



LETTER

FROM

EPHESUS

## The Dags of the Left

*Diana Simmonds*

**T**he left, as we all know, is in retreat. The right — or the New Right — is in the ascendant. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, it has ascended.

It's not so much that the New Right is right and the left is suddenly wrong, it's more that the New Right has some style and excitement, as well as the occasional new thought — not including the ultra-stylish republished Ayn Rand — while the left, as ever, is wilfully, correctly, yawningly boring.

It's not that this time in history is especially at fault. It's been happening for a while: at least ten or fifteen years, but it has now reached crisis proportions.

The trouble is, the right is winning the battle for young hearts and minds in a way unprecedented since the '30s, Oswald Mosley and the Bright Young Things, who thought he and Hitler were a good thing ... well, frightfully chic, anyway.

*Brideshead Revisited* — the series — was the turning point for the emergence of the fashionable right. The Young Fogie was epitomised by the effete world-weary young "heroes" of Waugh's novel. The other, lesser, misanthropic Waugh has since found a new readership on the back of it — which is surely one of the worst results. Idealism gave way to Fair Isle pullovers and Oxford bags. It's been downhill ever since, as the left staunchly insists on looking like a bad day at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

The matter of style and fashion

isn't frippery, although serious types might choose to dismiss it as such — from the threadbare fastnesses of daggy old frocks and/or correctly straggly beards. Personal appearance — the choices made — are as significant in their refusals as they are in their actual statements. The state of one's mind can be said to be indicated by the state of one's desk, bedroom, kitchen: that is, a mess means a messy mind (or, alternatively, that one has better things to do with time), while a pristine state means an orderly mind — or not enough to do. Thus does outward appearance indicate something of what's going on inside. And, by the state of many on the left, it is a sure sign of the mental decrepitude and hand-me-down thinking that continues to bog down any progress towards replying adequately to the surge of rightness which threatens to engulf us all.

It's a pity that Marx isn't alive today. He'd surely be the first to say "stuff *Capital*, that was okay then, interesting then. Now it's twelve years to the year 2000 and what I wrote then is now a monumental period piece. Let it be. This is now, folks. Life isn't a rehearsal. That play didn't work. Let's stop trying to rewrite it and fiddle with key scenes. Let's write a new one".

That brings me to the other most boring problem with the left: like the adherents of most hidebound and conservative religions, whether so-called Christian or marxist, many on the left are so terrified of letting go of comforting tracts and familiar disciples of dogma that they wouldn't dare to take a look at a new thought if it ran up and bit them on the bum. This is a profoundly dreary state of affairs.

Marx, Gramsci and all that lot would be flattered, but surely very depressed, that their ideas have been turned into tablets of stone. Egotistical old bastards that they were, they would surely have expected something more than eternal Rubik-style rearrangements of old cubes of thought when, in this videtric, post-capitalist world, a new game is called for.

Right now, all the old "isms" have had it, including capitalism, and

there is little to be gained from picking over their bones. It takes a highly-skilled witchdoctor to glean real meaning from the entrails and, on present evidence, there isn't one practising at the moment.

All the argument, debate and rereading in the world isn't going to make any of it work. Remembrance of things past, for the moment, is as appetising and useful as a stale madeleine. Put it another way: we are nothing without history and without what has gone before, but we're worse than nothing if we shackle ourselves to it — we're dead.

Loving or loathing something or somebody — thought and thinker perhaps — is the way and meaning of life and advance. Nobody ever got anywhere by boring someone else to death — which is why so few people have read *Capital* Vol. 3.

The magnitude of the quantum leap that has to be made can be symbolised by one man and one fact about him: Alan Bond, official national hero number one, and his purchase of half the Chilean phone system.

It would have been as easy to pick Rupert Murdoch, absolute monarch of the most far-reaching empire the world has ever seen. Or Peter Abeles, a man who has the ear of the Prime Minister in this country while totally disrupting the mail service in the old country. Perhaps a nation born in criminality is bound to create the most successful criminal class ever known — and export it back to its origins! It's a comical sight and would indeed be funny if it didn't mean that, as a result, our global village is getting the business end of a very rough multinational pineapple.

The fact remains that, in view of the activities of these three alone, as Australians, we owe it to the rest of the world to do something about it. George Orwell, another writer of interesting history books, told us that absolute power corrupts absolutely. He wasn't talking about national heroes numbers one, two and three ... but he might have been.

We must urgently seek the antithesis of that statement. As Marx once said: I have seen the future and I'm glad I'm dead.