BRAZIL

Sir—Your instructive essay on Brazil confounds inequality with poverty (March 21st). Either can exist with or without the other. Educated Brazilians may be concerned about inequality. Ordinary Brazilians worry about poverty: they are either desperately poor, or remember how poor they once were.

Recent research by the University of São Paulo and the University of Wisconsin shows that from 1970 to 1980 the incidence of extreme poverty ($20 per month per family member) corrected for inflation) dropped from 44% to 18% of the nation's families. This was due mostly to economic growth, generating new jobs at an annual rate of 3%, far above the 2.5% per year growth of the population.

Countering a population increase from 93m to 119m, this meant a stunning drop in the absolute numbers of individuals living in extreme poverty, from 45m in 1970 to 15m in 1980. In the 1970s Brazil's economic growth improved the lot of vast numbers of the poor.

Columbus, 
Ohio 
ARCHIBALD O. HALLER

The Pope's tour

Sir—Your article about the papal visit to central America (March 12th) spoke of the Pope as though he were a politician anxious to improve his chances of re-election.

Central America is an area where there is a great deal of suffering, and where the majority of the population look to the Pope, as their supreme leader. The essence of pastoral care is identifying with suffering, absorbing it and offering up to God; intrinsic to it is being where the suffering happens. As an expression of pastoral care, the papal visit was profoundly needed, and that it happened was willed by the Pope. The initiation of political action to end the suffering, even if it had been successful, would have been a secondary objective.

London

ANTONY HURST

AMERICA'S SPANIARDS

Sir—The question about the propriety of Chicago being the American site of the 1992 celebration of Columbus's discovery of America (February 26th) overlooks some important facts. Only two countries in Latin America have more Spanish-speaking people than the United States—Mexico and Colombia. Rapidly, people of Spanish-American ancestry are becoming the largest identifiable minority in the United States population and will soon exceed the number of blacks. Finally, Chicago has a large Spanish-speaking population of its own.

Cincinnati, 
Ohio 
ROBERT E. MANLEY

ARAB PENINSULA

Sir—Your survey about the "Arab Peninsula" (February 19th) is an exceptional instance of edifying journalism. It poses the dilemma faced by the west in the shadow of Opec's recent infiRnity.

Since the breakdown of the January Opec meeting in Geneva and unilateral decreases in the cost of crude oil by Opec and non-Opec nations alike, some see the west clear economic sailing ahead with abundant and "inexpensive" petroleum.

Instead of breaking out the Dom Perignon in collective celebration of Opec's mortal state—an illusion if there ever was one—the west should exploit Opec's transient disability in an effort to keep supply strong. This can only be accomplished by, first, applying substantial duties on all imported oil; second, increasing oil reserves; third, giving generous economic incentives to its own depressed domestic oil industries for increased exploration and drilling.

Failing to do this, western economic expansion due to cheaper oil prices will inescapably absorb much of the "glut" that so many people are glutting over today. And Saudi Arabia, so politely set by the Saudis will be spruced: Opec increases its prices (the non-Opec exporters will raise theirs, too), and the law of supply and demand will rule the day, just as those sagacious students of Adam Smith—knew it would all along.

Washington, DC

JAMES COLLINS

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Sir—Your American readers owe gratitude to The Economist for their article (February 12th) calling attention to the threat of a glut of international studies in the United States. I do not think that the administration hoped that the deletion from the fiscal 1984 budget of the very modest amount of $26m earmarked for international studies would pass unnoticed. I suspect that it was unaware of its existence.

For 20 years I have been director of Indiana University's Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Centre—the only one of its kind in the country—and one of some 90 area centres functioning under Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

The activities of the centres have been praised by the General Accounting Office, not known for its indulgent judgment. To the meantime, commission after commission—the last one, set up by President Carter, presented its report in November, 1979—emphasised the importance of international studies and described their desperate situation. The recommendations remain a dead letter.

Specialising as we do in the study of Turkic and Mongol populations (including those of the Soviet Union) we welcomed the bills to strengthen Soviet studies introduced by Congressman Charles H. LThomas (Democrat) and Senator Lugar (Republican), both from Indiana. The International Education Act was passed by Congress in 1966, but no money has ever been provided to carry out its aims. The dismantling of the present framework of the international studies section, the department of education would be a blow which would throw back to zero all that has been accomplished in this field in the 1950s.

Bloomington, 
Indiana

DEAN A.

Baa-baa bank sheep

Sir—To create a secondary market for syndicated bank loans among countries, the United States could offer to buy some of the loans from the banks, at an available discount.

An open invitation to sell these loans would pose few problems for bankers but would establish securitisation values which would then be applied in accounting for these loans in bank balance sheets.

This type of operation would not be restricted to the IMF could be extended to include United States Federal Reserve and other western monetary authorities, in conjunction with their international development aid budgets. No bank may be at a disadvantage, but I doubt it.

Geneva 
DAVID C. MITRO

PRISONS

Sir—Instead of crowding prisoners into one cell for months where they can neither move nor talk to each other, the inmates are taken each day to work in the fields and returned to their cells at night. I am not at all sure that this is a solution.

Sheffield 
ROYCE BARK

LABOUR'S RETREAT

Sir—You amaze (March 5th) "Labour needs primaries" to English politicians, to be considered "as responsible" as their American counterparts?

Loretto, 
Pennsylvania 
PETER N.

SIR—I enjoyed your correspondent's "Dennis's retreat to what?" (March 5th). Would it not, now, have been more appropriate to depict the unhappy Foot and his comrades as retreating towards Moscow?

West Germany 
PETER M.

The Economist Intelligence Unit

Malaysia, Brunei

Malaysia's relations with the UK have improved. Economic growth slowed to 3.9% in 1982 and a similar rate is expected this year with weak domestic demand being a major constraint. In the run-up to independence Brunei declared that it will become an Islamic state and this has led to a Chinese exodus. These and other issues are discussed in the latest Review—No. 1 1983.

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