

Councils prepare action against Heseltine

By David Hencke Planning Correspondent

The 13 penalised Labour councils yesterday began moves to take Mr Michael Heseltine, the Environment Secretary, to court. They hope to rally disgruntled Conservative councillors to their cause.

Mr Roy Hattersley, Labour's Environment spokesman, confirmed that the 13 councils—10 London boroughs plus Sheffield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Afan in South Wales—would try to prevent Mr Heseltine imposing £18 million extra penalties later this year.

But he still hopes that the Local Government Bill could be amended in the House of Lords next month to prevent the penalties. The 13 authorities could not wait for this, he said, but needed to plan now so court action could begin the moment the Bill had the Royal Assent.

What is very clear is that the Bill as it now stands, if passed into law, will enable the Secretary of State to pick on any authority which he chooses," Mr Hattersley said.

Mr Jack Smart, Labour leader of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, which represents 77 big cities and London boroughs, said it was not only Labour councillors which were annoyed.

"In my own authority, Wakefield, the policy and resources committee, which has Conservative members, passed a motion unanimously condemning the powers taken by the Secretary of State," he said.

"We shall be organising a special meeting of our association to discuss this issue and both Labour and Conservative members of the association will be invited to express their views."

Labour members have so far not been able to persuade the one Liberal-Tory council, the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, also facing penalties, to join the court action. It is understood that the Department of Environment is seeking to persuade the borough to make further cuts in return for the lifting of its penalty.

Welsh Office officials are also trying to woo Labour-controlled Afan away from the other Labour authorities with a compromise solution. In Exeter last night, the Local Government Minister, Mr Tom King, launched a campaign to clear up misconceptions about the new block grant system.

He told a meeting of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA): "Anyone might think, from the volume of criticism for our new proposals, that the existing arrangements are a halcyon and respected system. And yet we all know that this is nonsense."

He said: "The new grant system will offer a fair and consistent incentive to those authorities which economise and keep expenditure within reasonable limits."

Mr Heseltine refused to comment on the Bill or the legal action yesterday. His department said he was adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

Legislation to stiffen data bank privacy on way

By Peter Large and Martin Walker

Mrs Thatcher has been told by her technical advisers that Britain should introduce data privacy laws without delay.

This advice, contained in a Cabinet Office report completed in the summer but not published till yesterday, has been one factor in persuading the Government to accept that legislation is necessary.

But that legislation, which may be announced soon after Parliament reassembles, is unlikely to go as far as the recommendations made by the previous Government's Lindop inquiry, more than two years ago. The Lindop committee recommended strict codes of conduct on the use of computer-held personal information and a

data protection authority to police those rules.

The central theme of yesterday's report is the need for government to co-ordinate its supervision of the whole area of the new information technology of databanks, telecommunications, and office automation. It recommends a reorganisation of Government departments and the appointment of one Minister to be responsible for information technology.

That reorganisation is already underway in Civil Service terms, but the Government looks unlikely to take the ministerial recommendations higher than a junior Minister within the Department of Industry. The report published yesterday comes from a special working party of the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD), chaired by Sir Robert Claxton, technical director of GEC. ACARD itself is chaired by the former director of research for ICI, Dr Alec Spinks. Except for a handful of trade union and academic members, ACARD represents the scientific establishment of private industry, and is thus taken more seriously by the Prime Minister than any comparable quango.

The ACARD report, which specifically recommends that the Lindop finding should be taken into account, opens a crack in the door which could lead one day to a Whitehall reorganisation and the adoption of the Lindop committee's proposals.

Whitehall reorganisation and City notebook, page 16 for a separate Data Protection Authority. The immediate outcome seems likely to be a compromise: new legislation but no new authority to police it. The Government already has one such draft law to hand, provided by the National Council for Civil Liberties. "We strongly welcome this recommendation from a committee so close to the Prime Minister," Miss Patricia Hewitt, general secretary of the NCCL, said yesterday. "It goes to reinforce our contention that privacy legislation is in the interests of business and trade unions, as well as individuals."

Miss Hewitt called for the Government to take the proposed legislation "out of the hands of the Home Office, who have delayed this for two years, and give the responsibility to a government department which can act without further delay."

The NCCL has consistently maintained that a data protection law must include the basic right of any individual to see and challenge records which are held concerning him or herself. The NCCL also argues, with considerable support, that

legislation which does not include this provision would be unlikely to gain approval under the new Council of Europe provisions. These already losing contracts for British data firms because European companies are prohibited by law from exchanging data with unprotected Britain.

Whitehall sources said yesterday that a major pressure on the Government in recent months had been "a spate of complaints" from private industry about lost contracts because of Britain's lack of such protection laws.

One issue which could yet pose problems for the Government is the recommendations of the Council of Europe, which say that data should not be held on the religion or race of individual citizens. This

would automatically render illegal the Home Office's own controversial computer on immigrants, and the Metropolitan Police "C computer" which holds intelligence data on illegal immigrants, including suspects, associates, car numbers, and addresses. The ACARD report says that power from the use of computer-held information is great and there is "clearly potential for abuse." The legitimate interests of citizens and users of information technology must therefore be defined and protected.

ACARD also recommends the Cabinet to order an inquiry into other legal reforms required to bring the statute book into line with the new factors introduced by information technology.

Arnot case father at FO

By John Hooper and John Ezard

Mr Ronald Smith, who has been campaigning for more than a year to prove that his daughter was murdered at a party in Saudi Arabia, emerged from a meeting with a Junior Foreign Office Minister yesterday still convinced that there was a cover-up.

His meeting with Mr Douglas Hurd, the Minister of State, lasted an hour. In a statement the Foreign Office said that Mr Smith was told that if he believed that there was evidence to support a claim of misconduct by the staff at Britain's embassy in Jeddah he could approach the Ombudsman through his MP.

The statement added: "Mr Hurd has written to Mr Smith's Member of Parliament, Mr Giles Shaw, to the same effect."

After his meeting with Mr Hurd Mr Smith said: "He stuck to the official view in spite of all the evidence. So now we just fight on without regard to the consequences. My daughter was murdered. I am convinced about that on the basis of the evidence collected in Saudi Arabia and circumstantial evidence."

Miss Helen Smith, a nurse working at the Bakh Hospital in Jeddah, and a Dutch seaman, Mr Johannes Otten, were found dead outside a block of flats in Jeddah last year. They had been attending a party in the sixth-floor flat of a British surgeon, Mr Richard Arnot, and his wife, Penelope.

But Foreign Office officials stressed that they stood by their point-by-point denial of allegations which were first made in the magazine Private Eye. According to last night's statement, Mr Hurd told Mr Smith that the Foreign Office had no evidence to support any suggestions of misconduct by Mr Gordon Kirby, a member of the British consulate's staff.

The coroner in Leeds, Mr Smith's home town, has asked the police to make a full inquiry into Helen Smith's death. Her father said yesterday that he expected a decision on



Mr Ronald Smith leaves the Foreign Office.

whether there should be an inquest within two to four weeks. He added that he may return to Saudi Arabia to continue his own investigations.

Mr Richard Powell, a lecturer in Middle East affairs at Bradford College, who is helping Mr Smith and who attended the meeting with Mr Hurd, said he had shown the report on a post-mortem autopsy conducted by a Home Office pathologist, Dr Michael Green, to a French bone specialist.

"His conclusion was that Helen was dead before she left the flat, she died from internal bleeding and that internal bleeding could not have been caused by a fall," he said.

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Navy faces '30pc fuel cutback'

By Paul Keel

The Royal Navy's fuel allocation is to be cut as part of a Defence Ministry exercise. Cuts have already been made in the navy to save fuel by withdrawing two frigates from a NATO exercise this month.

One Whitehall source was reported yesterday as saying that fuel would be cut by 30 per cent. But the Ministry of Defence refused to confirm or deny that figure.

Instead, it said fuel economies had not been asked to and would affect all three armed services. There would be some reduction in activities and the level of the navy's participation in

some exercises was "bound to be affected," he added. The Defence Ministry, faced with the possibility of £650 million overspending over its original budget this year, has already put a three-month ban on new defence contracts.

The current fuel economies will last until the end of the current financial year. The Treasury reluctantly raised the Ministry's cash limits by £200 million earlier this year but insisted that the new limits should not be exceeded.

The Defence Ministry spokesman said that two Royal Navy frigates, the Apollo and the Berwick, would not be joining this month's NATO exercise, codenamed Display Determina-

tion 80, in the Mediterranean. The spokesman said that every effort would be made to minimise the impact of the economies on NATO's programme this year. The fuel cuts have, anyway, been imposed after the conclusion of NATO's major autumn exercises.

It is thought that the economy drive could jeopardise the navy's next planned deployment to the Indian Ocean and the Far East. It will almost certainly mean warships being tied up in port for longer periods until the end of this year.

Elsewhere in the armed services the effects of the fuel cuts had not yet been calculated, the Ministry said.

Zeppelin drummer found dead

By Mick Brown

JOHN Bonham, the drummer with Led Zeppelin rock group, was found dead yesterday in bed at the house of the group's lead guitarist, Jimmy Page, in Windsor, Berkshire. Police said there was no suspicious circumstances. A post mortem examination will be held today.

"The drummer was found in the early afternoon by another member of the group, Jimmy Page, who bought the house, The Old Mill House in Mill Lane, beside the Thames, from the film star Michael Caine, earlier this year for £900,000.

Mr Bonham, aged 32, had been drummer with Led Zeppelin since the group's inception in 1968, and had helped to steer them to the absolute pinnacle of commercial success.

They are probably the biggest selling rock act in the world with an income said to be in excess of £15 million a year. They are regarded as the architects of the hard rock style, and have built their reputation by concentrating exclusively on live performances and albums.

During the early seventies the group established a reputation for high living, wreaking damage in hotels across America whilst on tour. In the autobiographical film of the band, The Song Remains the Same, made in 1976, each member acted out a favourite fantasy. John Bonham acted the role of a gangster and Easy Rider motorcycleist.

In August of last year the group returned to the British stage after four years when they played to more than 250,000 people over two weekends at the Knebworth Festival.

Shortly afterwards their first album for three years—In Through the Out Door—entered the British album charts at number one, confirming their enduring popularity at a time when rock music had undergone a traumatic upheaval and the relevance of musicians of their generation had been questioned. The group spent last June touring in Europe, and were due to begin an American tour next month.

Benn troops pledge to 'fight and fight again'

Conference eve call for truce by Callaghan

By Ian Aitken and Michael White

Mr James Callaghan last night made a personal plea for a truce in Labour's internal constitutional battle in an attempt to drag next week's party conference back to the crucial issues of unemployment and the economic policies of the Conservative Government.

His plea, published in an interview with Labour Weekly, the party's official organ, is expected to form a central theme of his speech to the conference in Blackpool next week. But there was little expectation in Blackpool last night that it would meet with an enthusiastic response from the Labour Left.

The Labour Co-ordinating Committee, a rank and file organisation closely linked with Mr Tony Benn, issued its own pre-conference manifesto in which it declared that its members were prepared to "fight, fight and fight again" for major changes in the democratic structure of the party and the accountability of its leaders. They made it clear that whether they win or lose in Blackpool next week they will carry on the battle.

The main article in the Labour Activist, official journal of the co-ordinating committee, declares that "the whole struc-

ture of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the programme enjoyed by its leader will be the next target. Notice has already been served to that effect."

In a surprisingly melancholy interview in Labour Weekly, Mr Callaghan insisted that all current proposals for internal party reform were doomed to failure in the present climate of mutual mistrust. "My own view is that conference would be wise to put away this issue for the present and let it be considered quietly over a period when we have settled ourselves," he said.

The Opposition Leader is thought to be manoeuvring for the restoration of the status quo on the three key constitutional issues which divide Left and Right. But the volatile mood of the unions make it uncertain that confident predictions on the Right that he will win on two of the three issues, at least, will prove correct. Given that the Left is unlikely to accept such an appeal, Mr Callaghan's ties may well be intended less to impress the activist rank and file than to sway the weary union leaders and their block votes.

In his Labour Weekly interview, Mr Callaghan warned against "betraying our supporters and the unemployed" if the conference became pre-occupied with divisive issues like the constitution. Mr Callaghan acknowledged the need for change but argued that in the present atmosphere it was not the right time for new proposals— which should eventually come from the NEC, not another commission. "It is clear to everyone that because of the origins of the present proposals for constitutional change none of them will be considered on their merits. They will be considered on the basis of whether one group or another will get more power or less," he said.

But yesterday's sharp statement from the Labour Co-ordinating Committee gave rise to the near certainty of continuing conflict. The Labour Activist argued that unless the party leadership was subject to removal as well as appointment by the whole party conference policy decisions would "not make the blindest bit of difference to the policy of future Labour governments."

Arguing for the need to shift control "away from the Parliamentary elite towards the rank-and-file, away from the closed system of patronage towards an open system of accountability," the group said that "the present constitutional issues were the start."

AUEW's crucial Labour vote

By Keith Harper, Labour Editor

The Left's strength on the Labour Party national executive will be threatened next week at the party conference by the crucial vote of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.

The AUEW president, Mr Terry Duffy, is convinced that he has a Right-wing majority of one which will sway his delegation behind candidates already agreed by the union's leadership.

To reduce the Left's majority on the NEC the union has to bring about several changes on the women's five-member section of the executive.

At Blackpool on Sunday Mr Duffy has the task of convincing the Labour Activist, official journal of the co-ordinating committee, that the removal of Miss Joan Maynard, Labour MP for Shef-

field Brightside, an ardent Left-winger who has been on the NEC for several years.

The AUEW's women candidates for the NEC are Mrs Shirley Williams, Dame Judith Hart, Miss Diane Hayter, Mrs Shirley Summerskill and Mrs Betty Boothroyd. Mrs Williams and Dame Judith are current members, but the security of Miss Maynard depends on most of the other large unions supporting her as well.

The retirement of this year's chairman, Lady Jeger, already leaves a place vacant on the women's section which could give a place to either Mrs Summerskill or Mrs Boothroyd. It means therefore, that two seats occupied by left-wingers on this section could go to the other side.

Left-wingers on the NEC have been arguing that their majority is not very big and

that people like Mr Neil Kinnock and Mr Doug Hoyer, the president of the white collar union ASTMS, cannot always be relied to vote on strictly Left-wing issues. It is not difficult, they say, to see the pendulum swing the other way.

One of the medium-sized unions affiliated to the party, the Union of Communication Workers, has voted to accept the status quo on the constitution.

The UCW's general secretary, Mr Tom Jackson, said last night that the executive had voted this way because it was "unhappy at the continuing rumpus in the party."

The UCW vote will make little difference at conference next week. But it reflects a growing view among the unions that the party's interne-cine warfare must be stopped.

French hospital contract coup

Continued from page one

Versailles to Derbyshire to see for themselves. But Mr Birkett said: "We have an office in Chesterfield, and that's where the discussion took place, basically. It was only a matter of just being, as it happened, in that particular town."

Asked whether the Renault designers visited the Chesterfield hospital, Mr Birkett said: "They visited the town office, and then had occasion to visit the site office. Nothing was pre-planned or premeditated in that respect. They weren't interested in the general plans—that is the point."

Mr Birkett was asked what his firm's relationship with SERI Renault was, particularly in view of Abbott and Partners' involvement with the Chesterfield project. "All I can

say is that we've had no further contact with SERI and that's the minimal extent of it," he said.

At SERI Renault's office near Versailles yesterday Mr Jean Besier, a member of the sales department, said that he knew of a clear business understanding between his firm and Abbott and Partners. "We have an agreement with them but I do not know the details," he said.

Middle East Health magazine was able to show a set of the Renault plans for the Iraq hospitals to the Department of Health's chief architect, Mr Goodman, who flew to Baghdad earlier this year to lecture on UK hospital designs and to promote the sales prospects of British consultants and contractors in the health field.

Mr Goodman said: "This is a very British design, and I would have known it was not a UK layout except for the French name on the plans."

Mr Goodman said: "What makes British companies beat the French is invariably the quality of design. The French are good at identifying business and procurement needs and research have gone into the layout and sophisticated technical systems of Department of Health hospitals. The details are prized secrets which the British Government is careful to guard."

But Ministry sources admit that there are loopholes. Once a UK company has worked to these designs, it is in possession of information which it can dispose of "in any way it wished."

GOD, bigotry, sex and racial conflict in the melting pot of the American South produced in Flannery O'Connor a mistress of the short story. She died in the mid-sixties aged only 39, but her achievement in American letters has endured. To mark the appearance in Britain of a volume of her work, we publish the title story, Everything That Rises Must Converge.

"IT WAS one of those clear evenings in the summer when you can hear a snail clear its throat a mile away." Stanley Reynolds talks to Edward Duke about his one-man show of vintage Wodehouse which opens in the West End next week.

THE Finsbury Park Astoria opened in 1930 to a fanfare of bugles by His Majesty's Life Guards. Nine years ago it became the Rainbow theatre, home of rock. Mick Brown explores its Moorish splendour.

IN THE first of two reports on the coming winter ski season, Mark Heller re-examines the traditional claims of Austria and Switzerland in the year of the strong pound.

THE WEATHER

AROUND THE WORLD

Table with columns for location, time, and weather conditions. Includes locations like Ajaccio, Algiers, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Beirut, Berlin, Birmingham, Bristol, Brussels, Cardiff, Copenhagen, Curitiba, Dublin, Edinburgh, Florence, Frankfurt, Garmisch, Geneva, Glasgow, Helsinki, Innsbruck, Istanbul, Jersey, Lisbon, London, Luxembourg, Madrid, Manila, Milan, Moscow, Munich, Naples, Newcastle, Nice, Oslo, Paris, Rome, Reykjavik, Santiago, Stockholm, Strasbourg, Tangier, Tel-Aviv, Toronto, Tunis, Warsaw, Zurich.

AROUND BRITAIN

Table with columns for location, time, and weather conditions. Includes locations like Stornoway, Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Stornoway, Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham.

SEA PASSES

Table with columns for location, time, and sea conditions. Includes locations like Channel (S), English Channel, Irish Sea, North Sea, etc.

Becoming cloudy

Continued from page one

pressure will remain high in the south east as troughs of low pressure cross northern districts.

London area, SE and East S England, E Anglia, Channel Islands: Early fog patches cleared, bright or sunny intervals, decreasing clouds, but mostly dry. Winds variable, light, becoming S to SW, moderate at times. Max temp 13 to 17C (55 to 63F).

E and Cent N England, W Midlands: Occasional rain with hill fog patches. Wind S, becoming SW, moderate locally. Max temp 13 to 17C (55 to 63F).

SW and NW England, N and S Wales: Outbreaks of rain with hill fog patches. Wind S, becoming SW, moderate locally. Max temp 14 to 16C (57 to 61F).

Scottish District, Isle of Man, NW and SW Scotland, Glencoe area, Central Highlands, Argyll, N Ireland: Rain and fog patches, clearing to bright or sunny intervals. Wind from the west, becoming S, strong to locally gale. Max temp 12 to 14C (54 to 57F).

Outlook: Changeable. Rain in the south at first, otherwise showers and sunny intervals. Temperatures near normal in the south, windy and rather cold in the north.

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