

Letters to the Editor

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Isn't a levy on Cyprus accounts more honest than a bail-out?

SIR - Amid all the excitement about the levy on Cyprus accounts to pay in part for the EU bail-out (report, March 18), perhaps someone could explain the difference between this and our own bail-outs?

The Government's purchase of failing banks was, after all, underwritten by the taxpayer. I, for one, see it as being more honest to do things the Cypriot way.

For too long governments have been allowed to pretend that a bill drawn on future taxpayers did not amount to expropriation of their assets.

Nicholas Grandage
Bradenham, Buckinghamshire

SIR - Much is rightly made about the proposed theft from Cypriot bank accounts by the Cypriot government.

Shouldn't there also be a fuss about quantitative easing in Britain? The effect is the same: a reduction in the spending power of one's cash assets.

Michael McGough
Loughton, Essex

SIR - Is the EU raid on Cyprus another example of the lack of experience among the European elite, who either don't understand about the impact of their actions or don't care?

This will further cement relative decline, as many individuals and businesses the sensible defensive pre-emptive move of their assets out of the clutches of the EU.

This is money that could be retained or invested in jobs and growth.

Ed Cowley
Farnham, Surrey

SIR - That Cyprus can be imposing a tax on bank deposits is a condition of a bail-out by other eurozone countries in a similar position.

It also illustrates the consequences of the Left in the politics of the continent. Germany, under

Arms trade regulation

SIR - Most commodities, from food to fossil fuels, have a host of international trade regulations attached to them. It seems perverse that no similar global standards exist for the arms trade. This could all be about to change.

Representatives from the United Nations' 193 member states are currently gathered in New York for two weeks of negotiations to finalise a global treaty that will save lives and reduce the destabilising impact of the under-regulated arms trade.

However, the draft treaty does not sufficiently regulate ammunition or the export of weapons, while the criteria on preventing transfers to human rights abusers are so weak that some believe only a genocide would activate them. If adopted without change, the text could institutionalise unacceptably low standards or legitimise irresponsible behaviour.

The vast majority of states in favour of a strong treaty, including Britain, must not allow a minority of obstructive states to jeopardise proceedings.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock
Chairman of the United Nations Association UK
London SW1

War stories retold



Boxing clever: two males

A closed sea

SIR - I was pleased to see the wonderful spectacle of the Weather Watch, March 10, as the massive decline in the recent attempts to increase the number of birds that failed to achieve their target.



Impact on the poor of two policies

SIR - Without doubting the genuineness of the Work and Pensions Secretary's desire to make a reasonable contribution to alleviating the country's financial plight (report, Mar 12) I have to say that the Government cannot have it both ways.

On the one hand it asserts that the proposed benefits cap, far from disadvantaging the less well off, is a longer-term measure designed to release people trapped in welfare dependency. This implies that it is an almost neutral measure which merely seeks to correct an inappropriate direction in our nation's life by directing people on benefit towards an implied host of readily available and stimulating jobs which, in many places, don't exist.

On the other hand, however, plans by the Office of Fair Trading to take significant action against unscrupulous payday lenders who prey upon the financially vulnerable and the apparently marked increase in rent arrears which has arisen since changes to the mechanism for paying housing benefit both suggest that those people who will bear the brunt of the benefits cap are already under enormous and immediate pressure.

Some further reflection on both the wisdom and the consequences of the proposed cap is, surely, justified.
THE RIGHT REV JOHN DAVIES
Bishop of Swansea and Brecon
Brecon, Powys

Swedish lessons

SIR - That many Swedish children put in daycare from a very early age have experienced problems (report, Mar 13 & letters, Mar 16) will not surprise parents familiar with the "terrible 2s" phenomenon. It is the age at which children begin to test barriers and need firm but loving guidance, and it must be extraordinarily difficult to offer this to a large group of similarly aged children in a daycare setting.

Without parental restraint, it seems the children take their cue from their equally "terrible" peers. Jonas Himmelstrand's view (Mar 13) that the under-3s should not be in daycare deserves serious consideration.

ADRIAN COSKER
Hitchin, Herts

Corrections and clarifications

● In our report (News, March 15) we incorrectly stated that Warner Bros had sued the Tolkien Trust for \$80m (£53m) in damages. In fact it is the Tolkien Trust and co-plaintiffs The

Control of arms sales remains key to stability

SIR - Over the past two years the suffering in Syria has been a grim reminder of what can happen when dictatorships continue to be sold weapons regardless of the human rights implications. I witnessed the impact of irresponsible arms proliferation during UN Security Council missions to the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa. Arms flows continue to fuel conflict in these regions, which are poverty-stricken and ravaged by failures of governance. Most commodities have a host of international trade regulations attached to them. It seems perverse that no similar global standards exist for the arms trade.

This could all be about to change. Representatives from the UN's 193 member states are currently gathered in New York for two weeks of negotiations to finalise a global arms trade treaty. However, as these negotiations operate on the basis of consensus, there is a danger that the treaty could be watered down to get the necessary universal buy-in.

The draft treaty under discussion does not sufficiently regulate ammunition or the export of weapons in part or component form. Most worryingly, the criteria on preventing transfers to human rights abusers are so weak that some believe only a genocide would activate them. If adopted without change, the text could institutionalise unacceptably low standards or, worse, legitimise irresponsible behaviour.

The vast majority of states, including the UK, that support a strong treaty should not let a minority of obstructive countries jeopardise proceedings. If agreement on an effective, robust text cannot be reached, they should be prepared to take negotiations to the General Assembly later. Then discussions need not be constricted by consensus.



The lack of regulations makes it easy for repressive regimes to acquire arms

and the weight of the multitude of states that want to secure a strong treaty would be felt. While a treaty with broad participation should remain the objective, a robust text — even if not all states are willing to sign it immediately — will prove far more effective in the long run than a weak treaty that states subscribe to but subsequently ignore.

Conflict areas awash with arms threaten the UK's interest in international stability. It is time to stand up for an arms trade treaty that makes a difference. UNA-UK's members and supporters will be doing just that.

SIR JEREMY GREENSTOCK
Chairman, United Nations Association UK

Sir, Janice Turner (Opinion, Mar 16) is right to highlight the poor human rights record of Saudi Arabia. While one branch of the UK government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, lists Saudi Arabia as a

"country of concern" for its human rights violations, another section, UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation, lists it as a "priority market" for arms sales.

When we see that the main theme for the visit of the Prince of Wales is "the military links between the UK and Saudi Armed Forces", there is no doubt which view is dominant.

These links inevitably involve arms — not just the selling of equipment but support, maintenance and training. About 270 UK Ministry of Defence civil servants and military personnel work in the UK and Saudi Arabia to support the Ministry of Defence's Saudi Armed Forces Project and the Saudi Arabian National Guard Communications Project, all paid for by the Saudi government. As long as this arrangement stays in place, the UK is actively colluding in Saudi human rights abuse.

KAYE STEARMAN
Campaign Against Arms Trade

Can shale gas solve our energy needs?

SIR - Tim Webb (Business, Mar 14) reports that new official estimates say Britain could have enough shale gas to heat every home for 1,500 years.

If such huge gas deposits actually exist and can be economically and safely extracted, then why bother with building expensive and problematic nuclear power stations? Gas-powered stations must surely be safer, cheaper to build and maintain and do not carry the huge problems of dealing with nuclear waste, nor the enormous costs of decommissioning.

British companies must design and build the many gas-powered stations needed. This would put Britain back in charge of its own energy production and should also produce cheaper energy for industry and for our homes.
PAUL KILFOYLE
Cannington, Somerset

Press freedom

SIR - The letter from Charlotte Church and others (Mar 18) is deluded, dangerous, self-serving nonsense. The expensive Leveson inquiry was set up to punish the press. It seems to have been eminently successful, to the huge detriment of press freedom. Phone hacking was illegal and therefore a matter for the police. Any genuine libels could have been processed through the courts.

I do feel that the "red tops" would benefit from a more moral editorial policy and I consider that a slightly beefed-up PCC would be more than up to overseeing any problems. I am absolutely against any government interference with the press — somebody has to keep an eye on them, and if not the press, then who?
PETER THICKPENNY
St-Leonards-on-Sea, E Sussex

SIR - The role of the editor in any publication is crucial in giving contributions some editorial validity

NHS returns

SIR - Adapting the theory that if you look after the pennies the pounds look after themselves, a lesson could be learnt from my experience when I looked after my father. After he died, my brother and I tried to return the following items to the hospital: three months' supply of incontinence pads, dressings and bandages; four incontinence pads for the bed and various medicines (all unopened); one commode and an oxygen cylinder. While the last item was accepted, we had to persuade staff to accept the others. Multiply the cost of these items by the number of people using the NHS and project the costs into the future.
M. J. GIBBON
Fairford, Glos

Disappearing birds

SIR - To say that the decline of such birds as curlews, larks and plovers, and

Crossrail and the land price bonanza

SIR - Your article "Crossrail is on track to deliver profit" (Bricks & Mortar, Mar 15) reveals the true effect of the railways on the land values of cities. The average increase in property value for the seven locations where there will be stations is estimated to be £488 per sq ft. This translates into a conservative estimate of more than a £50 billion increase in the land values in these locations alone as a result of constructing this railway, which will cost taxpayers £18 billion. The increase in land values over the full 26 miles will be much greater and the profit will mostly go to those who are now scrambling to invest in properties that will be served by Crossrail, which is paid for by the whole community.

I suggest that we forget the mansion tax and instead tax land values, with the result that the benefit of building and running Crossrail is returned to the taxpayers who funded it.

GEOFFREY NUDD
Chorleywood, Herts

Whited sepulchre

SIR - You report that the Archbishop of Canterbury would stand up to the Government if future legislation conflicts with the values of the Church of England (Mar 16). The National Secular Society (NSS) responded that the Archbishop should not "directly interfere" in political decisions.

In a democracy, we accept the argument from parity — that both sides have the opportunity to voice their concerns in the decision-making process. The NSS believes that religion should have no role in voicing its concerns in politics, while at the same time it has the audacity to attempt to "directly interfere" in moral and political arguments from a non-religious standpoint. The NSS should reconsider its position, as at present it is practising blind hypocrisy.

JAMES A. PATON
Billericay, Essex

RIP

SIR - The wrangling over where, after 528 years of indifference, the supposed remains of Richard III should be buried (letters, Mar 14 & 16) reminds me that "seven wealthy towns contend for Homer dead, through which the living Homer begged his bread". The lure of tourist attraction has clearly not changed in 2,500 years.

KEVIN JAMES
Reigate, Surrey

SIR - The graves of many other monarchs at Windsor have equally simple markers, including Edward IV, George III and, most recently, George VI. Even simpler grave markers can be found in Westminster Abbey relating to, among others, Edward VI, James I, Charles II, William III and Mary, Queen Anne and George II. A simple stone slab to mark the resting place of Richard III would be entirely appropriate wherever he may finally