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Editorial

By the time this appears there will be a new Government in power. Whatever this may mean to the country there is no doubt that our leaders and representatives will be just as inept at mathematical argument. I expect many readers were as infuriated as I was by Teddy Taylor, M.P. for Southend and prominent anti-European who was ranting on the *Today* programme in January. His complaint was that because there are 12 countries in the EEC there will therefore be 144 language combinations for translation. Well, leaving aside the fact that some countries share a language, I would have thought that 132 might be a more sensible number to quote, or even more sensibly 66. But no, thundered Taylor: "144 is twelve times twelve, and you can't argue with that." I telephoned the programme to try to argue with him but I suspect the producer thought I was mad. Back up to bed then, and ten minutes later on came Frank Dobson M.P. to complain about the profits being made by the electricity companies. He had an average rise of over 200% to flourish, and needless to say he had got this by adding together all the percentage rises in the profits of all the boards, big and small, and dividing by the number of boards. That's how you find an average after all. I don't think I'm being elitist if I say that these two gentlemen (one Conservative, one Labour) are unfit for high office. Surely the very low level of mathematical attainment required to appreciate that these answers might be wrong and to go and get them checked by someone is a prerequisite if one is to represent a constituency, let alone aspire to be a Minister of State. With arithmetical inadequacy of this kind rife among our representatives, how can they possibly appreciate genuinely difficult concepts like Sterling M3 or the Retail Price Index? The fact is that they cannot, and that civil servants run this country and always will until we can teach a generation of potential Prime Ministers the elements of arithmetic a good deal more successfully than hitherto.