

LETTERS

Truth on the rocks

I find more common ground between myself and *New Statesman and Society* than is usually the case about your feature last week, "Truth on the rocks".

I agree that much of the tabloid reporting of the controversy about the Thames Television programme was deplorable. Nor do I take exception to your mentioning that the *Daily Telegraph* published a report in the course of the dispute, quoting "army sources". But, in your anxiety to demonstrate the inequity of Fleet Street's handling of this issue, I think you have done an injustice to those newspapers, including ourselves, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, which, throughout the controversy, upheld Thames Television's right to ask the questions it did, and also the propriety of the IBA's refusal to intervene to stop the programme.

I quote our leader on 29 April: "The programme was... most inconvenient politically... yet it is difficult to see how this justifies the government's request to the IBA. Thames Television's programme and the evidence of its witnesses may well prove to be entirely without merit... but the film-makers have broken no law. The issues they examined are of real importance in a democracy, where it is not enough to agree that terrorists deserve death before determining to kill them."

More recently, we have been at pains to point out that the government could not have it both ways, by arguing that such programmes as "Death on the Rock" prejudiced the Gibraltar inquest; and itself conducting a sustained black propaganda campaign against hostile witnesses.

I believe that there remain grounds for a delicately balanced debate about the merits of what was done in Gibraltar in March 1988. But the response of the government was not creditable, and a significant proportion of serious British newspapers recognised this.

Max Hastings
Editor
The Daily Telegraph

Early intervention

Surely there is a single, very important point to be made by Duncan Campbell about the implications of his argument for the value of early intervention in cases of

HIV infection: that is, that the understandable reluctance to proceed with widespread testing should be abandoned? If Campbell is right, then testing is in the direct interests of all those affected.

John Whiteley
Oxford

Your current campaign for properly conducted experiments of early medical intervention to stop HIV infection from progressing to full-blown Aids brings hope to many people, like myself, who are carrying the virus and fear for our future ("Race against time", and "Living positively", 6 and 20 January).

But I don't think you realise quite how important it is that a general magazine of your kind should be pressing these arguments. I am utterly isolated from the world of those you interviewed. I am what is known, in medical jargon, as "asymptomatic," which broadly means that though I have the virus, there is no sign of it yet. I don't feel or look ill. When I first told my parents, their reaction was primarily one of shame, and they don't want anyone to know. I also want to live as normal a life as possible. So none of our outer family, or friends, or neighbours know, and I have told none of my fellow students either.

There must literally be thousands of people in the same position as me, who don't have access to up-to-date information about treatments and research, and who can't, or perhaps, aren't, subscribe to the more specialist journals. This makes your interest all the more important, but it also means that it is a very rare source of general information and support. In this respect, Duncan Campbell's informative article about drugs and treatments was all too brief, even though it was said to present the information "in detail".

Please continue to publish these articles. It is a great consolation to know that someone is doing something, and that we aren't being written off by everyone, and in the end they may literally be a lifeline.

Name and address supplied

The editor writes: We too are sorry that Duncan Campbell's article wasn't longer. It was in fact cut for reasons of space. The most detailed information on HIV and Aids treatment comes from the United States; the best source is "Aids Treatment News", PO Box 411256, San Francisco, California 94141;

Project Inform, at 374 Dolores Street, San Francisco, California 94140, also offers detailed information. In Britain, newsletters containing some treatment information are produced by Body Positive (the association of people with HIV); they are at 5lb Philbeach Gdns, London SW5, and the main British charity dealing with Aids - the Terrence Higgins Trust, 52 Gray's Inn Road, London WC2; Frontliners, the charity for people with Aids, is at the same address.

Letter-boxed



Sean French mentions almost jovially the absence of letter-boxes in some new developments (Diary, 13 January). But I wonder if there is some sociopolitical background to this that should be alarming us—even if not the socio-architectural one that Sean French refers to.

I've always seen a letter-box as a kind of basic human right: anyone should have the right to deliver a message to anyone, directly, without the intervention of the Post Office, and without having to be limited to a specified time of day when there is someone there to receive it.

I recently discovered that my landlord, Camden council, was installing at the entrance to my block new security doors, which had no letter-box. When I tried to find out why, I was met with incredulity that I should lead the sort of life where friends might want to drop a message in when I was out. It was only when I convinced council officials that I was serious about hacking a hole in their nice new door that they rushed

someone round to give us our letter-box back.

But seriously—what is behind this tendency to eliminate the humble letter-box? I'm sure there must be some of your clever readers who could construct a theory linking the demise of the letter-box to the onset of Thatcherite values, or something.

Albert Beale
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Slow change

Sean French (Diary, 13 January) associates my name with those of Alasdair Milne and Wendy Henry. This link is based on fantasy. In 19 years on the *Times*, I have never come across the management style of Beria's secret police, nor have I ever been faced with dismissal, instant or otherwise.

Contrary to French's assertions, the amicable discussions over my relinquishing of the arts editorship to take up the double position of chief opera critic and obituaries editor were carried out over a period of months.

John Higgins
The Times

Plea for publication

The Policy Studies Institute stresses its confidence about its study of housing discrimination in Northern Ireland (Letters, 20 January). However, senior housing officials and members of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights do not share this confidence. They have attacked the PSI's report as unsound in terms of methodology and rejected results indicating Catholics have fared worse in the inner city and Protestants in rural areas.

The demand for further work has resulted in an unseemingly financial wrangle which has conveniently glossed over the political agenda behind such attacks. Members of SACHR misleadingly claim the report is covered by the official secrets act and will not be published in its present form. Housing officials have also sought to stake a contractual claim over the contents of the report.

While I have every respect for the PSI's work and methods, it should stick to what it is good at, namely