

number of other councillors, convene special council meetings to deal with relevant business.

No political party can deny other councillors this right. Sinn Fein councillors have already sought redress in the courts. One councillor forced the Belfast City Council to lift his indefinite suspension for referring to the union jack as a 'butcher's apron'. Several weeks ago opposition councillors in Craigavon, who were refused the right to attend council meetings, successfully secured High Court backing to do so. The council majority as a result suspended all council activities and narrowly avoided being in contempt of court.

THIS DUBIOUS TACTIC of suspending council activities has been picked up by Newtownabbey, Newtonards, Cookstown, Armagh, Antrim, North Down and Lisburn councils. What is surprising about this is that Antrim, North Down and Newtownabbey councils have no Sinn Fein members, Armagh has one and the others have only two out of 20 members or more. The effect of Sinn Fein on council business would have been little more than peripheral, had the Unionists not dramatised the situation.

In councils such as Derry, Fermanagh, Newry, and Magherafelt, where Nationalist parties are in a majority, the SDLP is compelled, because of pressure from the Unionists, to vote on a tribal basis. That means, at times, that Sinn Fein nominees can be sent to public boards such as the Housing Council, Health, Libraries and Education Boards, and be represented on delegations to Ministers.

Meanwhile the SDLP, vying for the same

vote as Sinn Fein, is in danger of losing out in Catholic urban areas. Certainly it would be fatal for it, or indeed any social democratic party, to allow itself to be driven away from its natural base into rural areas where clerics, big farmers and their professional hangers-on dominate. A party such as the SDLP may survive for a time in rural areas but history would be against it.

In the aftermath of the election campaign, which involved very vicious exchanges, usually initiated by paramilitary organisations on both sides against other opposition parties in urban 'ghetto' areas, there was a chance for the opposition parties to align themselves against Sinn Fein violence. It was not in the SDLP's interest, as the largest Nationalist party, to become a bedfellow of Sinn Fein. Nor, for that matter, was it in the interest of the smaller Alliance or the even smaller Workers' parties.

At the election counts a senior member of the SDLP said that it saw its best interest being served by a rigid separation from Sinn Fein. The right option for the Unionists to consider, in the light of that public statement by the SDLP, was to seek out the common ground for legitimate democratic policies and to isolate Sinn Fein in the process. It should have been abundantly clear even to them that the gulf between the parties that support the democratic process and Sinn Fein is unbridgeable.

Sinn Fein would have been placed outside the Pale by the offer of serious talks by the Unionists to opposition parties. The vast majority of Roman Catholics, approximately 330,000 out of a possible vote of 410,000, did not vote for Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. They would for the first time, if the opposition

parties had accepted the proposition, be mobilised effectively against Sinn Fein. The Unionists, by their stupidity in forcing their pact on councils which were still operational, have turned them into Towers of Babel.

Unionists seem to have forgotten that the primary objective of Sinn Fein in seeking election to councils was to disturb the working of the administrations to the extent that commissioners would have to be put in by the Minister of the Environment to run them. Sinn Fein have to do no more than raise a flag on a public building in a Catholic area or hijack the opening of a new leisure facility to set the Unionists 'bonkers'.

Unionist reaction was a heaven-sent gift for Sinn Fein. They never anticipated allies like these on the other side. Their propaganda machine proclaims to the world that the North of Ireland is ungovernable — as it has been for years under the Unionists, and now under the British. And Sinn Fein, they emphasise, is the only fit agency in Northern Ireland to make a fist of running its affairs.

Sinn Fein hardly anticipated when they started out in their election campaign, that the Unionists themselves would wind up delivering their policy for them. But that is precisely the effect of the Unionist pact. □

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IT'S THAT SECRET BASE AGAIN

## **WHEN THE LID BLEW**

Seven years ago DUNCAN CAMPBELL was in the dock of the Old Bailey's court 1 when the present Director of Public Prosecutions mounted a crude attempt to put pressure on the judge to accept that even the existence of Britain's 'sigint' spy unit in Cyprus — 9 Signal regiment — was so secret that it could not be mentioned in open court. The farce of secrecy surrounding Ayios Nikolaos base in eastern Cyprus continues, as we saw in the £5 million case which ended last week with the acquittal of all seven defendants after a four-month trial conducted almost entirely *in camera*

THE 'ABC' (Aubrey, Berry and Campbell) Official Secrets Act trial in 1978 centred on the charge that former Intelligence Corps corporal John Berry, an analyst at Britain's signals intelligence base in Cyprus, had passed on secret information during an interview with the other two defendants, Duncan Campbell and Crispin Aubrey, then journalists working for *Time Out*.

During the trial, overt government pressure was put on the trial judge to suppress the identity of 9 Signal Regiment.

There were in fact two ABC trials. The first

ended abruptly after it was disclosed that the foreman of the jury, whose members had been carefully vetted by the Special Branch, was by remarkable coincidence a former SAS soldier who had served in Cyprus.

During this first trial, however, evidence was given in open court about the existence and purpose of the spy base at Ayios Nikolaos. A former regimental security officer admitted, to prosecution dismay, that the work and location of the base were not secret. This evidence was reported in the *Guardian* on 8 September 1978.

Almost a month later, on Friday 6 October



Colonel Hugh Johnstone, former commander of the Cyprus intelligence base and 'Don of the communications underworld'

1978, the second ABC trial had reached the same point. During cross-examination of the former security officer from Ayios Nikolaos, trial judge Mr Justice Mars-Jones heard a prosecution objection to identifying 9 Signal Regiment in open court and overruled it. He accepted that it was already public knowledge from earlier hearings.

The prosecution at once applied, successfully, for an adjournment. When the court reconvened some hours later, a phalanx of prominent government legal and security officials had formed behind the prosecution benches. They included the Attorney General's top Legal Assistant, Mr Gerald Adams; the Legal Adviser to the Security service, Mr Bernard Sheldon; a senior official from GCHQ itself, and the Director of Public Prosecutions himself, Sir Thomas Hetherington, in person — his first and only appearance at the trial.

Coincident with this sudden and overt display of state concern, Mr Justice Mars-Jones wavered. The prosecution claimed that disclosure of its role as a British electronic intelligence base would embarrass the Greek Cypriot government. Discussion was adjourned over the weekend, so that witnesses on this matter could be called on Monday.

The defence countered that, not only was the base well known locally as a monitoring centre, but mentioning the fact in court would be no embarrassment to the Cypriot government. The then press counsellor for the Cypriot High Commission, George Lanitis, contacted Nicosia and was authorised to confirm this view. Now working for the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, Lanitis has told the *New Statesman* that the functions of Ayios Nikolaos had always been 'a common secret' in Cyprus. Cypriots are 'very well aware' of what goes on there, he said last week.

ON THE MONDAY, however, the prosecution made a formal statement on behalf of the Foreign Office. It stated that the Greek Cypriot government *would* be embarrassed if the court were openly to refer to the base. This statement was untrue. But no Foreign Office

witness was even heard, let alone cross-examined on it.

Foreign Office officials certainly did not bother to ask the Foreign Secretary for permission to intervene in this way. Dr David Owen told the *New Statesman* he had no recollection of the issue being raised with him, nor was he asked to authorise the statement made in court on behalf of his department.

In the continued presence of top legal officials, the judge refused to hear evidence that the existence of the base was not a secret. 'I don't need evidence', he said. He did 'not think that evidence could usefully be called [to show that] statements made by the Crown on behalf of the Foreign office are untrue. I must accept the statement by responsible counsel on behalf of government departments'. Newspaper articles, such as the *Guardian's* earlier report of the trial, were just dismissed as 'hearsay'.

The judge refused to accept an affidavit sworn by Chris Price, then MP for Lewisham, and an expert on Cypriot affairs. By this time, also, Lanitis had been informed — he does not recall by whom — that it would be against normal practice for diplomats to give evidence in court. The Foreign Office statement was permitted to stand, and for the next six weeks of the trial the Army's 9 Signal Regiment at Ayios Nikolaos became the anonymous 'Unit A'.

The Cyprus government was not told in advance of the statement made by the Foreign Office (ie GCHQ) in its name. Chris Price, now assistant director of the South Bank Polytechnic, said this week that 'the only inference' he could draw from the sudden arrival in court of Sir Thomas Hetherington and the others was that it was 'the clearest possible signal of serious government concern about the judge's ruling'.

From the very start of the case, the prosecution had insisted on having anonymous witnesses too. GCHQ's expert witness on sigint was to be one Lieutenant Colonel 'A'. But when they were told that Lt-Col A's real name would have to be divulged to defence lawyers, Colonel B — real name Colonel Hugh Johnstone — was substituted instead.

Colonel Johnstone was quickly identified from army magazines as the former commander of the Cyprus base. The Royal Signals magazine *Wire* had even published a profile, identifying him as the 'Don of the communications underworld'. His name was discovered and published by the *Journalist* and *Leveller* magazines.

In response, the DPP launched contempt proceedings against the magazines, which he finally lost on appeal in the House of Lords. At the height of these hearings, Colonel 'B' was deliberately named by MPs during Question Time in the House of Commons. His identity was thus revealed, four times, broadcast live to 5 million BBC radio listeners.

But the DPP still thought that Colonel B's name should be secret. Hetherington teleaxed Fleet Street newspapers, threatening them that to reveal the name would be a contempt of court. But the bubble was burst. Hetherington was almost universally attacked for his folly; some MPs wanted him cited for contempt of parliament. All ignored his strictures about publishing the Colonel's name.

Then when in court Colonel B's evidence of alleged damage to British sigint activities

collapsed completely, the prosecution suddenly wanted to produce another witness — Mr 'C', a senior Director of GCHQ Cheltenham, whose name was so absolutely secret that it could not be revealed even to the judge.

But by then Mr Justice Mars-Jones had finally had enough. He told the prosecution in no uncertain terms that it should drop the 'Section 1' charges of spying. Mr C need not attend, and the screens and alphabet soup of a trial over 9 Signal was over — until 1985. □

Research by Patrick Forbes.

## ROOM TO BREATHE

# WHO FEELS IT, KNOWS IT...

**As Rev Jesse Jackson comes and goes and as efforts accelerate to waken the conscience of a white government — our own — to its racism, Black women struggle on for elbow room. ZHANA tells it**

I HATED writing this article. I hate the idea of explaining to a mostly white readership just what it is that Black women organise around. Even worse, I resent the implication that Black women have to explain why we choose to organise autonomously.

The move for Black women's groups is a move for self-determination. Full stop. Self-determination is what we are about. Black women have a history of having our priorities defined by others, by both the empowered and the oppressed, convinced of their right to dictate to us. The perspective derives from a colonialist mentality.

Take one example. In groups of our own Black women find the space to discuss our sexuality, a marginal subject in male-dominated Black groups. Amos and Parmar pointed out in 'Challenging Imperialist Feminism', *Feminist Review* July 1984, that sexuality is defined by white women in ways that exclude our unique experience. The fact that Black women's sexuality has been systematically devalued by a society which labels all Black women prostitutes or sexually 'loose' has had grave implications for our communities.

Such labelling contributes to many Black families, and especially young Black single mothers, being deemed unfit and disproportionately likely to have their children taken into care. Our groups are also all too often called upon to support Black women who allege that they have been sexually assaulted by the police — the most recent case being that of Jackie Berkley (*NS* 22 March). And Black