

Letters to the Editor



Salt dangers

Sir, We endorse strongly the initiative to reduce the daily salt consumption in this country to the level proposed by experts (report, Apr 28, letter, Apr 30). This would not preclude adding iodine to salt to achieve an important public health aim, namely to reduce the risk of iodine deficiency in vulnerable groups. Adequate iodine is vital for women who are planning a pregnancy, as a deficiency of iodine during pregnancy is associated with lower IQ in their children, and indeed this has been shown in UK women. For information on iodine, including dietary sources and ways to ensure adequate iodine intake, an iodine fact sheet can be downloaded from the website of the British Dietetic Association.

PROFESSOR JOHN LAZARUS, chairman, United Kingdom Iodine Group, Cardiff University; DR SARAH BATH, University of Surrey; DR EMILIE COMBET, University of Glasgow; JANIS HICKEY, British Thyroid Foundation plus a further five names at thetimes.co.uk/letters

House rules

Sir, Anna Maxted presents some interesting issues in "Why grown-ups are setting a bad example" (Weekend, May 2) and I agree we all need time out from our devices. However, as the parent of teenagers, I believe we need to back away a little and learn to trust our teens, not keep an ever-watchful eye by being their Facebook friend or Twitter follower. In fact, the things some parents post about themselves on Facebook are mortifying to an adolescent. Teens need space to grow into adults, and we need to help them make good, safe choices online and to trust us not to spy, but to be there to support them when they need it.

Spending time online isn't always bad: I told my son to get off his computer the other day only to find he was doing his homework. My daughter is teaching herself the piano from an online app and now I'm learning guitar in the same way. We're learning a lot from our teenagers, embracing their world when they invite us in, and having fun along the way.

CLARE EGGINTON
Lichfield, Staffs

Corrections and

Concerns in the run-up to polling day

Sir, We wrote to you before the 2010 election pointing out that the campaign presented a political world dominated by men. We warned then that the outlook for women was dire. We are now deeply concerned that the pattern will repeat itself.

The effects of "austerity" hit women far more than men. It is women who have provided the vast majority of the cuts. Women are already burdened by unequal pay, poor job opportunities and the main responsibility for children. Austerity has disproportionately increased women's already fragile economic security.

We hope the new parliament will have more women members, but we fear that in reality the political parties will again fail to deal with the interests of women.

We need four urgent changes: implementation of full equal pay; an end to violence against women; legislation for the equal representation of women in parliament and local government; and equality of opportunity for girls and boys in education, employment and sport.

PROFESSOR KATE JENKINS
HELEN PITCHER
PROFESSOR SUSAN VINNICOMBE
KATHERINE WHITEHORN plus a further 54 names at thetimes.co.uk/letters

Sir, Margaret Duggan is lucky (letter, May 4): at least her existence has been acknowledged by one party. Here not a single one, not even Ukip, has shown any interest in my vote, even though they enthusiastically paly both my husband and (annoyingly) son with campaign literature. Is it that men are thought to be more easily swayed by hollow promises?

SARAH LEIGHTON
East Preston, W Sussex

Sir, I agree with Matt Ridley's call for reform (Opinion, May 4), but I am frustrated that he excludes the greatest of these: electoral reform (unlike Tim Montgomerie, May 4).

How many more column inches are we going to have to read about the dangers of hung parliaments and legitimacy of governments that do not gain 50 per cent of the popular vote? The electorate is crying out for a democratic system of voting in a multiparty state. Urges for strategic voting are insulting. People do not like being disenfranchised. It is time for electoral reform and it should be the first priority of an incoming government to ensure that it is introduced before the following election, whenever that may be.

DR LYNDHURST COLLINS
Rosewell, Midlothian

Sir, As the major political parties continue to hype the risks posed to politics and the Union by the prospect of a coalition with the SNP, those same parties should be asking themselves why they have manifestly failed to win the popular vote in Scotland.

Scots are not all nationalists, but many are grossly disenchanted with politics as usual. Voting SNP is not only a protest vote against the status quo, it is a recognition that fresh voices need to be heard, not ones purely with a Scottish agenda in mind, but ones that will re-energise centre-left policies and offer the public real choices and question with the SNP, and attempting to scapegoat them for others' failures, will merely throw more voters into nationalist hands.

TREVOR RIGG
Edinburgh

Sir, Helen Rumbelow (Notebook, May 1) suggests that displaying party election posters at home indicates somebody is a nutter. Rather, I suspect it is a perfectly sane statement saying to canvassers: "I've already decided; don't bother me."

SEBASTIAN MARR
Chippenham, Wilts

Nuclear threat

Sir, Alan Ashmole asks (letter, May 1) "under what circumstances [can the writers of the "Defence of Britain" letter] foresee that the nuclear deterrent would be used, knowing that such use would inevitably cause the loss of thousands, if not millions, of innocent lives?"

The events of August 1945 are instructive here, providing the only historical example we have of a nuclear power attacking a non-nuclear one.

Would the Americans have used the atomic bombs against Japan if they had known that Tokyo had developed its own nuclear weapons and might retaliate against Los Angeles and San Francisco, and also knew that the Japanese threat could not be pinpointed and therefore could not be taken out? It is unlikely. Deterrence would have prevailed with nuclear weapons, just as it did with

chemical weapons during the Second World War.

ANTHONY MARTIN
London SE15

Violence in rugby

Sir, Boys develop physically at a much different rate in the teenage years ("Is school rugby really 'state-sponsored violence?' May 4).

I well remember as a 6st whippet at 15 playing rugby at school and being flattened in a ruck by the biggest lad in our class. I was lucky to suffer only a broken ankle when he piled in.

Some amateur clubs have taken the weight/strength differential of teenage boys into account by introducing a grading system for youngsters. This must surely be the way forward to protect them without taking the fun out of the game — combined with stricter refereeing?

Ban body slamming, cut ruck times before the whistle is blown and

absolutely instil the physical dangers of a collapsed scrum on young players.

BRIAN CHEAL
Plymouth

A clean sweep?

Sir, Overdue with my first baby I was told that a "sweep" would probably be performed. In my naivety I imagined the midwives organising a sweepstake about my delivery date.

I was soon put straight by a veteran of the labour ward, whose description of the procedure differed considerably from Dr Mark Porter's "gentle sweeping under around the amniotic sac" (May 2). She described it as being akin to "having the top of your head scratched... from the inside". I believe the medical profession classes such procedures as "uncomfortable".

CATHERINE MEE
Birmingham

Lloyd George used those words on Thursday evening he was not walking across St James's Park. He would then have seen five able-bodied men engaged in digging up, for transplantation, a small tree, some 20ft high, of no apparent value, probably as a tree not worth more than 20s.

The work had apparently not been

Radical Pope

Sir, Pope Francis is not "dedicated to ending the capitalist order" ("The Pope's anti-capitalism will hurt the poor," May 4). On the contrary, he teaches that the Marxist ideology is wrong, and describes business as "a vocation, and a noble vocation". However, he does warn against unrestricted individualism: "The mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity... Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?" (*Evangelii Gaudium*). This radical message does not, as Melanie Phillips claims, "hurt the poor" but it does challenge those addicted to amassing personal wealth.

DAVID CULLEY

Bristol

Shaping the future

Sir, The task of whittling a green stick produces an inner calm in children and allows them to become totally absorbed in a satisfying activity (letters, Apr 29 and May 1). As a qualified forest school leader, I regularly introduce children as young as three to the joys of whittling, and concentration a child will show. Supervised safely by experienced adults, a child will feel strong, proud and capable. Surely these are attributes the Scout Association is looking to encourage?

SUSIE TIMMS
Coulson, Surrey

Look to the left

Sir, The leading articles page is a bigger problem than the letters page (letters, May 2 & 4). There is something about Nature Notes, birthdays, et al being positioned on the left that makes my brain unable to focus upon anything else on the page. Could your printers conceal the left column under a flap, to be lifted once the august words of the leaders have been properly processed?

STEPHEN KNIGHT
London N14

A bold move

Sir, In your travel section (May 2), a correspondent asks for guidance on which paradise island he and his girlfriend should go to, as he intends to propose to her in the first week and marry in the second.

What happens if she says no?

MICHAEL SCOTT
London W11

Cue tips

Sir, Snooker, like many sports, has

1914
THE FIRST
WORLD WAR
1918