

Trustworthiness as touchstone in public office

From Mr A. B. Ducker

Sir, In the Parkinson affair, it is a pity that you concentrated your editorial upon current sexual attitudes more than on the simple precepts of honesty and fidelity.

Apart from the unnecessary suffering caused to the women personally involved, the importance for the nation at large rests in the fact that honesty and fidelity have been shown deficient in the character of a person appointed to represent us in high matters of state.

Ordinary people at home, and the representatives of other countries abroad, can perceive this fact, and it is the Prime Minister's duty to act to restore the trustworthiness of her Government.

Yours truly,
A. B. DUCKER,
Donnybrook,
College Road,
Bath, Avon.
October 7.

From Mr Anthony Smith, QC

Sir, Yours is not a little paper run by a dated clique of aging public schoolboys raising laughs and circulation out of the follies of others. Because we all commit folly of some kind, it is easy enough for others to talk up such folly indiscriminately to destroy. On the part of the supposedly responsible this can be intellectual vandalism.

In my judgment few politicians of any party inspire by appearances much admiration for real ability. For this observer, Mr Parkinson's appearances have for some years constituted a notable exception to that rule. I would not have thought the manifestation of honesty, or love, or loyalty, or even of sin that is supposed to be original and in us all, reveals such startling defects of character as to make him less fit to serve the rest of us now than he was when we did not know.

In this age of vaunted permissiveness and liberalism, when even what was recently thought unnatural vice can be condoned as real love from the pulpit, there are still ways for ~~establishment journals to make~~ Parnells and Dilkes. I am disappointed that your paper, after all these years, should give the appearance of seeking them out.

A defence would have been more impressive. It would have been more useful, perhaps, to those whose sufferings you lament, too.

Yours sincerely,
ANTHONY SMITH,
Skeffington House,
Skeffington, Leicester.

From the Reverend Richard James

Sir, While our hearts go out to all those directly affected by this tragic situation, its indirect consequences are equally disquieting.

Why, if it is purely a private matter, was any public statement from No 10 deemed so necessary and issued so promptly?

Is the question of resignation ruled out so categorically because adultery, like any other sin repented of, can be fully forgiven, or because it is considered insignificant in today's climate where one in three marriages break up and one in seven families have only one parent?

On what scale of values was Lord Carrington respected for "doing the honourable thing" over a national disgrace of which he was not the personal cause, and Cecil Parkinson's services are now so insistently retained?

If it is true that "he who is trustworthy in little is trustworthy also in much", then has not a democratic nation the right to expect its leaders to possess, among other qualifications for high public office, the moral attribute of personal integrity?

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD JAMES,
Bedford College of Higher Education,
Polhill Avenue,
Bedford.
October 6.

From Sir John Herbecq

Sir, I have no wish to comment on the Parkinson affair, but your comment (leading article, October 7) that "We all know too well that, whatever society's aspirations to the contrary, life in this land is full of split homes, illegitimacy, and one-parent families" simply will not do. On the contrary, life in this land is full of united homes, legitimacy and two-parent families.

Despite the lamentable increase in split homes and the rest, those who have brought about this state of affairs remain a small minority in this land and there is no reason why their conduct should be held to have established a new norm in morality acceptable to a public at large who have no right to expect anything better in their leaders.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN HERBECQ,
Maryland Ledgers Meadow,
Cuckfield,
Haywards Heath,
West Sussex.
October 7.

From Mr J. F. Bird

Sir, Mr Parkinson's conduct has implications for his public life which cannot be dismissed as easily as your leading article suggests. Insofar as the character of a public figure is reflected in his private life, this surely must be a matter of public concern, whether or not public statements are made.

Leaving aside the moral issues, where there may be differences of view, Mr Parkinson has by his own admission betrayed personal relationships. This is dishonest. Also he is to be the father of a child who in effect will have no father. This is irresponsible.

When someone manages to make such a mess of their family life it gives me no confidence that they are in any way equipped to manage the affairs of state. And if the paying out of money is to be the Tory answer to a situation such as this, then God help us!

Yours faithfully,
J. F. BIRD,
17 Radcliffe Road,
Bamburgh,
Northumberland.
October 8.

From Mrs Vyvyan Evans

Sir, While I realize that your leading article on the "Parkinson affair" (October 7) is intended to give a fair and balanced view of the situation without innuendo, I must protest at the way in which you accuse the public of "one of its periodic fits of false morality and hypocrisy."

It is not the public which sends its reporters to hound the lives of well known people when they depart from accepted rules of behaviour but the editors of newspapers intent on exploiting the situation to the full.

It is in the interests of society that marriage in general should survive and that those involved in this particular one should be allowed to sort out their difficulties without the harsh glare of publicity upon them. To the press, however, this is just another scoop - from the despicable *Private Eye*, with its particularly underhand way of forcing the matter into the open, to the bland and reasonable view of *The Times* in its leader.

Please do not accuse the public of "false morality and hypocrisy". The matter is in your hands.

Yours faithfully,
VYVYAN EVANS,
Roden House,
4 Shenfield Road,
Brentwood, Essex.