

Massive daily issue of guns to USAF guards

UNITED STATES Air Force guards at British bases are issued daily with massive quantities of guns and ammunition, according to documents passed to the *New Statesman*. According to a security duty roster for USAF Security Police guards at Alconbury, near Peterborough, the guards for one area alone on the reconnaissance spy-plane base are issued with an armory sufficient to mount a modest coup d'etat.

According to the roster list — which was found by peace campers at the base — a 34 man team reporting for an 8 hour tour of guard duty are given at least 5,600 rounds of ammunition and 126 rifle-launched grenades, as well as over 70 guns — including two M60 heavy general purpose machine guns. Also issued to a three man team, according to the roster, is a 'GAU' weapon, which may be a small armour-piercing and anti-tank gun.

The roster deals only with guns issued to guards in the base's Weapons Storage Area (WSA), which holds conventional bombs and missiles but not nuclear weapons. Many other weapons will be issued to Security Police guards on the

perimeter and at sensitive areas. All WSA guards are warned that the 'consumption of intoxicating beverages/substances within 8 hours of duty is strictly prohibited'. Officials at the US base last week refused to comment on the weapons allocation list, but did not deny its authenticity.

The revelation of the formidable armory with which US security guards are routinely equipped will heighten concern about the ill-defined legal rules which presently govern the firing of the weapons. British guards are only permitted to open fire if life is in immediate danger, or if a nuclear weapon is about to be stolen, and no other action is possible. USAF guards, however, are permitted by their rules of engagement to shoot to kill in some circumstances where life is not in danger, and protestors are interfering only with non-nuclear equipment.

Over the last nine months, the House of Commons Defence Committee, as well as individual Labour MPs and peers, have repeatedly warned the government of the dangers created by not taking action over the lax American 'rules of engagement' for opening fire.

Duncan Campbell

£80 million withheld from women

A BRITISH JUDGE has ruled that the government have illegally withheld more than £80 million a year worth of benefits from women, by discriminating against them on grounds of gender or marital status.

The ruling made last Friday by Judge Byrt of the newly independent Social Security Appeals Tribunal means that the DHSS will now have to pay out invalid-care allowances to married or cohabiting women unable to work because they are caring for a disabled person.

Judge Byrt told government ministers that they must obey the terms of an EEC directive against discrimination in the award of social security benefits. Until last week, DHSS ministers had argued — despite serious reservations on the part of civil servants — that the EEC directive did not cover their official rules about the invalid care allowance. So the DHSS is now appealing to the Social Security Commissioners against the judge's unexpected verdict.

The decision is a vindication of a three year long campaign by the Invalid Care Allowance Steering Group, and the Child Poverty Action Group.

Lynda Bransbury

'Advise and consent'?

THE PRIME MINISTER worked herself up into a lather last month at the suggestion she'd intervened in the decision to prosecute Clive Ponting for his alleged breach of the Official Secrets Act: 'Ministers have absolutely no role in deciding [in OSA cases] whether to prosecute. That is the duty of the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. Ministers had no role whatsoever in the prosecutions.'

This clear doctrine was flatly contradicted by a story in *The Times* on 28 February by its well-informed political editor, Julian Haviland. In the case of Cathy Massiter, the ex-MI5 officer who blew the whistle on phone tapping in the still censored Channel 4 film, the situation seems rather different.

Thus *The Times*: 'Ministers have decided that there must be no prosecution of those concerned in making the film because that would require the consent of Sir Michael Havers, the Attorney General, once he received the DDP's report. Sir Michael's office said last night that the report had not been received.'

'Although the final decision is for Sir Michael alone, his colleagues have no doubt what it will be.'

MISCELLANY

Time will tell — maybe

In making *Time* and its Israeli correspondent, David Halevy, the targets of his losing libel suit in New York, Ariel Sharon dealt out more poetic justice than he can have realized. For Halevy's engagement by *Time* many years earlier had been the result of a quiet deal between the magazine and Israel's spy agency, Mossad, in return for suppressing details of a story Mossad didn't want the magazine to print. According to a story that appears in the latest issue of the Paris-based bi-monthly, *Israel and Palestine*, *Time*'s tangle with Mossad occurred in 1966. At the time Maxim Ghilan, now editor of *I&P*, had been jailed by the Israeli authorities for revealing, in a magazine he was then editing in Israel, that Mossad had cooperated with the Moroccan and French secret services in the kidnapping and murder in 1965 of Moroccan opposition leader, Mehdi Ben Barka. *Time*'s correspondent in Rome has uncovered and filed the story, but *Time*'s editors refused to publish it after meeting with the Mossad chief, Meir Amit. He promised that in return for the magazine's silence, he would suggest a new correspondent and guarantee high-level access throughout the Israeli government for him and for *Time*. Mossad's candidate was none other than David Halevy. Ghilan's story about him was originally reported in *Israel and Palestine* in 1980. It was republished last December in the Israeli weekly, *Haolam Hazeh*.

Police water sports

They can count themselves lucky they weren't made to walk the plank, or



hung in chains from Tower Bridge. Respectably sailing along the Thames this Monday, holding an on-boat press conference against rate-capping, Rodney Bickerstaffe and other luminaries of NUPE successfully navigated Greenwich to the Thames Barrier (hats off to GLC enterprise) and were tooling back up-river when at Tower Bridge, the noon-gun have scarcely gone off, they were boarded by Thames River Police. 'It was like the

Sweeney, they say. The police informed them that because they were flying banners they 'constituted a demonstration' — and had failed to notify the Port of London Authority.

Extraordinary thing

Miscellany readers who turn to *Tribune* for a little heavy relief may recall a recent article that poured scorn on 'Volvo drivers and *Guardian* readers'. The by-line on the article was 'James Miller'. This, we can disclose, is the anglicised pseudonym of a certain Seumas Milne. In his unspare time Milne is a journalist on — yes, you've guessed.

Too wet to handle

More evidence that She never forgives those who don't deliver. Pity poor old Geoffrey Warnock, the vice-chancellor of Oxford, caught in the cross fire when the dons resoundingly denied the ex-Somerville chemist the honour she so obviously wanted. By rights he should have spent at least the last year of his four-year tenure as Sir Geoffrey. Such has long been the custom. Yet while his opposite number at Cambridge Sir John Butterfield enjoys his bauble, at Oxford the v-c remains plain old Mr — and he retires in the autumn. Clearly after all that vain Downing Street pressure on Oxford to deliver the old boy is not to be forgiven. His wife meanwhile continues to accumulate her share of baubles, keeping her nose clean by moving to the other place to become Mistress of Girton. Dame Mary though, it turns out, is more than a friend of the Thatchers: she played the role of bridesmaid at their wedding after sharing student life in the city of perspiring dreams.

List to port

Meanwhile no such problem for Our Leader next time round. The next vice-chancellor is already knighted — none other than Sir Patrick Neill, QC, who kicked off that historic debate for the Thatcher team. While many dons mutter at giving the post to the head of a college sometimes described as a dining club without students they relish that his wings have been clipped even before he slides into office. He'll have to cry over the port with Lord Quinton, provost of Trinity, and Her other great ally at Oxford. Both were rewarded for past favours. But you can't win them all.

Ken's blue-shift

Ken Livingstone's desertion of his former allies on Labour's far Left is happening at a speed that surprises even seasoned Ken-watchers. His latest move: to resign from the board of the sectarian, colour-printed, definitely-not-financed-by Libya, Labour Herald.