

Letters

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

If we want to develop representative democracy in this country, as Dave Cook suggests (February issue), we need to look beyond petty party political considerations and raise ourselves above the subjective context of the present debates on PR. Representative democracy, if it is to mean anything, depends upon accountability to constituents. Multi-member constituencies and party list systems, as Peter Hain rightly states, are bound to diminish that feature beyond all recognition and seal the fate of democratic decisions into the hands of party political bureaucracies and manipulations behind closed doors. But both he and Cook fail to even mention an alternative STV system for *single* member constituencies. Here, electors would state first and second choices. If none of the candidates receives an overall majority on the basis of first choices, the lowest polling candidates would then be eliminated in turn and voters' second choices allocated to those remaining until one candidate gained an overall majority. This would ensure that most constituents would at least get their second choice.

Nobody can tell exactly how this would affect party representation in the coming period. It would, however, allow candidates of smaller parties to present themselves to the electorate without running the risk of letting in a minority candidate by default. A communist, for example could vote Communist first choice, Labour second and still not run the risk of letting a Tory in. It could of course go the other way, but that depends on the balance of political forces at any particular time (which would be modified by the system) and the state of the ideological struggle.

Another development that would give better representation is to have much smaller constituencies — there is no way that an individual can represent 70,000 — 5,000-10,000 would be much more meaningful. This would mean a greatly increased number of MPs but that would not be such a bad thing.

Jerry Jones, London

POST-PUNK

I read with interest Simon Frith's article on 'Post-Punk Blues'. As someone who was caught up in the initial wave of enthusiasm

generated by punk in 1977, and who mourns the apparent decline of youth music in the last year or two. For me the most important aspect of punk was not the interest in politics it generated, although this was important as the defeat of the National Front in 1978 showed, but the way in which it brought music back to its roots — the fans. As Patti Smith said in 1978: 'now there's no difference between the kids on the stage, and those on the dance floor'. Fanzines, independent record labels, and more recently the growth of cassette labels all represented the importance of fan involvement.

The decline of punk was inevitable, as with all youth cults. What is wrong and worrying is that nothing has taken its place - today parents probably find *Top of the Pops* more interesting than their children. It's time once again for a change.

Incidentally Robert Wyatt's *Shipbuilding* was not the only record released about the Falklands, Crass reached the top seventy with a message to Thatcher: *What's it like to be the mother of a thousand dead?*

Richard Griffin, Bradford

We welcome your letters for the May issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday, 8 April.



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