Making the nation eat what's good for it
Letters continued

perhaps 3000 items. Errors of a magnitude sufficient to account for Tom Dalby’s “major twist” are quite inexcusable and did not occur.

He will be telling us next that the bad weather is at the fault of those storm blights.

As far as I am concerned, the body of scientific background knows that the change is desirable even if the moment of change is uncomfortable.

And, in this era of readily available slide rules and pocket calculators, nobody will be allowed to get away with a thing even if he wished to.

Why have we become such a nation of muggins? The Indians have decriminalised their currency and adopted metric measures without turning a hair. Yet we indulge in an orgy of self pity over the hardships of the change.

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Crowding

Sir,—Dr. Halton (Comment, 22 April, p 162) appears to have accepted at face value the DNE statement that Connecticut has a higher population density than this country.

This is true for the UK as a whole, but not for London. According to the figures given in Whicker’s Malmeeck (1975), Connecticut has 1,895 people per square mile of land area. In the UK, the population density is 515 people per square mile of land area. However, the corresponding data for England is 515 (Wales 512, Scotland 175, N Ireland 285) and this puts a very different complexion on the room for increase in car ownership.

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Railway figures

Sir,—In your report (Technology, 1 April, p 19) of the meeting at the Institution of Civil Engineers held on 22 March you wrote: “...Smith’s revelation last week that his costs were based on data produced by the Railway Converson League...” This statement is untrue. Hall and Smith’s costs are, as clearly stated in their report, based on 1973 unit costs. Figures published by the Railway Converson League are given in our report Conversion of Railways into Roads in the UK 1970 and are actual costs of conversion schemes carried out.

Our figures relate to the late 1960s and Smith’s 1973 and some high figures quoted at the meeting to estimate work for work to be carried out in 1970 or later. Your correspondent is surely aware that in an inflationary age direct comparisons of cost figures over such a period are meaningless. Norwich reported a figure of £280,000 for a 9 km scheme completed in 1969. We have therefore a difference by a factor of four in the figures from one country over this period.

Anon Dalyleigh Railway Conversion League Ltd
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Random questions

Sir,—Your brief piece, “Random Questions” (January 11 March, p 185) communicates the “new” (to your Buckinghamshire reader) discovery that oryctoid dice do not show equi-probability for each face coming up, and so implies that classical statistical tests, which assume such equi-probability, are invalid when applied to testing for psychokineti (PK) abilities in parapsychological research.

Last any readers be misled, they should know that the problem of biased dice was taken up and solved over 40 years ago by J. B. Rhine and his co-workers.

1. First specially machined, balanced dice were developed to approximate equi-probability in control trials, but a much simpler solution was quickly found and has been standard ever since.

2. Before an experiment begins, a schedule of target faces is set up which not only fixes the total but calls for a frequent and regular alternation of which face is to be the target. For example, one might be the target for the first dozen trials, none for the second dozen, etc. One need only use dice which show rough approximations to equiprobability then, for any biases work against you as much as they work for you, and so balance out.

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Feeding babies

Sir,—I read appreciatively Dr. Walk’s recent article on the work of Professor Joaquin Graupno on malnutrition in Person, Vol 63, p 381. The impact of his careful understanding of the fact that Cuba was one of only three industrial countries to have eliminated malnutrition was, however, spoilt for me by reading at the same time a report that Cuba was to receive $310,000 from the World Food Programme for feeding babies, children and expectant and nursing mothers. (World Food Programme News Jan-March 1975, p 3.)

E. C. Young

Research on the control of olive pests and diseases

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Harwell programmes

Sir,—In reply to the comment by Dr. K. Heselitz (Letters, 15 April, p 152), Harwell’s R & D effort is categorised as follows:

1. Direct support for the British nuclear power programme: 2. Underlying research in nuclear science—long-term work; 3. Work under contract to government departments and research councils and local authorities; 4. Nuclear and non-nuclear work for industrial companies.

Fewer than 50 qualified scientists and engineers (QSEs) are engaged on the nuclear power programmes (1 and 2) supported by the nuclear energy vote. The other 500 QSEs are involved in contract R & D and other work (3 and 4) outside the nuclear energy vote.

Programmes 3 involve working both as agent and contractor to government departments and is funded mainly by the Department of Industry. Energy Environment and Defence and the Science Research Council in the customer-contractor basis enunciated in the Rothschild report.

Harwell’s industrial R & D programmes (1), which earned £140,000 in 1975-76, cover a wide range of contract research for British companies, large and small, and for the nationalised industries, and the development and exploitation of Harwell’s inventions.

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Correction

In the item, “Loss pollution from toxic wastes in South Wales” (This Week, 8 April, p 68) the figure 0.5 ppm of PCB should have read 3.5 ppm of PCB. The error is regretted.