

Comment



Established 1855

### MPs should judge the merits of torture claims

To listen to Yvette Cooper, the shadow home secretary, demanding a judge-led inquiry into allegations of British intelligence complicity in CIA-led torture, you could be left with the impression that the current Government was somehow at fault. Yet the matters that such an investigation would examine took place on Labour's watch.

The people who need to address these accusations and say what they knew are, principally, Tony Blair and Jack Straw. To be fair, the latter, who was foreign secretary for much of the requisite period, has said he would co-operate with such an inquiry. As to the former prime minister, we still await the much-delayed verdict of the Chilcot committee on the circumstances that led to war in Iraq, and should not hold out much hope of his co-operation in another historical probe.

But is a judge-led inquiry the right way to settle one and for all whether British intelligence condoned torture or participated in the unlawful rendition of suspects? Dan Hodges, on these pages, thinks so; we do not. After all, we have already had one, led by Sir Peter Gibson, which had to be halted after more than a year because it clashed with an ongoing police investigation. The responsibility for seeking the truth in this affair has now been handed to Parliament's intelligence and security committee (ISC). Its chairman, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, is seeking access to those parts of the US Senate report that were held back last week's publication, apparently at the request of the UK Government. Downing Street has said it did this on grounds of national security, and that the redacted information did not relate to British involvement in the mistreatment of prisoners.

There seems no reason why the ISC should not be told what this refers to, so that its members might judge for themselves. As Sir Malcolm wrote in *The Sunday Telegraph*, staff attached to his committee are already going through thousands of documents from MI6 and the other agencies on whether Britain was involved, or complicit, in these activities, so it is hard to see what another inquiry could achieve. Some people are questioning the ISC's independence. But this is an all-party body with a membership that has no reason to stage a cover-up. It should be emphasised, too, that there is no suggestion that British intelligence officers were directly involved in torture, even if there is an element of *qui tacet, consentit*.

We have had too many judicial inquiries that have lasted too long, proved inordinately expensive and still failed to satisfy the many who have reached their own conclusions before hearing the evidence. Just as Congress investigated these matters in America, so Parliament should do so here.

### Plus ça change...

Another city; pretty much the same outcome. The great climate change debate has rumbled along from Rio to Kyoto, through Copenhagen and on to Lima, without the breakthrough that campaigners have sought. There was an agreement of sorts in Peru, but nothing that lived up to the billing.

This gathering was supposed to clear away the obstacles blocking the way to a formal agreement, in Paris a year from now, to combat climate change. Instead, after over-running by two days, all delegates managed to approve was a framework for setting national pledges to be submitted to the Paris meeting.

Once again, there were divisions between rich and poor countries over how to spread the burden of pledges to cut carbon emissions, which will have to be resolved over the next 12 months – or in Paris itself – making success much less likely.

With 194 countries involved in the talks, each with its own interests to defend, expectations of a comprehensive deal need to be far more realistic. The fact is that the emerging economies will be reluctant to agree to legally binding caps on emissions that they, with some justice, feel were never imposed on advanced countries at the same stage of their development. They want richer nations to do more.

To that end, much more important than the pursuit of unachievable goals, was the recent pact between the world's two biggest energy users, America and China, to work towards a common position on the reduction in fossil fuel use. Although they, too, disagreed in Lima over how emission cuts should be shared between rich and poor countries, such voluntary and bilateral agreements are the basis of the way forward. Otherwise, Paris will be added to the lengthening list of cities associated with false promises on climate change.

### The wrong focus

There is something dispiriting about the rise of the "selfie". Not the thing itself; it is merely a self-portrait. Our neophiliac culture acts as though it has invented for itself something that Albrecht Dürer was doing in AD1484.

No, it's the ubiquity. Today we learn that the "selfie stick" – a device for extending your reach to make these

## Letters to the Editor

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We accept letters by post, fax and email only. Please include name, address, work and home telephone numbers.  
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### Enoch Powell backed the founder of Ukip, but not Nigel Farage

SIR – Your report on Ukip's relationship with Enoch Powell (December 13) brings back happy memories. I was the only Ukip candidate he ever spoke for at a public meeting, at Newbury racecourse in 1993. When I wrote a Eurosceptic constitution for Europe for the Bruges Group, he called it the best attempt ever made to square the circle of British independence and association with Europe.

We never discussed immigration. Under my leadership, Ukip never interested itself in the issue, which in the mid-Nineties was not a topic of public debate. I do not believe he was a racist. Enoch Powell's support was over Europe. He backed my stance that we should send no MEPs to Brussels and accept no income from the European Parliament. As soon as I quit the party, and after Enoch's death, Mr Farage was happy to become an MEP and take more than £2 million from the European Parliament in expenses. The clause in Ukip's membership form that laid down boycotting the European Parliament as a

principle was removed. The party is now a home for dim-witted opportunists.

Were he alive today, Enoch Powell would treat Nigel Farage and Ukip with contempt.  
**Professor Alan Skeed**  
London School of Economics  
London WC2

SIR – A friend of my parents served in the Second World War in North Africa with Enoch Powell. Some 15 years later he sought Powell's support for the European cause in Kenya, threatened as it appeared to be by African nationalism. Powell politely but firmly refused to take sides.

Shortly afterwards news of illegal killings at the Hola detention camp leaked out, with the attempted cover-up by the Kenya and British governments. Powell castigated the authorities in one of the most eloquent and influential contributions ever heard in the Commons.  
"Illiberal and racist? I hardly think so."  
**CJW Minter**  
London SW16

SIR – Enoch Powell was well past his best both physically and in influence by the Nineties. I would have had deep misgivings about him as prime minister, due to his anti-Americanism and softness on communism – though his predilection that the Soviet Union would break up turned out to be prescient.

However, when Heath sacked Powell in a mockery of justice, the Conservative Party should have sacked Heath. They have, of course, a record of choosing Balfour for Chamberlain, Chamberlain over Churchill, Major over Redwood, and Cameron over Davis, as well as Heath over Powell.  
**Mark Taba**  
London SE26

SIR – You report that Nigel Farage, as a teenager meeting Powell, found that he "dazzled me for once into an awestruck silence". It's a great shame that this effect didn't persist.  
**Harvey Clegg**  
Woodbridge, Suffolk

### Pensioners' savings

SIR – Interest on the bearded pensioner bonds (report, December 13) is paid each year for after three years, for the higher-value bond. Most pensioners seek income monthly and can't wait a year or three. An example of out-of-touch government.  
**Michael Edwards**  
Hasternere, Surrey

### Sexualisation

SIR – A mystery of our age is increasing feminisation of most walks of life – politics, education, the Church, medicine – being explained by ever-greater sexualisation. Are the two related? Or is the latter explained by the boundaries of what sells always being pushed and the opportunities for doing this never having been greater?  
**Bryan Clark**  
Ludlow, Shropshire

### Trench football

SIR – Michael Worfolk's letter (December 13) on his father's diary entry for December 25 1915, when English and German troops played football, mentions "an officer of the Scots Guards" and "court martials".

Two Scots Guards officers, Iain Colquhoun and my grandfather, Miles Barne, were court-martialled for fraternising with the enemy, though a High Command order forbidding this had, it seems, not been passed on by the sector's senior officer, Brigadier John Pousonby. According to the historian Randall Nicol, Iain Colquhoun was "nonchalant" about the charge, whereas my grandfather was "very low". Neither blamed the Brigadier, who did his utmost to defend them.

My grandfather was acquitted and, although Iain Colquhoun was convicted, his punishment was struck out by Earl Haig, who ordered that the records be expunged of any reference to the incident. My grandfather was killed two years later when a bomb was inadvertently dropped on his tent by a British aircraft.  
**Anthony Barne**  
Milton Lilbourne, Wiltshire

### With this ring...

SIR – Simon Edsors (Letters, December 13) asks when it became fashionable for men to wear wedding rings. My ring has not been removed since my wedding day more than 50 years ago. My father also wore his from his wedding day, before 1940.

**Keith Taylor**  
Hinton Cantlacorum, Herefordshire

SIR – I have been married to my husband for more than 40 years and I do not wear a wedding ring. I do not "belong" to anyone.  
**Julie Juniper**  
Bridport, Dorset

### Cold comfort

SIR – I read the report about arguments over home thermostat settings with some amusement. My stance is this: would you put your central heating on during a winter evening when the ambient temperature was, say, 15°C? No. Then why heat your house to 22°C in the winter?

If you think it is cold inside, go outside for a few minutes and come back in again. Your viewpoint will no doubt have changed.  
**Ted Bourne**  
Waterlooville, Hampshire

### Blue Eyes Blues

SIR – You know that the end is nigh when Bob Dylan records covers of Sinatra standards. Didn't see that coming.  
**Liam Power**  
Bangor Erris, Co Mayo, Ireland

### Bail time-bomb

SIR – The proposal to cap the pre-charge bail period at 28 days (Letters, December 2) is well-intentioned but profoundly flawed. Grounds for bail are recorded in writing and open to scrutiny, and if conditions are attached they must be proportionate and not onerous. Any aspect can be challenged by the subject or their legal representative, as the Human Rights Act demands that a suspect must have swift access to justice.

An excessive period on bail can in itself cause a case to fail. The law stipulates that inquiries must be conducted expeditiously, and strict, clear and accountable legal safeguards already exist.

A limit of 28 days' bail is unfeasibly short. A simple forensic test may take weeks to be completed. On its return, a further interview may be needed, which could require further evidence-gathering. At the conclusion of the investigation, a Crown Prosecution Service decision will usually be required, which can take days, weeks, or in complex cases, months.

My last four years, as a police sergeant, until I retired in 2011, were spent in the custody system, managing bail records and procedures. I find it hard to believe that those who call for a 28-day limit have sufficient understanding of the Pandora's box they seek to open.  
**Rupert Battersby**  
Chester

### Sunny side up

SIR – Thousands of houses and thousands of solar panels await planning permission on agricultural land. Why don't solar panels be put on the roofs of all new houses, which at least would save some farmland?  
**Sue Samuelson**  
Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire

### Painless performances

SIR – Some years ago I had a small job of surgery done under local anaesthetic. A few minutes listening to the barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffman* while an elderly nurse gently stroked my hand was pure bliss.  
**George Teasdale**  
Leeds, West Yorkshire

SIR – When I had some surgery under local anaesthetic, the surgeon asked if I would like some music. I chose Mozart. After half an hour or so, the surgeon announced: "It's all downhill from now." I had to ask how his comment should be taken, since the piece being played was Mozart's *Requiem*.  
**Eric Holloway**  
Banbury, Oxfordshire



Top bird when the supply of rabbits is running low, buzzards may turn to killing other birds

### Blame the buzzard for the loss of bird species

SIR – The decline in many avian species (Charles Moore, Comment, December 13) – a matter of concern to me, a farmer – is due to the buzzard being "top bird" in most areas of the United Kingdom.

It is not preyed upon. A small number are killed by motor vehicles. On my farm in the past 10 years, I have lost all the snipe, redshank, oystercatcher, woodcock, lapwing and a great many voles.

Their decline is not helped by the decline in rabbit numbers, through myxomatosis. When resident buzzards find their traditional food source is absent, they prey on other bird species, whose populations suffer.

To allow these species to recolonise their habitats, some culling, by shooting, of buzzards is required. It would be a mistake to exterminate them, as their role would then be taken over by sparrowhawks, kestrels and merlins, and the countryside would be no better off.

If only countrymen (in the truest sense of that word) were permitted to control many species of birds and mammals and thus create a desirable balance of nature, the countryside would be a more interesting and ecologically more sustainable environment for all to enjoy.  
**Angus Faure**  
Ircyberrie, Angus

### Impertinent greetings from prospective food

SIR – It isn't just Nigel Milliner's Cornish Blue that is issuing seasonal greetings (Letters, December 12). I've noticed that my (Kellogg's) breakfast cereal box wishes me, in large letters, a "Merry Crunchmas".  
**Hugh Stewart-Smith**  
London E11

SIR – Stephanie Mariani is spending £2,000 on her dogs at Christmas (report, December 11). My poor Nova Scotia Tollers will have to make do with four-mile walks, a swim in the lake, mud up to their elbows, a few squirrels to chase, my left-over sprouts and gravy on their evening meal, then a sleep by the fire. No Santa Claus for them. Lucky they don't read the paper.  
**Nancy Lawson**  
Purbury, Somerset

SIR – The trouble with leaving Christmas preparations to women is that they tend to be too fastidious. Proper enjoyment of Christmas requires the liberal application of festive bling, the more naff the better. Only men and children can cast good taste aside sufficiently for the required effect.  
**Dannien McCrystal**  
London W14

SIR – My husband once brought home a Christmas tree and, finding it too tall, cut 2ft off the top of it. I retrieved it from the dustbin and stuck it back on with Sellotape. He still does not understand what he did wrong.  
**Louise Faure**  
Buntingford, Hertfordshire

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Nothing makes you feel more like one of life's amateurs than ordering badly in Pizza Express.  
@amithatweeter

Just been asked for ID. Extraordinary thing to happen to a 32-year-old in a three-piece suit.  
@timothy\_stanley

Sorry. People who say folk instead of people are as bad as people who say relevant when they mean said.  
@lukesage

Labour has been holding detailed briefings with MPs on the Ukip threat in their constituencies.  
@IsabelHardman

## All I want for Christmas is a different song



THOMAS H GREEN

'Tis the season to hear the same old tunes, yet there are plenty of others we can listen to

day, is the only uptempo Christmas love song I even know about. Anybody can sing it to anybody and it can only mean one thing.

This musical formula alone, however potent, can surely not be the sole reason for the song's multi-million-selling reach. But where are its successors? Where can we hear the next tranche of seasonal gems?

The golden era of Christmas singles was undoubtedly the Seventies, a decade so glittery and spangled, at least when viewed via TV nostalgia shows, that it appears to have been one long Christmas Day in flares. As Sixties counterculture faded, and prior to the advent of punk, there was a window wherein pop coaxed up to the entertainment industry. Seasonal froth was as welcome as any other sort, thus a deluge of Yuletide fare appeared from Slade, Wizard, Mud, Greg Lake. The Wonderful, Shakin' Stevens and Ronnie Dawson.

Since then occasional Christmas staples have emerged: Wham's *Last Christmas*, Cliff Richard's *Mistletoe and Wine*, Jona

widely popular new festive fare. There has been some great new Christmas music over the past couple of decades but it hasn't received mass acceptance, building slowly, steadily year on year, in the traditional fashion. For one thing, the media has fragmented since the millennium. There are no focal points akin to *Top of the Pops*, or other seasonal "event" TV and radio. The only one that masters such attention is *The X Factor*, but Simon Cowell's television juggernaut doesn't really reside in Christmas. Its sole agenda is promoting homogeneous production-line pop that's neither seasonal nor very exciting.

The social media campaigns to undermine *The X Factor* winner's annual chart success have become a more entertaining tradition, but they're hardly Christmassy. From the unexpected rise of Rage Against the Machine's *Killing in the Name* to the top spot in 2009 to this year's wave of support for Iron Maiden's *The Number of the Beast*, these are arch exercises in hard-rockin' satire.

The online community, of course,

that's the default setting of so many modern music consumers.

So what are we missing out on? Let me point you in the direction of the grow-up, self-aware Christmas-themed albums. Artists as diverse as the Minnesota indie outfit *Low*, Everything But The Girl singer Tracy Thorn, US singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens and American-tinged rockers Bright Eyes have all released albums in recent years that embrace poignancy and the longing for childlike wonder. They've played it straight with rewarding results.

And there are plenty of Christmas classics awaiting their moment of widespread acceptance. Queen's *Thank God It's Christmas* and the Waitresses' *Christmas Shopping* bit time eternally on the periphery, the Darkness's ridiculous *Christmas Time (Don't Let The Bells End)* keeps poking its head round the door, but my favourite is *This is Christmas*, an album by Tim Wheeler of Ash and his girlfriend, the singer-songwriter Emrat the Great. This has been glued to my stereo every December since its release in 2011. It contains the essential