

VEIL LIFTS ON RAF'S SECRET WORKS IN KENT

A MAJOR NEW underground radar control centre has been constructed in Kent, the Ministry of Defence admitted to the *New Statesman* this week. The new centre, being built next to a civilian radar station at Ash, near Canterbury, will be one of four 'Control Reporting Centres' for a new radar network, UKADGE (UK Air Defence Ground Environment) which the MoD hopes will come into service during 1987. DUNCAN CAMPBELL reports

suppress information about the development, as it involved 'an important national security and defensive role... it is requested that the proposal is only notified to those whom it is essential'.

Kent county council officials also contrived to 'avoid a site description' of MoD plans at Ash being given to the council's planning committee.

Ash is the only wholly new military site in a chain of six underground headquarters for the UKADGE radar system. The other radar control centres are at Buchan near Aberdeen, Boulmer near Alnwick, and Neatishead near Norwich. All are existing RAF radar stations whose underground portions have been rebuilt over the last four years. A five storey underground Air Defence Operations Centre is approaching completion at High Wycombe — controversially sited on National Trust land, now leased to the MoD — and a Standby Air Defence Operations Centre has been rebuilt at Stanmore in suburban northwest London.

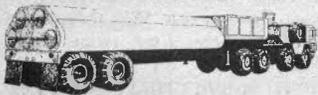
The Ash site is presently operated by the Civil Aviation Authority, and is used to help control civil air traffic

UNTIL last week, a veil of security has been drawn over the purpose of the massive underground works at the Kent site. The development was referred to in planning applications as the 'refurbishment and extension of an existing underground structure' — in fact a small and derelict A-bomb proof bunker of 1950s vintage — and Dover district council was asked to

Yes, they were dummies

FOLLOWING revelations in the *New Statesman* (see 1 March) of the strange vehicles posing as cruise missile launchers, the Minister of Defence has admitted that our suspicions were correct.

In a written reply to Gavin Strang MP (Labour, Edinburgh



East), Heseltine says there are 'a number of driver training vehicles which simulate the size, shape and weight of the major cruise missile vehicles.'

So... these famous excursions destined to show that protestors cannot hinder military training don't only leave the missiles behind at base, but they even use dummy vehicles. Funny, really, that learner drivers are at the wheel of genuine automobiles, trainee bus drivers take out big red buses but soldiers are too

careless to be trusted with the real thing.

Jane Dibblin

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THE CONTROVERSIAL defence agreement under which plutonium from Britain's nuclear power stations has been sent to America for use in nuclear weapons has been extended to last for the next ten years. It was due to expire at end-1984, but, unnoticed by MPs or anti-nuclear groups, was amended in the autumn to stretch until the end of 1994.

This was confirmed this week in a written Parliamentary answer to Plaid Cymru MP Dafydd Elis Thomas. The agreement's renewal, which may be connected with the development of Trident, is bound to rekindle fears that British civil plutonium could find its way into American weapons. In the past plutonium from both Britain's civil and military programmes has been swapped for American highly enriched uranium and tritium which have been used here for military purposes (*New Statesman* 13 July 1984). At the weekend, the Labour Party's Scottish conference overwhelmingly passed a motion calling for the halting of plutonium exports to the US.

Rob Edwards

passing to and through the London area. Concerned local groups have, however, hitherto been unable to discover the purpose of the extremely large and increasingly visible underground annexe to the civil station.

The UKADGE system is due to start operation in 1987, but has, like every other postwar British radar system, faced substantial difficulties — which, in the past, have invariably led to substantial parts of the system being ditched as either unworkable or unnecessary, soon after completion.

UKADGE is still officially 'on target' for 1987, but major difficulties have arisen with computer software being developed by the Marconi company. Marconi have also recently been responsible for major delays and huge extra costs for airborne radar early warning control stations — Nimrod AEW aircraft — which are supposed to link into UKADGE. In January, it was admitted that the Nimrod project was at least five years late, and would cost at least £500 million over its original budget. ●

GLC rates row threatens the deputy leader

FOLLOWING last week's row at the GLC over rate-capping strategy moves are afoot to unseat the deputy leader of the ruling Labour Group, John McDonnell. The 'hard' left chair of the finance and general purposes committee publicly criticised GLC leader Ken Livingstone over the GLC's failure to adopt an illegal strategy of refusing to fix a rate.

McDonnell could lose his finance chair and the deputy leadership in May. His likely successor as Livingstone's no 2 would be Mike Ward, the GLC's industry chair who moved the proposal to fix a legal rate at the Labour group meeting last week.

Steve Hayward

GLC 'monument' opens



From a gleam in the eye three years ago to today's sun-drenched reception area

A STONE'S THROW from the *New Statesman's* offices (and surely someone will try and prove this) the London Lesbian and Gay Centre has now opened its doors. Funded by the GLC to the tune of around £750,000 as part of its commitment to projects by lesbian and gay groups in London, the centre when fully opened will be the largest of its kind in the world — bigger even than those in San Francisco and New York.

It has five floors housing cafe, bars, discos, theatre space, creche, meeting room, print resource centre and dark room, office space and a book shop. Although the decorations aren't yet completed on all floors — shortage of money has led to some areas being finished by volunteer labour — the 11 full-time staff are already providing most of the facilities which will be available when the centre is fully functioning.

With the granting this week of a licence to serve alcohol excitement is building towards an official opening on 11 April. Completion and official opening will have been achieved in the face of great hostility from both local and national press and from politicians who tried to make political capital out of the homophobia engendered by the funding of such a large project.

The London Lesbian and Gay Centre may well turn out to be the most visible monument to the political courage of the current GLC administration in funding 'unpopular' minority based projects. It is also a monument to the unusual experience of a large number of lesbians and gay men collaborating successfully on a mixed project over a period of almost three years. Such collaboration will be increasingly necessary to combat anti-gay hysteria over AIDS. (See also Feedback p24).

Linda Semple