

Letter to the Editor

A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

SIR,—Many people believe that if a majority can be persuaded to vote in favour of doing something, it is in line with free democracy for that thing to be done. This indicates a serious misconception of the nature of free democracy, which is primarily concerned with the rights of people as human beings, and not with the dominance of the majority. A majority vote that violates ethical or moral principles, or deprives people of rights they are entitled to enjoy, is not democracy but tyranny, even though, as in the case of fluoridation, it may operate in the guise of doing good. It is a subversion of democracy that will help to bring free democracy to an end if allowed to continue.

The survival of free democracy depends, first and foremost, upon preserving the basic rights of individuals. Everyone has a personal responsibility for doing this—not only for himself but for others as well—and free democracy can only prosper provided that everyone plays his or her part in preserving these rights. We are all involved, whether we want to be or not.

The protection of our basic rights is undoubtedly the *first* duty of our

elected representatives in parliament and on local councils. High in the list of these rights is the right of every individual to decide what he will consume, and what he will not consume, for the maintenance and development of his own body. Fluoridation violates this right and sets a highly dangerous precedent. That is why so many MPs and council members are against the idea.

Most of these MPs and council members are also against the principle of making council members responsible for deciding whether or not those whom they represent are to take medicine. In the case of fluoridation, the fact that many qualified people, including Nobel Prize winners in the fields of medicine, chemistry and physiology, are widely divided in their opinions as to its safety, makes it doubly objectionable that laymen should be asked to accept such a grave responsibility. Asking them to vote in this matter is the equivalent of asking them to act as judges in matters about which the vast majority know nothing at all.

Yours faithfully,

P. CLAVELL BLOUNT
Thames Ditton, Surrey.

Miscellany

Radio and the Rates

WHY should we have new local radio stations foisted upon us whether we want them or not? No-one thought of consulting the ratepayers who are being asked to subsidise what they may not want. We could certainly think of much better entertainment than four hours a day of palm court music and local gossip, as in Leicester's case.

But that's not all. At a cost of £1,000 a week ratepayers are compelled to support what two-thirds of them cannot even get! Only one-third of the population of Leicester has V.H.F. radio sets.

One city has refused to shoulder the cost of having a local radio station because it is the rates that will have to foot a lot of the bill.

If we must experiment with putting the time machine back, it would have

been more sensible to let the private enterprise interests that first raised the idea see whether they really could make it pay. They would have stood the losses, without taking a penny from either ratepayers or taxpayers. On the contrary they would even have paid rates and taxes.

We Pay Their Way

MRS. BARBARA CASTLE, the Minister of Transport, is planning to "write off" the railways' debts.

British Railway's accumulated debts have been estimated to be more than £1,000 million. The White Paper just published does not suggest that the whole amount should be written off—just enough to cut capital debt to a level "at which it is reasonable to expect that interest payments can be met out of revenue early in the 1970s."

This is not the first time that a nationalised industry's debts—too big

for ordinary men and women to be able to visualise that much money—have been vapourised at the stroke of a pen.

But are they vapourised? Maybe they started as vapour, at any rate, paper printed with "promises to pay," but it has been spent. It has gone into the economy generally as spending power.

You cannot write off money. It is one of the built-in delusions of socialists that it can be done, but in fact all that happens when a nationalised industry's deficit is "written off" is that the debt is transferred from the industry to the community.

Meanwhile, the spending power goes around and around, a bit more money chasing the available goods. It is, in fact, inflation pure and simple. Whatever may be the merits of helping the railways to pay their way, do not let us be deceived about who is doing it for them. It's us.

Not Wanted

MR. ROBERT MELLISH, Minister of Public Building and Works, took care to explain that he was expressing a personal view the other day when he said private landlords may have to be compelled to modernise old houses. But he used to be joint Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Housing, so it may be reasonable to guess that he was thinking on lines that had been discussed there.

Grants for improvements to private houses have been available for years. There has been no rush to collect the money from the town hall. One reason, some landlords say, is that tenants will not have the work done, and housewives resent any idea of compulsion. Sometimes it's because they don't want to lose a room that is going to be turned into a bathroom. More often than not it's because they don't want to pay extra rent for the better comforts.

Private householders have been reluctant, too. Local councils are sometimes to blame for this. When plans for putting in a bath or indoor toilet, or hot water system, are submitted, the council says that this, that and the other additional structural improvements must be done also. So what may look at the start like a bill the owner can just meet with a struggle becomes a very large one that he could never hope to afford—even with the grant, which has a top limit, anyway.

And, of course, if the improvement is carried out, the rateable value of the