

Letters to the Editor



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Assaults on police

Sir, On what should have been one of the quietest days of the year, Christmas Day, a total of 16 police officers were assaulted across Sussex. That is 16 individuals assaulted just trying to do their best to serve the public on Christmas Day. Those figures are simply appalling and completely unacceptable. Legislation has been introduced to enable courts to hand out stiffer sentences to those individuals guilty of behaving in this way. However, there is precious little evidence that the courts have used these additional powers. There can be no justification whatsoever for assaulting an emergency service worker and we need to ensure that those responsible can expect to be severely punished. It seems to me that the judiciary is failing to do the right and proper thing. We should all ask our MPs to put pressure on the home secretary and the criminal justice system to ensure that the courts hand out the sentences available to them for any assault carried out upon an emergency service worker.

Kevin Moore, retired detective chief superintendent, Seaford, E Sussex

It's all me, me, me

Sir, Your report that meditation can lead to "spiritual superiority" (News, Dec 29) in many ways complements the concerns raised by AN Wilson ("Church shepherds have lost their flocks", Comment, Dec 26). The timeless message, championed by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, should be that we discover true value and meaning in life only when we involve ourselves in the lives of others, when we realise that one act of genuine human kindness is more valuable than many thousand tweets.

Anthony Cohn
London NW4

Sir, I am amused to read that researchers have discovered the path to enlightenment can be an ego trip. Some of us have known this for years. Many religions believe in life after death. Wanting to live on after you die is a clear manifestation of the ego-self, which cannot bear the thought of its own non-existence.

Hugh Laidlaw
Kelso, Scottish Borders

Corrections and clarifications

● We stated that about 900 bronzes from Benin are held in the British Museum and 145 in the Pitt Rivers Museum (News, Dec 22). These figures in fact relate to all object types, not just bronzes.

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Optimist or pessimist, we're all Brexiteers now

Sir, Labelling Brexiteers as optimists and Remainers as pessimists is pointless ("It's Brexiteers who are the true progressives", Melanie Phillips, Comment, Dec 29). What really matters now is that our government keeps the promises made in the 2016 referendum and the 2019 general election regarding the claimed benefits of Brexit. Taking back control sounds nice, but means nothing unless we do something with it that improves people's lives. It's time for the rhetoric to stop and for Boris Johnson to tell us what he is going to do with these new powers. It would be helpful to have a series of goals by which the success of Brexit could be assessed by the electorate. These should be specific, measurable and time-bound.

Gordon Lethbridge
Sherborne, Dorset

Sir, We are all Brexiteers now, and we all have an opportunity to shape the future which is not the preserve of either "side". I am now looking to see how we will engage with the rest of the world such that the UK does play a leading role. To do that, we need to begin by recognising that we should all stop focusing on "I, Remain" or "I, Brexiteer", and instead focus on how "we" are going to work together to improve our society for the benefit of the poorest; and how we are going

to remain attractive to those whom we need to migrate to our shores to help us to broaden our minds and to provide us with the essential services we need, including most obviously in the care sector.

Julian Hemming
Bristol

Sir, This Remainer, at least, has enough confidence in the strength of the UK to believe that it can take the "risk" of co-operating with its neighbours without fear of losing its identity. The attitude of Leavers, however, is epitomised by our withdrawal from the Erasmus student exchange programme, and is symptomatic of our culturally and emotionally monoglot government.

Richard Willmott
Hereford

Sir, Brexiteers are really blind optimists who, with no evidence, claim that Britain will mightily prosper. But how? Car manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, and virtually all major enterprises are multinational and subject to EU or other regulations. British businesses that want to export to the EU face mountains of red tape. That is fact, not pessimism. It is time to start a daily Brexit cost/benefit chart and we will soon see who are fact-based

realists and who are blind optimists.

Andrew Gilg
Exeter

Sir, Melanie Phillips claims that many Remainers do not look forward to anniversaries and birthdays, whereas Brexiteers do. Given the advanced age of so many who voted Leave in 2016, I wonder how many are still alive to celebrate these milestones so optimistically. Instead, it is our young people, who voted overwhelmingly to remain and whose freedoms and economic prospects have been curtailed by this act of isolationism, whom Leave voters are now relying upon to keep a glass-half-full attitude.

Philippa Hart
Royston, Herts

Sir, Melanie Phillips's belief that "the crucial point is that the UK and EU are now on a level sovereign playing field" so that the trade deal can be renegotiated "like any other treaty", ignores a fundamental point of all free trade agreements: concepts of national sovereignty ultimately count for nothing in such negotiations. The sole determinants are economic interests and muscle and the UK will always be smaller than the EU. We'll be dancing to its tune for the foreseeable future.

Michael McParland, QC
London WC2

Fighting Covid-19 and so much more

Sir, Your leading article "Year of the Nurse" (Dec 29) provides an excellent overview of the vital work performed by nurses during the pandemic and the great personal costs involved. We all owe them a great debt and must see them properly supported and rewarded in future. We would like to add one point: nurses are increasingly taking on wider roles as first responders in emergencies, nurse practitioners and specialists. Many services for people with long-term conditions such as diabetes, asthma, dementia and other respiratory diseases are now led by nurses and they have a growing role in primary and community care. These developments are absolutely essential if we are to make major improvements in health globally.

Lord Crisp, former NHS chief executive; **Professor Sheila Tlou**, former minister of health, Botswana; co-chairmen of Nursing Now.

Sir, The number of Covid-19 cases and deaths has rightly received huge media coverage throughout the pandemic. What remains under-reported is the impact that restrictions are having on young people's mental health. In contrast to reports on Covid-19 cases, reports on mental health often don't give mental illness rates or raw figures but talk of trends and percentage differences. Journalists should be investigating the number of children and young people attending primary and secondary healthcare services. In addition, they should report on young people in the community who may not have used healthcare services but are still struggling. This will convey the human cost of social restrictions and give a full picture of the risks and benefits of restrictive measures.

Anna Nicholls, fourth year medical student, Hemel Hempstead, Herts

Sir, The vaccine is our most important weapon against the coronavirus. GPs

Letters to The Times must be exclusive and may be edited.

are at their most stretched this winter, as cases rise daily. With this in mind, why is the military not supporting GPs in providing the vaccine?

The vaccine programme will deplete the primary care workforce, taking staff away from routine care and services and from supporting Covid-19 cases in the community. As a profession placed in the heart of communities, we are well placed to be involved in providing the vaccine, but to be entirely responsible for it seems to be putting service provision in primary care at great risk, which in turn will affect the hospital sector.

Dr Lucy Andrews
London SW15

Sir, I'm at a loss regarding the hysteria about a Covid-overstretched NHS. Yes, intensive care units are filling up again but come Friday, January 1, won't the NHS be receiving an additional £350 million extra funding per week? My eldest daughter, a midwife, and my middle daughter, a doctor are very much looking forward to it.

Amanda Baker
Edinburgh

THE SERVANT PROBLEM

FROM THE TIMES DECEMBER 30, 1920

It has been suggested in the House of Commons that in November there were over 28,000 domestic servants in search of work. Fortunately or unfortunately (depending upon the point of view) that was not the case. Many thousands of charwomen, waitresses, caretakers, and others included under the official designation, were and still are unemployed. But the dearth of servants proper — that is, of cooks, house and parlourmaids, and other house servants — is almost as great as during and just after the war. The taste for the freer life, developed by

occupations that were then open to girls and to women, is as compelling as ever. Now, however, that most of these occupations no longer exist, the necessity of earning a livelihood must once more bring into the domestic-service market many who still look upon work of this kind with disdain. It is to be hoped, for their sakes as well as in the interests of their would-be employers, that that time will not be too long delayed. There is nothing derogatory in domestic any more than in any other service. Even in the old days the life, if too confined, was far more sheltered than most occupations pursued by girls and women of the poorer classes and, under a wise and capable mistress, a far better preparation for marriage. Since the war conditions have been immensely improved, especially in wages and freedom. In well-conducted households maidservants no longer live the life of prisoners; they have

shorter hours, their "walking-out" times are extended, and they can see more of their own friends. The pity is that as a class they do not seem to respond as they might to the greater consideration shown for their happiness and welfare. The old spirit of loyalty and friendly feeling towards those whom they serve has largely died out. Much of their work is done "grudgingly and of necessity" and many have no scruples in throwing up their engagements at short notice, whatever inconvenience they may cause, whenever they see a chance of "bettering" themselves. To some extent this change in attitude may be regarded as a just *revanche* for the days when too little consideration was shown on the other side; partly, no doubt, it is simply a reflection of a prevailing tendency of the age.

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Our rights abroad

Sir, Professor Piotrowicz (Letters, Dec 29) may be correct in law that, owing to her dual nationality, Iran has the right to treat Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe purely as its own citizen in Iran, as does the UK when she is in the UK. Has the professor forgotten that law is made by representatives of its citizens? Hopefully, British citizens will demand that the law be changed, because, according to the report in *The Times* (Dec 28), even those with single UK nationality have no right to the British government's assistance or protection when abroad. However, it seems that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's detention has far more to do with a debt left unpaid by the British government. While UK citizens are hopefully lobbying their MPs to change the law to provide assistance, I suggest that citizens also lobby for the government to pay this debt, as called for by Jeremy Hunt.

Stephanie Trotter
Seaview, Isle of Wight

A Christmas classic

Sir, My father, every Advent for 52 years, read Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* to my mother and to a changing assemblage of children, grandchildren, sleeping dogs and passing visitors. He read it on each Sunday in Advent, with the final chapter on Christmas Eve ("What we've been rereading in 2020", Saturday Review, Dec 26). How joyously my father voiced Scrooge's delight on discovering that he had not missed Christmas — this passage getting louder and louder as my father got deafer and deafer. How tearfully he shared with us the predicted death of Tiny Tim. Today, ten years after my father passed away, I can still hear his voice: "God bless us, every one!"

Sophieke Piebenga
Cirencester, Glos

Friends of nature

Sir, In celebrating the recovery of wildlife at National Trust properties, we must be careful not to pit people as the enemies of nature ("With people locked away animals come out to play", Dec 28). Many of the species mentioned will have benefited from good active land management on National Trust land, including the 2,682 hectares of priority habitat created by the trust in the past year, and from good private management on the farms and fields that surround them. Without these working conservationists, things could look much worse.

James Swyer
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

House is a museum

Sir, Paul Newton (Letters, Dec 29) suggested that the Palace of Westminster could be converted into a museum. Perhaps he also has proposals for which of its present occupants should remain as permanent exhibits.

Antony Hurden
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Backing away

Sir, I certainly remember the "I'm backing Britain" campaign of the 1960s (Letters, Dec 29). I also especially remember the song to accompany it, sung by Bruce Forsyth, which is now circulating in my head endlessly.

Please do not revive it.
Gillian Harrison
Sudbury, Suffolk