

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why silence would be Callaghan's best policy

Sir, — When prime minister, James Callaghan had no colleague more loyal than Michael Foot who accepted a series of defeats in Cabinet, notably over the IMF/sterling crisis in 1976, in order to sustain the Labour government in office. Why then has Mr Callaghan chosen the most damaging moment possible to torpedo his former lieutenant?

He knows better than most of us that manifesto commitments are as binding on a prime minister as he chooses to allow them to be: he must remember, for example, the open government and freedom of information pledges in the October 1974 manifesto. This time, more than ever, the hony left's chances of relating terms to an incoming Labour government look remarkably slim because so many pledges are so severely pruned. A list of priorities is because of the

likely composition of a Labour Cabinet, having, in Mr Foot a sub-Allee chair-man of proven flexibility and vagueness, and dominated by anti-militant, anti-unilateralist heavyweights such as Messrs Shore and Healey; and because the very best the party can hope for is minorly government with Alliance support.

I suggest that Mr Callaghan should have employed these obvious political and constitutional constraints for the benefit of a British public still largely at the mercy of a hysterically Thatcherite popular press. Instead he has chosen to continue the betrayal of his party and his friends that he began when he ran away from the fight with Bennism — now largely a spent force thanks to the courage, dedication and skill of Mr Foot and Mr Healey. — Yours etc, Will Attenborough, 6 Spital Street, Lincoln.

Sir—James Callaghan has decided to "contribute" to the debate on Labour's defence policy.

This poor person's Willy Brandt, displaying all the subtlety of the weapons he refuses to proscribe, begs to be taken seriously as a statesman, having served time in the four Great Offices of the Crown.

Unlike Sir Harold Wilson — that other bastion of socialist virtue — he has not had the grace to retire. Perhaps we could contribute a few notes towards a political obituary which might help us to assess the merits of his advice. As chancellor of the Exchequer (1964-67) he wrecked the DFE experiment with planning, and eventually returned over a devaluation which, if appropriate at all, should have come earlier. (Only the advent of Sir Geoffrey Howe has prevented him from winning the Sir Alec Douglas-Home Prize for economic illiteracy.) As home secretary (1967-

70) he can be proud of his visionary perspective on immigration controls, and of his complacent response to events in Northern Ireland — which he later was to reward with the stewardship of Roy Mason.

As the foreign secretary (1974-76) who aided "renegotiation" of EEC membership, he is perhaps the last person to advise on how to "negotiate" in other spheres of inestimably greater importance.

As prime minister (1976-79) he repudiated Keynesianism, returned to the nostrums that Snowden and MacDonaid had proclaimed in the 1930s, and presided over IMF-suggested cuts that were unnecessary even on the terms of the arguments used (as money mandarin Sir Leo Paltzsky has shown). With a rare capacity for mistiming — which he has obviously not lost — he more than anybody is responsible for the disinclination, in the 1980s of altruistic conservatism. With such a record Mr

Callaghan should be advised, in the words of Attlee to Laski: "A period of silence on your part would be welcome." N. Ellison, P. Heywood, B. O'Leary, Department of Government, The London School of Economics.

Sir, — The future over the Labour Party's defence policy disagreements really amazes me. As a unilateralist, I naturally welcome Labour's manifesto commitment to move towards a non-nuclear defence strategy. But common sense tells me that stopping the arms race is like defusing an unexploded bomb, and needs similarly delicate handling. The argument about whether a Labour government should "abandon" Polaris or "put it on the negotiating table" is on this level: an argument about means, not ends.

Compare this with the Conservative policy: to hang on to Polaris come what may,

and to update it regardless of cost.

I suggest that Labour's uncertainty as to how best to defuse the bomb should cause us far less concern than the conservatives' apparent determination not only to leave it intact, but also to cram even more explosive into it: a policy of such wild irrationality that even the Defence Secretary no longer pretends to have any logical arguments for it.

The Labour leadership may or may not be able — or even willing — to protect Mr Heseltine against the onslaught of a feather duster; but anyone who wants to see the world step back from the nuclear abyss must fervently hope that it will be able to perform the more valuable function of protecting the nation against the defence policies of Mr Heseltine and his associates. — Yours Arthur Peacock, Rosemary Street, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire.

The wrong questions wrong answers

Into bondage with Britain's masochists

Sir, — Yes, she is headstrong, profligate with other people's money in her own dubious causes, a cheeper of every thought she touches, and the nearest female equivalent to Horatio Bottomley that we are ever likely to see. (Just the person to be

five or 15 years, or however long it takes to put together a left-of-centre coalition, with a matching socio-economic base, which does not seek to stop the planet and get off, but does seek fairer shares of wealth and opportunity around the country and the world than any business-

Thatcher to take as her text. I have in mind T. S. Eliot's The Hollow Men, which begins: We are the hollow men We are the stuffed men Leaning together Headpiece stuffed with straw. Alas!

copiers, to mass meetings planned to greet them. They lecture the people with their parrot-learned parts, or mouth their mutual insults day and night, ad nauseam, in the family home. Menthime those sought-after redundant human voters, with no real oppor-

