

# LETTERS

## Brazil

SIR—Your instructive essay on Brazil confuses inequality with poverty (March 12th). 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 4.5%, 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 in extreme poverty, from 45m (1970) to 25m (1980). So 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 it 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 what mattered most. 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 infirmity.

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 in the west see clear economic sailing ahead with abundant and "reasonably priced" oil.

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 gloating over today. And it is then that the clever trap so politely set by the Saudis will be sprung: 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—the Gulf princes—knew it would all along.

Washington, DC JAMES COLLINS

## International studies

SIR—Your American readers owe gratitude to *The Economist* for the article (February 12th) calling attention to the threat hanging over 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, and totally insufficient, 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 judgments. In 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 Hamilton (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 of the department of education would be a blow which would throw back to zero all efforts undertaken in this field since 1958.

Bloomington,  
Indiana DAVID C. MITCHELL

## Baa-baa bank sheep

SIR—To create a secondary market for syndicated bank loans to sovereign countries, the IMF could offer to buy some of the loans from the banks, at a small discount.

An open invitation to treat these loans would pose problems for bankers but would establish some free-market values which would then be applied in counting for these loans in bank balance sheets.

This type of operation is not restricted to the IMF; it 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 wish to take advantage of such offers—but I doubt it.

Geneva DAVID C. MITCHELL

## Prisons

SIR—Instead of crowding thousands of prisoners into one cell for months where they can take each other how to commit crimes, they should each get a month in solitary. It would be a bigger deterrent to have nob to talk with, no visitors, no radio, television or newspapers.

As three prisoners would occupy the cell for three months instead of six it would cut prison population by half so half the prisons could be sold to make money instead of spending more money on prisons.

Sheffield ROYCE BRADSHAW

## Labour's retreat

SIR—You amaze (March 5th) "Labour needs primaries"? British parties, then, to be as "responsible" as their American counterparts?

Loretto,  
Pennsylvania PETER MARRAS

SIR—I enjoyed your coverage of Labour's retreat to what? (March 5th). Would it not, however, have been more appropriate to have depicted the unhappy Foot and his comrades as retreating towards Moscow?

West Germany PETER MARRAS

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## 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 has 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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