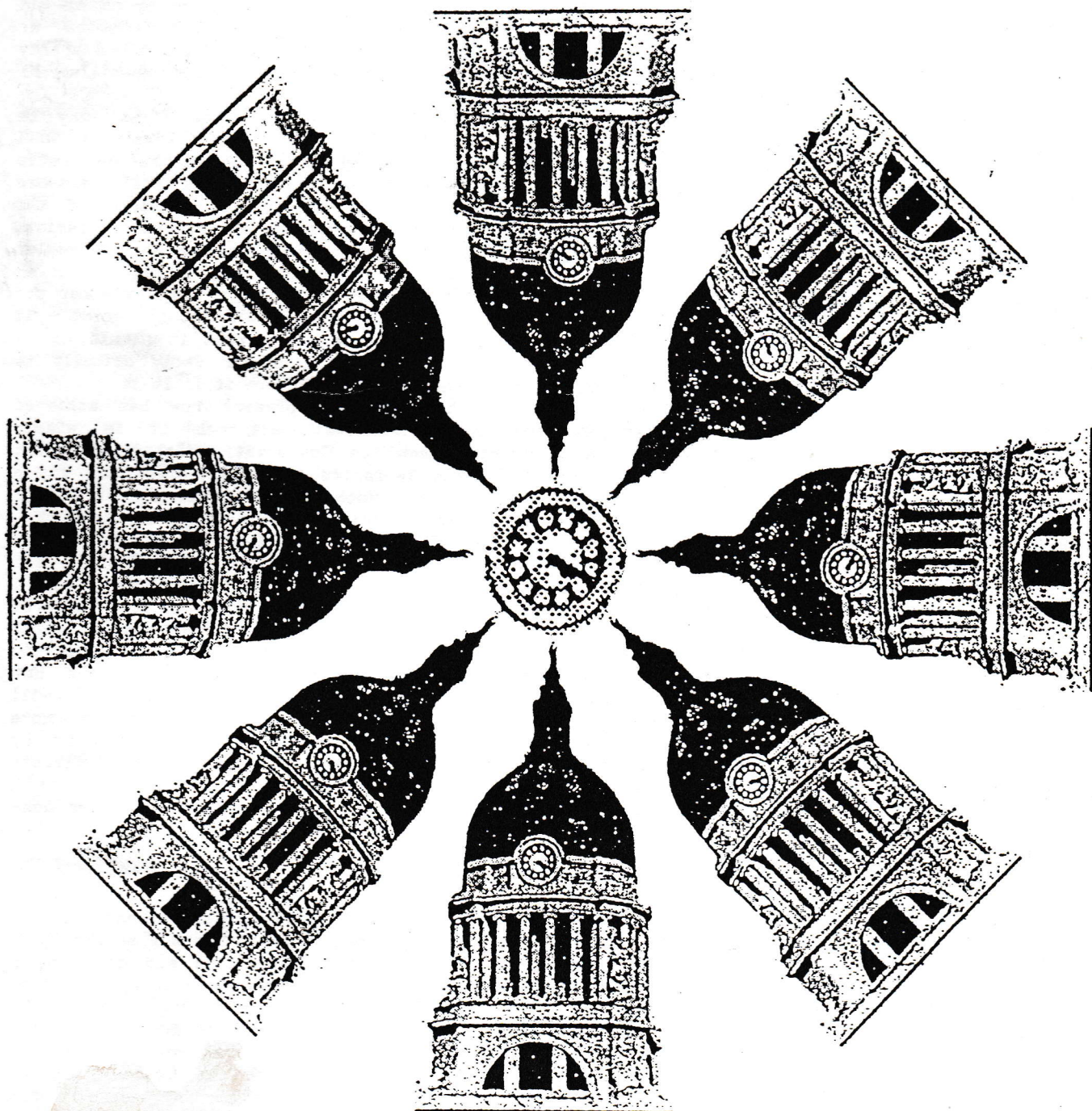


NOTTINGHAM EXTRA

NUMBER 7 SPRING 1987 30p

The fortunes of the left



Nigel Lee on 'Where we went wrong'; Lee Harrison interviewed; The death of radical bookshops; Remembering Spain; Arkwright Street; Chartists

HEARSAY

Safe in their hands?

JOHN SHEFFIELD

THIS EDITION OF *Nottingham Extra* was meant to appear before the local elections, but the problems of grappling with a new word processor have delayed it. Apologies to fellow contributors, therefore - apart from a short postscript by Nigel Lee, I am the only one writing with the benefit of hindsight about the elections and the deselection of Sharon Atkin.

As it happens, the election results make little difference. In fact, if there is going to be an inquest, what Nigel Lee and Lee Harrison have to say in this issue will be useful evidence: it is their policies and their role in the 1983-7 Labour Group which have taken some of the heaviest criticism. The discussion will continue in future issues, with contributions from other positions in the party as well as the left.

No basis

Losing the city was a disaster which will be compounded if the Thatcher government wins a third term. But there are minor consolations. Considering the shit that was flying, Labour didn't do at all badly. The narrow Conservative victory had as much to do with the quirks of voting patterns as with a consistent anti-Labour vote: it could have gone either way. The city fell well within the national pattern and did not, overall, vote very differently from 1983, when the majority of one went to Labour. There is no basis for claims that a "moderate" electorate booted out a "loony left" council.

Rather, it was arch-"moderate", anti-gay Dennis Birkinshaw who was decisively booted out. And, since he had identified himself so publicly with accusations of Labour "extremism", this result was surely the electorate's clearest comment on it. "I owe it to the people of Strelley and Broxtowe who have supported me for 25 years," said Mr Birkinshaw when he announced that he was standing as an independent. He got 280 votes. The Labour candidates were elected with 1,734 and 1,704 votes. That seems sufficient comment on what the people of Strelley had really been supporting for 25 years.

And what are we to make of the extraordinary situation where, at the end of the day (1.40 a.m., to be exact), after the second recount, everything turned on whether a massive and unexpected swing to Labour in previously unwinnable Park Ward would be quite dramatic enough to save the city from the rampant right. The three-vote Tory victory in one of their previously impregnable wards hardly represents a massive public rejection of Labour (though it does represent a lot of hard work by the candidates and their helpers). Could it be that more people than often assumed are able to put accusations of "loony leftism" into perspective?

Likewise with the "Sharon Atkin factor". It is widely believed that the row is damaging to Labour. In Nottingham East, this may be true, but

for very special reasons. Imposing a candidate with a political history distasteful to many of the most active party members is the surest way to send them off campaigning in neighbouring constituencies. (This is only carrying on an old tradition from the days of Jack Dunnett.) Mr Aslam may well find himself short of party workers - but this could be bad news for Mr Brandon-Bravo.

Outside Nottingham East, the effect may be less destructive. On the one hand, it will reassure those who like to see the leadership leading. On the other hand, it will reassure black voters that substantial sections of the Labour Party are passionately opposed to racism, and that the Labour Party is plainly not racist while the issue remains so open.

In fact, the argument is not about whether the Labour Party should or should not be racist - it is assumed by both sides that it should not - but about whether the Labour Party actually is racist, and what to do about it if it is.

Unfortunately, the present row has achieved one miraculous feat: although it is widely accepted that the Conservative Party is racist and should be racist (which is, after all, why a lot of people vote for it), absurdly it is the Labour Party which now finds itself in the dock.

What of the electoral disaster, though? Unless Labour takes a Tory seat at a by election, and unless the Conservatives lose the General Election, we face the possibility of four years of a hard right, centralising Tory government backed up locally by a compliant Tory council. It is too early to say how far to the right the new controlling group will be, and how easily it will roll over with its paws in the air as yet more local government powers are snatched away by government-led inner city initiatives, restrictions on council publicity, the new "poll tax", accelerated council house sales and further contracting out and privatisation.

Unnoticed

But there is a "loony right" element in the local Conservative Party which has gone unnoticed during the years of opposition and could be a greater threat to the democratic independence of the city than a few gay swimming sessions. We shall be taking a close look in future issues at the way the new administration develops, at the beliefs and backgrounds of its members, and at the effect of its policies on the people of the city.

In particular, we shall be looking at how vigorously Bill Bradbury and his team fight for the independence of local government against central government interference. The dangerous doctrine has gained ground since 1979 that local government is only an arm of national government, that politicians and civil servants in London are entitled by the mandate from a

general election to override local preferences expressed in local elections. One of the greatest indictments of the Tory Party as a whole is that their distaste for certain left-wing councils and policies has led them to acquiesce in a steady erosion of local democracy because it seemed an effective way of attacking the left in local government, just as their distaste for Arthur Scargill and the tactics of the NUM led them to give blanket approval to some extraordinary police misbehaviour in the coal dispute.

As far as the cities are concerned, the next stage in the Tory counter-revolution seems likely to be the wider imposition of urban development corporations, which will effectively take control of their own inner city areas from elected local authorities. Let me quote from a far from radical local government journal, *The Surveyor*:

"The UDCs, with their ability to bypass local councils and their planning and compulsory purchase powers, are seen as the most effective way to release land quickly for new housing and industrial development.

"They will also be a chosen vehicle for Mrs Thatcher's other post-election aim to reduce local government and Labour's power base in the cities."

The imposition of an urban development corporation on Nottingham, with all its consequences for local democracy, will be a key test for a Conservative council, a test of its independence from an authoritarian central

government - a test, in effect, of its civic pride.

Let's hope that the future of the city, unlike that of the National Health Service, really is safe in their hands.●

Same old thing

REGULAR READERS will have noticed the devotion of *Nottingham Extra* to history, especially the history of the labour movement. It's extraordinary how often events repeat themselves, not necessarily as tragedy or farce, but simply as more or less the same old thing. The only farcical aspect is the way commentators pontificate from a great height as if it were all amazingly new, unprecedented, "apocalypse now". For example, the question of Trots and other weirdos and "extremists" in the Labour Party. Let's take a couple of short journeys back in time, one a mere twenty-two years, the other fifty, to the days of the good old Labour Party which even Mrs Thatcher occasionally waxes nostalgic about.

Turning over some old files the other day, I came across an intriguing little note of an item which appeared on 12th May 1965 in the *Guardian Journal*, Nottingham's last morning daily, which ceased publication in 1973. The note records that city councillor John Caughtry, replaced by Peter Price as Byron Ward candidate for the Labour Party, had announced that at the next election he

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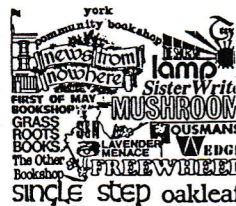
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wouldn't vote and his wife would vote Tory in protest against "Trotskyite" elements in the local party which had given Mr Price their support. Mr Caughtry, the item went on, had a Labour background of over twenty years as a member of the AEU and a shop steward at Loughborough engineering works. Presumably, the period covered by his nostalgia, when everything had been all right with the Labour Party, went back the full twenty years, almost to 1937 when George Orwell wrote the following passage from *The Road to Wigan Pier*. With a few changes of personal decor and terminology, is it so different from the complaints we hear fifty years later?

"It would help enormously ... if the smell of crankishness which still clings to the Socialist movement could be dispelled. If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaler, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly! ... Sometimes, when I listen to these people talking, and still more when I read their books, I get the impression that, to them, the whole Socialist movement is no more than a kind of exciting heresy-hunt - a leaping to and fro of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of 'Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist!' It is because of this kind of thing that it is so much easier to feel yourself a Socialist when you are among working-class people."

Yet fifty years later, defecting Labour councillor Mrs Linda Phillips could argue, as if it were an entirely new phenomenon, that the Labour Party had been set up to be the party of "working-class people like bus drivers" (her father was a bus driver), but was being taken over by "middle-class intellectuals like lecturers and teachers". Does she really think the origins of the Labour Party are as simple as that? The Labour Party has always had its share of "middle-class intellectuals", usually to the left of the party. (Orwell himself was, of course, an Old Etonian.)●

Where are they now?

SPEAKING OF Christopher Pole-Carew (aren't we always - see page 6, first paragraph), someone passed on the following extract from a journal called *Marketing Week*, which will be of interest to the numerous admirers the former *Evening Post* managing director left behind when he went to Wapping to advise Rupert Murdoch on how to clobber the unions more effectively.

"Lamb Pole-Carew Associates, the publishing consultancy set up last September by Sir Larry Lamb, Christopher Pole-Carew and Bill Thomson, has been dissolved.

"The three partners came together to provide recruitment and management advice to publishers, but the appointment last week of Pole-Carew to advise on Robert Maxwell's new free 24-hour newspapers in Glasgow and Manchester has ended the partnership ...

"Pole-Carew's move, although a coup for

Maxwell who will appreciate his experience of new technology, is a blow for Chris Bullivant, who was hoping Pole-Carew would be the manager of his first 'metro-morning' newspaper in Manchester ...

"He (Pole-Carew) was very closely involved with me on the metro concept and I was hoping to make him my manager. I now need to find a good manager to look after the first metro," says Bullivant."

Obviously, a good manager is hard to find, and Pole-Carew's particular cocktail of union-bashing and new technology is much sought-after in the swiftly moving world of the thoroughly modern newspaper. And what a completely reliable ally of the labour movement the proprietor of the *Daily Mirror* is!●

Eyesore of the beholder

WHEN IS AN EYESORE not an eyesore? When it's been tidied up and "landscaped" by the city council. And when is an eyesore an eyesore? When the city council has decided it's ripe for redevelopment.

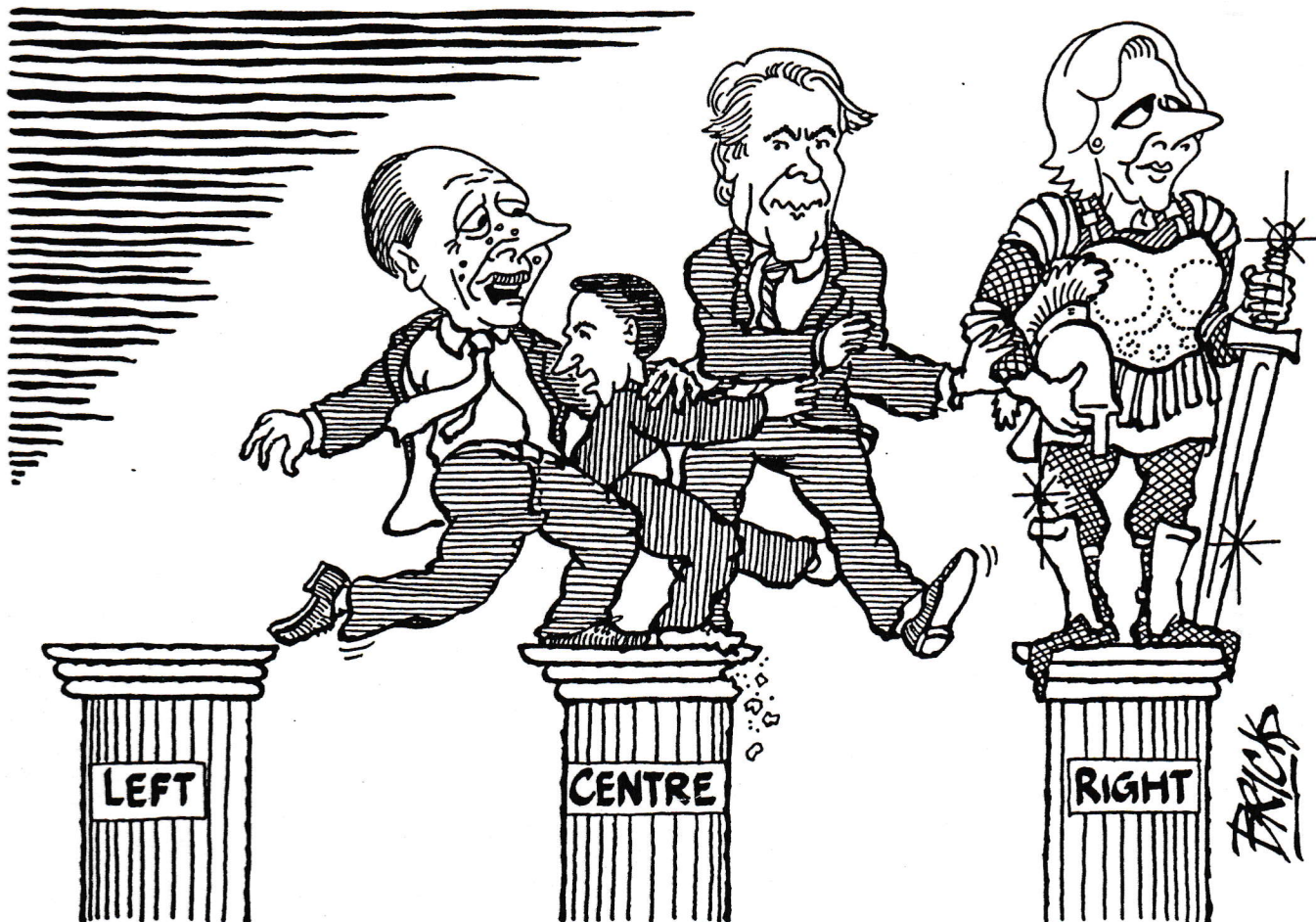
These thought-provoking aphorisms were stimulated by the announcement of a £6m 63,000 sq ft office development at the corner of Mansfield Road/Woodborough Road/Huntingdon Street, described by the *Nottingham Arrow* as "an eyesore for many years".

Now, admittedly it isn't up to much, this particular corner, though partly because it's been blighted by the threat of redevelopment. And the architect's impression of the replacement does look reasonably inoffensive for an office block, skulking behind trees as it does, in the usual way of architects' impressions.

But the old corner does have a certain ramshackle charm, and is enlivened by the presence in one of the doomed Victorian houses on Mansfield Road of Aurora Lusus, or "The end of civilised hairdressing". (Will demolition mean the end of the end of civilised hairdressing or will there be a happy ending?)

What strikes me, though, is that the site is almost directly opposite one of the truly outstanding eyesores of Nottingham, the corner just above York House and The Empire public house (which was until recently a gay pub called The Roebuck). This corner used to be occupied by a not totally repulsive red-brick Wesleyan chapel, built in 1870 and latterly used by the Pentecostal Church. It was demolished in 1973 to make way for a road improvement, revealing the awful side view of York House, which had already done sufficient damage to the fabric of Nottingham by looming hideously over Watson Fothergill's Yorker public house (which used to be called The Rose of England).

Now as you approach the city centre down Mansfield Road, instead of Gothic windows and turrets you see a pathetic smattering of gravel and flowerbeds, and the glitzy hi-tech imperial gloss given to the old Roebuck, embedded ludicrously in the bottom right hand corner of what I suppose might charitably be called a very large brick wall. No talk of eyesores here, though. The "landscaping" is apparently the



council's last word.●

Impeccable

MOST PEOPLE WITH the slightest knowledge of Flying Officer John Peck DFC were delighted when he was elected a Communist city councillor at the three millionth attempt. Cllr Peck claimed loyally that it was a vote for the Party and not for him, but three hundred thousand people in Nottingham know otherwise.

Among the undelighted was county councillor Michael Cowan, vote crunching on an electorally programmed computer in a corner of the Radio Nottingham "Election Special" studio. Cllr Cowan remarked grumpily that the people of Bulwell East would have been far more sensible to vote Labour and in any case Cllr Peck would have to vote with Labour to avoid losing credibility.

Nice, kind Brenda Borrett, with the chocolate cream vocables, did the damage far more gently. John Peck was a most *respectable* person, she said. Some of his views were remarkably close to those of the Conservative Party and she was sure that on some issues he might well vote with them.

(I am reliably informed that Cllr Mrs Borrett hardly ever says anything very unkind about anyone. She is one of those lovely Tory ladies who seem scarcely to share the same planet with Mrs Thatcher let alone the same political party.)

One of the pleasures of an unexpectedly enjoyable (considering the final result) and occasionally comic election programme, presided

over by laid-back Tony Church with his aristo drawl, was the delicate sparring between Cllrs Borrett and Cowan.

It is clearly impossible to be seriously rude to Mrs Borrett. Cllr Cowan displayed gallantry and charm, as well as the more predictable numeracy at the computer, only taking time off from a generally benign performance to be discreetly brutal to poor Steve Parkhouse, performing nobly as Alliance spokesman on a night when, in the city at least, his two parties were whitewashed.

"It's a complete disaster for you, isn't it?" said Cllr Cowan callously, producing a string of figures in the region of 18 per cent. "You're not getting anywhere near winning anything, are you? You're only getting more votes because you've put up more candidates. It would be very surprising if you didn't."

"That's a county council computer, isn't it?" asked Mr Parkhouse mischievously.

"Yes it is," agreed Cllr Cowan matter-of-factly, crunching out more 18 per cents.

Not only was it a county council computer, it was also programmed to be a city council computer, analysing only what happened in the city and what would happen in the parliamentary seats if votes in the general election went the same way.

I'm afraid I crashed out on the settee long before it came up with the answer.

Somehow, I don't think even Cllr Cowan could make it cough up a three-seat Labour victory.●

UNION COMMENTARY

Journalistic licence

IAN JUNIPER

MUCH OF THE LAST edition of *Nottingham Extra* was concerned with the *Evening Post*, now with added extra bright NUJ recognition. However, readers should be aware that, although the NUJ has kissed and made up, it has jilted its former partners in the campaign to gain "full print union recognition as exists in all other provincial and national newspapers" (from the leaflet: *T. Bailey Forman: Space Age Technology, Steam Age Management*). The leaflet quoted was obviously written well before the marriage between Rupert Murdoch and Christopher Pole-Carew.

The national trade union boycott of the *Evening Post* had *not* been lifted, despite the NUJ's unilateral declaration that it had been, and despite its disingenuous publicity to that effect. The local NGA remains in dispute as a result of the union-busting offensive launched by Pole-Carew. It is somewhat surprising, is it not, that local NUJ Branch spokespeople, whose Pavlovian response to any criticism from their trade union colleagues of the way they report local industrial disputes is "balance", should act in this way without any reference whatsoever to those organisations which have stood by them since 1979, especially the local Trades Council.

Reflection

But reporting a boycott to be over when it isn't is an accurate reflection of the journalistic standard in most of the local media. When Central News covered a GCHQ demonstration in Nottingham's Market Square by transmitting pictures of a desultory flock of pigeons before the march itself was even in loudhailer distance of the Square, the local Chair of the NUJ (who works at Radio Nottingham) justified this at a Trades Council Executive meeting on the grounds that "journalists had deadlines to meet".

When the Chair of the strike at Silentnight, where the workers had been on strike for over a year and a half, did an extensive speaking tour in this area last year, he was told by the ex Secretary of the local NUJ branch (who works at the BBC) that he couldn't cover it because the strike "wasn't in our patch", and he didn't want to upset the journalists in that "patch". Needless to say, they were ignoring it as well.

The journalists at the *Nottingham Trader* must have had their journalistic scruples stretched to the limit recently in the PR job they did for their proprietor on the front page, when perforce they had to explain that of course employers did have the right to sack their workforces, and wasn't it utterly inconsiderate of the *Trader* print workers to force poor Mr Pickering to have to act in this way. And at Christmastide as well. Not much balance in evidence there - in fact, more bollocks than balance. But then, that dog in the toilet roll ad makes more intelligent and imaginative use of paper than the *Trader* journalists at the best of times.

And of course the "provocative" *Evening Post* which, immediately after the NUJ had declared "peace in our time", celebrated its reconciliation by attempting to whip up an hysterical frenzy of reaction against the visit of Sinn Fein councillors. In the event, when they visited the Council House, only one worthy citizen of Nottingham turned up to protest by shouting out "Fenian bastard". He was, of course, given prominent coverage, although they didn't use that particular quote. If a football supporter had behaved like that, the *Post* leader would have been calling for the birch, the cat, hanging, flogging, bringing back conscription, &c; if there had been a trade union demonstration on the same day involving thousands marching through Nottingham, the *Post* would have reported that traffic was disrupted.

One of the Sinn Fein councillors wryly observed that it was strangely "English" for a provincial newspaper to be trying to whip up hysteria about "terrorism" in a city which sold itself to the rest of the world with Robin Hood as its leading PR man. But such subtleties would be lost on the *Post*, which is manifestly as thick as its namesake.

Yet, whenever local journalists have a dispute, their branch spokespeople immediately manifest themselves before the Trades Council, asking us to believe that unless we support them, the roof of the world is likely to fall in on us. Note the fact that they don't turn up with *their* employer, to make sure that *we* all get a balanced picture.

A leaflet published by the former Chair of the local NUJ Branch, titled "Evening Post Dispute - The Facts" contained the following:

"Far from the Post dispute being a 'historic' issue it is now clear to all but those who wish to ignore the principles involved that TBF is at the centre of a spreading campaign to smash union organisation;" and

"Nottingham branch of the NUJ will always be indebted to the loyal support it has received from fellow trade unionists who have consistently abided by TUC policy, namely, that all trade unionists should 'refuse to advertise in, talk to, or buy the *Nottingham Evening Post*'".

Nottingham will never be free of union-bashing publications - and the press in this town is literally synonymous with repression - while these paid wordsmiths don't have the integrity to take their word seriously, even when they're not being paid for it. They are just as capable of disinformation campaigns as their proprietors.●

For the Scrapbook

THE FAME OF Workers Against Racism has spread far beyond the discerning circulation of the *Extra* to the doormats of Nottingham. The *Nottingham Trader* recently carried a front page feature article on their protest over race

checks at local employment offices. This contained a direct quote from "WAR member Richard Wilde", and a picture of the protestors outside with paper bags over their heads to give them "ethnic anonymity" (the ungloved hands clasping the next step displayed a fine set of pinkies, though). They became even more anonymous later on when they failed to turn up at all "to picket the offices daily" as WAR had declared ... and the *Trader* had presumably been delivered.

Members of the RCP nationally regarded this as a brilliant propaganda coup, apparently oblivious to the fact that you're a dead cert for *Trader* coverage if, apart from putting a paper bag over your head, you're willing to stick your arse in the air with just your underpants on, show a bit of cleavage, shave one side of your head, and adopt any number of other positions the least required ingredient of which is usually principled politics.

However, is it possible that these "Workers" could also have been oblivious to the local labour movement boycott of the *Trader*? Seeing an

an anonymous letter from "CPSA member Nottingham" in the next step indicting the CPSA for a "lack of information and guidance" re the introduction of race checks, and extolling WAR for providing it, I wrote to *tns* providing information and guidance for its readers about the *Trader* dispute. With regard to the local efforts of the WAR group, I made what was only a passing observation that scabs would be better pulling polythene bags over their heads rather than paper bags in pursuing cheap publicity for a stunt which could have been inspired by no less than Mr Ian McGregor during the miners' dispute.

My letter wasn't published in the next edition, but there was a letter which was all about the *Trader* dispute headed "Another Wapping" which called for donations and messages of support from *tns* readers. It was from ... "Richard Wilde, Nottingham". Nice one, Dick.●

(Ian Juniper will be contributing a regular column to *Nottingham Extra*, mainly on trade union affairs.)

CND

Keeping the banners waving

ROSS BRADSHAW

ELECTIONS OVERSHADOWED the April CND/Friends of the Earth London demonstration. Most of the speakers at the rally referred to it and much of the talk on the march was election conjecture (especially amongst those people from Nottingham East!). The national attendance compared to

previous CND London marches was down, as was the Nottingham contingent. Nevertheless this was still the *only* demonstration in Britain this year of any size and the 250 or so from Nottingham stands up well compared to any demonstrations by other groups in this city. And that is impressive. Single issue campaigns rarely keep their mass popularity for much longer than three years. This wave of CND has doubled that. Six years of campaigning, five years of Greenham, four years on from the

Falklands war. It's a long time to march, to leaflet, to fundraise. Paul Johns - a local lad made good - speaking as CND chair, remarked that we'd come too far now to put our banners away.

CND has changed the face of politics and of course is fighting the issue on which the government and vested interests are most dug in. CND's imminent collapse has been predicted by its critics almost since its inception - *Socialist Worker* once banally announced the collapse just days before CND's biggest demonstration ever. CND is, however, in a reasonable crisis. At a national

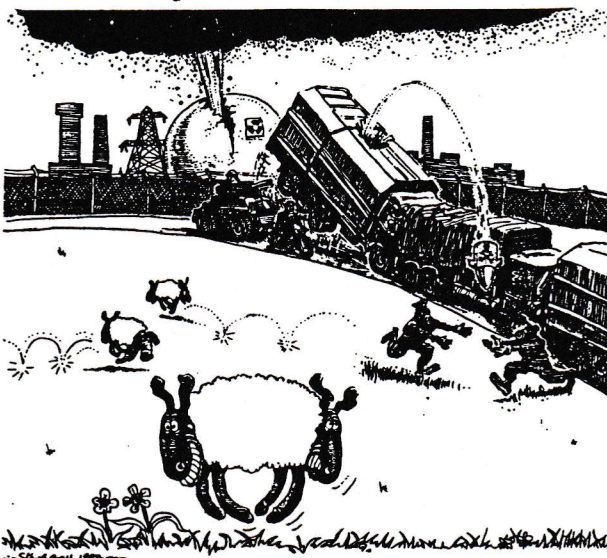
level the successors to Bruce Kent and Joan Ruddock have been unable to match their inspiration and charisma. At a local level, whilst there are still active groups in Sherwood, Bulwell, Radcliffe on Trent, Raleigh Street, Wollaton, Arnold, West Bridgford and Forest

Fields, it is some time since new groups were formed. The Direct Action wing too has shrunk considerably.

Nottingham CND has sustained itself as a single issue campaign by a small core running the office and producing the monthly *Bulletin*, as well as a variety of *themes*. The European dimension, nuclear free zones, peace camps and direct action have in succession kept interest alive. Currently there seem to be no major new issues to excite, distant as we are from the current international

negotiations.

The nuclear power link could be the issue. CND now opposes all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle and the nuclear power link raises important issues, from aboriginal rights (where uranium is mined) right through to nuclear waste being dumped on unwilling communities. One of the previous reservations to CND taking on the nuclear power industry was fear of union disapproval - but the signs are that, if anything, union members are more concerned with nuclear power than weapons. The seafarers' union, for example, has



taken excellent action against nuclear dumping at sea. Significantly, Bill Morris spoke at the CND demonstration representing the Transport and General Workers' Union, and the demonstration had twin aims of opposing nuclear power and weapons.

Unfortunately, whilst Friends of the Earth had jointly sponsored the demonstration, the FOE and general "green" mobilisation was poor. FOE has little tradition of the coalition and mobilising politics necessary to take an equal role in such demonstrations, but it would have been nice to have seen greater effort, and, locally, any effort. Most of the demonstrators were from CND groups, complete with the most amazing display of "banner art".

Of the various speakers at the demonstration, two will stay in my mind. Billy Bragg spoke and sang straightforward gutsy politics and enlivened the crowd. So often "stars" seem to take a para-

sitical role in left movements - they draw in the punters, but guess who really benefits. Bragg, with his simple rhetoric and genuine enthusiasm, seems a rare exception.

The other memorable speaker was a rape survivor from Molesworth peace camp. Of all speakers, she was the only one to speak with bitter and angry emotion. That five rapes have occurred at all is bad enough. That this should happen within what is seen to be part of the peace movement is shocking. The speaker called for CND members to withdraw all support from the camp which continues, though women who live there think otherwise. A peace camp under the shadow of rape can have no peace. Whilst continued action at Molesworth is essential, it seems that only the withdrawal of the existing camp would clear the way to a renewal of Molesworth campaigning. Peace overshadowed by sexual or any violence is no peace. An issue as important as the election.●

CITY COUNCIL

Where the left went wrong

NIGEL LEE

Nigel Lee, a current city councillor who is not standing again in May, replies to Mark Charles's article in the last issue about a possible left takeover of the City Council's Labour Group.

MARK CHARLES'S predictions about the politics of the next Labour Group on the City Council missed out one very important point. Politics is not just about the positions of individuals, but more importantly it is about organisation.

The fact is that the City Labour Group has been controlled for most of the last twenty years by what has been affectionately known as "The Dunnett Machine". And, whether I or Mark Charles likes it or not, the remnants of the Dunnett Machine are still in control. More importantly, the left does not have an effective organisation capable of challenging that control.

The Dunnett Machine

The point about the Dunnett Machine is not whether it is right or centre, but that it is in control. It emerged in the 1960s when Jack Dunnett was adopted as parliamentary candidate for one of the Nottingham seats. As a multi-million pound property dealer and financier, he could afford to bring in Len Maynard and John Carroll with him as his personal agents and later to appoint Betty Higgins to this role. It is no coincidence that these three Dunnett agents all became leaders of the City Council.

The Dunnett Machine first established itself in the sixties by cynically combining with the left to overthrow the old corrupt right. Then it turned ruthlessly on the left, smashing their power base, the old City Labour Party, and expelling many socialists from the party (including Ken Coates, who has been readmitted and stood as a Labour candidate in the 1983 General Election and the 1984 Euro-election).

The left did not finally oust the Dunnett Machine from its power base in Nottingham East and then from control of the District Labour Party, which is responsible for the City Council elections and manifesto, until 1981 - not until after Dunnett himself had already announced that he would retire as MP at the next election. However, the left was not well enough organised to prevent the remnants of the Dunnett Machine from keeping control of the City Council Labour Group elected in 1983.

The Left

Before the 1983 election there was only one active left councillor on the City Council, Eddie Ashbee. He tried to do what Ken Livingstone had done for the GLC by galvanising the left into getting involved in the manifesto, putting themselves forward as candidates, and making their wards more active. This was highly successful as far as the manifesto was concerned - the 1983 manifesto included some very good detailed policy and was probably the best the City has seen. However, the left fell far short of the number of candidates needed to take control of the Labour Group. Ashbee himself dropped out, leaving the left leaderless.

In the end only 7 or 8 out of the 28 Labour councillors elected clearly supported the manifesto. The first meeting of the Group after the election refused even to discuss adopting the manifesto as group policy. (At that stage, I thought that a few of us would have to break the whip at the first Council meeting in order to propose the manifesto, that the rest of the Group would vote against it, and that they would then expel us. What fun that would have been!)

However, at the next meeting it emerged that the Council's Chief Officers had taken the manifesto more seriously than the Group leader-

ship - they actually expected the Group to implement the manifesto on which we had fought the election, and some were quite enthusiastic about it. The leadership has always had great respect for the Officers' political judgment, so they concluded it would be acceptable to implement the manifesto. Also, the Group came to its senses and realised that, since we only had a single majority over the Tories (28 to 27), if they were to expel the left for supporting the manifesto, not only would they lose the propaganda battle but they would also lose their fragile majority.

So they implemented the manifesto. And we supported them. But there were serious problems in this strategy as far as the longer-term goal of building left organisation was concerned:

1) Playing a constructive role in *developing* policy is much more time-consuming than *opposing* a failure to implement policy. It also makes it more difficult

to define the differences in how the left would have implemented the manifesto if it was in control.

2) As individuals we were all working on different projects, which led to a lack of focus on which the left could be co-ordinated.

3) Our most significant achievement was to stop the leadership plan to cut £2 million every year for three years from 1984, which would have meant the loss of several hundred jobs - instead there has been a modest expansion in jobs and services. But, because the cuts didn't happen, there was no continuing interest.

4) The left in the party is not generally interested in anything unless there is a confrontation. The fickle Trotskyist left, in particular, decided after the collapse of the campaign against ratecapping nationally that local government was no longer flavour of the month and shifted their attention to other things.

As a result there was a failure of the left to continue organising within or around the City Council. And apathy in the party allowed the Machine to reassert control.

The 1987 Manifesto

The current failure of the left is most clearly seen in the 1987 manifesto. Detailed policies approved by the District Party were swept aside by a slick public relations hatchet job which replaced virtually all detailed commitments by meaningless generalisations.

That was particularly true for equal opportunities. Almost all commitments to any of the target groups (women, black people, lesbians, gays, people with disabilities) were systematically censored from the main body of the

manifesto, and, even in the equal opportunities section at the end, specific commitments were few. It is clear that the party has not gained any real understanding from the last four years of consultations with groups suffering discrimination in the city, and still has no idea how actually to eliminate discrimination rather than just make pious statements about equal opportunities.

This manifesto would have left the way clear for the next Labour Group to do whatever it wanted, with the minimum of constraints made by party policy. It was clearly a major defeat for the left. Yet the left is not well enough organised even to recognise that it suffered a defeat!

In 1983, the only real power of the left derived from our ability to organise around the manifesto. For example, we were able to force the Group to operate more openly and democratically and to consult regularly with the District Party because the details of

how this should be done were spelt out.

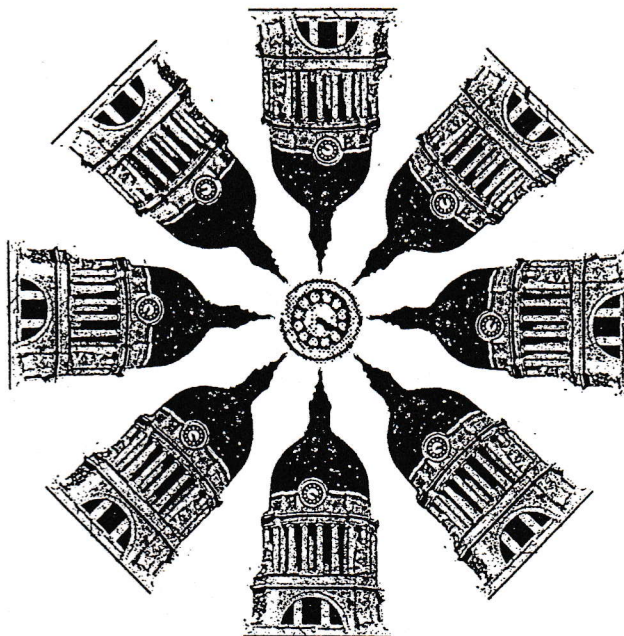
Secret Cabals

Because the left this time failed to organise around producing an effective manifesto, they will have very little basis for organising within the next Group. This means that the left, from the beginning, are likely to be forced to react to leadership proposals instead of taking the initiative. The danger is that, with a reasonable majority, the leadership could even drift back into the old ways of developing policy in secret cabals with Chief Officers - a habit which was only partially broken down.

This officer-led system works by the Leader, together with selected sidekicks, meeting in semi-formal "corporate policy advisory groups" with relevant Chief Officers without any authorisation from the Group and without ever even informing the Group that these meetings are taking place. Policies then emerge without reference to these meetings as the source.

This system caused the only successful public opposition by the left to Group policy over the last four years. The leadership tried to push through an increase in council house rents for 1984, even though it was unnecessary because of a £5 million balance which had resulted from a sudden fall in interest rates (in General Election year). It only emerged later that this policy proposal had come from discussion in a "corporate policy advisory group" attended by Group leaders and senior Chief Officers.

The Chair of Housing, Malcolm Wood, gave only an oral report to Group on a complex operation involving the transfer of most of the £5 million balance into the capital fund for housing invest-



ment, even though there has continued to be a large surplus on that fund which the government will not allow the Council to spend. This operation was the exact opposite of what many other councils, with a firmer grasp of political and financial realities, had started to do - use the surplus on the capital fund to help keep rents down.

The leadership had failed to recognise that they now had backbenchers who had a better grasp of housing finance than they had. Under cross-examination, Wood had to admit that he did not know the details which were needed for the Group to make an informed decision. In spite of this, the Group voted for the rent increase. The left were able publicly to vote down the increase at the Housing Committee because the Tories also opposed it.

It emerged later that the reason the Group leadership had attempted to dupe not only the public but also the Group and the party by cynically putting forward this ludicrous proposal was to conceal its real aim of "justifying" a rent increase at the most politically advantageous time, three years before the next election. (If they had been more honest they might have had more success! Instead they exposed themselves as seriously incompetent both politically and financially.)

In spite of inflicting this humiliation, the left failed to force the secretive system of policy development out into the open. That should be a major priority for the left on the next Labour council.

Predictions for the future control of the Labour Group

I predict that after the election the main focus of organisation will continue to be Betty Higgins, together with Bill Dinwoodie and Peter Burgess (if they are re-elected), as the three remaining members of the Dunnett Machine. Behind them will be eight of their old fellow travellers from pre-1983 (Ducker, Gibson, Harby, Hartshorne, Matthews, Riley, Wood and Worthington) and perhaps one or two newcomers.

Against them will be ranged a motley crew of assorted lefties. First, the very soggy compromised left on the present Group (Heppell, Jones, MacLennan, Morris and Taylor) who are all capable of challenging for Chairs of Committees. Then the rather firmer, or at least fresher, left: all the new candidates standing in winnable seats in Nottingham East (Collins, Ghazni, Hassan, Ibrahim, L. Khan, Munn, Muter, Pearch) together with one or two in North and South like Baker and Clausen who are likely to side with the left.

Most of the rest I would describe as the "middle ground" who could support either side depending on the issues and personalities involved. This suggests that the pro and anti Machine forces will be fairly evenly divided and decision-making will be based on which side has the best organisation.

My betting will be on the old Machine coming out on top yet again because of the dismal failure of the left to organise (a failure for which I take my full share of the blame).

Next issue: After the election, Nigel Lee makes further revelations about some of the more controversial issues within the 1983-87 City Council.●

POST ELECTION POSTSCRIPT

LABOUR LOST the election mainly because of bad organisation. For example, one seat was lost in Bilborough by only 15 votes as a result of support being directed to Beechdale instead.

With Burgess and Dinwoodie defeated, the old Dunnett Machine is now dead and Betty Higgins isolated, though confirmed as Labour group leader. Malcolm Wood organised the old "hangers-on" into a reactionary right-wing revolt which caused the centre to unite with the left to elect John Taylor as deputy leader instead of Wood, but the right then did a deal with the centre to freeze out the new left.

The Tories' main problem is that they have only three councillors with any real ability - Bill Bradbury, Martin Suthers and Andrew Hamilton - and the latter two are out of favour because they are old-style "thinking Tories". It will be interesting to see whether they have any restraining influence on their loonier colleagues led by "boot-boy" Ted Hickey.

If the Tories do what they did when last in control in 1976-79, they will ruthlessly axe several hundred jobs across the authority by "natural wastage". They will massage down the numbers on the housing waiting list (Hickey has called it a "fiction"). Homelessness, like unemployment, will get worse. They will sell off large areas of council land and stop all new council house building. And they will put many council services out to tender with the aim of cutting jobs and reducing wages and conditions.●

The left in the driving seat?

Mark Charles writes: After selections had been completed by Labour for all the seats listed in the last issue, the picture which emerged was as follows. As predicted, Bill Dinwoodie, rejected by Trent, was selected in Byron with another right-winger, Gary O'Connor. Also as predicted, two soft left candidates were selected in Portland - Nigel Cooke and Andrew Cooper.

Three candidates had to withdraw because of ill health - Mick Stout (Bridge), Frances Dennett (Clifton East), and Keith Pavier (Bulwell West). They were replaced respectively by Di Clausen (left), Chris Gibson (lazy right, rejected from Aspley), and Vernon Gapper (centre (right)). This brought the score in Labour's 39 winnable seats to:

Left/Soft Left	16
Centre	11
Right/Soft Right	12

The best guess for future leadership that can be made at the moment is for a centre-left axis led by Betty Higgins and John Taylor, with a left rump led by Hassan Ahmed excluded from the power stakes, and a right rump led by Brent Charlesworth and John Riley also excluded.●

BOOKSHOPS

Battered bookshops

ROSS BRADSHAW

NEGES, WOMANZONE, Birmingham Peace Centre, York Community Bookshop, Days of Hope, Fourth Idea, 108 ... well-travelled radicals will recognise this list of names as radical bookshops with one thing in common: they no longer exist. The list could be longer and is a reflection of the decline of radical bookselling over the last few years.

A moment's thought will make it clear what the effect of this decline is on the socialist/radical movement at large. Each shop, for example, will have sold fifty or a hundred radical magazines and would often have been the only outlet for the mags in its area. These shop sales represent one of the few ways radical mags (whose advertising budget is usually close to zero) reach all those potential readers who don't go to the right meetings or go up to the big London shops. The effect on small publishers who do not have a cushion of subscribers/sponsors is worse. Pamphlets, unless written by the famous, will not be stocked by commercial bookshops, can't easily be sold on demos, and can't be subsidised by advertising.

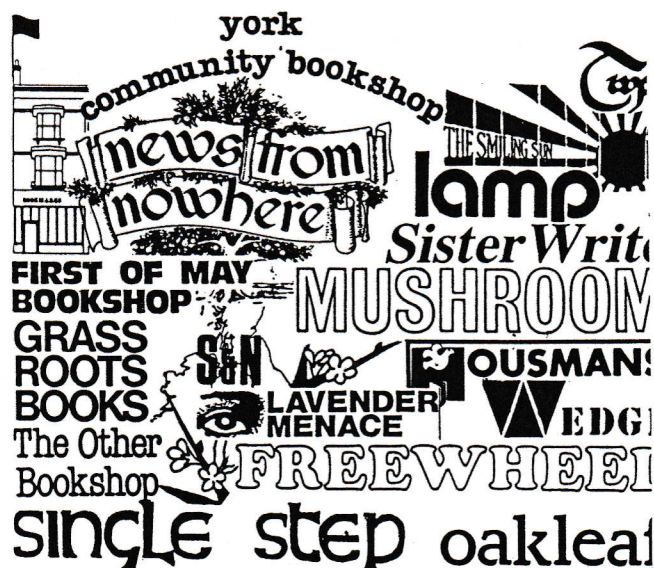
The little pamphlet scene has had to cope with a drastic reduction of outlets, and in recent years both the main distributors (Full Time and Scottish and Northern) of small political pamphlets have gone bust, owing the publishers a lot of money. Limited sales mean higher prices, distribution costs are too much, and so the vast array of ideas we used to get from little publishers goes undistributed, unpublished, unwritten - ultimately unthought.

Headlong rush

The situation for the left book publishers is interesting too. Women's and gay books have been taken up by the high street shops and *Color Purple* has become a best seller! Where once you had to go to an alternative bookshop for, say, a feminist or a vegetarian title, now you don't have to. You cannot blame publishers for rushing headlong on to the high street - a single order from a chain store will be worth more than the orders of the whole radical booktrade put together. Publishers still have to eat, writers deserve a reward for their labour, so the publishers go where the money is.

However, those publishers who have made it are not as radical as they seem. Women's Press is bankrolled by the Namara group, who also publish soft porn. Virago are part of a big conglomerate who also publish the famous racist children's book *Little Black Sambo**. Both these two treat authors badly, with little consultation over jacket design etc. Authors get better pay and

*As we go to press, Virago managers are completing a "buy-out" to go independent again. The Virago feminist bookshop in London, though, has taken to stocking hardback books by Jim Prior of all people ...



treatment signing up for those feminist imprints like Pandora who are nothing other than the feminist sideline of multi-nationals (in Pandora's case, a bible, law and everything else publisher!). The truly independent and innovative publishers like Sheba just don't have the muscle or the advertising power to compete.

Sadly, this last year has seen the bankruptcy of two major left independent publishers, Pluto and Writers and Readers. The former started as the publishing wing of the Socialist Workers Party but split off to become the general left publisher, most famous for its *Big Red Diary*. Pluto was never profitable, but in 1986, where book sales in general dropped by 18%, Pluto's sales halved. The market for radical titles is no longer big enough, it would seem (I'll come back to that later).

Pluto has been "saved" by a good commercial publisher strong on black writing, so it won't disappear entirely. Writers and Readers are most famous for the *Marx etc. for Beginners* series, for publishing the art critic John Berger and for producing the supposedly first non-sexist and non-racist children's books (which were also bloody awful). Writers and Readers seem likely only to survive as the "Beginners" series done by someone else - but expect to see more Elvis and less Nicaragua ...

In case you are wondering how Nottingham fits in ... First, on publishing, Ken Coates' *Spokesman* imprint survives but, with the decline of Bennism and the shop stewards' workers' control movement, their market has gone. *Peace News* survives, just. Shops have gone too - Pathfinder, Earthwise, Concord are names that few readers will recognise. The straight shops in town are all chain stores. (Incidentally, did you know W.H. Smith owns Sherratt and Hughes?) Mushroom Bookshop survives, as does Ujamaa, but I'll talk about them only by implication.

So what has caused this decline in radical bookselling throughout the country? Is it inevitable?

Many of the problems faced by radical bookshops are longstanding, and some insurmountable. Largely, the shops grew out of the libertarian milieu of post 1968. The workers in general were young, idealistic, middle-class dropouts. It is less easy to be utopian in your mid-thirties with children to feed and clothes to buy. Thus staff turnover tended to be high, skill and knowledge were lost. Wages were low, if paid at all. Shops survived on self-exploitation. The hours and conditions would certainly lead to strikes elsewhere.

This self-exploitation was defended politically, often by those who'd move on after a year or two, or whose mummies and daddies would help out when things were tight. Some shops - including many that closed - would only stock "politically sound" books, forgetting that lefties go for country walks, laugh, cook, have babies and read for pleasure. Those shops which tried to broaden their appeal and attraction to the general public and to recognise the harsh realities of the 1980s were often/are often accused of "selling out".

Reasonable wages

My own opinion is that it is necessary to pay reasonable wages (and live with the commercial ways of raising the money) for several reasons. First, if radical bookshops (and workers' co-ops) in general are to retain workers long enough even to learn the trade, they must offer wages at least getting on for those available elsewhere. Retail is predominantly a female area and pays badly anyway, but, unless we can find the money to pay something like union rates of pay, the radical booktrade will remain marginalised from the rest of the labour movement and shunned by those who need wages to pay their bills. There is, crudely, an attitude that being poor is somehow more revolutionary than being not poor. Frankly, there's no attraction to me, as a worker or a consumer, in dimly lit, tacky backstreet enterprises full of worthy but boring tomes living off the fanaticism of shop workers whose every waking moment is a political one.

So what can we do about it? Whilst much of what I've written above would indicate that politics is dead, or merely resting, that is not the case. Anti-Apartheid, CND still, Red Wedge, the late GLC and countless other initiatives have shown that the punters are still interested. The style of politics has changed. Whilst radical bookshops remain with a 1960s (or, even worse, 1930s) mentality, they will be ignored by newer movements. Whilst I wouldn't go as far as the Communist London bookshop Colletts, which sells hammer and sickle boxer shorts (actually manufactured by a Nottingham co-op!), I do think it's important that radical bookshops sell stylish T-shirts, records, posters and earrings, and put more thought into layout, display and design. Similarly, shops could realise that "politics" is also green as well as red, and about spirituality, self-help health and animals as well as humans.

Shops could learn a lot from *Marxism Today!* Bright, innovative, provocative, *Marxism Today* is

widely read by people who believe politics has changed, not gone away. Fundamentalists hate it, but there you go. Politics should be fun, political bookshops should be interesting and seek to bring in the curious and unconverted rather than bludgeon the passer-by into alienation by being so right-on you're dull.

Uneconomic

The alternative (or even a supplement) to being more commercial and exciting is to seek subsidy. Even with the best will in the world, radical bookshops will never have that much money around, and in small towns will always be uneconomic. It may be, in Thatcher's Britain, radical bookshops could be unable to survive on any commercial basis. Here rises an area of political debate with local authorities. Labour Councils are generally favourable towards co-ops, which, of course, most radical bookshops are. I would not argue in favour of direct subsidies which could be turned off when political control of local authorities changes. I would argue that public sector buying should be in support of the local economy, whereas much of the buying exports capital and profit from the area. Local authorities directing book buying to locally owned shops is a stimulus to the local economy, and, if the local bookshops include radical ones, channels start to open for libraries to stock more radical and third world presses.

Unfortunately, many Labour authorities, having a short-term Scrooge-like mentality, have been instrumental in setting up Direct Purchasing Organisations. DPOs, basically, scoop up all the book orders in a local authority, or group of local authorities, and, going direct to publishers with a massive order, gain discount - but at the cost of destroying local stockholding bookshops who need library buying to keep them in business.

(In Sheffield, the Council has worked closely with the (radical) Independent Bookshop, helping them with city centre premises and giving them library contracts to supply lots of radical publishers' books to the library system. Library workers and Independent work closely at promoting book fairs and other issues. But that's Sheffield.)

Extra bit

On a smaller scale - and many people do this already - individual buyers can "subsidise" radical shops by walking that extra bit out of the centre of town to ask first for the book they need at the radical shop. Many individuals have the power to spend small book budgets within their organisations. Here, too, try radical bookshops first. This also has the advantage of opening up radical bookshops to a wider community, and in turn forces the shops to be more efficient and less insular. Having said that, be patient too. Most radical bookshop workers are wrapped up in a struggle for day-to-day existence and have little energy to look at the long term. Harassed by Nazis and other authoritarian bullies, undercut by the greed of shoplifters and the general problems of retail, there often seems little time to talk and to work things through.

But still, unless shop workers and the "reading public" work out their future, a small but, many, important part of our culture will disappear.

(This article, in a slightly different form, first appeared in *The Chartist*, a libertarian socialist magazine. The author works at Mushroom Bookshop.)

INTERVIEW

Women in local politics

GAIL SQUIRES interviews LEE HARRISON

Lee Harrison, City Councillor for Radford Ward from 1983 to 1987 and Vice Chair of the City Council's Equal Opportunities Committee, was interviewed by Gail Squires some weeks before the May local election, at which she stood down.

GAIL: What made you become active in the Labour Party and want to stand for the Council?

LEE: What made me want to become active in the Labour Party was helping to set up the Women's Section in East Nottingham Constituency as one of the first things I did after joining. I don't think that I would have had the same level of involvement in the Labour Party if there wasn't that separate women's organisation. Something I feel now, even though I'm fairly experienced, is that, in many ways, how the Labour Party operates and a lot of what happens in the Labour Party is not of that much relevance to women. A lot of the time I sit in branch meetings and go away feeling that there actually hasn't been that much I've been able to relate to as a woman. Obviously, you have a responsibility to raise a woman's perspective within the branch, but that's a lot of hard work; having women's sections provides an opportunity where you're with other women in a supportive environment, and you can work constructively towards changing the party to make it more relevant to women.

GAIL: Do you think that coming from a women's section, and working in that forum initially, helped to build your confidence?

LEE: Oh, definitely! Even branch meetings can be very daunting - certainly constituency party



meetings are very intimidating. Even when you're familiar with them, they're large, very formal meetings. It's difficult to know where you can have an input, the debate isn't often that constructive and no allowances are made for inexperience. There isn't even the space to ask questions to find out what's going on.

GAIL: So what have been your experiences as a woman on the City Council?

LEE: I think the biggest advantage I had was not knowing what I was getting into at all. If I had been better informed, I probably would never have done it. It was particularly difficult at that time, in 1983, as there were a number of other women standing for election who were also very committed to women's issues, but unfortunately didn't get elected. We kept control, but with a small majority, and I felt very isolated, although I did get support, particularly from Nigel (Lee). Apart from just getting used to it, it helped when Eileen (Heppell) was elected in the by-election - having

her around has made a big difference, knowing that there's somebody else with the same level of commitment. It's a big support, and hopefully I give her that support as well.

I think what really shocked me was being prepared for overt sexism, but not being prepared for the form that it actually took, which was that I was totally ignored - it was as if I

didn't exist! Very often you were in meetings where you were the only woman in a completely male-dominated environment, or where women were in the minority, and that's very undermining, particularly if you're inexperienced.

GAIL: And that's more difficult to deal with than overt sexism.

LEE: Oh yes, because you're all geared up to be angry and come back, and it's - yes, it's very difficult!

GAIL: Do you think that the City Council's equal opportunities policy has developed well, and is starting to achieve results?

LEE: It's the area I've been most committed to, and I think it's been developing along useful lines, although not as quickly as I would have liked. For example, we're now up to the level of staffing we had a commitment to in the manifesto we were elected on, but that's taken four years. We didn't get the Women's Officer until the Women's Sub-Committee had been established, then we just had the one Women's Officer - that was a year and a half after I'd been elected. I would have liked to see that woman in post sooner, and additional staff. Hopefully, if we get re-elected, we are going to have two additional posts for working with black women, and I'm very pleased about that.

Crucial role

GAIL: What do you feel is the role of local government in developing equal opportunities issues?

LEE: I think the Council's got a crucial role to play, because it's a major employer, although not as large as the County Council. Just in terms of having good employment practices for its own workforce is very important, and the potential is there. What holds back developments is the lack of resources, having to argue with people that equal opportunities is a priority. There are other members of the Labour Group who don't see it as a firm priority as you do, and that's frustrating because you know that real change can be achieved, but needs the resources to back it up. It obviously also has an important role in influencing other employers, although that's limited - that's where, if the work local authorities were doing around the country was backed up by a Labour government, at a national level, the rate of change would be much faster.

GAIL: You work for Leicester City Council now as a Women's Officer - are there similarities between working for a City Council and being a City Councillor, or do you find the two totally different?

LEE: It's obviously very different, because working for a local authority means you're not in a position to make the final decisions, and so that does tie your hands more. I've certainly found it very helpful having gained experience in Nottingham, because there are some similarities between the two authorities, and having an understanding of the political process is very useful. I worry sometimes that it may take the edge off how I see things, and that being too

too aware of my limitations might, perhaps, make me lower my expectations, although I hope that's not the case.

GAIL: Do you find it frustrating as an employee to watch the political process in Leicester, not being in the position to make policy decisions as you are in Nottingham?

LEE: I suppose it is, although I enjoy doing the actual work. I think one of the disadvantages of being a councillor is that, no matter how hard you try, it does distance you. You're never involved just as an individual, you can't take off your councillor's hat, and that somehow separates you off. Working for Leicester City Council means I have direct contact with women employees, which I feel is very important. I do believe that listening to women's experience and using it to inform your policy is fundamental, and that's why I'm totally committed to having co-optees on women's committees. Even if we had a Labour Group which was 50% women, those councillors still couldn't reflect the wide experience of women. Obviously the fifteen co-optees on the Women's Sub-Committee don't represent all women living in Nottingham, but they add another, crucial aspect, particularly in Nottingham, where there are no black or black women councillors. Hopefully we will have black councillors after the May elections, but there still won't be any black women. The Women's Sub-Committee is mainly for those women who aren't represented, and that is obviously very important.

GAIL: What are your reasons for not standing in the forthcoming local elections?

LEE: I've really enjoyed doing the four years, and I've learnt an awful lot. I did expect that most of it would be pretty boring, and that some of it would be interesting, but in fact the reverse has been true. I've learnt a lot about local government and about organisations in Nottingham, met lots of people and also learnt a lot personally, like chairing committees.

Worthwhile

It's been a very worthwhile experience - I would recommend it to anybody who's interested - but at the same time it's a very big commitment. It does take up all of your life, and it makes it very difficult to have any sort of life of your own outside council work. I don't think you can do it and work full-time, which is why I made a decision after a year to give up my teaching job, which I did for about two years. That's not something you can do indefinitely, because it means living on supplementary benefit, and I decided before I got this job that I wasn't going to stand. In fact, I was surprised to get a job because I thought while I was still on the council that I'd be unemployable!

I also think you run out of energy. Both myself and Nigel, who is also standing down, have represented Radford Ward, an inner city ward and the most disadvantaged within the county, which has meant a lot of work. The work has been very worthwhile, but it's a very high level of commitment, and I think you have to be realistic about how much you can do. You can be on the

inside for too long, get too drawn in, and perhaps sense losing your edge a bit. I think it's useful to take that experience and knowledge and use it from the outside - most people actually have very little understanding of how the local council runs. That's valuable as well, and I'd like to think that I'd be able to do that in some way.

GAIL: In the run-up to the local elections, there's been a smear campaign against the Labour Group on the City Council in the local press, particularly the *Evening Post*. Isn't it quite worrying to see how equal opportunities issues are being used as a weapon in that attack, by the media's misrepresentation of such issues as the gay swimming sessions, contract compliance and the sexual harassment policy? What thoughts do you have about the media's conduct, and what impact do you think it has had on the City Council?

More cautious

LEE: Well, it has had an impact, because it's made the Labour Group more cautious, particularly on gay issues, and caused them to slow down what was going to be pushed through over the next couple of months. I'm not surprised in the way that the *Evening Post* in particular has used the issues of gay rights, and more recently, the sexual harassment policy, not at all. I think what's important is that we have the courage of our convictions, and are not frightened into backing off from our policies. If we stick to them, and put some effort into promoting them, then I think we will be doing the right thing and not have a detrimental effect on the election.

It's very easy to over-react to that sort of press campaign - we've got enough experience from when Richard (McCance) stood openly as a gay councillor, for the first time in Nottingham and one of the few gay men to do that nationally. There was this hysteria from Labour Party members about how it was an electoral liability, and the result proved that was not the case. (Richard McCance overturned a Tory majority.) I don't think you need much more evidence than that. Also, when Eileen Heppell won the by-election in Basford, where the Tories mounted a massive smear campaign around gay issues, and lost completely - I think it lost them votes in the end, it backfired - that's another example. If you hold fast to what you believe, there isn't the danger. The danger is if you start backpedalling, people see that you're unsure and they, too, will have doubts. The viciousness of the attack on lesbians and gay men is one that we shouldn't kowtow to at all; it's important that we stand very firmly in support of them and our policies.

GAIL: Given the present political climate and, as you were saying earlier, the drain on resources etc., what future do you see for equal opportunities issues in local government? Do you feel that the only way forward now is if the Labour Party is elected nationally?

LEE: If there is going to be much more significant progress, then we do need a Labour government, though we obviously still need a Labour City Council because if the Tories get

elected in May, then that will be the end of any developments in equal opportunities in the city, apart from perhaps some token actions for people with disabilities. Even within the constraints we've been operating under for the past four years, I think we've achieved a great deal. It's actually more crucial in a way that we continue to do that in this political climate. If there were a Labour government, I don't think the conflict between local government and central government would be gone, that they would be working in complete harmony. There is a fair lack of understanding of the role and importance of local government from the Labour Party nationally, particularly the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Even though I'm standing down, and it doesn't look as if there's going to be a massive increase in the number of women committed to women going on to the council, I still feel it's very important that women come forward. It's a difficult job to take on, particularly with women having so many other commitments, but at the same time as ensuring more women are employed within the authority, we need women councillors. What is much needed is black women represented as councillors, and that's an omission which, hopefully, we can redress - certainly the Labour Party has a responsibility to be taking it on board. We need to open up local government and allow women in through forums like the Women's Sub-Committee. We must bring in more women, although it isn't enough to have women for the sake of it; you definitely do need to have women committed to pursuing women's rights.●

YOU READ IT FIRST ...

ALL JOURNALS ARE FOND of the "We told you first" type of item, so here goes.

From *Nottingham Extra* Number 1, June 1985:

"Have you ever wished there was a good left-wing national newspaper? ... The first issue of a popular left-wing weekly, *News on Sunday*, will appear in October 1986 (sic) ... The paper will ... differ from Fleet Street rivals in its news values. Instead of conventional trivia and reliance on agency reports, there will be serious news and analysis of the realities behind the news - where the power lies which shapes the events ...

"But *News on Sunday* will be a genuine popular paper. The comparison with the *Mail on Sunday* is a very real one in terms of appearance and market appeal. Its touch will be light and it will not be exclusively political."

Brave (or bravish) words! And now the reality. After a shaky start, it's settling down into a reasonable paper. On 10th May, it carried a very strong treatment of the MI5 destabilisation story - nice to see a Labour-supporting paper going all out for the jugular in the way the Conservative press does all the time. At 35p, every left sympathiser should buy it on principle - in the popular market, it's almost all we have!

And from *Nottingham Extra* Number 3, May 1986:

"How the Nottingham East activists must have hugged themselves when they got Ms Atkin! What a lot of shit is going to be stirred!"●

ON FOOT

Meaningless streets

JOHN SHEFFIELD

"ANOTHER MAIN ARTERY SEVERED!" screamed the uncharacteristically strident headline in the normally emollient *Nottingham Topic* in September 1973 when Arkwright Street, the direct route between Trent Bridge and the city centre, was closed for ever. The indignation was understandable. The closure of Arkwright Street, together with the building of the Broad Marsh Centre and the paving over of Lister Gate and Albert Street, interfered terminally with the motorist's freedom to go from A to B (or TB to OMS) as the crow walks (crawls, in this case: at its rush hour worst, the commuter scramble for West Bridgford and the South of England gave the "main artery" what I suppose you would have to call a thrombosis. I used to get off the bus and walk - and it was quicker). To get from TB to OMS via the Meadows now, the driver plays a tortuous game of snakes and ladders which is nearly all snakes and very few ladders.

Long diversion

So what was the point? It might seem perverse to pave over a busy direct route and send motorists on a long diversion, but the idea was to banish all through traffic to peripheral roads, and leave a traffic-free core which was pleasanter and safer for the people who lived there. At the same time, the dozens of shops and pubs which lined the half mile to the Midland Station were flattened, and retailing was concentrated in the Bridgeway Centre. A "village green" was laid out nearby, with a children's playground and an octagonal public loo, while a big new pub, the Riverway, was built in the traditional spot next to the church.

Few people in the Meadows wanted the shops on Arkwright Street to be replaced by a small group of more expensive shops a long way from where most of them lived, but the planners told them that the Meadows was being "completely redesigned" (every megalomaniac's dream!), and articles appeared in the *Nottingham Arrow* enthusing about the new "gardens" which were replacing the old terraces. And so that was that. Instead of Orange Street, Kirkby Street, St Saviour's Street and Eugene Street, we got Orange

Gardens, Kirkby Gardens, St Saviour's Gardens and Eugene Gardens.

Arkwright Street was pulverised, and the attractive red-brick Burton Almshouses of 1859 were demolished too. (They were in the way of the new peripheral road - you can still see the gateposts in front of the grass bank just up from the Greyhound on London Road, and, across the peripheral road, a line of trees which used to be in the gardens at the back.) The people were shipped off to Clifton and Bulwell, and when the houses had been built, other people were shipped back in from Radford and Hyson Green.

So what about Arkwright Street today? Or, rather, what about its fragments, for the original half-mile sweep from Turney Street to Queen's Drive is now chopped into four distinct sections. Confusingly, the top and bottom are still called Arkwright Street, though they are several hundred yards apart and totally unconnected, while the long stretch in between is now called Arkwright Walk. This middle section is itself cut in two by the yard of the Crocus Fields children's home, so there is the main length of Arkwright Walk on one side and on the other a little stretch of cul-de-sac with some houses and a Salvation Army Centre. The pedestrian walking along the Walk has to divert round the children's home or through the Bridgeway Centre.

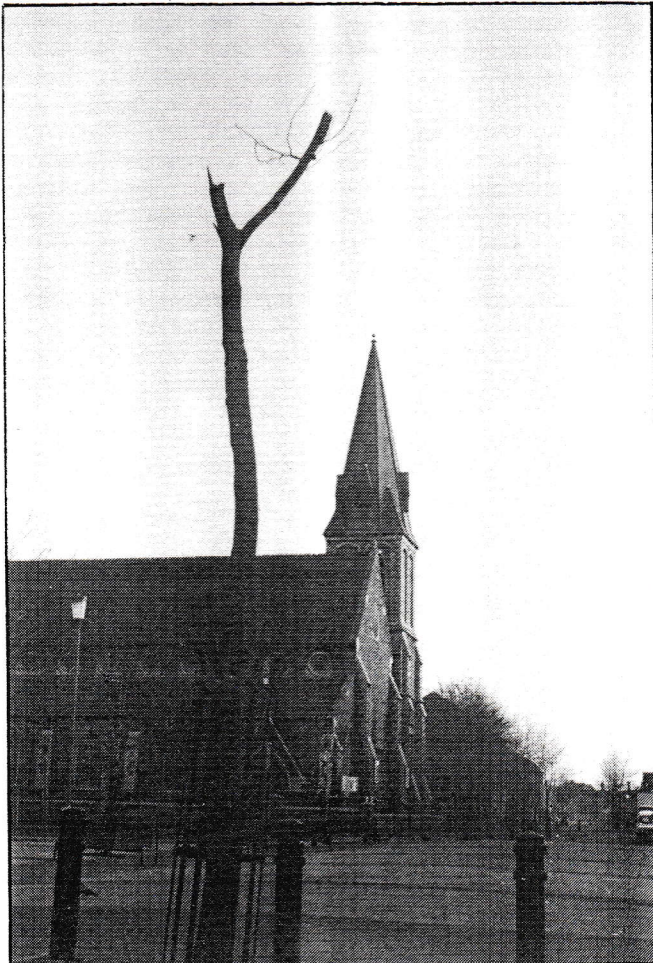
Wilderness

Let's imagine we're walking from the Trent Bridge end. The most striking thing about this first stretch of Arkwright Street is what an utter pig's ear it is. Worse: a pig's ear is a coherent shape with a recognisable function, but this is a wilderness of strangely twisting roads, odd bits of left-over building and sterile wide open spaces, with that peculiarly meaningless, added-on-afterwards type of prettying-up which too often passes as landscape design. And this is the product of careful planning, of deliberate "redesign"! For this, rows of profitable shops and an old almshouse were knocked down! Quite apart from the sheer desolation, consider the ratable value that once occupied this urban mini-desert!

Now cross (at your peril) the various bits of

(Clockwise) 1. The last building on Arkwright Street! As I took this photograph, a worried-looking chap emerged from the garage and asked if I was from the Council. Survivors of great disasters probably have the same feeling of insecurity. To the right used to be the Globe cinema, to the left - the whole of Arkwright Street! 2. Looking north, towards the city centre. Amazing to recall the dozens of shops and the nose to tail traffic. 3. St Saviour's vicarage, "a cosy, mellow brick dream of suburbia". If anything, it sorts even iller with new Arkwright than with old. Some of the demolished shops and terraces were by Watson Fothergill, a better

stylistic match. Surely the vicarage should have followed them into extinction. Shouldn't the thoroughly modern vicar live in a council house? Or is he still a social cut above his flock? 4. "A mere gibbet." It's easy to take this sort of photograph and present it as vaguely symbolic. But it is, after all, only a vandalised tree (heavy duty vandalism, but it is near the pub) and there does seem to be a symbiotic relationship between trees and vandals. Vandals seem to find trees irresistible, and without the assistance of the vandals, how could the tree have made such an eloquent comment on urban sterility and the doomed irrelevance of the Church?





road (I have yet to find an obvious safe route for pedestrians), and soon we are in the much more carefully considered landscaping of Arkwright Walk. Note the tasteful matching of brick paving and tinted tarmac; note the way road and footway alternate on different sides so that motor vehicles have to follow a slow zig-zag; note the way most cyclists ignore it, despite the big white bikes painted on the road, and ride on the footpath instead. Note, too, the stylish selection of street furniture, the elegant lamp standards, the shapely cast-iron bollards, the vandal-proof cast-iron benches, the protective fences round the trees, the grids round their bases, reminiscent of railway engine wheels.

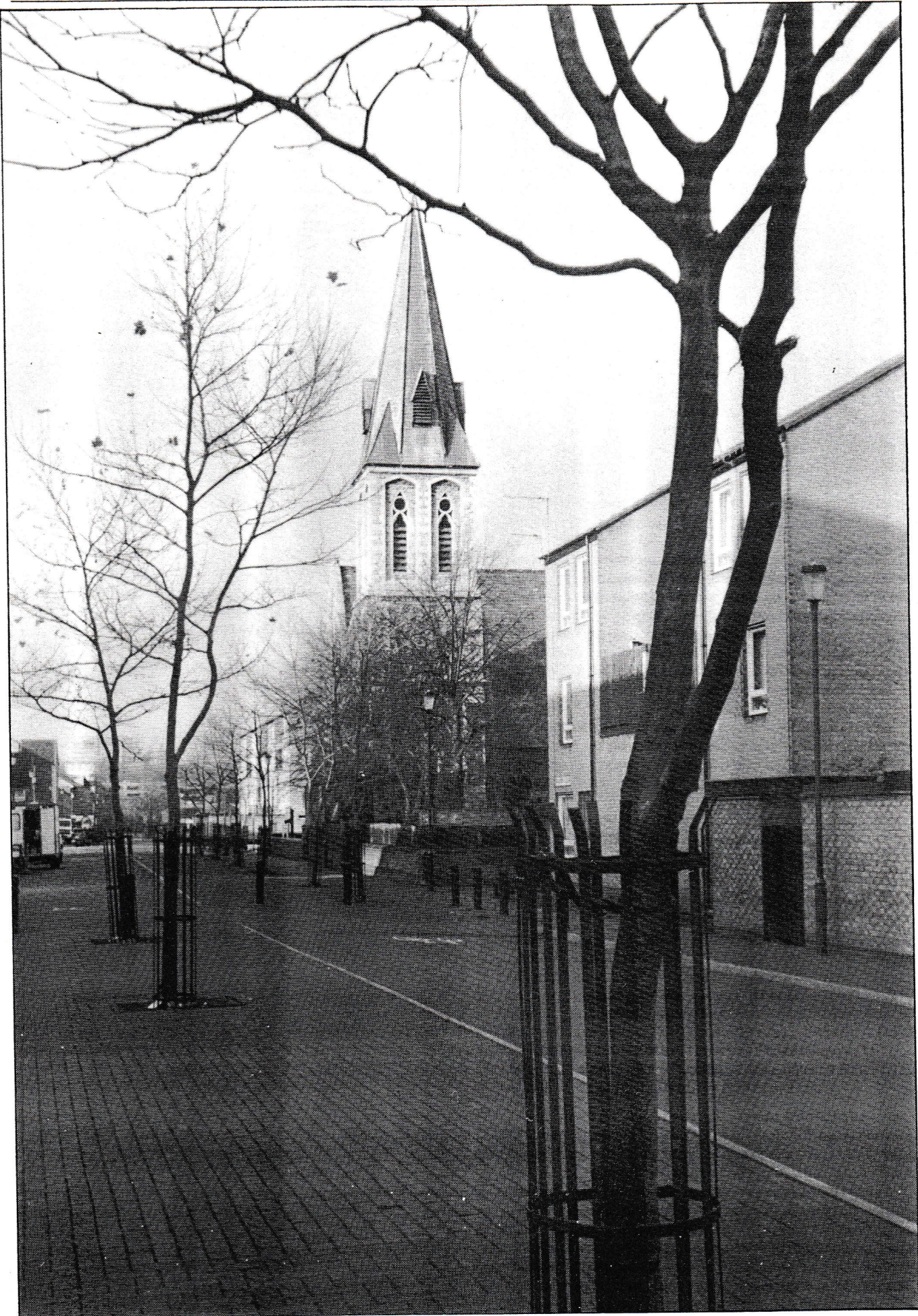
Apron-sized

Note also the litter, persistent as dandruff, the graffiti, the apron-sized front gardens tarmacked over because they weren't looked after properly, the trees with branches torn off (one near the church is a mere gibbet), the jagged rusty holes kicked in the vandal-proof cast-iron benches, the vandalised telephone, the kicked-in palings round the children's home, the botched-up relaid bricks where the public utilities have been in, the torn-down wire fence round the playground, and, when you get to the shopping centre, the steel shutters rolled down over the shop windows at closing time, against the ever incipient kristallnacht.

Well, you can blame the people who live there if you like, or blame their kids. Human nature. Original sin. Individual wickedness. But they weren't asked about any of this, whether they wanted this particular type of redevelopment. Others wanted it for them. Blame the people certainly, blame the vandals; but blame the others as well, the megavandals. Blame those who turned Arkwright Street into the poor broken-backed thing it is, who designed the hideous travesty of town planning at each end, who designed the fortress-like ugliness of these maisonettes, the jumble of little windows in the forbidding expanse of looming brickwork in long military rows, the meaningless maze of a street pattern behind, the ridiculous little front gardens with their six-inch fences, hitching-posts for sausage dogs. Dump people in an unsympathetic place, take away their autonomy, and then watch them act responsibly - after all, they've had so much practice!

Old Arkwright Street and its backstreets were slummy all right, but there is a special dead-

The unpretentious but really quite splendid-looking Crown Inn at the corner of Crocus Street is the sort of building the Victorians used to put up effortlessly. There is no comparable easy modern vernacular. And look, in these two pictures, at what a bit of renovation and cleaning-up can do. The whole of Arkwright Street could have been like this. It needed a lot of work, of course. My grandmother insisted on moving instantly from Crocus Street when my grandfather discovered standing water under the floorboards, and much of the Meadows was like that, built, as it should never have been, on the flood plain of the river Trent.





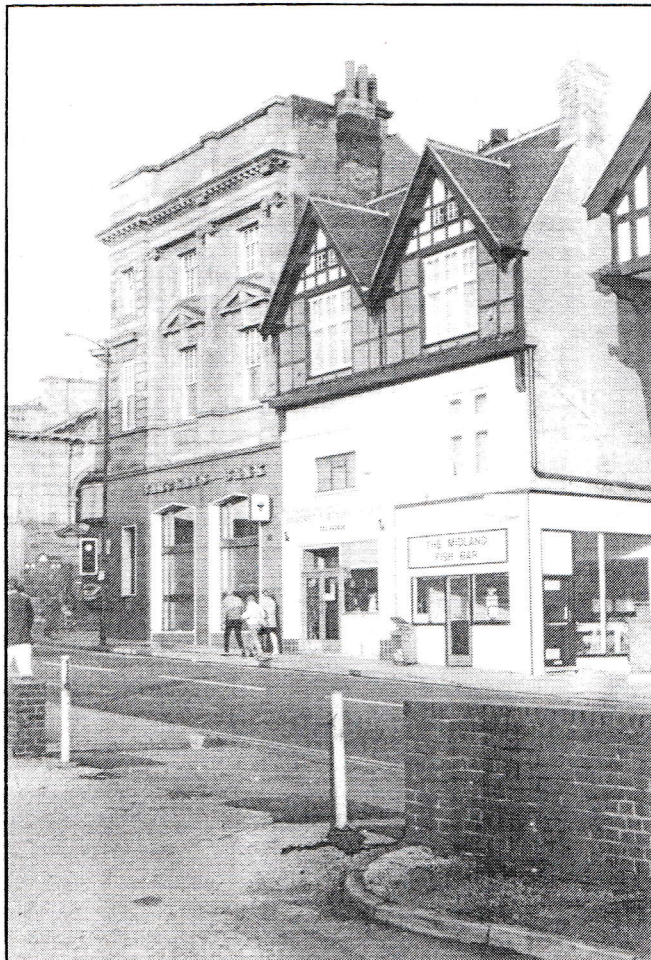
liness about a place which is beat up and brand new. It never had a heyday. Nobody ever liked it. Imagination and optimism failed, both. The best bits of Arkwright Street are still the old bits: the church, nondescript by most other standards, and the splendid old vicarage, a cosy, mellow brick dream of suburbia with a nice big garden and a faraway look as if it's yearning for its cousins in The Park. How did the Church of England ever have the face to plonk these opulent little oases in the middle of terraced rows - and preach the gospel of poverty and humility? (There is an answer to that, but this isn't the place to make it.)

The top end of Arkwright Street, beyond the peripheral road, is the only bit with a real echo of its old self. On one side, the Queen's Hotel stands up like, well, not a sore thumb exactly, because it is not a bad old building, but there is something ridiculous and melancholy about this tall, upright, isolated thing on a corner, with its old mates, the buildings it grew up with, all dead and gone, and the flat urban steppes behind it.

Surviving row

Across the road is the only surviving row, complete from Queen's Road to Crocus Street (the names have a meaning: Queen Victoria passed down Queen's Road; crocuses famously thrived in the pre enclosure Meadows). Repaired as most of them have been, they look decent and attractive enough, and yet much of what was knocked down was no worse, sometimes better, than these. And look at this fascinating jumble of shops: a cobbler (recently closed, alas), a tattooist, an Asian store, a Chinese restaurant, a Tandoori restaurant, a social club, a dental laboratory, a junk shop, an entertainment agency, a second-hand clothes shop, a chip shop, the Royal Naval Association club, and a pub - many of them the type of interesting little business which only gets a toe-hold in old streets like this. Arkwright Street was the Mansfield Road of the south side. It has not been replaced.

I could tell a few affectionate tales of old Arkwright Street, crummy though much of it was (or was allowed to become), but I won't. I've saddened myself enough already. And not just saddened - angered. The well-meaning inanity of these clever men who could so thoroughly reduce a solid half-mile of urban energy to such a barren hotchpotch of inconsequence!O



Two seconds before the top photograph was taken, there was no car and no figure in the doorway. I think he's a geni in mufti. A genial geni, too. I explained, in anticipation, that I wasn't from the Council, but he wasn't interested - just amiably tolerant of this barmy bloke with a camera. The double-gabled building was at one time the Queen's Cinema where, at Saturday morning matinees, the screen every so often would flicker into darkness and all the rowdy little Meadows kids would yell, "Put a penny in it!" Lloyd's Bank on the Queen's Road corner is a handsome enough classical building, but why the ghastly remodelling of the ground floor?

PERSONAL COLUMN

Allotments, roses & the "ca'cannie"

ROSS BRADSHAW

Edna

EDNA IS AN ELDERLY woman, well-known, her and her dog, around St Ann's. Edna is a gardener, looking after her allotment on Hungerhill alone, since her man died. Edna is arthritic and getting on, but whatever the weather tries to make it up the allotment a couple of times a day.

Last week someone burnt down her shed, with all her tools in it. Even if she could afford replacement tools, she couldn't carry them up and down to the allotment every day. What a cruel thing to happen.

This isn't the first time allotment sheds have been burnt out. Many gardeners have given up after decades at Hungerhill, worn out from constant vandalism and thefts. It would be easy to jump to conclusions and blame youths, but many of the thefts have been done by "professionals" equipped for careful burglary or with axes to smash doors down. Many tools have been seen later on second-hand stalls, and some have turned up in the hands, and this is nasty, of other gardeners.

One allotment I know has been broken into three times this spring already. The people who rent it are angry now and are putting "man traps" round their garden. What else are they to do? The council does not make the whole allotment area secure and the police are not interested in a few tools - even if, like Edna, gardening is someone's life.

As a libertarian I react against the idea of vengeance, or heavy sentences for those caught. But I have no answers, and despair at the anti-social behaviour of those who make the simple pleasure of gardening a trial for those who want little more than a bit of exercise and a few vegetables to help them through the recession.

I'd like to hear from those who cope with such problems - how to avoid feeling angry. Probably Edna would too.●

A rose by any other name

AT THE RISK OF INCLUDING too much Labour Party material in this column (and paper - Ed.), I thought it worth making a (belated) comment on Labour's change from the Red Flag to the Red Rose. The Red Rose in mythology is a women's symbol - that of "uterine blood and female self-knowledge, in which men might participate if carefully taught". The "wise blood" was romantically symbolised by the Rose, the Christians taking it on too: the rose window, the rosary - the cult of the Virgin Mary is strong on roses. "When a girl menstruated for the first time she was said to have borne the Kula (red China rose) flower: she was newly connected with the spiritual unity of the family, the ancestral mothers, and the ancient tribal loyalties and responsibilities 'centred in the blood'." (Quotations from Barbara Walker's *Secrets of the Tarot*.)



Rose windows in Gothic cathedrals faced west, the direction of the matriarchal paradise, usually dedicated to Mary, opposing the male cross in the eastern apex.

Good to see the Labour Party getting back to its pagan roots.●

On strike action

DURING THE COAL STRIKE, as the odds were stacked more and more against the NUM, like many people I shoved more and more into the miners' collecting tins. It was obvious towards the end that the strike was lost. I suppose, in the "white liberal" mould, I was salving my conscience; more honourably, maybe, it was in a generous spirit, a symbol of respect for people putting up a brave fight. Whatever, that one was lost. And so was the Murdoch/Wapping dispute. Lost maybe when the TUC wouldn't take on the electricians, lost maybe at the beginning when most journalists (with honourable exceptions) took Murdoch's silver, lost certainly when Sogat members throughout the country voted against a levy to keep the dispute going. Silentnight too - the whole recent labour history is of long, bitter and ultimately failing disputes.

But what can we do? A failure to vote for a "support" motion or to chuck a couple of quid into the collecting bucket is to negate the beliefs and courage of those workers in struggle. But constantly shoring up losing disputes could bring even more disillusion, defeatism and poverty to those workers in the long run. It may be fine for the left to praise people's bravery, to coat-tail other workers' disputes and to win

the odd recruit, but we may also be sowing illusory seeds.

The problem is that so many disputes are created - set up - by the government and employers. The three I've mentioned are cases in point. The laws are more and more stacked against the unions - injunctions, sequestrations, banning of secondary picketing. Unions are often loth to give full backing to workers, as the whole union could be broken by one smallish dispute. Also - the employers pick *their* time and *their* battleground, and the rules are *theirs* already.

In the early days of unionisation, especially in America, workers knowing what they were up against tried to choose the issue and choose the battleground. The "strike on the job", as it was known in America, the "ca'cannie" as it was known in Scotland (basically, go slows, and a little bit of creative sabotage), and wildcat unofficial strikes are harder for the employers to deal with. Significantly, in the mines there have been dozens of lightning stoppages - to stop safety measures being abolished by management, to protest against sackings and speed-ups. When you are outside on the stones up against the might of the state, prospects are bleak; inside the firm, the "spanner in the works" can bring factories to chaos, whilst workers keep their wages.

We can't afford long, expensive defeats or strikes we can't win. Maybe now's the time to seek more effective and imaginative direct action which will both win and save our unions from the sequesters.●

Don't die of privatisation

DID YOUR GOVERNMENT AIDS leaflet come wrapped in a car advert? Mine did - as if anyone in our street could afford a Porsche. I presume, though I may be wrong, that the mail drop was not through the Post Office - or British Post, as no doubt it will be renamed - but a private mail drop contractor. I did want to see what the government had to say on Aids; I do not want to go from 0 to something illegal in less than 10 seconds. If there is a connection between the two "products", I suppose that it's that Porsche is sold, like most cars, as what a crude friend of mine would call a "big willie" affair.

The private car probably kills as many if not more than Aids; world war against pedestrians is at hand - who needs personal notes when you can mow 'em down like ninepins anyhow. Maybe the message could have been, "Wear a condom and look both ways before crossing the road."●

The aliens are amongst us

NOTTINGHAM CND'S public debate in March, tying in with the national CND bus tour, raised a number of interesting issues apart from the main substance of the meeting. Prior to the meeting, which was to have included David Regan of Peace Through Nato, CND had bowed to the demands of various pro-Nicaraguan groups and withdrawn Regan's invite. Regan had previously appeared on pro-Contra platforms. Whilst CND's invite may have been naive, have they now put

themselves in a position where any other progressive group can demand changes in their platforms if particular speakers are appearing who (by definition in a debate with the right) have shady views?

The meeting itself was subject to an amusing, if confusing, anarchist intervention. Along the lines of - speaker stands up from the floor announcing there are aliens amongst us who stand for election as MPs. Speaker then gets dragged out by people with ray guns. Presumably they'd heard that one of the speakers, Alan Simpson, was a Vogon. Actually he's a Vegan, which may have caused the confusion.

There were, however, some peculiar aliens at the meeting from the Coalition for Peace Through Security. The Coalition have tailed the CND bus, disrupting meetings and causing offence by giving out rather vile leaflets on CND's Paul Johns' marriage. The Coalition usually demand platform space - as "experts" in the nuclear debate (they want to bomb Russia now). This particular Coalite was given five minutes from the floor. Later, however, he bundled the SDP speaker (you're not going to believe this, but it really is true!) into the police station on a "citizen's arrest". The Coalition had given the SDP speaker (a young lad from Mansfield, addressing his first political meeting, poor sod) a letter from Michael Knowles, Conservative MP for Nottingham East, authorising the Coalition to speak on his behalf. The SDP bloke tried to hang on to the letter and was duly "arrested" for theft.

The police, finding their police station suddenly resembling something out of *Alice in Wonderland*, hit the roof when they found that the Coalition were taping all this and started threatening arrest for wasting police time ...

The Conservatives, it seems, are now unwilling to debate disarmament, preferring to set loose their real bonzos to disrupt attempts at debate.

The question is - in the face of all this, can CND gain anything themselves from such open debates? There must be other ways of presenting the case.●

Of little interest

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH (little actually), *Nottingham Extra* was described recently by a delegate to the Nottingham Trades Council as "anti-Trotskyist". It's nice to know the delegate's union branch takes such a keen interest in the small press world. The truth is more that this column can't take Trotskyists seriously - after all, who else but a Trotskyist would blanket Britain with posters about a conference on "Preparing for Power" when their party had just lost the Greenwich by-election by 18,196 votes. That's the trouble with universal suffrage: you give the workers the vote and they all turn out to be traitors to their class. Looks like the Greenwich voters will be up against the wall after the revolution - not only did they give more to the nutty Rainbow Alliance, but *both* the Nazi parties easily beat the Revolutionary Communist Party into last place.

And aren't they so macho? Not just the RCP either. Last night a Militant leaflet popped through the door. The leaflet drew attention to a

Mr Sainsbury who earns £7 million a year and Tories making a lot of bombs ... and goes on, "It's time these 'extremists' are put out of action, and we are the ones to do it." No doubt Mr Sainsbury is shaking in his shoes - after all, look what Derek Hatton did to Liverpool and the fashion pages.●

Enlarged hand problem

I'VE NOT HAD AN opportunity to mention this for some years now, but the enlarged hand problem seems to be back. The British National Party, or another bunch of loony Nazis, as they're otherwise known, have been sticking town with their very patriotic red, white and blue stickers. (They do peel off easily but make sure there's no razor blades underneath.) You can probably guess the slogans on the stickers, so I shan't repeat them, but I'm most curious about the big hand. You see, the stickers have as a graphic a nice couple of white people, a nice couple of children, the man (very Nordic) protecting his family with an embracing arm and an *enormous* fist - presumably ready to bop the nose of less patriotic people. There are diseases that do enlarge particular organs, but I believe they are treatable if caught in time. This case is obviously far gone as the fist is half the size of the man's body, which must make, for example, getting the bus fare out of your pocket very difficult. Anyway - if you *do* see a Nordic bloke with a massive fist, followed by an especially timid family, do point him in the direction of QMC - he is obviously very ill.

Thinking of Nazis, I've remembered that a few years ago the British Movement were on the go around here. A few of us were concerned about their image and idly considered putting out mock BM posters with Adolf Hitler photographs on - just to hint that the BM really were Nazis. Lo and behold - we never got round to it, but later the BM *themselves* put out posters with the (less than Nordic) face of Adolf and the slogan, "Adolf Hitler - our spiritual leader". We'd obviously underestimated their stupidity.

Ho hum. I do hope the Nazis aren't back, though. The last time they communicated with me was with a string of death threats accompanied by German martial music down the 'phone. I've never liked marching bands.●

Dog's dinner

I REALLY MUST, dog eats dog fashion, comment on the article in the last issue (available for 30p worth of stamps still) giving a run down of who's who, and how far left, of the new intake of prospective Labour councillors in Nottingham!

The article certainly had the punters buying, or at least the named prospective councillors, their Tory opponents and assorted *Evening Post* hacks. The article stuck one councillor out on a limb as Nottingham's "hard left", a restaurateur became a revolutionary, a personal friendship was presented as a political alliance ... and a whole host of people's politics were summed up in words usually describing the state of your boiled eggs. Confused? Send for the last issue.

The article was written by one "Mark Charles" - a clear pseudonym, as the membership secret-



aries of Nottingham Labour will have realised. Who is "Mark Charles"? Favourite guess was departing councillor Nigel Lee, presumably because he's the only councillor ever to have put anything in print in scurrilous lefty mags. No, it's not Nigel. I asked him. The editor of *Extra*, who protects his sources, will, if pressed, reveal that "Mark Charles" is *not* Brent Charlesworth (Labour councillor for the nineteenth century) but that was as far as he would go ...●

Competition Corner

THE COMPETITION in the last issue was to spot the first person/place sporting the Labour Party's Xmas gift, a signed and framed portrait of Neil Kinnock. There was one entry only. Ian Juniper claimed to have such a photograph on his bedroom wall. Those who know Ian will realise that this is as likely as Neil Kinnock having a photograph of Ian Juniper on his bedroom wall. Still, Ian wins on the grounds of audacity, rather than veracity. And, of course, tenacity - Ian enters all the *Extra* competitions! (Not after this issue: we've taken him on the staff specifically to avoid it - Ed.)

This issue our competition is inspired, though not sponsored, by Mainmet. Mainmet make household meters, acclaimed by tenants everywhere for their infallibility and generosity, no doubt. Mainmet have a snappy phrase, "Mainmet - managing resources, improving the quality of life", emblazoned on their van. The competition is to supply suitable mottos for other local companies, similarly describing their qualities. Entries acclaiming the good food at McDonald's will be disqualified (too obvious). The usual invaluable prize of a year's supply of *Nottingham Extra* for the winner. Entries please to the editorial address on page 3, to arrive before the end of June.●

SPAIN REMEMBERED

A faraway country

JOHN SHEFFIELD

SINCE THE LAST DAY of last year, I have had niggling away at me like a sore which refuses to heal an adverse judgment by the highest authority in the land on my innermost convictions. And not only mine, but those of my friends and forebears, and of millions of the people of this country over hundreds of years.

We have been told that we do not belong, that this is not our country, that we are foreigners in our own land. No matter that the person who made this judgment has often shown the profoundest ignorance of history. No matter that she views almost all human affairs through the most myopic of lens. She has the *authority* to impose this internal, spiritual exile upon us - and she has been busy doing it.

Routine handout

This prolonged bout of psychic unease was provoked by a small item on the back page of the New Year's Eve *Guardian*, a report based on the sort of routine press handout you would normally pass over like the rest of the undykable flood of political trivia, more verbiage in the interminable sling-slang of party politics:

"Mrs Thatcher" (it said) "last night began an attempt to set the agenda for the next general election by arguing that her government may have beaten back socialism, but needed a third term to overcome it ...

"In her new year message the Prime Minister took up her theme that socialism was 'alien to our British character'."

(The insidious possessiveness of that "our"!)

Now, we are used to seeing Mrs T as Boadicea scything down with the bristling wheels of her fiscal chariot those unpleasant Common Market (Treaty of) Romans; or as Britannia, poking the long, long handle of her trident (soon to be Trident) all the way down to the South Atlantic; or as St Georgina slaying any number of real and imaginery ideological dragons. But - Mrs T as Dr Freud; Mrs T thrusting us on to the Procrustean psychiatrist's couch of her view of the British character (Procrustes, you will remember, fitted people to his bed by chopping or stretching them); Mrs T diagnosing the presence of alien elements in our personality - this is uncomfortably new. We knew she didn't *like* us, but we hadn't realised she contested our right to be here at all. Now we learn that, for hundreds of years, we and our kind have been illegal immigrants, passport-holders not of Her Britannic Majesty but of the distant, utterly foreign Republic of Socialistica.

Well, let's take a relaxed attitude about it. Niggling it may be, but as yet it is only a *surface* irritation. I haven't internalised it yet. I don't *feel* foreign (though foreign to Mrs Thatcher, perhaps) and I am sure I can prove she's wrong. I am sure I can prove it many times

over, but here is just one vivid, recent example.

A remarkable event took place at the Central Library on the evening of 25th March this year. I would have liked Mrs Thatcher to have been there. I don't suppose she would have enjoyed it, but it would have enlightened her considerably about "our British character". Fifty years on, three local veterans of the Spanish Civil War, Frank Ellis, Walter Gregory and Lionel Jacobs, were reliving before an appreciative audience their memories of fighting as volunteers in the International Brigade. For all three, it had been an intensely formative experience, one which they have never forgotten, which has influenced their lives ever since. At least as formative as the aldermanic homilies of a Grantham grocer's shop. And considerably more dangerous. All three were captured, narrowly escaped being shot out of hand, and were repatriated only after enduring dreadful conditions in captivity (scurvy, lice and regular beatings, among other horrors).

What was remarkable about the evening was not so much the tales they had tell (though they were fascinating enough), but the *atmosphere* of the meeting. The auditorium was packed, with late-comers standing at the back and round the sides, and the three speakers and county councillor Paddy Tipping (in the chair) were clearly astonished and touched by the size and warmth of the response.

Enthusiastic

The audience was a heterogeneous bunch. I suspect there were more leftwingers than local historians (though where do you place a retired clergyman who used to teach at the High School?). Ages ranged from callow youth (with questions like, "What do the three lads think we can learn from the Civil War and what do they think of my own apathetic generation?") to a good turnout of their own ageing contemporaries, grey and balding, still fiercely enthusiastic, still making their own fervent contributions: low growls of approval when a particularly trenchant point was made about British non-intervention or a Tory leader who had described Franco as "a Christian gentleman", reminiscences about that period in the thirties when, despite indifference and worse from government and the press, the republican cause inspired widespread popular sympathy, practically expressed in collections of food and money, and well-attended political meetings.

I don't suppose much of this enthusiasm penetrated the prudently stocked shelves of the Grantham grocery. I can't somehow imagine Alderman Roberts expressing much solidarity with the beleaguered Spanish Republic, or bringing the same passion to the struggle against Franco which he brought to the principles of self-reliance, driving a hard bargain and getting-on. Yet it was undoubtedly British, that great outburst of compassion and practical support, and

the response which it evoked in an audience fifty years later was undoubtedly British too.

Whatever the small-town virtues of the "shopocracy" (a common Chartist expression of contempt - perhaps it should be revived), of balancing the budget (if you've got one), of keeping a tight fist on what's yours, my heart goes out rather to the idealism which inspired the willing, entirely non-budgetary self-sacrifice of young working-class volunteers (and working-class most of them were, despite the greater celebrity of middle-class literati like George Orwell and John Cornford) in a war in which they had no direct interest. (Compare and contrast a famous dismissal of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia as a "quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing".) That deep feeling of empathy with the desperate struggle for self-realisation of another people, that sense of a common and collective interest, of helping those who need help whatever the personal cost, is as persistent a part of the British character as the narrow, pecuniarily-impelled self-preoccupations of Robertson-Thatcherism. The British, and not just the British working-class, have for centuries practised mutual as well as self help. (There is even a kind of socialism in the collectivist activities of the rich as a mutual aid club - it's just that socialists think the aid should extend all the way down the social ladder. I am, of course, using the term "socialism" crudely, as Mrs Thatcher does, to cover almost everything left of the ... well, left of what? Left of Norman Tebbit, one is almost forced to say.)

Lie nailed

The evening also reminded us that there is a big historical lie to be nailed - the attempt to brand the labour movement and everything associated with it, then and now, as traitors to their own people, the "enemy within"; whereas what we should be remembering is that it was the Tory party (and its fellow travellers) which was the party of appeasement, and that it was a Tory government which refused to intervene in Spain. The elevation of a Tory dissident, Winston Churchill, to wartime leadership and only then to leadership of the Conservative Party, has helped hide the fact that, overwhelmingly, the impulse to fight fascism came from the left.

All three speakers saw the Spanish Civil War as the first stages of the Second World War. Frank Ellis, still powerful-looking, hawk-nosed with a strong, rough voice (he was later an officer in the paratroops) commented sardonically that "some of us had the pleasure of being bombed by the same German planes twice, once in Spain and later in the World War". He and Lionel Jacobs were captured by a heavily armed unit of the Italian army. (So much, as they pointed out, for non-intervention.) Later, in San Sebastian jail, Spanish republican prisoners tapped out messages on the water pipes asking why the British government didn't intervene, why they couldn't see that Madrid today would be London tomorrow.

So all three enlisted in the British armed forces in the Second World War as a continuation

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR



Looking back after
50 years

A presentation by
three local volunteers
who fought with the International Brigade

WALTER GREGORY • FRANK ELLIS • LIONEL JACOBS

MES HOW
MES ARM
MES MUN

WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 7.30 p.m.

The Auditorium, Central Library, Angel Row, Nottingham.

of the same fight, though Walter Gregory found the class-bound Royal Navy hard to take after the easier comradeship of the International Brigade and the republican army.

But they were British, all right, these three holders of alien beliefs. The POW camp reminiscences of Lionel Jacobs (small, shaky from a recent illness but with a frail gnome-like cheerfulness and insisting on standing up) were delivered with humorous, diffident understatement. The cocky heroics of shouting "Vino Blanco" instead of "Viva Franco", the morale-boosting concert parties and classes in politics and history, the prison-camp cunning of hanging on to his treasured International Brigade pay book by putting it blatantly on top of his kit instead of hiding it underneath (he held it up for us, bound in leather by the bookbinders of his London trade union) - all this was uncannily reminiscent of those later tales of wartime POW camps, *The Colditz Story*, *The Wooden Horse* et al. They're British, all right, these unrepentant aliens!

The Civil War was lost, of course, and badly. It was lost messily amid recriminations and nightmarish purges and score-settlings, not just by the victors against the losers, but by the left against each other. The thirties were, after all, not only a time of idealism and widespread socialist commitment but, as Auden wrote, a "low, dishonest decade".

There was, rightly, little reflection of this at the meeting. It was a commemoration, a recollection, a remembrance, in particular of Bernard Winfield, of St Ann's, killed in action in 1938, to whom Walter Gregory dedicated his book, *The Shallow Grave*, published last year; and Frank Ellis read out the names of the six Nottinghamshire men killed in the war.

It was not a time for recrimination. But anarchists especially have bitter memories of the civil war, and a grudge against the communists who murdered so many of them, and at the end of the meeting this old conflict began to emerge, mutedly, in questions from the floor. Walter Gregory was able to speak with some personal knowledge, having been at one point responsible for training a unit of a hundred young anarchist peasants. He described the problems of instilling military discipline, and of choosing NCOs, from among the sort of man who "if he took an order was humiliated and if he gave one was degraded". (The sentiment was Bakunin's, and there was a curious echo here, almost a contradiction, of his own experiences in the Royal Navy.) Anarchists were, he said, capable of incredible heroism and incredible stupidity and indiscipline. Anarchism was made for Spain, Spain for anarchism. It was the only place where it really took root, but the anarchists had almost disappeared from Spain now, and he couldn't help feeling that Spain was better off without them.

Walter Gregory has a quiet, scholarly air. With his white, thick hair and fastidious features, he is not unlike a less gangling Douglas Hurd (the comparison, I'm sure, would not be welcomed). His judgments carry weight, they seem thoughtful, well-considered, without animus, based on experience. This was as well, because his views met with some resistance from at least one younger member of the audience, and the old bitterness was just beginning to make a lively reappearance when the meeting was closed at the 9.30 deadline, impeccably but with relief, one felt, by Cllr Tipping.

Three heroes

At the beginning of the meeting, Cllr Tipping had explained, enigmatically, that the Spanish Civil War had always meant something very special to his own family, and throughout the proceedings his eyes had positively shone with the joy of sharing a platform, in front of a responsive audience, with three heroes of the war. Cllr Tipping is an important crossover figure between right and left in the county council Labour Group: avuncular, tall, dark-bearded, slightly stooping, as if forever a sympathetic listener. Winding up the meeting, he picked up a theme from the speakers. Just as they had seen themselves as our representatives in Spain, and had needed the moral and material support of people in Britain, so we, the audience, the people, needed *them* to tell us and remind us of these events and inspire us for the future.

So we conclude neatly, don't we, with the sort of people we are, the British. Perhaps the most telling comment was made, anecdotally, by Lionel Jacobs, remembering that the interpreter who mediated between them and their captors - between their captors' eagerness for them to give the fascist salute and their own (dangerous) refusal - was a fiery young revolutionary ("if the revolution had been the day before yesterday, it would have been too late for him") called Alfred Sherman - now Sir Alfred and, as Mr Jacobs reminded us, until recently a prominent adviser of Mrs Thatcher (one of those who has

been disappointed by her moderation).

So how does Sir Alfred look back after fifty years? Does he think of his youthful self as "alien"? What kind of self-mutilation is required to reject one's own past so completely? A mere admission of youthful folly would seem wildly inadequate.●

BOOKS

Guinea pigs

ROSS BRADSHAW

The Military Abuse of Animals. BUAV. £1.20 (from Mushroom Bookshop)

ONE OF THE MOST enduring, and heartbreaking, scenes I've come across was a short section of an anti-nuclear film showing animals being tethered near an American nuclear test. The particular scene was after the explosion where a large group of pigs were being loaded on to a lorry, presumably to go back to the labs for testing. The pigs were writhing in agony - irradiated and scalded, veritable living bacon. As they writhed, their screams were so like those of children.

This experiment was by no means unique and most bombs, bullets, gases and common or garden riot control equipment is tested first on animals. Much of Britain's testing goes on in secret conditions at Porton Down. This short pamphlet by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) sheds a little more light on one of the grimmer aspects of military life. Encouragingly, the pamphlet has a foreword by CND's Bruce Kent, so bringing together the animal rights and peace interest. By no means all peace activists are in favour of animal rights, and of course it would be wrong for CND to ask its members to go that far beyond nuclear disarmament. Similarly, animal rights activists may be pro-nuclear, though I've never met one who is. But both movements will share a horror of war being manufactured by killing animals, and this pamphlet will help. (Such a coalition is not new. In 1963 and 1965, the peace movement and animal rights movement direct action wings staged major, jointly organised civil disobedience actions at Porton.)

In these days of space wars, it's worth remembering that here too reluctant animals led the way. Can you imagine the fear animals suffered at being strapped in primitive space-suits and hurtling through space for weeks at a time so that humans could follow? Even the (dubious) benefits of space flight - the invention of the teflon frying pan and early photos of the earth - are not worth the pain and death of one animal. Laser beams in space are worth less.

It is but a short step from testing your bullets on animals to moving on to the "real thing". Nor am I just thinking of Nazi atrocities against the Jews - service people as well as animals were used as nuclear guinea pigs. Soldiers were not, of course, scalded and blasted, just stationed near enough to get a good dose of radiation. Some still campaign for compensation

for their resultant injuries. At least they can campaign. The animals of Porton can only scream.

This is not an easy pamphlet to read, nor easy to review, but it *is* important. It should be read, remembered, used.

One Girl's War. Joan Miller. Brandon. £8.95 (from Mushroom Bookshop)

HERE'S A BOOK the government definitely doesn't want you to read. The British distributors, Turnaround, have had injunctions slapped on them stopping its distribution in Britain. It's not that often the government, as opposed to over-excited Customs and Excise officers, takes legal action to stop a book, so it must be important. Goodness knows why. This book is a short personal memoir of a rather dull middle-class woman who worked for MI5 during World War Two. The book ends in 1945. Well, if it is important to you to know which MI5 biggie may have been

a Soviet spy decades ago, if you want to know who fancied who and who was gay or not in MI5 forty odd years ago, then this will interest you. Not in that category? Join the other sixty million who'd find this book tedious. Still, the point is that - for reasons known only to themselves - the government thinks that the security of the country is at risk if you get your hands on it. Still, curious Britons and Soviet spies can pick up copies in Ireland, where the publishers come from. So too in Nottingham. However - rest easy in your beds. Mushroom Bookshop has been stocking this book for months and no copies have been bought by Soviet spies (or anyone else for that matter). Maybe Soviet spies don't get as far as Nottingham.

Perhaps the only useful thing about this book is that the persecution of it by the government makes them look silly. But you knew that anyway.

PS. Stick to John le Carré.●

CHARTISM

A wet day in Nottingham

JOHN SHEFFIELD

HERE IS A LITTLE BIT of local labour history taken from the pages of that excellent radical paper *The Nottingham Review* (as good a newspaper as Nottingham has had) which flourished in the first threequarters of the last century under the owner/editorship of Charles Sutton and his son Richard.

The *Review* was by no means a Chartist paper, but its coverage of the Chartists and their much vilified leader, Feargus O'Connor, was notably sympathetic, and, as was the practice in those days, it had every confidence in its readers' intellectual and ocular stamina, devoting vast column inches of minute print to detailed accounts of great Chartist events in the Nottingham area, with long verbatim reports of O'Connor's dramatic speeches.

There are many points of modern interest, of similarity and contrast, and by and large I shall let the words speak for themselves, leaving readers to find their own resonances.

Background

First, though, a little of the background. Chartism grew out of the misery of early industrialism. It was named after the People's Charter, whose six political demands aimed to open up parliamentary government to working men and their representatives. This, it was thought, would automatically solve all problems of poverty and exploitation. (Chartism had its feminist wing, but "votes for women" was generally considered too outrageous, not least by O'Connor, who thought it would cause discord in the home.) As the first mass political organisation in history, Chartism naturally excited great alarm among the bourgeoisie and great interest among revolutionary theorists such as Marx and Engels, who sent their congratulations to O'Connor when he was elected MP for Nottingham in 1847.

O'Connor was a complex figure who has perhaps

been over-identified with Chartism, which was a much broader movement than his prominence suggests. His hyperactive leadership was nevertheless crucial in both its rise and its decline. Marvellous at whipping up enthusiasm and expectation, he was less skilful at knowing what to do with it, or at building the solid organisation needed for what it soon became obvious would be a long haul. Chartism was characterised by dramatic climaxes, focused on the presentation of monster petitions to Parliament, followed by almost equally dramatic anti-climaxes and disillusion when Parliament resolutely refused to make even the tiniest concession.

Nottingham and the surrounding industrial villages, populated largely by destitute framework knitters in a ruined industry, was enthusiastic O'Connor country. It is no coincidence that Nottingham elected him MP (the only Chartist ever to enter Parliament) and that the only statue of him was put up here, in the Arboretum.

1842, the year from which these extracts are taken, was a dramatic year for Chartism, nationally and locally. In May, the second Chartist petition was rejected by Parliament, and in August there was an ineffective "strike for the Charter". In August, too, Nottingham was the scene of one of the most famous of all English by-elections, in which O'Connor and his supporters took part in a ferocious battle in the Market Place, memorably described by Thomas Cooper in his autobiography.

In February, O'Connor came to Nottingham for one of the mass processions and meetings which were a central feature of Chartist campaigning. Let the *Nottingham Review* take up the story.

"On Monday morning early, the town was rife with bustle and excitement. The Market-place was thronged with people, while from the different villages round, and from the distant places, processions kept coming in, and parties of twenty or thirty at a time arriving without cessation.

The morning up to half past nine, was fine although dull, but at that time the rain began to descend, and continued without cessation till the meeting had nearly concluded, between one and two o'clock. Much as the sight of so many thousands of Englishmen coming to press forward in the contest for the suffrage, might gladden the hearts of true lovers of liberty, yet, their wan and famine-like appearance, mingled with their jaded walk, and wet, forlorn condition, could not but excite a feeling of regret and sorrow in their behalf. One thing it proved - that an Englishman never forgets a friend who has laboured in his behalf - perhaps not wisely - but too well. The heroism of some hundreds coming from Mansfield, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Mansfield Woodhouse, and other distant places, all on foot, bespoke with great truth the fast hold that O'Connor had secured in the hearts of the people. It was not till near twelve o'clock that the whole of the numerous flags, devices, carriages &c, were got into order to form the procession, and they then proceeded down Wheeler-gate, to the railway station, where Mr. O'Connor was received from the Birmingham train, amid immense cheering. Having taken his stand in a carriage drawn by four greys with postillions, the procession moved again into the town, proceeding round by Parliament-street, and coming down Chapel-bar and Beastmarket-hill to the centre of the market."

There follows a detailed description of the long procession and the various banners - and a rather startling comment on Chartist enthusiasm and the musical talent to be found in Sutton-in-Ashfield:

"Three bands of music left Sutton-in-Ashfield by 5 o'clock in the morning, taking three different routes to stir up the people: - one took Mansfield - another Kirkby, and the other Papplewick, Bulwell, and other places. All three joined at Hyson Green, and marched into Nottingham followed by vast numbers of people. Much as is said about the lower orders at Sutton-in-Ashfield, there is not a place in England, and of the same magnitude, where vocal and instrumental science so much prevails, and of no ordinary rate either. Children in the streets are mingling their voices in songs, duets, and glees, almost constantly.

"At twenty past one o'clock, the procession having reached the Market-place, Mr. Feargus O'Connor, and his immediate friends, took their station on the platform which had been erected for the occasion ..."

After a few words from local speakers, the great moment arrived, the moment for which the poverty-stricken thousands had poured in on foot from twenty miles away: the people's champion, the "Lion of Freedom", took the platform:



"Feargus O'Connor, Esq., after the long-continued cheering had subsided, inquired if the chairman and his brethren had ever seen seeds grow up into more healthy plants than those of Chartism had produced in Nottingham. He was glad to meet his friends in this town above all places in the kingdom ... The time was now come when they ought no longer to see England as a sea-bound dungeon, in which her sons and daughters are confined as slaves. He wished no longer as he walked through the streets of Nottingham, to see aged mothers and helpless youths peeping through the grates and bars, and pining away their days within the walls of a large building that is only fit for a gaol [i.e. the workhouse] ...

"He would now say, let us send Peel from office; let us destroy Toryism for ever ... he pointed out the anomaly that exists in the country. It is a fact, that there never was more money and money's worth in the country than there is now. If they want thirty millions in America, to improve their canals, make railroads, or for any other speculation; if the king of France wanted a loan to build a wall round Paris, money could be borrowed in England to any amount ... If the Almighty Dispenser of Providence sent a shower of gold, the Whigs with their blue bottle and armed police would collect and seize it, and say God sent it for them. Have they not amassed their millions by improvements in machinery, and yet they are not satisfied, but as soon as their capital begins to go out of their pockets they cry out ...

"He said there was much money in England; and so there is; then why were the people poor? - because it is in the wrong channel, and they had been gulled and robbed. What have they got in lieu of money? - bastiles [workhouses] and an Exchange [the predecessor of the Council House] they can never enter ..."

"He would tell them a piece of joyous information about our amiable young Queen, which they would be delighted to hear, and that he had seen that day in the public print, namely, that she was in a certain situation again. (Loud laughter.) We shall soon have plenty of princes and princesses in the country ... to maintain ... Had the people all a vote, these large salaries would not be allowed; that is, had they the trowel and the spade, they would soon dig up all the weeds ..."

Finally, O'Connor urged the meeting "to nail upon the figure head of the vessel, 'The Charter, and no surrender'," and, after "loud and hearty cheering", a resolution was carried unanimously "to agitate for nothing less than the whole of the document called the People's Charter".

Later that year, in July, O'Connor made a remarkable, semi-regal, progress through Nottinghamshire - more about that in a future issue!●