

# 1. New juice range made from wonky fruit and veg aims to cut waste

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 1 May 2018**

‘Wonky’ fruit and vegetables that would have been thrown away are now being used to make a new range of juices, in one of a number of assaults on food waste.

One of the UK’s largest fresh produce growers has teamed up with a Spanish fruit supplier to create a new product, Waste Not, which will stop edible but visually ‘imperfect’ ingredients such as fresh celery, beetroot and oranges from being dug back into the soil, or used for animal feed. The new juices will go on sale in branches of Tesco.

The move is one of a growing number of innovations to reduce food waste throughout the supply chain, following criticism of supermarkets and suppliers that perfectly good food is being thrown out while UK consumers are relying increasingly on food banks.

Supermarket chains have been selling ‘wonky veg’ ranges for some time, at discounted prices to make them more appealing to consumers. In April, Morrisons added wonky chillies to its misshapen fruit and veg range – the same heat and flavour but costing 39% less than standard chillies. Defects include missing stalks, imperfect colour and extreme curves.

Meanwhile, companies such as Rubies in the Rubble specialise in making chutneys and sauces from surplus ingredients that would otherwise go to waste, and in May is launching a new range of ‘vegan-friendly mayonnaise’ (made from aquafaba, the liquid in tinned chick peas) through Ocado.

Soft fruit, root vegetables and salad are particularly prone to waste. One in 10 strawberries in the UK ended up as waste according to a recent study by the government’s food waste reduction advisory body Wrap – equivalent to 10,000 tonnes and valued at £24m. And one in five lettuces were unharvested, with 38,000 tonnes lost with a value of £7m.

In the US the problem is even worse. Americans throw away almost as much food as they eat because of a “cult of perfection”, inflicting a heavy environmental toll.

## **2. New Mexico Democrat Poised to Become First Native American Congresswoman**

**Cecily Hilleary – VOA News – June 06, 2018**

Native Americans have been largely absent from the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. But that could soon change. Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna, won the Democratic nomination for New Mexico's 1st Congressional District, and if predictions are correct, could become the first Native American woman in Congress.

“Tonight, we made history,” Haaland told supporters Tuesday. “Our win is a victory for working people, a victory for women, and a victory for Indian Country.”

Haaland, a graduate of the University of New Mexico’s law school, is no stranger to politics. A single mother, she was the first Native woman to chair the state’s Democratic Party (2015 to 2017). In 2012, she served as the state’s vote director during President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign and is crediting with helping him win in New Mexico.

“What makes Haaland's primary win so important is that she is running in a district that's favorable to Democrats,” said Mark Trahan, editor of Indian Country Today, who has closely tracked the campaigns of dozens of Native Americans running for federal, state and local office across the country this year. “She is likely to rewrite history - either alone or with another Native woman.”

Climate change and renewable energy top Haaland’s political agenda. She is an outspoken critic of President Donald Trump’s environmental policy.

“The Trump administration is the worst nightmare to happen to the environment in decades,” she told VOA in February. “And then we have got the Bureau of Land Management working overtime to sell off leases to lands so that people can frack.”

She is also critical of Trump’s immigration policy and has promised to work to stop deportations and defend DREAMers, those protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The federal government program, created in 2012 under Obama, allows children brought to this country illegally the temporary right to live, study and work in the U.S.

Native Americans in New Mexico, who account for 10% of the state’s population, did not get the right to vote until 1948.

### **3. Wimbledon serves up ban on plastic straws**

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 1 May 2018**

Wimbledon would not be the same without a thirst-quenching Pimm's, but this year visitors to the annual tennis championships will be served the beverage without the customary plastic straw.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club announced on Tuesday that no plastic straws would be used in its bars, cafes and restaurants during this year's Wimbledon fortnight.

Hundreds of thousands of cups of Pimm's are sold at the tournament each year – a large number served in plastic containers with plastic lids and plastic straws that can be taken on to the courts. Last year more than 400,000 plastic straws were used during the tournament.

But this year as part of a wider sustainability plan, Wimbledon will not be using plastic straws during the tournament. Recyclable paper straws will be used instead.

The UK uses an estimated 8.5bn straws a year, according to the Marine Conservation Society, and plastic straws are one of the top 10 items found in beach clean-ups. A single plastic straw can take up to 500 years to decompose, and the buildup can wreak havoc among marine life.

Also unveiled at the Wimbledon press conference on Tuesday was the provision of a paper bag option for merchandise bought at shops during the event. This will complement the existing multi-use, oxo-degradable plastic bags that are gradually being phased out.

The Wimbledon chief executive, Richard Lewis, said there would also be 87 free water refill points available for public use in the grounds, as well as 21 water fountains. The number of water points had nearly doubled since 2014, he said.

Recycling point signage and waste collection at the tournament is also being improved, although in 2017 only 1.4% of waste generated over the fortnight went to landfill.

## 4. Gucci Donates Scrap Fabric to Migrant Dressmaking Shop

**Associated Press – June 06, 2018**

Nigerian women who were trafficked to Italy to work as prostitutes have found work in a handbag and dressmaking shop that recently received some top-notch raw materials: 4,000 meters (4,374 yards) of leftover fabric from Gucci.

The initiative was announced Wednesday in Rome, complete with a fashion show by the Nigerian dressmakers and a group of Italian design students who helped teach them to sketch and sew the designs, which mix Gucci silks, satins and cotton with bright African prints.

Sister Rita Giaretta, who runs a home for rescued migrants in the southern city of Caserta, said the aim of the project was to give the women dignified work so they aren't reliant on handouts.

"Giving them their dignity means putting them back on their feet and believing in themselves and not seeing themselves only as in a situation of need," Giaretta said.

The New Hope tailoring cooperative, which has a storefront shop in Caserta, was born in 2004 as a project affiliated with Giaretta's residence and until now made mostly bags and accessories.

Its workers branched out into clothing after attending in-training workshops put on by design students from the local high school. The Gucci bolts of fabric were donated as part of the fashion house's philanthropic environmental initiative, Equilibrium, which seeks to distribute leftover leather and fabrics to organizations that work with marginalized groups.

"When I saw the fabric I was amazed," said Josephine Phillips, a 35-year-old Nigerian woman who works in the New Hope workshop and modeled a headscarf and reversible handbag Wednesday. "We weren't expecting such beautiful things — satins, materials I didn't know."

Between 10,000 and 30,000 Nigerian women are believed to be currently working as prostitutes in Italy, forced into the sex trade to pay off debts to human smugglers who arranged for them to get here.

The Italian government has tripled its funding to help them get off the streets and into safe houses, but advocates say there aren't enough beds to go around.

## **5. Raise a toast! New beers made from leftover bread help to cut food waste**

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 28 Apr 2018**

Beer and sandwiches have gone together ever since Harold Wilson invited trade union leaders for talks at No 10. Now brewers have gone one better and created a beer made from leftover sandwich bread.

It is a tasty solution to the shocking daily waste of bread, with more than 24 million slices thrown away in Britain every day by consumers alone. Three new beers will soon be available at Marks & Spencer made from surplus bread from its sandwich factory that would otherwise be discarded or turned into animal feed.

Suffolk brewery Adnams is using the crusted “ends” of sliced sandwich loaves – frozen by M&S supplier Greencore in Northampton and then sent to the brewery’s headquarters in Southwold – to create the new beers, which are already on sale in some M&S stores and will soon be available to order online.

Making beer out of bread isn’t new – its history stretches back 4,000 years to a time when brewers and bakers worked together. The difference is that the new beers use bread that would otherwise go to waste.

Bread is made from grains such as barley, wheat and rye – exactly the same raw materials that are used to make beer. In this case, surplus crusts are mashed down into the mix and replace some of the malted barley traditionally used in brewing to create the Used Our Loaf range.

Each batch of the new beer will use 700kg of surplus bread with three times the quantity of malted barley. And using bread has an added benefit of helping to reduce carbon emissions from the energy-intensive brewing process.

The three Used Our Loaf beers are a triple English hop pale ale, a raspberry fruit beer and an Earl Grey pale ale. If the drinks prove popular with customers, the process will be rolled out across a wider range of beers.

## 6. Aldi named as best British supermarket for sustainable fish

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 18 Apr 2018**

The discount grocer Aldi has been named the best British high street supermarket for sustainable fish, according to a new league table.

Some 79% of the seafood range stocked by the fast-growing German discounter is certified sustainable, the annual survey from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) found. This year's results also show that supermarkets are selling more sustainable seafood than ever before – a 60% rise over the last two years.

The MSC is the international NGO that sets the standard for sustainable fishing around the world and its blue label indicates that seafood has been sustainably caught and traced back to its source. More than 20,000 seafood products worldwide now carry the MSC blue fish label.

Second after Aldi is Sainsbury's, which sells the largest number of certified products – 226 – making up 76% of its wild seafood range. Next is discounter Lidl with 72%, Waitrose on 67%, the Co-op on 61% and Tesco with 48%. For Marks & Spencer, however, the figure is just 19%. [...]

However, the survey only refers to products which are MSC-certified. Both Waitrose and M&S use third party independent verification that is not reflected in these findings.

Many retailers have made commitments to make their seafood range 100% sustainable over the next few years, the survey said. Singled out for the biggest improvements this year was Asda, which increased its certified sustainable seafood range from just 17 to 52 products, now totalling 38% of its range.

“The majority of British supermarkets are making a real investment in the future of their seafood” said Toby Middleton, head of market operations at the MSC. “If you're buying MSC-labelled fish or seafood in one of these top five supermarkets, you're helping to make a positive difference to the world's oceans. Our league table shows that retailers are offering their customers clear labelling and the chance to make a difference, helping to protect fish stocks for our children and our grandchildren.”

## 7. Current Miss America: Scholarships Don't Rely on Swimsuits

**Associated Press – June 06, 2018**

ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY — In the nine months that Cara Mund has been Miss America, not once has she ever had to don a swimsuit as part of her duties.

The reigning Miss America told The Associated Press on Tuesday night she supports the decision of the Miss America Organization to drop the swimsuit competition, starting this September.

The former Miss North Dakota said Miss America is all about scholarship opportunities for young women, adding they shouldn't have to display their bodies in swimwear in order to get college assistance.

"Swimsuits should never equal scholarships," she said. "I believe that a woman's lifestyle and fitness can be showcased in a way that does not display her in a swimsuit. The Miss America Organization is a scholarship program. No woman should ever feel like her physical appearance limits her from seeking out these scholarship opportunities."

Mund will be the last Miss America to have worn a swimsuit onstage during the nationally televised competition.

Gretchen Carlson, a former Miss America and the new head of the organization's board of trustees, made the announcement Tuesday.

Carlson, whose sexual harassment lawsuit against Fox News Chairman Roger Ailes led to his departure, said the board had heard from potential contestants who lamented, "We don't want to be out there in high heels and swimsuits."

The announcement came after a shake-up at the organization that resulted in the top three positions being held by women. The overhaul was triggered by an email scandal last December in which Miss America officials mocked winners' intelligence, looks and sex lives.

Instead of showing off in a bathing suit, each contestant will interact with the judges to "highlight her achievements and goals in life and how she will use her talents, passion and ambition to perform the job of Miss America," the organization said.

## 9. In India, A Trio of Unlikely Heroes Wages War on Plastic

**Associated Press – June 04, 2018**

For more than 25 years, Ram Nath has lived on the banks of the Yamuna River under a 19th-century iron bridge. Each morning, the wiry man walks a few steps from his makeshift hut and enters the black, sludgy waters of one of India's most polluted rivers. He is fishing for trash.

Hundreds of garbage collectors live on the Yamuna's banks in New Delhi, making \$2 to \$4 per day recycling plastic waste collected from the river. Nath is one of a handful of New Delhi residents waging war against the tsunami of plastic threatening to swamp India. They include a 9th-grade student who convinces posh restaurants to give up plastic straws and a businessman whose company makes plates and bowls from palm leaves.

Amardeep Bardhan believes he can make a difference. His company, Prakritii, makes plates and bowls from the leaves of south India's areca palm trees. The plateware, which has the feel of thick paper plates, biodegrades in seven to ten days, he said. The company doesn't harvest any palm trees, but waits for leaves to fall to the ground.

“In this entire process, we are not harming the environment,” said Bardhan. “We are generating something from the waste, people are loving it, and then it goes back as a waste.”

While Prakritii initially made most of its income from exports to Europe and the U.S., Bardhan said the market for eco-friendly products is growing in India, especially among younger people who value quality over price. His company generates more than \$150,000 in revenue each year.

Some fancy restaurants in and around New Delhi are doing away with plastic straws and replacing them with paper straws. That's largely because of Aditya Mukarji, a student who launched his campaign after seeing a video of two veterinarians trying to remove a plastic straw from a turtle's nose.

“People listen more to children bringing up environmental concerns,” said Mukarji, who has helped replace more than 500,000 plastic straws at restaurants and hotels since he started his campaign in March.

## 10. Want to save the world from hunger? Start by not wasting food, shoppers told

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 12 Apr 2018**

Consumers are being urged to use their imagination and create recipes from food that would otherwise go to waste, as part of a campaign to raise money to tackle global hunger.

The World Food Programme has launched a social media movement, #RecipeforDisaster, with the aim of making the public more conscious of the food waste they generate. It is hoped the initiative, which is being launched in Britain first before being rolled out globally, will encourage people to share recipes online and make a donation.

Although there is enough food in the world to go around, one-third of the 4bn tonnes produced each year is wasted, costing the global economy nearly \$750bn (£530bn) annually.

A recent study found that no African country is likely to reach the UN target of ending childhood malnutrition by 2030, and that malnutrition indicators remained “persistently high” across the length of the Sahel, with 14 countries affected.

“If we can tackle the problem of food waste, we could feed 9 billion people every day,” said Corinne Woods of the WFP.

“In developing countries the majority of food is wasted in storage and production, which WFP is helping to address with new technologies and community education. However, in the developed world most food is lost on the plate. Recipe for Disaster aims to confront this issue and get people to take action by creating a meal and making a donation.”

On a typical day, the WFP has 5,000 trucks, 20 ships and 70 planes on the move, delivering food and other assistance to those most in most need.

The campaign encourages consumers to check for food close to its best-before date that is still edible.

Despite concerted efforts to reduce food waste through the entire supply chain, the British government’s waste advisory body, Wrap, says £13bn-worth of edible food is thrown out in the UK every year. With consumers often unaware of the difference between a use-by and a best-before date, Wrap is overseeing a major simplification of labelling.

## **12. Iceland to be first UK supermarket to cut palm oil from own-brand products**

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 10 Apr 2018**

Iceland is to become the first major UK supermarket to pledge to remove palm oil from all its own-brand foods, in a bid to halt the ongoing destruction of tropical rainforests in south-east Asia.

The frozen food specialist will reveal on Tuesday that the controversial ingredient has already been taken out half of its own-label range, with the rest being reformulated by the end of 2018.

Palm oil – a cheap and mass-produced ingredient renowned for its versatility – is currently found in more than half of all supermarket products, from bread, pastry, biscuits, cereal and chocolate to soap and detergent.

But the complex supply chain means only a small percentage of the palm oil used to make these products comes from an officially approved sustainable source.

Palm oil is also used in cosmetics and biodiesel, and with demand projected to double by 2050 its popularity is set to wreak further havoc on the environment.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, where expanding palm oil and wood pulp plantations are the biggest driver of deforestation, the orangutan is among the wildlife species threatened with extinction. Recent studies show that Bornean orangutan numbers more than halved between 1999 and 2015, with only 70,000–100,000 now remaining.

“Until Iceland can guarantee palm oil is not causing rainforest destruction, we are simply saying ‘no to palm oil’,” said Richard Walker, Iceland managing director, who visited Borneo last November to see the impact of deforestation. “We don’t believe there is such a thing as verifiably ‘sustainable’ palm oil available in the mass market.”

Iceland’s pledge is that by the end of 2018, 100% of the supermarket’s own brand food lines will contain no palm oil, reducing demand by more than 500 tonnes per year.

It has worked with its suppliers to replace palm oil with substitutes such as rapeseed and vegetable oils.

The environmental campaign group Greenpeace has been pressuring manufacturers to “take control” of their supply chains.

## **13. Waitrose to remove all disposable coffee cups from shops this year**

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 10 Apr 2018**

Waitrose plans to remove all disposable coffee cups from its shops by this autumn as part of efforts to reduce plastic and packaging waste and stop millions going into landfill.

Customers who belong to the myWaitrose loyalty scheme will still be able to get free tea or coffee from the stores' self-service machines but will be instead be asked to use a refillable cup, the company said.

The removal of disposable cups will initially take place in nine stores from 30 April as a trial for managing the changeover before the scheme is rolled out nationwide in a phased programme.

The grocery chain said the move would save more than 52m cups a year across the UK.

According to a recent report from the parliamentary environmental audit committee, the UK throws away 2.5bn disposable coffee cups a year. They cannot be recycled by normal systems because they are made from cardboard with a tightly bonded polyethylene liner, which is difficult to remove. As a result, just one in 400 cups is recycled.

“We realise this is a major change, but we believe removing all takeaway disposable cups is the right thing to do for our business and are confident the majority of customers will support the environmental benefits,” said Tor Harris, head of sustainability and responsible sourcing at Waitrose.

Trewin Restorick of the environmental charity Hubbub said: “This is a bold move by Waitrose that should be applauded. It is great to see a major retailer taking decisive action to cut waste in such a high profile part of their business.”

The changes mean myWaitrose members will not be able to claim their free hot drink in the chain's 180 in-store cafes, to avoid customers without a reusable cup who cannot use the self-service machines putting increased pressure on the catering areas.

Instead, myWaitrose members who purchase a tea or coffee in a cafe will get a choice of food options free or with a significant discount.

## 14. New Apple Software Helps Limit Smartphone Use

**Michelle Quinn – VOA News – June 05, 2018**

For Apple users worried about how much time they and their children spend posting photos and videos to their devices, help is on the way.

Apple has announced new controls that will allow parents to remotely limit the amount of time their offspring spend on iPhones and iPads, as well as hold up a mirror to their own online habits. The feature will be available in the next software update.

The move comes as the tech industry faces criticism that it has successfully made its smartphones and apps addictive with little thought for how people's lives may be negatively affected by the distraction of constantly checking their devices.

Earlier this year, major Apple shareholders wrote the company asking that it do more to help parents by providing tools to limit children's screen time, while looking at how being online constantly affects customers' mental health.

Apple appears to have listened to some of these concerns. It is introducing "Screen Time," an app that will give users a weekly report about how much time they spend on their devices and on specific apps, as well as new ways to curb the habit.

Parents can give their children screen time allowances — a specific amount of time they can play a video game or check in with friends on apps such as Snapchat. Once they hit the limit, children will have to ask parents to increase the time allotment.

Apple isn't the only company creating a digital baby sitter of sorts. Last month, Google announced it, too, was giving parents more tools to monitor their and their children's usage.

In addition, Apple revealed new ways it would limit the sharing of customer information, perhaps in response to the firestorm directed at Facebook over how the social media giant mishandled customer data. It has long been part of Apple's message that compared with fellow Silicon Valley companies, Apple cares the most about users' privacy.

"We believe your private data should remain private," said Apple's senior vice president of software engineering, Craig Federighi.

## 15. Fish and chips to curry: UK's favourite dishes at risk from climate change, research shows

**Rebecca Smithers *Consumer affairs correspondent* – The Guardian – 20 Mar 2018**

Some of the UK's best-loved dishes – including fish and chips and chicken tikka masala – could be under threat as a result of climate change, environmentalists warn in a new report on Tuesday.

Warmer seas could see populations of cod – long the staple in fish and chips – replaced by lesser-known substitutes, leading to an “anchovies and chips” fish supper as soon as 2050, the environmental charity WWF said.

Research commissioned for Earth Hour, the world's largest event to protect the planet, found that these and other favourites including the cheese ploughman's platter and lamb cawl (Welsh lamb stew) may taste different and cost more in the future. Crucially, climate change could threaten the supply of the key ingredients in these dishes, leading to substitutes.

Britons could find themselves dining out on algae-fed chicken tikka masala, if chickens need to be fed on alternatives to soy if production is hit by higher temperatures and changes to rainfall. Other key ingredients of a tikka masala, such as rice, tomatoes and onions could all suffer price hikes and shortages as a result of fluctuating weather.

To mark Earth Hour, which starts at 8.30pm on Saturday 24 March, WWF is urging people to make promises to change their life in one small way to help the environment, such as refusing plastic cutlery, carrying a refillable cup or cutting back on meat.

“The threat to these classic dishes just shows that climate change could impact every aspect of our lives in future if we don't act now,” said Gareth Redmond-King, head of energy and climate at WWF. “That's why we want people to eat more sustainably. That doesn't necessarily mean going vegan or vegetarian – it means each of us cutting back on the amount of fish, meat and dairy. If each of us takes a small action, together we can combat climate change and future-proof our best-loved dishes.”

## **16. Stop discriminating against seniors in the workforce**

**Editorial – Toronto Star – June 5, 2018**

It's hard to imagine that any employer would be allowed to deny or cut off a worker's benefits based on the colour of their skin, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

Still, under both Ontario's Human Rights Code and Employment Standards Act employers have been allowed to cut workers off health, dental and life insurance benefits simply because they turned 65.

If that sounds discriminatory and unjust, it's because it is.

Finally, the province's Human Rights Tribunal has ruled that the practice is a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It sends "a message that older workers are essentially of lesser worth and value than their younger co-workers," tribunal vice-chair Yola Grant wrote in her decision.

It's a wonder that employers have been allowed to do this for so long. When Ontario passed a law back in 2006 ending an employer's right to terminate workers when they turned 65, it should have also amended the Human Rights Code and Employment Standards Act to prevent companies from cutting off benefits for senior employees.

Instead, it allowed the situation to drag on for a dozen years.

That was both unfair and bad for the economy as a whole. As the population ages, it makes no sense to discourage older workers from continuing in their jobs.

Three things must happen to fix this problem.

The new provincial government should bring Ontario's legislation into line with the tribunal's ruling, as the Ontario Human Rights Commission is urging.

Employers should not wait for that to happen. Instead, in the spirit of inclusion and fairness they should immediately abide by the ruling.

Finally, the employer that lost the case — the Grand Erie District School Board — should not appeal the decision. Nor should the new Ontario government.

That would just put off the inevitable. Cutting off a person's benefits and insurance simply because they turn 65 is discriminatory. It's a practice that should be ended as quickly as possible.

## 17. Hong Kong's Skyline Farms Harvest More Happiness than Food

**Associated Press – March 28, 2018**

HONG KONG — High above downtown Hong Kong's bustling, traffic-clogged streets, a group of office workers was toiling away not on a corporate acquisition or a public share offering but on harvesting a bumper crop of lettuce atop one of the skyscrapers studding the city's skyline.

It's rooftop farming taken to the extreme, and more about reaping happiness than providing food.

The volunteers were picking butter lettuce, Indian lettuce and Chinese mustard leaf in rows of low black plastic planters on a decommissioned helipad on the 146-meter (480-foot)-high roof of the 38-story Bank of America tower, the scenery: a vertiginous panorama of glass office towers framed by lush mountain peaks and Victoria Harbor.

The farm is run by Rooftop Republic, a three-year-old startup whose founders are tapping growing interest in organic food and taking advantage of unused roof space in the cramped, high-rent Chinese city.

Plenty of other groups or individuals have started cultivating their own rooftop vegetable gardens, said Matthew Pryor, a Hong Kong University architecture professor who has counted at least 60 and thinks there are a lot more he doesn't know about.

Pryor's research found approximately 1,500 rooftop farmers in the city, cultivating a total area of about 1 ½ hectares. He thinks there's potential for that to easily grow to 50,000 people working on a suitable rooftop area of 600 hectares.

He helped set up a farm on top of a university building where volunteers, mainly staff, grow tomatoes, potatoes, strawberries, lettuce, dragonfruit, papaya, beans, peas and squash.

Pryor said he discovered through his research that their main product isn't edible.

"The rooftop farms here produce virtually nothing" compared to Hong Kong's overall consumption, Pryor said. "What they do produce, however, is happiness, and this social capital that they generate is enormous."

The farms can help stressed-out, overworked and socially isolated Hong Kongers be happier and improve their well-being by letting them hang out with their friends and commune with nature.

## 21. Nail salons used as a front for modern slavery

**The Week, May 29, 2018**

The police have warned that British high street nail salons are operating as a front for organised crime, including trafficking and slavery.

The salons are using their cash-only structure to launder money from cannabis farms and prostitution. According to the National Crime Agency (NCA), they are moving child slaves between branches in order to avoid detection. The nail bars are also linked to illegal immigration. The Agency is currently carrying out 500 investigations into modern slavery. Albanians, Vietnamese and British nationals are the most common potential victims.

According to Adam Thompson of the NCA's human trafficking unit: "Nail bars are one of the most prevalent areas where we see Vietnamese victims, usually quite young adult males, around 18 or 19. The gangs... recruit them from Vietnam. People will be told, 'Come to the UK you will get a really good job, you will be paid lots of money which you can send back to your family.' They will then typically use the services of an organised immigration gang... up through China then Russia and into Europe and then into the UK – usually clandestine in the back of a lorry. Then they will be linked up with the gangs in the UK who will put them to work in a network of nail bars."

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) – the body that monitors modern slavery in the UK – reports that instances of shops forcing people to work for free to pay back extortionate debts have increased by 35% since last year. Police recorded 2,255 cases of modern slavery in the last year but estimate there are "tens of thousands" of further offences that go undetected.

"The barbaric nature of modern slavery means it destroys the lives of its victims, which is why we introduced the world-leading Modern Slavery Act 2015 and increased the GLAA funding by £2.6 million a year to tackle modern slavery and wider labour exploitation," Victoria Atkins, minister for crime said in early May.

## **22. Trump promised the NRA he'll continue to support the 2nd Amendment, Sanders says**

**Brian Bennett – Los Angeles Times – 2 March 2018**

President Trump reassured the National Rifle Assn. in a Thursday evening meeting of his support for 2nd Amendment gun rights but stuck by his proposal to set a minimum federal age of 21 to buy long guns, his press secretary said on Friday.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders also indicated that Trump does not support universal background checks for gun buyers, which would expand to include sales at gun shows and over the internet that are currently exempt. The president wants to improve the current system but is “not necessarily” in favor of background checks for all gun purchases, she said.

Trump’s Oval Office meeting with NRA lobbyist Chris Cox came a day after he’d rattled his allies among gun rights groups by telling lawmakers to send him a bill with a number of limits on gun ownership, including the age limit to buy assault weapons like the one used last month in the mass shooting at a Parkland, Fla., high school and several others.

Cox disclosed the meeting on Twitter on Thursday night, writing that it was “great” and that Trump and Vice President Mike Pence “support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don’t want gun control.” Trump then also called the meeting “great” in a tweet.

Trump supports a bipartisan Senate bill that would make more modest changes to the federal background check system, to better ensure that state, local and federal agencies send incriminating information on individuals to the database used to check gun store purchases, Sanders said. As for other gun controls, she said, “we’ll see what the legislation looks like.”

While reaffirming Trump’s support for an age limit for some buyers, which the NRA opposes, Sanders said the president believes “there’s not a lot of broad support” for the idea, and that perhaps the issue is one for the states to deal with.

## **23. Offended by Koreans eating dog? I trust you've never had a bacon butty**

**Chas Newkey-Burden. The Guardian. 15 February 2018**

Would you eat rabbit? Even those who regularly consume meat from chickens, sheep and pigs will often balk at the thought of eating a cuddly little bunny rabbit. But what's the difference? Why do we see some animals as furry friends and others as fair game to chop up and eat? With the Winter Olympics turning attention towards South Korea, dog meat has been put on the media menu. The west has gone into shock mode. They eat dogs? They must be mad!

But they do. Some of the same breeds we consider man's best friend in England – labradors, beagles, chihuahuas – are eaten in South Korea. More than 30 million dogs are slaughtered each year for the Asian market and served up in dishes like dog stew. As a vegan, this appals me. But no more than I'm appalled by people eating chickens and cows. Is there really such a difference? I sense some hypocrisy in the outrage, and perhaps a little dollop of xenophobia on the side.

The details of the dog meat trade are indeed horrific. Puppies are squeezed into excruciatingly cramped metal cages. They are left alone for most of their lives, yelping for help that never comes. Paws become torn and bloody as they struggle for firm footing on the hard wire they are supposed to stand on. Some of them collapse and die. The rest are sent to markets in even more cramped crates. Then they are killed. In other words, it's much like what happens to pigs and many other animals in much of the west.

Did you know that 93% of pigs killed for meat in the UK are factory-farmed? Farmers openly admit they cut off the pigs' tails and clip or grind down their teeth without anaesthetic.

Yes, dogs are smart and friendly – but so are pigs. Researchers from Cambridge University found pigs are as smart as three-year-old humans.

They can play computer games and recognise people they met several years ago.

## **25. Ottawa pits ‘traditional knowledge’ against ‘science’, and then walks away**

**Editorial – The Globe and Mail – April 2, 2018**

Resolving tensions between competing interests is a core government function. It can also be an acrimonious business.

Take Ottawa’s recently introduced legislation to amend the federal environmental impact assessment process so that it “takes into account scientific information, traditional knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and community knowledge.”

Last month, a Quebec government bureaucrat wrote an official letter to the feds raising questions about what is understood by “traditional knowledge” and musing about whether it should have equal footing with Western science.

Indigenous leaders were furious. A group of legal scholars accused Quebec of favouring a “reductive, counterproductive and offensive” hierarchy of knowledge. The government apologized for the letter.

The critics should turn down the volume. It is perfectly fair to raise questions about this or any reform before it is passed.

Asking for the term “traditional knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of Canada” to be defined, and for ways to evaluate it, is a good idea. Doing so doesn’t devalue traditional knowledge; in fact, a strong definition will only serve to give it more value.

But it is equally fair to defend the legitimacy of Indigenous traditional knowledge. It was, after all, Inuit traditional knowledge that helped researchers find John Franklin’s sunken ships in the Arctic. And traditional knowledge contributed to the Paris climate agreement.

Putting “traditional knowledge” on the same legal footing as “scientific information” is an audacious step in the era of reconciliation.

The key issue will be how to reconcile the two when they are in conflict during an environmental assessment, as one suspects they will be. And that is the problem that Ottawa has so far refused to address.

The failure to define those terms, or to provide guidance on how to resolve them when they are in conflict, might only lead to division and stalemate.

## 29. When cops become soldiers, they are no longer us

**Editorial – The Globe and Mail – April 29, 2018**

The suburban town of Newnan, Georgia, is home to 37,912 people. Its police department looks like it could lead a Special Forces raid on Fallujah.

Last weekend, they were out in full tactical regalia as picketers demonstrated against a white supremacist march. It was peaceful, which didn't stop one officer from pointing his military-style rifle at counter-protesters.

No one said keeping the peace is easy, but the ongoing militarization of civilian police is a serious problem. Canadians have little to be smug about in this regard.

According to a study of SWAT team deployments by researchers at the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba, it is now commonplace to see heavily armoured, fatigue-clad police show up for routine law enforcement.

In 1980, the average Canadian tactical unit was deployed 60 times per year; that average is now 1,300. Some units can handle as many as 3,400 calls in a year.

They are used to execute warrants, intervene in domestic disputes and even handle traffic. Calgary's was dispatched 200 times in 2016 to investigate "disturbances."

When officers look more and more like combat soldiers, we stray further away from the ideals of policing pioneer Sir Robert Peel, who said "the police are the public and the public are the police."

Some law-enforcement leaders, notably former RCMP commissioner Bob Paulson, admit they're worried about this trend. Last week, Mr. Paulson took to social media to say it "leads to 'us and them' approaches to an officer's decision making and strategy development."

Criminologists have established that paramilitary culture can have a profound effect on police services, some of it unwitting.

Modern policing is challenging. The beat cops of a generation ago didn't worry much about terrorist threats.

But there is a crucial distinction between a policing mission and a military one. As the recent attack in Toronto shows, even extreme events can be dealt with by well-trained officers equipped for the former.

### **33. After 3 Decades, Washington State Bans Atlantic Salmon Farms**

**John Ryan – From  – National Public Radio – March 26, 2018**

Atlantic salmon farming has been banned from Washington state waters after Gov. Jay Inslee signed the restrictions on nonnative fish farms into law last week in Olympia.

"These present a risk to our wild salmon runs that we cannot tolerate," Inslee said.

The move comes eight months after an ill-fated fish farm near Anacortes started to come undone in a strong current on an otherwise calm summer day. The floating farm, owned by New Brunswick, Canada-based Cooke Aquaculture, tore apart a month later, letting as many as 250,000 Atlantic salmon escape into Puget Sound.

While lawmakers included a provision stating that the Legislature would research and revisit the issue as new science becomes available, Inslee vetoed that section, bringing what appears to be a decisive end to at least three decades of Atlantic salmon farming in Puget Sound.

Opposition to the farms grew after one of Cooke Aquaculture's three net pens off Cypress Island imploded in August. Fish from another ocean quickly swam north into Canada, south past Tacoma and up several rivers, raising fears among tribes and environmentalists that the invaders could harm the region's struggling runs of wild Pacific salmon.

While officials and early media accounts blamed a solar eclipse for the collapse, state investigators later concluded that the farm's poor condition — corroded and overgrown with tons of mussels and other sea life — made it more vulnerable to the push of tidal currents that arrive like clockwork in Puget Sound.

The state's remaining Atlantic salmon farms, all owned by Cooke, could be gone by 2022, once their existing leases with the Washington Department of Natural Resources expire.

The controversy over these fish might not be over. Earlier this year, Cooke, which raises salmon on three continents, threatened to sue under the North American Free Trade Agreement if Washington officials tried to curtail its operations here.

## **34. Humans just 0.01% of all life but have destroyed 83% of wild mammals**

**Damian Carrington, The Guardian, 21 May 2018**

Humankind is revealed as simultaneously insignificant and utterly dominant in the grand scheme of life on Earth by a groundbreaking new assessment of all life on the planet. The world's 7.6 billion people represent just 0.01% of all living things, according to the study. Yet since the dawn of civilisation, humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of plants, while livestock kept by humans abounds.

The new work is the first comprehensive estimate of the weight of every class of living creature and overturns some long-held assumptions. Bacteria are indeed a major life form – 13% of everything – but plants overshadow everything, representing 82% of all living matter. All other creatures, from insects to fungi, to fish and animals, make up just 5% of the world's biomass.

"I would hope this gives people a perspective on the very dominant role that humanity now plays on Earth," said Prof Ron Milo, at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, who led the work, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. He added that he now chooses to eat less meat due to the huge environmental impact of livestock.

The transformation of the planet by human activity has led scientists to the brink of declaring a new geological era – the Anthropocene. One suggested marker for this change are the bones of the domestic chicken, now ubiquitous across the globe.

The new work reveals that farmed poultry today makes up 70% of all birds on the planet, with just 30% being wild. The picture is even more stark for mammals – 60% of all mammals on Earth are livestock, mostly cattle and pigs, 36% are human and just 4% are wild animals.

The destruction of wild habitat for farming, logging and development has resulted in the start of what many scientists consider the sixth mass extinction of life to occur in the Earth's four billion year history. About half the Earth's animals are thought to have been lost in the last 50 years.

## **35. Electromagnetic radiation from power lines and phone masts poses 'credible' threat to wildlife, report finds**

**Sarah Knapton – The Telegraph – 18 May 2018**

Electromagnetic radiation from power lines, wi-fi, phone masts and broadcast transmitters poses a 'credible' threat to wildlife, a new report suggests, as environmentalists warned the 5G roll out could cause greater harm.

An analysis of 97 studies by the EU-funded review body EKLIPSE concluded that radiation is a potential risk to insect and bird orientation and plant health.

However the charity Buglife warned that despite good evidence of the harms there was little research ongoing to assess the impact, or apply pollution limits.

The charity said 'serious impacts on the environment could not be ruled out' and called for 5G transmitters to be placed away from street lights, which attract insects, or areas where they could harm wildlife.

Matt Shardlow, CEO of Buglife said: "We apply limits to all types of pollution to protect the habitability of our environment, but as yet, even in Europe, the safe limits of electromagnetic radiation have not been determined, let alone applied.

"There is a credible risk that 5G could impact significantly on wildlife, and that placing transmitters on LED street lamps, which attract nocturnal insects such as moths increases exposure and thereby risk.

"Therefore we call for all 5G pilots to include detailed studies of their influence and impacts on wildlife, and for the results of those studies to be made public."

The EKLIPSE report found that the magnetic orientation of birds, mammals and invertebrates such as insects and spiders could be disrupted by electromagnetic radiation (EMR). It also found established that plant metabolism is also altered by EMR.

The authors of the review conclude that there is "a need to base future research [on EMR] on sound, high-quality, replicable experiments so that credible, transparent and easily accessible evidence can inform society and policy-makers to make decisions and frame their policies."

## 37. European countries ban 'bee-harming' pesticides

**James Crisp – The Telegraph – 27 April 2018**

EU countries have agreed to a ban on pesticides that harm bees in a decision hailed by green campaigners as a “major victory”.

Britain and 15 other nations including Germany and France voted in favour of stopping the outdoor use of “neonicotinoid” pesticides in the EU.

The European Food Safety Authority had reported they were dangerous to honeybees, bumblebees and wild solitary bees and harmed their ability to forage and form colonies.

The ban will now restrict the pesticides' use to greenhouses. Neonicotinoids are already banned on some crops such as oilseed rape.

The Daily Telegraph understands that Denmark, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania voted against the ban. Eight EU countries, including Poland, Bulgaria and Belgium abstained Friday in the vote by a committee of national experts in Brussels.

The law should be in force by the end of the year but Bayer and Syngenta, two of Europe's largest chemical companies, have challenged an earlier ban in the European Court of Justice.

Michael Gove, the environment secretary, said last year that Britain would support the ban after new evidence emerged showing the risk to bees and other insects was “greater than previously understood”.

Emi Murphy, bee campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said: "This a major victory for science, common sense and our under-threat bees. The evidence that neonicotinoid pesticides pose a threat to our bees is overwhelming.

"It's great news that Michael Gove listened to the experts and backed the ban - he must now give farmers the support they need to grow food without bee-harming pesticides."

A spokesman for the Environment Department (Defra) said: "We welcome the vote today in support of further restrictions on neonicotinoids.

"The government has always been clear we will be led by the science on this matter.

"We recognise the impact a ban will have on farmers and will continue to work with them to explore alternative approaches as we design a new agricultural policy outside the EU."

## **38. Australia to Allow Export of Cannabis-Based Medicines**

**Phil Mercer – Voice of America – January 07, 2018**

Australia is to become the fourth country in the world to allow exports of cannabis-based therapies. The federal government hopes the reforms will help Australia become a world leader in the medicinal cannabis market.

Laws to allow exports of Australian cannabis-based therapies will come into force in February, according to the federal health minister.

It will allow Australian produced oils, lozenges, sprays and pills to be sold overseas for the first time. Advocates have argued the plant-based treatments can relieve severe pain associated with many medical conditions, including multiple sclerosis, and to reduce the impact of cancer therapies.

Potential export markets include South America, Spain, Canada and Germany.

Australian federal health minister Greg Hunt said allowing exports will help the developing domestic market to expand.

"We have a world class reputation for our clean and green farm products. Put them all together and we are brilliantly placed to be a world leader in medical development and medical cannabis," he said.

Officials say medicinal cannabis exports have the potential to create a lucrative new agricultural industry within Australia, similar to that already established for the use of Australian-grown poppies for medicinal and scientific purposes.

Only Canada, the Netherlands and Uruguay have so far legalized the export of medicinal marijuana. Israel has said it intends to do so within months.

Victoria became Australia's first state to legalize cannabis for medical use following changes to federal laws in 2016. However, there are some concerns doctors have been reluctant to prescribe the products.

Despite the new export laws, the use of cannabis for non-medicinal purposes remains illegal in Australia. Cannabis cultivation in Australia is still relatively small because recreational use of marijuana remains prohibited.

## **39. Study of Nutrition Crisis Finds Millions Either Malnourished or Obese**

**Reuters – November 03, 2017**

Almost every country in the world now has serious nutrition problems, either because of overeating leading to obesity or a lack of food leading to undernutrition, according to a major study published Saturday.

Researchers behind the Global Nutrition Report, which looked at 140 countries, said the problems were thwarting "human development as a whole" and called for a critical change in the response to this global health threat.

The report found that while malnutrition rates were falling globally, their rate of decrease was not fast enough to meet the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030.

More than 155 million children under age 5 are stunted because of lack of nutrition, and 52 million are defined as "wasted," meaning they do not weigh enough for their height, the report said.

At the other end of the spectrum, overeating is taking a heavy toll on people of all ages worldwide: The report found that 2 billion of the world's 7 billion people are now overweight or obese.

In North America, a third of all men and women are obese.

Worldwide, at least 41 million children under 5 are overweight, and in Africa alone, 10 million children are now classified as overweight.

"Historically, maternal anemia and child undernutrition have been seen as separate problems to obesity and noncommunicable diseases," said Jessica Fanzo, a professor at Johns Hopkins University in the United States who co-led the Global Nutrition Report.

"The reality is they are intimately connected and driven by inequalities everywhere in the world. That's why governments ... need to tackle them holistically, not as distinct problems."

Donor funding for nutrition rose by just 2 percent to \$867 million in 2015, the report found. It said funding needs to be "turbocharged" and called for a tripling of global investment in nutrition to \$70 billion over 10 years.

## 40. Voice-recognition gadgets make me worry for the future of humanity

**Michele Hanson – The Guardian – 8 Jan 2018**

My friend Mavis bought one of those little voice-recognition assistance gadgets for her parents for Christmas. Whatever for?

“I couldn’t think of anything else to buy them,” says she, wearily. Do they like it? “I don’t know,” says she. “They haven’t spoken to me yet.” Would she like one? “Oh no,” says Mavis. “I’d rather remember my own appointments, keep my brain working, switch the lights on myself and get a bit of exercise. And the salesman didn’t like them either. He was worried about data collection.’

Sensible him. I’m also worried about the future of all this. I see us lying about like dying slugs, with tubes coming out of every orifice, so these machines can perform our bodily functions as well as order our shopping – even shopping we don’t want, which our children ordered on the sly – and let in any old robber who calls instructions through the letter box, if there’s anything left to take after our bank accounts have been cleaned out, because earphones and passive loudspeakers are, after all, only reverse microphones, which can relay our details to the crooks who in the future may be able to hack in and find them, because we couldn’t be fagged to go to the shops, and preferred to buy everything online. Without moving a muscle.

Very Orwell, 1984. “The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously,” he wrote. “There was no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment.”

But who cares, so long as our devices get the latest football scores, remind us about our dentist’s appointment, find music, and turn on the heating before we get home?

Some voice recognition is tremendously useful if you have genuine difficulty typing, or getting about. But why use up our finite resources just for fun? Perhaps because these wretched machines will make some people colossally rich and happy. It just won’t be you.

## 42. Painting of naked nymphs removed from Manchester Art Gallery to provoke debate about women in art

Christopher Hooton – *The Independent* – 2 February 2018

Is a pre-Raphaelite painting of nude nymphs in a pond tempting a man to his doom fit for display in the #MeToo/Time's Up era? This is the question being posed by Manchester Art Gallery, which has courted controversy by removing John William Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs* from its walls.



*John William Waterhouse's Hylas and the Nymphs Manchester Art Gallery*

The removal is only temporary, however, and appears to be more an act of trolling on the part of curators, the empty space where the painting hung being designed "to prompt conversations about how we display and interpret artworks in Manchester's public collection," with visitors sticking Post-it notes around the void offering their reaction.

Refuting accusations of censorship, gallery curator Clare Gannaway said "it wasn't about denying the existence of particular artworks."

Instead, the hand-wringing seems to surround the room the painting normally hangs in, titled 'In Pursuit of Beauty'.

Gannaway said the name was a bad one, and confirmed to the Guardian that the #MeToo and Time's Up movement were in mind when the decision to take the Waterhouse out of it was made.

"For me personally, there is a sense of embarrassment that we haven't dealt with it sooner," she said of the room. "Our attention has been elsewhere ... we've collectively forgotten to look at this space and think about it properly. We want to do something about it now because we have forgotten about it for so long."

It is not clear when the Waterhouse stunt will end.

"We think it probably will return, yes, but hopefully contextualised quite differently. It is not just about that one painting, it is the whole context of the gallery," Gannaway added.

## **49. When a local newspaper is attacked for telling the truth**

**Editorial – The Globe and Mail – April 5, 2018**

This is a dark time for local journalism.

Dozens of community newsrooms were swapped and closed by the country's two biggest newspaper companies late last year, a deal now being investigated by the Competition Bureau.

An increasingly troubled business model has left big markets like Thunder Bay with bare-bones reporting resources that leave local citizens uninformed.

This has been compounded by attacks on the credibility of the profession, especially in the United States. President Donald Trump has given ammunition to anyone looking to discredit pesky reporters by bleating the phrase "fake news."

This is the climate Ontario Liberal MPP Bob Delaney waltzed into with his recent attacks on his local paper, the Mississauga News.

The dust-up began when the News published a story accurately reporting comments Mr. Delaney made at a constituent meeting to discuss the provincial budget last week.

In a testy exchange with a News reporter about rising debt, the MPP for Mississauga-Streetsville said, "With respect, that's bullshit."

"We have tripled [the debt] and we're proud of it, because we can afford it," he went on to say.

Faced with published evidence of his words, Mr. Delaney went on talk radio and said the News had their story wrong. He also ran a Facebook ad attacking the News for their "seriously inaccurate and incomplete" story and suggesting that those who believed it were "neo-cons."

Unfortunately for him, the News had tape. Their recording confirmed the original story.

It takes a politician of a truly adamantine shamelessness to lie in the face of recorded evidence, and Mr. Delaney is no Donald Trump.

He has apologized to the News and admitted their story was accurate. But at this moment in the history of democracy and the press, even gaffe-prone politicians should know better than to try to smear journalists for doing their jobs, and doing them well.

## 50. Targeting teens with booze-filled pop is reckless and wrong

**Editorial – The Globe and Mail – 25 March 2018**

In late February, ads for the subtly named sugary alcoholic beverage FCKDUP appeared on bus shelters near several Quebec high schools, proclaiming “One can = 4 drinks.”

Days later, 14-year-old Athena Gervais drank one or more cans behind her Laval, Que., high school at lunchtime. What happened next isn’t clear, but four days later her body was found at the bottom of an adjacent ravine.

Under extreme public pressure, the drink’s Quebec-based makers ceased production and the province ordered existing stocks removed from shelves. That’s called too little, too late.

Public health officials in the United States and Canada raised the alarm as far back as 2010 about teenagers’ excessive consumption of “blackout in a can” drinks.

The federal government shamefully and inexplicably failed to heed the warning signs. It has belatedly launched a 45-day consultation to look at regulating the alcohol and sugar content of these products, which is better than nothing but doesn’t fully address the “alcopop” problem.

Studies conducted in Australia, the U.S. and elsewhere show young people are drawn in by high-test booze and sweetness, yes, but also by edgy branding, especially in combination with low prices. A previous ad for FCKDUP touted the product as “zero to party in a few sips”; it could be purchased for as little as three for \$10.

Most adults understand the dangers of quickly knocking back four shots of alcohol. Kids don’t. To ignore this is to be sickeningly indifferent to their welfare. It is deeply irresponsible to allow such products to be aimed at inexperienced teenage drinkers, but that’s exactly what is happening.

But while Ottawa is obsessed with protecting teenagers from the risks of marijuana, it has not brought the same vigour to alcopops. It’s an oversight that speaks volumes about our society’s relationship with alcohol.

## **51. Renewables generated more electricity than brown coal over summer, report finds**

**Michael Slezak – The Guardian – 26 March 2018**

Renewable energy generated more electricity than brown coal during Australia's summer for the first time in 2017-18, according to a new report by Green Energy Markets.

Continued growth in solar pushed renewable generation in Australia to just under 10,000 gigawatt hours between December 2017 and February 2018. With the Hazelwood plant knocked out of the system last year, brown coal's output in the same period was just over 9,100 GWh.

Renewables produced 40% more than gas over the period and was exceeded only by black coal.

The report, commissioned by GetUp, found renewables were generating particularly large amounts of electricity when it was most needed, producing 32% more than brown coal during summer between 11am and 7pm, when demand peaks.

Solar in particular was working to support the system, on average producing more than Hazelwood was capable of producing between 9am and 5pm.

A further 5,000 megawatts of large-scale renewables projects was under construction in February, supporting 17,445 jobs.

GetUp's campaign director, Miriam Lyons, said the latest renewable energy index showed renewables were keeping the lights on while coal became increasingly unreliable.

"Over summer renewables kept houses cool and lights on during peak demand times when people needed electricity most," Lyons said. "Meanwhile dirty old coal plants are becoming increasingly unreliable in the heat.

"These ageing clunkers failed 36 times over summer.

"Clean energy rescued people from blackouts this summer. When the clapped-out Loy Yang coal plant tripped, South Australia's giant Tesla battery reacted in milliseconds to keep the power on.

"It's clear that a smart electricity grid based on a combination of renewable energy and storage is the best way to deliver clean, affordable energy for all Australians."

## 52. Qatar's World Cup: labour rights and wrongs

**The Guardian – Editorial – 27 Feb 2018**

Qatar is one of the world's richest countries and expects to spend more than \$200bn on major infrastructure projects ahead of the 2022 World Cup. Yet it appears the wellbeing of the workers building these facilities has too often been held cheap. In October, responding to criticism, Doha promised major labour reforms including axing a system described as "modern day slavery". But safety remains a pressing issue.

The "supreme committee" organising the event has long said it is striving to enact higher than usual welfare standards for World Cup projects. It has recorded 10 deaths since October 2015, but has classified eight of these (including three of men in their 20s) as "non-work-related", despite immense scepticism from campaigners. On Tuesday, an inquest in Brighton examined one of the remaining deaths, of the British worker Zac Cox, who died last January after falling 40m as he installed a walkway in the roof of the Khalifa stadium in Doha. His relatives' distress was compounded by the response when they tried to find out what had happened and why: months of silence from the Qatari authorities (broken only a week ago). Building contractors were seen to be less than helpful. Mr Cox's relatives belatedly discovered that an investigation was carried out weeks after his death, which concluded that it was caused by the failure of the lifting equipment provided to him on site and that this equipment was known to be in poor condition. This was the conclusion of the coroner.

Yet the report – now submitted to the inquest – was never published, nor given to relatives by his employers or Qatari authorities. The family wants an independent inquiry and is urging the Foreign Office to pursue the case urgently with the Gulf state. FIFA too, which profits so handsomely from the World Cup, has a responsibility to press authorities to ensure that workers' deaths are quickly, thoroughly and transparently investigated. [...]

## **55. The N.R.A. Can Be Beat**

**Editorial – The New York Times – FEB. 15, 2018**

Parents throughout the country live with the dread that the next lockdown at their child's school won't be a drill and that screams like those we heard on cellphones from classrooms at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School will come from their own child's classroom.

The terror that has gripped their elected officials, however, is fear of the wealthy gun lobby, to which they have let themselves be held hostage for decades.

But standing up to gun rights extremists and industry lobbyists can no longer be seen as an act of heroism that could lead to political suicide. It is an act of common sense that would bring our government under the control of its citizens.

Hundreds have been killed in mass shootings at a high school in Littleton, Colo., a church in Charleston, S.C., an office party in San Bernardino, Calif., a nightclub in Orlando, Fla., and elsewhere in the past 20 years. After 20 first graders and a half-dozen adults were slaughtered in Newtown, Conn., in 2012, it seemed that a line would be drawn in the sand. But nothing was done. People have been injured or killed in eight school shootings in the first seven weeks of 2018 alone.

Though many Americans, and some elected officials, have taken a stand to stanch the epidemic of gun violence, the National Rifle Association and its congressional servants have been an unyielding obstacle to sensible reform.

But the gun lobby's stranglehold on our elected officials does not need to continue, if candidates stand up to the lobby and voters demand that they commit themselves to the sorts of changes that a vast majority of Americans want.

With midterm elections coming up this fall, America has a chance to get that message across. Candidates must realize that reducing gun violence is a winning and moral issue. Aggressive turnout by voters who believe this can defeat the N.R.A. at the polls.

## **56. British Columbia's plan for cannabis sales the smartest one so far**

**The Globe and Mail – Editorial – February 7, 2018**

A greater share of British Columbians took up than residents of any other province, save Nova Scotia.

So it's unsurprising that our westernmost province has proposed regulations on legal marijuana that are among the most sensible, and least neurotic, we've seen.

In rules fleshed out by the government this week, the province has committed to a hybrid approach to selling the drug. The B.C. Liquor Distribution Branch will set up its own weed-only stores, but private retailers will be able to apply for licenses to run the same.

That's smart for two reasons. The first is that retailing weed exclusively out of government stores, as Quebec and Ontario are planning to do, will help the black market continue to flourish.

To stamp out the unregulated sale of pot, governments need to make their own product reasonably priced and readily accessible. With an initial batch of only 40 outlets planned in Ontario, and a mere 15 in Quebec, many consumers could find scoring a few grams in the park easier than going to a legal vendor.

That will take a bite out of government revenues, push consumers towards potentially tainted pot, and maintain the expense and absurdity of locking people up for selling a legal drug.

It would be so much wiser to bring the shadowy, semi-tolerated dispensaries that currently operate in many Canadian cities into the regulatory fold, along with new entrants to the market who show they can do a responsible job of selling weed. That's effectively what B.C. is doing.

Aside from the trouble it will save, it's what consumers deserve. Weed can be harmful, especially for young people with developing brains. But millions of Canadians enjoy a toké in much the way others enjoy a glass of wine. The two vices are not so different.

B.C., with its flourishing pot culture, should know. Now it has shown that it does.

## 57. Smart knows that's not English – how adland took a mallet to the language

**Christopher Beanland. The Guardian. 14 May 2018**

It's taken a millennium and a half for English to develop into a language as rich and complex as a character from your favourite multi-part Netflix drama series – and just a few years for the advertising industry to batter it into submission like a stained piñata at a child's party.

Baffling slogans have become the new norm in adland. Perhaps Apple laid the foundations in 1997 with its famous Think Different campaign, but things have since gone up a notch: in 2010, Diesel blurted out perplexing offerings such as “Smart had one good idea and that idea was stupid”. Now we're informed by Ireland's flag carrier that “Smart flies Aer Lingus”. Who are these people called Smart and how can we avoid sitting next to them on our next flight?

Today's language-mangling ad campaigns run the greasy gamut from the somewhat confusing “Live your unexpected Luxembourg” to the head-scratching “Start your impossible”.

“In adland, we don't call it language-mangling, we call it ‘Language DJ-ing’,” jokes Alex Myers, founder of agency Manifest. “In reality it's just lazy creative work. Ad agencies need to ‘Think more good’.”

Bad-ad fans can quickly notice patterns emerging: “finding” something and it being “amazing” appear with clockwork regularity. See, for instance, Rightmove's “Find your happy” and Visit Wales's “Find your epic”. Or Deliveroo's “Eat more amazing”.

Clearly these odd turns of phrase are partially derived from the language of social media, while pandering to the notion of being easily turned into hashtags. But wouldn't your English teacher have thrown a copy of *Mansfield Park* at you if you showed this much disdain for adjective and noun deployment?

When you see half-baked slogans – such as Hitachi's “Inspire the next” – taking a mallet to the accepted rules of English, it can seem as if adland has taken a lesson from Roald Dahl's *George's Marvellous Medicine*, and boiled a random concoction of leftover words and ideas together in a pot. Experience gibberish.

## **58. It's the Russians who should be apologizing in Pyeongchang**

**The Globe and Mail – Editorial – February 8, 2018**

It appears delicate sensibilities have been hurt in South Korea, and by someone sporting the Maple Leaf, no less.

An unidentified Canadian Olympic team official may have said some unfriendly things about doping to a Russian counterpart in a cafeteria at the just-opened Pyeongchang Winter Games.

Or so claims a representative of the Olympic Athletes from Russia, which is definitely not the same as the Russian Olympic team, despite its members having arrived carrying suitcases with the word "RUSSIA" stamped on them.

Anyway, our country's delegation offered an apology of sorts, which was awfully Canadian of them but completely unnecessary. Anger is the proper human response to the farce the International Olympic Committee and Russia are perpetrating in Pyeongchang.

No country is perfect. Unethical performance enhancement exists in the highest reaches of sports, including in Canada. But Russia presents a different case.

Thanks to whistleblower testimony and documentary evidence, the world knows that Russia built a sprawling state-sponsored doping program that was in place for years. At the Sochi Winter Games in 2014, it involved a cloak-and-dagger operation to tamper with urine samples.

Longtime IOC member and World Anti-Doping Agency founding president Richard Pound was the first to raise the issue this week.

His uncompromising words at a pre-Games IOC session may have raised hackles, but he was right to denounce the corrosive taint of Russian participation in Pyeongchang.

The nominal ban on Russia's athletes, sports federation officials and coaches has been exposed as a Potemkin-like charade. The OAR team counts 170 members, a number that could grow. Dozens of them are known dopers, and several of them had their 2014 medals stripped.

Amateur athletes and the teams who support them spend years preparing for their moment on the Olympic stage.

They are right to be angry at having to share it with cheats, and they shouldn't feel the least bit badly about expressing it bluntly.

## 59. Marmite maker Unilever threatens to pull ads from Facebook and Google

**Julia Kollewe. The Guardian. 12 February 2018**

The consumer goods multinational Unilever is threatening to withdraw its advertising from online platforms such as Facebook and Google if they fail to protect children, promote hate or create division in society.

In a speech later today, Keith Weed, the Unilever chief marketing officer, will say that, as a brand-led business, Unilever “needs its consumers to have trust in our brands”.

Unilever is the world’s second largest marketing spender, after Procter & Gamble, and spent €7.7bn (£6.8bn) last year advertising its brands, which include PG Tips, Marmite, Dove and Persil.

Weed will tell major advertising, media and technology companies gathered at the annual Interactive Advertising Bureau conference in Palm Desert, California: “As one of the largest advertisers in the world, we cannot have an environment where our consumers don’t trust what they see online.

“And we cannot continue to prop up a digital supply chain – one that delivers over a quarter of our advertising to our consumers – which at times is little better than a swamp in terms of its transparency.”

Silicon Valley’s tech companies are under mounting pressure to clamp down on online harassment, fabricated political content, hate speech and content that is harmful to children. Google said in December it would hire thousands of new moderators after coming under fire for allowing child abuse videos and other offensive content to flourish on YouTube.

Weed compared cleaning up the digital supply chain with efforts made by Unilever to find sustainable sources for its food ingredients and other raw materials.

“Unilever will not invest in platforms or environments that do not protect our children or which create division in society, and promote anger or hate,” he plans to say. “We will prioritise investing only in responsible platforms that are committed to creating a positive impact in society.”

The company has trimmed its ad production as part of a cost-saving drive; it is making fewer TV ads and has halved the number of ad agencies it uses to 1,500.

## 60. Urban beekeeping is harming wild bees, says Cambridge University

**Sarah Knapton – THE TELEGRAPH – 25 January 2018**

The rise in amateur beekeepers keeping hives on roofs and gardens is contributing to the decline of wild bees, Cambridge University has claimed.

Experts at the Department of Zoology said the growth in urban keeping was leaving wild bees struggling to gather enough pollen and nectar.

Urban beekeeping has flourished in recent years, with many museums, charities and businesses creating colonies on their roofs.

“Keeping honeybees is an extractive activity. It removes pollen and nectar from the environment, which are natural resources needed by many wild species of bee and other pollinators,” said González-Varo, also Cambridge’s Zoology Department.

“Honeybees are artificially-bred agricultural animals similar to livestock such as pigs and cows. But this livestock can roam beyond any enclosures to disrupt local ecosystems through competition and disease.”

The conservationists argue there is a “lack of distinction” in public understanding – fuelled by misguided charity campaigns - between an agricultural problem and an urgent biodiversity issue.

“The crisis in global pollinator decline has been associated with one species above all, the western honeybee. Yet this is one of the few pollinator species that is continually replenished through breeding and agriculture,” said co-author Dr Jonas Geldmann.

“Saving the honeybee does not help wildlife. Western honeybees are a commercially managed species that can actually have negative effects on their immediate environment through the massive numbers in which they are introduced.”

Honeybees are active for nine to twelve months and travel up to 10km from their hives.

Experts say it results in massive “spillover” from farmed honeybees into the landscape, potentially out-competing wild pollinators.

Honeybees also pass on diseases to wild bees when they feed from the same flowers, the researchers warn.

Wild European bee species such as the great yellow bumblebee, which was once found across the UK, is now limited to coastal areas of Scotland.

The experts say there needs to be greater controls of managed honeybee hives.

## 62. Sugar and Sleep: More Rest May Dull Your Sweet Tooth

Allison Aubrey – National Public Radio – The Salt – January 18, 2018

A new study finds that getting the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep per night may help you tame your sweet tooth.

Researchers at King's College London recruited "short sleepers" — that is, people who routinely sleep less than seven hours per night. The participants were coached on strategies to extend sleep time, such as cutting back on caffeine, reducing screen time and sticking to a regular bedtime each night.

Based on this coaching, the short sleepers began to sleep about one hour more per night. And here's the fascinating part: They also changed their diets — without being asked.

"We found that those who extended their sleep [also] reduced their intake of added sugars by about 10 grams per day," explains one of the study authors, Haya Al Khatib, a doctoral candidate at King's College London. That's about 40 calories' worth of sugar.

The study, which is published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, included just 42 normal-weight participants, and it doesn't prove that sleep is the key to diet change. But the findings serve up more evidence that our sleep can influence our eating habits and waistlines.

A study published back in 2013 found that just five days of shortened sleep can lead to weight gain. In that study, people were allowed to sleep for just five hours for a five-day period. They gained, on average, almost 2 pounds.

And the timing of meals — independent of sleep — can also influence how our bodies respond to all the calories we eat. For instance, a study published in the *International Journal of Obesity* found that people who eat their main meal early in the day are more successful at losing weight, compared with people who eat a heavy, late-night meal.

It seems we humans require regular sleeping and eating habits to keep our body clocks in sync — and our health in check.

## 64. Facebook to Prioritize 'Trustworthy' News

**VOA News – January 19, 2018**

Social media giant Facebook said Friday that it would begin to prioritize "trustworthy" news outlets on its site in order to counteract "misinformation."

The company said it would ask its more than 2 billion users to rank the news organizations they trusted in order to prioritize "high-quality news" over less trusted sources. It said the new ranking system would seek to separate news organizations trusted only by their own subscribers from ones that are broadly trusted across society.

Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg wrote in a blog post that the company was not "comfortable" deciding which news sources are the most trustworthy in a "world with so much division."

"Social media enables people to spread information faster than ever before, and if we don't specifically tackle these problems, then we end up amplifying them," Zuckerberg added.

He said Facebook considered asking outside experts to choose the most reputable news sources, but that doing so would most likely have led to an "objectivity problem." He said the company decided to rely on member surveys as the most "objective" way to rank trust in news sources.

Zuckerberg said it's important that Facebook's News Feed "promotes high-quality news that helps build a sense of common ground."

He also announced that Facebook would shrink the content on its News Feed from 5% to 4%. This means users will see fewer posts from news organizations while scrolling through their feeds in favor of more posts from friends.

Facebook has been struggling with how to handle its distribution of news in an era of fake news and claims of media bias.

The social media company has faced accusations that it helped spread misinformation as well as Russian-linked content meant to influence the 2016 U.S. elections.

Also last year, U.S. Republican lawmakers expressed concern that Facebook was suppressing stories from conservative news sources.

## 66. Stacey Morrison: Time to give Maori language respect it deserves

**Stacey Morrison – The New Zealand Herald – 21 Jan, 2018**

If Te reo Māori is 'a patient on life support' you could say my husband and I awoke from our own 'reo coma' of a monolingual childhood, and breathed life into the language of our family, by raising our children as Māori speakers.

We're not much of a curiosity in the circles we move in, which includes many Māori speakers, but when speaking Māori in public we've had various responses: "What's that language you're speaking with your children, it's so exotic! Are you from South America?" (It's Māori. "Oh my gosh, I'm terrible with languages, sorry...")

"You don't hear Māori being spoken very much do you" (well, yes I do, every day actually. So by 'you' I think you mean 'I')

"You shouldn't be speaking that Jungle Language, this is New Zealand" (I'll just leave that one hanging.)

None of those comments rile me, even the last one, because they reflect the language paradigm those people live in, and perhaps some benefits of bilingualism they're missing out on, like tuning your ear, and broadening your cultural experience. I can accept Prof. Moon's comments because the headlines actually fuel a growing tide of change for Te Reo Māori.

I even agree on his points that we need to speak Māori in our homes - we support families to do so – boost kōhanga and kura, and speak Māori every day, in order for it to be a thriving, living language. As Prof. Temara has said 'he's not saying anything we don't know.'

What we need to know is if you will make a change, today, albeit small, not 'when I do a Māori course' or 'when I'm fluent'. Will you bother to say Matamata as "MutterMutter" instead of "MatterMatter" and not get defensive because you're changing the pronunciation you've come to know. Is that too much to ask?

*Stacey Morrison is a drive show host on the hits, a proud Maori speaker and co-author of the book Māori at Home: An Everyday Guide to Learning the Maori Language*

## **69. We're promised one big Northern Forest – and it's one great big diversion**

**Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 8 Jan 2018**

“A culture is no better than its woods,” wrote WH Auden. “Tree planting is not synonymous with conservation,” argued revered ecologist Oliver Rackham. “It is an admission that conservation has failed.” Such wisdom suggests that the announcement by Theresa May of a new Northern Forest shadowing the M62 from Hull to Liverpool is a symbol of our times. A government covers its ills with the cheap (£5.7m) fig leaf of greening; a society builds a generic landscape with no appreciation for the ancient.

It's tempting to fill this column with Rackham, who recognised that thoughtless or generic tree-planting “diverts funds and attention away from real conservation, and encourages people to go on destroying wild trees”. In this way, the Northern Forest is greenwash, obscuring the government's destruction of older trees: HS2 will destroy or damage 98 ancient woodlands, while Sherwood Forest is explored for fracking shale gas. With their uncontaminated soils and 400-year-old trees supporting thousands of species, ancient woods are irreplaceable, but it's still deemed too expensive to, say, bore an HS2 tunnel under the bluebells of South Cubbington wood in Warwickshire.

Rather than plant trees in many Northern Forest locations, we could stand back and see which species seed themselves. The former dairy farm of Knepp in West Sussex is an inspiring example of how quickly native “wood pasture” – a vibrant mix of trees, scrub and open glades – is created if we let wild nature take its course. Jays plant more oaks than humans.

Nevertheless, the Northern Forest is a heartening idea. The government is beginning to recognise the value of green infrastructure. Woodlands close to urban areas will help us all enjoy high-quality green space, essential for our mental and physical wellbeing.

So we should embrace the Northern Forest, without letting 50m saplings obscure a more urgent task: halting the loss of our last ancient woodlands.

## **71. Ocado to wheel out C3PO-style robot to lend a hand at warehouses**

**Sarah Butler – The Guardian – 11 January 2018**

Ocado is to test a humanoid maintenance assistant in its warehouses, in the online grocery specialist's latest move to reduce reliance on human workers.

The SecondHands robot prototype, which resembles a cousin of Star Wars' C3PO with a wheeled platform instead of legs, is designed to assist engineers looking after the company's handling systems. The aim is to use artificial intelligence to predict the technician's needs and hand them tools or move ladders or bolts.

Graham Deacon, robotics research team leader at Ocado, said the aim was to develop a robot that could help without prompting in "a fluid and natural interaction between robot and technician".

Ocado, which delivers groceries for Waitrose and Morrisons, has invested millions of pounds in developing technology to manage home deliveries for global grocery retailers. In November, it signed its first big international contract to develop a robotic warehouse for the French supermarket Groupe Casino.

Its newest warehouse in Andover, Hampshire, uses hundreds of battery-powered robots to shift boxes of groceries stored in a giant grid.

The group is also developing packing robots that can grasp many types of products, from potentially dangerous bottles of bleach to fragile avocados and eggs.

Retailers have used automated warehouse systems for years but the involvement of robots is expected to step up dramatically as technology gets smarter and labour costs rise.

Last year, a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers said more than 10 million workers in the UK were at risk of having their jobs rendered obsolete by automation in the next 15 years. About 2.25 million of them work in retail and distribution.

## **77. What David Attenborough should have said at the end of Blue Planet**

**Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 12 December 2017**

We find the sea a great source of solace and peace. Watching Blue Planet II has been almost as hypnotic, with its sublime rendering of our turquoise oceans, a watery world almost without humans.

This lulling effect is at odds with the message the programme conveyed with new urgency in its final episode: that our oceans, upon which we depend, are under threat like never before.

The BBC Natural History Unit, which makes these incomparable, world-leading works of art and science has come under increasing criticism for not telling the most urgent story of our times: humanity's destruction of our planet. Blue Planet II is a riposte. Coral bleaching or plastic pollution, say, was not bundled into one final episode but scattered throughout the series.

Its finale combined breathtaking footage of the most charismatic sea creatures with the most noble broadcaster deploying every fibre of his authority to hit us with overfishing, noise pollution, plastics and other toxins, ocean acidification and sea-level rise.

So as not to swamp us, Sir David Attenborough's message was that hope, action and individuals can make a difference. This stirring stuff will help us do the easy bits – switch to reusable water bottles and coffee cups, or paper straws – and nudge policymakers towards tougher rules, such as outlawing single-use plastic and creating marine nature reserves (the campaign to protect 30% of the global ocean is admirably ambitious).

Blame the ocean, perhaps, but I was still soothed as much as stirred. Sir David is a saintly man who has done more to save our planet than any living person. But I hoped to be a little more jolted by Blue Planet II's concluding piece to camera. We needed to hear the following: sustainable growth is a lie; we must renounce economic growth as a societal goal; we must consume much, much less.

We can't go on as we are.

## 79. Digital World Provides Benefits and Risks for Children

**Lisa Schlein – VOA News – December 10, 2017**

The U.N. Children's Fund says the explosion of digital technology and growing internet access holds both benefits and risks for children. UNICEF's annual State of the World's Children report explores ways to protect children from the potential harm of the expanding digital world.

The U.N. children's fund reports one in three internet users around the world is a child. Despite this huge and growing online presence, UNICEF says little is known about the impact of digital technology on children's wellbeing and little is being done to protect them from the perils of the digital world.

UNICEF Director of Data Research and Policy Laurence Chandy tells VOA the internet can be a game changer for children. "We sincerely believe that especially for kids in places where opportunities are few or for children who are disabled living in remote places... the internet has enormous potential and is already helping children access opportunity," said Chandy.

At the same time, he says the internet poses many risks. These include the misuse of children's private information, access to harmful content and cyberbullying. Chandy says criminal digital networks make children vulnerable to some of the worst forms of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking and online child sexual abuse.

He says safeguarding children's privacy on the internet is an issue of major concern. "We really emphasize the importance of putting in place safeguards to prevent children's personal data from falling in wrong peoples' hands and protecting their identities," said Chandy.

While the risks are great, Chandy criticizes businesses and regulators for doing little to reduce the dangers.

The report finds millions of children still are missing out on the benefits offered by the internet. It notes around one-third of the world's youth, most in developing countries, are not online. It calls for these inequities to be addressed. It says children everywhere must be given the opportunity to participate in an increasingly digital economy.

## 80. The Guardian view on languages and the British: Brexit and an Anglosphere prison

Editorial. *The Guardian*. 3 November 2017

Three-quarters of UK residents can't hold a conversation in any language other than English. This linguistic monoculture would be even more hegemonic if it were not for bilingual migrants.

The upshot is that the UK is mired in the relegation zone of European linguistic proficiency. Across the European Union, just over half of all students (51%) study two or more foreign languages. In Finland, France, Romania and Slovakia the proportion studying two or more languages is 99%. In Britain, by contrast, the figure is a dispiriting 5%.

The standard excuse for Britain's neglect of foreign languages is that English has become the world tongue. In such circumstances, some in this country (though not British business leaders) say: why should Britain bother to learn other tongues when so many have learned ours?

There are several answers to that. The most important is that the lack of foreign languages risks the British mind becoming locked inside an Anglosphere of Britain, Ireland (sometimes), the British Commonwealth and above all the United States. These are significant links. But the famous remark that Britain and America are two nations divided by a common language holds true, especially in the Donald Trump era. The Anglosphere is a minority of the world, its wisdom and its trade. While other countries speak their own languages and English too, the British just speak English. Where's the advantage there?

Theresa May's government talks about "global" Britain. On the Brexiteer right, this tends to mean an Anglosphere within which the privileged and prejudiced can nurture a reactionary fantasy of British greatness. Mentally and materially it is a retreat from the world, not an engagement – as much a prison as a liberation. A genuinely engaged Britain must not just hunker down in the Anglosphere, the Atlantic and the past. It must remain wholly engaged with the real world, with Europe above all, because that is where these islands are – and that means understanding what our neighbours and allies are saying too.

## **81. Philip Pullman is right – discounting is the true book lover’s enemy**

**Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 30 October 2017**

Someone should write a book about the economics of bookselling. Nothing about Britain’s 900 independent bookshops adds up.

I visited half-a-dozen on a book tour last week. Books have never been more beautiful and small shops never more creative in selling these lovely objects. Many indies have sofas or cafes. They all convene book groups. They work with schools, open late, host author talks and devote hours to free advice for the nation’s army of aspiring poets, publishers and playwrights.

Several indie owners I met are former teachers. Bookselling is longer hours, they say. One reports that his teacher’s salary matched the entire turnover in his first year of bookselling. “There was only one day I failed to make a sale,” he says cheerily.

Last week, the shops seemed twitchy. Partly this is seasonal: the next eight weeks will determine whether 10 months of losses become a profitable year thanks to the Christmas frenzy. But mostly they’re upset about discounting.

“Does Manchester United sell new shirts half price? Does Porsche offer 50% off its new model?” asks Richard Drake in Stockton-on-Tees’s Drake the Bookshop. He points at his unsold copy of Philip Pullman’s *La Belle Sauvage*.

“Why does the book industry flog its flagship products half price?” Independents can’t sell a £20 book they buy (at best) for a tenner. But that’s how it’s been discounted by Waterstones. Amazon sells it for £9.

Pullman has criticised “absurd, destructive, and unsustainable” discounting.

When I last toured indie bookshops two years ago, there was ebullience at the peaking of Kindle sales and popular revulsion at Amazon’s tax arrangements. But no conventional economist could grasp how 900 indies are still in business. They are, because so much bookselling is done out of love. That’s wonderful, but the rest of us – and publishers producing special editions – must love them back.

## **82. Oxbridge admissions: race, place and class matters**

**Editorial. The Guardian. 20 October 2017**

Earlier this month Oxford University put up a plaque to celebrate its first black graduate. Christian Cole read classics and went on to become the first African-origin barrister in the English courts in the 1880s. Where Mr Cole once blazed a trail, few unfortunately have followed. Data extracted by Labour MP David Lammy shows that 10 out of 32 Oxford colleges did not award a place to a black British pupil in 2015. Oxford's great rival Cambridge University fared little better: six colleges failed to admit any black British A-level students in the same year.

There is a legitimate call to broaden access to the best universities. The top institutions are gatekeepers, in many walks of life, to a high-flying, well-paid career, often in prestigious fields where power and influence reside. Oxford – the alma mater of seven of the past 10 British prime ministers – and Cambridge regularly vie for the top spot in global university rankings. Race matters; as does place and class. Wealthy, privately educated students from the south-east of the country dominate Oxbridge's intake. Oxford and Cambridge represent an elite within the elite. London's Imperial College, one of the world's best universities, took in double the percentage of black students Cambridge did last year. Within the Russell Group, representing the best universities, 6% of new young students come from the most disadvantaged fifth of neighbourhoods. At Oxford, it's only 3%. It is also claimed that universities are rejecting minority ethnic students when they judge that too many are taking a course. Without access to quality education, divisions that have opened up in British society are likely to widen, not narrow. This would be deeply corrosive, affecting the way the country works and the way it thinks about itself. There's plenty of evidence to suggest diversity should be prized – obvious when you consider that those from the same milieu probably share too much of their world; they are a lot less likely to introduce new information or challenging viewpoints.

## **84. The Guardian view on internet security: complexity is vulnerable**

**Editorial. The Guardian. 19 October 2017**

This week's security scandal is the discovery that every household with wifi in this country has a network that isn't really private. For 13 years a weakness has lurked in the supposedly secure way in which wireless networks carry our information. Although the WPA2 security scheme was supposed to be mathematically proven to be uncrackable, it turns out that the mechanism by which it can compensate for weak signals can be compromised, and when that happens it might as well be unencrypted. Practically every router, every laptop and every mobile phone in the world is now potentially exposed. As the Belgian researcher who discovered the vulnerability points out, this could be abused to steal information such as credit card numbers, emails and photos.

It is not a catastrophic flaw: the attacker has to be within range of the wifi they are attacking. Most email and chat guarded by end-to-end encryption is still protected from eavesdroppers. But the flaw affects a huge number of devices, many of which will never be updated to address it. Since both ends of a wifi connection need to be brought up to date to be fixed, it is no longer safe to assume that any wifi connection is entirely private.

The story is a reminder of just how much we all now rely on the hidden machineries of software engineering in our everyday lives, and just how complex these complexities are. The fact that it took 13 years for this weakness to be found and publicised shows that no one entirely understands the systems that we all now take for granted.

And then there are the known unknowns: the devices which most users do not even notice are connected to the net. It is estimated that there will be 21bn things connected to the internet by 2020, from baby monitors and door locks to cars and fridges. Billions of these are unprotected and will remain that way.

## 87. The Guardian view on money: enough is enough

**The Guardian – Editorial – 13 November 2017**

Denise Coates is probably the most successful entrepreneur you have never heard of. She started a business, Bet365, in a Portakabin in a Stoke car park 17 years ago which is now the second largest bookmaker in Britain and one of the largest online operations in the world. She and her family, who still live in Stoke, are now worth between them perhaps half as much as the annual economic output of everyone else in the town. But is she – is anyone – really worth the £217m salary she paid herself this year? That made her Britain's highest-paid executive by an astonishing margin: the previous record salary had been held by the advertising man Martin Sorrell, who was paid a comparatively pathetic £48.1m last year. For comparison, the chairman of Goldman Sachs, Lloyd Blankfein, made only \$22.3m – and by far the greatest part of that was in stock options. Cristiano Ronaldo, the best-paid sportsman in the world, is arguably overpaid for what he does, with an estimated annual income four times as much as the banker – but that isn't even half Ms Coates's.

By all accounts she is a modest and decent person. She built the business from nothing, through hard work and a willingness to make bets rather more sensible than those of her customers. She does not represent the most rapacious and damaging forms of the industry, the fixed-odds betting terminals. Unlike her rivals, she has not moved operations abroad to dodge tax. But to take nearly half the year's profits as salary for herself is a cause for bogglement. It outrages any egalitarian instinct. There comes a point where the sheer quantity of money defeats the imagination. How much work would be needed to spend all that? Her success makes a serious point about inequality. If anyone deserves to be so rich, she does. Yet instinct tells us no one does, and instinct here is right.

## 89. Why tolerate Tarmac-geddon in the countryside?

**Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 13 November 2017**

Like most motorists passing the West Sussex town of Arundel, I spent some time last week in a jam at Crossbush, one of the most bizarre road junction sever. A child could design a better way of moving traffic into the single-carriageway A27.

I then spent several hours in the countryside that grown-ups hope will alleviate this jam. Highways England proposes building a dual carriageway through a landscape filled with bluebells, orchids, historic hedgerows, a pond where a thousand toads gather in spring, and ancient trees where 13 of Britain's 17 breeding bat species fly.

Engineers are now deciding between three routes, all of which destroy precious water meadows and woodland (one option obliterates a massive 24 hectares), and pass through the South Downs National Park. Trees that have been alive since the Norman conquest have less legal protection than listed buildings, and ancient woodland – designated as over 400 years old – urgently needs specific legal protection. However, Arundel's bypass illustrates the hazards in such "conservation" designations. They simply encourage developers to let rip on unprotected land.

West Sussex county council favours the most southerly route, which avoids the largest incursions into the national park. But the bluebells don't stop where woodland becomes less ancient. Nor do the rare bats, bees or butterflies. The whole of our countryside is greater than the sum of its parts, and new roads not only bring pollution – noise and light, as well as air – they fragment and isolate the species we share our world with.

Are we prepared to trade such wealth – peace, space, clean air, dark skies, other species – for a road that will save motorists, at best, 10 minutes in 2041, before they hit the A27's next pinch-point at Worthing or Chichester?

I once asked for directions when I was lost and was told: "I wouldn't start from here." So, too, with utterly futile road-building.

Start here instead: no new roads.

## 91. It's official: muddy kids learn best

**Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 23 October 2017**

For two weeks now, the media has descended on the nursery – Dandelion Education – attended by two of my children, as it was judged the country's best nursery at the 2017 Nursery World awards.

This might have remained an obscure industry prize were it not for the fact that, unusually, Dandelion is an outdoor nursery and forest school. My four-year-old, Ted, spends his Dandelion days playing outdoors, in all weathers, in a place where plastic toys are banned and children build their own with real tools.

We noticed such a beneficial impact on Ted that we asked our local primary school to allow another of our children, Esme, to flexi-school and join Dandelion two days a week. The school's enlightened head agreed.

For the past six months, I've volunteered a day a week at Dandelion too. This began as book research but it has brought less expected, more important benefits. Young children are the funniest, most enthusiastic colleagues imaginable. Watching Dandelion's founders, Emma Harwood and Hayley Room, facilitate child-led learning and defuse conflict has been a massive educational experience for me as a parent. And I've been surprised how I beam at each day's end: outdoor learning is good for adult health too.

As a consequence, outdoor education no longer seems radical to me.

I've been impressed with how the tabloids have covered Dandelion's success in good faith, but mostly I've glowed with pride at the recognition for Harwood and Room, who set up Dandelion against all odds and continue to labour all hours to make it work. I assumed that forest schooling was a middle-class lefty passion, but rightwingers love getting children outdoors again and banishing "elf and safety".

Is the penny dropping? All five shortlisted nurseries at the awards were outdoor operations. Policymakers across the political spectrum should take note: making outdoor learning part of conventional early years education could be as popular as free school dinners.

## 92. Hey Alexa, come clean about how much you're really recording us

**By Geoffrey A. Fowler. The Washington Post. May 24, 2018**

We're learning an important lesson about cutting-edge voice technology: Amazon's Alexa is always listening. So are Google's Assistant and Apple's Siri.

Putting live microphones in our homes has always been an out-there idea. But tech companies successfully marketed talking speakers such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home to millions by assuring they only record us when we give a "wake word."

That turns out to be a misnomer. These devices are always "awake," passively listening for the command to activate, such as "Alexa," "O.K. Google," or "Hey Siri." The problem is they're far from perfect about responding only when we want them to.

The latest, and most alarming example to date: A family in Portland, Ore., two weeks ago found its Echo had recorded a private conversation and sent it to a random contact. The event, reported by Washington state's KIRO 7, went viral Thursday among Echo owners — and naysayers on the idea of allowing tech companies to put microphones all over our homes.

Amazon, in a statement, said the Echo woke up when it heard a word that sounded like Alexa. "The subsequent conversation was heard as a 'send message' request. At which point, Alexa said out loud 'To whom?' At which point, the background conversation was interpreted as a name in the customer's contact list."

But how often do these devices go rogue and record more than we'd like them to?

You have the ability to dig deeper into what's being recorded. Prepare to be a bit horrified: Amazon and Google keep a copy of every single conversation, both as a nod toward transparency and to help improve their voice-recognition and artificial intelligence systems. In the Alexa app and on Google's user activity site, you can listen to and delete these past recordings. (Apple also keeps Siri recordings, but not in a way you can look up — and anonymizes them after six months.)

## 93. They erased nature from our dictionaries. The fightback starts here

Patrick Barkham – The Guardian – 18 September 2017

It is hazardous to stand in my garden. Thwack. Thud. Every five minutes, the tree above slings a conker to the ground as if by catapult.

Some open their spiny cases on impact. Others can be gently crushed to reveal their gleaming treasure: cool to touch, encased in cream memory foam, and decorated with whorls that resemble a chestnut map of the world.



*'My young children may not rap knuckles with conkers, but they relish the thrill of discovering what's inside each case.'* Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

Conkers are not an endangered species but they are disappearing from children's vocabulary – controversially excised from the Oxford Junior Dictionary a few seasons ago. It's an old chestnut that children no longer play conkers, but this autumn's bumper crop has two new champions: the writer Robert Macfarlane and the artist Jackie Morris.

Their gorgeous new book, *The Lost Words*, celebrates 20 natural things, from adders to wrens, that have been culled from the dictionary. Macfarlane writes acrostic poems, which he hopes are spells to be read aloud, to conjure up each thing.

When Macfarlane and others first objected to the dictionary's cull of the likes of kingfisher and newt, lexicographers gave a teacherly retort that it isn't a dictionary's job to be didactic (true) and these words are no longer common currency, among children, curriculums or literature (false).

My young children relish the thrill of discovering what's inside each case: sometimes unexpectedly small, sometimes twins, always shining. Like most beautiful pleasures, this is ephemeral: each conker quickly dulls, and collections are discarded.

Perhaps if lexicographers are clunked on the head by a falling conker they will realise that many simple wonders they've decided are no longer part of busy urban lives – magpies, otters – are actually thriving, even in cities, and are more numerous than they have been for decades.

I hope *The Lost Words* restores some of these natural treasures back where they belong: in our dictionaries, as well as hearts and minds.

## 94. The Guardian view on Jacinda Ardern: pregnant with meaning

**Editorial. The Guardian. 19 January 2018**

Of course it ought not to be news that someone with an important job has a baby and then gets on with their work while their partner gets on with the childcare. Men do it all the time. Even some women do, if they are rich and powerful enough to turn their childcare over to paid help. But the announcement by Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, that she will have a child, take six weeks' parental leave, and then leave the bulk of the childcare to her partner, Clarke Gayford, is still important. It's an assertion of everyday equality from the first country in the world to give women the vote.

Ms Ardern and Mr Gayford are not exactly a couple like any other: she's the prime minister, and he's a television presenter, whose show centres on him killing and eating fish. But their relative prominence makes the impact of their decision greater. Even Mr Gayford's screen persona as a macho outdoor man increases the significance of their announcement. It demonstrates that they recognise there's an important sense in which neither of their high-powered jobs is going to be as influential as the work they do as parents.

There can't be a single right answer for everyone to the question of how to balance paid work and childcare. Both men and women differ in their enjoyment and even tolerance of babies and infants. Their choices should not be imposed on them from the outside. We have a long way to go to get there. For most parents in the world, there is no real choice. A combination of social and economic pressures forces them into full-time childcare – or out of it. Changing this will demand an immense, global revolution – one which will make life better for everyone.

## **95. Slurs Prompt U.S. Air Force Academy Head to Call for Racial Tolerance**

**Reuters / The New York Times – Sept. 29, 2017**

Racial slurs were written in the dormitory of the U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, this week, prompting the head of the institution to tell students, faculty and staff that bigotry would not be tolerated.

The academy's superintendent, Lieutenant General Jay Silveria, citing other highly publicized racial incidents, urged the school community to embrace diversity and laid out what was required of them.

"If you can't treat someone with dignity and respect, then get out," Silveria told the academy's 4,000 cadets and staff in a five-and-a-half minute address, a video of which was posted on the school's Facebook page.

To capture the moment, Silveria invited students to record his admonition using their phones.

The racial slurs were discovered this week on message boards outside the dormitory rooms of five black cadet candidates, according to a memo Silveria wrote on Wednesday to the academy's staff that was also posted on Facebook.

The academy's prep school, where the slurs appeared, is a 10-month program that gives about 240 students the chance each year to train and study to become full-fledged freshman cadets the following year.

Some students sent photos of the slurs, which the Air Force Times said included the N-word, to their parents, while some photos were posted on social media, Silveria said, adding that the academy was investigating the incident. [...]

In his address to students and staff, Silveria said there was no place for racism and bigotry at the institution.

"You should be outraged not only as an airman but as a human being," he said.

Citing a march by white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as silent protests by professional football players over police shootings, Silveria spoke of the benefits of diversity in society and academia.

"The power of that diversity comes together and makes us that much more powerful," he said.

## 97. Britain Gets Shaken Up as Tory Women Say ‘Me Too’

Editorial – The New York Times – Nov. 8, 2017

With Prime Minister Theresa May’s grip on the government already shaky as she negotiates Britain’s painful break from the European Union, the sort of sexual harassment accusations that have stirred the media, entertainment industry and politics in the United States have driven one of her ministers from office and rocked her Conservative Party.

Britain’s defense secretary, Michael Fallon, quit last Wednesday after a series of allegations of sexual misconduct, including a complaint by Andrea Leadsom, the leader of Britain’s House of Commons, that at a parliamentary meeting six years ago, he lewdly suggested where she could warm her hands. Mr. Fallon denies the allegations.

A list of more than 30 lawmakers in Mrs. May’s Conservative Party — with names redacted — has been circulated online with anonymous charges of sexual misconduct ranging from “handsy in taxis” to accusations of extramarital affairs.

The Labour Party has been affected too. A party activist, Bex Bailey, says she was raped by a Labour official in 2011 and was told by a senior party member to keep quiet about it if she valued her career.

Both Labour and the Conservatives are drawing up codes of conduct and grievance procedures for victims of sexual misconduct. But the seriousness of the official response is already in doubt.

Mrs. May angered many in her party by replacing Mr. Fallon with a trusted aide responsible for party discipline, Gavin Williamson, whom critics say is a political climber with scant experience for the job who will do nothing to change the status quo.

If America’s recent experience is any indication, though, women themselves will keep the issue alive.

“The dam has broken on this now,” said the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, and these “overwhelmingly male-dominated professions, where the boys’ own locker-room culture has prevailed and it’s all been a bit of a laugh, has got to stop.”

## 98. The Guardian view on soft skills: being clever is not enough

**Editorial. The Guardian. Thursday 25 January 2018.**

Theresa May has made it clear she wants social mobility to be a defining theme of her time in office. How it is to be achieved is less obvious. Her original plan hinged on a return to widespread selection in secondary education, but not everyone in her party was convinced. So there is a gap in Mrs May's programme where a flagship education policy used to be. This puts pressure on Damian Hinds, the new education secretary. In his first public statement of intent, Mr Hinds addressed the challenge that rapid technological change poses to schools and the need to create systems so adults can acquire new skills.

These are not original insights, but they are a refreshing break from years of fixation on school management structures. The same is true of Mr Hinds' focus on what he calls "employability skills" – the social and cognitive capabilities that make school leavers attractive candidates for jobs but do not appear on the academic curriculum. These can be as elementary as a readiness to look a boss in the eye, reliably turning up each morning, responding to criticism constructively, and speaking clearly and politely. Such things can be learned, but not as superficial performance. They are expressions of confidence, resilience and that ill-defined thing known as "character". Such attributes are hard currency in a competitive jobs market.

Mr Hinds is not the first minister to extol the virtues of resilience – the ability to defer gratification and to recover from setbacks. But it is encouraging that Mr Hinds sees it as a priority. It sounds like a second-order issue only to someone who has not tried to teach or work in environments where such qualities are lacking.

It will certainly take character and resilience to translate Mr Hinds' lofty words into practical, evidence-led policy. Time will tell if he is endowed with the qualities he wants to inculcate in younger generations.

## **99. The Guardian view on Australia Day: we need to debate our history, not deny it**

**Editorial. The Guardian. 25 January 2018**

Australia's prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, said last week that "a free country debates its history, it does not deny it." He was right. But he did not appear to be listening to himself. With his next breath he sought to dismiss the growing discussions about whether Australia Day should be moved, portraying advocates as sowers of discord. Yet to ask whether the anniversary of the first fleet's arrival in Sydney Cove in 1788 is appropriate for the national celebration is precisely to address the most consequential questions about the country's past. The meaning of 26 January has to be part of the big, honest discussion that just might lead to a lasting reconciliation.

Mr Turnbull acknowledged that, for Indigenous Australians, European settlement has been "complex and tragic" – but insisted it was "divisive" to suggest that they might not want to celebrate the date of their colonisation, as if the conversation itself is the problem rather than the historical facts about massacre and dispossession. He appeared to imply that it is somehow unpatriotic to advocate for #changethedate, as if it were impossible to be both a proud Australian and also painfully aware that some kind of reconciliation with Indigenous Australia is the nation's most chafing piece of unfinished business.

He has even tried to deny that this debate was happening in any significant way at all. He claimed that it was the preoccupation of "a tiny handful of people". The truth is that it is happening in spite of the major parties. The discussion is playing out across news sites and radio stations around the country.

Despite predictable attempts to turn it into a tedious culture war by tabloid columnists and desperate attention-seeking provocateurs, this is not a new discussion, but one that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long been seeking. Protests about 26 January trace back to 1938. The national strategy that followed the 1990s' decade-long process to achieve reconciliation also recommended the date be changed.

## 100. Insect Armageddon

**Editorial – The New York Times – October 29, 2017**

There is alarming new evidence that insect populations worldwide are in rapid decline. As Prof. Dave Goulson of the University of Sussex, a co-author of a new insect study, put it, we are “on course for ecological Armageddon” because “if we lose the insects, then everything is going to collapse.”

The study, which tracked flying insects collected in nature preserves across Germany, found that in just 25 years, the total biomass of these insects declined by an astonishing 76%. The reasons for the decline are not entirely clear — and only flying insects were collected, so the fate of crawling insects, for example, is not known — but the scientists suspect two main culprits: the use of pesticides and a lack of habitat in surrounding farmland.

This isn't the first study to indicate that insects are in trouble. The Zoological Society of London warned five years ago that many insect populations worldwide were declining, and a 2014 study published in *Science* magazine documented a steep drop in insect and other invertebrate life worldwide, warning that such “declines will cascade onto ecosystem functioning and human well-being.”

The disappearance of creepy, crawly, buzzing insects doesn't elicit the kind of emotional response that, say, global warming's threat to polar bears does. But we cannot survive in a world without insects, as they are critical for pollinating our food and are themselves a food source for many fish, birds and reptiles. Insects are also nature's scavengers and soil aerators.

There are proven steps that could be taken now to help stem this decline. Buffer zones of wildflowers and native plants around single-crop fields can help, as can agricultural practices that respect biodiversity and reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides. Our planet's rapidly disappearing forests, wetlands and grasslands need to be preserved and restored wherever possible. More research is also needed to better understand why and where insects are disappearing and how they can be saved.

## **102. Animal rights groups condemn 'inhumane' use of bear to start Russian league match**

**Callum Davis – The Telegraph – 17 April 2018**

Animal rights groups have condemned the exploitation of a bear for a third division league game in Russia.

The circus bear, called 'Tim', was trained to hand the match ball to the referee of the clash between Mashuk-KMV and Angusht in Pyatigorsk.

After being led out onto the side of the pitch before kick-off, the bear led a round of applause whilst stood on his hind legs.

He then passes the ball to the referee after being prompted by his handler.

The performance, which comes just a few months before the start of the World Cup in Russia, has been called 'inhumane' by animal rights campaigners.

"In addition to being inhumane and utterly out of touch, using a bear as a captive servant to deliver a football is downright dangerous," Elisa Allen, director of animal welfare charity Peta told BBC Sport.

"The bear is the symbol of Russia, so we hope the country's people will show some compassion and national pride and stop abusing them. Common decency should compel the league to pull this stunt."

Brian da Cal, country director of Four Paws UK, told the BBC: "While some supposedly find this depressing scene 'entertaining' there is nothing at all light-hearted about this kind of abuse.

"Bears are wild animals and as such have very specific and complex needs.

"Being chained up, muzzled and forced to perform unnatural acts in front of large, rowdy crowds of people causes tremendous stress and can have an untold impact on these animals, both psychological and physical."

FIFA have denied suggestions that the bear could be used in the World Cup opening ceremony.

## **105. Even Meghan Markle can't make feudal privilege acceptable**

**Kenan Malik – The Guardian - 20 May 2018**

So, Britain has a black princess (or a “biracial” one, as the princess herself would have it). Along with anticipation of the dress and gossip about her extended family has come a debate about how much Meghan Markle will transform both the royal family and perceptions of blackness and Britishness. It's a debate as dysfunctional as the Windsors themselves.

According to the 2011 census, 2.3 million people in Britain are either married to, or living with, someone of a different ethnicity. The excitement and, for some, apprehension at Harry doing the same is a reflection not of how much the monarchy is being modernised, but of how anachronistic it really is.

In today's celebrity culture, Meghan may actually be the most authentic royal of them all. In the past, the mystique of the royals derived from the distance between their lives and those of their subjects and from the secrecy with which they surrounded their affairs. Now, the royals capture the imagination for exactly the opposite reason: they've become a soap opera in which their every sneeze is splashed across the gossip pages. Welcome to Meghan's world.

As for the belief that Meghan will break down barriers for black people and make minorities more accepted as truly British, that's as anachronistic as the monarchy. Faced by an abusive skinhead or by a police officer about to stop and search me, my first thought has never been: “If only there was a black Windsor, then I might be accepted more.”

Nor can I work out why adding a few more black dukes and duchesses, or even kings and queens, should be a step forward. Equality does not mean making inherited privilege more “diverse”. It requires us to get rid of the whole shebang. Adding a splash of colour to a feudal relic is not my idea of social progress.