

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Archbishop and miners' strike

From the Archbishop of York

Sir, Forgive me for returning to a small matter which has already received far more publicity than it deserves. However, Mr Enoch Powell has, for reasons best known to himself, chosen to launch an extraordinary attack on my personal integrity, concerning a private letter I wrote some weeks ago to a miners' leader in my former diocese. And you yourself, Sir, have compounded the error in a leading article (April 28) and by a headline in which you describe me as supporting the miners' strike. May I therefore set the record straight?

My original letter was written in reply to a request for support and began by pointing out that in the Durham coalfield pit closures have been carried out on a massive scale, and with very little friction, for many years. I then drew attention to two main issues in the present dispute, the question of jobs and the question of long-term energy resources, and pointed out the need for caution.

It seemed to me at the time that the dispute was in danger of moving into areas about which rational discussion was impossible and my sole purpose in writing was to remind my correspondents of the basis on which Durham's excellent record of negotiation might be continued. I did not see myself as either supporting the strike or condemning it. That is not my business. In fact when I wrote it I felt that my letter erred on the side of being platitudinous.

Mr Powell based his attack on the sentence, "I believe we owe it to future generations not to close pits before they are properly worked out". By a very curious argument, which it is not necessary to repeat, he claimed that the word "properly" could be interpreted as meaning "no longer capable of yielding coal that can be disposed of for not less than it costs to mine".

He then accused me of not admitting openly that this is what I meant and made this the basis of a charge of moral and religious bankruptcy. Mr Powell once had a reputation for clear and rigorous logic, but I must confess that the logic of this particular argument escapes me.

The word "properly", in the sentence which he subjected to such tortuous analysis, takes its colour from the previous paragraph about successful pit closures. The simple and only point I have been concerned to make is that there is a civilised way of dealing with pit closures in which all the factors, human, economic and long-term, are balanced against one another and used as a basis for negotiated agreements.

It would be better for all concerned if those in the public eye tried to recapture this vision instead of indulging in foolish polemics.

Yours faithfully  
JOHN EBOR.,  
Bishopthorpe,  
York.  
April 30.

## Crackdown on diplomatic abuses

From Mr Peter Foster

Sir, Inevitably, a lot of nonsense is being written about the implications of the St James's Square incident and its antecedents. It ranges from the totally irresponsible - e.g., that we should send a punitive expedition to Libya to extract an apology and reparation for the murder of Yvonne Fletcher - to the obviously unrealistic - e.g., that the searching of diplomatic bags should be authorized on application by the International Court, the suspect bag presumably being held in bond while the legal action proceeded. May I suggest, if not a solution, at least a few practical parameters?

We have to start from the virtually certain assumption that the communist countries, not to go further and leaving aside mavericks like Gaddafi, would never accept a system of inspection, would block any attempt to set one up by international agreement and would take instant reprisals if any attempt were made to impose one on them.

The approach to tightening up on current abuse would have to be, therefore, through bilateral reciprocity, i.e., special restrictions applied between ourselves and specific countries. They could, for example, be made a prior condition of the resumption of diplomatic relations with Libya, if and when that time comes. We would thus not be unilaterally abrogating the Vienna Convention, only modifying its usual interpretation by mutual consent in specific cases.

Bilaterally agreed and reciprocally applied restrictions might take the form of granting immunity not to whole "pouches" (the size of a kit-bag) but only to individual packages of strictly limited size and weight, capable perhaps of concealing small quantities of drugs or plastic explosive, but not firearms. Larger items, which we should ourselves need to send by secure means from time to time, e.g., cypher machines and other security equipment, would have to be subject to X-ray examination.

Confidential correspondence, for which the diplomatic pouch was originally invented, would present the least problem of all: modern automated cypher systems linked by diplomatic wireless or telex have already replaced to a large extent and could replace almost entirely the transmission of paper.

Of course Gaddafi might refuse to accept the "humiliation" of such "discriminatory" conditions for resuming diplomatic relations. But would that be so sad? And an important corollary would be readiness on our part to break relations as soon as reasonable evidence of abuse had accumulated, rather than waiting for indisputable proof by public tragedy.

This could create some further redundancies in the Foreign Office's establishment, in Damascus, for example, as well as Tripoli. But the job of diplomats, as of other public servants, is to protect their country's interests, which include the uphold-

ing of international standards of civilized conduct.

Yours faithfully,  
PETER FOSTER,  
The Athenaeum, Pall Mall, SW1.  
April 28.

From Mr John Gouriet

Sir, Mr Maloney's thoughtful letter (April 25) highlights several points on which, if HM Government, or at least Cobra (Cabinet Office briefing room) have taken cognisance, there is little evidence of action.

Some so-called "civilised" people may eschew the time-honoured penalty of "an eye for an eye", but followers of the Koran still respect such a daunting deterrent.

Why is it that Cobra did not react with the same speed as its namesake? Why did we not immediately seek to galvanise world opinion in our favour, call a Security Council debate to redefine and amend the Vienna Convention? It is surely in most countries' interest to deny international terrorists shelter behind a cloak of diplomatic immunity.

If Nigeria can remove such immunity to thwart currency movements, how much more justified are HMG in bringing to justice those who saw fit to spray a London square with machine-gun bullets and so murder a police officer on duty.

British citizens, working on their own volition and presumably for substantial remuneration, in and for Libya, may have expected harassment, even deportation. However, I doubt that they would have fared worse. Colonel Gaddafi is certainly a fanatic, but he is not a fool. His zealots in St James's over-reacted; however he is unlikely to have compounded their gaffe had we taken a tougher line sooner, and provided we had world opinion with us.

Now it is suggested that the trail is too stale for even the forensic experts to identify the murderer. Nevertheless I believe it is totally unacceptable to the majority of the British people, and certainly to her colleagues, that those responsible for the death of WPC Fletcher should merely be deported, untried and therefore unpunished.

Yours faithfully  
JOHN GOURIET (Chairman,  
Freedom in Action),  
34 Parkview Court,  
Fulham High Street, SW6.  
April 26.

From Mr D. H. Street

Sir, Why do you say in your first leader (April 30) that there is no way that the St James's Square episode can be presented as other than a humiliation for the United Kingdom? On the contrary, our behaviour has in every way been honourable. If it has been humiliating, it can't have been humiliating.

Yours faithfully,  
D. H. STREET,  
Lownds Farm, North Clifton,  
Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire.

cause their basic physiology is such that they do not react to stimuli that

## Housing needs of rural elderly

From the Minister for Housing and Construction

Sir, I write to correct some misunderstandings in the letter (April 23) from Mr Robin Thompson, of the National Agricultural Centre Housing Association, and others on proposals in the Housing and Building Control Bill to safeguard the position of elderly persons' dwellings in rural areas under the right to buy.

The additional safeguard approved by the House of Commons on April 12 (local authorities in designated rural areas already have the right to impose 10-year pre-emption covenants on all sales) would enable local authorities in those areas to apply to the Secretary of State to have individual elderly persons' dwellings exempted from the right to buy.

This safeguard would apply not only to the 22 areas described by Mr Thompson, but also to areas covered by the national parks and to all designated areas of outstanding natural beauty. In all, some 170 local authorities in England and Wales would be affected to a greater or lesser extent.

As I made clear in the House on April 12, in considering future applications from local authorities for designation as rural areas, the Secretary of State will take account of any representations on the problems faced by a particular area in meeting the housing needs of the elderly.

The House of Commons also approved on April 12 an additional safeguard which will allow authorities selling elderly persons' dwellings to impose a pre-emption covenant over a period of 21 years not merely when a dwelling is sold but also when it passes on death to a non-resident beneficiary other than a surviving spouse.

I emphasise that sheltered accommodation and housing owned by charitable housing associations (of which the National Agricultural Centre Housing Association is one) will remain excluded from the right to buy.

Yours faithfully,  
IAN GOW,  
Department of the Environment,  
2 Marsham Street, SW1.  
April 30.

## Sharing our heritage

From Mr Fred Uhlman

Sir, In reply to Professor Shaw's letter (April 21), may I point out that I have been collecting African art for over 50 years and have just presented my collection to a British museum?

I know for certain that without the interest of Europeans, some of them artists like Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Epstein, who were deeply influenced by African art - see Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger" - thousands of the most precious masks and fetishes would have been destroyed by the climate and the termites, but most of all by the total lack of interest by the

## Polygraph tests

**Archbishop and miners' strike.**

JOHN EBOR:.

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