a great deal of social casework. I was at the Tavistock Institute when her book, *Social Service and Social Pathology*, was published in 1959. The staff wandered around like small rabbits that had caught their first glimpse of a hungry fox. Perhaps they realised that social work would never quite be the same again; "casework to a climax" was destined to die.

Say what you like about classical casework, while it lasted it did know most of the answers. During one seminar at the Tavi, I remember a highly respected tutor explaining to us in all seriousness that the only problem that stood in the way of creating a world radiant with mental health was the simple one of producing a sufficient number of trained therapists. We all sat unsmiling and believing.

Really there should be a museum for old casework skills and phrases. Put 2p in the machine and hear the recorded voice of Noel Timms repeating, "Perhaps this is your problem?"

But somehow I have a feeling that "How do you feel about that?" will manage to outlive us all. The genius who gave it to "do-goodery" was probably innocently delighted with his creation. Little could he have ever guessed what it would ultimately do to the rest of us.

Geoffrey Parkinson