



ESTABLISHED 1855

We must retain the right to trial by jury

The old legal maxim that justice delayed is justice denied has rarely been more appropriate than it is today. The worsening backlog in the courts means cases are taking years to come to trial. This leaves alleged miscreants in limbo, either on extended bail or periods of custodial remand, which is itself an affront to justice. It also means that victims are left waiting too long for punishments to be meted out for the offences against them. Close to 77,000 cases are pending in the Crown Court in England and Wales.

A review by Sir Brian Leveson, a former High Court judge, has proposed that in order to clear the backlog, thousands of cases that would normally be heard in front of a jury should be decided by judges alone.

He said that without a fundamental reform the system faced total collapse. Sir Brian also called for more out-of-court settlements, such as a greater use of cautions, and for some inmates to serve just a small part of the jail term handed down.

There is unquestionably a crisis in the system but whether Sir Brian's proposed solutions are the right approach is another matter. There is a danger of replacing one injustice with another. Many thousands of so-called "either way" cases are already heard by magistrates alone, so there is no absolute requirement for juries.

Nonetheless, to remove even more cases from the scrutiny of juries is to deny access to a cornerstone of English justice and should be resisted, whatever the apparent logistical attraction. The ancient right, dating to Magna Carta, to be tried by one's peers should not lightly be discarded.

Other remedies must be considered, including sitting throughout the summer rather than taking a two-month recess. How that can be justified in such a crisis is hard to understand. If the courts are full, cannot other public buildings be used as temporary venues in which judges and juries can sit? Why can't more retired judges, made to leave office aged 70, be recruited back to the colours? Should judges and juries not sit around the clock until the backlog is cleared?

Moreover, the suggestion that more crimes should be dealt with by a caution is to further diminish the importance of deterrence in our system, already undermined by reduced jail terms and early release. Most offences are committed by a small number of repeat felons. If they think they can get away with just a ticking-off they will not be dissuaded from a life of crime.

Driving out wealth

Sir Keir Starmer told MPs yesterday that no prime minister would ever seek to second-guess the Budget by ruling out any specific fiscal measures. He was pressed by Kemi Badenoch, the Conservative leader, to state unequivocally that there would not be a wealth tax under Labour. Sir Keir declined to do so, citing precedence and convention. Yet that has not stopped him ruling out increases in income tax rates, VAT and employee National Insurance.

Such is the exodus from Britain of wealthy individuals that this continued uncertainty will cause further damage and make the Government's search for economic growth even harder to achieve. Already, around 16,000 wealthy people have left the country, taking their money with them, as a result of decisions taken since Labour came to power, including changes to non-dom rules.

At the weekend, Lord Kinnock, the former Labour leader, said that the Chancellor should introduce a two per cent levy on assets above £10 million, something he claimed would raise upwards of £10 billion a year and show the party's commitment to "equity". It would also show its economic illiteracy, since all the evidence from around the world shows that wealth taxes do not work and end up costing considerably more to administer than they raise in revenue.

The danger is that in order to bring recalcitrant MPs into line after their revolt over welfare reforms Sir Keir will be tempted to reach for an old-style, 1970s-style socialist measure. The real reason the Prime Minister refused to rule out a wealth tax is because he is keeping the option open, however harmful it may prove to be.

Not quite Pollocks

As is his habit, Ed Sheeran talks disarmingly of his new paintings. "I am by no means an 'artist,'" he says about the series of canvasses called *Cosmic Carpark*. *Carpark*, because he paints in a disused carpark and *Cosmic* because the works share something of the unrepeating patterns of the heavens. "Think Jackson Pollock," the singer-songwriter suggests, and it is hard to think of anything else when looking at these drip paintings. Unkind critics have pointed out that Pollock did it rather better. Even a print of a Sheeran painting will cost about £900, half of which goes to his charitable foundation. Certainly young people would be better occupied creating drip paintings in disused carparks than snatching phones on electric bikes. But almost all young people would be unable to sell their paintings, and canvas is dear.



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Post Office bosses must be held to account for the Horizon scandal

SIR – Senior individuals at the Post Office knew of flaws in the Horizon IT system, yet they let employees go to prison for crimes they did not commit ("Horizon scandal drove 13 people to suicide", report, July 9).

These people must not go unpunished. Corporate guilt should not be used as a shelter. Custodial sentences might go some way towards discouraging any repetition of such behaviour in both the public and private sectors.
Dr Robert J Leeming
C Coventry, Warwickshire

SIR – Unless those responsible for this appalling scandal are brought to justice, confidence in law and order in our country will be destroyed.
Jonathan Fogg
Loulé, Algarve, Portugal

SIR – What kind of legal system finds hundreds of innocent people guilty?
Douglas Jenkinson
Nottingham

SIR – The public inquiry report published on Tuesday contains damning evidence that the Government and the Post Office are stalling instead of paying compensation to sub-postmasters.

Haven't these people been through enough? Or will it take another television drama to deliver what's right?
Brett Trafford
Bramley, Hampshire

SIR – If compensation is not paid soon, some claimants will die before justice is done. Shame on Great Britain.
Adrian Lloyd-Edwards
Dartmouth, Devon

SIR – Fujitsu was responsible for the Horizon software, and the defects that led to erroneous accusations of false accounting. The company should be required to pay a share of the compensation due to the victims.
Richard Watts
Cholsey, Oxfordshire

SIR – After nearly five years, Sir Wyn Williams, chairman of the Post Office Horizon IT Inquiry, has found that the scandal has had a "disastrous" impact on those wrongly accused and prosecuted for criminal offences.

Our statutory inquiry system is a gravy train for the legal community, and a convenient way for politicians to bat difficult issues into the long grass. How much money has been spent on this inquiry? How much have all the solicitors and barristers pocketed? What have any of our politicians achieved?
Meanwhile, many people whose lives were ruined are yet to receive proper compensation.
Tim Spurry
Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

SIR – I wonder when Sir Ed Davey will be held to account for his failure to act on the Horizon scandal when he was postal affairs minister.
Michael Wilkinson
East Sheen, Surrey

Macron on migration

SIR – I don't often agree with President Macron, but he is right that one of the main draws for illegal migrants is the UK's generous benefits system (report, July 9). This is something that no Labour politician would own up to.
Tony Manning
Barton-on-Sea, Hampshire

SIR – Why can't the French seize and destroy the small boats before they reach the shore? They must know where they are stored prior to inflation. This would prevent the police from getting their feet wet.
Graham White
Huntingdon

Hounded by HMRC

SIR – I am the director of a number of companies, four of which have been seriously inconvenienced by HMRC (Money, July 5).

One business had to wait more than 14 months for payment of a tax credit. It would have folded if it had not taken out an expensive loan. Another new business is currently awaiting a £40,000 VAT repayment. It has not received the money as the "systems are down", and have been for the past seven working days.

A further business was repeatedly hassled to pay an outstanding VAT bill, despite HMRC owing it a VAT rebate. I made several calls to HMRC, which told me to ignore its letters. Still they kept being sent, along with threats to instruct bailiffs. HMRC then advised me to phone the bailiffs myself and tell them they did not have to take action.

The cost to these businesses is outrageous, never mind that the taxpayer has to fund this abysmal service. I have mothballed another start-up business, as I simply cannot face the aggravation of operating in the UK. Why should I expose myself to the risk of doing so?

If the experience of other companies is similar to mine, then UK plc is stuffed – even before Labour's policies bankrupt the country.
Charles Palmer
Steventon, Hampshire

Fledgling career

SIR – My wife and I were walking through the lovely town of Petersfield on Tuesday, when we saw a young lad dressed as a chicken. He looked extremely embarrassed. My wife said to him: "I hope that you are being paid well for that." To which he sheepishly replied: "I'm on work experience" (Letters, July 8).

Steve Frampton
Denmead, Hampshire



On the move: a father and his children ride down Plascrug Avenue in Aberystwyth

Schools have a duty to get children exercising

SIR – Malcolm Tozer (Letters, July 7) writes that some 23 primary schools in Carmarthenshire are failing to provide the two hours of physical education (PE) per week recommended by the Government. There cannot be any excuses for such a dereliction of duty by schools regarding the future health and wellbeing of our young people.

This situation does not have to be. I give the example of Bilston Church of England primary school in the Black Country, where pupils take part in "bike ability" cycle training, and will soon be able to use a "bicycle bus" aimed at encouraging pupils to cycle into school.

Last month, the headmaster took 25 pupils to Derby Arena, where the children and head of PE undertook a two-hour coached session. Two coaches, track bikes, cycling shoes and helmets were all provided, for a

total cost of just £275. The trip was a tremendous success and is to be repeated.
David Viner
Stourbridge, Worcestershire

SIR – During my schooling in the 1970s, I managed to break my arm. Arriving at a double games lesson in my plaster cast, I was asked by my teacher to produce a parental letter saying that I was unfit for physical exercise. He proposed that, instead of joining the rugby union session with everyone else, I should go for a cross-country run.

In the 2000s, all my son had to do was turn up with the wrong socks to be told he wouldn't be allowed to participate in games. After that, I don't think he ever took the correct socks to school again.
Michael Ware
Cardiff

The search for a pub serving an affordable pint

SIR – Dr Rosie Boxer (Letters, July 9) reports reasonably priced pub food in her part of Sussex.

I have recently returned from North Yorkshire, where a delightful village pub offered Theakston bitter at just £2.10 a pint and Foster's lager at £2.80 a pint.

In my part of the country, prices are more than double these. Somebody is evidently making serious profits from pub-goers.
Nigel Williams
Aston Rowant, Oxfordshire

SIR – I was pleased to read that Dr Rosie Boxer has found a pub where she can get two good meals and three pints of Harvey's bitter for £33. Not only was this excellent value, but the pub and its kitchen were actually open on a Monday – a rare find these days.

As a former licensee, I deplore the current trend for people running pubs as a part-time business. To be successful, they should be open for lunch and dinner seven days a week.
Charles Murray
Botesdale, Suffolk

Ukraine needs guns and men, not just sanctions

While the US president is now aware of Putin's tricks, there is little sign of a real change in military policy

CON COUGHLIN



The penny has finally dropped for Donald Trump: for all his efforts to end the war in Ukraine, Russian president Vladimir Putin simply has no interest in resolving the conflict.

While it has been blindly obvious to anyone with a passing interest in the Ukraine conflict that Putin has set his heart on waging war until he has accomplished his goal – the total subjugation of Ukraine to the Kremlin – Trump has persisted with his own quest for a peace deal.

If the US president's campaign pledge to end hostilities within 24 hours of taking office was never on the cards, he can't be faulted for investing an enormous amount of political capital in negotiating a ceasefire. From his public humiliation of Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office, to his fawning over the Russian leader, whom he has called a "genius" and praised for being "savvy", Trump has been unstinting in his attempts to persuade Putin to accept his ceasefire plan.

At one point, having bullied Zelensky into accepting his proposals, Trump was so confident the Russian leader would follow suit that he predicted Putin would not "violate his word" after indicating Russia would sign up to the terms.

That was back in February. While Trump has continued to maintain regular contact with the Russian leader, it has dawned on him that Putin has, after all, simply been "tapping me along" to buy time for his military campaign in Ukraine.

The final ignominy for Trump came after his most recent phone call with Putin last week, which prompted Putin to launch one of his largest aerial assaults against Ukraine after the American leader said he was "disappointed" by the outcome of the conversation.

Further large-scale Russian attacks have subsequently taken place, with Moscow yesterday launching its largest drone attack on Ukraine after Trump accused Putin of throwing a lot of "bull----" at the US. "He's very nice all the time, but it turns out to be meaningless," Trump complained.

Putin's cynical exploitation of Trump's goodwill may not only have provoked an irate response from the American leader. It could prove to be a significant turning point in the conflict if it results, as now seems likely, in the US re-establishing supplies of advanced weaponry to Kyiv.

So long as Trump believed there was a genuine chance of achieving a breakthrough with Putin, he was

reluctant to maintain military supplies to Ukraine at sufficient levels to sustain Kyiv's war effort. Only last week – prior to Trump's latest telephone exchange with Putin – the White House confirmed it was halting the shipment of critical weapons to Ukraine in order "to put America's interests first".

Trump's anger at Putin's prevarication tactics has led him to reverse this decision, with the president giving approval to sending US defensive weapons to Ukraine. In addition, he is seriously considering giving his approval to a Senate bill that proposes a significant increase in sanctions against Russia for refusing to end the war.

From Moscow's perspective, these are measures that, if fully implemented, could have a serious impact on the eventual outcome of the Ukraine conflict.

Putin's delaying tactics in his talks with Trump have not resulted in any tangible improvement in Russia's performance on the battlefield, with the latest intelligence reports suggesting that Moscow's summer military offensive is faltering, just weeks after it began. If the Russians have been unable to achieve any meaningful breakthrough at a time when the Ukrainians have been suffering from severe US aid shortages, they are hardly likely to fare any better if Trump resumes military support for Kyiv.

Putin will also be aware of the limitations of Russia's own military

Trump and Putin

SIR – It is unfortunate that more than three years of unprovoked brutality against the people of Ukraine, and almost six months of what Donald Trump has described as "bull----" in his dealings with Vladimir Putin (report, July 9), have been necessary for the US president to see that Russia's unwavering aim is to subjugate the entirety of this beleaguered nation.

Perhaps Mr Trump has now also learnt that the only things Putin really respects are superior strength and overwhelming force – militarily, economically and politically.

If Mr Trump's entourage of sycophantic sidekicks had mustered a scintilla of courage to persuade him of this earlier, a lasting peace might even be in sight.

Sadly, though, the writing was on the wall when Mr Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, emerged from an early meeting with Putin proclaiming him to be not a "bad guy". He also described the Russian leader as "super smart" – not, perhaps, a definition that can be readily applied to him.
David Platts
Newark, Nottinghamshire

Western Sahara strife

SIR – I strongly reject Robert Clark's article ("Iran has just reached another stage in its terrifying war against the West", telegraph.co.uk, July 1), which describes the Polisario Front liberation movement as "a terrorist organisation".

The struggle of the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara, led by this organisation for more than 50 years, has never involved terrorist methods. Peaceful resistance, with respect for international law, is our strongest weapon, and the basis for our legitimate demands.

The UN has identified Morocco as an occupier and recognised the Polisario Front as the representative of the Sahrawi people, recommending "a just, lasting and definitive political solution". The Polisario Front is not a separatist movement: Western Sahara has never been part of Morocco, so cannot be separated from it. The International Court of Justice confirmed this in 1975, and more recently the European Court of Justice.

The Polisario Front categorically denies having links or relations with any terrorist group in our region or any part of the world. It denies the existence of relations with Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas, and the existence of any military cooperation with them.

Morocco is orchestrating a defamatory campaign against the noble and just struggle of the Sahrawi people for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in accordance with the UN Charter, and via all means of legitimate self-defence.

Sidi Breika
UK representative, Polisario Front

Down to the wire

SIR – My late husband was very good at "make do and mend" (Letters, July 9), and to this I probably owe my life.

In 1985 we were on a sailing catamaran that capsized in the Atlantic, half way between the Azores and Portugal.

When my husband went to use the international phone, the aerial fell off. Although upside down, we were still inside; he found a wire coat hanger and used that to make an alternative aerial. The coastguard at Falmouth said it was the best signal they had received from that area, and were able to organise our rescue by a merchant ship.

Readers of a certain age will remember such aerials also being used for car radios.
Sheila Ellison
Thatcham, Berkshire