

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Where voting for Labour will aid the Alliance

Sir,—The effect of calling a general election seems to have been to catapult the Tories into a large lead in the opinion polls. People seem to like decisiveness. This mood will evaporate if Labour is effective in conveying to people how disastrous the consequences of Mrs Thatcher's decisiveness have been for all but a small minority.

However, there is another, usually overlooked, reason for thinking that the Tories can be beaten. This is the fact that Labour and Alliance support is already largely concentrated in different constituencies. And this concentration could rise if tactical voting increases.

In February 1974 Labour won more seats than the Tories on fewer votes, largely because a large fraction of Labour's vote in rural areas defected to the Liberals. Regrettably, but understandably, this is likely to happen again.

The big question is whether the Alliance supporters in Tory-Labour mar-

ginals will realise that the interest of their parties would be best served by voting Labour.

It is only through Labour capturing seats from the Tories that the Alliance can hope to have any influence — in a hung Parliament. Messrs Steel and Jenkins must be desperately hoping that their supporters realise this, though they would never dare to admit it.

For these two reasons, we should not take a Tory victory for granted. — Yours, Alan Taylor, London SW11.

Sir,—Undoubtedly, as Peter Jenkins says (Guardian, May 13), the changing demographic and social basis of party support in Britain has dramatically affected Labour's ideological roots and compounded the problems it faces.

Mrs Thatcher has been able over the last four years to legitimise the centrality of the values and ideology upon which she was elected in 1979—not just within her

party, but for the whole electorate—by moulding and incorporating the shifts in attitudes and sentiments of the British, especially post-Falklands.

The choices people face are sharply dichotomised. The political rhetoric defines the reality. Marxist socialism is perceived as being rampant in the Labour Party. This is neatly contrasted to a moderate, responsible conservatism. State interference, collective waste, and bureaucracy against individual choice and Victorian self-help, and so on.

The Labour Party becomes marginalised, an outsider; even the political geography reinforces this imagery with its North-South split. On those issues where the Tories are especially vulnerable, even on their own terms, Labour finds it difficult to capitalise.

For instance the burden of taxation, direct and indirect, is now seven per cent greater for average families than it was under Labour. Yet Labour is perceived as the

high-taxation party and, I suspect, most people either don't know or discount the tax question with regard to the Tories.

A further difficulty for Labour lies in the perception that it has been captured by single-issue pressure groups, or is a prey to sectional interests, especially the more recent association with CND. The effect again is to marginalise its appeal and effectiveness against the self-knowledge and values of the majority who in fact are home-owners, employed, and two-parent families.

Unless and until the Labour Party can engage in adequate political education by demonstrating the centrality of its values and aspirations for the majority, it will remain on the defensive.—Yours faithfully, Richard de Zoysa, London SE 21.

Sir,—Ian Aitken (Agenda Extra, May 13) persuasively shows how Mrs Thatcher manipulated the media and her party into accepting the

holding of a general election one full year before it need have been called constitutionally. More's the pity that he ended his piece with such complacency and cynicism.

Of course the Prime Minister chose to advise the monarch to dissolve Parliament because she thinks she and her party can regain power for another five — or four or three and a half, well three-and-a-bit? years. But that is emphatically *not* "what democratic politics is all about."

It is about strictly controlling the conditions under which elections are held to prevent, for example, all those political abuses of dictatorial governments — often using elections, plebiscites, referendums, and other apparently democratic forms.

The way the date of the coming general election was decided should cause all British citizens the deepest shame and strongest indignation. — Yours faithfully, David Alfred, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

Mind you

Sir,—There are other aspects concerning the confrontation at Teignmouth about mentally handicapped people which Mr Heginbotham of Mind (Letters, May 10) appears to ignore.

We have two large hospitals locally for the mentally handicapped, and small groups from the hospitals have come to Teignmouth almost daily for years without problems. In addition we have many private nursing homes devoted to the care of elderly mentally handicapped residents. The two hospitals are the largest employers in our area and many people in Teignmouth earn their living working with the handicapped, both in the hospitals and outside in the community.

Both Mind and Mencap seem to be ignoring that we are used to living beside mentally handicapped people in Teignmouth, and I am sure that the controversy would not have arisen had the small groups who visit and integrate well in the town not turned into an influx taking over the town's main hotel.

The timing of Mencap's recent conference in the town was also unfortunate. Instead of bringing together opposing sides to find a compromise, it enabled some town councillors — mostly Conservative — to engage in electioneering. This has succeeded in reinforcing entrenched positions on both sides, as well as giving a distorted and generalised view of Teignmouth's attitude towards mentally handicapped people. — Yours faithfully, Andrew Pearson, 9 Frobisher Close, Teignmouth, Devon.

Miscellany at large

Sir,—There is an interesting inconsistency in the Government's love-hate relationship with social science. Within the wide range of topics covered by this discipline, it seems to believe in the two subjects on which specialists are most noticeably divided.

Although the Government commissioned Lord Rothschild to strangle the Social Science Research Council and was disappointed that he conspicuously failed to oblige it, its economic policy is based on a school of thought which is diametrically opposed to another school of equally eminent practitioners. Now it appears to support a group of laboratory psychologists and the lie-detector test, which is thought to be ethically and scientifically unacceptable to the rest of the psychological community.

On what grounds does the Government, then, ignore the many important social-science findings on which the experts are much more widely agreed: for instance crime, training, and industrial relations? — Yours truly, (Dr) Frank A. Heller, The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London NW3.

Sir,—I see that Times Newspapers may ask Stern magazine to hand back payments made for the rights to the faked Hitler diaries. I was one of the unlucky readers who bought the issue of the Sunday Times in which extracts from this nonsense were published on May 1. Can I have my money back, too? — Yours faithfully, Neil McCartney, Richmond, Surrey.

Sir,—Can we assume that The Norman Tebbit Diaries, as chronicled by Steve Bell (Guardian, May 2 to 9) have been stopped because they have been sent to Lord Dacre for verification? If so, can we expect them to be serialised in the Sunday Times soon? — Yours Christopher Phillips, Nigel Cadman, Crewe, Cheshire.

Sir,—The feature by Mr Michael Parkin (Guardian, May 13) on dental decay in Anglesey had an error which would be misleading. The mean number of decayed teeth in five-year-old children from non-fluoridated Arfon was 3.55 and in fluoridated Anglesey it was 1.58. It was not 0.325 and 0.174 as respectively quoted.—Yours (Prof) D. Jackson, The University of Leeds.

Sir,—The Guardian, seen by millions on ITV, and in Iceland where they "roll on the floor with their legs in the air," has been seen live on two consecutive days west of the Tamar. Is this a record? — Yours, rolling on the floor screaming, D. Mackenzie, Fowey, Cornwall.

A few more scientists whom the Pope should rehabilitate

Sir,—The Pope is paving the way for the acquittal of Galileo and other Renaissance scientists. Many contemporary scientists would like a few more names added to the list.

How about acquitting Pythagoras? In the sixth century BC he deduced that the world was a sphere.

Aristarchus (third century BC) first person to say the earth circled the sun.

Eratosthenes, proved the world was round and even measured it, also third century BC.

Hypatia, the female mathematician, astronomer, physicist, philosopher and head of the great library in Alexandria. She was murdered on the orders of St Cyril in AD 415.

The work of these "ignorant

idolrous pagans," with the work of all the brilliant Greek and Roman academics, was destroyed by the Christians when they took over the Roman Empire in the fourth century and plunged the Western world into the Dark Ages.—Yours faithfully, Michael Roll, 38 Downend Road, Bristol, Avon.

Sir,—We can see the improvement in the relationship between the Catholic Church and science when we compare the time taken by the Church to apologise to Galileo and to Teilhard de Chardin (Leader, May 14).

In 1981, only 26 years after Teilhard's death, Cardinal Casoroli, the Papal Secretary of State, wrote to Mgr Paul Poupard, rector of the Catho-

lic Institute of Paris, extolling Teilhard's life and work:

"The astonishing range of his research coupled with the brilliance of his personality and the richness of his thought have left a lasting impression on our epoch. . . . His constant willingness to dialogue with contemporary science and his irrepressible optimism about the evolution of the world give a marked attraction to intuitions which are expressed in the lustre of phrase and the magic of image. . . . his synthesis was always directed towards the future and. . . it has surely made a contribution towards giving back to men prone to doubt a glimmer of hope."

"At the same time, however, the complexity of the problems he confronted and

the variety of approaches he used have inevitably raised difficulties which call for a critical and dispassionate scientific, philosophic, and theological examination of a work of quite exceptional merit."

As further evidence of Teilhard's rehabilitation your readers may be interested to know that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Hume, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland are together sponsoring an exhibition of Teilhard de Chardin's life and work to be held in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey next month.—Yours faithfully, and from where the action is, John Woodcock, The Teilhard Centre, London W8.

the opponents to the NF literature sellers have been 15 or 20 members of a group called Red Action.

When our Islington members feel the situation is becoming intolerable, and the following Sunday a much larger band of NF members is mobilised to "see off" the leftist troublemakers.

On these occasions the leftists cockily chant, "Smash the racists off the streets." The moment they attempt to put their chant into effect they get battered.

When that happens they have the impudence to write to you whining about "fascist violence"! — Yours faithfully, Martin Webster, National Front, Croydon, Surrey.

Eye for an eye on Sundays

Sir,—The letter (May 9) about the occasional troubles between National Front literature sellers and left-wing opponents at Chapel Market, Islington, could have been written by Professor Paul Wilkinson, it was so full of propaganda errors.

The true situation is simply this: from time to time our Islington branch holds a literature sale at Chapel Market on a Sunday morning. Our members do not go to the market to involve themselves in fights, but to sell their papers.

From time to time various left-wing groups mobilise to try to prevent the NF members from selling their papers. During the past year and more the hard core of

The 'dirty snowball' fight

Sir,—Your article "Sting in the comet tail" (May 13) suggested, with timely pessimism, that the recent bright comet might bestow "bubonic plague or small pox during its fleeting visit to our part of the galaxy." I should like to set your readers' minds at rest.

Comets are, in fact, quite common in our solar system: the majority are unspectacular and so do not attract much attention. The suggestion that comets' tails carry

micro-organisms is certainly not generally accepted by scientists; the majority of astronomers picture comets as "dirty snowballs" containing nothing more exotic or venomous than ice and silicate dust.

The idea that life originates in interstellar space is very far from being the accepted theory that its proponents would like us to believe.—Yours faithfully, D. C. B. Whittet, Preston Polytechnic.