

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Khomeini is not the answer to Iran's prayers

Sir.—While I would support Prof. Sanai (Letters, January 20) in his reasoned plea for elections to be held soon in Iran, so that the will of the people can be determined, I would suggest that there are a number of facts which he has left out of account.

The Shah and both his recent Prime Ministers have made it clear that they favour free elections. However, the two prominent opposition leaders, Dr Sanjani and the Ayatollah Khomeini, have made it equally clear that they will not participate in any elections under the present constitution.

Indeed, if the present legal government were to hold elections now, it is probable that the opposition would boycott them, and on its recent record one would expect massive intimidation to prevent upholders of the present constitution going to the polls.

Both opposition leaders have obvious reasons for refusing to recognise the Shah's regime. The Ayatollah has grounds for personal animosity towards the Shah's family; and Dr Sanjani knows that he has little hope of coming to power through the ballot box unless he aligns himself with the Ayatollah's supporters. The Ayatollah is obviously

not willing to use constitutional means to bring about change, and will continue to rely on emotional appeal through mass demonstrations. In fact the Ayatollah is planning a coup, and this is far more likely and dangerous than the alleged threat of an army coup.

It is not really relevant to question whether the army is primarily loyal to the Shah or to the constitution. It would be bound in any case to respond to an Islamic coup attempt, which would be aimed at both the Shah and the constitution. The only legal way for the opposition to gain power would be for the Regency Council to remove Dr Bakhtiar and appoint Khomeini's nominee as Prime Minister and secure the approval of Parliament.

There are still millions of Iranians, of various religious persuasions, who favour the Shah and who enjoyed the freedom of his rule. They rightly fear the Islamic imposition with which their nation is threatened.—Yours
David Bansome.

Penwortham,
Preston PR1 ORD.

Sir.—Prof. Sanai (Letters, January 20) wants Dr Bakhtiar to dissolve the Majlis and set a date for elections so that the ballot box may decide Iran's future. How



The Ayatollah heading for a coup?

good and sensible. I very much hope that the Prime Minister of Iran does something of the kind soon; that the Iranian people, who unfortunately have not had much of a grounding in the give-and-take of parliamentary politics over the past 25 years, can handle it; and that the army tolerates what certain of its officers probably do regard as this democratic nonsense long enough to let them.

In short, I hope that the bravery of those who, over the past months, have died before the Shah's guns is rewarded by something like a government that has the sup-

port of the Iranian people.

But let us have none of this talk of Khomeini's, or Islam's, superior claim to democratic credentials. The democratic bits in neither Christianity nor Islam (are there not a few in Christianity also?) prevented very large parts of Europe and the Middle East being ruled, for centuries, by governments which did not even try to claim any democratic legitimacy—but which none the less enforced the practice of their respective religions.

That no Western nation has ever managed to democratise its political life without secularising the state to a rather large extent should not need pointing out.

I was fortunate enough to leave Iran last July, having worked there for two years. A few weeks earlier Isfahan had had its initial modest share of the unrest; play thrown over a book display organised by the Christian Hospital, and petrol bombs thrown into liquor shops owned by the long-suffering Armenians. All, presumably, in the tolerant and democratic spirit of Ayatollah J. S. Mill.—Yours faithfully,

Andrew Knapp,
Lincoln College,
Oxford.

Sir.—Martin Woollacott's most sympathetic profile of

the Ayatollah Khomeini (January 22) omitted to mention some of the Ayatollah's less pleasant features. The anti-semitic opinions of this cleric are becoming well known.

It was under the influence of Iran's religious leaders that Jews have experienced such attacks before. As recently as the time when the Shah's father ascended the throne Iran's Jewish community had few, if any, rights and was among the most downtrodden minorities in the world.

In addition to the estimated 80,000 Jews in Iran there are sizeable communities of Christians and Bahais. They too are now forming the targets for the Ayatollah's outbursts.

Your correspondent quoted a sentence from a book written by the Ayatollah: "Islam is the religion of fighters for freedom, who pursue justice and righteousness." In the light of the above one is left wondering just what those concepts mean to the Ayatollah. The safety and possibly the lives of many thousands of Iranians may depend upon it.—Yours faithfully,

Jonathan Arkush,
1 Verulam Buildings,
Gray's Inn,
London, WC1R 5LQ.

Quango tango Tall order

Sir.—You report (January 19) that "the Housing Corporation... wants sweeping changes in the management and control of its accounts after the confirmation of a £5 millions deficit last year."

Does it, indeed? How forthright and objective, how brave of Sir Lou Sherman to offer us such a concealed apology a month after he was obliged to withdraw from Parliament the audited accounts of his quasi-national government organisation.

For the pure quality of its impertinence, prefacing as it does a demand for still more Housing Corporation staff, this statement surely qualifies to be nominated as Quango Bluff of the Year.—Yours faithfully,

Douglas Pollard,
127 Venerable Road,
London SE26 5 HU.

Light switch

appropriate at this time" is remarkable even when judged on his record for weasel words.

Why did he not reach this decision weeks ago and save the country from chaos and hardship and the Labour Movement from humiliation?
Roy D. Roebuck,
6 Gray's Inn Square,
London WC1R 5BA.

Sir.—Let us give a lead to the country and show that we are wholeheartedly behind Mr Callaghan's policy by refusing to pay one iota above 5 per cent on our rate demands in 1979.—Yours faithfully,

R. H. Parry,
Llanferres,
Mold, Clwyd.

Sir.—It used to be said that the ultimate aim of a successful strike was to enlist the support of public sympathy. Now many strikers believe they will achieve their aim more readily by creating public fear and apprehension.—Yours truly,
(Rev.) George Whitfield,
31 Foxholes Hill,
Exmouth,
Devon EX8 2DQ.

Wrong tie

The Government must act to be believed

Sir.—It is a somewhat chastening experience as an MP on the Government's back benches to find the most acute comment on the present turmoil in Britain coming from an American professor (Letters, January 23).

What he has identified is the vacuum now at the heart of our situation. He is wrong to discount altogether the value of verbal persuasion, or "jaw-boning"—it has, after all, been a considerable weapon in bringing indignation down to manageable levels in the past year and is almost certainly the reason why public anger now is directed against the strikers rather than the Government (as compared with 1974 when it was felt that Edward Heath had called calamity on his own head by his rigidity and legalism).

But there comes a time when the psychology of the situation demands that persuasion is underpinned with action; if the moment is missed the Government loses its authority. The vacillation as to whether or not a State of Emergency should be de-

clared is a case in point; the actual effect might well be limited, but the declaration would serve as a personal message direct to the public that the Government is taking control.

As it is, the message most people are getting derives from their personal experience of no trains, ungritted roads, neglected hospital patients, and uncertain food supplies. No nation should be allowed to feel so inadequate.

There is really no excuse for the handout of 50 Ministers, with only a few exceptions, to adopt such breathtaking reticence at this time. What they should be doing is spelling out to sectional interests that, though they can win their immediate battle for a wage claim, they will ultimately lose, along with the rest of the nation, the final battle for survival.—Yours faithfully,

Eric Moonman, MP,
(Lab., Basildon),
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA.

Sir.—The announcement by Mr Hattersley that a freeze order on hauliers' charges "would not be

Language barriers

Sir.—I know that third leaders on Saturday mornings deal usually with the less central issues of our lives and can be excused their ministerial tones. Even so it is important on occasion to think a little more deeply than was evident in your comments on the use of minority languages at the European Parliament (January 20).

There are two points to be borne in mind, one of practicality and one of political principle. The importance of the first is obvious. That of the second is not so obvious—at least to your leader writer—but a number of contemporary political theorists have shown its importance and not merely for the minorities themselves.

When I addressed the European Parliament in Welsh the only practical problem was the one which faced me. I had written out my speech in Welsh and provided the interpreters with an English translation. The Belgian President was unaware that I was speaking Welsh because he was listening through headphones to a French interpreter, and it was only when an official pointed out to him what I was doing that he interrupted me.

The practical problem was mine in that I had to read a speech from a piece of paper instead of making one—as all good speeches are made—from the heart.

It is not so easy in the space of a letter to show the importance of maintaining as much social, cultural and political diversity as possible on our shrinking globe. Can I give two quotations which at least hint at hidden depths?

Sartre, speaking of the Basque language under an admittedly despotic Castilian regime, said that "to speak an oppressed language is itself a revolutionary act and is to attack capitalism at its softest spot."

Yves Person, referring to the positivism sadly adopted as much by socialists as by capitalists, pointed out that this mechanistic philosophy "has pervaded one kind of leftist thinking leading it to the notion of the Utopian Universal Republic whose citizens will not only be equal but identical and interchangeable."

Had I 5,000 words available to me I would have been happy to develop the theme.

Tom Ellis, M.E.P.,
House of Commons,
London, SW1A 0AA.

Juries: where a lifetime's experience counts for nought

Sir.—In your leader about juries (January 19) you say the fundamental principle is that jurors should be selected at random. In one important respect Parliament itself has said this should not be so.

A jury can include someone who is still at school, but not someone with a lifetime's experience if he or she is over 65. This is because all persons over 65 have been disqualified as jurors by a statutory provision which slipped through, almost unnoticed, following the Latey report.

It is difficult to comprehend why—short of some curious fit of prejudice—this very large section of the population is excluded: especially when one considers that they have the knowledge of the world and in many cases the time for such service. Judges and magistrates go on until they are seventy and more.

Jurors who are clearly unfit to follow the proceedings should be asked to stand down, whatever their age; and if a dodderer gets by, is an occasional dodderer worse than an occasional villain? Perhaps I should add that I am well under 65.—Yours sincerely,

John Carswell,
5 Prince Arthur Road,
London NW3.

Teachers seeking pay justice

Sir.—Hugh Hebert's salary comparisons (January 24) were unintentionally misleading as far as teachers were concerned, and Mr Hebert himself acknowledges that such comparisons must be rough and ready. The 1974-8 pay movement for teachers in fact includes the "Houghton" increases which were supposed to set right the decline in teachers' pay in the preceding years, 1965-74.

The independent 1974 Houghton inquiry was important in another way: it linked the salaries of teachers to those of non-manual employees generally. The appropriate Department of Employment Index of comparison, said Houghton, was therefore the Salaries Index (not the earnings survey).

The Houghton report was accepted by the Government, and the Salaries Index shows that at April 1978 teachers would need an increase of at least 20 per cent to restore their 1974 relationship with non-manual employees. By April 1979 the shortfall will be more than 30 per cent.

The importance of the link which Houghton established

Sir.—According to your report of E. P. Thompson's introduction to the NCCCL pamphlet Justice Denied (January 18), juries used to refuse convictions in cases involving blasphemy and free thought, as well as in cases involving treason, sedition, libel, press freedom, and obscenity. I wish this were true, but I don't think it is.

Out of the hundreds of victims of blasphemy prosecutions from 1676 to 1821, and now in 1977, virtually all were dutifully convicted. There are only two significant exceptions—the three trials of William Hone in 1817, when three juries acquitted for political reasons; and the three trials of the Freethinker in 1883, when two juries failed to agree and one convicted. Unfortunately, even the freest juries are willing to convict for religious reasons.

In this connection, according to your report of the beginning of the Hull prison riot trial (January 16), the jurors were vetted to see whether any of them had been prisoners. Were they also vetted to see whether any of them had been prison officers?

Nicolas Walter,
New Humanist,
88 Islington High Street,
London N1 8EW.

is that it provides and endorses the principle of comparability as a fair way of dealing with teachers' pay (and the Government has recently confirmed its willingness to see comparability exercised undertaken). Yet the years of incomes policy and the fact that no fringe or "productivity" extras are given to teachers have left them behind. This year the teachers will need to restore the link accepted by the Government in 1974.

This is the basis for our forthcoming pay claim. The need to restore Houghton is a matter which has been discussed by union associations all over the country and agreed by our last annual conference.

The teachers' case is responsible. A painstaking inquiry established their true salary position and the Government should honour its acceptance of the results of that inquiry.—Yours faithfully,
Fred Jarvis
(General Secretary),
National Union of
Teachers,
Mableton Place,
London WC1H 9BD.

Sir, — Your story (Guardian Diary, January 23) about the neo-Fascist Almirante sharing a political platform in Brighton with Mr Julian Amery links the European Movement, with this meeting.

First, the chairman and organiser of the meeting, Mr Bill Sykes, is not a member of this movement and we were in no way concerned with the function. Second, this being so, I do not understand how Mr Julian Amery could have assumed the contrary. Third, the European Movement, either in Britain or in Italy would never consider associating itself in any way with neo-Fascist parties.

Ernest Wistrich,
(Director),
The European Movement,
1a Whitehall Place,
London, SW1.

Sir, — Martin Wainwright (January 19) has not done his homework. My Encyclopaedia Britannica (1963) edition has no entry under "Electric Light" but under "Lighting" full credit is given to the work of Swan. There is also an entry under "Swan, Sir Joseph Wilson" in which his priority is acknowledged.

The Larousse Dictionnaire des Découvertes Scientifiques (1968), under the entry "éclairage," puts Swan before Edison, and the English inventor Frederick de Moleyns before Swan. But de Moleyns's patent filament lamp of 1841 had not incorporated an evacuated bulb, and so it came to nothing — Yours faithfully,

R. V. Wells,
13 The Crest,
Widley,
Portsmouth, Hants.

● The Port of London Authority is losing £1 million a week because of the lorry drivers' strike, not £1 million a day as inadvertently stated on this page yesterday.

(Sir)—How right that London's Centre Point should be selected as an Historic Building. (Guardian, January 23). Mr Pooley is quite right in describing it as "of monumental or symbolic significance." What better monument is there to man's greed, ignorance, and stupidity?

And no doubt there will be other monuments erected in the name of "development" at the cost of economic stability to individual, city, and nation, until such time as a correct foundation for taxation, is established and the income from the value of land is restored to its rightful owner, the community which creates it. — Yours faithfully,

Richard Dickson,
11 Warren Street,
London W1P 5DA.