

the countryside has to be given back to animals, humans have to be prepared to stop living in unnatural cities.

Ecology movements, of course, are or seem luxuries affordable only in societies which have a high degree of control over the natural environment; equally, they are only necessary in those societies. Among younger and less analytical liberationists, there's also an apocalyptic feeling, parodiable as: 'look what humans have done to the world — isn't it time animals had a chance?' that clearly has ecological strands.

AS AN ACTIVIST politics, animal rights fits only jaggedly into other left-wing campaigns and commitments — when it isn't asserting an absolute right to priority over them.

Despite the various anti-fur campaigns under way, a Saturday afternoon walk down any high street reveals just how many of these obscene garments are being flaunted by perverts... Spitting and verbal assaults are very effective [but] what will make them think even more is economic sabotage. With this in mind, a careful squirt of battery acid from a syringe on the back of the coat will have the desired effect. It is not immediately noticeable but will shortly cause a large bald patch. Happy squirting!

The suggestion comes from a recent issue of the Animal Liberation Front Supporters' Group newsletter. According to Ronnie Lee, press officer for the ALF, there are 1,500-2,000 people in Britain who regularly take part in direct actions for animal liberation. He estimates that six actions take place a day, ranging from small guerrilla-style paint-stripper attacks on the cars of 'vivisectionists' to the all-out assaults on laboratories and factory farms.

Animal rights have provably entered the popular consciousness. According to the most recent poll (Gallup 1985), nearly 1.5 million people have given up meat, though only half for 'moral' reasons — an increase of 23 per cent over the previous year. More specifically, animal liberation is arguably the youth movement of the '80s. Magazines as diverse as *Just Seventeen* and *Class War* discuss it, and a host of rock stars and youth cult figures have announced that they have become vegetarians for moral reasons. The trend has been most marked in women between 16 and 24, 10 per cent of whom are now vegetarians. It's also a phenomenon mainly of the A and B social groups in the south of England — particularly in London.

Animal liberationists have been reluctant to form pragmatic alliances with other political groupings. In Bradford, for example, natural sympathies between anti-racists and animal liberationists became strained over the halal meat issue. The same thing happened with feminists and the notorious 'dumb animal' anti-fur coat campaign. What animal liberationists see as a refusal to compromise, other left wing groups perceive as arrogance.

'True' liberation movements are expected to demand development of class-consciousness — that a class recognise its oppression and organise against it. Animals can't (we suppose) ever be expected to react in such a way against human exploitation. The usual analytical armoury of the Left has yet to find its 'fit' with Singer and his disciples. □

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CLOSING DOWN DEMOCRACY

GAGS ON FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

If the 1986 Local Government Bill is not successfully amended by the House of Lords, it will soon be illegal for local authorities to announce the time of day reports DUNCAN CAMPBELL. Research by PATRICK FORBES

VIRTUALLY unnoticed in comparison to the controversial bills to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties, the new Local Government Bill has been slipping through Parliament at breakneck speed, in the face of hitherto low-key opposition. Introduced in November, the Bill now need only pass a report stage in the Commons, before becoming law on 1 April.

But this Tuesday the House of Lords defeated the government and amended the first of the Bill's provisions. A final committee hearing on the Bill, to be held next Tuesday, is their last opportunity to make other necessary changes. It will then remain to be seen whether the government will permit the Lords' amendment to stand in the Commons. A final committee meeting on the Bill will be held in the House of Lords next Monday, 24 February.

For many British local authorities, the Bill will create more havoc in a shorter time than does the upheaval of abolition. It marks the latest, major step in turning local authorities into service institutions whose political role right wingers would like to see wholly limited to debating such matters as the efficiency of street-sweeping services.

The Bill as originally drafted would prohibit local authorities from publishing any material which might 'affect public support for a political party' — which can mean almost anything, or nothing. This week's Lords' amendment, if it stands, will restrict this prohibition to material 'designed to affect', rather than merely 'likely to affect' public support. Another section of the Bill restricts the use of local authorities' discretionary powers to distribute information or to run publicity campaigns to providing 'information relating to the functions of the authority' only.

This provision is intended to ban campaigns on and the distribution of information about such matters as ratecapping, the Social Security Reviews, privatisation, abolition, nuclear free zone policies, police monitoring, or immigration, as well as a host of other issues taken up in the last few years by Labour councils. But this section also makes it illegal to give any information to the public which is not directly related to the strictly-defined 'functions' of a local authority — or to allow any local authority funded bodies to produce publicity either.

This threatens all kinds of advice services, including welfare rights and benefit 'take-up'

campaigns on behalf of the elderly, ethnic groups, or other minorities. Since local authorities do not run trains, the Bill also appears to make it illegal for a local authority to include train times in its local newspaper — even if it does run a bus service to the station. It would also be illegal to tell people the time, or the weather, unless giving this information related directly to a local authority function.

A 'code of practice', whose terms have yet to be written, will also be introduced to control local authority publicity. The exact legal force of the code of practice remains to be resolved (in the Lords). But as presently drafted, it would prohibit the inclusion of party political material in media interviews given by council members. Under the present 'embryo' code of practice, Ken Livingstone or David Blunkett would be banned from giving a newspaper an opinion of Conservative government policy.

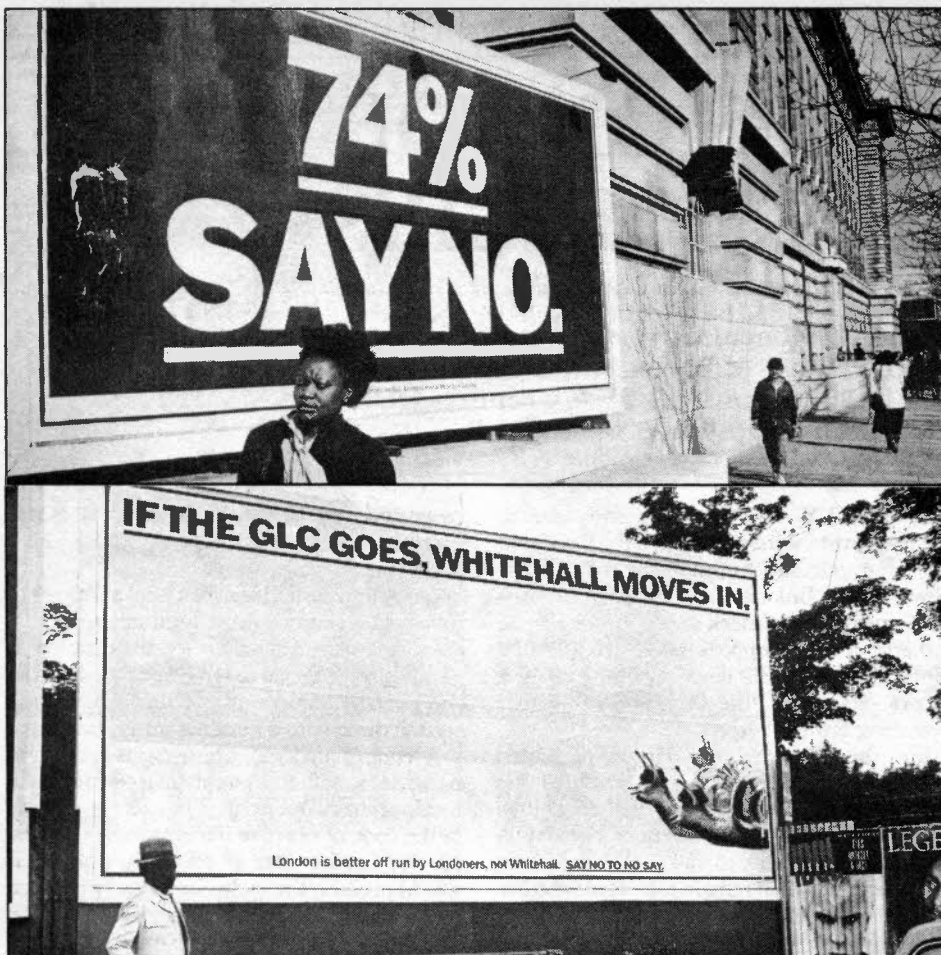
The real sting of the Local Government Bill lies in its being short, hastily drafted, exceptionally wide-ranging, unnecessary to the purpose for which it is said to be required — and in many places so badly set out as to be virtually meaningless. Its provisions really could ban local authorities from telling you the time. Or they could ban almost nothing. The courts will have to decide. But whoever eventually loses the argument about what the Bill does mean, lawyers will be the unequivocal winners.

TO MULTIPLY the Bill's effectiveness in harassing local authorities, it also requires each authority to keep a detailed account of every item of expenditure on publicity, and to make



Right, Robert B. Jones MP, a leading light of the far right 'St Andrews Mafia'. Left, Edward Leigh MP, a right-wing prankster and consultant to 'CAMMAC'

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Keith MacMillan

The Department of the Environment have stated officially (in a letter to the *New Statesman*) that in their opinion, most of the GLC anti-abolition posters, considered in isolation, would still be legal. Neither of these posters would, say the Department 'fall foul of the prohibition in the Bill'. Since stopping campaigns like this was supposed to be the major purpose of the new Bill, some Conservatives may be as unhappy about the Bill as most local Authorities

this available for public scrutiny. Ratepayers can then take action in the courts.

This aspect of the Bill is specifically intended to assist harassment groups which are now being set up in Labour-controlled areas, in advance of the Bill becoming law. Prominent in organising such groups is the so-called Campaign against Council Corruption.

'CAMACC' is the latest in a string of front organisations for a small and noisy group of unscrupulous right-wingers. Their previous major activity was the US-funded anti-CND dirty tricks organisation, the Coalition for Peace through Security (NS 12 March 1982). The people involved are Edward Leigh, who became an MP in 1983; and Julian Lewis and Tony Kerpel, both of whom failed to get into Parliament.

Lewis now runs a company called Policy Research Associates as an umbrella organisation. Lewis is secretive about the sources of funds for his campaigns. Kerpel, well known as a histrionic and red-baiting Conservative councillor in Camden, has recently moved into the Department of the Environment as a political adviser to Environment Secretary Kenneth Baker.

From the very beginning, the Bill has been presented as a necessary measure to stop 'party political propaganda on the rates'. But party political propaganda on the rates has always been illegal. Indeed, the only explicit example of such alleged propaganda that right wing lobbyists have been able to cite was a recent

judgment against Lothian Regional Council, when a judge ordered the council to pulp its newspaper after considering that one article was 'calculated to promote the election of Labour candidates'. Existing law was already quite sufficient to deal with the problem.

The real motive force for the Bill has been the Tories' widespread detestation of many recent local authority campaigns. Their fury has risen in proportion to the scale and success of such campaigns, especially those mounted by the GLC against abolition.

Behind this broad tide of intolerance lies the work of two right-wing cliques, who have tried to set the pace for legislation, and pull the government into line behind them. One group centres on Edward Leigh and his CAMACC associates. The other, much larger, group has no specific identity, but is nevertheless well known to government supporters as 'a nasty little sect on the right — one of the few really cohesive groups there are'. This 'little gang' is commonly known as the 'St Andrews Mafia' (most of them were educated or educators there in the early 1970s).

One of the 'St Andrews Mafia', PR consultant Michael Forsyth MP, helped start the ball rolling with a pamphlet attacking 'Politics on the Rates', published by the Centre for Political Studies in April 1984. The pamphlet picked out a few controversial items of expenditure — and then went on to muddle in everything else, however popular or clearly legal, that the Right don't like.

As the issue became a new focus of Tory anger, the 1984 Conservative Party Conference was promised action. At first, this took the form of the Widdicombe Committee of Inquiry into the Conduct of Local Government Business, which was appointed in February last year.

But even the relatively short wait of a year for the inquiry to report was unacceptable to the government. Claiming 'growing public concern about the use made by some local authorities of their discretionary powers to engage in overt political campaigning at public expense', former Environment Secretary Patrick Jenkin asked the Inquiry to prepare an interim report on this topic by July 1985.

Widdicombe's interim report did not find evidence of that level of public concern. The Committee noted at the outset that they did not accept Jenkin's premise that such political campaigning had actually occurred; or even, if it had occurred, that the public were concerned about it. On the evidence available, no 'general conclusions' could be reached.

But they did note that, although the number of 'political' complaints received by the Advertising Standards Authority had risen from 100 during 1983 to 177 in 1984, some 62 of the latter complaints were about the government-backed campaign for the sale of British Telecom. Less than half the remaining 'political' complaints were about local authority advertising or publicity.

BUT THE WIDDICOMBE INQUIRY was (so far as the government was concerned) never intended to be more than an additional smokescreen behind which their real intentions might usefully be concealed. Even before the Inquiry was appointed, a special interdepartmental policy committee was meeting to consider the provisions Ministers wanted to put in the Bill.

Together with junior environment minister William Waldegrave, the committee included representatives from the Home Office (which has responsibility for voluntary organisations), the DHSS, the Treasury and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices. Soon after the Widdicombe team was appointed, Environment Secretary Patrick Jenkin quietly made it clear that he 'did not preclude the possibility of early legislation'.

Even before Widdicombe's interim report was published in August a second Cabinet committee met to plan the details of the new legislation. In retrospect, it can be seen that so far as local authority publicity was concerned, Ministers saw the Widdicombe Inquiry as little other than a potentially useful stratagem to justify pre-ordained plans.

But both the 'St Andrews Mafia' and the Edward Leigh groups then moved in with pre-emptive strikes against the government. Leigh himself and Roy Galley, one of the 'Mafia', introduced private members bills on local government publicity in June and July 1985. Their intention was to predetermine what legislation was required, to put pressure on Waldegrave and Kenneth Baker as new Environmental Secretary to start legislating.

Detailed drafting work on the Bill began soon after the 1985 Conservative Party Conference, when Baker announced the Bill on 2 October. The final drafting of the Bill by

Parliamentary counsel took less than a month, working at what civil servants admit was 'breakneck' speed.

To the 'chagrin' of William Waldegrave, the 'St Andrews Mafia', including MPs Galley, Robert B. Jones, Michael Forsyth, Michael Brown, Christopher Chope, with many others from the far Right, filled the Bill Committee, 'It was virtually a roll call', according to a government supporter. 'Their view was that everyone who disagrees with us has to be silenced. It was difficult to hold them down'.

After the far right had manipulated the Commons committee, the Opposition had little chance of effectively amending the Bill. And the government didn't care too much anyway. Waldegrave and his supporters are secure perhaps in the expectation that, handed a parcel of absurdly wide 'catch-all' laws to interpret, judges will impose the most restrictive interpretation on left wing local authorities.

The new Bill has been claimed to be 'in line with the Widdicombe Inquiry'. But in fact, other than imposing an explicit statutory ban on party political publicity, it runs counter to both the letter and spirit of Widdicombe's recommendations. His interim report particularly stressed the importance of *not* muzzling what local authorities have to say:

It is important that at all times, particularly in times of wide political differences, our political system should accommodate the free expression of opposing views... it is right for local authorities to be able to explain their views on controversial matters affecting them.

Widdicombe also recommended that local authority powers to produce information 'about matters affecting local government' should be 'left unchanged':

We reject the view that this is too wide a scope... We think that local authorities should be entitled to inform those living in the area of the consequences of proposed changes in or affecting local government.

For sophisticated local authorities, following the pattern established by the GLC over the last three years, there may well be tortuous legal ways to sidestep the Bill's greatest difficulties. Such authorities will carefully take legal advice first, altering the style rather than the substance of what they do.

One useful approach — grudgingly admitted by the Department of the Environment to be legal — is to continue as before, taking the view that what they do now in the way of say, take-up campaigns or nuclear free zone publicity, is and has always been 'information relating to their functions'.

Another leading lawyer points out that the phrase 'support for a political party' has, as yet, no precise legal meaning. Since almost all activity can ultimately be 'political', a local authority could reasonably and creatively construe that to refer only to times of imminent elections.

Now, one day remains for the House of Lords to deal with the rest of the Bill. If passed unaltered the Bill's main effect will be not to ban propaganda, but to undermine democracy and free speech — and to provide a select band of lawyers with holiday homes and lush pastures, all at ratepayers' expense. □

HOPELESS HYPOCRISY OF PROPRIETY RULES

In our second extract from the previously unpublished 'Questions of Procedure for Ministers' CLIVE PONTING dissects the 'paranoiac' advice on secrecy

BRITISH GOVERNMENT, as conceived by 'Questions of Procedure for Ministers', is a private operation carried out by a small group of Ministers and senior civil servants. There is no understanding, let alone acceptance, of any idea that government should involve the public or even the public have a right to know what is being done in their name.

The government is responsible for spending about £140 billion a year, or about 45 per cent of the national wealth, and taking decisions that affect the day-to-day lives of every member of the public. All of this is done behind a wall of secrecy suitable for protecting a crucial wartime operation. It is not just a matter of protecting the way in which the government operates — the Cabinet and its network of secret committees — but the simple fact that the government is discussing a subject must be kept under wraps: 'Premature and unauthorised disclosure of matters under discussion... damages the reputation of the Government and impairs the efficiency of administration'.

Any government will have important military and diplomatic affairs and secrets that cannot be discussed in public, but British administration is conducted on the paranoiac assumption that every piece of information has to be subjected to the same level of military style secrecy. Two characteristics dominate Whitehall: an excessive wall of secrecy and a flow through this wall of propaganda masquerading as information.

'Questions of Procedure' is insistent that little or no information should be given out to the public before a formal announcement of policy is made in the correct constitutional way to Parliament. Internal papers should be circulated on a strictly 'need-to-know' basis, only those directly concerned should know anything about what is going on and 'information' officers in departments should not see Cabinet documents.

As in so many other areas 'Questions of Procedure' is hopelessly hypocritical about what actually goes on every day inside Whitehall. Far from being reticent about its proceedings, the government is engaged in a constant round of activity, briefing the media and planting stories. 'Questions of Procedure', though, primly says that 'in appropriate cases it may be in the public interest to communicate certain information in confidence... for the purposes of guidance: but this is permissible only when it is known that such confidence will be respected.'

In practice what happens is that the No 10 Press Secretary, currently Bernard Ingham,



Bernard Ingham (See also p15)

holds two press 'unattributable' briefings a day, one at 11 am for the evening papers and one at 4pm for the dailies, to plant whatever stories are required. On Thursdays, the Leader of the House of Commons gives a full scale briefing and on Friday afternoons Bernard Ingham holds a special meeting just for the Sunday papers.

In the same way the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders of the Alliance have their special sessions with the press each week. And every hour of the day politicians are talking to journalists and giving them as many stories as they think will suit their personal interests and ambitions. Cabinet Ministers spend much of their time talking to journalists, telling them exactly what went on in Cabinet and often spiced with any damaging stories they know about their colleagues. The Westland affair is only the most recent blatant example of daily life in Whitehall, though telephoning the Press Association and leaking passages from Ministerial correspondence was a bit beyond the norm.

All of this is conducted behind the polite fiction of the 'lobby' rules, where all the conversations and briefings never officially take place and the sources of the stories are suitably disguised. So Bernard Ingham usually appears as 'sources close to the Prime Minister' and Cabinet Ministers as 'senior Whitehall sources', while many of the more personal stories attributed to 'friends of...' originate from the person himself.

WHITEHALL IS NOT interested in the free flow of information and an informed public debate. Instead what it tries to achieve is manipulation of the news through the lobby system and the deliberate planting of stories often to suit personal ambitions. In these