

## Letters to the Editor



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### Curbs on the press

Sir, In response to Tom Bower's article ("Only the guilty will cheer curbs on the press", Comment, Jan 3), the potential harmful impact of section 40 on free speech is clear and demonstrable and the impact on investigative journalism, in particular, would be devastating. We find it unbelievable that the UK could pass a law that means any publisher could be wrongly accused of libel, malicious falsehood or slander, taken to court, win the action and vindicate its journalism — yet still have to pay the legal bills of whoever brought the case, as well as their own. Such a regime can only lead to a multiplicity of false claims being made (risk-free of costs) in the hope of financial settlement and enforced silence.

We believe that section 40 is wrong in principle and will seriously undermine the important role of journalism in a democratic society. The press industry is under serious commercial threat and the importance of trusted news sources and plurality in the industry cannot be overstated.

ANGELA MILLS WADE  
Executive director, European Publishers Council

### Migration cap

Sir, David Sapsted seems to be crying wolf (Thunderer, Jan 3). Limitations on recruiting skilled workers from outside the EU have not been as draconian as he suggests. On an annual basis the cap of 20,700 has never been reached, although for three months in 2016 a few employers would have had to wait until the next month for a slot. As for skilled workers from the EU after Brexit, a work permit system is very likely but there will not necessarily be a cap.

It is surely not unreasonable that there should be a trade-off between the convenience of industry, the need to train British workers and the public's strong desire to see the scale of immigration reduced.

LORD GREEN OF DEDDINGTON  
Chairman, Migrationwatch UK

### Corrections and clarifications

● The source we quoted as saying snow cover at Ischgl, Oberurgl and Kühltai in Austria, was "paper thin" ("White Christmas? Not in the Alps", news, Dec 24), also said that, thanks to the use of snow-making equipment, the snow on the pistes was "perfectly reasonable".

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Letters to The Times must be exclusive and may be edited. Please include a full address and daytime telephone number.

## No 10 and resignation of our man in Brussels

Sir, The resignation of Sir Ivan Rogers deprives the government of a very experienced and capable European expert at a critical moment. What is equally concerning though is the manner of his departure and what it tells us about the government's state of readiness for what many see the biggest challenge this country has faced since the Second World War.

Less than three months away from the government's self-imposed deadline for triggering Article 50, we still do not have a delivery plan, negotiating strategy or clear understanding of the resources required to achieve a successful Brexit. To say this is neither to be "pessimistic" or "political", nor in denial of the referendum result, but simply make an honest statement about the reality of our situation.

Too much of the debate about Brexit starts from a naive view of how we would like to world — and Europe in particular — to be rather than how it actually is. Nowhere is this more evident than in our insistence that despite all the evidence to the contrary, we can have free trade in goods and services with Europe but not free movement of labour.

I have no doubt about the commitment and skills of the civil service to serve the government well on Brexit. But to do this it needs to be clearly led, resourced properly to

the job and listened to even when its advice is not welcome.

LORD KERSLAKE  
Head of the civil service 2012-14

Sir, We cannot dictate our Brexit terms, and to leave the EU with nothing agreed would be a political and economic disaster. So we have to take account of 27 countries' views. What causes least contention around the cabinet table, and in the echo-chamber of the Conservative Party, will not necessarily deliver the best deal for the country. Strategy and tactics also need to be informed by honest accounts of what the foreigners think, and unvarnished expert advice on what will, and will not, fly. That is what diplomats are for. Sir Ivan Rogers will be missed: let us hope that his successor will be someone who knows Brussels equally well, and will be equally thorough and fearless in speaking for the national interest both there and with his political masters at home.

LORD KERR OF KINLOCHARD  
Permanent representative to the EU 1990-95

Sir, Sir Ivan Rogers's resignation has created a headache for the prime minister. Not just the need to fill two key vacancies at the top of the UK's representation in Brussels, but a challenge to the style of her

government, as your leader (Jan 4) points out. She needs to move swiftly. First, to fill those gaps with well-qualified candidates who have both knowledge and credibility with their opposite numbers, and the confidence of ministers on whose behalf they will negotiate. Second, to make clear that she puts a premium on honest advice, offered unflinchingly, as a prerequisite for ministers and civil servants working together to deliver a successful Brexit.

Last month Theresa May said she wanted "the best possible advice" from her officials to enable her to take decisions. Her new year's resolution should be to show she meant it.

JILL RUTTER  
Institute for Government

Sir, Sir Ivan Rogers would do well to reflect on his failed last negotiations with Brussels on behalf of David Cameron. It is likely that the Brexit vote can be largely blamed on this failure. Would the same person really be the ideal negotiator on our behalf now? In the meantime, displays of pique do this public servant no good.

GEOFFREY ABBOTT  
Ely, Cambs

Sir, Perhaps we should wait to see where Sir Ivan Rogers pops up next before concluding why he quit.

R E MANN  
Kendal, Cumbria

### Fat chance

Sir, Phil Willan shows the right way of thinking by equating a finger of Kit Kat with a 30-minute walk (letter, Jan 2). One extra finger of chocolate biscuit a day, or just one additional glass of wine, with no increase in walking will result in about five pounds weight gain in a year. Thirty minutes' extra walking, in three ten-minute spells if more convenient, five days a week with no increase in calories will result in ten pounds weight loss in a year.

Modern men and women walk a tightrope, with tiny changes being enough to tip the balance one way or the other. Mr Willan may be right not to like the name "walking deficiency syndrome" because not only walking but also all the tiny increases in energy expenditure from being busy ironing or gardening, or typing while

standing up, all add up if done for long enough. It is the sitting that is the killer. Instead of walking deficiency syndrome, would he prefer hyper-sitting hyper calorie syndrome?

Walking more and consuming fewer calories both prevent and cure obesity and being overweight.

PROFESSOR SIR MUIR GRAY  
Oxford

### Cost of train fares

Sir, The trade union data is very misleading on the cost of train tickets in the UK compared with Europe (News, Jan 3). Yes, if you walk up and pay, UK prices are higher. But that's because we have a sort of "surge pricing" to promote efficient use of the network. Tickets from London to Sheffield are cheaper than Paris to Dijon, Rome to Florence, or Nuremberg to Kassel — all similar

distances — if booked a month in advance, or even for tomorrow. The remaining gap is driven by a longstanding UK trend towards having those who use the trains pay for them, rather than the taxpayer. Indeed, given that rich Britons use trains far more than the less well-off, the remaining state "bung" (about a quarter of the ticket price) is effectively a tax on bricklayers in Bootle subsidising stockbrokers in Surbiton.

Train companies do not earn particularly generous profit margins — about 4 per cent over the past ten years. Even if the government could simply transfer rail company profits into its own bank account, and run the lines equally well, it could only chop a few per cent off the average ticket price.

Nationalisation is a red herring. The only question is: who pays?

BEN SOUTHWOOD  
Adam Smith Institute

## 1914 THE FIRST WORLD WAR 1918

ON THIS DAY JANUARY 5, 1917

### ESCAPED HUNCHBACK'S STORY

At Liverpool Police Court yesterday Ferdinand Louis Kehrhahn, the hunchback who escaped from the internment camp at Islington, London, and was rearrested on board a liner in Liverpool on arrival from New York, was charged (1) With embarking on a Liverpool liner without permission of the Aliens Authorities and (2) with embarking on the liner without a photographic passport. He pleaded "Not Guilty".

Evidence was given that the prisoner, under the name of William Farrell, signed on as a trimmer. Two days out from Liverpool he was recognized by the purser. He was allowed to go on working until a day before the vessel reached New York. When asked to write his name the prisoner signed William Farrall (not Farrell). He was then told that he would be locked up, as he was suspected of intending to desert the ship in New York. Subsequently the prisoner signed a passenger's declaration in the name of Albert Edwards, but on the day before the vessel arrived in Liverpool he admitted he was Kehrhahn.

The prisoner went into the witness-box and read a statement in which he said he was born at Birkenhead in 1883. His father was a German who had resided in this country for over 40 years and his mother was a Yorkshirewoman. By profession he was an art publisher. During the early months of the war he spoke at the Jack Straw's Castle, Hampstead Heath, on behalf of the British Socialist Party, but his

speeches were confined to economic and social questions arising out of the war. He had never been told the reason for his internment or charged with any offence. He implored the then Home Secretary (Mr Herbert Samuel) to bring him to trial, but he also refused to charge him or state the reason for his internment. As he could not get justice he decided to escape. He contended that he had never illegally left this country, and in any case that he had already received terrible punishment by working in the stokehold, where he spent the most miserable Christmas and New Year of his existence. He added that if anyone hated Prussian militarism he did, as he had had to leave Germany for *lèse-majesté*. He asked to go back to internment camp instead of prison. The Stipendiary sentenced him to three months' imprisonment on both charges.

SIGN UP FOR A WEEKLY EMAIL  
WITH EXTRACTS FROM  
THE TIMES HISTORY OF THE WAR  
[WWW.THETIMES.CO.UK](http://WWW.THETIMES.CO.UK)

## Royal Archives row

Sir, Jack Malvern's article ("Saucy royal quip they tried to censor", Jan 4) will strike a chord with many historians. Favoured authors likely to deal indulgently with royal reputations can expect to be treated with great kindness by the archivists at Windsor. For the rest of us it is often a different story. Years ago I was refused access to Queen Victoria's journal in the course of research on the first Home Rule crisis of 1886. I am not inclined to be sweet-natured in assessing reputations.

Are these archives purely private property to be inspected on terms that their owners decree? They should surely be regarded in the same way as the royal palaces or pictures, things of vital national significance held in trust for the country as a whole. The public has access to them on terms that are the same for everyone. We must have clear, objective criteria for access to the Royal Archives without any attempt to censor publication of material that illuminates history. I shall be pressing in the Lords for the introduction of clear protocols to achieve just that.

LORD LEXDEN  
House of Lords

## Tank gun of choice

Sir, Whatever the merits or demerits of the decision not to buy Leopard 2 tanks (report, Jan 4), it will leave British tank units at a disadvantage because they will not be armed with the higher performance 120 mm Rheinmetall smooth bore guns. This was clear as long ago as 1980, when I argued in the Ministry of Defence that British tanks should be armed with such guns — only to be told that it would cost too much. A chance was missed in the mid-1990s when Leopard 2, as well as two other tanks armed with this type of gun, competed with Challenger 2, but again the gun was not adopted. A 120 mm smooth bore gun was finally mounted in a 2006 in a Challenger 2 but a decision appears to have been taken not to proceed with it, leaving British tanks at odds with all but one of the recently built western tanks, including Japanese, South Korean, US, German, French and Israeli tanks.

PROFESSOR RICHARD OGORKIEWICZ  
London SW14

## Done with Dunelm

Sir, I graduated from Hatfield College, Durham University in 1961, before Dunelm House was built. I had a clear view from my window across to St Hild's College. The "ugly concrete carbuncle" really is as bad as it looks in your photo (Jan 3) and completely obscures my old college behind it. I have never heard a single word of praise for it in all my visits to Durham, and look forward to seeing it replaced by something more in keeping with this beautiful and historic city.

BILL OXLEY  
Appleton, Warrington

## Glow in the garden

Sir, Further to your report that 14 new English garden villages are to be built, combined with seven garden towns and cities already being built, can we now hope that developers will not erect large orange streetlights in residential areas? The installation of low-level streetlamps would cut light pollution enormously yet still allow the necessary visibility.

VERLIE BATTENTI  
Buckingham