



Cover Photo: Carlos Augusto (IFL)

Not waving but drowning

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Editor: Bruce Page
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Francis Wheen, Patrick Wintour
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Duncan Campbell reveals that the American 'New Right' is now intervening in British politics

Reagan's hit-team comes to Britain

A SECRET CONFERENCE to teach British industrialists, military figures and right-wing conservatives the election techniques of the American 'New Right' is to take place in London next Monday and Tuesday. The conference features a team of speakers from the Heritage Foundation, one of the key organising groups in the 1980 US Presidential election. A key speaker will be Morton Blackwell, a White House official described as 'President Reagan's Special Assistant for Public Liaison', who will be talking about 'youth politics', 'fund raising' and 'direct mail' techniques of political lobbying. The mailing techniques will be used to 'target' a 'hit-list' of left-wing and Labour MPs.

The conference is organised by a new, right-wing lobby group, the 'Coalition for Peace Through Security', whose name and style are based on the entryist techniques of the Reaganites in 1980, using 'Political Action Committees' and 'Coalitions' rather than party factions on the British model. The Coalition for Peace Through Security was originally set up in October 1981 as an anti-CND propaganda campaign. Two key figures are Thatcherite former Young Conservatives: Tony Kerpel, a Camden councillor, and Edward Leigh, a former GLC councillor. The other sponsors are a colourful American businessman, Francis Leonard Holihan, and Dr Julian Lewis. These have recently been joined by Stewart Menaul, a former RAF officer who runs the right-wing Foreign Affairs Research Institute, based in Whitehall.

The *New Statesman's* Washington correspondent last week inquired about the propriety of a US government official directly interfering in the internal politics of a friendly country. We were told that Blackwell's trip was unauthorised, and that he had not applied to his superiors to take time off, nor asked the State Department to authorise his visit to the secret conference.

After consulting lawyers, Blackwell claimed that he would not be taking 'vacation time' to come to London, and would pay his own expenses. The US State

Department says he has been told not to discuss British politics at all.

The invitation to the Conference on 'American Campaigning Techniques... Fund-raising and Opinion-forming' was sent to about 170 people, including the chairmen of many prominent companies. It was backed up by letters appealing for company directors to attend and support it, from



Francis Leonard Holihan

David Trippier MP, who chairs the Tory backbench defence committee. The invitation tells participants:

The Coalition for Peace Through Security is bringing to this country some of the key figures whose mastery of these new methods helped ensure victory for the Republican Party in the contests for the control of the White House and the Senate. Although the Coalition has been formed to argue the case for Britain's continued membership of NATO and the preservation of the nuclear deterrent, we feel that the [American] expertise is of equal relevance to individuals and

pressure-groups [concerned with other subjects].

Besides Blackwell from the White House, there are six other US speakers, who have worked in lobbies against abortion, homosexuality, controls on campaign contributions, and equal rights legislation. They include Paul Weyrich, who set up the Heritage Foundation as well as the 'Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress', and Connie Marshner, who chairs the National Pro-Family Coalition, and is in the Library Court Coalition, which has lobbied for the control of schoolbooks - particularly in order to inject Christian fundamentalist, anti-Darwinist doctrine.

The Conference, according to CPS Director Leigh, will be entirely 'private' and 'no press will be present'. The conference, he says, is being funded by the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, which annually raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for right-wing political education.

The CPS has also been soliciting funds from and making contact with industrial concerns since its (unannounced) October launch. Invitees to the conference include members of British United Industrialists, Sir John Clark of Plessey, Nigel Brookes and Sir Arnold Hall of Hawker Siddeley. □

The Fruitcake Right: see p.12

Duncan Campbell on press manipulation

Fleet St sings for its supper

THE MINISTRY of Defence is making a mighty effort to massage public opinion into accepting the Trident submarine missile system - at a cost which not even its enthusiasts reckon to be less than £8 billion.

Defence Secretary John Nott is now lavishing secret briefings on the national press. Two weeks ago, he leaked details of 'offset' arrangements for British firms to work on Trident, and got a front-page lead in the *Sunday Times*.

On Wednesday last week he invited a group of Fleet Street editors to a private dinner at his London home, on 'lobby terms'. They were Harold Evans of *The Times*, and the editors of the *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Express*, and *Sunday Telegraph*. The gov-

ernment team consisted of Nott, Sir Frank Cooper (Permanent Secretary, Defence) and Admiral Sir Terence Lewin (Chief of the Defence Staff). Ian MacDonald, acting head of MoD Public Relations, was in attendance.

This privy gathering led to a remarkable leader in Monday's *Times*, which Mr Evans wrote himself. It contained an extraordinary sentence which wrote off Britain's £1 billion Chevaline missile development programme as 'vulnerable to developments in Soviet defensive systems'. Thus, *The Times* endorsed the Trident decision as 'sensible'.

While preparing the leader, Mr Evans told his staff that many developments in Soviet defences have ruled out any hope of continuing with the Chevaline/Polaris system. If so, his colleagues said, should there not be a major front page story?

The editor said this was impossible because what he had been told was 'secret'. (Mr Evans, it should be said, disputes this version.)

Ian MacDonald this week offered the public explanation that 'there is a possibility that the Galosh ABM deployment around Moscow might be extended from an extrastratospheric capability to an endostratospheric capability that would make differences to Chevaline's vulnerability'. Speculative rhubarb of this kind appears to have been what was offered to the national editors in their little chat with Nott.

Fleet Street's defence correspondents are not a sceptical crew, but even they would not have been much moved. But nobody would even that much expert knowledge was invited to the dinner. □

Mary Holland reports that Ireland's ban on divorce will be challenged in Europe

For better or worse, for ever and ever

THE IRISH Government is to be taken before the European Court of Human Rights in a bid to challenge Ireland's constitutional ban on civil divorce. Two cases have already been sent for examination to the European Commission, the first step in the process of appearing before the Court of Human Rights.

One concerns a father of five who gave up his job as a salesman several years ago to look after his children. Under Irish law he cannot get a divorce, or remarry. The other case, details of which were announced by the Divorce Action Group last week, is being brought by a couple and their child. The man is separated from his wife and living in what amounts to second marriage with a single woman. The child is illegitimate; neither he nor his mother have any inheritance rights, and the father cannot be his child's legal guardian. Only last week a high court judge in Dublin reaffirmed that under the Irish constitution only legitimate children qualify as 'issue' and have an automatic right of inheritance.

Marital breakdown is now a major problem in Ireland. The government's own free legal aid centres, which service the poorest sections of the community, have said that half their time is spent dealing with difficulties which arise from inadequacies in the present state of family law. Central to

this is the lack of any provision for divorce. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Catholic Church, in this particular instance, is some way ahead of the civil power. The Church does allow a marriage celebrated by a Catholic priest (as 97 per cent of Irish marriages are) to be annulled if the couple can prove that it was invalid at the time they entered into it. One popular ground for annulment is 'psychological non-consummation'.

In recent years, the number of applications for church annulments has been growing, though only a tiny proportion succeed. If a couple do succeed in getting their marriage annulled they are then free to marry new partners in a Catholic church and often do. In Ireland these second marriages are bigamous in the eyes of the state and the Church has admitted that any priest who officiates at one is an accessory to a criminal act. Moreover, the Church's tribunals do not concern themselves with matters like custody of children or maintenance. Recognising these anomalies, the Catholic Church has on several occasions suggested that the Irish government should take steps to bring civil law into line with ecclesiastical law.

Such a step might help the tiny minority who qualify for annulments. It would do nothing

for the thousands of Irish men and women whose marriages have broken down, many of whom have gone on to form second partnerships and have children. This is an issue which successive Irish governments have steadfastly managed to avoid. The last Coalition government refused to commit itself to the introduction of the necessary legislation, although the Labour Party, the junior party in government, had it in its election manifesto. Instead, Dr Garret Fitzgerald set up an all-party committee of the Dail to look at the problem. This was effectively stymied when Charles Haughey, leader of Fianna Fail, refused to allow any member of his party to sit on it. The issue was touched on in a TV debate before last month's general election, when Mr Haughey again gave it as his opinion that a 'non divorce situation' was preferable to a 'divorce situation'.

Without being able to command at least the tacit acquiescence of Fianna Fail, which is the largest political party in Ireland, it is unlikely that any Irish prime minister will have the courage to face up to the issue in the near future.

Hence the importance of the cases at present being examined by the European Commission on Human Rights. Ireland has made something of a fetish of its respect for European institutions, particularly on human rights issues. If the European Court were to give an unequivocal ruling that the ban on divorce constitutes a violation of the European Convention to which Ireland is a signatory, it would have a considerable effect on public opinion and greatly strengthen the hand of those few politicians who have supported a change in the law. □