

# Letters to the Editor



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## Troublesome dean of Christ Church

Sir, "Mad, is he? Then I hope he will bite some of my other generals." These words of George II about General Wolfe can be applied now to Martyn Percy, the dean of Christ Church.

The fifth attempt in four years by a cabal of disaffected dons to defenestrate their dean ("Oxford college turns to medical team in row over dean's future", Dec 16), this time by voting for him to be classified as mentally ill, is both comic and contemptible. I saw Dr Percy this week. He was on sparkling form, battered but unbowed by the continuing civil war at The House.

A humorous observation might be that he is far sharper and saner than some of the obsessive academics who have so far wasted over £3million in legal fees and lost at least another £3million in cancelled charitable donations in their fruitless efforts to dislodge the head of their college. How much longer can this expensive and unpleasant nonsense continue?

There are signs that the Charity Commission and the chancellor of Oxford University, Lord Patten of Barnes, might finally intervene.

Biting or, better still, removing the "other generals" of Christ Church would be a good start.

**The Rev Jonathan Aitken**  
Christ Church alumnus 1961-64

## Tory response to defeat in North Shropshire

Sir, After the spectacular swing in the North Shropshire by-election, it seems probable that a majority of Tory MPs will conclude that they are more likely to win the next general election without Boris Johnson as leader. For many voters the final straw may have come last week when, instead of showing at least a degree of remorse over the Christmas party in Downing Street, the prime minister suggested that the facts had been mischaracterised by journalists.

The Tory party is renowned for its instinct for survival, so a leadership contest seems likely well before the next general election. This could lead to some alienated Tory voters considering a return to the fold.

**Galen Bartholomew**  
Evesham, Worcs

Sir, It must now be clear that the Conservative Party is no longer what it was. The party line stretching from Margret Thatcher to John Major, David Cameron and Theresa May has gone and in its place is a populist nationalist party. Gradually traditional Conservative voters who expect probity, integrity, pragmatism and good management are recognising what they have elected. The by-election in Shropshire shows

that they now reject this style of government.

**Gerard Connolly**  
London SW11

Sir, Many Conservative commentators are saying that the result in North Shropshire had nothing to do with the popularity of Boris Johnson and that he has a record as an election winner. When he first became mayor of London, Londoners had had enough of Ken Livingstone so it was a bit of a walkover. Similarly, the country was never going to vote for Jeremy Corbyn as prime minister. Boris Johnson has never fought an election with a credible opponent so I cannot help thinking that this result is all about Boris Johnson.

**Robbie Cathcart**  
Laxfield, Suffolk

Sir, Please don't make the mistake of thinking that the by-election was all about Boris. Many voted tactically with a heavy heart to show despair over the whole machinery of government and those who milk the system. It is not only Boris and the Tories: they are just the icing on a cake that has lost touch with the great majority of those on and around average incomes. Some of the basic

machinery of everyday life is fracturing for those who cannot afford to buy their way out. This is not the politics of envy but everyday reality. From potholes to breakdown in the care system, there is widespread incompetence. We require a massive change in attitudes.

**Peter Bevington**  
Weston Rhyn, Shrops

Sir, The continuous sniping of many Conservative backbenchers has seriously damaged the party they claim to support. How naive they are as they show new depths of disloyalty to their leader, who made it possible for many of them to win their seats. Boris Johnson is a prime minister with vision and needs to be surrounded by a supportive team who can see off the ambitious traitors in the Tory party.

**Judy Bromley Davenport**  
Cholmondeley, Cheshire

Sir, I actually feel sorry for the prime minister. He's just forked out, be it eventually, tens of thousands of pounds of his own money to pay for the refurbishment of his Downing Street flat, only to realise he may not be living there for very much longer.

**Bob Maddams**  
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

## West Side wokery

Sir, I'm sure that Gerard Baker ("Democrats have alienated Hispanic voters", Dec 17) is right about the damage the "woke" Democrats are doing to their standing among America's fastest growing minority. But his asides on Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story* are off the mark. Yes, the film avoids the obvious cultural beartraps (such as subtitles in Spanish but not English) but not in an overt or preachy way. Indeed the biggest change from the original is thoroughly unwoke; the cops in the 1961 version are unashamedly racist, which they are not in Spielberg's version. It is a terrific, and essentially unpolitical, retelling of a universal story.

**Sir Anthony Brenton**  
Former British ambassador to Russia, Cambridge

## Rantzen's privilege

Sir, Dame Esther Rantzen, while recounting experiences of misogyny at the start of her media career (Times2, Dec 14), blithely accepts a far more insidious corruption as normal. I quote: "I prepared myself for a gruelling interview ... but it turned out some of his team knew me from Oxford anyway and told him to employ me." Rantzen clearly doesn't see this an equally wrong form of discrimination, and doesn't see