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Letters

Your letters

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Don't slur activists with the eco-terrorist label

It was very disappointing to see the label 'eco-terrorist' used to slur environmental campaigners ('Police warn of growing threat from eco-terrorists', News, last week). Neither in Britain nor in the US have even the most radical environmental activists attacked people rather than property.

Your article is misinformed on a number of points. Rather than a single, centralised organisation, Earth First! is an identity adopted by various informal networks, with quite different histories in Britain and America. The story speaks of links between US and UK campaigners and the Earth Liberation Front, but our research showed that the ELF never took off in the UK. Research on environmental direct action taken in the name of Earth First! in the past 16 years shows that activists are overwhelmingly committed to nonviolence, and are not using terrorism, violence, or any other direct action to seek to reduce the Earth's human population.

When, in the late 1990s, some American politicians and media started to call activists 'eco-terrorists', it was the start of a concerted campaign which prepared the way for repressive policing and new laws curtailing fundamental civil liberties. Is the same thing about to happen here?

Brian Doherty,

Senior Lecturer in Politics, Keele University

Tim Doyle,

Professor of Politics and International Relations, Keele University

Graeme Hayes,

Senior Lecturer in French Studies, Aston University

Chris Rootes,

Professor of Environmental Politics, University of Kent

Clare Saunders,

RCUK Research Fellow in Energy and Climate Politics,
University of Southampton

Your article takes as the basis for a very serious accusation the fact that some people may have posted messages on the internet stating that overpopulation is a major ecological issue. This is ludicrous. There are many theorists and commentators who make the same arguments and are never accused of potentially planning murderous acts.

Environmental activists engaging in legitimate civil disobedience are presented as planning to resort to terrorist acts, without any evidence.

We want to highlight that no Climate Camp has resulted in a conviction for any offence of violence. Every year since the inception of the Climate Camp, the police have warned about lone mavericks with dangerous intents. They have never materialised. Climate change is such an emergency that everyone from Al Gore to Nasa's James Hansen, to a jury of ordinary people at Maidstone crown court last month, is coming out in support of direct action and civil disobedience to prevent it.

Kevin Smith

Climate Camp Media Team
London N1

Enough of Brand's self-justification

Russell Brand's conversation with Miranda Sawyer (OM, last week) can be summarised as: 'I didn't mean anything bad. We were just having a laugh. It was stupid. I'm not going to change.' Would you seriously accept similar comments from a school bully who uses her/his mobile phone to spread innuendo and half-truth? No, of course not. And yet, as a teacher, I have heard those comments from bullies countless times over the last 40 years. The bullies actually believe them. So it doesn't help when a 'celebrity' such as Brand comes up with the same self-justifying claptrap.

I would like to see Brand and [Jonathan] Ross involved in a documentary about the effects of bullying. It could open with a shot of the two of them at the grave of a child who hanged himself because of cyber-bullying. It could end with them talking to camera about what they have learned from their appalling behaviour.

Dr Stuart Newton

Peacehaven
East Sussex

Prisoners must be allowed to vote

Your story on votes for prisoners (News, last week) warned that the next general election could be illegal if the government fails to heed a unanimous ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. The blanket ban on sentenced prisoners voting was declared unlawful in 2004. An appeal to the Grand Chamber failed in 2005. Since then government has done all it can to delay implementing the ruling.

Most European countries allow sentenced prisoners the vote. Eighteen, including Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain, have no ban.

The case for reform rests on the view that voting should not be a privilege; it is a human right. Giving prisoners the vote would enable them to take the responsibilities that come with citizenship and may encourage politicians to take more interest in prisons.

Juliet Lyon,

Director, Prison Reform Trust

Bobby Cummines,

Chief Executive, UNLOCK

Shami Chakrabarti,

Director, Liberty

Lord Ramsbotham,

Former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

Peter Bottomley

MP

Save art students as well as art

We are writing to express our support for the campaign to raise £50 million to save two Titian paintings for the nation. We would, however, like to issue a warning and a plea: please do not forget today's young artists who are embarking on their careers. They need your support too. The students of today have the potential to be the next generation of world-leading artists. However, as the costs of education become increasingly prohibitive, and the financial climate darkens, we risk losing many gifted students. Scholarships can transform a young person's life.

The government has recently launched a scheme that will see it match donated funds raised by universities over the next three years. The question we would like us all to consider is that if two magnificent Titian paintings are valued at £50 million, what price countless future generations of artists, designers, journalists and actors?

Sir John Tusa Chairman, University of the Arts, London

Nigel Carrington, Rector, University of the Arts, London

Britain's bees are all in danger

Your report on the situation of honey bees is very worrying ('Artificially bred bees could fight hive disease', News, last week). What is equally worrying is

the fate of the over 300 other species of bee in Britain. The wet winter of 2000 drowned many underground hibernating bees and they have been slow to recover. One way people can help is to leave rough areas in gardens to provide nesting sites. A regular succession of suitable flowers throughout the year to provide food for bees will also help.

David Burgess

Hawkhurst

Kent

Twist in the tale

The image of the liver, gall bladder, stomach, duodenum and pancreas accompanying the review, by Rachel Aspden, of Will Self's book *Liver* (Review, last week), was upside down. Was this an intentional sign to convey the distress the author's former well-reported intemperate habits have occasioned on his innards?

Dr Ian Thompson

Bromley

Kent

Write to us

Letters, which may be edited, should include a full name and postal address and be sent to: Letters to the Editor, The Observer, 3-7 Herbal Hill, London EC1R 5EJ (to be received by noon Thursday). **Fax: 020 7837 7817**. Email: letters@observer.co.uk (please insert Letters to the Editor in subject field).

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