

Letters to the Editor

The price of peace

Sir, We let down our Armed Forces at our peril. The late Admiral of the fleet that they would be quite unable to cope with a sustained period of heavy casualties. We are told that large sums of money are to be spent on improving accommodation, but those responsible for executing this policy tell me that the money is woefully slow in coming forward.

All this and a great deal more is presided over by a part-time secretary of state. Perhaps if he had more time available he would better understand the dire state of his department.

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JAMES JUNGUIS
Sherborne, Dorset

Party funding

Sir, Gordon Brown has announced three separate inquiries into the Labour Party cash donation situation (report, Nov 29). Only when these inquiries are complete will he decide whether to call in the police to investigate these offences. This will only muddy the waters and possibly hinder the police investigation. If he allows the police to do their job, we will soon know if any offences have been committed.

BOB BEAUMONT
Cambridge

Sir, The reason a ship's captain is responsible for everything that happens to and on his ship, even when asleep in his cabin, is because it is his responsibility to ensure that the chain of command is structured so that everyone under his command carry out their tasks correctly, even down to the most junior lookout. Gordon Brown seems to have no idea what his first lieutenant is up to.

BRIAN CHRISTLEY
Abergyle, Conwy

Khartoum's interpretation of Islamic law

Sir, The grotesque prosecution of

Sir, The law of the land was broken.

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Unproven theories have value

Sir, While Sian Griffiths's article on climate change in the Science Museum (Nov 25) is excellent, I am somewhat astonished to learn of complaints about exposing children to "a theory that is not proven in all its details". Newton's Laws are not "proven", in fact we know that they are wrong. Nevertheless, they are extremely useful for day-to-day technology and making trips to the Moon and back.

Weather models are far from perfect, yet modern forecasts are useful enough to draw significant investment in both the public and the private sector. Climate models are harder to interpret, as we cannot see their faults as clearly as those of weather models and Newton's Laws, yet they still contain important information which should neither be undervalued nor oversold.

Science never "proves" its theories in the way mathematics does, and anyone who argues seriously that we should only teach theories proven in

all their details either does not understand science, or intentionally misrepresents it for some other purpose.

A science museum is the perfect place to clarify the way science works. If Chris Rapley can help to inform children of the known knowns and the known unknowns of climate science, while including historical illustrations of how we discovered what were unknown unknowns, he will not only have taught our children what science is, but will also raise the standard of the climate policy debate in the next generation.

PROFESSOR LEONARD SMITH
London School of Economics and
Pembroke College, Oxford

Letters to the Editor that are intended for publication should carry a daytime telephone number. We accept letters by e-mail, fax or post, but not by telephone. We may edit letters, which must be exclusive to The Times.

Paths to prosperity

Sir, I agree that rights-of-way legislation is backward-looking and maintenance is underfunded (letter, Nov 24), but landowners are not the main sufferers.

Certainly, some of the footpaths that used to follow field boundaries and now cross the vast fields of today may be redundant, but no one who appreciates walking in the countryside can afford even one to lapse, because it is so hard to establish alternative routes. With today's mobile population, it is difficult to establish a 20-year use, and the accuracy of the "definitive" maps is not certain.

It is in the interests of landowners to have an effective network of well-marked footpaths giving a resource that will increase the value of their property when they want to rent/sell and will stop inadvertent trespass and possible damage. It will also benefit all those who enjoy the countryside and who, through their taxes, help to maintain it.

PAULIA MELVILLE
Oxfordshire

Terrific teens

Sir, May I compliment The Times on an innovative and daring leap into new territory with the recent feature on Washington to a background of the presto from Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*.

The programme featured voices that resound with association and significance — they would have made far more impact if they had been allowed to speak on their own.

PROFESSOR PETER DICKINSON
Aldbrough, Suffolk

Baton charge

Sir, I was sorry to read about "The Case of Oscar Wilde's Disappearing Cigarettes" (letters, Nov 27).

We musical folk of Dorking faced a similar problem some years ago with "The Case of the Disappearing Baton", whereby the conducting baton, forming part of the statue to Sir Ralph Vaughan Williams, kept vanishing.

Fragile protruberances of this kind on a statue are a great attraction and those who commission sculptors need to be aware of this. In the meantime if anyone is tempted to commemorate a cigarette-smoking conductor, don't!

NEIL RILEY
Dorking, Surrey

Gift of tongues

Sir, If, as the Rev David Heep maintains (letters, Nov 29), English is "the language that God actually speaks", would He not have communication difficulties, with the language of Heaven being Welsh?

TEGWYN JONES
Aberystwyth

Join the debate online today timesonline.co.uk/comment

Wall Street tremors

When a forecast storm in the North Sea is mentioned in TV dispatches as a major influence on the oil price, then I think we can safely say that it is all overhyped.

C. Richards, Bristol

Rape convictions

As long as neither party disputes that intercourse happened, most rape trials will be reduced to "she said yes — no I didn't". I wouldn't want to go through it again as a juror.

Geoff Walker, Bordeaux

Party funding

Attempts to increase forcibly the contributions to political parties through the tax system are simply attempts by interested parties to preserve a system that suits them.

John Scott, London