



THE INDEPENDENT

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Letters: Tory 'localism'

Tories will forget about 'localism' if they are elected

Steve Richards (Opinion, 16 October) quite rightly sees some of the contradictions in the Tory enthusiasm for localism. He could usefully have added that the normal time lag between an opposition party pledging to give away power, that party's election to government and its subsequent rediscovery of the virtue of central control, is around the 48-hour mark. It is instructive to remember both the Thatcherite assault on the metropolitan councils and the gleeful rediscovery of rate capping by messrs Blair and Brown.

But let us be charitable. Perhaps Cameron and Osborne do mean what they seem to be saying. If this is the case, are they truly prepared to initiate the sort of reforms that would make for real local government, as opposed to the local deliverers of government diktat which has been its role for at least 30 years?

Local councils would need to be given the powers to raise the bulk of their funds from locally determined taxation - no rate caps, no nationally laid down levies on businesses, no claw backs. If jaundiced electorates were to be convinced that local government now needed to be taken seriously the electoral system would have to be changed to the proportional system now working perfectly well in Scotland. And local councillors would have to be given assurances that the whole process would not be put into reverse when relations between the national government and the newly empowered localities became tetchy, if not confrontational.

Everyone would have to accept the reality of postcode lotteries (or democratically determined variations in local service delivery, to give them another title) and that central government would only intervene to rectify the most glaring anomalies in service provision. And all of these changes would have to be accomplished quickly, before the sclerotic system that exemplifies English governance and public administration reasserted its customary control by inertia.

As a Green party county councillor, I can't say that I'm holding my breath.

Simon Sedgwick-Jell

Cambridge

Stalinist methods blight our schools

The Cambridge Review is spot on (report, 16 October); and it is not only in the primary sector that the effects of these policies are being felt: the "Stalinist overtones of a 'state theory of education'" and "surveillance machinery" are rampant in secondary schools too.

Many teachers are deeply uneasy about the effects on successive generations of children, who are emerging at 16 or 18 with an experience of nothing more than meeting endless dreary numerical targets. These pupils perceive no value in their schooling beyond the delusion that a particular piece of paper marked "pass" will

guarantee their material future. Their real expertise, by their later years, is their cynicism about the process to which they have been subjected.

Of the real value of a broad, deep and humane education, they are ignorant - until you break the rules and start engaging their real curiosity. The released enthusiasm is like watching a dam break - but teachers who do this risk low gradings for failing to employ the approved techniques, no matter what the outcome.

One would hope that after decades of soul-searching, the educational and political establishment would accept that there is no Holy Grail in educational methodology; what counts is the unique interaction between individual teachers and individual pupils. If you stifle that, even in the name of well-intended equality, you kill the autonomy, vivacity and spontaneity from which real engagement with learning can spring.

I J Stock

Coggeshall, Essex

Yet again, the government commissions a report and can hardly wait to bin it. When will our political representatives understand that our rage with them is not limited to financial incompetence and, in some cases, greed?

We, the electorate, do not believe that ministers know more about education, health, social services, and the armed forces than the intelligent people who write the reports based on evidence. The Cambridge Primary Review, like the Tomlinson report and so many others, makes an entirely compelling case for reform. Both major political parties lack the courage and intelligence to act upon it.

Vivien Kies

Bristol

In the wake of the Cambridge Primary Review; what concerns our members most is that the imposition of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) on independent schools has meant all young children are now subjected to a curriculum dictated by government. Parents who once opted out of the assessment-laden state system for a more individual approach in the independent sector have had that choice taken away from them. That is the real story and that is the real disgrace.

David Hanson

Chief Executive, Independent Association of Prep Schools,

Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

World in danger from rising seas

Dominic Lawson (Opinion, 13 October) would like us to believe that climate change is unreal. Further, he points out that mammals evolved when the carbon-dioxide content of the atmosphere was a lot higher than it is today, but he omits to say that it was also considerably hotter at the time.

Indeed, we now know that it was the steady loss of carbon dioxide between 65 and 34 million years ago that led eventually to the formation of the Antarctic ice cap once atmospheric CO₂ fell to 450ppm. The fall in CO₂ led to the fall in temperature.

Nor is there any escaping the fact that seven out of the 10 warmest years in the past 150 years have occurred in the last decade.

Lawson is right that carbon dioxide can be good for plants. However, he misses a key point. If carbon dioxide rises back above 450ppm, plants may well grow like wildfire but what will become of sea levels? We will not have to melt much of Greenland and West Antarctica to raise global sea level by 1-2 metres, something now confidently forecast for the end of this century. And not just from models. Based on recent measurements by the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (Grace) satellite mission, geophysicist Isabella Velicogna of Nasa's Jet Propulsion laboratory in Pasadena, California, concludes that the rate of ice mass loss doubled over the latest seven-year period in Greenland and more than doubled on Antarctica. Together, that makes for a 5 per cent acceleration each year in the rise of sea level. We should be extremely concerned.

Colin Summerhayes

Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR),

Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge

Dominic Lawson seems to be motivated more by his dislike of global-warming campaigners than any informed scientific opinion. When he argues that life can survive on increased levels of CO2 he's missing the point. No one said it couldn't. It is the swiftness of the change that will bring on catastrophe - and we are far more vulnerable now that there are 7 billion of us crowded mostly around the world's coastlines, utterly dependant on industrial agriculture for our food.

Changing tack somewhat jarringly he then suggests a simple, no-nonsense way of tackling climate change.

And what is this suggestion? Pump the atmosphere full of sulphur dioxide. What does sulphur dioxide produce when it reacts with water? Sulphuric Acid. Brilliant.

William French

London W5

Dominic Lawson is quite mistaken on a number of things, but none more so than the idea that the best solution to climate change would be one that doesn't involve changing our behaviour in any way. Our way of life does not cause just one single impact that requires a cheap and convenient "solution", but has a vast and complex series of implications for the environment.

We would do well to remember that the ecosystem we continue to destroy is what supports all life on this Earth, and without it we are sunk. Our escalating carbon emissions are a prime example; if climate change doesn't get us, then ocean acidification certainly will.

Robert McSweeney

Peterborough

David Cameron is wasting his energy

The report "Cameron: I will ban TV stand-by buttons" (17 October) highlights the Conservative leader's idea that he will solve the problem of electrical stand-by losses through a UK-only, voluntary-based process. As you rightly point out, product energy-efficiency standards are being regulated at EU level.

The EU's Ecodesign of Energy Using Products law has already set standards for stand-by, as well as lightbulbs, fridges and industrial motors, and is now preparing laws on boilers, computers, TVs, set-top boxes, and many other products. If Cameron is really concerned about energy efficiency, he should work to strengthen these EU laws, not create pointless talking shops with companies.

Germana Canzi

London EC1

Don't panic about 'President' Blair

Could we not calm the hysteria produced in some people ("Save Europe from this American stooge", 14 October) by understanding that "president" in the European Union context is in fact an adoption of the French word "president" - ie "chairman" - rather than President in the Obama sense. A lot of emotion is being generated by people who misunderstand this distinction and are fearful of some US-style of federal organisation.

Whoever gets this job will simply be chairing a very varied and diverse association of national interests, calling them European, and trying to represent them. God help him (or her) I say.

Angela Peyton

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Pity for MPs over expense claims

I actually do feel sorry for those MPs who've been asked to pay back sums as the result of a retrospective changing of the rules. We are all rightly furious about a few politicians who've cheated the system, and very

annoyed about many others who've milked it while keeping within the rules. But it really won't do to rewrite history and say that allowances should have been lower, and then for party leaders to get all pious about paying money back.

If, when I worked in publishing, my employer had gone through my receipts three years on and told me that I'd bought an author a drink too many and asked for a repayment, I'd have felt demeaned and furious. Why shouldn't some MPs feel the same?

Don Manley

OXFORD

Dylan's foresight

In deciding to release his Christmas CD last week (review, 16 October), Bob Dylan obviously had the possible postal strike in mind, when late October may be the last posting date for Christmas parcels to such faraway places as Colwyn Bay or St Albans, for instance.

John Hall

Telford, Shropshire

Gas savings

While your campaign encourages the energy companies to behave well and sensibly (17 October), one small change to the charging structure would make a large change to our motivation to save energy. My gas bill is currently charged at around 8p per kilowatt hour on the first chunk of gas used and 2.5p on the rest. So, if I use less energy, I only get rewarded at the lower rate. If I paid a flat rate, the average would be about 5p per Kwh - in other words, my motivation to save energy would be doubled. Simple.

Robert Swan

West Bergholt, Essex

Female priests?

To be consistent, if the BNP can be prosecuted for breaking the laws on race in their entry rules, then should the Roman Catholic Church not be prosecuted for denying employment to women as priests and violating laws on equality of opportunity for both sexes? They have yet to explain how "In Christ there is no male or female" (St Paul) does not apply.

Rose Moloney

Findhorn, Morayshire

The kids are alright

I can assure Philip Hensher ("Two small children, one hideous journey", 19 October) that with regard to looking after children, nothing lasts for long. No sooner are they out of nappies than they're kicking people's ankles on trains. Next it's nursery, Sats, spots and (who knows?) maybe even Exeter University. The parents will have the real consolation of a difficult job well done, the palpable contempt of fellow travellers a distant memory.

Jim Vickers

Redcar, Cleveland

Champagne etiquette

Further to correspondence from Simon Robinson and Mike Abbott (letters, 15 & 16 October) regarding the varied drinking habits of the Conservatives and New Labour; as a proud paid-up member of the Liberal Democrats, I have one question, "What's champagne?"

John Schluter

Guildford

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