

Letters

Dear Editors

The trouble with most Marxists, would-be Marxists, left-wing intellectuals, and banner-carrying hangers-on, is that they live outside the real class-struggle; they live in cloisters, like monks; and only very rarely do they ever descend into the suppurating wound where the organisms of inequality originate.

There is sound reason for the belief that no revolution will ever take place in this country because the intellectual forces which would be required to give such a revolution leadership are too busy arguing the trivial points of socialism to be bothered with anything as menial as a revolution. This attitude of the left-wing intelligentsia has done a great disservice to the movements of the left; lessening their credibility and weakening their forces.

I wonder how many readers of this journal, radical philosophers though they may be, have ever lived in a slum, or been at the receiving end of a charlatan factor's unscrupulous practices. Or how many of them have been at the brink of death, surviving only by eating pieces of cardboard. I suspect most of you have come from secure middle-class backgrounds, and the class-struggle presents you with a little spice; a little revolution of your own. Do you really care to dirty your hands investigating the realities of poverty?

A true revolutionary socialist should be with the workers offering them something which they

clearly lack - knowledge; how to fight the forces of oppression, how to recover the dignity which the workers have lost in this time of mass indoctrination. You should be at the factory gate, in the workers canteen; the workers will never come to you, you will have to go to them.

Endless hours of poring through masses of socialist literature will never right a social wrong, or fight a revolution. An old woman dying of hunger in Liverpool derives no consolation knowing that in the university round the corner there is someone talking about the wrongs that exist in this society which watched her die; but he is only talking about it.

So, as a working man, who incidentally was introduced to your journal through the carelessness of the cleansing department, I ask you to throw your copy of *Das Kapital* away, stop arguing, leave your monasteries, and go out into the streets. That is where the fight is all happening.

George Provan
Glasgow

Dear Editors

Are you actually trying to move in on the *Mind* market? Or is there so little movement inside British tertiary schools that you are forced into almost pure articlism? I don't object to the articles themselves - on second reading I understand most of them quite well, despite the

verbal flatulence radicals share with their straighter colleagues - but who is communicating to who?

The whole thing would start to look more serious if, just for a start (a) people started commenting on what goes on in the journal without feeling obliged to build verbal cathedrals; (b) the pages of the journal were actually used by people who need to get help from each other, or just to communicate ideas they are working on, about things they have read, even about courses they are trying to put on, with 'essays' or 'dissertations' they are writing. For example, I am trying to work out what dialectical materialism is, in the context of a third year course. I've read Engels, Stalin and Althusser. I am still 'very unclear'. Could someone send a useful bibliography to the editors so they could, if they would, publish it for me and others like me? Maybe some even have useful material they could remove from under their backsides, without solicitation. (c) it was not felt beneath the dignity of radical heavies to contest the terms in which politicians, the media etc, are now posing, e.g. 'the crisis we are all faced with', to descend to agitational philosophy. Or do the masses need to understand the labour theory of value to know they are being taken for a ride?

I remain, but do not rest,
Neil Thorley

Reviews

Marx's metaphysics

Bertell Ollmann: *ALIENATION: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge University Press, hardback £4.00, paperback £1.80.

At a time when books on Marx and, still more, books on alienation, lie thick on the ground, I should like to point out that in my view Ollman's work is something quite special. It is what occurs depressingly rarely in the literature: a serious and lucid exploration of Marx's philosophical presuppositions. If its thesis is found convincing, then it constitutes a major original reinterpretation of Marx. If it fails to convince, then the exercise

of coming to grips with what Ollman says is still in every sense worthwhile and rewarding.

Alienation is divided into three main parts: (1) an account of Marx's philosophical position, (2) an account of Marx's view of human nature, and (3) an account of Marx's theory of alienation. It is Ollman's view - and he is surely correct - that one cannot understand Marx on a specific topic without having grasped his overall philosophical approach. Without this, we shall be continually asking of Marx the wrong questions and assessing him by the wrong criteria. It is in Ollman's account of Marx's general philosophical presuppositions that the originality of *Alienation* lies. In what follows, I shall comment on each of Ollman's three main

sections in turn.

1. Philosophy

In this, to me his most interesting section, Ollman starts by considering an interpretation of Marx to be found in the writings of H B Acton¹ and John Plamenatz². On this interpretation, Marx divides man's activities into a set of separate and mutually exclusive 'factors', certain of which are said to change independently of, and be ultimately responsible for changes in, the others. Having interpreted Marx in this way, these critics then object that social reality cannot be so divided, that one cannot conceive of a 'purely economic' base without introducing into it legal or even moral elements which Marx at the same