

Letters

A note of sanity on the Middle East

Editor:

It is no solution to the problem of the Middle East to dismiss the plight of the Palestinian refugees by saying that "they could have been assimilated long ago by the oil-rich Arab states" or because, in the opinion of some, "they are pawns of their Arab masters" (Letter, *ITT*, Nov. 2).

To discuss the Middle East question one should know something of history. At a minimum I will mention the guarantees to the Arabs of full sovereignty in return for their assistance against the Turks, the Syke-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration and the circumstances surrounding the issuance and the betrayal of every promise made to the Arabs. And above all, one should be aware of the history of the British policy in implementing the immigration of the Jews to Palestine.

While the solution to the problems may not be evident, the starting point is to admit that a grave injustice has been done to the Palestinians by the creation of a modern diaspora. Unless this is done, there is no hope beyond the pragmatic solution of might.

—D.B. Lawrence
Weaverville, N.C.

And a voice of sanity on terrorism

Editor:

Frank Scott's letter "In Praise of 'Terror,'" (*ITT*, Nov. 2), brings front and center the issue of confused allegiances and definitions on the left. Scott would foist the SLA on us as good guy revolutionaries who, after all, only kidnapped a millionairess.

Serious people ought to call things by their right names. The SLA was a band of insufferably callow, self-righteous middle-class jerks who canonized a sick former prison informer, proclaimed themselves—all 17 of them—"the people," and decided who in the rest of the 230 million population of "fascist pigs" should be murdered—starting with an able, conscientious black superintendent of schools in Oakland. If they were not led by police agents, they might as well have been. Rather than investing them with the aura of the left, leftists (as some did) should have publicly denounced them and wished them no success.

The lack of a solid socialist left in this land has led to wild confusion among some folks of good radical instincts. This ranges from backing hawkish union bureaucrats because they are "labor," and endowing Jimmy Carter with wistful hopes of making fundamental changes, all the way to cheering criminal irresponsibles like Timothy Leary, who persuaded many teens that LSD was an answer, and Eldridge Cleaver, who proclaimed Hitler to be the greatest white man who ever lived.

Now we have a "left" paen for the SLA gang. Does Scott's benediction for "revolutionary" terrorists include the Japanese Red Army zombies who loosed machine-gun fire at random into travelers at an airport? Murderers of Olympic athletes, school children and commercial airline pilots? If the world hasn't learned in this century that non-human means lead to rotten ends, it hasn't learned much.

Scott asks: which side are you on? Well, I am on the side of winning the American people to a far more sensible, humanistic organization of society than callous monopoly capitalism. Certainly not on the side of nuthouse random murderers who profane the

word left and who are a mirror image of the worst features of the system they profess to fight.

—Lester Rodney
Torrence, Calif.

Better insight

Editor:

I have been an ardent reader of your weekly ever since the first issue. Every week you show me the world and our bitter problems in a different and truer light than any other paper I know of.

Your articles on labor questions here and on political trends in France and Italy have given me a more intimate insight into situations that will in time change the climate in America and in many parts of Europe. I want to thank you for that and also express my best wishes on the first anniversary, with hopes for a continued and long existence.

—Carla E. Wolf
Newton, Mass.

And free (from what?) sex

Editor:

Eli Zaretsky (*ITT*, Nov. 2) never really answers his own question: why is sex so often a source of anguish and despair? He contents himself with disconcerting shop talk that tends to obscure the fact that sexual relations involve emotional situations. Stripping sex of "mystery" and "romance" is not the same thing as ignoring the nuances of personal relationships that are subjectively experienced and have as much to do with sexual response as sexual roles, goals and techniques.

Neither the shift in social pressures nor a shift away from goal-oriented sex can relieve the pain of attrition that afflicts long-term relationships. The need for compassion, empathy and even humor—hardly erotic qualities—is implicit in the process of communication which underscores M&J sex therapy. Yet Zaretsky never examines the labyrinthine ways in which sexuality is touched by the cumulative effects of disappointment and defeat, the trail of resentment and betrayal, the dislocations and strains that provide long-term partners with pretexts for revenge and which erode tenderness and respect.

The separation of sexuality and reproduction is only one precondition for "pleasurable and free (from what?) sex." There are others. To ignore the rest is to make each of us a Peeping Tom at the vast erotic spectacle that the "sexual revolution" seems to have become to the media.

A re-examination of the case for marriage as we know it (or sexual exclusivity) might be a more useful undertaking than a cursory overview of a "new form of sex."

—Maureen Mullarkey
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Seething indirection

Editor:

John Judis' piece on punk rock was particularly well put. The line: "This absence of a political or social context gives Punk its seething indirection that encompasses intimations of liberation as well as of authoritarianism and misogyny," sums it up well. Onward with building a viable American left that puts punk rock as well as the Democratic party into perspective, and much more.

—Dan McIntyre
Missoula, Mont.

The baby and bathwater syndrome

Editor:

Despite "fragmentations and reverses" the left may have a chance to revive, but not with the contradictory analysis that Roberta Lynch recently offered (*ITT*, Oct. 26). Lynch started out by correctly stating that we cannot ignore the "sectarian" left because they have organizing energy and input into mass organizations.

Then, in the very next paragraph she lumps them all together for being on the

other side when it comes to "democracy," and proceeds to belittle (if not ignore) them. After declaring that "they are usually more obsessed with maneuvering to have their own line adopted than with honestly working to involve people..." she proceeds to give the NAM view on freedom in socialist countries.

Although I agree with Lynch on the shortcomings of many of the groups on the "sectarian" left, I think that lumping them together as groups and forgetting to address the *people* in these groups (many who *are* honestly working to involve people) can only add to the fragmentation process. Otherwise, this type of approach can lead to viewing the *Guardian's* work as simply Silber's "Fan the Flames" and ignore the fine coverage and analysis contributed by Ben Bedell, Richard Ward, Burchett, and others.

It's time to stop ignoring people simply because (oh forbid!) they might be a "Trot."

—Daniel Neal Graham
Syracuse, N.Y.

But it was diet cola—or a Coke with Cuban sugar?

Editor:

Your excellent paper has always been a welcome article in the mail where we work. We are particularly interested in the Chautauqua announcement in your October 19 issue. While the Chautauqua program sounds outstanding, we must confess our surprise at the poster ad for this upcoming event ("refreshment of the mind"), which at first glance appeared to be a parody. How can the mind be nourished by a symbol of junk food—soda pop?

Neither of us is a natural foods purist, since we both eat products containing added sugar now and then. Nevertheless, we find little to applaud in the soft drink industry. Having saturated the U.S. market, the big corporations in this field now purvey their worthless wares throughout the globe, including countries where primary foodstuffs are in scarce supply for much of the population. Soda pop is like so many other frivolous Western commodities identified with the "good life" that in reality compound existing problems among the poor. Only dentists and doctors can profit from the proliferation of such sugary products.

It is also important to note that much of the sugar nurturing America's sweet-tooth is produced on arable land in countries like the Dominican Republic, where it would make much more sense to grow basic crops for local consumption. Only the wealthy benefit from the present cash cropping-for-export.

Soft drinks are not only a nutritional and economic loss, but an ecological problem as well. Disposable containers require enormous amounts of energy to produce and clean up, even if they are recycled. The beverage industries will undoubtedly continue to fight statutory bans on non-returnables, continue to propagandize for resource "recovery" (instead of source reduction of solid waste), continue to misrepresent the employment impact of bans on disposables.

In short, we hope that *ITT* will find a more appropriate symbol of nourishment than soda pop to promote its Chautauqua program.

—David Fry
—Nancy Fry
Chevy Chase, Md.

Wake up, socialists, it's the government that controls business

Editor:

The very idea of a "social investment system" replacing the capitalist system borders on the absurd (What's Good for Business is Bad for Us," *ITT*, Nov. 2).

The expertise you display in revealing the current problems our economy experiences is astounding. But, when it comes to a fair and open analysis of the reasons for our economic mess (and, for that matter, intelligent solutions to the problem), you fall far short.

When will the liberals of this country wake up to the realization that it is not

the heartless corporate monster that is responsible for inflation and unemployment; rather, the blame can only be placed on the muddleheaded in Washington. (But alas, the real blame falls on all of us for allowing the economic uneducated [but well meaning] to lead us).

You state that the economy and the people's well-being are too important to leave to the "confidence" and "incentive" of businessmen. Well, I submit to you that it is government, not business, that has been primarily responsible for the direction our economy has taken as of late.

At the same time, our people have lost a little more freedom. It sickens me to think how little we all receive from government for the tremendous amount of taxes we pay in. Wake up you socialists! Your equitable solutions to our economic ills will only cause a greater loss of freedom for every American. Direct your energies toward the advocacy of a loosening of the government stranglehold that plagues the economy.

—J. Kirkpatrick
Kansas City, Mo.

Boycott Chicago

Editor:

ITT has been very strongly for: justice, freedom, equality—all those good things.

Why has it not supported the ERA travel and convention boycott? There have been many organizations boycotting states and convention cities where ERA has not been passed. Women's organizations have been advocating the boycott for some time.

The effectiveness of the boycott is substantiated by the Page 1 story, Oct. 23 in the *Chicago Tribune*, reporting some \$15 million in revenue lost from cancelled conventions, according to the Chicago Tourism and Convention Bureau.

And yet, *ITT* is sponsoring an old-fashioned conference in the city of Chicago. Isn't that quite a contradiction in positions?

—Stina L. Hirsch
Evanston, Ill.

Editor's note: No, it is not. The Chautauqua is not a convention that will bring large numbers of people to Chicago, it is a meeting in Chicago primarily for Chicago area residents. Where else could we have had the meeting?

A commitment

Editor:

I've been making a ritual of going to our coop bookstore every Wednesday for the week's copy of *ITT*. But to be sure I get it and to give you the support you need, I've decided to commit my reading-self to you for a year.

—Diane Nettles
Oakland, Calif.

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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Manning Marable

An anatomy of black politics: Inescapable poverty and racism



The election of 1976 also expressed a vote of confidence in black elected officials. Four of the 17 members of the Black Congressional Caucus received over 90 percent of the vote in their districts. Twelve black Representatives garnered over 80 percent majorities. Only four black Congressmen, including Andrew Young of Atlanta, were seriously challenged, but none of their opponents received more than 39 percent of the district's vote. Black elected officials and civil rights organizations had registered 9.5 million blacks, an increase of one million above 1972. 64 percent of all registered blacks went to the polls, compared to 58 percent only four years before.

Only one year ago James Earl Carter, former peanut farmer and south Georgia Democrat, was elected President, largely on the strength of the black electorate. In at least 13 states—including Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Alabama and Texas—the black vote proved to be the decisive factor in providing Carter's margin of victory. In Mississippi, for example, Carter received 147,540 votes from blacks, enough support to create a slim statewide majority of 11,537 votes over Gerald Ford. The largest number of black voters in history came to the polls.

But President-elect Carter appointed relatively few blacks to high administrative positions, and for several months he remained silent about the creation of federal jobs for minorities. The Humphrey-Hawkins bill and the principle of full employment became dead letters. Yet many black Democrats expressed satisfaction when Congressman Andrew Young was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations. Throughout the winter and early

months of spring they decided to wait for the new President to act.

By May, the Carter administration announced an end to "new programs" for social welfare and education in an attempt to balance the federal budget by 1981. With the approval of Federal Reserve Board chairman Arthur Burns, Carter announced that his new priorities were to cut inflation and to stimulate the business sector. Bert Lance, then head of the Office of Management and Budget, and chief economist Charles Schultze criticized liberal Democratic-Keynesian proposals that called for public jobs. Although Carter had promised the previous autumn to cut the defense budget by five to seven billion dollars, he actually increased defense spending to \$111.8 billion.

In the early summer months many prominent liberals sharply criticized Carter. Sen. George McGovern declared that "the corporations have cried the wolf of 'business confidence' and the administration has run scared." Even the *New Republic*, which had "cautiously" endorsed Carter, deplored his "moral" opposition to the use of Medicaid funds for abortions. Cold warriors like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and democratic socialists joined a growing chorus of organized labor, feminists and liberal intellectuals in opposition to Carter's entire domestic program. In the wake of growing liberal-left criticism, Vernon Jordan of the Urban League voiced reservations about the Carter administration.

One year after Carter's electoral triumph, the political and economic condition of black America is in crisis. Official unemployment figures for blacks

range from 13.2 percent for men, 40.4 percent for teenagers nationwide, and as high as 80 percent for teenagers in New York and other cities. The Urban League's unofficial unemployment figures are considerably higher. The "recovery" of 1975-77 never reached the ghetto.

Black petty bourgeois supporters of Carter had anticipated a flood of social legislation similar to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. They were greatly disappointed with Carter's backhanded support for Alan Bakke, and upset with the small number of federal patronage jobs made available to them. In September, 15 black leaders submitted at Urban League headquarters in New York to propose a counter-political strategy to meet the steadily deteriorating conditions of black urban poor. Many of the black leaders who attended the conference—Parren Mitchell, Bayard Rustin, Benjamin Hooks and Jesse Jackson—had been among the chief supporters of Carter earlier in the year. Declaring that they had been fooled and betrayed, Jackson charged Carter with "callous neglect." Gary, Ind. mayor Richard Hatcher declared, "Now it's difficult for any black leader who pushed the election of Jimmy Carter to face the people he campaigned with."

What went wrong? Neither Carter nor the Democratic party can be accused of "betraying" the real interests of blacks and the poor, since they never committed themselves to the socialist transformation of America's political economy, which is essential in destroying the inequities that black leaders complain about so dramatically. The 15 representatives of elite black civil and political society were primarily concerned about losing their own constitu-

ents, as the "Carter malaise" filtered downward through black America.

The current crisis in black political leadership is, more fundamentally, an expression of the deeper crisis within the black community. Most black federal, state and local officials tend to represent increasingly conservative black middle-class voters who support, consciously or not, the political economy of capitalism, and are only interested in marginal reforms. Vernon Jordan, Barbara Jordan and a host of others defend these interests.

But the inescapable reality of permanent poverty and racism still constitutes the heart of the black American experience. The real income gap between all black and all white families has steadily increased. In 1971, median white family income was \$10,672 per year, compared to \$6,440 for blacks, a gap of \$4,232. By 1974 white families were earning \$13,356, and blacks were making only \$7,808, a gap of \$5,548. The median black family income is roughly 58 percent of the amount earned by a similar white family.

It is to these people that black socialists must address their agenda, by listening to their grievances and concerns, by responding to beliefs and insights. Only by organizing a mass black political party that rejects elitism and the hegemony of the black petty bourgeoisie over indigenous protest institutions can the fundamental problems of black Americans be addressed.

Manning Marable is chairperson of the Department of Political Science, Tuskegee Institute, Ala., and an associate fellow of the Institute of the Black World, Atlanta.

Barbara Ehrenreich

The women's movement must rethink its image and revamp its program



I remember the heady days of the early Women's Liberation Movement when we knew we would win simply because we outnumbered them. Unlike students, or blacks, or even the industrial working class, women are a majority category. All we had to do was get the word around to our 52 percent of the population and, in any fair fight, we'd have it made.

But now, eight or so years later, the women's movement is beleaguered—in some regions, almost cornered. The ERA has been defeated in every state except Indiana where it's come up in the last two years. Abortion rights have gone through so much legislative surgery that it's questionable whether they'll survive at all. And perhaps the most bitter pill of all: the rank and file opposition to the ERA and abortion is not coming from bands of testosterone-crazed males, but from women. (A recent poll shows that men are more likely to favor the ERA than women.) So much for that old 52 percent majority and the idea that sisterhood wells eternal in the female breast!

But by now we've had enough experience with the anti-feminist opposition to begin to analyze and make some distinctions. Just as all feminists are not unkempt man-haters or hard-headed female executives (pick your favorite perjorative image), not all anti-feminists are deluded fundamentalists, Ku Klux Klan fans, or dupes of the Vatican. As least half—maybe far more—of the current and potential anti-feminist opposition *should* be on our side. And will be, if we're willing to develop a feminist politics that speaks to the real needs of a majority of American women in the late '70s.

There is, of course, the hard-core, politically conscious, upper middle class-based

rightwing opposition. For the rising American New Right, abortion and the ERA are only part of a long list of issues that includes opposition to busing, the Panama Canal Treaty, gay rights, and car pools (they erode individualism). It's a nostalgic kind of politics, calling for the good old days of Pat Boone, Doris Day and Joe McCarthy, when "love and marriage went together like a horse and carriage," when "Negroes" were either inoffensive or invisible, and when homosexuality was a disease ranking in social acceptability slightly lower than leprosy or advanced syphilitic degeneration.

Aside from the conscious right-wingers, there's a whole other constituency for anti-feminism. Most of them are housewives. Unlike anti-ERA leader Phyllis Schlafly, though, they don't have their own housekeepers, secretaries, and private family bomb shelters. But they're scared, too. The sexual and cultural "revolution" of the last ten years didn't liberate them. Forty percent of marriages end in divorce, and something like 60 percent of divorced men skip out on alimony and child-support payments before a year is over (without any help from the ERA, it should be noted).

Men are irresponsible, but what are the choices for these housewives? \$2.35 an hour standing behind a counter or assembly line while you wonder what the kids are doing? And what does feminism have to offer when its most visible representations are *Ms.*, *Viva*, *Working Woman*, etc.—all aimed, more or less, at slender, youngish career women who have credit cards, therapists and several ongoing affairs? Rightwing anti-feminism at least seems to offer some simple comforts:

That motherhood will be respected. That families will hold together. That things will go back to being more or less like they were supposed to be when you first got engaged.

But, of course, the right wing can't offer any real security because its class interests are opposed to those of the average working class or lower middle class housewife. Rightwing anti-feminists rhapsodize about the glories of homemaking, but oppose pensions for women who have put in a lifetime of it. They "honor motherhood" but oppose measures—like a guaranteed annual income—that could free mothers from total economic dependence on a man. They adore all fetuses until the moment they exit from the birth canal and add to the welfare rolls, the school tax rate and the nation's Medicaid bill. And of course the right has nothing to offer the working mother trying to make ends meet on a \$2-3/hour—except perhaps some expensively-produced literature on her "right" to work in an open shop.

I still think the women's movement has a fighting chance to become a *majority* movement. Phyllis Schlafly—plus the rest of the John Birch Ladies' Auxiliary types—is an enemy, no matter how many hormones we have in common. But the woman in curlers pushing a shopping cart with a few toddlers in tow and worrying about the price of ground chuck is, or should be, a sister.

If feminism is going to mean anything to her the movement will have to re-think its image and revamp its program. Somewhere along the line the image of "feminism" got taken over by the \$1-and-up magazines, the gray-suited businesswoman with attache cases, and the purveyors

of assertiveness training for managerial women—as if all we wanted was a chance to integrate, one by one, into the man's system. But the radical thrust of feminism always lay in its insistence on our connectedness as women: that we would support each other, stand together, and re-make the world for *all* women, for all people. Is it too late to re-make our public image in our own image?

As for program: There's no getting around it, in late 1977, a majority-oriented program for women's liberation has to focus directly on a few economic issues like adequate welfare and child support, full employment, decent wages for women's work, etc. So long as most women are economically dependent on an individual man—and so long as there are no visible, social alternatives—we might as well concede defeat to Mirabel Morgan of *Total Woman*. But if we can make the issues of economic justice central to the idea of women's liberation, then there'll be a lot more women on our side.

This means expanding beyond the narrow ground that mainstream feminism has retreated to in the face of the New Right threat: Broadening, not narrowing, our concerns. Linking the ERA, for example, to the overall problem of women's economic security. Linking abortion rights to the need for decent health care and day care. Building alliances with everyone else who's threatened by the New Right campaign—minority group movements, the gay movement, the labor movement.

Publications like *ITT* can be a big help in doing this. Happy birthday, *ITT*!

*Barbara Ehrenreich is co-author of *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*. Her column appears regularly.*