

R. H. S. Crossman

THIS CONCERTED and highly disingenuous attack by two of our leading pollster bosses bewilders me. They try to write me off as one of those politicians who are hopelessly biased against political polling and then adduce in evidence quotations from my review of *Political Opinion Polls*. What they do not reveal to the reader are the frank and critical comments by Teer and Spence (both of whom have worked in poll organisations) on which my remarks were entirely based. Since some of those who now can read Messrs Taylor and Abrams' effusions may have forgotten or not read the October number of *ENCOUNTER* where my article appeared, some reply is necessary. It is only necessary to quote in full the key passages in *Political Opinion Polls* on which I relied for my contention that political polling as it is at present organised has much more to do with Fleet Street journalism than with scientific enquiry. The first states the difference in principle:

"Unlike academic enquiries whose objectives will be to reach a basic understanding of the mainsprings of opinion, the pollster's function is simply to report that opinion as succinctly as possible. He is seldom concerned with its depth, intensity or origin because his work is not undertaken to help decide what action should be taken but merely to report the existing opinion for publication as a news story."

The second explains the key role of the editor in deciding the content of the questionnaire.

"The end use of the poll primarily affects the depth of questioning on any topic. The newspapers' needs and the consequent limitation on space devoted to opinion poll reporting mean that any issue examined by the polls will be dealt with at a relatively superficial level. The analysis will also be severely limited to the main aspects of the finding for the same reason. The requirements of the client will also govern the content of an opinion poll questionnaire. The topics examined by a poll will in general be those which the client newspaper considers to be of editorial interest. . . ."

It would have been fair enough for Messrs Taylor and Abrams to take issue with the authors of *Political Opinion Polls* and dispute their highly controversial statements. What is not fair is to try to destroy their importance by attributing them to me!

Now to a more detailed point—the technique of "clustering", Mr Taylor describes as "a wild

exaggeration" my claim that "in order to save money the newspaper editors insist on them using devices which substantially increase the sampling error." Again I must refer him to the text of the book. On p. 29 Messrs Teer and Spence write: "Because of these practical difficulties and the resulting high cost [my italics] the opinion poll organisations concentrate their interviews in a limited number of constituencies." On p.30 they go on:

"Stratification improves the efficiency of the sample but clustering the interviews, within a selection of constituencies, though necessary for practical reasons has the opposite effect. Unfortunately for the researcher clustering exercises the dominant influence, with the result that many of the estimates made from these samples are subject to sampling errors greater than those which would be derived from simple random samples."

And on p.31:

"The extent of this increased variance depends on the variable being measured. But for social class and voting intention the sampling error is increased by a factor (known as the *design factor*) of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{3}{4}$."

Again everything is attributed to the wicked politician who wrote the review, whereas the grave charges are made by the two professional pollsters who wrote the book.

Mr Taylor then proceeds to accuse me of prejudice not only against the polls to which at the beginning of my review I urge politicians to give more attention, but also against the press. His tortuous argument is worth quoting.

"To Mr Crossman, it follows that if the polls are, as he argues, the creatures of newspaper editors they are at best worthless."

Nowhere in my article do I call them "at best worthless" and, in fact, I find them quite useful. Nor, for very obvious reasons, do I believe that an outside contributor who works for an editor must become his creature. The reason why I greeted this excellent book so warmly and at such length is because politicians and journalists who read it will be able to make better use of the polls when they recognise them for what they are and what Messrs Teer and Spence call "yet another aspect of journalism." I can understand that Messrs Abrams and Taylor regard this as degradation. As a journalist I greet them as hitherto secret but now unveiled members of our fraternity. I hope they won't be too unkind to Messrs Teer and Spence for revealing their secrets.

London
A POLICEMAN came to the door [Lady James writes] one Saturday evening last May and said: "I regret to inform you that your son has met with a fatal accident."

My son, Luke Potter (his father was the late Stephen Potter) was at a boarding school and later that night the head master told me that he had thrown himself out of a window. He was 16 years old.

The year before he had run away from school because he was rebelling against the Establishment and I found out that he had been smoking pot.

At the inquest several pupils confirmed that he had not been overworking. One said that he liked to lie on his bed reading "not always school books." The disappointment over the girl they said was slight, but two said my son told them separately that he was on a "bad trip." Verdict: Death by misadventure whilst under the influence of drugs.

The children are being brainwashed. They are being told that intelligent people take drugs and that those who do not are unimaginative fuddy-duddies.

My son was influenced by Aldous Huxley's book on mescaline, and the false profundity of Tim Leary's on LSD. A few months before he died he had told my daughter that he had tried both drugs and that she should read Tim Leary's book "to broaden her mind".

Similar words were quoted by one of the witnesses at the inquest. My son wanted to be a writer and I am sure that he felt drugs would help him more than education.

SUNDAY EXPRESS

London
SOUNDS: "Redistribution, Partnership, Devolution, Decentralisation, Participation" are the words embroidered on the Liberal banner. They do not have the ring of the earlier Liberal slogan "Peace, Retrenchment and Reform." In fact they ring with the sound of a blancmange disturbed by a plastic spoon. But that is perhaps less the fault of the Liberal Party than of the deplorable condition into which the vocabulary of politics has fallen.

THE TIMES

New York
FATHER & SON: "I hate poetry," said Michael Yeats, chairman of the senate of the Republic of Ireland, barrister and only son of William Butler Yeats. "Of course, I don't hate poetry," he said, "but I can't say that I'm particularly interested in it."

The poet's son said that he had no particular favourites among his father's poetry but that he had one unchallenged unfavourite.

"That was 'Prayer for My Son'," he said. "It was written after my birth in 1921, and the other boys at St Columba's School used to recite it, knowing it would drive me to a fury."

The poet had a lifelong interest in spiritualism, the occult and astrology, other interests that his son does not share. "I'm sure he had a horoscope cast when I

was born," he said. "I may even have it, but I can't say that I've ever looked at it. As to ghosts, I'll believe in them the day I see one. I'm afraid I lack imagination in that direction."

Though his father's study was closed to him and his sister when he was working, Mr. Yeats recalled, there were occasions when he would work in public places.

"He would make a sort of queer, low-pitched humming noise," he said. "They were the kind of noises that when he made them on a bus someone might come up to him and ask him if he were ill. When he composed his verses, before he wrote anything down, he had to be satisfied that it sounded right. My mother told us at a very early age: 'When your father makes that kind of noise, just stop whatever you're doing and be still.'"

NEW YORK TIMES

London
40 X BLOODY: The word "bloody" was used 40 times in a recent play on BBC1 television, Sir Gilbert Longden told the Commons standing committee dealing with the Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill yesterday.

It was interesting that no one minded the use of the word "bloody" any more, yet when it was first used on the London stage about 60 years ago, in George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion", it had shocked the entire nation.

The use of the word then had been the first step in a downward spiral.

Apart from the "bloodies" in the television play there had been 26 other offensive remarks.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

New York
CULTURAL EXCHANGE: Out in the suburb of Stony Brook, Long Island, browsers in the library have been looking very startled at some of the titles on the shelves. Books like "The Red Detachment of Women" and "On the Long March with Chairman Mao," not to mention "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" (an opera, would you believe) and "New Archaeological Finds in China."

Stony Brook's librarian has not taken leave of his senses. This was chosen as the first library to participate in an exchange of books between America and Red China. Meanwhile, at the National Library in Peking, similarly startled ladies and gentlemen in little grey suits are trying to figure out "Houses and House Life of the American Aborigines" and "The American Beaver and his Works."

The deal seems to be that Americans get told about the inevitable thoughts of the worthy Chairman, plus librettos and choreography of Chinese operas and ballets, along with the odd volume on acupuncture. The Chinese will, in their turn, be drawing a picture in their heads of a Continent infested with small, furry animals, where the population speaks aborigine and Iroquois and studies basic sociology.

DAILY MAIL

LETTERS

Barzun & Rousseau

JACQUES BARZUN's interesting article, "Educational Disputes" (November), significantly comes under the heading *Men & Ideas*; for having made a passing reference to Locke's maxim about educating girls like boys, he proceeds to the statement that "Rousseau's outlook is obviously much wider. . . . It is a man capable of spiritual contentment and social self-respect anywhere that Rousseau hopes to develop."

The fact that Rousseau's *Emile* conspicuously leaves out women from this state of social self-respect does not concern Professor Barzun. It greatly concerned Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was largely devoted to a brilliant refutation of Rousseau's "male aristocracy" as she termed it, as well as setting out a blueprint for national education of both sexes in state schools.

"All the ideas of women, which have not the immediate tendency to points of duty [wrote Rousseau] should be directed to the study of men, and to the attainment of those agreeable accomplishments which have taste for their object; for as to works of genius, they are beyond their capacity; neither have they sufficient precision or power of attention to succeed in sciences. . . ."

It is Mary Wollstonecraft's resistance to this theory of women educated only to be man's "toy, his rattle", that forms much of the substance of her book. She claimed "the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature . . . and that women, considered not only as moral but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being—one of Rousseau's wild chimeras." Until women were more rationally educated, the progress of human knowledge must receive continual checks. In her proposed national schools co-education, and even the early dressing of girls and boys alike (a theory much propagated in Sweden today), would be used to demonstrate how much the disparate achievements of the sexes were based on artificial distinctions in childhood. Indeed she challenged Rousseau on his own ground, by an ingenious twist of his chosen weapon:

"'Educate women like men', says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us'. This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves."

I would agree entirely with Professor Barzun that popular translation of writers' ideas is usually a distortion of what those ideas actually were, and based not on reading of the original book but on "prefabricated knowledge." Mary Wollstonecraft's

works, which not only analyse women's position in society but also the defects in the whole political and social system on which that society is built, have been particularly subject to this procedure. But *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* cannot be left out of any serious discussion of the literature of education.

London

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

MISS WILLIAMSON, like her authority Mary Wollstonecraft, is really too selective in her representation of Rousseau. Both give the impression that he denied women genius and the intellectual means to self-respect—just another male bigot (Chauvin was not yet born). The truth is that the long Book V of *Emile* is a complex, closely reasoned view of women's education, based on the premise that men and women are equal—indeed, identical—in everything not influenced by what we now call biology. Rousseau knows and says that it is very difficult to be sure what is thus influenced. But having "the same faculties" women must not be reared ignorant and housebound. Their minds are "subtle and delightful" and they must be taught to "think, judge, know, and appreciate" all intellectual things.

The fact that he assumed most women would continue economically dependent on men is, I agree, monstrous. But then he had not heard from General Bonaparte about careers open to talent; in 1762 they were not even open to men. Nor had the socially emancipating factory, typewriter, and department store been invented. But although abstract ideas are not sufficiently self-propelling, the models were vivid enough. Rousseau's Julie in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the book that enraptured Mary W.'s posthumous son-in-law Shelley, is charming and learned, discusses Plato's *Republic* with her tutor-lover, and amazes her father with what she knows. Only geometry is off her programme—I leave reformers of all sexes to guess why.

In view of all this, to make of Mary Wollstonecraft a pioneer educational theorist who "refuted Rousseau" is more than a little partial. And there is more: twelve years before Mary was born, Diderot's essay "On Women" deplored their hard lot and spoke out against the laws and the education that left them to be "treated like retarded children." The Enlightenment—rich in educated women—was for both sexes, as is shown by the passage in 1792 of Condorcet's bill for their equal education. Mary W.'s book of the same year perhaps owes something to her long stay in France. But in England other circles than hers—the Edgeworths, the Wedgwoods—were also concerned about education for women *and* men. Their friend the great Dr Beddoes inveighed against "the studied neglect of women," devised programmes for boys' and girls' schools, and put employment for women "among the greatest desiderata of society."

All these plans and claims can be argued against and criticised. We haven't yet, among men or women, a consensus on sex equality *versus* identity, any more than on school goals and methods. But anyone can make a start and show the world by example, without belabouring those earlier thinkers but for whom the issue itself might not be in our