UN summit at risk from US
From Captain P. J. D. Kenes, RN(ret)
Sir, It is reported that, in advance next month’s United Nations summit, John Bolton, the new US Ambassador to the UN, has tabled 750 amendments to the draft proposed by the UK, to ensure the agreement of the summit. Without question the UN is in great need of reform, but many of Mr Bolton’s amendments would appear to be so destructive of its status as to suggest that the United States has lost patience with the whole concept of a world governed under principles of multilateral consensus. If this is so, it is a grave matter, indeed a “Pax Americana,” however stable and benevolent, would be a global dictatorship under another name, but far more worrying would be the situation which would arise should another superpower emerge to challenge US pre-eminence.

Her Majesty’s Government would seem to be in danger of making a decision of great difficulty but of profound importance. Should we continue to stand by our great ally, right or (in this case) wrong, or do we still consider, and continue to support the concept of a revived United Nations?

PETER KIMM
Emsworth, Hampshire

Diesel fools
From Mr Tony FitzHugh
Sir, I gather that 400 times a day a UK-flu diesel vehicle with petrol, with very expensive and unnecessary conversions. This is a problem that the motor industry should address. For example, the pump room at the BP garage next to my house could have a cross-section that is round, triangular, square, pentagonal and so on, according to the fuel type. A plug-in piece of plastic would convert all existing cars at minimal cost.

PLINT PRYDAID
Reigate, Surrey

Exams: criticised the system, not the students
From Mr Norman Isaac
Sir, Alice Mils (Comment, August 31) contends that our exam system teaches nothing useful or "the good stuff". My son, aged 15, has just taken GCSE exams in French and religious studies; his ability to converse on a range of everyday subjects is impressive. His grades in these two subjects are consistent with his ability to discuss a variety of topics that are of his interests. He has graduated a high mark because he is not a straight A student, but he excels in his range of subjects. These are the skills he will need in his life, and these are the skills that the exam system is designed to assess.

NORMAN ISAAC
Wishawden, London
normanisaac@aol.com

From Mr Robert Dewar
Sir, I agree with Alice Mils that the current exam system does nothing more than test the ability to conform; there is no room for originality of thought.

For many years I’ve deplored the trend towards "vocational training. My brother, a successful nuclear engineer, envies me my old-fashioned, non-vocational schooling, which taught me pleasure in breadth of learning. In his own words he has "nothing more than training for a career", whilst I enjoy the infinitely more rewarding advantages of having received an education.

Conformity is needed; it is the glue in society. But the current system fails in both regards.

ROBERT DEWAR
High Wycombe

From Mrs Khorshed Dinshaw
Sir, As usual at this time of year the news media are full of negative comments on exam results.

Most children have no chance to celebrate their achievements within the system we currently have. As the mother of a child who has recently taken her GCSE results, I find it difficult because there is little recognition of the genuine hard work that has gone into achieving these results.

The fact is that we should be allowing our children to celebrate their successes for as long as is possible before their achievements year after year are no incentive to their pursuing excellence as they go further in life.

KHORDSH DINSHAW
Buckinghamshire

Locum services a service
From Mrs Muriel Sanbury
Sir, You assume (leading article, August 16) that locum services must form part of every child’s secondary education, but many achieve no great profiency in, or relevance to, the world of work. The locum system is not designed for success beyond very simple conversation.

As medical students, in our studies in General Practice, we are taught to observe, to notice, to sort information, to interpret. We are far from being able to have a conversation in GCSE, a level at which we can safely assume and costs to teach language or to cope with medical conditions.

Moreover, there is no financial incentive for locums to teach. The locum system, which allows general practitioners to spend more time in their homes, has been limited and diminishing success. The locum system is a standard which cannot cope with the"to the benefit of self-discipline.

Sir, Angela Ahrendts, the head of the Apple store, is led by superfluous politicians. We fail to reject the obsessions of the media, advertising, and business and superfluity of achievements, value behaviour and the trivialities of celebrity. We fail to accept personal responsibility and instead seek to place blame and receive compensation. We seem happy to raise a generation of weakened self-risk, to ignore attempts of initiative and starters to self-discipline.

We tend to ignore the thousands of dedicated and selfless workers who silently do so much good every day.

In this context, the action of Barstings to stem the tide of locum sanctimony, and to re-consider the reactions of some of our correspondents to unemployed fanatics, are welcome signs that, maybe, the tide is turning.

ANDREW DOW
Newton-on-Ouse

Animal testing
From Dr Rudolf Cardinal
Sir, Mr Adolfo Sancenini (letter, August 27) says that animal researchers fear an open debate about animal experimentation. Yet they publish their methods and results openly in scientific journals. It is more likely that they are reticent about the details of their Home Office licences for the same reason that prime ministers are reticent about the details of their holiday: they do not fear open discussion with law-abiding citizens who might question their work, but rather attack by terrorists acting in the name of this opposition. Producing animal experimentation is an admirable goal, and one shared by researchers. Yet, without it our society would be at risk of the unnecessary standard of healthcare and drug safety, or develop new treatments for many diseases.

Join the debate with Times readers worldwide... timesonline.co.uk/debate

CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP

"If the Tories choose the person who ideologically agrees with them the most then the system will work, and they will be yet again on a loser."

Lisa Marie Jones, Shrewsbury

WEARING THE VEIL

SU DOKU

"I have to do a 5x5 Sudoku in the morning — it’s like taking a shower for me. Joyful, but if you feel forced to wear skimpy clothes".

Kamran Hussain, Doha, Qatar

C. Freeman, Bedford, Massachusetts

Preparation for bird flu
From Mr Jeremy Azis
Sir, The threat of the British Veterinary Association says that the next generation of vaccine is inevitable (report, August 20). Much of the recent media focus has been placed on the emergency acquisition of vac-

cines (though there will never be enough of these to cover the whole of the country) and none focused on the lack of a specific vaccine for the new strain of avian flu. Based on my company’s pandemic emergency training and simulation (PETS) exercises, which provided much more emphasis should be placed on emergency management organisations throughout the UK to improve understanding of the particular characteristics of a flu outbreak and how the various organisa-

tions involved should work together to prepare for outbreaks. Prompt, informed, co-ordinated, well-planned control measures by trained staff throughout the UK at the beginning of an out-

break could reduce considerably the chances of an epidemic developing.

Jeremy Azis
Managing Director, VectorCommand Ltd
Harvard, Massachusetts

Youth hostsels
From Mr Colin Logan
Sir, The chairman of the Youth Hostels Association (letter, August 26) has not addressed the underlying issue of the possible wholesale closure of youth hostels.

If the YHA were to lose 90 of its operations (letter, August 20) then it would radically alter the situation.

The YHA’s association’s trustees must prune the network of unsuccessful youth hostels, they must slash costs and they must promote the movement amongst cities all over the country with the strong YHA, not an emissions agency.

C. T. LOGAN
(Chief Executive, YHA, Glencorse, Bathgate, West Lothian, Scotland)

Simple shopping
From Mrs Barbara Self
Sir, Your report (Comment, August 23) and Nargis Walker (letter, August 29) who deplore our shopping culture, should remember that no one else does.

BARBARA SELF
Sutton-in-the-Isle

Cumbria

Electric defence
From Mr Claude Swain
Sir, You report that the next generation of Army vehicles could be battery powered (report, August 20). Is this because there will be no more petrol by the time they are ready for service?

CLAUDE SWAIN
Chandler’s Ford, Hampshire

Brainy males
From Dr Paul Weston Smith
Sir, There is a simple explanation for the difference in the way men and women use their brains (letters, August 30). Women are obsessed with process, men are obsessed with outcome. This is why women watch soap operas, which are endless, and men watch the news. Why? When a couple go out for an evening, the husband is waiting in the car in the drive with the engine running whilst his wife is still deciding what the next coat to wear.

PAUL WESTON SMITH
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