LETTER FROM LONDON IGerry Loughran

*When the Aids virus* is *used as a weapon* •••

As of 2010, at least

600 people were

convicted of criminal

transmission of HIV

Leslie Pringle, an awardwinning

photographer,

had been HIV positive

for nine years when he had

unprotected sex with his girlfriend.

The couple later split up but

then the woman became ill with

vomiting, stiffness in her joints,

a burning sensation in her eyes

and a skin rash. Tests revealed

she, too, was HIV positive.

At Newcastle Crown Court,

a jury found Pringle guilty of

inflicting grievous bodily harm

by infecting his former partner,

identified in court only as X,

with the virus. He was detained

in custody for sentencing in

November.

Prosecutors said Pringle

had failed to take his medication

and missed some medical

appointments.

Pringle told police he had

been devastated by his diagnosis.

“I told nobody about it.

I tried to ignore it, to put it in

the bottom drawer and push

it away.”

The situation came to light

when the girlfriend confronted

Pringle at his studio in a rage

and then reported him to the

police. Pringle said: “Next

evening I tried to hang myself

and the cable snapped, then I

put myself in the River Tyne

but your survival instinct

comes in.”

The case was the first of its

kind dealt with by Northumbria

Police and only the third

to be prosecuted in the north

of England. But worldwide an

increasing number of people are

being prosecuted for transmitting

the virus to their sexual

partners, either “deliberately”

or “recklessly.”

The first conviction in the

UK in March 2003 was of Mohammed

Dica, Kenya-born with

family in Somalia. Dica, living

in London, was found guilty of

causing grievous bodily harm to

two women by recklessly transmitting

HIV. He was sentenced

to eight years but this was cut

to four and a half years after a

series of appeals and retrials.

As of 2010, at least 600 people

with HIV in 24 countries

were convicted of criminal

transmission of the virus, and

in several cases murder charges

have been laid when the infected

partner died. Some libertarian

and human rights groups,

however, argue against criminalisation

on grounds that while

HIV is unpleasant to live with,

it is no longer a death sentence.

With modern anti-retroviral

drugs, HIV positive people

can live with a good quality of

life for many years.

Not all criminal transmission

cases have involved intercourse.

In 1998, Richard Schmidt, a

doctor from Louisiana, USA,

was accused of infecting his

lover, Janice Trahan, a nurse, by

injecting her with HIV-infected

blood. Trahan said Schmidt injected

her with blood from one

of his HIV-positive patients as

an act of vengeance after she

tried to end their relationship.

Schmidt was jailed for

50 years.

In the same year in Illinois,

Brian Stewart, a medical technician,

was sentenced to life

in prison for injecting his son,

aged 11 months, with HIV-contaminated

blood to avoid paying

child support. He told the boy’s

mother not to bother seeking

financial assistance because the

child would not live beyond the

age of five.

The boy was diagnosed with

full-blown Aids in 1996 and was

not expected to live beyond the

age of six. But with advances in

treatment of Aids, he completed

high school, has a girlfriend and

lives an active social life.

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It is a problem which sports

fans in Britain thought was all

done and dusted – racism in

football. But a number of incidents

recently involving players

against players, and fans against

players have brought it to the

fore again, both at home and

overseas.

A report by a House of

Commons select committee

concluded that racism remains

“a significant problem”

in British football. One of the

committee members lamented

a lack of ethnic diversity in

management and board room

positions at many English

clubs. There is only one black

manager of a Premiership club,

Chris Hughton at Norwich, and

most boards are all-male and

all-white.

Spats on the field involved

Luis Suarez, a South American

insulting Patrice Evra, a black

Frenchman, and John Terry, a

white Englishman, anathematising

Anton Ferdinand, a black

Englishman.

Some black players, among

them Rio Ferdinand, brother

of Anton, are boycotting the

organisation Show Racism

the Red Card on grounds it is

not aggressive enough.

Although racist chanting

and monkey noises have disappeared

from the terraces in

Britain, such displays have disfigured

matches in Euro 2012.

Anti-racist groups complain

that UEFA, European football’s

governing body, hands

down derisory penalties to the

guilty clubs, especially those in

eastern Europe and sometimes

Iberia.

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Continuing on the theme of

love and marriage, here is a

cynical view:

“I never knew what real happiness

was until I got married,

and by then it was too late.”

… and a silly one:

Two little boys attended a

wedding and one asked the

other, “How many women can

a man marry?” “Sixteen,” said

his friend. “Didn’t you hear the

vicar? Four better, four worse,

four richer, four poorer.”

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