

Beating the left sensible

Francis Wheen writes: It was grimly appropriate that the National Front's AGM last Saturday should have been held on the same day as the funeral in East London of Michael Ferreria, a victim of the racism which the National Front does its best to encourage. The most ominous note of the day was sounded by NF chairman John Tyndall who, in a long and ranting speech, declared 'it hasn't been the National Front that's been obliterated. The obliteration has been of the red mobs who declared war against the NF - the red mobs whose members, as they nurse their scars and bruises, are now perhaps wiser people than they were before.' There seems only one possible interpretation of this comment, but doubtless the police will think otherwise. 'If our opponents are determined not to allow debate and argument,' Tyndall continued, 'we will use all the force and all the power necessary to defend ourselves against them - and when they hurt us we'll hurt them four or five times as much.'

The same delight in violence inspired Tyndall's choice of the Elizabethan and Tudor era as Britain's finest hour: 'In that age men first thought of Empire, not as a device to bring democracy to savages, but as something for the expansion and enrichment of the British race. A man like Drake was able to act ruthlessly against the nation's enemies and not bring upon himself the disapproval of a thousand pens, dripping with the anguish of liberal thinkers.'

Observation of the meeting was cut short when Martin Walker of the *Guardian* and myself were forcibly ejected by a rabble of NF goons. What we

did see in the hall, however, suggested that reports of the NF's death may have been greatly exaggerated. The turn-out, of over 1,000, was impressive given the secretive and complicated system of 'redirection points' by which NF members had to find the venue (which turned out to be the Seymour Hall), where a notice proclaimed the AGM of the 'British Physical Chemistry Association'.

Nevertheless, there are still signs of rebellion in the ranks. During the debate on a motion declaring that no member of the NF National Directorate should be a freemason (which was defeated), the apelike NF activist Derek Day - who was also responsible for my sudden expulsion from the hall - said that if the motion was passed the Front should also agree not to allow homosexuals on the Directorate. Indeed a motion suggesting precisely this had been brought forward earlier in the morning, but the chair refused time for it to be debated - presumably to spare the blushes of the NF's activities organiser Martin Webster.

Because of bad publicity in the past, the Front is also selecting its candidates for the next general election with more care than usual: one NF stalwart was privately furious that he had been turned down because of his past associations with the British Movement, a Nazi group which is on the Front's list of proscribed organisations. Tyndall is clearly desperate to present a 'clean' face to the electorate, but even so he seemed to anticipate an unsuccessful election campaign, and was already making excuses: 'We are not a party that seeks its justification in the momentary approval that it may gain at the ballot box or in the opinion polls. We are in a war and we have to face the vicissitudes, as well as the triumphs, of war.'

A new Norwegian 'resistance'

Duncan Campbell writes: A new round of state security trials starts in Norway this week. One of Norway's most celebrated veterans of the wartime resistance, Major Sven Blindheim, has appeared in the Supreme Court this Friday to appeal against a suspended prison sentence imposed after he had revealed details of his work in the 1950s for Norwegian military intelligence, which had involved the undercover recruiting of sabotage teams in Finland for attacks on the Soviet Union. He was also involved in the organisation of right-wing former members of the Norwegian resistance into 'stay-behind nets' to carry on guerrilla activities against a Soviet invasion or communist government in any of the Scandinavian countries. The nets were equipped with weaponry and radio equipment by Nato intelligence agencies and the CIA.

Ironically, since Blindheim's original disclosures, which were initially wholly denied by the government, the whole story has largely become an open book. The memoirs of former CIA chief William Colby, published last year after Blindheim had been charged, described Colby's work as a CIA agent in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland organising the stay-behind and sabotage groups.

Last November, police searching the Oslo home of a right wing former shipowner, Hans Otto Meyer, discovered a cache of arms in a secret room, including American, German, and Nato arms and anti-tank weapons. The room was also equipped with radio to act as a military command centre. After repeated official denials and retractions, it was admitted that Meyer had been recruited to a

secret military arm of the security service as part of the network originally set up by the CIA. The centre had been exercised at least once during the 1960s, in an armed rehearsal to counter a coup. Although the defence ministry had, after questions about CIA activities, claimed that the arms and equipment of the stay-behind nets had been transferred to the defence forces after 1962, it was clear that Meyer's cache had been established by the security services after that date. Meyer, a fanatical anti-communist, has now been charged solely with illegal importation of some of the arms discovered.

The Blindheim appeal will be the first of a series of trials which has already tarnished the Norwegian government's liberal democratic image. The major case of the series, involving two journalists on the socialist weekly *Ny Tid* and a publishing assistant who were involved in Blindheim's original disclosures, starts next month.

War on the off-licences

Philip Shaw writes: A strange alliance of interests will descend on the House of Commons next Monday, when the National Union of Licensed Victuallers and the National Association of Licensed House Managers are linking up with the United Kingdom Alliance, Britain's leading temperance body. This bizarre party wants the support of Sir Bernard Braine – chairman of the National Council on Alcoholism – and Ron Lewis – MP for Carlisle, once the home of the state brewery – to halt the granting of further off-licences. They also want to stop the automatic 'upgrading' on request of wine licences to full on-licence status. Both these developments have increased the competition faced by traditional pubs.

Since the war, licences have grown from 123,032 licences in 1946 to 162,462 in 1977. Within this total the number of on-licences has fallen with the decline of 'a pub on every corner', but off-licences have grown: up by over 12,000 between 1960 and 1977.

The licensed trade's criticism of this trend may be connected with the off-licences' freedom to buy where they like. Some 50,000 of Britain's 74,484 full licences are still 'tied' to their source of supply. The major brewers – concerned about their reputation for restricting competition – are watching the publicans' alliance with the teetotallers with interest.

The off-licences claim they are satisfying a need and that they offer product knowledge beyond the usual depth of an on-licenssee. Also conscious of their image, many, particularly in the supermarket field, have recently participated in schemes to promote awareness of the illegality of under-age purchasing; members of the Brewers' Society have done the same.

Oil spills untamed

Brian Wilson writes: The first oil to reach the Sullom Voe pipeline terminal in the Shetlands was formally welcomed ashore last weekend – amid growing local concern about the management of the entire project. As junior Energy minister Dr J Dickson Mabon was picketed at the terminal, local conservationists pointed out that the Islands had suffered their first oil spill victims already, largely due to quite inadequate pollution clearance measures. Over 1,500 birds and 1,000 otters have been killed as a result of a spill of 1,100 tons of bunker fuel from an Esso tanker. The spill itself was partially also the result of unobserved precautions; too few tugs had towed the tanker into the harbour, and when one tug caught fire and had to move away rapidly, the tanker collided with part of a jetty.

With the completion of Sullom Voe far behind schedule and arrangements to prevent or deal with accidents looking distinctly shaky, the image of efficiency presented by the Shetland Islands Council and the oil companies has tarnished. The council, in particular, is jealous of its reputation as the local authority that tamed the oil companies. Now its own successful interventionism seems in danger of leav-

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Sam Silkin and the art of self-defence

If Clement Freud's Official Information Bill reaches the statute book – it could, after last week's unopposed second reading – then the unlovely provisions of Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act will come at long last to the graveside. Merlyn Rees, however, moodily plans to continue life support. And meanwhile the Attorney-General, Sam Silkin, is trying to re-write the last year of Section 2's inglorious history.

Silkin was responsible for the trial in which I, another journalist, and a former army corporal were defendants, under both Sections 1 & 2. We were acquitted – after much to-ing and fro-ing over jury vetting, the nature of secrecy and what have you – on six charges, and convicted on one Section 2 charge relating to an interview two years ago. Two of us were discharged, and ex-Corporal John Berry got a six-months suspended sentence. The milder press comments suggested that the whole thing had been a blunder.

Silkin's self-defence was first produced at a (private) meeting of Labour MPs last year: a few days ago his parliamentary secretary, Arthur Davidson, obligingly re-cycled it as an article in *Labour Weekly*. The line of argument, which deserves a little comment, proposes that a Labour A-G can only interpret the law as he finds it, and that getting us on one charge each under the notoriously 'catch-all' Section 2 is justification for all the palaver. This doesn't explain away the 'oppressive' Section 1 charges, which had to be dropped. But Silkin claims that the judge has been 'widely misquoted' on this point. Really? 'Oppressive' was a word the prosecution first used, whereon the judge noted:

The crown have made two concessions – (firstly) they think it would be oppressive in this case for me to apply the law because of the presumption (of guilt) that arises in (Section 1) ... It is a very oppressive section designed to

ing it the weaker and submissive partner in the oil enterprises in which it insisted on a stake. Two senior council officials concerned with pollution and the ports have already been forced to resign because of their critical attitude to safety precautions.

Former pollution officer Captain Chris Hunter predicted last August that there would be one minor spillage a week with a major incident every ten



meet spying or sabotage. To extend it beyond that should be resisted.

This 'misquotation' may be compared with Silkin/Davidson's management of the judge's words in *Labour Weekly*:

... the judge said that the information disclosed by Berry was 'still important' and 'of a kind which might imperil the lives of former colleagues and other innocent people' ...

He did no such thing. He said:

Although the information was stale and of a comparatively low level of intelligence, I believe it was still important.

The judge *never* said that Berry's disclosures had, or could have, endangered anyone's life – nor did the prosecution claim it. Davidson appears to be twisting what Judge Mars-Jones said in *contrasting* Berry's behaviour with that of American intelligence defectors:

You did what you did because you thought it was your moral duty ... I believe that very few people in this country have sympathy with defectors from the CIA or NSA who make money from disclosing secrets which they were entrusted with; disclosures which might imperil the lives of former colleagues and other innocent people. As I have said, money was not your motive.

Silkin/Davidson misquote the judge yet again when they make him put the matter in 'the upper half of Section 2' – implying that the prosecution weren't so wrong to go eyeballs-out for Section 1. The actual words were:

I would put your case *just* inside the upper half of the [Section 2] scale.

which suggests that they were near enough half a section out. It is remarkable that Sam Silkin should still seek to justify the blunders into which the security services led him. But if this is a reasonable specimen of his champion's performance, I am glad that Davidson wasn't defending me.

Duncan Campbell

years. He considered that the dangerous approaches and treacherous climate magnified the risks inherent in any large oil installation. The Director of Ports and Harbours, Captain George Biro, resigned in September after a report of his was leaked to the press. He had outlined inadequacies in safety arrangements, and stressed the shortage of first class harbour pilots and skilled tradesmen.

The council's fears for their reputation go further than maintaining local pride in the 'taming' of the oil companies. The Sullom Voe terminal, expected to handle about half the eventual North Sea oil production, could well be a target for nationalisation.

Testing time in Egypt

Christopher Hitchens writes from Cairo: Alfred Atherton is an uninspiring figure, and not likely to set the Nile on fire at the best of times. He arrived in Cairo this week to continue the American peace mission, as a figure of the second rank who has failed to convince the Israelis of the importance of linkage between a peace treaty and West Bank autonomy. The Egyptians are more impatient on both counts – because the departure of the Shah has enhanced Israeli dependence on Sinai oil (perhaps developed in co-operation with Egypt) and because the anti-Sadat line-up still includes the Saudis, who are nothing if not impressed by the swing to the PLO in Tehran.

This unpromising background to American