Hunger strikes in Turkey

Sir—In your Dec 23/30 news item, you continue to do a service to those deprived of basic human rights in Turkey by publicising the views of such organisations as the World Medical Association and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.

Although torture is a fact of life in Turkey, health professionals who raise their voices in protest at ill treatment of prisoners face arrest, physical assault, and imprisonment, and can themselves be tortured. The crimes of the Turkish state have been described as based on a fundamental failure to respect the right to think differently, with any opposition to the military-dominated status quo an invitation to terror and disappearance (www.geocities.com/hari6kumar/garbisprisoners.html, accessed Jan 31, 2000). Protestes over attempts to isolate prisoners in top-security prisons are part of a continuing campaign by prisoners and their families and supporters against punishment and as a psychological weapon for silence dissent before, after, and during trials and sentencing.

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has declared that Abdullah Ocalan, head of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), has the right to appeal against his death sentence on the grounds that he was denied a fair trial because of Turkish violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. A year ago, the European Union formally adopted Turkey as a candidate member. An insistence on respect for human rights is a condition of European Union membership. Unfortunately, if the Ilisu Dam project is anything to go by, western European governments are mainly concerned with the prospect of commercial gain from access to Turkish markets.

Lamentably, the UK government is showing the way with its intention to grant a UK £200 million export credit to Balfour Beatty for a project that will drown the historic town of Hasankeyf and leave up to 78 000 Kurds without their homes.1 Doctors should express support for their persecuted Turkish colleagues, but the UK electorate as a whole must ponder the question, what in the name of Bastian's "en einkrastrai" instead being rendered as the more Hellenic "eni enikrastrai".

H C Bastian, Aldous Huxley, and Jonathan Osborne

Sir—The neurologist H C Bastian whose many works were reported by B Jellinek (Dec 23/30, p 2180) has the distinction of being mentioned in one of the more scientifically literate classics of twentieth-century literature, Aldous Huxley's Point Counter Point.

“Philip was dining alone. In front of his plate half a bottle of claret and the water jug propped up an open volume. He read between the mouthfuls, as he masticated. The book was Bastian's On the Brain. Not very up-to-date, perhaps, but the best he could find in his father's library to keep him amused in the train. Halfway through the fish, he came upon the case of the Irish gentleman who had suffered from aphasia, and was so much struck by it that he pushed aside his plate and, taking out his pocket book, made a note of it at once. The physician had asked the patient to read aloud a paragraph from the statutes of Trinity College, Dublin. 'It shall be in the power of the College to examine or not examine every Licensant, previous to his admission to a fellowship, as they shall think fit.' What the patient actually read was: ‘An the bee-what in the tee-mother of the trothotodoo, to majoram or that emphysematous pyelonephritis: a rare cause of pneumaturia—In this Report letter by S Piscitelli and colleagues (Feb 12, 2000, p 548), the first sentence on p 540 should be “The AUC, of indinavir decreased by a mean (SD) of 54% (15%) 0.358 [13.0 to 15.6; 5.3] after therapy with St John’s wort (p=0.0008).”

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Bone-targeted therapy for advanced androgen-independent carcinoma of the prostate: a randomised phase II trial—In this Article by Shi-Ming Tu and colleagues (Feb 3, p 336), the world placebo in figure 1 on page 338 should be replaced with control intervention.

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