

# Letters

## Conservative and oppressive

Editor:

Sexism continues to be an element of *ITT*. The latest instance is John Judis' feature on punk rock (*ITT*, Nov. 2). Judis passes lightly over the fact that punk rock "has its B&D freaks and its brutal misogynists." His analysis of punk rock ends on a note of sympathy and quiet admiration: "There is much to learn from and enjoy in punk rock." This lack of concern for the dimension of sexual inequality and oppression is depressingly typical.

Judis also is sexist in tying the "degeneration" of Elvis Presley to the fact that Elvis was always in part a "mama's boy." This derogatory construct — mama's boy — is misogynistic itself. No wonder Judis doesn't make an issue of the anti-woman element of punk rock.

The socialism of *ITT* in general is inadequately concerned with the exploitation and oppression of female people. Labor coverage has a male emphasis, despite the fact that non-white women comprise the cellar in the capitalist wage hierarchy with white women next to the bottom. Perhaps if you would focus more on non-unionized labor the results would be less sexist.

It is also offensive that *ITT* uses the title **WOMEN** over articles that contain material on the oppression of female people. The article on wife-beating (Sept. 28) is just as much a human and political issue as the article on police brutality towards Kentucky miners in the Nov. 2 issue. The fact that *ITT* saw fit to print **WOMEN** over the wife-beating article is testimony to the fact that the rest of the newspaper is ordinarily concerned with issues arising out of the male experience of capitalism and domination. The beaten wife is a brutalized worker, no less than the attacked miner.

There is no excuse for ignorance and insensitivity to the force of sexism and male domination and its place in a capitalist system—there have been plenty of analyses written. Until the staff of *ITT* begin educating themselves on these issues the paper remains in part conservative and oppressive.

—Joanne Corbett  
Boston

## Left (right?)

Editor:

Joshua Dressler states (*ITT*, Oct. 26) that, to him, defending free speech for Nazis is "a means to an end, free speech for the left." Harshly put, that is the Nazi position, too, substituting "right" for "left."

The point is that the civil libertarian view of free speech is not that its purpose is merely individualistic self-indulgence. Its purpose is to correct false speech with more speech, to be a tool for people to keep open an informed, critical democratic process.

With all its flaws, I'll go that route rather than submit myself to the rule of "free speech for the left (right)," which can only mean whatever the authoritarian in power wishes it to mean at that moment. After all, maybe my looking-glass "left" is the wrong left (right-left/right-right), some of us being more equal than others on this here animal farm.

Josh also sets up a straw man. The American Civil Liberties Union does not, in my longish memory, "cling to the belief that law is neutral," as he asserts. However, we do try to push the law to live up to its rhetoric in that respect, and that has accomplished a lot for the "outs."

But those of us who are socialists know—as I tell my anti-Bakke friends—

that this economic system is not going to bring social justice. That's why we are also democratic socialists. Right? (Left?)

The rest of the column was dead right (live left?).

—Edwin L. Laing  
Santa Barbara, Calif.

## Socialist protectionism?

Editor:

Your editorial (*ITT*, Nov. 2) might have some basis if the working class USA were struggling for socialism while workers throughout the rest of the world abhorred the idea. But it's not that way.

The weird economics of protectionism is part of the old game of divide and disorient the working class to keep on plucking them. There is no point in trying to shuffle unemployment around from one geographic area to another, inside national boundaries or outside of them. If we could bring the jobs from country X here and shove our unemployment there, wages would thereby be pushed down in X and our employers, whether they were greedy capitalists or liberal state-capitalist bureaucrats, would ask us to take a cut in pay so we could compete in the markets of countries A, B & C against the lowered X wage rates. Or if, by tariff or boycott, we keep the products of X out of the U.S. to save jobs here in industries L, M & O, we can expect lay-offs here in industries R, S & T that used to sell stuff to X. Surely there is some more rational way to see that we all eat.

The valid union approach is that workers should stick together and not go to bed with the boss, on the tariff or any other issue. We live in a world market and need to extend union principles to that world market. If we do, we can soon stop worrying about unemployment and concentrate on how four billion people and their descendants are going to have good times on this round ball.

—Fred Thompson  
Chicago

## News to the people of China

Editor:

David Milton's pronouncements (*ITT*, Oct. 12) about the "conservative regime" that has emerged in China since Mao's death bear a striking resemblance to the insights of other China watchers that have gone up in smoke over the years.

Visions of Chinese social and economic policies distinctly flavored by "revisionism" have become a major theme among Milton's fellow practitioners of the art of reading the stars. Some, like Milton, have spent a few years in China at one time and come away frustrated because the Chinese don't behave in the manner approved by a conservative or liberal Westerner or by a "radical" teacher of English in Peking hailing from the U.S.

Flat statements served up as gospel truth in the Milton article pound the reader's pulse—an exhausted post-Mao China; the new technological and political elite; new efforts to subordinate the peasantry; complete repudiation of the "maoist policy" of broadening participation in factory administration by workers; one man was responsible for arresting Chiang Ching; Mao reverted to the "feudal politics" of 2,000 years of Chinese history.

All this and more, the crystal ball implies, are turning China away from a truly revolutionary path: "Order, unity and economic progress," after years of turmoil and the influence of Chiang Ching and her cohorts in any number of fields including the economy, are made to sound like dirty words.

From his vantage point in San Francisco, Milton assures us that the present mood of China's people is resignation! They "must now feel that if they must again be ruled by an elite, let it at least be competent."

This indeed is news to the people of China, as is the fantasy that their country is "exhausted." If anything, developments in China since last autumn have

brought on new expectations of socialist advance.

I was still in China at the time of the fall of the "gang of four" in October 1976 and a half year after that. I'd say the mood of the Chinese, following the enormous popular relief and elation at the gang's demise, is one of great hope that the nation can again get down to the job of building socialism.

Whether what is happening in China is what "experts" like Milton are now saying, time will tell.

—Julian Schuman  
San Francisco

## Is this a sound comparison?

Editor:

The continuing controversy over the *ITT* support of the ACLU-American Nazi party position in Illinois prompts this letter.

It appears to me that the issue has been debated to this point primarily in terms of theory and principle. I am more concerned with the action, if any, that should accompany the acceptance of these principles.

In the debate there appear to be two points of view. The first—and the *ITT* position—holds that, as socialists, we should support the political rights of the American Nazi party. This position argues that if the political rights of the group are diminished, the rights of all, including the left, are likewise diminished; and that if the ACLU and the Nazis lose, a bad precedent will be established. As some have noted, this position assumes the neutrality of law in class society, nor does it confront the possibility of the alternative, which is that the Nazis, because they are either "immoral" or "wrong," should be denied the full range of political liberties in a bourgeois democracy. The defects in this position are obvious.

However, having accepted the position of support for the rights of the American Nazi party in theory, is it necessary to act upon this belief in this particular case? I question the strategy of aiding the American Nazi party in practice. The only possible justification for co-operation with the American Nazi party would seem to be self-defense; that an attack on the rights of the Nazis represented an imminent threat to the very survival of the left. At no time has the Illinois case been demonstrated to pose such a threat. Accordingly, it seems fair to operate on the assumption that, since the Nazis are presumably not overly solicitous of the left's political liberties, there is no compelling reason to be overly solicitous of their rights. By way of comparison, I would accept the rights of the American Nazi party to qualify for a place on the electoral ballot; but I will not sign their electoral qualifying petitions and thereby make it any easier for them to satisfy ordinary and practical electoral requirements.

—Tom Dietz  
Detroit

## An unlikely solution

Editor:

There's a simplistic formula to explain why social services decline in a tight economy—blame the workers!

I'm disappointed to see Nat Hentoff (*ITT*, Sept. 28) offer such a pat solution to explain why students don't learn to read. There's a lot more to it than bad teachers. He could have at least mentioned an economic system that lays off thousands of teachers while some young people sit in 35-person classes.

Sure, there are plenty of incompetent teachers. But getting rid of individuals doesn't reach the heart of the matter.

Public school systems themselves need to be reorganized. Existing school bureaucracies should be replaced by decentralized management, so that parents and teachers can run local schools. And students should be given a large say in how they are to be educated. The key is to make our education system flexible enough to meet the needs of each student.

I'm no defender of the tenure system that Hentoff attacks. But teachers do

need some protections. Usually it is not incompetent teachers, but outspoken/radical teachers who come under fire. Simply making it easier to fire teachers—Hentoff's only concrete suggestion—is unlikely to solve the reading problem.

Doug Honig  
Seattle

## Nonsense

Editor:

I have just read Joshua Dressler's criticism of libertarianism (*ITT*, Oct. 11), and I think it is nonsense.

Dressler is worried that libertarians would take away the state's power to mandate the wearing of motorcycle helmets and to suppress laetrile. Even assuming that action in these areas is desirable—better examples could have been found—there is no reason to conclude that the state should in fact step in. The desirability of something isn't enough to give the state the right to act on it. It is desirable that Nazis not speak; but it is even more desirable that the state have no say in the matter.

Unlike Dressler, I think it is fully consistent for socialists to espouse libertarian beliefs. It is a terrible mistake to equate socialism, a cooperative commonwealth, with state interference in how people choose to live.

—Paul Berman  
New York

## Corrections:

In our last issue, Vol. 1, No. 49, Nov. 2-8, 1977, we inadvertently left off the byline on "The Fiefdom of Russell Long." The article was written by Alan Ehrenhalt for Congressional Quarterly news service.

We also left off notice that Roy Appleton's "Devil Defies Denton Drys" first appeared in the *Texas Observer* (600 W. 7th St., Austin, TX 78701), and is reprinted with their permission.

**Editor's Note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

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## JUSTICE FOR LETELIER AND MOFFIT FREEDOM FOR CHILE

C O M E H E A R :

Isabel Letelier, widow of Orlando Letelier, Allende's ambassador to the United States, who was assassinated in Washington D.C. by agents of the Chilean fascist secret police.

Ralph Stavins, Washington attorney and coordinator of the independent investigation into the assassination.

Film: "The Long Arm of the DINA"

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Hans Koning

# There is no immunity to violence in the modern world

As I am writing this, on a rainy day in Paris, no fewer than 100,000 policemen in Western Europe are looking for the people who kidnapped and then killed the German industrialist Hanns Martin Schleyer. A hundred thousand men—the equivalent of six army divisions!—pulled out in the middle of all the local American-style crime waves: it shows an international determination and collaboration seldom seen. Seldom? Never. Never in modern history have German and French forces collaborated on this scale.

The newspaper and television commentators on the European continent and in England have been speaking with one voice: the German terrorists, this second or third generation of the Baader-Meinhof gang, must be exterminated like rabid dogs. Only the French *Le Monde* (one of the most serious papers in the world, by the way) had the gall, or the objectivity, to run an article assuredly not condoning murder, but putting questions, painting a picture with half-tones rather than blacks or whites. It was not an editorial but a contributed "Op-Ed" piece (by the playwright Jean Genet), which did not stop every other paper I've seen, down to the execrable eight-penny dreadful *Evening Standard*, from calling *Le Monde* bastardly if not treacherous for doing that.

No paper dwelt on the questionability of terrorists' suicides with pistols in a maximum security jail, and only "left wing extremists" struck a false note amongst the

eulogies by saying that Schleyer had been a "war criminal." As Schleyer was a member of the German occupation forces in Prague at the end of World War II and an SS-man, these left-wingers, extreme or not, would seem justified: the SS was declared a criminal organization at Nuremberg. The question is raised once more, how true is the accusation that the West German establishment over the age of 50 is almost solidly ex-Nazi? It may be in bad taste to mention this when a man has been killed, but we are dealing with a political matter, not a social event.

To avoid the automatic misunderstandings produced in these cases, I must emphasize that I am not suggesting any of this justifies Schleyer's kidnapping and murder. But trying to understand them is something else. That appears to me a legitimate enterprise, one not served by the expert commentators jumping to typewriter and microphone to explain the psychopathology of these "children of Hitler" or, alternatively, to announce that there is simply no explanation for such behavior. They remind me uncomfortably of those psychiatrists and psychologists holding forth ten years ago in *The New York Times Magazine* and *Time* and *Parade* about the neuroses and psychoses—not of the men who were dropping ten million tons of bombs on Vietnam, but of the men and women who had bombed or were trying to bomb an army recruiting center or war research lab.

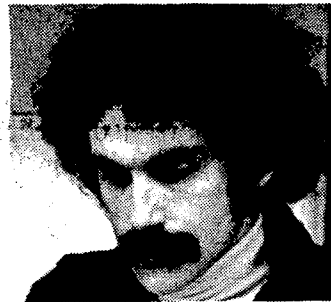
Am I equating our anti-war protests with the activities of the German Red Army? Equating, no. Comparing, yes. Surely only a true pacifist, a man who has rejected all terror and all violence, a man like the late A.J. Muste, for instance, has the right to reject terror per se. Everyone else has the right to investigate its degree of justification, and no European state government perpetrator of institutionalized violence through centuries, has the moral legs to stand on while it is forbidding us to do so.

The fears and hysteria of the European middle classes are neither surprising nor new. Everyone is scared of ending up in a hijacked plane, precisely because it can happen to a person who hasn't "done anything," without provocation. The anarchist bombs in the Paris cafes around the year 1900 created the same reaction: it could happen to anyone. That is why some European newspaper readers are more outraged by Schleyer's death than they were 30 years ago by the deaths of resistance heroes: the heroes had stuck their necks out, knew what the anti-German underground was getting into, while the newspaper readers knew that German firing squads did not threaten them.

No real socialist, and no real revolutionary either, no matter how "extreme left wing," can condone the victimizing of innocents. Che Guevara, who called for "Three...four Vietnams," did not, and even at the very end in Bolivia he kept sett-

ing his army prisoners free (contributing in that way to his own capture). But we do not need to prove how housebroken we are by joining the chorus that sees terrorism as a well-nigh unexplainable, devilish phenomenon, a game of maniacs out to spoil our democratic world order. All action equals reaction and vice versa. Hijacking became a fashion when the U.S. cut all links with Cuba and made it into a no-man's-land. We regularly read of murderers who "went wrong" in Vietnam. There is silent terror in those third-generation camps of Palestinian refugees, those prisons of the Shah of Iran, Indonesian concentration camps, Russian psychiatric wards. If Baader was a "child of Hitler," then so was Schleyer. Let us equally reject the violence of amateurs (the terrorists) and the violence of the professionals (the statesmen). Let us learn, too, that there is no immunity and no neutrality left in the modern world. The hijacked plane, the bomb in the pub, should finally teach us that the words "I don't care," "That is not my concern," "I lead my own life," are not only immoral, but that they no longer give protection.

Hans Koning is a New York novelist and former reporter-at-large for the *New Yorker*. His latest novel, *The Petersburg-Cannes Express* is now being filmed in Europe; his latest book of non-fiction, *A New Yorker in Egypt*, came out last winter.



Herbert A. Schreier

## Black children sue California over bias in intelligence tests

An important trial began last week (Oct. 11) in Federal Court in San Francisco, Calif. The suit, *Larry P. vs. Riles*, a class action brought on behalf of six black children, contends that black children are unjustly overrepresented in classes for the mentally retarded. That there are many more blacks in classes for the educable or mentally retarded (EMR) is a fact. While 9.1 percent of California pupils are black, 27.5 percent of the children in EMR classes are black. The plaintiffs will attempt to show that standard intelligence tests have a built-in cultural bias that inappropriately labels black children, condemning them to a classroom situation where they will most likely fulfill the system's expectations of them.

Numerous studies have not only demonstrated that children, adults and even rats conform to testers' expectations of how well they perform on seeming "objective tests" (even mazes), but they also show how children conform in their "abilities" to the expectations of adults teaching them. The plaintiffs charge that "the stigma attached to the EMR notation on their record and the widening gap in actual learning...deny [them] any chance to realize their potential." The suit brought in 1971 has already had one major effect: the federal judge in the case, Robert Peckham, issued an order in 1972 stopping San Francisco public schools from using IQ tests to place black children in classes for the EMR. In 1974 a similar racial imbalance was noted outside San Francisco and the order was expanded to cover the whole state of California.

California has taken many stands in pretrial court pleas, including one that suggested that one of the factors for lower intelligence scores by students in these classes was a "poor genetic pool for all races, ghettoized in the inner city." Other factors that contribute to "lower intelligence" among blacks, the state will contend, are poor nutrition, pregnant moth-

### Even rats conform to testers' expectations of how they will perform on "objective" tests, including mazes.

ers, poor prenatal and postnatal care, one-parent families, a greater number of births to one mother, teenage pregnancies, and other environmental conditions of the poor.

The genetic explanation argument is being dropped by the state but warrants comment here. The studies on which Arthur Jensen based his work which purported to show that lower IQ test scores found among black students when compared with whites, was based on genetic inheritance, have recently been shown to be fraudulent (*ITT*, Dec 6, 1976). While it is likely that some portion of intelligence is inherited, it is impossible now and in the foreseeable future to separate out the contributions of genes from that of environment. But even the differences found in test scores are highly suspect. Much has been written on the cultural bias of standardized IQ tests. Thus, the Stanford Binet, one such intelligence test, has such test items as a question asking students to choose the "pretty face." The "wrong" answer is a person with negroid facial features. In fact, when qualified Bay Area black psychologists reworded some of the items on standard tests to make them more consistent with the children's background and language experience, made special efforts to establish a good rapport and gave credit to non-standard answers that nevertheless showed an intelligent approach to the problem, each of six black EMR students scored above the cut-off point for placement in EMR classes. Another group of psychologists recently wrote a test using language that black children are familiar with that not only demonstrated their abilities but would have resulted in most white takers

of the examination being classified as retarded.

The State, in moving from a defense based on a genetic argument to one based on factors of birth trauma and poor prenatal care, leading to irreparable damage, has moved to a much more sophisticated argument. There is much documentation to indicate that poor care during pregnancy, poor nutrition of mothers, teenage pregnancy, prematurity, and low birth weight, lead to problems in early development and to infants doing poorly on early tests of "intelligence." All the above conditions have been shown to be associated with poverty, and black people are grossly overrepresented among the poor. Such arguments, if accurate, would lead one to policies to improve nutrition and prenatal care, but would permit the State and its education system to feel less responsible for the outrageously high levels of illiteracy recorded in many of the nation's cities. But a closer examination of more recent studies in this area provides little peace for those who would argue that the initial biological inputs determine for the most part the outcome that is the lot of many black children.

Studies following thousands of children from birth demonstrate that the noxious effects of early trauma such as prematurity, low birth weight and early anoxia (periods without oxygen) and other birth trauma, pale by comparison with the effects of low socio-economic status. To quote one review, these studies have "yet to produce a single predictive variable more potent than the familial and socio-economic characteristics of the caretaker environment." In one study, children from poor families who scored low on eight-months tests of

"intelligence" continued to do so at four years. But the researchers found a cross-over effect—children from upper class families who were in the lowest quartile on these examinations at eight months, performed better at four years than children from poor families who scored in the highest quartile at eight months!

Now, the argument is likely to turn to the Moynihan concept of the "pathological" black family. In its most pernicious form, the black family with its absent father and strong matriarch was said to be a persistent product of years of degradation from slavery to urban ghettoization. Little could be done to help black children without major therapeutic interventions to change the black family. First, it should be noted that the primary effect in the infant studies quoted above was from socio-economic status, not race—that is, not from being black, but from being poor.

Recent studies have shown that, contrary to the view of the black family cited above, there is enormous strength and resiliency in the family network systems of the black ghettos; that many black children develop excellent survival strategies for the world they face.

Applying middle-class white family standards to blacks will produce a picture of a "pathological" family as likely as applying white middle-class standards of language and informational skills will produce a picture of a cognitively damaged black child. Poverty takes its toll on blacks and whites alike. Those who focus on the "irreparable" harm done by being poor will find a convenient excuse for passing the blame to another part of the system. Money and special programs for hungry people with poor medical care are essential, but cannot be seen as solutions to the basic imbalance in the distribution of the fruits of a society that depends so heavily on that imbalance for its existence.

Herbert A. Schreier, M.D., is a physician at Oakland (Calif.) Children's Hospital.