

Reviews in brief

David McLellan
Marxism after Marx
Macmillan £8.95

Since *Marx before Marx* it has always been on the cards that David McLellan would want to produce a *Marxism after Marx*. But this useful volume is more like McLellan's other handy guidebook, *The Thought of Karl Marx*. That is, it consists of historical and biographical summaries of movements and persons, together with suggestions for further reading and so on. Its coverage is very wide—from the Second International to the various branches of the Fourth—and its tone is as always calm, informed and balanced. It's not always clear that the results are worth the effort: in the case of British trotskism, for instance, either one needs a vast amount of detailed information or none, and here we inevitably get just a little; but the book will be a great help to a lot more people than bemused undergraduates. ALAN RYAN

Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth
An A to Z of Income and Wealth
HMSO £1.25

The government, presumably anxious that we should not know the facts about the contrasts of riches and poverty in this country, has decided to abolish the royal commission which has previously published eight substantial reports on that and related subjects. This booklet is therefore the commissioners' swansong, designed to bring some of their findings to the notice of a wider public. In its 30 pages of diagrams, beautifully produced and explained, you can, for example, see how the poorest 50 per cent of the population have not increased their share of total personal incomes (after tax deduction) since 1949, but still get a slightly smaller share of the total than goes to the richest 10 per cent, even though the latter have lost a little to the middle ranges. Seldom has so much information been so attractively presented at so modest a price. BARBARA WOOTTON

Anthony Barker
Public Participation in Britain: a classified bibliography
Bedford Square Press £6.95 or, by post £7.95

Like many bibliographies these days, this one more than it claims to be. Barker has listed almost 1,400 books, reports and articles about participation in many fields, as indicated their content and, in a masterly introduction, has striven to draw together the many strands of community politics. COLIN WARD

Henri Desroche
The Sociology of Hope
Doubleday & Kegan Paul £8.95

Millennial movements from cargo cults to makerism form the substance of this book (translated by Carol Martin-Sperry), surrounded by a dubious and almost meta-physical body of dialectical theorising. Elaborate and excessive typological apparatus and exiguous accounts of leaders and movements are shot through with flashes of insight. BRYAN WILSON

Letters



West Indians at school

SIR: I am emboldened to write to you about Geoffrey Driver's article in the confident expectation that the overwhelming response from the denizens of the educational establishment will be hostile to his conclusions.

Among his more important reflections, Geoffrey Driver identifies one of the major social obstacles in the way of ethnic minorities as "predictive judgments by some theoreticians with universalistic or deterministic views."

This school of thought, which is so prominent in educational research, gets across a very crude message to the average student—namely, that there is a *prima facie* case for regarding ethnic minorities as disadvantaged groups who underachieve, and are therefore a problem. Many of the proposed remedies are equally crude, and in subject terms frequently amount to no more than a simplistic belief that all that is required is a change of content.

In history, for example, the argument in its most naive form will maintain that British history is irrelevant in a multi-cultured society and should be replaced by, say black studies or Caribbean history. Such remedies lead, in most cases, to even greater superficiality and, therefore, to greater irrelevance.

Geoffrey Driver's findings are the first that I can remember reading which treat a minority group, the West Indians, not as a special problem but as part of the total educational scene—where the problem is, and always has been, how to find ways and means of approaching the various subjects in the curriculum in a way that will make them comprehensible, interesting and relevant.

His article should be seen as a light at the end of the tunnel; and before it is brushed aside, educationists would do well to recall that both psychology and commonsense suggest that children respond and achieve largely in relation to the expectations which their teachers have of them—a hypothesis which the determinist school has little difficulty in accepting when the subject under debate is mixed ability grouping versus streaming.

MARTYN DYER
Department of History
St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill,
Twickenham, Middlesex

SIR: Geoffrey Driver's article on West Indian pupils has received considerable publicity outside your journal, due, I fear, to a desire by educationists and policy makers to believe the overgeneralised headline introducing the article. A belief in an improving situation will enable them to cease worrying about difficult policy changes and resource allocation needed to aid Afro-Caribbean children.

The recent ILEA research and the latest findings from the National Child Development Study (which you only mention in passing and which we reserve the right to cut letters; please be brief. Monday is next week's deadline.

do not give prominence to) do not confirm Driver's findings. Nor does my own research. I have monitored the comparative achievement of Afro-Caribbean children in one borough from age five to 16. At all ages, the children were performing worse than their white peers and, in particular, they were failing in the secondary school.

To give just one example, only one adolescent of Afro-Caribbean descent had obtained mathematics at O level in June 1979; only three had obtained English O level. The fact that the sample had obtained 337 CSE passes grades 2-6 does not in my view, or in their parents' view, mean that they are obtaining equality of opportunity to compete in the job market and for higher education places.

I am concerned that complacency, supported by one small research project, will slow down or halt the very real need to look critically at what is going on in schools and the position of Afro-Caribbean children and adolescents in the structure of opportunities in our society.

JENNY WILLIAMS
Lecturer in Sociology
The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton

SIR: The increasingly explosive correspondence on Geoffrey Driver's article is rather low on comparative data, though—understandably—high in political temperature. I appreciate the importance of the issues; what I do not understand is the manifest surprise generated by the findings. If your embattled correspondents will refer to the work of P. E. Vernon (*Selection for Secondary Education in Jamaica*, Kingston, 1961) or of D. R. Manley (*Mental Ability in Jamaica, Social and Economic Studies* vol. 12, University of the West Indies, Kingston, 1963) they will observe that the superior school achievement of Jamaican girls has already been well documented in the Jamaican context, while the questions arising therefrom may well be extensible to other Caribbean islands.

Moray House tests in verbal reasoning, English and arithmetic were there used to assess school attainment and, whatever their deficiency as measures of inherent ability, they demonstrated over a very wide class range, and in almost all environments (on a rural-urban scale) girls were normally more successful than boys in meeting the demands of a rather traditional education system. The difference was most marked among the daughters of professional and managerial parents.

The material is old, of course—just about old enough to be descriptive of secondary school candidates in the generation that became parents to Driver's current school leavers in Britain. I do not think they will be very surprised at their daughters' success. They might well expect more.

But would their attitude be sufficient to constitute a complex matter like an ethnicity? If it were indeed closely linked with other organisational and cultural factors—like, say, family structure—perhaps. But the daughters of that class where the matrifocal family was most widespread are not the girls who were, in Jamaica, outstripping their brothers.

And can we even be sure that the educational pre-eminence of the girls who did is a specifically Jamaican characteristic? Rather, it might be specific to a particular structure of employment. We might deduce that where it is economically convenient for men to be available for heavy, unskilled and irregular agricultural work, there is an advantage in reserving to women the stable, non-seasonal white collar jobs.

On the other hand, the girls' relative academic distinction may simply be normal to the human race. There is no real need to go as far as Jamaica to find schools where the girls are more successful. The younger classes in primary schools, the length and breadth of the UK, will do quite as well.

Though Driver intends his ethnic concept as a celebration of the strengths available to West Indian women, he must also reckon with the extent to which a closely similar concept has been used to deplore, and explain away, the "weakness" of West Indian men.

The ethnicity concept, or even a simple family expectation of schoolgirl success, ought to imply a pre-disposition to the relative failure of boys, and Driver's West Indian boys were doing better than their English counterparts. I would therefore suggest a tentative modification towards the prosaically functional.

Allowing persistence into a second generation of the expectations built on a Jamaican employment structure, it is possible to conclude that where women have been regarded as responsible beings, and have had reasonable access to good employment, they will, at least for a while, be motivated towards success in school. Where men, or women, are seen as a reservoir of unskilled labour they will tend to do badly in school.

And—placing those less successful English boys—where men have traditionally expected better paid and more highly reputed work, and find those expectations now denied, then they will do even worse.

How long can Driver's West Indian girls hold out against the disillusiones of English ethnicity, or against the female unemployment consequent on the slaughter of jobs in the public services?

RACHEL POWELL
School of History of Art and
Complementary Studies,
Birmingham Polytechnic, Birmingham

SIR: Geoffrey Driver has highlighted a fact which many black people have known for a long time—that given the opportunity West Indians do just as well and even better than their white peers. Nevertheless, this is not to say that "under-achievement" does not exist among West Indians—not because of ethnicity *per se*, but due to institutional racism and teacher prejudices.

Driver does not distinguish clearly between CSE and O level in terms of their differential statuses and their importance for West Indians generally. It would have been more enlightening to know whether there were more West Indians than English taking CSE courses compared with GCE courses. General observation shows that more West Indians do take CSE than GCE. The better results of these West Indian girls in CSE may explain, for example, just why they should not have taken CSE in the first place!

Driver also does not tell us anything about the relative size of the West Indian populations in the chosen schools. We do know for a fact that, in some inner city schools with high black populations, blacks in the main do badly and are often not entered for public examinations.

Driver tells us nothing about class differences in West Indian achievement. The tendency to assume that because they attend the same school as poor whites, blacks are all working class and therefore poor and deprived can be problematic. We do not know the background—for example, the class, socio-economic status, primary school progress, and so on—of these "high" achievers. Had the successful West Indian girls a successful

primary school record?

Driver gives us some matriarchalist reasons for such success. This may be so, but recent research has demonstrated that the labour market offers better career/professional prospects for black women than for black men—as in nursing, social work and secretarial work.

I am afraid that if we fall for such research findings without asking even more critical questions, institutional racism will be allowed to flourish, and blacks who make demands on the education authorities for more relevant curricula, more resources and better prospects for black teachers will find Driver's findings an obstacle.

GEORGE FISHER
Brunel Institute of Organisation
and Social Studies,
Brunel University, Uxbridge

SIR: Dr Driver's findings ("How West Indians do better at school," 17 January) are welcome in conclusively refuting the viewpoint of extremists who, citing Jensen and Eysenck, seek to cloak their racialism in a veneer of academic respectability.

Unfortunately, his research is bound similarly to be used by passive racialists, those people whose attitude was illustrated in the Home Secretary's defence of the changes in the immigration rules. Referring to the system of arranged marriages, William Whitelaw said he could not "see anything wrong in the way in which our country has worked over generations."

There are, of course, far more passive racialists than there are racial extremists and, because they are well represented amongst policy makers and those who shape opinion in this country, it is they who represent the greatest obstacle to the achievement of racial equality.

Driver's research does not *ipso facto* invalidate other work, carried out over many years here and elsewhere, nor the recommendations based on that work about the pre-conditions necessary for pupils from racial minorities to realise their academic potential. There is little evidence that the majority of local education authorities have even looked further than language provision to meet the needs of pupils whose main frame of reference is a non-British cultural tradition and who are living in a racist society.

Without entering into a fruitless argument about representative sampling, variations in schools' attitudes on exam entries or the real significance of exam results, it is important that all of us who are committed to working for racial equality insist that the onus rests on LEAs to demonstrate that black pupils in their secondary schools are achieving comparably with those in the five schools studied by Dr Driver.

Where they are doing so, one wonders what further measures schools can take to enable their bright black pupils to come to terms with the fact that, when they leave school (or university for that matter), they will find it so much more difficult than their white peers to get jobs which anywhere near match their qualifications.

MARIAN GERRARD
2 Campbell Road,
London, E17

Law Commission

SIR: Readers of Jenny Levin's note "No Controversy" on the Law Commission's annual report (24 January) might like to know that among the topics presently under consideration

by the commission, which affect and concern a great many ordinary people are:

Aspects of insurance of vital interest to everyone who takes out an insurance policy.

The important question of what should constitute an attempt to commit a crime.

What should be the legal rules governing contracts where one party is under 18 years of age.

The whole question of the status of an illegitimate child.

The problem of child kidnapping.

The need for reform of the three-year time limit in divorce, which is to be followed by a review of the law relating to the ground of divorce.

In all cases these subjects cover very much more than "highly technical and obscure issues of lawyers' law."

So far as the legislation on children in care is concerned, the reason for postponing a full review, which can be done only with the co-operation of the relevant government departments, is lack of resources in those departments, and in the commission itself. We do not think that inability to undertake a full review at present should inhibit more limited reforms in this area.

Neither the past record of the commission nor the work it has in hand justifies the assertion that we are unwilling to undertake investigations into controversial areas of the law. But it is sometimes desirable to allow time for public debate and for a consensus to emerge at least on the need for reform before we review the law in such areas. It is for this reason that we do not think that the time has yet come for us to initiate any review of the policy of the law governing the financial aspects of divorce.

All these matters, as well as the continuous work being done on statute law, are covered in our report.

J. C. R. FIELDSSEND
Secretary, Law Commission
37/38 John Street, London WC1

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