

Christmas elections should be a last resort

The Prime Minister had no choice but to hold an election close to Christmas. The old Parliament had degenerated into an uncontrollable shouting match, preventing government and making us look ludicrous abroad. When you can not even pass a budget it's time to ask the people.

Necessity does not make Christmas a good time to be campaigning and I trust it does not become a habit. It was cold and wet for much of the time, with slippery steps and paths, more dangerous in the dark when the sodden leaves were concealed in the shadows. The Labour candidate in Wokingham had an unfortunate fall at the start of the election and had to struggle on crutches for most of the time. I felt sorry for her, as it must be so frustrating and painful when you wish to dash around to meet as many people as possible.

I had to hone my skills at carrying a bundle of leaflets in one hand, an umbrella in the other, and then working how to battle with the letter boxes near the ground with highly sprung backs and tough brushes. If you abandoned the umbrella the leaflets soon got ruined by the rain. It was necessary to locate the prevailing wind and park the umbrella where it could not blow away whilst tackling the more aggressively defended letter boxes.

We candidates are all volunteers, and I am not seeking any sympathy for us. We do not have to do it, but we did have to fight that feeling of wistfulness as we watched everyone else getting ready for Christmas. Through lit windows we saw the trees and tinsel appear. The outsides of some houses were joyously lit up by great light displays or illuminated Santas and reindeer, making it a bit easier to find our footing as we went from house to house. We returned to our homes converted into leaflet stores and canvass offices feeling a bit like the person made to stay on duty during the party.

For MPs rightly stripped of office as soon as Parliament dissolves it is perhaps the busiest season for official duties. They all had to be binned. The two wreaths I had bought to lay at local war memorials sit in the corner of my office. I had to cancel my attendance at the Winter Carnival, pull out of reading a lesson at a civic service, and was told politely I was not wanted at the schools' carol concert which is a highlight of the year in Wokingham Borough. There was no question of dropping in on nativity plays, charity events or other Christmas specials. I will return to Westminster on Monday to a pile of Christmas cards ordered well before the election which could not be signed or sent as they have on them the Portcullis logo and MP designation.

The public was generally understanding of visitors after dark as they sensed the importance of the election and the limited time for parties to get their message across.

I hope in future we return to spring or early summer elections. There is so

much more daylight, it is a bit warmer, and the official calendar is less packed with must do events even allowing for the popularity of summer fetes. I like Christmas and it will great this week-end to be able to do some Christmas shopping and decorate my home. I will get Christmas done!