

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Parliament should step in to rush through a picket Bill now

Sir,—In the past when governments have wished to deal actively with a crisis they have introduced a short Bill and passed it through all stages of both Houses in one day, to become effective at midnight that day.

This could readily be done to stop the present abuse of picketing and, I think, by four simple clauses, such as: a definition of picketing; that no person shall be allowed to picket except at his/her own place of work; that not more than six pickets may be on duty at any one time at each gate of entrance to the place of work; that this Act may not be interpreted in such a way as to prevent the lawful right of a picket to state briefly the case of the strikers to those desiring or needing access to the premises.

I am in favour of consulting all parties concerned before legislation is proposed but action is needed immediately.

Some of Mr Callaghan's party would no doubt object but many would support a Bill designed to end present excesses—and those which may be projected—while Mrs Thatcher has already promised her aid in this direction.—Yours sincerely,

W. L. Kent.
Appleton,
Warrington WA4 5DS.

Sir,—For over 50 years I have worked and voted for the Labour Movement. I am now very sad and a little ashamed.

All the material advances seem only to lead to wanting more—and at the expense of each other. We talked of aiding the weak but now we give way to the strong. Once we dreamed of the democratic road to power but now we see unelected pickets deciding what should be done.

Surely Mr Callaghan's Government deserves better support from trade unionists.

Ira Beswick,
27 Margin Drive,
London SW19 5HA.

Sir,—My son Adam, aged ten years, informs me that the latest game in his school playground is called "Pickets". To give it a sense of balance—all the best games must have goodies and badies—"The Pickets" are attacked by another group who called themselves "The Caped Crusaders."

Perhaps this could be the idea Mrs Thatcher is looking for? What a stirring sight it will be to see the defenders of individual freedom rushing from the portals of Parliament wearing their underpants outside their trousers.—Yours sincerely,

Peter Maguire,
Ripponden, Yorks.

Let the ballot box decide who will rule Iran



Ayatollah Khomeini

When death is not

Sir,—I will be grateful if you will allow me to reply to the letter from Dr Cicely Saunders (January 19). I must query the validity of her assumption that "requests to end life are nearly always requests to end pain."

The Guardian two years ago published an article by me declaring my intention to end my own life when increasing helplessness from multiple sclerosis makes it a hopeless, useless burden. This article led to an ITV "World in Action" film, *Death by Request*, in which I appeared in conversation with a representative from St Christopher's Hospice.

She said that though I might be helpless and actually fed and washed and

Sir,—In Mr Martin Woolcott's interview (January 19) the Iranian Prime Minister has made his position—and his dilemma—clear. We have known Dr Bakhtiar as a man of courage and integrity for the past 25 years. Mr Woolcott acquaints us with the arguments on both sides. May I examine the issue to see if a compromise could be suggested?

The Prime Minister's arguments are fully related by Mr Woolcott. There is, however, a slight error in what he says on an ambiguous point. When he says that Khomeini is a creation of the Shah's (oppression), so it may be argued, is he.

But this is not true. Khomeini was already a prominent political figure when, after the war, Ghavam Salimani, the Iranian Prime Minister, was planning to liberate Azerbaijan from Russian occupation. He requested Ayatollah Berujerdi, the leader of the Iranian Moslems at the time, to discuss the matter with him. Berujerdi sent his deputy, the then young Khomeini

What the Prime Minister is not clear about is the allegiance of the Army. Does he mean that the Army has an allegiance to any constitutionally established government or to him personally as the Lieutenant of the Shah? If the latter, then he confirms the worst suspicions of Khomeini. But we believe the former is the case.

Ayatollah Khomeini is much more than a political leader. He is a philosopher who sees the fundamentals of Islam, which could be the basis of any democratic government. Islam is primarily a social and political religion as J. S. Mill recognised (in *On Liberty*). One fundamental tenet is the supremacy of God and that implies the rejection of all idolatry including the cult of personality and king worship.

The second is justice and equality under the law and this is a negation of class distinction based on any criteria. The third is the principle of accountability and responsibility. Participation of people in running their own affairs is also a funda-

mental tenet of Islam. I need hardly say that all these principles were shelved over the past 25 years.

Ayatollah regards these as "categorical imperatives" to use the terminology of Kant. He is aiming at a change of heart as well as a change of regime. He sees in present-day Iranian society a decadence that needs a fundamental change. It is difficult to disagree with him about this. Present-day Iran is many ways resembles the decadent Sassanid Empire of the seventh century. That mighty empire crumbled not before Islam's might of arms but before the revolutionary message of Islam.

The ayatollah is a lawyer as well as a philosopher. To avoid possible confrontation, I wonder if the following solution would be acceptable to him. I fail to see why it should not be acceptable to Dr Bakhtiar. After all, a government truly representing the Iranian people is what both parties want.

The Bakhtiar Government should order the dissolution

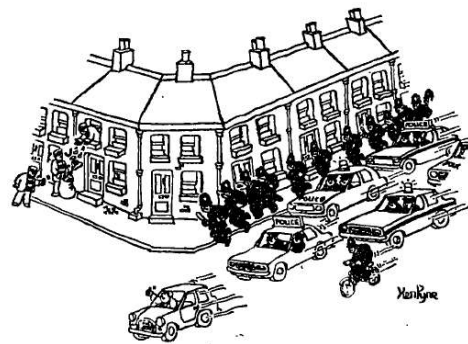
of Parliament immediately and announce the date of new general elections with the minimum of delay. Khomeini's and the National Front's representatives should be invited to supervise the new elections. The new democratically chosen Parliament would be acceptable to everyone concerned and would prepare the way for any constitutional change it deems necessary.

Meanwhile the ayatollah could encourage people to go back to work to mitigate the hardships caused by widespread strikes.

I have full faith in the patriotism of the Iranian Army. If there are, however, certain hard-line officers who think of a coup and wish to place themselves above the law, they'd better consider what chance they have to succeed where the Shah failed. His military government, after all, failed disarmingly and hastened his departure.—Yours,

(Prof) Mahmoud Sanai,
37 Frogna,
London, NW3.

Siren call to the boys in blue



just a release from a life of pain

meant it was no longer worth while to him.

And what of sufferers from Huntington's Chorea, never still a moment and unable to speak clearly enough to be intelligible. One of these unfortunate who is well known to me has tried three times to end her own life.

I respect Dr Saunders's medication for the relief of pain and would regret very much indeed that she does not take a wider view. Why should anyone fear death? Why should it be senselessly postponed? Christ nowhere condemns suicide.—Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Meg Murray,
Cedarwood House,
Elvendon Road,
Goring-on-Thames,
Oxon.

Points

Sir,—Sheila Brain (Letters, January 18) follows Mary Whitehouse in criticising the BBC for broadcasting "adult" films on Friday evenings at a time when some children may see them. But is there any reason to believe that any harm will be done to anyone of any age by watching films about sex without violence—as distinct from films about violence with or without sex?

Arthur Freeman,
London E1.

Sir,—Can anyone tell me a good reason why British Rail limits the validity of its tickets to three days? —Yours faithfully,

Richard Noble,
Shuthonger Manor,
Tewkesbury, Glou.

Sir,—Last week the residents of Camberwell were treated to a late night high-speed car chase in which a dozen police vehicles, all equipped with at least one driver and an observer, sped through the streets in pursuit of one stolen car. The car crashed the youths were arrested and the Rovers, Triumphs, Transits, and dogvan, all went off and presumably chased other villains.

This afternoon I glanced out of my window and was amazed to see my neighbour's flat being broken into by three youths. I phoned 999, the operator answered immediately and then was totally unable to get any answer from the police emergency switchboard. It wasn't until she had tried three different lines that she got an answer and the whole pro-

cess took over five minutes.

When I rushed back to the window the three burglars were driving away in a BMW, presumably stolen. By the time the police turned up they were well away: the officer blamed the delay on "staff shortages."

Would it be possible for Sir David McNeel to so arrange his force that somebody is there to answer 999 calls in the middle of the afternoon? Just one of the 20 officers involved in the high-speed chase would have done. I know it isn't so exciting as zooming around in a Rover but it would have saved my neighbour a lot of distress and the police might have actually caught the thieves.—Yours sincerely,

David A. Clark,
91 Grove Lane,
London SE25 8SN.

A Pacific island apart

Sir,—Mr Hiley (Letters, January 13) thinks Sir Bernard Braine is overstating the case for the Banabans. But he appears to base his attitude entirely on the belief that Banaba is self-evidently part of the Gilbert Islands.

Banaba "became" part of the Gilbert Islands purely by British edict, and as recently as 1900. These islands may look close to one another on a world atlas, but 300-500 miles separate the Banabans from the main group.

Whyever would they feel any sense of identification? They had had no contact before the British imposed it on them. Yes, they withdrew from the recent Gilbert Islands' Independence Constitution conference—as the only method open to them for protesting that this conference should not concern them.

The Gilbertese churches "found the Banabans uncooperative" in seeking a peaceful settlement—naturally, since the Banabans have never felt themselves to be part of the Gilbert Islands.

Pakistan, Nyasaland, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands are all examples of similar minorities who refused to consider themselves as parts of India, the Central African Federation and the West Indian Federation respectively—all of whom the British Government permitted to secede in spite of protests from the central governments affected. More recent, Anguilla now has its own constitution, instead of being "forced under an administration under which they do not want to live," (the wording of the report).

The recent legal case focused attention on a very sorry piece of British history. We cannot now undo the enormous wrong done in our name to the Banabans, in destroying their homeland, nor, apparently, can we add to the pitiful sum offered in compensation; can we not at least allow this tiny people the dignity of settling their own destiny at last?—Yours faithfully,

M. K. Jackson,
4 Lowood Court,
Farquhar Road,
London SE19 1SW.

Master stroke

Sir,—I agree wholeheartedly with the decision that a Justice should be a Mrs. so as not to be confused with mis-justice (Guardian Diary, January 16).

Isn't it time that we now sought a name change for the Director of the Association of Master Bakers? —Sincerely yours,

Robin Phillips,
4 Whybourne Grove,
Rotherham S60 2LQ.

A COUNTRY DIARY

MACHYNLLETH: An original book on British mammals is a rare event. So many animals are nocturnal and elusive that a study of their habits is really the work of a lifetime. For this reason many books about mammals tend to be cribbed wholesale from other authors. So I was delighted recently to be given a book that takes a completely fresh look at some of our mammals. Entirely free from accepted and probably erroneous beliefs, it consists of one man's observations made in the field over a period of about 35 years. It is a pleasure to read, not the least of its attractions being that it was published in 1914. Perhaps it would now be a classic alongside *The Cornpeck Angler* and the *Natural*

History of Selborne but, as its present editor puts it, "it languished in obscurity apparently quite unknown to naturalists both in this century and the last." Its title is *The Experienced Huntsman* and of course it includes a great deal of hunting information. But its author, Arthur Stringer, who was employed all his life on a Northern Irish estate, was obviously a first-class naturalist who made his observations on his own experiences to describe the daily lives of deer, foxes, hares and otters. What I especially liked is that he even has a chapter on the pine marten, an animal I have always sought in vain. The book is published at £5.50 by Blackstaff Press, Belfast.

WILLIAM CONDRY.