

31 December 1982

PC16/5/3/3/84



Dear Peter,

Perhaps this letter should have been addressed to Alan, though he had the bad luck to have had one from me only a month ago (though my annual letter to him tends to be rather shorter than those that occasionally find their way to your address).

Alan's review of Mrs. Lewsen's book on Merriman was fascinating, and I am much tempted to want to read it. There had also been a good review here, either in The Guardian or The Times Lit. Supp. But where does one find the time? (I do not wish to embark on the hoary old tale of how many other jobs need doing, etc.). But what should one be reading to acquire a better understanding of the situation that we (or you) are facing now? From this point of view I am always very hopeful about REALITY providing me with a current analysis, and the article you published in the September issue by Peter Wickins seems to be very promising in this respect. Is REALITY flourishing? It would be marvellous if it were widely recognised as a journal that provided political analysis on a wide scale, but I expect that that sort of endeavour requires considerable resources. Of course I enjoy it as it is now, and I believe that it is in a sense moving into the sort of field that I have in mind, but is there a body of writers available to you who can provide you with publishable material?

All these questions going through my mind have been prompted by two 'observations': a Christmas card from AP had the single remark on it (besides the greeting) 'Are you still grieving over South Africa?', to which the obvious answer is that I am but that as a Liberal (deliberately with a capital L) I am at times haunted by the feeling that we may have been consigned to the dustbin of history. Which brings me to the second point: our son Jeremy, now in his final year of a degree course in Politics at Exeter University, has imbibed a great deal of Marxism in the last two years, much of it, to my mind, very bookish and sometimes unrecognisable in terms of the behaviour of actual people, but fortunately rather less dogmatic than some I have known in the past. A few days ago I asked him whether he had ever read anything by Harold Laski and was rather shocked to learn that Jeremy was unaware even of the extent of Laski's literary output. Is it not all too easy to be consigned to the dustbin of history? Then what chance do we have of survival?

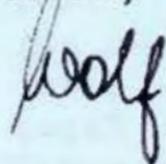
One of the problems that stems from an all too regular reading of the Times Lit. Supp. is that one not only gets bogged down reading their more substantial contributions but that one is also tempted to read books that have had good reviews, or at least to want to read such books. Such ambitions conflict hopelessly with my habit of going back to books that I have valued in the past, and at the moment I am in a phase of trying to revive some of my Russian because I have developed a fascination for Pushkin. I shan't try to expand on that - I can imagine the fun your friends would have if I included some lines of his here, in the original - but turn instead to a bit of re-reading that I have been doing today: some pages of 'Ah, but...'. Early on in the book Alan puts uncanny words into the mouth of his civil servant "after forty years of the spineless rule of Botha, Hertzog and Smuts it is the ~~the~~ Malan govt. that has given teeth to democracy." Uncanny because earlier today I was reading an article in 'History Today' on the coming to power of Hitler. I was struck in particular by a paragraph which dealt with the way Hitler demolished the existing power structure, primarily the Trade Unions (since the Weimar parliament had already been made irrelevant by the machinations of Hindenburg and his friends) and then replaced them by his own power structures, e.g. the police, the army and, of course, the gangsters. What is new about that, you may ask. Of course there is nothing new in that, but the way it was put struck me as requiring little in the way of omission and correction to read like a description of the recent actions and attitudes of the Thatcher government. I read

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the bit in Alan's book after that and began to ponder on the relationship between Conservative thinking here and the way in which authoritarian governments elsewhere have acted.

My typewriter seems to be in awful form this evening, and I'll therefore declare the innings closed. (What an awful metaphor.) I hope that 1983 will give us more cause for satisfaction than 1982, and that you and your family will find it rewarding.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wolf".