

## Letters to the Editor



Letters to the Editor should be sent to [letters@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:letters@thetimes.co.uk) or by post to 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF



### Press freedom

Sir, We are writing to express deep concern over attempts by some politicians in the UK to use the implementation of data protection laws as a weapon against the media.

We represent 18,000 news media publications in 120 countries. Changes to press regulation in the UK — traditionally a bastion of free speech — would only embolden repressive regimes to restrict media freedoms and silence critical voices.

The anti-press clauses added to the Data Protection Bill are intended to force newspapers and magazines to join a state-recognised regulator against their will. They would undercut vital protections for freedom of expression and freedom of information, making public interest investigative journalism all but impossible.

The vast majority of UK journalists adhere to professional standards upheld by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IpsO), which regulates more than 2,600 print and online publications under a system of voluntary press self-regulation advocated by the Leveson Report. This is over and above British laws covering libel, contempt and other reporting restrictions.

We hope that the UK will ensure it upholds the high standards of press freedom expected from a leading democracy by removing these dangerous clauses from the bill.

MICHAEL GOLDEN  
President, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers  
DAVID CALLAWAY  
President, World Editors Forum

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

### Corrections and clarifications

- We described Penhill as one of the highest points of the Peak District (Cheltenham tips, Mar 15). Penhill is in Wensleydale, North Yorkshire.
- We stated that Dr Abraham Gross, father of Tony Gross (Obituary, Mar 14), had “fled” London in the war. In fact, having sent his wife and children to safety, Dr Gross stayed in London and treated victims of the Blitz. We apologise for the error.
- Coutts is owned by Royal Bank of Scotland, not the Bank of Scotland (News, March 16).
- The British Boarding Schools Network states that although interest from Russian parents has risen this year (“Keep Russia’s dirty money out of our schools”, Mar 15), only one of 170 agents in Russia with whom they deal had reported that applications were up by two or three times.

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## Russia and the prize of a private education

Sir, Jenni Russell (“Keep Russia’s dirty money out of our schools”, Mar 15) urges banning the children of the Russian super-rich from British private schools. She argues that the open celebration of their wealth undermines existing norms, and that some Russian parents use the fees as an opportunity for moneylaundering. She also debunks “the liberal assumption” that Russian children will be exposed to western values.

I have been an educational consultant for ten years, and placed hundreds of Russian children into UK boarding schools. I always believed that if there was any hope for Russia, it was in the new, British-educated generation. Russian children studying in England learn to question, analyse, compare and form their own opinions. Precisely the skills that the Russian government does not want those children to have.

Russia has in any case already taken care of it. Fearing that British liberal education is “poisoning” the minds of the young, the Russian Duma adopted a law forbidding Russian government officials from sending their children to UK schools. The law, combined with the fear that trickled down to the rest of the society, resulted in the steady

(and considerable) decline in the numbers of Russian children coming to study in the UK.

I am no apologist for Putin, and firmly believe that retaliatory actions in response to attempted murder on British soil are necessary and should be tough and wide-ranging. But banning Russian children from UK private schools would not work, as they have stopped coming anyway.  
IRINA SHUMOVITCH  
Founding director, School Placement Service, London N5

Sir, Jenni Russell’s moral outrage may be understandable but the unintended consequences could be lamentable. A good British liberal education may be one of the few ways in which we can begin to change the moral compass of the next generation of what she calls the “corrupt elite”.

DR ELIZABETH VALLANCE  
London SW1

Sir, Edward Lucas (“Putin has the West exactly where he wants it”, Mar 16) correctly assesses the failure of the West to deal with the threat from a resurgent Russia. Putin is a sharp card player: he has a bad hand but plays it like a poker professional. During the

Cold War, similar tactics from the Soviet Union were countered with deterrence, principally underpinned with nuclear forces, but buttressed with political will. Today Nato struggles to demonstrate the means and resolve needed to deter Russia and must rethink how to do so before it is too late. Deterrence requires capabilities across a wide range of contemporary capabilities: nuclear, conventional, cyber and economic, but it fails unless there is co-ordination, political will and resolve of the public. At present all these areas are weak in the West, giving reassurance to Putin that he can continue to test the boundaries of tolerance without fear of effective reprisals.  
AIR MARSHAL SIR CHRISTOPHER COVILLE, Sherborne, Dorset

Sir, Some things are difficult to spot by their absence, even England’s World Cup football team. If our players were encouraged to wear black bands in memory of Alexander Litvinenko (and perhaps yet the Skripals) this would be both within Fifa rules and an apt reminder of recent events — especially on Russian TV.  
SIMON BREESE  
Bledlow, Bucks

### Selina and Thirsk

Sir, The people of Thirsk do not understand why a well-known figure like Selina Scott should choose to find the people of this fine market town in some way culpable for the cruel practices that occurred at the Bowood abattoir some miles away (letter and report, Mar 15). The men convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to animals at Bowood are not from our town and nobody in this beautiful North Yorkshire community would have condoned what happened there. Indeed, many local people took part in protests against Bowood.

We are, however, very proud of being the home of the world’s most famous vet, James Herriot, better known here as Alf Wight, a man who cared deeply for the animals he looked after. Further, we will continue to celebrate our association with his memory at the centre dedicated to his life and much-loved books. We invite Miss Scott to visit Thirsk and the centre to see how “despicable” and “hypocritical” we are.  
IAN ASHTON  
Managing director, The World of James Herriot, Thirsk, N Yorks

### Pencil perfection

Sir, The insistence by the theology professor Kevin DeYoung that his students use pens instead of laptops (letters, Mar 15 & 16) resonates in my own profession of architecture. The sight of a drawing board in a modern architectural studio is now such a rarity that it merits almost archaeological significance. Everything is now produced by CAD (computer-aided design) with all drawings being generated through the keyboard. Like Professor DeYoung, I sometimes wish I could insist on the use of more traditional techniques such as PAD (pencil-aided design) which some of us still hold dear — and believe to be more conducive to producing the best design work.  
ANDY DAVEY  
Peebles, Scottish Borders

### Chauvinist pigs?

Sir, Sarah Bradfield’s letter (Mar 16) about animal insults aimed at men had me pondering, as I’ve often wondered about this too. How about dirty dog, sly or wily old fox, randy old goat, wolf in sheep’s clothing or bull in a china shop? They don’t seem to have the same sting or bite or sheer nastiness as those aimed at women though.  
HAZEL LEVENTHAL  
Aspley Heath, Beds

Sir, Wolf, (love) rat and skunk are all insults that seem only to be directed at men. One could reasonably add ape and snake.  
NEIL MURRAY  
Sutton, Surrey

### Famous diary dates

Sir, Further to the Dinah Hall’s infamous diary entry for July 20, 1969 (letter, Mar 14), my late mother’s diary entry for January 30, 1948, reads: “Ghandi shot dead in India. Had a nice hot bath and went up to the Prince [a pub]”.  
JENNY GILBERTSON  
Chester

Sir, My own personal favourite was an entry I found in my old Puffin diary, written when I was 11: “Today Britain went decimal, and Daddy had all his teeth out.”  
GILL ASHTON  
Chesterfield, Derbyshire

### Mrs Lazarus

Sir, Janice Turner (Notebook, Mar 15) is to be applauded for being so honest about experiencing the rollercoaster of a parent who is deteriorating physically and mentally. The first five years of my retirement were filled with worry, stress and frustration as I sought to do my best by my mother. Numerous times I found myself in a hospital ward with other recently retired daughters as we sat at our mothers’ bedsides.

I expect that many of their mothers, like my own, had been resourceful, practical and energetic for most of their long lives. Now their strength of character and independent nature was rebounding on them as they stubbornly refused advice, help and change.

How many times I prayed that my mother would die peacefully in the night. Eventually she went into a care home after yet another crisis. It was a horrible time, so when I got a call from the home that she was near to

death I just peered round her bedroom door and then crept away. It wasn’t how I had expected to say a final goodbye to my mother. I was just so afraid that by holding her hand and talking to her I would call up that Lazarus instinct in Mum, too.  
EILEEN MORGAN  
Mackworth, Derbyshire

### Supine mandarins

Sir, Having joined the civil service in the 1960s my reaction to the study by Andrew Kakabadse of Henley Business School (“‘Undervalued’ mandarins run for cover from their political masters”, Mar 15) is that not much has changed over the decades — except, perhaps, that the present senior civil servants are lacking in backbone compared with their predecessors.

I do not believe that today’s politicians are significantly more beastly than previous ministers.  
PAUL TWYMAN  
Birchington on Sea, Kent

### People’s poet

Sir, “Stunningly beautiful descriptions” with “missing capital letters, misspellings and poor punctuation” (“Stifling creativity” letter, Mar 16) applies admirably to the writing of John Clare, one of the greatest poets of the English language. Do his works appear in the national curriculum?  
FRANCIS ENGLEHEART  
Bewdley, Worcs

### Closing the book

Sir, I realise that I could be accused of heresy but in my opinion the film of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* is far superior to the book (letters, Mar 10 & 14). There were grown-up characters in the former, which unashamedly deals with racism and Atticus Finch’s parental duties. Not so the book.  
PETER HAYES  
Newent, Glos

## 1914 THE FIRST WORLD WAR 1918

ON THIS DAY MARCH 17, 1918

### THE EXPLOSION NEAR PARIS

Last night the northern sky of Paris was still glowing with the fire which followed Friday’s great explosions at Courneuve, and it is impossible yet to state with accuracy the extent of the damage done and the number of killed and injured. The number of officially ascertained dead is 30, and the injured number nearly 1,500, most of them being but slightly hurt by falling glass or grenade splinters. Some idea of the widespread nature

of the damage may be gathered from the fact that windows were broken as far away as Versailles, and in Paris itself the quantity of glass destroyed is very great. The most notable damage in Paris was done at the Academy, where the glass roof of the meeting hall was destroyed. Naturally unlovely, the district of the Plain of St Denis, outside the city walls, has been transformed into a realistic imitation of a modern battlefield. The first explosion was caused by the dropping of a case of the hand grenades. The first two explosions were by far the most serious. When the tremendous roar of the first explosions was heard Paris concluded that a daylight raid was in progress, and the inhabitants were quite justified in thinking that bombs were dropping immediately upon them. With a celerity which shows how well Paris is learning its air raid drill people took to cellars and shelters. A gigantic column of smoke which spouted up to the north made it quite clear, however, what had happened, and with really remarkable promptitude ambulances

were rushing out to the scene of the disaster. The work of rescue was extremely difficult, as explosions still continued, but it was effected with rapidity and by the afternoon the first trainload of wounded had reached the Gare du Nord. I may remark that the American Red Cross rendered services which have still further increased the esteem in which it is held by the French. The propaganda effect of the activity of the American Red Cross during the recent air raids and this tragic weekend cannot be overestimated. British ambulances hurried up also to assist the French in treating the wounded as they came into the hastily established dressing stations and operating rooms. For the last three days the fire and explosions have been continuing, and the countryside is covered with grenades, some still unexploded.

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