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Political Editor

Expected one for the Prime Minister alone and, as she did after a similar meeting in 1983, she was planning to make her mind up finally overnight.

Mr Tebbit told the meeting that the final estimate of voting support for the parties in the local government elections on Thursday was: Conservatives 37 per cent, Labour 29 per cent, SDP-Liberal Alliance 26 per cent, others 7.5 per cent.

It was thus similar to the pattern in similar wards in 1983, after which the Conservatives went on to a landslide victory in the general election on June 9.

On these figures, Labour's vote was down about 5 per cent, the Conservative vote by just under 1 per cent and the Alliance up by 5 per cent.

But ministers took enormous encouragement from the figures because the "others" category included independents, many of whom vote Conservative in national elections.

Although the Alliance vote was up by about 5 per cent they were fielding something like 20 per cent more candidates than last time.

Labour normally achieves a lower vote in general elections than it does in local government elections. In 1983 the party's vote dropped by 6.5 per cent between the local government elections and the general election.

The Conservatives have undertaken extensive private opinion polling since Thursday night to determine the effect of the local election results on voting intentions.

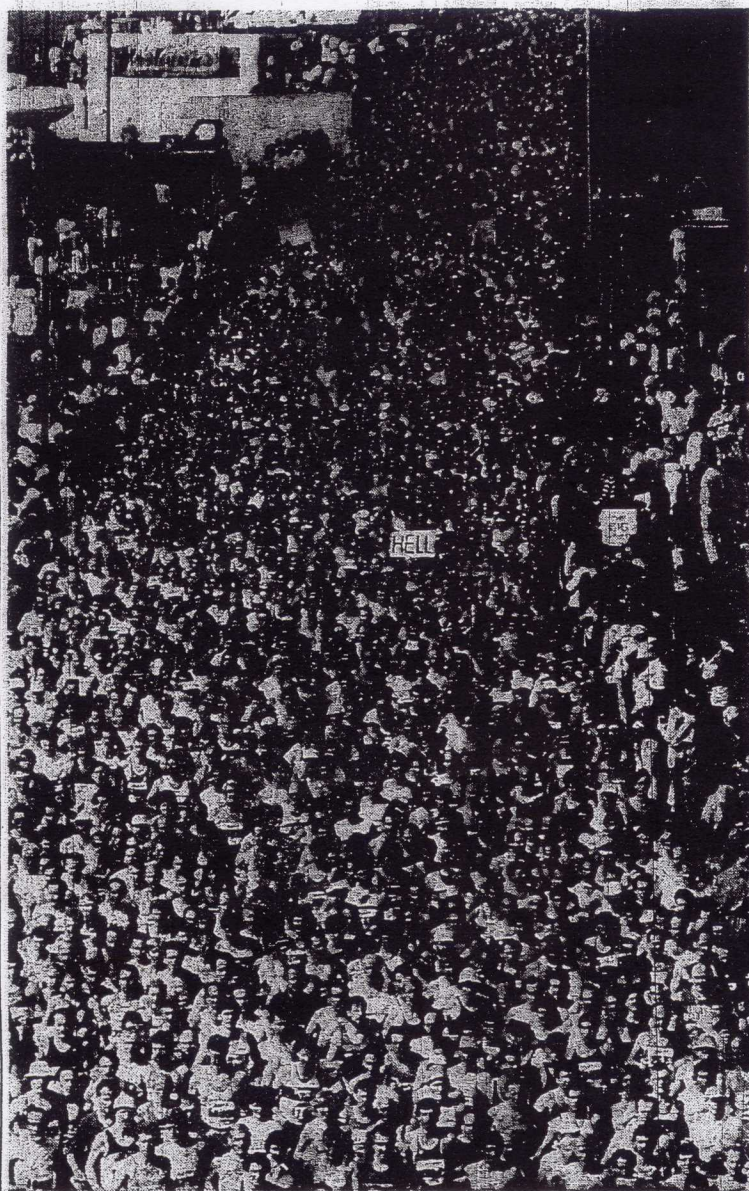
They have detected no sign of any Alliance bandwagon developing. One Conservative strategist said last night: "As

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ey angered by ours on visit

Christopher Walker, Moscow

by saying that she spent the first day of her visit trying to convince Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, that "Thatcherism would be very good for the Soviet Union". During his stay Mr Healey will be meeting Mr Eduard



Hell for some, jubilation for others as the sea of marathon runners engulfed the streets of London yesterday.

Record run gives £4m to charity

A record 21,000 runners, aged from 18 to 83, took part in the Seventh London Marathon yesterday, pounding the capital's streets to raise an estimated £4.5 million for charity.

Seven hours after the race began, 19,710 competitors had crossed the finishing line, making London the world's largest marathon. And it lived up to its colourful tradition of a 26 mile 385 yard street party with crowds lining the course.

Ingrid Kristiansen, from Norway, narrowly failed to complete the marathon, sponsored by Mars, in a world record time and collect

£211m uncollected by councils Crackdown on rent arrears

By Our Political Editor

The Government is preparing to crack down on councils which fail to collect their rents, thereby cutting the money they have for house-building and renovation and increasing rents for those who do pay.

There was a total of £211 million in uncollected rents in England in 1986 and officials at the Department of the Environment believe the arrears figure for the year to April 1987, due to be published soon, will show that the total has increased.

Mr John Patten, the Minister for Housing, will today send out a sharply worded circular to councils telling them that they have one last chance to put their houses in order before the Government considers changes in the law.

It will call for better counselling services for tenants who have debt problems.

The Ministry circular will also spell out model accounting procedures on keeping track of rent arrears.

The £211 million rent arrears in England last year amount to 3.7 per cent of the

rent roll and Mr Patten has pointed out that no commercial business could survive on such uncollected debts.

The worst nine offenders on rent arrears are all London boroughs. Brent has 63 per cent of its rents uncollected, a total of £10.96million. Second in the list is Haringey with 29 per cent (£5.59 million) and equal third on 24 per cent are Southwark, Lambeth and Waltham Forest.

Liverpool comes tenth in the list on 13 per cent (£7.67m) and Manchester 16th (£5.78m).

Smallpox vaccine 'triggered' Aids virus'

By Pearce Wright, Science Editor

The Aids epidemic may have been triggered by the mass vaccination campaign which eradicated smallpox.

The World Health Organization, which masterminded the 13-year campaign, is studying new scientific evidence suggesting that immunization with the smallpox vaccine *Vaccinia* awakened the unsuspected, dormant human immuno defence virus infection (HIV).

Some experts fear that in obliterating one disease, another disease was transformed from a minor endemic illness of the Third World into the current pandemic.

While doctors now accept that *Vaccinia* can activate other viruses, they are divided about whether it was the main catalyst to the Aids epidemic.

But an adviser to WHO who disclosed the problem, told *The Times*: "I thought it was just a coincidence until we studied the latest findings about the reactions which can be caused by *Vaccinia*. Now I believe the smallpox vaccine theory is the explanation to the explosion of Aids."

● In obliterating one disease, another was transformed ●

Further evidence comes from the Walter Reed Army Medical Centre in Washington.

While smallpox vaccine is no longer kept for public health purposes, new recruits to the American armed services are immunized as a precaution against possible biological warfare. Routine vaccination of a 19-year-old recruit was the trigger for stimulation of dormant HIV virus into Aids.

This discovery of how people with sub-clinical HIV infection are at risk of rapid development of Aids as a vaccine-induced disease was made by a medical team working with Dr Robert Redfield at Walter Reed.

The recruit who developed Aids after vaccination had been healthy throughout high school. He was given multiple immunizations, followed by his first smallpox vaccination.

Two and a half weeks later he developed fever, headaches, neck stiffness and night sweats. Three weeks later he was admitted to Walter Reed suffering from meningitis and rapidly developed further symptoms of Aids and died after responding for a short time to treatment.

There was no evidence that the recruit had been involved in any homosexual activity.

In describing their discovery in a paper published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* a fortnight ago, the Walter Reed team gave a warning against a plan to use modified versions of the smallpox vaccine to combat other diseases in developing countries.

Other doctors who accept the connection between the anti-smallpox campaign and the Aids epidemic now see answers to questions which had baffled them. How, for instance, the Aids organism, previously regarded by scientists as "weak, slow and vulnerable", began to behave like a type capable of creating a plague.

Many experts are reluctant to support the theory publicly because they believe it would be interpreted unfairly as criticism of WHO.

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Aids epidemic 'triggered by smallpox vaccine'

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In addition, they are concerned about the impact on other public health campaigns with vaccines, such as against diphtheria and the continued use of *Vaccinia* in potential Aids research.

The coincidence between the anti-smallpox campaign and the rise of Aids was discussed privately last year by experts at WHO. The possibility was dismissed on grounds of unsatisfactory evidence.

Advisors to the organization believed then that too much attention was being focussed on Aids by the media. It is now felt that doubts would have risen sooner if public health authorities in Africa had more willingly reported infection statistics to WHO.

Instead, some African countries continued to ignore the existence of Aids even after US doctors alerted the world when the infection spread to the United States.

However, as epidemiologists gleaned more information about Aids from reluctant Central African countries, clues began to emerge from the new findings when examined against the wealth of detail known about smallpox as recorded in the *Final Report of the Global Commission for the Certification of Smallpox Eradication*.

The smallpox vaccine theory would account for the position of each of the seven Central African states which top the league table of most-affected countries; why Brazil became the most afflicted Latin American country; and how Haiti became the route for the spread of Aids to the US.

It also provides an explanation of how the infection was spread more evenly between males and females in Africa than in the West and why there is less sign of infection among five to 11-year-olds in Central Africa.

Although no detailed figures are available, WHO information indicated that the Aids league table of Central Africa matches the concentration of vaccinations.

The greatest spread of HIV infection coincides with the most intense immunization programmes, with the number of people immunized being as follows:

Zaire 36,878,000; Zambia 19,060,000; Tanzania 14,972,000; Uganda 11,616,000; Malawai 8,118,000; Ruanda 3,382,000 and Burundi 3,274,000.

Brazil, the only South American country covered in the eradication campaign, has

the highest incidence of Aids in that region.

About 14,000 Haitians, on United Nations secondment to Central Africa, were covered in the campaign. They began to return home at a time when Haiti had become a popular playground for San Francisco homosexuals.

Dr Robert Gello, who first identified the Aids virus in the US, told *The Times*: "The link between the WHO programme and the epidemic in Africa is an interesting and important hypothesis. "I cannot say that it actually happened, but I have been saying for some years that the use of live vaccines such as that used for smallpox can activate a dormant infection such as HIV.

"No blame can be attached to WHO but if the hypothesis is correct it is a tragic situation and a warning that we cannot ignore."

Charity and health workers are convinced that millions of new Aids cases are about to hit southern Africa.

After a meeting of 50 experts near Geneva this month it was revealed that up to 75 million, one third of the population, could have the disease within the next five years.

Some organizations which have closely studied Africa, such as War on Want, believe that South Africa's black population, so far largely protected from the disease, could be most affected as migrant workers bring it into the country from the worst hit areas further north.

The apartheid policy, they predict, will intensify its outbreak by confining the groups into comparatively small, highly populated towns where it will be almost impossible to contain its spread.

Aids was first officially reported from San Francisco in 1981 and it was about two years later before Central African states were implicated. It is now known that these states had become a reservoir of Aids as long ago as the late 1970s.

Although detailed figures of Aids cases in Africa are difficult to collect, the more than two million carriers, and 50,000 deaths, estimated by the World Health Organization are concentrated in the countries where the smallpox immunization programme was most intensive.

The 13-year eradication campaign ended in 1980, with the saving of two million lives a year and 15 million infections. The global saving from eradication has been put at \$1,000 million a year.