



the hazard to health, even if little more than background level. The issue then shifts to containing radiation to 'permissible' or 'recommended' levels. And who judges the 'permissibility' of giving another cancer?

Freeloading in Namibia

Roger Murray writes: Journalists at the United Nations Headquarters in New York have found themselves in the thick of a major controversy following an invitation from the South African Government to spend 10 days in Namibia reporting next Monday's internal elections which it describes as 'country-wide elections based on universal adult suffrage'. While the South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Bernardus Fourie, has been busy assuring the UN Secretary-General Dr Kurt Waldheim that Pretoria is willing to cooperate in implementing the UN plan for elections next year, the text of the invitation makes interesting reading. A letter signed by David Steward, the South African Chargé d'Affaires in New York, and dated 30 October, conveyed an invitation on behalf of the Administrator-General of Namibia, Judge Marthinus Steyn: 'Because of the historical and political importance of the occasion, I have pleasure in inviting you to the Territory for the process of observing the electoral (sic) process. It is suggested that you arrive in the Territory between 27 November 1978 and 4 December 1978 for a visit of up to 10 days prior to, during or after the election period. I am looking forward to having the opportunity of meeting you personally in Windhoek. Signed: M. T. Steyn, Administrator-General.' The covering letter continued: 'The Administrator-General is prepared to bear the cost of your visit.'

The invitation was extended to 17 journalists in their capacity as UN-accredited correspondents. What particularly incensed officials of UNCA, the UN Correspondents Association, was less the offer of a free trip than the apparent attempt to set up a situation in which it could be claimed that the UN in some form had taken part in the proceedings, and the fact that the invitation was exclusively directed to Western correspondents, although UNCA has several, although too few, African and third world members. Inquiries by one veteran observer of UN affairs, journalist Alec Collett, failed to obtain a prior assurance from the South Africans as to whether or not the group of UNCA journalists invited would be able to travel freely and have full access to individuals, rather than being obliged to travel about in a group at all times. A majority of the news organisations invited - most of which in any case have long-standing house regulations precluding the acceptance of free trips - declined the invitation. Only two correspondents - from the BBC and Reuters - accepted the initial invitation.

The South African Embassy in Washington has confirmed that up to 100 persons from various countries had been invited by Judge Steyn. Americans invited included heads of major foundations, jurists and some strong critics of apartheid, such as Millard Arnold, a Washington attorney who directs

the South African programme of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, who had twice before been refused visas for South Africa. John Knowles, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, and McGeorge Bundy, head of Ford Foundation, publicly announced they had turned down their invitations.

Paying for students

Francis Wheen writes: The National Union of Students is holding an emergency conference in London this weekend to discuss the reforms of student union financing suggested by the Department of Education and Science. Students in receipt of mandatory awards currently have their annual union subscription - sometimes as much as £50 per capita - paid by their local education authority, which then has 90 per cent of the sum reimbursed by the DES. Following consultations with interested parties the DES issued a discussion paper in May this year, which proposed that unions should receive a maximum of about £15 from local authorities and, 'to cover the cost of all but the minimum level of student union activity', would have to negotiate a subvention from their host institutions to make up the sum.

This move was designed to stem criticism of student unions' alleged lack of accountability for the large sums of public money they consume - £13 million in 1976-77 - without impinging on their autonomy. Many unions feel, however, that having to negotiate a subvention direct from their college would reduce not only their independence - since the money could be awarded conditionally - but also their income, since they would be competing with academic departments for a slice of the same cake. Recognition of this unease came last week with the announcement by Mr Gordon Oakes, Minister of State at the DES, that, while the government still intends to go ahead with its original scheme in the absence of any acceptable alternative, it might now prove necessary to defer its introduction until the academic year 1980-81 to allow time for further consultations. Although the DES proposals are far from perfect, they do at least represent a heartening victory for the Department over the Treasury, which wanted to interfere with the NUS's independence as well.

Intelligence fantasies

Duncan Campbell writes: The lobbyists of the right have hit back at the allegations of Mr Sia Zand - the Iranian defector who claims that certain British journalists have been in the pay of the Shah of Iran - in a burst of fantasy which illuminates them rather than Zand. In the *New York Times* of 23 November 'British Intelligence Sources known for a generally hard line attitude' are quoted on the subject of Mr Zand, who, they say, 'has been taken over by "the Agee ring"' - said to be a group of writers and activists who were friendly with CIA critic Philip Agee. The 'sources' ventured one name of this Agee circle - mine. Because of these taunts, Mr Zand was not to be trusted.

Mr Zand has not met me, or indeed anyone who might be part of an 'Agee ring' as described. The incident points to a clear and no doubt witting fantasy being perpetrated by some sections of British intelligence agencies and their lobbyists, namely that any critic of their activities is a servant of Moscow, orchestrated by *bêtes noires* like Agee.

Mr Zand's allegations still await substantiation, although it is notable that the Iranian embassy has admitted the practice of giving expensive gifts to journalists. Embassy spokesmen have helpfully refuted any suggestion that Mr Zand was 'a puppet of communists or Trotskyites'.

The fantasies of 'British intelligence sources' will also leave their mark elsewhere this week. Attorney-General Sam Silkin is to face a meeting; of the Parliamentary Labour Party this Thursday to explain why he allowed 'unsubstantiated' and 'oppressive' charges under Section One of the Official Secrets Act to be brought in the recent trial on the recommendation of security advisers.

The old, old Nixon

I like a drink as much as anyone: critics, indeed, may say this is an under-estimate. And if you edit a newspaper, even a small one like the NS, there's no shortage of occasions on which you can have one, or several, without paying.

But there are some invitations I find myself refusing. In October for instance, there was the card entitling the bearer to celebrate at the Soviet Embassy the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Now, I'm quite ready to do specific business with the controllers of the Soviet Union: asking, for instance, about human rights in their country, or about their latest methods of refining titanium. But I'm not ready to swig champagne with them on the anniversary of a socialist revolution the aspirations of which were butchered long ago.

Of course, this is an awkward matter for a reporter. In order to do one's job, one must be meek and gentle with all kinds of butchers. Certainly I would not give 10p for any reporter who claims to understand the condition of modern Britain, but who has not spent some time leaning on a bar while some National Frontsman expounds his unlovely theories. (One never knows how much of one's modest demeanour is professional detachment, and how much is pragmatic judgment about the number of bodies blocking one's passage to the door.)

There seems to be no test except the instinctive one of the irresistibly rising gorge. Others may differ; but my own gorge passed the Plimsoll mark on the arrival of an invitation from Lord Longford to lunch luxuriously with Richard Nixon and some large gathering of London wits and intellectuals. It was, I think, the wording of the card that did it: Guest of *Honour the Honourable* Richard Nixon. Coming from a self-appointed guardian of public morals, it seemed a little rich. Should we honour the man who tried to subvert American democracy? Nixon is, of course, entitled to free speech. Any time he has something to say, there's a soapbox at Hyde Park Corner. And why shouldn't Lord Longford, who likes to reform hard cases, buy him a warming lunch afterwards? But it would be wrong to imagine that the Longford shindig, or Nixon's visit to the Oxford Union, have anything to do with the free passage of information. Nixon, as usual, will say nothing he has not said before, and those who attend will learn no more than the visitors to a raree-show.

Nixon, however, is satisfied with such an exchange, for his business at the moment is to restore himself as a force in American politics by 'collecting' naïve and, where possible, distinguished audiences outside America. (It was always his pitch that 'the world' was more appreciative than his own ungrateful people.) He will not be a Presidential candidate again, but he is on the way to being a Republican kingmaker - and Lord Longford and the Oxford Union have received a small part in the script. Soon, we shall be reading about another 'new Nixon', and it may be wise to recall what one veteran American editor said last time a product was launched under that name, in 1968. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'there is no "new Nixon". There is just the old Nixon, a little older.'

Bruce Page