

NOTTINGHAM EXTRA

NUMBER 6 WINTER 1987 20p



Left takeover at city council? Trapping the tourists; AIDS hysteria; Rosa Luxemburg; Virility in Suffolk; Pigs at the Playhouse

Cover story

Hoodwinking the tourists

JOHN SHEFFIELD

LET'S BE REALISTIC. Let's live in the real world. Let's accept that here in Nottingham we are entering the post-industrial age. Goodbye local industry, hello the "ice cream" or "leisure" economy.

We won't all be working for Walls, of course, nor will all of us be on the dole. But the only way to keep off the dole will be by providing leisure activities for people with time and money (foreigners, southerners etc.) who have nothing better to do with their leisure and their loot than the things we provide for them.

Got it?

Right, so here in Nottingham what can we offer that they can't get elsewhere? What have we got in the way of "tourist attractions" or "leisure magnets" (in the jargon of the trade)?

Averagely old

Well (living in the real world again), Nottingham is an averagely old city with an averagely interesting history and some averagely interesting old buildings only averagely knocked about by wartime bombing and post-war development - neither fossil Stamford nor born-again Birmingham.

We have a spectacular castle rock with an unspectacular not-a-castle on it, a cluster of excellent museums not quite in the Jorvik class, Byron and Lawrence connections (Newstead is a pearl, Eastwood a wart, but an interesting one), a working windmill associated with a mathematical genius (not many people are interested in mathematical geniuses but most people like windmills), an Elizabethan mansion of great architectural interest (though mainly to architectural historians), a Victorian industrial area which we are often told is rather special (but which, in my experience, never quite convinces visitors, who expect something rather more special), plenty of caves, which have a surprising, doubtless ancestral, fascination, an excellent concert hall, two excellent theatres, a vibrant nightlife (so I'm told - I wouldn't know, myself), an Olympic rowing course (but, so far, no Olympics), a Test Match cricket ground (with Test Matches), an occasionally exciting cricket team, one (sometimes two) successful soccer teams, a first-rate rugby team (largely ignored in this soccer city - I've heard more people talking about American football), and ... and ... well, Nottingham is a wonderful shopping centre, there are two or three interesting old pubs, the river Trent is quite attractive, and, and ... of course! ... ROBIN HOOD!!

Where?

Well, nowhere, actually. Apart from a few medieval ballads and the remarkably persistent tradition from which they sprang, there is not a scrap of tangible evidence that Robin Hood ever existed. No eyewitness account, no documentary record. Nor, if we look at the earliest stories, is his connection with Nottingham beyond all reasonable doubt. True, his great enemy, the Sheriff, lives in Nottingham, and Robin has to go there to confront him - but most of the

evidence in the ballads, including some very precise place-name references, puts him in Barnsdale Forest in South Yorkshire rather than Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. No mention of Mansfield (the most important town in Sherwood Forest), or of Edwinstowe, Calverton or Linby (where forest courts were held), but lots about Wentbridge, Doncaster, Wakefield and The Sayles (an obscure spot overlooking the Great North Road which nobody outside the immediate area would ever have heard of).

The most convincing theory for the absence of Nottinghamshire place-names is that at some point in the development of the ballads two separate traditions were brought together, that of a wily but chivalrous Yorkshire outlaw and, to give him a suitable opponent with a well-established pedigree of villainy, a group of stories about a wicked Sheriff of Nottingham. Why else would a South Yorkshire outlaw have for an inveterate enemy a distant royal official whose jurisdiction came nowhere near him?

However, these are matters for scholars and learned amateurs. The essential point is that here in Nottingham we have literally nothing genuinely associated with Robin Hood. A medieval castle would have given at least an aura of possibility, but the Civil War and the Dukes of Newcastle deprived us even of that, and, for all the energetic burrowings of the Trent Valley Archaeological Society, all we will ever be able to offer visitors is a few moderately suggestive heaps of roughly mortared medieval stone.

Modern technology

There is, of course, the Robin Hood statue. The outrage over his dropsical legs and elfin hat has now more or less died down, and modern technology (courtesy of apprentices at the Royal Ordnance Factory) has at last given him a vandal-proof bow and arrow. (But so far no string. Perhaps they're working on it. Curious that the Gun Factory produces all sorts of sophisticated weaponry so that Third World governments can zap their neighbours and, rather more often, their own people, but can't yet come up with a workable-looking imitation of the medieval long-bow.)

And if anyone thinks that recent controversies over civic sculptures are anything new, they might try looking up old newspaper cuttings on the Robin Hood statue. Outrage over "Leaf Stem" (or "Dribbling Dick" as it is more appropriately called) is a piddle in the ocean compared with the blow to the local psyche delivered by sculptor James Woodford when Robin Hood was unveiled in 1952.

I have a theory about this, which links in with what I want to say about the cornetto tendency in the local economy. I think that what really offended the locals about the Robin Hood statue was not that it didn't look like Douglas Fairbanks or Erroll Flynn, but that it gave Robin Hood a material form. Queen Victoria and Samuel Morley, yes. Robin Hood, no. We'd managed without a statue for nearly /continued on page 10

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COVER PHOTO: Fred Broad (see Cover Story page 2).

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AIDS scare hits Nottingham
- please panic slowly

THERE IS A GRUESOME fascination in watching the AIDS epidemic take hold, not so much in the progress of the disease - the statistics are grimly predictable - as in the moral attitudes which develop with it.

In Nottingham, the joint efforts of the City Council's Leisure Services Committee and the Evening Post have given us a preview of the rituals of panic which will no doubt increasingly be enacted as the disease spreads. Perhaps separate, subsidised gay swimming sessions are not the most effective or sensible way of advancing gay rights - like most political decisions, it was at least arguable - but what was disturbing was how quickly AIDS became a stick with which to beat the gay community.

The Evening Post, in a typical act of moral funk (when has it ever campaigned for a cause it knows will be unpopular with its readers but which it believes to be right?), agreed that for parents to keep their children away from swimming sessions was "misguided" - but was nevertheless "perfectly natural". The Council's decision was a "monumental blunder" and "crassly insensitive" - although, of course, "persecution and victimisation of gays should never be tolerated in this day and age".

Pious professions

Weasel words! How characteristic of the Post to make pious professions of tolerance while simultaneously declaring open season for bigots.

The attitude of the parents was "natural" only to the extent that ignorance, prejudice and panic are natural. It is the job of responsible newspapers to dispel these attitudes, not encourage them. This was a tragically wasted opportunity. If our future dealings with AIDS are to be calm and rational (and we desperately need them to be), then here was a good place to start.

Had any of the parents seriously thought through the implications of their attitude, one wonders. Had they thought about the gays who turn up, unidentified, to public swimming sessions? (Hitler had an answer to that: Stars of David for Jews, pink triangles for homosexuals.) If people really are worried about AIDS in swimming baths, then surely they ought to welcome gay swimming sessions and encourage, even compel, all gay swimmers to attend them. That way the risk could be isolated and contained. The swimming baths could be fumigated and hosed down afterwards and made fit for decent folk to swim in.

But what about the heterosexuals who carry AIDS in increasing numbers? If AIDS spreads as predicted (and so far it has), all of us will be in regular contact with people who have contracted it. Not all of them will be aware of it, since the virus can be carried for long periods without symptoms appearing, and even screening is unreliable, because the antibodies on which it depends take three months to develop.

Are we to close every swimming baths and sports centre? If the scaremongers are right, the government's advice about safer sex and condoms is woefully inadequate. We should be talking about safer contact with the entire human race in whatever capacity, in and out of bed. After all, you never know when someone is going to bite you or bleed on you or splutter over you. Perhaps people should be advised to encase their whole bodies in giant condoms equipped with breathing apparatus or surgical masks. (Non lubricated, of course, in case they slip on the pavement and get a puncture.)

The Post was at it again in its comments on the appalling Cllr Bill ("put 90% of gays in the gas

chamber") Brownhill, leader of South Staffordshire District Council. (And why this feeble tolerance of the other 10%?) Shameful, yes, said the Post - but Cllr Brownhill was nevertheless expressing a legitimate criticism of the government's campaign, which hadn't pointed the finger clearly enough at gays.

Dangerously wrong

Now, apart from pandering to bigots yet again, the Post has got it seriously and, given its position of influence, dangerously wrong. As anyone with the slightest awareness of how the disease is spreading worldwide will know, AIDS is in many places no longer a mainly homosexual disease. It is a venereal disease transmitted by and to both sexes like any other, and there is no reason to think it will not follow the same pattern in this country. The government knows well enough that the gay community in Britain has not only been aware of the dangers of AIDS for even longer than the editor of the Evening Post but has taken significant steps to combat it (so much so that the incidence of venereal disease among gays has dropped dramatically). Gays should still be warned, of course, but the most urgent need now is to stop AIDS spreading in the "straight" community, and to dent the complacency of heterosexuals misled by the "gay plague" label still prevalent in sections of the popular press.

But it's fascinating how prejudices, overt and concealed, come to the surface in a crisis. Tragically for the gay community, two decades of slow progress towards acceptance of homosexuality as a normal human variation have been cruelly sabotaged by a biological accident.

Accident? Well, of course - unless you believe that someone somewhere, or Someone Somewhere, deliberately planned AIDS as a global epidemic.

It's important to be clear about the secular framework for fighting AIDS. Already the moralists and the religionists are massing on the hilltops, and what we've seen so far are only scuffles compared with what's to come. There are clear parallels with the medieval plagues and the accompanying outbreaks of pathological religiosity and scapegoat-hunting. And self-chastising. We await with interest the moment when James Anderton stips to the waist and flagellates himself through the streets of Manchester, offering his own suffering in expiation of the sins of the nation.

So far the government has resisted appeals for a moral crusade, aware that our society is sufficiently secularised to make an explicitly moral campaign counterproductive. But already there have been calls from within the Tory party and the government itself to link "safer sex" not with condoms and caution but with specifically Christian principles of chastity and abstinence which are nothing to do with physical health but with scourging and purification of the spirit. AIDS is going to be difficult enough to fight without entangling it with Christian sado-masochistic phobias about the corporal and the erotic.

A virus is not a supernatural or even a moral event. It is a part of the natural world, a living thing like myriads of others, and, like them (including ourselves), it seeks its most favourable ecological niche. Its search is not directed by moral fervour. Moreover, it is only

one (if the most immediately dangerous) of the countless ills that flesh is heir to. To give moral status to AIDS and its avoidance is to give moral status to all the others, so that the tiniest pimple becomes a moral reproach (perhaps for a very tiny lustful thought), or, if undeserved, will doubtless be compensated for by an anti-pimple in heaven.

This, to the secular mind, is the grossest form of superstition. We need to fight AIDS not with moral categories but with medical knowledge and appropriate changes in our behaviour. It may well be that Christian moral principles happen to coincide with sensible precautions against AIDS. There is no reason to see this as more than coincidence. Let Christians be thankful for the coincidence and for the earthly reward it brings. Let them also keep their self-righteous moralising to themselves, remembering that there have been other Christian doctrines less conducive to human well-being.

But let's not leave morality to the moralists. Let's widen the argument. Let's consider where AIDS started and how it spread - and see what this tells us about the morality of the world we live in.

Give or take the odd conspiracy theory (experiments in biological warfare by the CIA/KGB etc.), it seems generally agreed that AIDS started in Africa, where it is now endemic as a venereal disease of both sexes. Apart from prostitution and other promiscuous sexual activity, a significant means of transmission has been hypodermic needles used not by drug addicts but in normal medical care. These needles were meant to be used once and thrown away, but, because of poverty and lack of proper medical training, they are often used several times without being sterilised.

Easiest means

Once the disease had made the leap to the West (easy enough in these days of air travel), first to the United States and then to the rest of the world, it was transmitted fastest by the easiest means, anal intercourse (the lining of the anus is weaker than that of the vagina), a practice most common among homosexuals. This concealed its slower but equally inexorable advance among heterosexuals, and opened the way for recent outbreaks of self-righteous homophobia disguised as concern for public health.

But, instead of blaming a section of the community which is clearly victim rather than cause, it would be more revealing to examine the history of our society as a whole and the attitudes which have developed with it and which allow us to dismiss vast sections of humanity as outside our concern - until their part in our impending disaster draws them forcibly to our attention.

Modern Africa, with its starvation, its poverty, its cash-crop monoculture economies, its vulnerability to exploitation by international capitalism, its cultural dislocation and its strife-torn artificial boundaries, is a creation of the colonising west. Had we tried, we could hardly have devised better conditions for the spread of an epidemic.

And our ignorance of Africa! How could a deadly epidemic have gripped such a vast continent without us being aware of it until so very recently? Less than two years ago, it was still being suggested in /continued on page 10

Hearsay . . . JOHN SHEFFIELD

The Editor strikes back

THE EDITOR OF the Evening Post has a low boiling point. My (moderately critical) comments on the NUJ/EP settlement in the last issue provoked an outraged two page missive obviously fired off in the white heat of the editorial word processor. I would love to share the thoughts of Editor Barrie with you (it was quite a performance), but, alas, I'm not allowed to. I sent him a reply, and suggested that our two letters might usefully be published in Nottingham Extra. No, he said, his own letter "was never intended for publication" and "I do not believe that publication of our exchange of correspondence would be helpful".

I think I can allow myself to tell you, however, that it read very like an EP editorial, beginning with a heroic effort to be fair and restrained ("in the main, perceptive ... enjoyed reading it"), escalating through accusations of inaccuracy ("totally wrong", "totally ignorant", "extravagant claims") and libel ("If I did that, I'd be hauled before a libel court"), and ending with a combined assault on my impartiality and my bowel movements ("painfully constipated state of your objectivity").

Still, we parted on good terms ("an honourable draw ... you and I can debate the matter sensibly ... exchange of correspondence - which I have enjoyed ..."), and at least the Williams régime is refreshingly different from the tight-lipped era of Messrs Snaith and Pole-Carew, who, far from sending unsolicited diatribes, wouldn't even write to you if you asked them to (as I did when researching a long article on the EP ten years ago). And at least it's the editor and not the manager who makes most of the running - i.e. a journalist, not a businessman.

Mr Williams, by the way, vigorously denies being in the SDP, though I still find it the most convincing explanation of the politics of his editorials. But I wonder if the Post still gives a donation to the Conservative Party - as it certainly used to do.

Matters of fact

SPEAKING OF DONATIONS, whether or not the Post still contributes to the Tory Party financially, it's certainly giving them a hearty leg-up politically. In the run-up to the forthcoming elections - general (October, probably) and city council (May, definitely) - the Post is lending enthusiastic support to the campaign co-ordinated by Conservative Party Central Office to label the entire Labour Party, national and local, as "loony left".

The Post's helping hand extends well beyond "scoops" like the two full pages of small print devoted to the leaked draft of the city Labour manifesto, or the extraordinary splash given to the attempt by hard-right county councillor John Armstrong-Holmes to exploit another leaked document about the Wilford Meadows school. (This wasn't even an official Labour Party document, draft or otherwise, but a paper produced by a small minority in Bridge Ward Labour Party - but it was enough for another full page and several

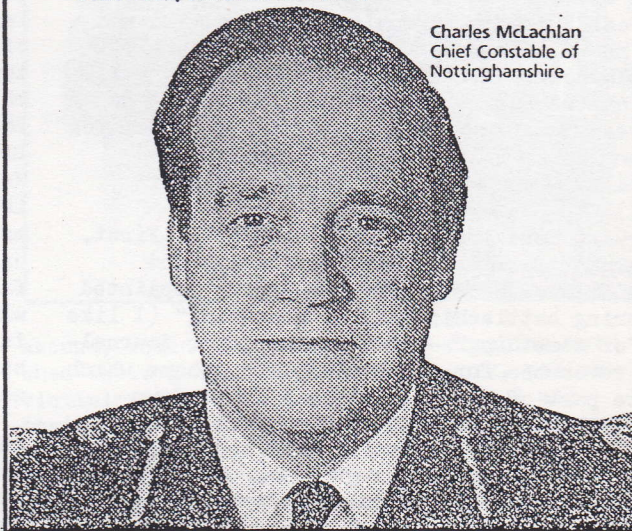
Please don't mix it Don't drink and drive!

I want you to enjoy yourselves this Christmas, but don't mix drinking and driving. It can be fatal. By this time last year my officers had found nearly 2,000 drivers who were over the limit. They regretted it. They lost their licences and some their jobs. Don't let it be you this year.

This lethal cocktail has this year resulted in some 500 drivers involved in accidents in Nottinghamshire being over the limit. Think of this in terms of human misery and despair. Please ensure that you have a happy and safe Christmas and New Year. We will be doing our bit, will you?

Don't mix it, don't drink and drive.

Charles McLachlan
Chief Constable of
Nottinghamshire



Personal appeal - page 6

days of aggro.)

As well as these factually based items, the Post campaign also runs to "satire" by the usually amusing Caroline Stringer: two separate efforts so far, one a Christmas "loony left" special with scintillating inventions like "O Come All Ye Black, Disabled, One Parent, Handicapped, Lesbian Faithful" (droll, isn't it?). At least this is openly fictitious. More revealing of the Post's real motivation was a little "Tuesday Column" piece by Janet Waltham, which began:

I see the Loopy Left have started the new year as they mean to go on. In Swindon, they've declared some railings outside a public lavatory sexist because the section outside the ladies' is painted pink and the men's half is painted blue. Outraged by this bit of blatant discrimination, they've ordered them to be repainted in boring battleship grey or something. The next logical step can only be to ban separate lavatories altogether. How long will it be before everyone is required to have an operation at birth to remove all evidence of sexist differences?

Etc. etc. drivel drivel. You could write the rest yourself. The only snag about this oh-so-typical example of leftie lunacy is that it didn't happen.

Now we know the Post doesn't have a very

active fact-checking department. Ask the Chief Constable (not a natural enemy of the Post), who recently sent a very long, very heavy letter of complaint about Post coverage of the case of a distressed 87 year old lady. Among his choicer phrases were: "editorial completely wrong", "better for you to have checked properly", and "sensationalised this story, without assessing the true facts". The Director of Social Services wrote more briefly but in similar vein.

(I wonder if I am alone in suspecting a connection between this embarrassingly forth-right ticking-off and the sustained virulence of the Post's attack on the local constabulary's Christmas anti drink-driving campaign, which featured a personal appeal - with photo - by the Chief Constable himself - see illustration on page 5 above.)

I suppose there's more excuse for Swindon. It's a bit further away than Sherwood Lodge, and trunk calls are so expensive nowadays. And no doubt Ms Waltham got the story from a usually reliable source like the Sun or the Daily Mail, on which the Barrie Williams Post seems so eager to model itself. (Motto: look after the politics and the facts will look after themselves, especially when you can rubbish the Labour Party.)

Anyway, here are some dull old facts. First, they aren't railings. They're archways and window frames. Second, far from being repainted in "boring battleship grey or something" (I like that "or something" - it shows a proper journalistic reverence for the facts), the scheme which they're part of has been given a Thamesdown (i.e. Swindon) Borough 1986 conservation award. So, of course, they're still pink and blue, and there are no plans to change them. One councillor and a few female council employees made some critical comments, and a local newspaper reported that the colour scheme had been "described by some passers-by as sexist". And this is the frenetic outbreak of loony leftism on which Ms Waltham based her scathing little article.

Well, speaking purely as a passer-by, I think Nottingham's Council House is a vulgar, grandiose piece of aldermanic exhibitionism, but I don't suppose, despite my membership of the Labour Party, that the city council is going to pull it down or paint it boring battleship grey (or something).

Politicosclerosis

HARDENING OF THE ARTERIES section. (Still on the Evening Post, I'm afraid - what a provocation it is!) The leaked manifesto, two full pages of excruciatingly small print ("obligatory reading" - Editor, Evening Post), produced an interesting letter from Hugh Lawson, former deputy City Engineer and Director of Leisure Services. Mr Lawson was worried about the threat of political interference with the professional impartiality of council officers, and took the opportunity to spell out the professional code under which he himself had operated. He concluded: "We must not allow the traditions of disinterested public service, both from councillors and officers, that have made this city great to be thrown away in the pursuit by alien methods of extremist dogmas."

A ringing declaration (if somewhat derivative - more of that later).

It put me very much in mind of an even more ringing declaration which I read once, delivered to the Labour Party Conference in 1948 by a young Rushcliffe divisional party delegate also called Hugh Lawson:

I want to see in the forefront of our General Election programme a declaration of faith in Socialism ... I want us to say we believe, as economic scientists and on the grounds of social justice, that the large resources of production in this country ought to belong to the common people. When Churchill says, "You Labour people are doing it for doctrinaire reasons," I want him to be quite right. I want us to be doing it from principle and doctrine ...

And now this same defiantly doctrinaire Mr Lawson can find no better way to express his legitimate concern for the neutrality of council officers than to parrot the canting right-wing terminology ("alien", "extremist") of a Conservative prime minister who makes Winston Churchill look like Karl Marx (well, R.A. Butler). Mr Lawson might also bear in mind that when Margaret Thatcher talks of the alien and extremist creeds which she needs a third term to exterminate from Britain, she means the ideas not only of the left-wingers he views with such fastidious distaste but of old-fashioned post-war nationalists like himself, who were active in the period of her political youth. What else have British Telecom, British Gas, British Airways etc. been about?

Mr Lawson might also remember that after Churchill's mortifying defeat in 1945, the great man stumped about the United States licking his wounds and complaining that Britain had gone communist - and it was people like Mr Lawson he meant.

I suppose what baffles me most about these rightward-drifting old Labourites (Dennis Birkinshaw is another) is their strange delusion that contemporary Thatcherism is somehow closer to the Labour Party they joined than the present Labour Party is. You should have told that to Nye Bevan - or even Clem Attlee.

Success stories

"LOCAL GIRL/BOY MAKES GOOD" also makes a good headline: Alan Sillitoe, Leslie Crowther, Viv Anderson, Sue Pollard, Kenneth Clarke, Torvill and Dean, Stella Rimington. Stella who? Ssshh... you're not supposed to know about Stella. We owe news of her success not to any desire for publicity on her part but to the tireless sleuthing of Duncan Campbell et al. at the New Statesman. Mrs Rimington (née Whitehouse) was a pupil at Nottingham Girls' High School from 1947 to 1953, graduated from Edinburgh University in 1958 and in 1962 married an old Nottingham High School boy, John Rimington (now director of the Health and Safety Executive and responsible for the recent report which gave Sellafeld another twelve months to clean up its act.) And then she became a spy.

According to the NS (5 Dec. 1986, p14), she is now in MI5, where she "heads 'F2' division, part of 'F' branch, which handles all domestic subversion ... she's the woman across whose desk pass MI5's reports to Whitehall on 'subversives' in Parliament - together with those on other

political figures, 'subversives' in the media and education. If Kinnock's phone was tapped, she'd know it ... Among the trade union leaders who have been the subject of 'F' branch surveillance in the past have been Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon ... more recently, it has monitored the activities of Arthur Scargill".

Perhaps we should be glad that an ex High School girl is putting her education to good use. It would be unfair to accuse either of the High Schools of anything so crude as overt political indoctrination which might predispose some of its former pupils to join the battle against the "enemy within". However, you wouldn't need more than one guess which party all three ex boys' High School MPs belong to.

The wettest of the three is Jim Lester, son of former Labour county councillor Ernest Lester. He was dismissed by Maggie for being insufficiently "one of us" (perhaps the wetness is genetic). Of the other two, Piers Merchant is so far out on the right that he occasionally dips below even Maggie's horizon, while Ken Clarke, who once had a somewhat liberal reputation, has now learned to live with Thatcherism, if not necessarily to love it. (If The Times tips you as a future prime minister, perhaps you learn to be less choosy.)

Paranoia

FOR AN INSIGHT into the wierd and wonderful world of the Wrights and the Rimingtons, look no further than the thoughts of Colonel Michael Hickey, recently published in The Spetsnaz Threat: Can Britain Be Defended? Hickey is a former member of the Defence Staff who believes that Soviet Spetsnaz (special forces) are already in position waiting for the outbreak of war (or even earlier) to carry out a comprehensive strategy of violence and disruption - "A relentless programme of selective assassination", causing "maximum havoc through widespread sabotage", "sowing confusion and inducing military collapse ... undermining of civilian morale, the disruption of communications and command systems ..."

But who are the Spetsnaz? How will you know one if you see one? Well, you won't recognise them by their Russian accents or the snow on their boots or even their love of ballet. And for a very good reason. They are just like you and me. In fact, according to Colonel Hickey, they probably are you and me. Well, you anyway, because they certainly aren't me. (But I would say that, wouldn't I?) So most Spetsnaz will consist of ordinary British citizens, though mostly of left-wing persuasion (you wouldn't expect a security freak to think otherwise).

Anti-fascists and the peace movement have, apparently, been fertile recruiting grounds. Agents "can be of all ages, occupations or social classes; and they are unknown to each other, having been recruited as individuals with specific tasks to perform when activated. Many will have been waiting for decades. They may have chosen to work this way because of a youthful romantic attachment to the ideology of 'anti-fascism', or they may have been permanently ensnared through some personal indiscretion. Their tasks would include the provision of safe houses, the custody of special equipment, or help with documents, maps, and civilian clothing."

But this is glorious stuff! A catch-all conspiracy theory in full luxuriant bloom, a



licence to spy on the entire population. For which of us might not fall into one or other of these categories? Which of us, even the non lefties, is immune to "personal indiscretion". Cecil Parkinson and Jeffrey Archer might already have been recruited, although the blackmailers have now blown it. And the Queen and Mrs Thatcher - who knows what ensnareable activities they get up to when nobody's looking. 10 Downing Street and Buck Palace would be the safest of safe houses, and I'm sure the Queen could help out with the odd bit of civilian clothing (I'm not so sure about the Duke).

For, after all, the most useful Spetsnaz are not the most likely, who are spied on pretty thoroughly already and would probably be picked up at the first hint of war. No, if you want your really well-camouflaged secret agent, look not to the left but to the right, to the Tory Party, the historic party of sexual and financial scandal, the natural home of blackmail and double standards.

Not a fascist

COUNCILLOR JOHN ARMSTRONG-HOLMES (pictured above) has, according to Private Eye in an article on his political associate Martin Brandon-Bravo, "been associated with the neo-fascist League of St George". This is clearly untrue. In his speech on the Wilford Meadows school (page 5 above), Cllr Armstrong-Holmes likened Labour militants to the Nazis in the thirties. A genuine neo-fascist would have regarded this as a compliment.

On the more positive side, Cllr Armstrong-Holmes is author and publisher of an excellent and well-written Nottinghamshire Tourist Guide, which is certainly the best cheap guide to the city and county currently available. It's disappointingly untotalitarian (further proof that he isn't a fascist).

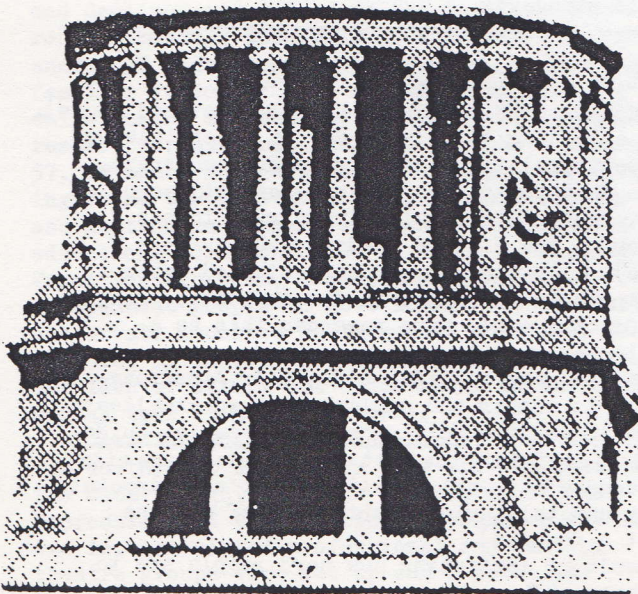
Isn't it irritating how hard people are to stereotype? ●

City Council



The left in the driving seat?

MARK CHARLES



AS WE APPROACH the City Council elections in May, the Evening Post is stepping up its campaign against the Labour Party. One of its tactics has been to defend the sitting Labour councillors who have been deselected. So we have been treated to a load of garbage about how people like Dennis Birkinshaw (a known Freemason who tried to defect to the Tories in 1984) represent the "real" Labour Party. In fact, out of the six Labour councillors who have been deselected, only one, Peter Burgess, can in any way claim to have been badly treated. The full list of deselections is:

Dennis Birkinshaw (Strelley). After Birkinshaw resigned the Labour Whip in 1984 and tried to join the Tories (even they wouldn't have him!), the local party in Strelley had just been waiting for the opportunity to ditch him.

Chris Gibson (Aspley). Gibson has not been noted for being the most enthusiastic worker in Aspley. He was replaced by an old rightwinger, Colin Worthington, who was on the City Council ten years ago.

Frank Dennett (Clifton East). Dennett was rejected at the same time as his wife, Frances Dennett, was retained, and he was replaced by someone not renowned for left wing views (Alan White). It was probably thought that someone whose main aim as a councillor was to be Sheriff of Nottingham (for which he got the MBE) would not be the best choice for Clifton.

Bill Dinwoodie (Trent). Dinwoodie had been criticised for not being seen in the ward and failing to run surgeries, so he was asked at the selection whether, if reselected, he would be willing to run surgeries in the ward in the pre-election period. His reply, it is reliably reported, was that he was too busy being Deputy Leader. He got fewer than five votes and was replaced by two leftwingers, Andy Muter and Lorasib Khan. Dinwoodie may still survive if he is selected for the marginal Byron Ward.

Unkind members

Frank Higgins (St Ann's). Higgins has not been much in evidence in St Ann's recently. Although shortlisted, he failed to turn up at the selection. Some unkind members suggested he may be so out of touch he doesn't even know where the branch meets these days. (Higgins is still county councillor for Bestwood, and Labour Party rules strongly advise against members serving on two councils at the same time.)

Peter Burgess (St Ann's). Burgess has worked hard in St Ann's and is well-known on the estate (though not in the rest of the ward). He got a considerable personal vote at the last city election. He is the only one of those deselected to have any cause for complaint. But as an old rightwinger he is clearly out of tune politically with the party in St Ann's and was replaced for political reasons by Hassan Ahmed (who is chair of the East Nottingham constituency party) and Jon Collins (who has been secretary of St Ann's branch recently). Burgess has now been selected for Beechdale, which was won for Labour by the arch rightwinger Bob Churchill in the county elections in 1985, and he should make a good showing there.

In addition to these six deselections, five Labour councillors have decided not to stand again: Lee Harrison, Richard McCance and Nigel Lee on the left, David Tongue on the right, and

Gill Haymes in the centre.

Women have made no advance in the selections for Labour candidates. At present only seven out of 28 Labour councillors are women. Two are resigning: Lee Harrison, who has chaired the Women's Committee, and Gill Haymes. They will be replaced by two very capable women: Margaret Munn and Noreen Baker. But there are no other women selected in the 39 seats of wards won by Labour in the county elections in 1985, so if Labour won all these there would still be only seven women out of 29 Labour councillors.

The gay cause will take a step backwards because the only openly gay councillor, Richard McCance, is resigning.

Black presence

But there will be a significant black presence for the first time. Five of the seats currently held by Labour have gone to black candidates plus one marginal seat (Trent) and the possibility of another one in Portland. Four of these black candidates have emerged from the battle in East Nottingham for recognition of a black section. This clearly shows the value of black sections, even though they are not yet recognised by the Labour Party nationally. These four also represent a new left movement within the Pakistani community in Nottingham.

This realignment in the Pakistani community was carried through largely by Hassan Ahmed, a revolutionary with a background of trade union struggle in Pakistan who came to Nottingham only a couple of years ago. Previously, Labour county councillor Mohammed Aslam acted as leader of the Pakistani community, having won the patronage of Labour administrations. However, disaffection with this godfather style of leadership, based on white colonial-style divide and rule, caused Aslam's right-hand men Mohammed Riasat and Mohammed Ibrahim to align themselves with Hassan and a younger, more radical element. This grouping has also taken the lead in building "black section" politics in the Labour Party. This has forced Aslam to take a more populist and less progressive line in order to retain his control of the Pakistan Centre.

Riasat was elected as a county councillor for St Ann's in 1985. Hassan and Ibrahim, together with Lorasib Khan and Ihsan Ghazni, are now standing in the city elections in May (respectively for St Ann's, Forest, Trent and Radford). These four will provide the main focus for the left on the City Council if they are elected. A fifth Pakistani, Shaukat Khan (Lenton), is likely to ally himself more closely with Aslam. This means he is likely to support whatever group leadership emerges, left or right.

In addition, another Pakistani, Zahoor Mir, has been shortlisted for Portland Ward at the time of writing. If selected he would probably be a strong supporter of John Taylor, who is likely to emerge as a strong left contender for the leadership of the city Labour Group after the election.

The only Afro-Caribbean to be selected is Tony Robinson (Bestwood), a well-respected member of the local community and a bus driver, who has worked his way up through the Transport and General Workers' Union. The only other black person on Labour's panel of candidates is George Powe, a long-standing socialist and activist in the West Indian community. He would almost

certainly have been selected in his own ward of St Ann's if he had backed Hassan Ahmed and the left. Instead, he backed Peter Burgess and Mohammed Aslam and the right. As a result, he will be left out in the cold. He would have been one of the best councillors in the city if he had played his cards right.

So what will the next city Labour leadership look like? The best guess that can be made at the moment about the outcome of the elections is that it will be similar to the results in the county elections in 1985. If the voting pattern is the same, there will be 19 wards returning a total of 39 Labour councillors (two for each ward except Byron, which has three). The Tories would get only 16 councillors from the other eight wards.

This compares with the result at the last city election in 1983 of 28 Labour to 27 Tory. Since then, Labour have gained one from the Tories at a by-election (Eileen Heppell in Basford) and lost one defector to Independent (Linda Phillips), leaving the official score at 28 Labour, 26 Tory, 1 Independent. However, another Labour councillor, Dennis Birkinshaw, following his abortive defection to the Tories in 1984, has often abstained or even voted with the Tories recently, so that Labour can no longer rely on their majority.

Target wards

The following analysis is based on Labour's target 19 wards which they won in 1985. At the time of writing, Labour had selected in 17 out of these 19, and there are unlikely to be any upsets in the remaining two, where there is only one sitting councillor to be reselected. In the selections so far, 11 out of the present 28 Labour councillors had resigned or been rejected.

LABOUR COUNCILLORS RESIGNED

Richard McCance	Forest	Hard left
Lee Harrison	Radford	Left
Nigel Lee	Radford	Left
Gill Haymes	Lenton	Centre (right)
David Tongue	Manvers	Hard right

LABOUR COUNCILLORS REJECTED

Chris Gibson	Aspley	Right
Frank Dennett	Clifton East	Right
(selected in Wilford - unlikely to win)		
Peter Burgess	St Ann's	Right
(selected in Beechdale - winnable)		
Frank Higgins	St Ann's	Right
Bill Dinwoodie	Trent	Right
(may be selected in Byron)		
Dennis Birkinshaw	Strelley	Freemason/Tory

The following tables show Labour's selections made so far in the 19 winnable wards. The designations of "left", "right" etc. are intended to show which side of the fence candidates are likely to support if elected, rather than their personal political position. As far as possible, they have been listed in order of the spectrum from left to right.

EXISTING COUNCILLORS RESELECTED

Mick Stout	Bridge	Left
John Taylor	Forest	Left
Eileen Heppell	Basford	Left
Dennis Jones	Bulwell West	Left

Ian MacLennan	Bridge	Soft left
Tony Morris	Lenton	Centre (left)
John Hartshorne	Bestwood Park	Centre (left)
Joan Ducker *	Byron	Centre (right)
Betty Higgins	Manvers	Centre (right)
Frances Dennett	Clifton East	Soft right
Barrie Parker	Strelley	Soft right
Keith Pavier	Bulwell West	Soft right
Tom Harby	Aspley	Right
Ivy Matthews	Bulwell East	Right
John Riley	Clifton West	Right
Malcolm Wood	Bilborough	Right
Brent Charlesworth	Clifton West	Reactionary

*selection not yet made at time of writing

NEW CANDIDATES SELECTED IN THE 19 WINNABLE WARDS

Hassan Ahmed	St Ann's	Hard left
Andy Muter	Trent	Left
Ihsan Ghazni	Radford	Left
Lorasib Khan	Trent	Left
Mohammed Ibrahim	Forest	Left
Noreen Baker	Bulwell West	Left
Margaret Munn	Radford	Left
Jon Collins	St Ann's	Soft left
Bill Pearch	Manvers	Soft left
John Peck	Beechdale	Centre (left)
Graham Chapman	Strelley	Centre (left)
Russell Lambert	Basford	Centre (right)
Tony Robinson	Bestwood Park	Centre (right)
Don Scott	Bilborough	Centre (right)
Shaukat Khan	Lenton	Centre (right)
Peter Burgess	Beechdale	Soft right
(presently councillor for St Ann's)		
Colin Worthington	Aspley	Right
(city councillor 1973-76)		
Alan White	Clifton East	Right
2 to be selected	Byron	Right?
2 to be selected	Portland	Soft left

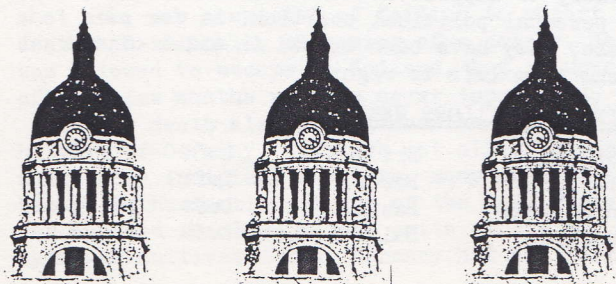
TOTAL CANDIDATES IN 19 WINNABLE WARDS		39
LEFT/SOFT LEFT	(plus 2 extra predicted)	14
CENTRE		10
RIGHT/SOFT RIGHT	(plus 2 extra predicted)	11

The implications of these figures are:

(1) A right-wing axis led by Wood/Riley/Charlesworth would be very unlikely to win sufficient support from the centre for a majority.

(2) A left-wing axis led by Taylor/Ahmed/Muter would be unlikely to win a majority unless the centre was forced to choose between left and right.

(3) A centre-led axis, such as Higgins/Hartshorne/Morris, would probably be able to play off the left against the right. In this case, the left would probably be able to choose whether to use its power to keep out the worst of the right and shift the balance left of centre, or to play an oppositional role against a right-of-centre leadership. ●



continued from page 2/ six hundred years, after all. There had been countless portrayals in books and films, but there were so many that none could claim to be definitive. A larger-than-life bronze statue outside Nottingham Castle seemed to be staking a claim and, worse, to be giving a dull, permanent, down-to-earth presence to something whose "real" existence was in the spirit, the imagination.

One of the things I always found refreshing about my native city was that it didn't overdo Robin Hood, perhaps because it didn't need Robin Hood. We were pleased to have him, especially as children, but Nottingham was a city with more important things on its mind than an insubstantial, world-famous legend. We mined things and we made things: hosiery, lace, machinery, bicycles, cigarettes, drugs, guns. That was our real world - a characteristic sample of the benefits the industrial west has conferred on the planet.

Now, strangely, this real world is no longer our real world, and our real world is the fantasy world of the new Robin Hood Centre and other tourist-associated enterprises. Because we haven't got a real Robin Hood, not so much as a fake grave (that's near Huddersfield), then we're inventing one, using the stage-set wizardry of Jorvik and the dramatic presentation of Disneyland and Westworld.

In fact, comparisons with Jorvik - a faithful reconstruction on a real archaeological site - are misleading. Though the setting in the Robin Hood Centre was described by one of its progenitors as "authentic", this is clearly a misuse of the word. "Authentic" has a range of meanings, but none of them is applicable to a representation, however well researched, of something which never existed.

This shift from a world of real material production to a "real" economy where we produce fantasies of a non-existent past will doubtless produce comparable changes in the local character. No longer this cheerful carelessness about Robin Hood. Instead, the insincere babble of the huckster's stall.

But the publicists may have an uphill struggle. The local gift is not for praise and puff but for grouse and grumble. Me too. I'm a local product. That's why I've put an old photograph on our cover of Robin Hood in his vandalised, unreconstructed state without added tourist appeal. As some people couldn't resist pointing out when graffiti appeared on Leaf Stem, vandalism can be the sincerest form of criticism. ●

continued from page 4/ scientific journals that AIDS originated in Haiti (or was it Hawaii? I forget - but sexual relations with pigs were postulated), which, it is now clear, was just a staging post in its spread to the United States.

As Africa to the world, so gays to their own societies. First our ignorance, then our dismissal ("not our problem", "serves them right"), finally our panic, vilification and persecution.

Perhaps a very practical lesson of AIDS might be that morality really is enlightened self-interest; and that self-interest, if truly enlightened, means empathy with all sorts, conditions, races and sexual orientations of women and men. The underlying reason for the spread of AIDS is not individual promiscuity, hetero or homosexual, but ignorance and unconcern about the fate of other human beings. An AIDS-infested society really is, in more ways than one, dying of ignorance. ●

Personal Column ROSS BRADSHAW

Xmas to stay shock

UNDER SOCIALISM, we will still have Christmas. This shock announcement was made in the December/January issue of Workers' Power. Christmas will be "stripped of the religious, commercial, hypocritical and sickeningly sentimental aspects that mark Christmas under capitalism" and socialists will revert to "a mid-winter celebration (which) is a long-standing pre-Christian tradition". This endorsement of paganism by Trotskyists has shocked the political world, especially since the pre-Christian winter solstice revellers generally worshipped the Goddess. Their religions were matriarchical and St Nicholas himself (Santa Claus) in Italy supplanted a female benevolent deity called The Grandmother who filled children's stockings with gifts. While we wait for the day when the red banners fly amongst the hippies and druids at Arbor Low and Stonehenge, we can carry on without guilt, for "It is no good pretending - even socialists give each other presents at Christmas!"

SDP defunct - true

JUST BY CHANCE recently I found myself on a Radio Nottingham 'phone-in. There were not many 'phoners-in. To try to stimulate some, I did a bit of SDP-bashing, and challenged any SDP members to ring in to prove the party still exists. Nothing. Not a sausage. Could this mean the SDP is now defunct?

On the Campaign trail

TWO NOTTINGHAM LABOUR prospective parliamentary candidates, Alan Simpson and Sharon Atkin, are supporters of the Campaign Group. Campaign comprises an assortment of MPs on the "hard left" of the Labour Party, the best known being Tony Benn and Eric Heffer. On the ground, the Campaign Group is supported by an assortment of "hard left" political groups who sell its newspaper.

Locally, attempts to set up a vibrant Campaign Group got off to a bad start with only three dozen or so attending the launch meeting. The main speaker was Tony Benn, the man who attracted hundreds to a packed Labour Weekly Forum in Nottingham just a few years ago. The star of Benn is clearly on the wane, as is that of Eric Heffer, whose recent book, The Future of Labour, looks set fair to clog the warehouse of its publisher for years ahead.

The Campaign Group is a ragbag of MPs with conflicting interests and ideologies, united only by their hostility to Kinnock. An example of their internal problems is their position on Black Sections and racism in general. Sharon Atkin is a prominent campaigner for Black Sections in the Labour Party, and Alan Simpson, not solely through his work at the Community Relations Council, is well-known for his anti-racist stance. Yet "Militant" MPs and Militant in general support the Campaign Group, and Militant are fiercely hostile to Black Sections. Their racism in Liverpool has led to their rejection by the entire black and minority



Sharon Atkin - Campaign trail

community.* Militant do not believe in positive action for oppressed groups and have used brutal tactics to impose their own racist views (and personnel) when in power. Significantly, Liverpool City Council has an atrocious record of employing black people compared to the number in the Liverpool population. Strange bedfellows for black and anti-racist activists.

End of an era

IN ALL THE NEW YEAR reviews of the year on TV and in the newspapers there was a "died in '86" section. Many of the people mentioned I'd never heard of in life and only two struck me - Earl Stockton and Pat Phoenix. Earl Stockton had formerly been a nuclear baron, a gunrunner, and in the Greek Civil War a murderous anti-Communist. And yet in many ways he represented a sort of caring Conservatism at home. It's an awful sign of the times that this patrician, rich rightwinger can almost be remembered with affection by the left compared to the Tebbits of today who no one will remember with any warm feelings at all.

Pat Phoenix was a socialist and for more years than I can remember I watched her twice a week on telly. Her death was one of those end-

* See The Racial Politics of Militant in Liverpool, written by the Liverpool Black Caucus (Runnymede Trust, £2.95).

of-an-era breaks with the past, and my past too. I saw her once. She came to open a restaurant in Heathcote Street. The public didn't turn out but she was surrounded by photographers fighting each other as she got out of her limo to get a snap of cleavage or thigh. I can't for the life of me understand how she put up with such crap. Still, although she canvassed for Benn amongst others, Pat Phoenix died in a private hospital with a string of nurses, doctors and whatever on call and in attendance. At the time, I was in a public hospital, having waited months for a minor op. In a side ward by me was a senile and rambling old woman who constantly cried out in her terror and confusion until she was drugged to shut her up.

I can't blame the nurses, and welcomed the silence myself, but feel angry that there was no one to look after her. My warmth towards Pat Phoenix/Elsie Tanner is tempered by anger that any socialist will go private, even to die, when the health service itself is being bled by the private parasites.

Private parts

SUFFOLK CONTINUES to fascinate me. Half the countryside reminds me of those most English of villages in which the Avengers of my youth played out their spy fantasies. The other half is under American occupation. Woodbridge, though too large to be a village, is full of little winding streets and typical Anglian black-beamed houses. Its links with the past are apparent in the town which makes much of the nearby Sutton Hoo burial ground. Outside the town, the B roads are rather wide. I suppose they have to be to accommodate the width of the ostentatious American cars. I wonder how CND manages there, where every turning seems to bring another US base and birdsong is drowned out by the bombers overhead?

Were it not for the ever-present Sizewell, Thorpeness would be a truly idyllic village. There's a windmill, a unique "House in the Clouds" nearby (a water tower, cunningly disguised, and indeed used, as a des. res. on a stilt) and a fantastic variety of alms houses and individual large houses of variety and beauty. Astonishingly, the whole village is a fake, being built this century as a holiday village, made up to look like genuine Suffolk.

Once I'd been let into the secret it all became obvious and the beautifully oakbeamed, olde worlde pub (the Dolphin) became less like a bit of old England and more like something out of The Prisoner. (Why is it that whenever I'm seeking similes or analogies all I can come up with are 1960s serials - it makes me wonder whether I did anything other than watch TV in my youth.) Certainly I began to doubt the reality of some of the people in the pub, engaged in conversation about golf, cars and horses - all the while eating disgusting black things which looked ever so like a slug I once found in the milk at work. Perhaps these people too were pretend weekend visitors. You couldn't imagine them doing anything like washing the dishes or rebuilding the economy.

However attractive the village was, people were ever so keen to keep out ramblers, proles and casual visitors. Every piece of ground, vacant or built-on, had a notice saying PRIVATE in big unwelcoming letters. The village pond, or mere (artificial, of course), even had a sign

saying PRIVATE WATER - NO PRIVATE BOATS. Paths marked on my old map as footpaths all seemed to be PRIVATE, and in several cases were marked PRIVATE - NO RIGHT-A-WAY. This last is presumably an attempt to use Suffolk dialect, unless of course public school education is less than it's cracked up to be.

The desire for privacy outside the village, on the heathland, may have had something to do with the numbers of large feathered things all over the place and the untidy heaps of spent cartridges behind every bush. Blasting tweeters out of the sky is not something to be proud of and the blood-crazed may well need privacy for their activities. Not wanting to be shot myself, I felt little option other than to obey the notices.

Odd, isn't it, free-born Englishmen shooting everything that moves and servicemen from the land of the free ready at any moment to blast any Ruskie that moves. Do all the men in Suffolk need to prove their virility?

However, the most astonishing bit of Suffolk in my opinion is Dunwich. Over the centuries, storms and erosion have caused the land to give up the ghost, sometimes quietly, sometimes spectacularly, and vanish under the sea. This has meant, since the land had to go somewhere, that in other parts of Suffolk once prosperous ports are now marooned inland. Dunwich preferred the spectacular variety of disappearance. Once a very prosperous town with lots of churches, Dunwich must have incurred the wrath of the sea, and every now and again a storm would move the shoreline through the suburbs, into the main street, or over a church. Dunwich is effectively no more, which has made it a fascinating tourist haunt. Mostly tourists visit places to see things; in this case, whoever runs the tourist department deserves a medal for getting thousands of us to go and look at something which doesn't exist. At least it is free. Even the most gullible tourist would probably balk at paying a quid to look at nothing. Or would they (we)?

Competition corner

IN THE LAST ISSUE of Nottingham Extra, we offered a small prize to anyone spotting an "ex" Socialist Workers' Party member in the Labour Party. There was one entrant only, Ian Juniper of 118 Workshop, a former Socialist Unity parliamentary candidate. Ian fingered a well-known local lecturer who'd made a swift switch from the SWP to being political education officer in his local Labour Party (presumably following a cycling holiday to Damascus). Ian, however, does not win the prize as he failed to notice the difference between an "ex" SWP member and an ex-SWP member.

The competition this issue follows the appearance of the Labour Party's first Xmas gift catalogue. From the new modern Labour Party you could have bought a Clem Attlee mug, a Daily Herald Tea Towel (younger readers may like to check out these names in a history book), a choice of five ties, an umbrella or lots more socialist accessories. The catalogue includes a colour photograph of Neil Kinnock which "so many supporters have asked for" (price £13.95).

The first prize is a complete set of Nottingham Extras to any reader spotting a copy of this photograph anywhere in Nottingham. As there could be more than one entry, competitors should

complete the following sentence: "The Labour Party Gift Catalogue has a teddy bear on its front cover because ..." Entries, please, to Nottingham Extra by mid Feb. If there is more than one entry, the editor will decide the winner on the basis of the most politically sound completion of the sentence.

Exit workers

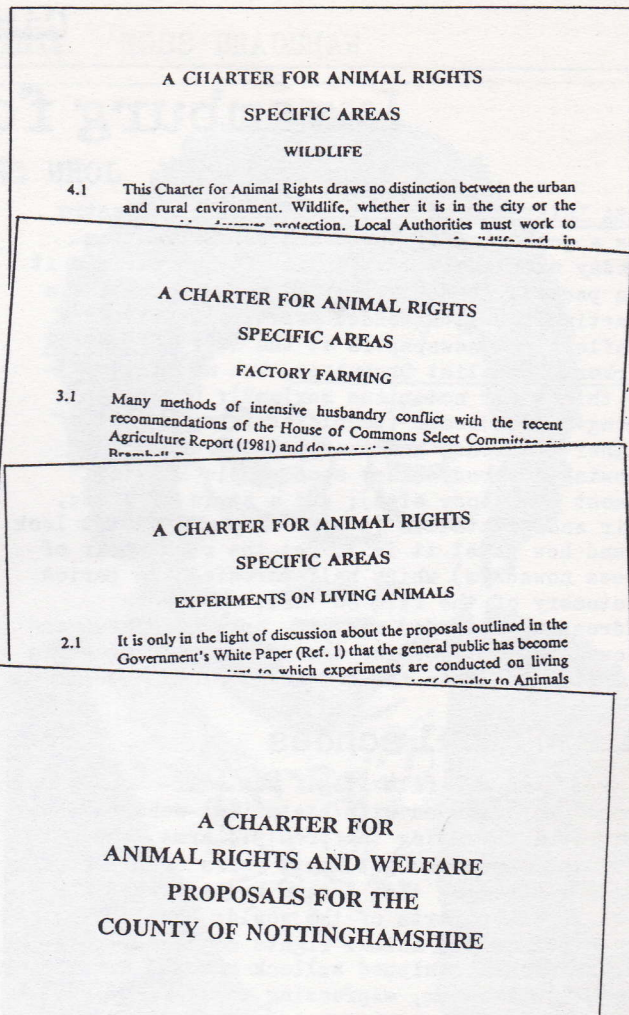
HERE AND THERE around the city are the tatty remnants of posters advertising a London international conference of "Workers Against Racism". The local group supporting the conference attempted to win support from Labour parties. On visiting Forest Fields Labour Party, their speaker was reminded that the Hyson Green/Forest Fields area was tatty enough without being wallpapered with conference posters. More seriously, some had been flyposted on the window of a seemingly empty shop. The poster, and therefore the window, were bricked, causing anger and upset to the Asian owners, who had not given permission for the posters. So the request for support was not going too well ... And who backs "Workers Against Racism"? Well, um ... the Revolutionary Communist Party. Would that be the same Revolutionary Communist Party which calls for workers to break with Labour and indeed stands candidates against it? Well ... actually ... Exit Workers Against Racism.

Animal rights success

LOCAL ANIMAL RIGHTS activists have chalked up their first success in the political arena with Notts. County Council passing the Charter for Animal Rights. The decision was predicted when three groups - Labour, the Labour Whip Withdrawn rebel group and the Alliance - backed the Charter. Despite the vote being on clear party lines, the debate took six hours, with councillors keen to speak and for much of the debate an unprecedented packed gallery. Most of the gallery were from the blood sports lobby, which had earlier staged a large demonstration. A demonstration which incidentally would have been illegal under the new Tory public order acts.

The charter itself - available from the County Council - is limited by the powers of the Council and much of it was a statement of opposition to various aspects of animal abuse. Small but important sections covered the availability of vegetarian and vegan food in school meals, paved the way for the Council to buy non-battery produced food and outlawed particularly cruelly produced food (presumably pâté de foie gras and frogs' legs) from council functions. Equally important is a commitment to include humane education in school curricula. Much of the debate centred on hunting with hounds, and the Quorn Hunt will no longer be able to hunt, or stage ancillary activities, on Notts. County Council land.

The anti-hunting sections brought the most heated debate. Labour councillors were prominent in their deeply felt opposition to hunting, one councillor challenging the hunting fraternity in the gallery to deny his knowledge of foxes being bred locally for hunting, thereby destroying the hunt lobby's argument that their role was to control the dangerous fox. Conservatives did their utmost to pander to the hunt supporters - who included in their number a convicted badger



A CHARTER FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS AND WELFARE PROPOSALS FOR THE COUNTY OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

The County Council's Charter

baiter and several dog-fighting adherents.

The Charter was welcomed by animal rights activists (who congratulated Cllr Alan Simpson on securing them vegan food to last through the debate) and groups as diverse as the RSPCA, the Vegetarian Society and the Socialist Countryside Group. The Charter is not a final document and local groups will, it is hoped, be encouraged to work with the Council in working out the detail of its implementation and further strengthening.

Predicted

THE WOMANZONE BOOKSHOP in Edinburgh, whose closure I predicted in Nottingham Extra, has indeed closed. Their bank grabbed all the remaining money, so the many radical publishers they owed money to lost out.

Spaced out

I WAS EMBARRASSED to find myself boasting in Nottingham Extra of never reading the Evening Post, whilst succeeding in getting a letter published in that paper, replying to some previous letters! In mitigation, I plead that I only started reading the Post after the NUJ boycott was ended, long after I wrote the "I don't need the Post" bit. Predictably, the letter in question, on disarmament, had references to Ireland and the Falklands/Malvinas war edited out - no doubt on grounds of lack of space. ●

Cinema

Luxemburg for beginners

JOHN SHEFFIELD

ROSA LUXEMBURG at the Nottingham Film Theatre was a gathering of the comrades. We went on Sunday night, the last night of the run, and it was packed. Less like a film show, more like a startlingly well-attended political meeting: leaflets and newspapers at the door (Socialist Worker, Socialist Organiser, but no Militant - is this their notorious sexism?); socialising among the audience (people arriving in cells rather than ones and twos; almost everybody knowing somebody else; some people knowing almost everybody else); and a style of dress, hair and spectacles (a sort of punk/peasant look - and how vital it is to get the right pair of specs nowadays) which half-parodied the period costumery of the film so that, when Rosa addressed a crowded meeting, her audience overflowed not only out of the doors and windows in the film but into the NFT auditorium as well.

Historical echoes

But then the film itself was self-consciously loaded with historical echoes: one character defending the pre-1914 arms race because it had brought forty years of peace, another replying that Europe had exported its wars to other parts of the world; Rosa as a precursor of the animal rights movement, pitying a savagely whipped bullock and the down-trodden earthworm, expressing more affinity with coal-tits than the political struggle; the eternal (socialist) dilemma of parliamentary versus revolutionary action.

These parallels did not intrude too blatantly. You were allowed to think you had found them for yourself. But other ploys were harder to take, ranging from a filmic "Luxemburg for Beginners" (with strained visuals for essentially verbal concepts, like the direr volumes in the "Beginners" series) to a style of introducing and portraying characters and emotions which owed more to Hollywood biopics than the more subtle techniques of the European cinema.

It's not as if this film will ever reach a mass audience (ironic, considering the socialist obsession with the masses), so where's the point in these studied introductions to Bebel, Kautsky and the great revisionist Bernstein (she wouldn't dance with him), so reminiscent of those creaky old movies ("Let me introduce you to our latest young musical genius from Bonn, Ludwig van Beethoven. I have a feeling the world will hear more of him!"). Or the Moonlight Sonata (a cliché in itself), played with wonderful competence by Liebknecht just before he and Rosa were dragged off to their deaths. Or the sudden, mournful close-up of a face, signalling that she was seeing it for the last time, and, later, the ponderous bringing into frame of his photo so you knew that the letter she was reading was announcing his death.

This seemed to me a near fatal mixing of genres, and a miscalculation of the likely audience (unless the German masses are a good deal keener on art films than the British). Dialectical discussions over dinner (there were several) or at the heavily symbolic New Year

celebrations in 1900 may seem a painless way of introducing ideas vital to understanding Rosa's political progress, but I would guess they were equally indigestible to those who really are interested in the ideology and didn't want it confusing with sauerkraut, and those who are more interested in the human drama. The ideology was most effective in its public context of party congresses and political meetings where Rosa's brilliance and passion as a speaker were uninterrupted by cutlery.

Uneasiness with politics was at the heart of the film. This is the story of a woman for whom, despite her occasional reservations, politics were utterly central, who was the intellectual rival of Lenin (whose authoritarian tendencies she profoundly mistrusted), who because of her political convictions spent years in prison and was brutally murdered, and who in consequence became one of the great martyrs of the left. Rosa Luxemburg is a figure as resonant with revolutionary hopes and despairs as the Paris Communards, the Haymarket Martyrs, Sacco and Vanzetti, and Che Guevara.

But she was also, as the film told us, an ardent lover of nature; of cats and other creatures; of poetry, music and dancing (though, given her pronounced limp, caused by a crippling childhood disease, her energetic cavorting with the ageing leader of the party, August Bebel, at the 1900 celebrations must have been symbolic rather than historical); of children (a particularly poignant scene where Leo, her lover, would not agree to have children, insisting that Rosa's revolutionary ideas should be her only children); of other women (deeply and affectionately but platonically); and of men (two in the film).

Complete personality

Often it worked movingly, this attempt to show a complete personality beyond the revolutionary. Sometimes it collapsed with a loud noise of escaping air and guffaws from even the NFT's sympathetic audience.

"Must you go, Aunt Rosa?" asked a little girl as she was kissed, lullabied and tucked up in bed. "Yes, I am working for the German Social Democratic Party, the most important workers' movement in the world," came the not exactly child-centred reply.

This failure fully to integrate the politics and the person revealed, I think, a basic weakness in the film. It explains the curious absence, in a film about a leader of a working-class movement, of any actual workers, except in walk-on roles. Not even walk-on, but grovel-on. The simple, comic young worker who wanted to know if it was politically acceptable to marry his pregnant girlfriend. The maid whose devoted dumb-beast eyes when Luxemburg was arrested placed her closer in the revolutionary scheme of things to the mistreated bullock than the exclusively bourgeois activists with whom Luxemburg was always shown. Servants, prison warders, audiences, soldiers - this was the proletarian back-drop before which the real revolutionary



drama was played out.

The emphasis on the personal also explains the blank space, cinematically and thematically, which served as an ending. In effect, the film simply stopped. The portentous music, more or less restrained during the narrative, had also stopped. Rosa, clubbed semi-conscious by a rifle butt, was thrown into a car, shot through the head and dumped in the Landwehr Canal. The film finished on a sustained shot of lamplight reflected in black, rippling water. That, we were being told, was the end of Rosa, of her ideas, and of her hopes of revolution.

In strictly personal, solipsistic terms, I suppose it was, and perhaps it was too for the film's director, Margarethe von Trotta, so closely had she identified with Rosa - so closely that at certain points she perhaps lost artistic control of the film. Hence the tendency to sentimentalise and the loss of political focus. Ultimately, the form of the film itself was identified with Rosa. That blank water at the end was Rosa's shattered, dead mind.

Personal tragedy

Or were we meant to be content with her last defiant insistence to her captors that history would vindicate her? Surely not. The last, abiding message of the film was that silent black water. Here it all ended: it was, after all, merely a personal tragedy.

I doubt whether Rosa would have accepted that. Those who survived her certainly didn't. She was a figure of such importance to both the German and the Russian left that her political legacy was bitterly contested after her death. And there was a political context to her death which could have been better explained. There were those among her former comrades in the Social Democrats who thought Luxemburg and Liebknecht deserved their deaths because of the bloodshed caused by the Spartacists' futile uprising. Rosa, as the film showed, was opposed to a revolution unless the proletariat had accepted the need for one and understood what they were fighting for: we could have done with more about how she came to die in the course of just such a hopelessly unprepared revolt (in contrast with the greater "professionalism" of the Bolsheviks). Her life and death still ask unresolved questions about the roles of revolution and constitutionalism, about ends and means, about the relationship between the leaders and the led, about what revolutionaries should do in non-revolutionary times, and about historical moments and how to use them.

Instead of collapsing into blank despair, the film might usefully have given us an epilogue, if only a voice over, emphasising the continuing importance of Rosa's ideas and perhaps recounting the grim irony of the fate which befell her Freikorps murderers. Private Runge, wielder of the rifle butt, was jailed for a few months for attempted manslaughter; Lieutenant Vogel, who shot her, was convicted of failing to report a death and illegally disposing of a corpse. He was allowed to escape to Holland, but returned after a few months and was never imprisoned.

Rosa's death also prefigured the later history of Germany. Although not all Freikorps units were incipient fascists, many of them became enthusiastic members of the Nazi party and evolved seamlessly into units of the SS. The myth was cultivated that Germany had not lost

the war but had been stabbed in the back by the socialists and the Jews (Rosa was both, though the film never mentioned the latter), and by the defeatists who had signed the Treaty of Versailles and capitulated so abjectly to the Allies' humiliating demands. The bitterness created by the terms of the Treaty, particularly by the massive financial and other reparations demanded by France, was one of the causes which led directly to the Second World War. (Some historians regard the two wars as really one, with a lengthy intermission between 1918 and 1939.)

The Spartacists, meanwhile, became part of the new German Communist Party, which was eventually dominated by Moscow and fatally weakened by Stalinist purges of the leadership. Rosa was criticised, though never denounced, and was subordinated to Lenin in the pantheon. Both the Communists and the Social Democrats were eventually crushed (exterminated, more accurately) by the Nazis.

Rosa continues to fascinate, and even in our less revolutionary age her ideas seem as relevant as ever. This film is itself a tribute to her enduring interest, and therefore it would have been more appropriate if it had ended on a less defeatist note.

Let me conclude by quoting from J.P. Nettl's monumental two volume biography of Rosa Luxemburg:

Both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had considered death in action to be the highest honour for a Social Democrat. For Rosa it was a fitting end which helped to preserve her from Stalin's special form of Bolshevik dishonour. There was something larger than life about her ideas and the rigid prescription she had set herself in a life devoted to revolutionary politics, yet always combined with a deep respect for human values and culture. She died in the firm belief that her cause would win in the end; that she could advance it by dying as much as by living. ●

MUSHROOM BOOK EVENTS

BARBARA BURFORD 7.30 THURSDAY
12th FEB. 1987

Barbara Burford is a leading Black British writer. She has written drama, science fiction and short stories. 'The Threshing Floor' includes evocative stories of an older Black woman's reflections on the plunder of her ancestors' culture and of women's communities in a visionary future world.

MAUREEN DUFFY 7.30 MONDAY
2nd MAR. 1987

Maureen Duffy has been writing fiction, non-fiction and poetry for many years. Her novel 'I Want To Go To Moscow' was one of the first to introduce animal rights. Her other novels include 'Gor Saga' and 'That's How It Was'.

ZOË FAIRBAIRNS 2.30 SATURDAY
21st MAR. 1987
crèche available

Zoë Fairbairns was first published as a teenager, later editing CND's paper *Sanity* before becoming poetry editor of *Spare Rib*. Her novels include a thriller 'Here Today', a futuristic novel 'Benefits' and 'Stand We At Last' a family saga of five generations of women.

Tickets are £1.50 (waged), 75p (unwaged) for each event. Tickets are available from Mushroom Bookshop 10 Heathcote Street, Nottingham and the Victoria Centre Box Office.

Organised by Mushroom Book Events Group, 10 Heathcote Street, Nottingham. Tel 582506, in association with Nottingham County Council Leisure Services.

All the evening events are at the Auditorium, County Library, Angel Row, Nottingham (good wheelchair access). Zoë Fairbairns will be at 2.30 pm at University Adult Education Centre (WEA) on Shakespeare St, Nottingham (poor wheelchair access: help available).

Books

The bad, the OK, the good

ROSS BRADSHAW

IN ORDER TO READ some good books, perhaps you've got to read some bad books to put them into perspective. Recently I seem to have been reading more of the latter. Here's an unrepresentative sample.

Stereo terrorists

The Good Terrorist, by Doris Lessing. Grafton. £2.95. I've admired for a long time Doris Lessing's early books - the Martha Quest series and short stories especially. The Good Terrorist is her latest book, fiction, and a return to politics after her SF series. Now Doris Lessing used to be a communist and a disarmer, but more recently has turned to the right. Naturally I was suspicious of her book, but felt that even if the politics were poor, the writing would not be. It was. In fact this is the worst book I've read all year. Well, The Times had called the book "realistic", the TLS remarked on the book's "attention to detail" and the (leftish) London Review of Books said The Good Terrorist was "thorough, factual and oddly entertaining". Wrong.

The storyline ... Middle-class drop-out Alice is a bit thick; she's in love with a closet gay who steals her money; these two share a squat with a wimp, two lunatic lesbians, a macho bloke who wants to join the IRA, a housing officer and her boyfriend, and a black criminal. This bunch of stereotypes are all in the Communist Centre Union and next door there squats a couple of KGB agents. Some thick Paddies bring them a few boxes of guns which the squat throw away, but then they make their own bombs which they use to blow up a hotel and assorted passing strangers. (This is the book which almost won Britain's major literary prize, the Booker, and did win the W.H. Smith Literary Award - at least that figures.)

The Communist Central Union, incidentally, is supposed to be a political party, though it doesn't have a paper - whoever heard of a left party without one? The bookstall at their conference, however, does have some literature - IRA material, Leninist stuff, Greenham and Greenpeace! No doubt Doris Lessing's name will sell the book - but frankly it's the sort of left-scare rubbish newsagents were selling off for pennies fifteen years ago. Not researched, poorly written.

Sorry, Jeremy!

Arrested, Charged, Imprisoned. Self-published by J.C. Deacon. 50p. I hummed and hawed for a while wondering whether to mention this because I'm loathe to have a go at self-published efforts, and more especially because I knew the author and don't want to make more enemies than I need to. But hell, sorry Jeremy! The intro to this diary of a peace protester self-critically says, "It seemed (on typing) raw, unflowing and repetitive. It seemed pretentious and middle-class, naive and insensitive to the realities of imprisonment ... (and) to fail on so many



accounts." Too right, and please limit the number of times you use the word "brilliant" next time you describe things you see or feel, Jeremy.

Absolute end

Inside Outsider, by Tony Gould. Penguin. £3.95. This book is "the life and times of Colin MacInnes". Colin MacInnes is most (posthumously) famous for writing the book which gave us the film Absolute Beginners. Personally, I find that book (and the others, City of Spades and Mr Love and Justice, of the London Trilogy) very good indeed. Equally good is MacInnes' journalism. In fact, Inside Outsider is well-written too, but what shoves it into the "worst of the year" section is the character of MacInnes himself. MacInnes was gay - but he solely used other men, especially black men, as nothing but sex objects; he never loved them. MacInnes cared little for women.

In fact, he exploited, so it seems, everyone who came his way - he ripped them off financially, emotionally and sexually, or just insulted them. A lot of craven people came back for more - maybe that's the way it is in literary

circles. The book itself, whilst revealing all this, is written with fondness, and MacInnes was well thought of by Nottingham's own Ray Gosling and people like Colin Ward. Personally, I wouldn't - if he was half as much an egotistical ravaging drunk as the book makes out - give MacInnes the time of day.

Avoid the biography, stick to what he wrote!

These books, if you must, are available from Mushroom Bookshop. The next batch are not good, nor bad, but are worth reading. Interesting to me, I suppose, the right word. Interesting to me anyway, possibly not to you! Only the first is available through Mushroom. The others are out of print and need to be ordered through the library.

Octogenarian sectarian

Fragments - A Memoir, by Sam Dolgoff. Refract. £6.00. Sam Dolgoff is an elderly American anarchist. This book lives up to its name, as it is not researched, nor one uniform piece, nor even quite chronological. Being in his eighties and with no access to researchers or original material, Sam Dolgoff relies on memory to write dozens of brief chapters on people, incidents and events during his long life of activism in the American anarchist and wider Labour movement. Anyone with an interest in Labour history will find the book interesting, especially the first-hand accounts of the rise and fall and continued survival of the "One Big Union" - the Industrial Workers of the World. Some chapters surprised me, such as his near advocacy of Zionism. I was also surprised to read his (presumably accurate) comments on the democratic debate amongst the membership prior to the anarchist CNT union entering the government of Spain during the '36 Civil War. Prior reading had led me to believe it was an unpopular decision. Sam Dolgoff looks very like Eric Heffer and is rumoured to be equally sectarian, but I nonetheless felt very warm towards him after reading this book.

Educating the masses

The Left Book Club, by John Lewis. Gollancz. In short, the Left Book Club was a subscription organisation which flourished in the thirties and declined and folded in the forties, based round a monthly book sold to subscribers. Afficionados of secondhand bookshops will know the familiar yellow jackets and the astonishingly dull-looking subject matter. Dull to the modern reader, perhaps, but the Club reached a peak of 57,000 members organised in 1,500 groups, focusing round the political drive against fascism and meeting an authentic demand for political education. Gollancz hoped to build a "Popular Front" of Liberals, Communists, Labour and independent people to move Britain to the left and create a united and educated populace. That the Club ultimately failed is not testimony to its lack of effort but a testimony to the monumental task it had set itself.

I had thought, in my ignorance, that the Club was worthy but dull. This book proves otherwise. The Club brought politics to life after the Depression and the political depression the left was in. Associated professional and amateur theatre groups were set up and a socialist culture (reminiscent of the early Independent

Labour Party and similar socialist groups) emerged. There were rallies, rambles, PT classes even. A songbook was issued, groups were set up in the professions, in workplaces, little villages and overseas. Several groups took on their own premises. Comfortable premises with room for theatre groups and meetings, and rooms with armchairs and libraries. Nottingham held a celebration of the Byron Centenary with the Club making a special banner for the occasion which included a portrait of the poet. What happened to the banner, I wonder?

The main person behind the Left Book Club was the late Victor Gollancz, who published the books (and whose company now mainly does library-bound science fiction), but thousands of people created the discussion groups and took part in Left Book projects like aiding the Spanish Republic against Franco - eight million of one particular leaflet were distributed. Club members also acted as distributors of some publications, in one case selling a quarter of a million of John Strachey's pamphlet, Why You Should Be a Socialist.

This book tells the authorised story of the Left Book Club and is mostly interesting. The disappointing bit is when it talks of the effective beginning of the end at the start of the war, with the twists and turns of the Communist Party and fellow travellers in their attitude to the war which, given the importance then of the CP, did so much to wreck the organised left and people's trust in it. John Lewis is somewhat generous in his assessment! Lewis was for some time the National Groups organiser. I'd be very interested now to read some material by local group activists.

Inspector Pooh

The Red House Mystery, by A.A. Milne. Penguin. A.A. Milne is, of course, revered as the author of Winnie-the-Pooh books. When in my cups, I've been known to read aloud extracts from Pooh stories and by all accounts do a fair imitation of Eeyore and Piglet. (I can never quite get the right voice for Christopher Robin, though.) A.A. Milne, however, did more than provide a source of cheap entertainment for inebriated adults. Milne was active in the pacifist movement and wrote some excellent early pacifist books, I believe. Oddly, he also wrote a single crime novel in 1926, published in 1938 in Penguin for the price of an old sixpence! I could not help giving in my mind all the characters of the first few pages "Pooh" voices, but settled down after a while. Basically, The Red House Mystery is a classic country house murder story - a surprise visitor bumped off and a convenient amateur detective naturally works it all out when the plods have gone for the obvious solution. Escapism, and certainly to be avoided by those allergic to croquet and such.

Saving the best to last! Actually, it's much easier to criticise books than to praise them. Superlatives are boring to read, and in my vocabulary at least there are more damning than praising words. Anyway, here are three books I have with little reservation thoroughly enjoyed this year. (All are available from Mushroom Bookshop.)

Before Fred and Billy

Goodnight Campers! by Colin Ward and Dennis

Hardy. Mansell. £9.95. Regrettably, the high price will put a lot of people off this well-researched and attractive book. This is the social history of the holiday camp. Billy Butlin and Fred Pontin did not invent the holiday camp, whose originals lie as far from the Butlin's nightmare as food differs from Big Macs. Holiday camps started as working-class escapes from the dreadful conditions of the big cities. Often the camps were run by the Co-op movement, unions or by the campers themselves, electing daily committees. One such was the "Caister Socialist Holiday Camp" - 1,000 people a week camping, and taking part in socials, debates and self-managed catering. Nowadays, the site is the Caister Supercentre - run by Ladbroke's mass entertainment.

The concept of the holidayer as a consumer rather than a creator gradually nibbled away at the attractiveness of roughing it. World War II devastated the philanthropic holiday camp movement as camps were requisitioned, owners sold up and organisations closed down. However, camp culture lives on - its best expression is the Woodcraft Folk (a socialist alternative to the BBs and Girl Guides). Communal life, healthy outdoor activity, self-reliance and a counterpoint to the monotony of factory and school life give to the Folk what the early pioneers of the camping movement gave to the industrial workers early in the century.

Walking the dog

Equally expensive is Five Hundred Mile Walks, by Mark Wallington (Hutchinson. £9.95). This book is of no social importance whatsoever. You may have heard the autumn radio serialisation of this walk of one man and a dog round the south west coastline. Dogs in general don't get written about, though there's plenty of cat books (yuk). Jerome K. Jerome is the only author I know who wrote about dogs as they really are and this book is more in his tradition than the awful Lassie.

Mark tramps the coastline with Boogie, a city slicker of a dog from a broken home. When its owners split up, Boogie was fought over like a child. "You have him!" "No! You have him!" A real townie dog which preferred pavements to grass, a dog which had to be persuaded the hard way that walking was not revenge for something he'd done in the past. He was persuaded and the walk was completed. A good book for armchair walkers and armchair dog lovers. Incidentally, while he walked, the Falklands/Malvinas war raged and lots of us got very depressed. Perhaps we should have spent the war like Wallington.

Women and the coal strike

Lastly, Hearts and Minds, by Joan Witham (Canary Press. £4.95). Joan Witham is a doughty fighter for socialism who bears an uncanny likeness to Margaret Thatcher. Joan is an ex-teacher and this is her first and, she swears, last book. It looks at the role of women and the women's support groups for the NUM throughout the long coal strike. Joan puts the overall politics of the dispute to one side and draws out the individual effect of the strike on the women involved. The difficulties the women found in making ends meet, in securing premises (often by occupying village halls) and in keeping their own and their menfolk's morale up. Personal tragedies

Goodnight Campers!



abound, women activists quietly dropping out when their menfolk went back to work, police victimisation. This is a very powerful and moving book. Joan has included a brief history of all the Notts. women's support groups. That Joan was able to write this book with the co-operation and involvement of what must have been hundreds of women when she herself was of a different background, a Tory-looking woman with a reputation as bit of a feminist, is a tribute to her own perseverance and commitment. At no time does the book feel condescending or written by an outsider. It would be a pity if Joan kept to her desire never to write another book. ●

BACK ISSUES

BACK ISSUES of Nottingham Extra are available. Send 30p to John Sheffield at the address given on page 3, stating which issues you wish to receive. Please note that the charge is 30p whether you request one issue or all five. (This is to avoid complicated calculations of cover price and postage.)

For the immediate future at least, it is planned to publish Nottingham Extra every three months, and gradually to extend the coverage and the number of contributors. The next issue should appear in April.

If you wish to ensure that you receive all future issues as soon as they are published, please send your name and address, but no money, to the same address. A copy of each issue will then be posted to you immediately on publication with a bill for cover price and postage. Failure to pay will, of course, mean no more copies! ●

Theatre

All the way to the piggy bank

JOHN SHEFFIELD

I'M IN TWO MINDS about the theatre. I used to teach English, and so I suppose I had a vocational commitment to English literature (not exactly a priest, more like one of the people who tidied the graveyard), and the theatre is one of its glories. And I do enjoy the live theatre. When I had the money and the time, I went often. There were whole Playhouse seasons when I barely missed a production, from the days of the little old rat-trap on Goldsmith Street, where a motorbike revving at the Talbot Street lights would fart all over the most delicately poised Shakespearian set piece: "Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music/Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the ..." phut, phut, phut, phthAAARRRGH; through good king Neville's golden days; to the intellectually ambitious productions of the National Theatre's new Eyre apparent - magnificent productions which dragged the critics down from London, made their director's reputation, and nearly killed the Playhouse stone dead: obscure, fascinating Jacobean tragedies staged with glittering barbaric splendour before a Saturday night house of under a hundred.

Criterion

The present Playhouse director, Kenneth Alan Taylor, may be on nobody's shortlist for the National, but if bums on seats are the criterion, he knows what glues the jeans to the draylon.

But (and here I come to the second of my two minds), the live theatre, the art theatre, whether castles in the Eyre or Taylor made, is so bloody bourgeois. "How beastly the bourgeois is," wrote D.H. Lawrence - and, as the son of a miner married to the daughter of an aristocrat, he could cheerfully despise the bourgeoisie from both directions (and what a wonderfully bourgeois word "beastly" is!).

Take this Christmas's superbly populist pantomime, Robin Hood and the Babes in the Wood, which would have delighted any child of four or five upwards from any social background whatever: if it had been on the telly, it would have been watched and enjoyed everywhere, like the Muppets; in the theatre, it is colonised by the middle classes. (Yes, yes. Me too.)

It isn't simply a question of price - there's a whole culture associated with the theatre - but let's take price as a symptom, and look at some other vulgar commercial considerations as well.

The cost of a ticket: £5.25 for an adult, £3.25 for a child, student, OAP or UB40. Say a family of four came on the bus from Bulwell. That's £17 for tickets plus £2.60 busfare at the new deregulated prices. Programmes are 60p. We'll say one only, though the kids would squabble over the pop-up Robin Hood and filling in the quizzes and fibre-tipping the pic. Plus refreshments. I shared a bar of chocolate and an orange drink with my daughter over two intervals, and that cost 70p. Say £2 to satisfy four people moderately, and that's more than £22 for a trip to the panto. No wonder the auditorium echoed to the cultivated woodnotes of Mapperley Park and

the rurban villages on the Nottingham fringe.

Not Mr Taylor's fault; and, of course, it was a Labour council which built the Playhouse in the teeth of Tory opposition (with compensation money from the nationalisation of town gas, topically enough); but I bet ninety per cent of its patrons vote Conservative. These pantomimes Mr Taylor writes are terrific demotic entertainment (no, demotic isn't a demotic word). Unless he had an equally gifted successor, there must be a pantomime-shaped hole in Oldham every Christmas. What a pity their audience is so narrow.

Now let me expose my killjoy socialist soul for a while. Let me be a rotten ideological spoilsport. In these belt-tightening, straitened times, commercial sponsorship is the government-endorsed prescription for the increasingly pauperised arts, and the medicine for this production was doled out by the NatWest Bank, using as a sponsorship theme their Piggy Bank savings scheme for children. (This was in addition to Arts Council, City Council etc. subsidies, without which, the programme told us, seats would have cost £10. Yipes!)

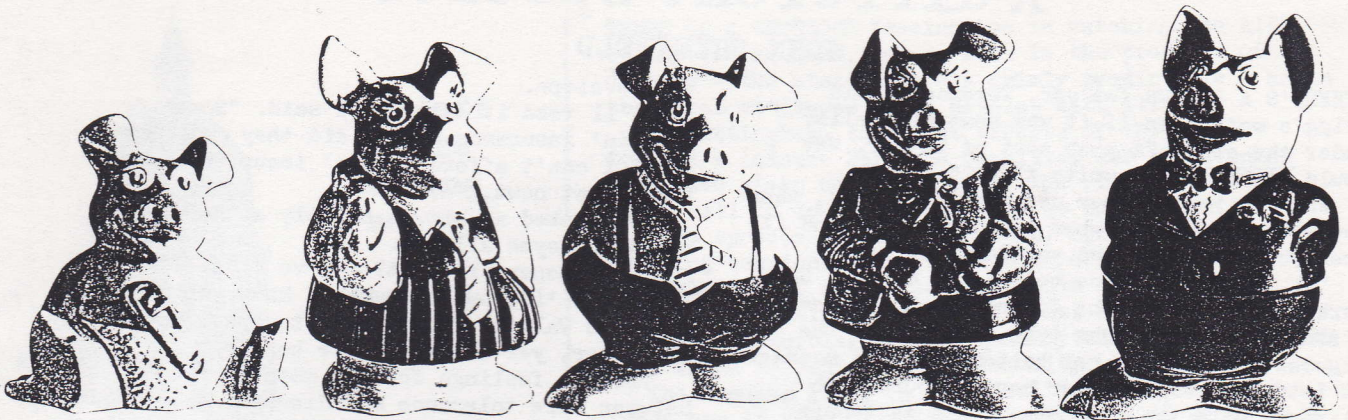
It was very discreet, very tasteful. You had to look quite hard in the programme to find the announcement. Out in the foyer there was an equally discreet, if unmissable, display of leaflets and samples of the "beautifully crafted" ceramic piggy bank Westminster family of five which a child will receive, member by member, as its account increases - Woody, the youngest, in nappy and giant safety pin (price £1, plus the first £2 deposit), sister Annabel (savings of £25), brother Maxwell (£50), and parents Lady Hilary (£75) and Sir Nathaniel (£100). Charming they most undeniably are, but (sorry Playhouse and NatWest Bank), my puritanical socialist soul is affronted: couldn't they have been plain Mr and Mrs, like most of us? Can't we even keep our rotten class system out of children's piggy banks?

Nurturable

And is it perverse to see patriarchy as well as hierarchy lurking behind it? The head of the family is, needless to say, male; the eldest child is male; the youngest child, appealingly nurturable, is male (and which sibling will help with that mega-nappy?); there are three males to two females; the males are worth £152, the females £100. We've had male chauvinist pigs. Now we have male chauvinist piggy banks.

Nitpicking? I don't think so. This unwholesome cocktail of class/money/patriarchy packaged in fetching nurseryware may not be deliberate, but neither is it accidental. The system throws up patterns like this quite unselfconsciously because that's how the system works. And it has a ready defence against its critics. What a preposterous fuss over such innocent trivialities! How typical of the loony left!

The piggy money certainly showed in the production values. The fairytale sets, Mr Taylor's dame costumes in ever-ascending scale of outrageousness, the cuddly little Beatrix Potter furry



tale creatures in the forest (audience: "Aaahhh...!"), a genuinely alarming Jabberwocky conjured up by the Sheriff from the depths of Sherwood Forest - a monstrous, rhino-hided goblin with blazing red eyes and claws like a fistful of meathooks (necromancy courtesy of ITV's *Robin of Sherwood*, surely), and, so help us, a Toyland dream sequence (the Babes' "favourite dream"), featuring the NatWest piggies (good little bourgeois babes, investing soundly even in their dreams).

Badly needed

Well, let's not be squeamish. The money is badly needed. Let's extend the principle instead. Let's have a *Nutcracker Suite* where the rat king is defeated not by a toy soldier but by the Rentokil man (ideologically, non-militaristically, there's something to be said for it); let's drown Clarence in a butt of Harvey's Bristol Cream, ignite St Joan with England's Glory or Ronson, and, with a minor title change and small textual amendments, put on a British Gas sponsored *Waiting for Sid* (there was a Sid joke in this production: another ideological affront!).

Finally, let's be really miserable and consider the sexual politics. The traditional pantomime is, as we know, a "travesty", a gender blurrer if not bender, but in a way which reinforces the sexual stereotypes. The principal boy is a girl (i.e. woman), but in a tight-costumed, long-legs-and-fishnet-tights sort of way which emphasises her female glamour - no one ever thought Marlene Dietrich in top hat and tails looked like a man.

Meanwhile, the men get the really juicy roles, male and female. There's the villain. This year, it was the Sheriff of Nottingham, looking and sounding like Olivier's Richard III while stilt-ing around on crutches like Anthony Sher's Richard III as paraplegic spider. Last year, it was the Wicked Witch Bane, played by the same actor as a drag queen with malevolent high camp, all purples and blacks and straight-backed hauteur, like Danny la Rue doing Snow White's stepmother. For two years running, then, the villain's been a man, even when he was a woman.

Then there's the Dame, that farcical, mostly uncharitable slander on mature womanhood. The

tradition, the fun, the entire point is that she's really a man - but there must be plenty of actresses who'd love to get their teeth into the part. Why not let women send themselves up for a change? Wood and Walters make a pretty good job of it.

Let's probe a little further. Why don't women play comic, disreputable old men? Let's sketch out a reverse pantomime. The principal girl is played by a man, a very masculine man (mirroring the traditional pantomime's very feminine principal boy). Can we imagine him/her retaining a powerful male sexuality while performing as a woman? The principal boy will be played by a man as a stereotype butch male, just as the traditional principal girl is a stereotype, usually vapid, of the feminine female. There is no dame, but instead a dotty, bossy, well-meaning, salacious old man, played by a woman - but how? There is no ready stereotype available (significantly, because there are far more slanderous stereotypes of the female available than of the male), but the components are to hand - Willie Whitelaw, Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Duke of Edinburgh, Les Dawson. Stir and serve. A challenge for the character actress.

Female Sheriff

And we need a villain/ess, always to be played by a woman. (A female Sheriff of Nottingham scheming to seduce a male Maid Marian. Or do I mean Robin Hood?) Last, we need a comic duo: in this production, they were called Arnold and Clifton (they had a silly little song, "I'm Arnold from Clifton, 'I'm Clifton from Arnold", which buzzed around in the brain for days afterwards). What would they have been called if they'd been women? How very masculine placenames are! Radcliffe and Carrington, perhaps? Too Bloomsbury? Is Strelley female? How masculine is Bulwell?

Well, next year it's *Cinderella*. Booking starts in February. February! It's like putting your child down for Eton. Soon we'll be booking them in at birth. No chance, I suppose, of a Cinderella, Princess Charmian, two ugly brothers and a Fairy Godfather (hmmm ...). But we hope to be there with the rest of the muesli belt. Sponsorship by Coalite? ●

Short Story

A different species

JOHN SHEFFIELD

"THERE'S A LETTER for yer, Terence," said Trigg's mother as if it was something slimy under the sink. "A posh sort of letter. Why would anybody posh write t' yo?"

Why did your mother use your full name, when you were seventeen, when you couldn't stand it, when your mates called you Terry or Tez?

"On the mantelpiece be'ind the clock." She jerked her head at the fireplace. The movement dislodged an inch-long tube of ash from the cigarette gummed to her bottom lip. She massaged it into the carpet under her slippers, the slippers with the pom-poms as big as tennis balls bought six months ago when she was being young and skittish for her latest bloke. There was the sourness of rejection in that hostile nod at the battered alarm clock on the kitchen mantelpiece.

Funeral suit

Trigg had been expecting the letter. Or something like it - he wasn't sure what happened when you were mentioned in somebody's will. He'd half expected to be tapped on the shoulder in the street by a natty-looking solicitor's clerk in a funeral suit and bowler hat. Here it was, though. No mistaking it. He'd never seen an envelope like it, thick creamy paper with a sort of weave, more like cloth than paper. Paper the Bible might first have been written on.

"Aren't yer goin' to open it?" His mother's voice grated through the cigarette. He searched the breakfast table for a clean knife, not wanting to desecrate such an exotic object by ripping it open with his thumb.

"Ere y'are. It's only 'ad marge on. Go on, it's all right. I wiped it on the cloth."

Trigg sat down heavily at the other end of the table. Savouring the envelope was only a way of putting off the moment when he found out what the last six months had amounted to. At least the old bogger had remembered him.

He opened it.

The letter was even more imposing than the envelope, the same creamy paper, thick (they must have folded it with a pair of pliers) and embossed (was that the word?) at the top of the page with shiny black letters like little pools of tar, spelling out the names Bone, Cottrell and Friendless, Solicitors, and the address. With a harsh effort, he read it slowly, concentrating on each separate word, not getting excited.

"T. Trigg Esq.," it said, and his address. Then "Dear Sir," followed by a heading, underlined: "Estate of Athelstan Edwin Wallis, deceased."

He stopped, astonished. Athelstan Edwin! He never told me that! I thought he was called Stanley.

"What is it, then?" The voice again, a hybrid of whine and wheedle. "It in't one of them prize draws from that magazine, is it? There was a feller won fifteen thousand quid. Right out of the blue. Never even entered for it."

He re-folded the letter and put it back in

the envelope.

"I'll read it later," he said. "Somebody floggin' insurance. Where did they get me name from? I can't afford flamin' insurance, can I? I an't got nowt, 'ave I?"

She looked at him as sharply as her faded, bloodshot eyes allowed.

"It's money, in't it? Yer've fiddled summat. Yer can't 'ide owt from me. I know yer too well. Owd Stan Wallis. Yer managed to crawl round 'im, din't yer, yer smarmy little bogger."

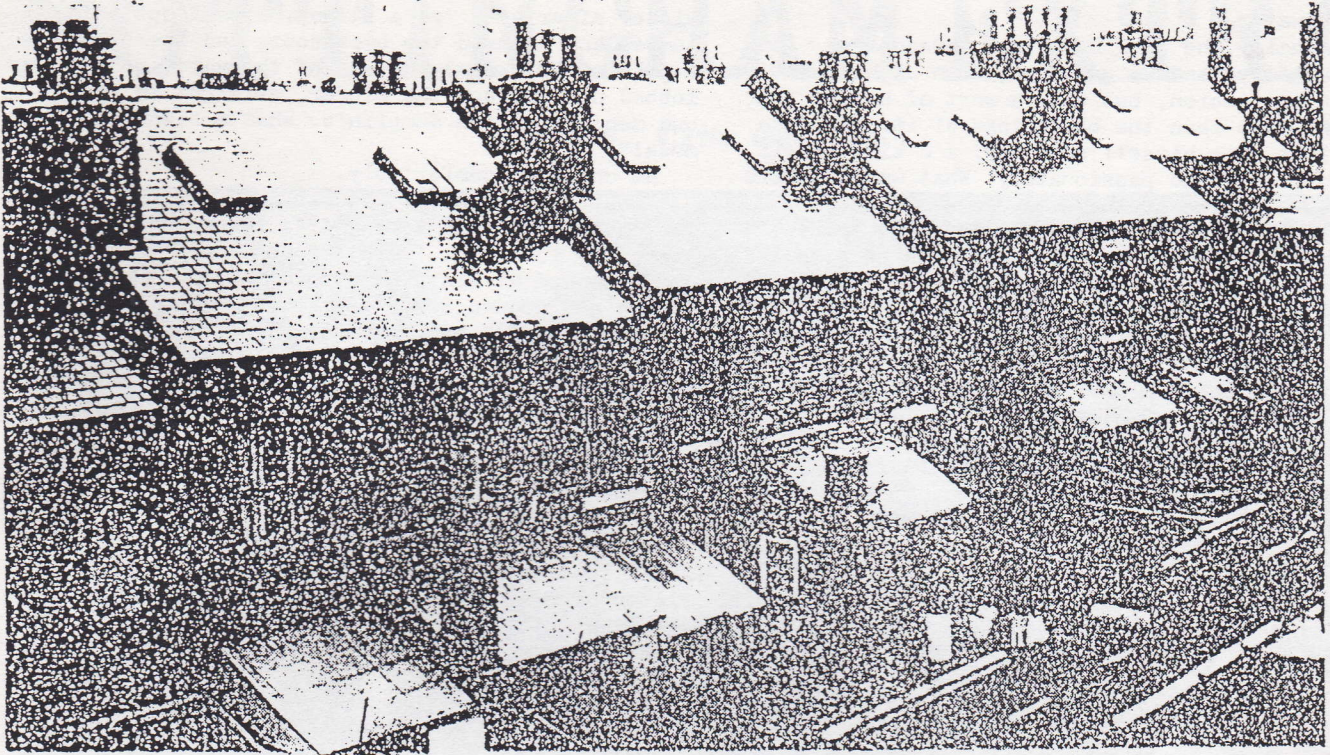
Trigg's feelings for his mother veered between bare tolerance and disgust. He looked at her across the breakfast table: at the lifeless black hair (dyed, of course - stretched taut over rollers, it was like a mound of little black puddings); at the collapsing face, the complexion like perishing rubber; at the eyes, snuffed out by booze and fags and disappointment. Unlucky in love, she said. Bleddy stupid, he thought, her blokes one predictable disaster area after another. They could have had little notices round their necks - "Danger: Subsidence" or "Demolition Site: Keep Out". A succession of hopeless, faithless layabouts and spongers, the earlier ones packing him off to the corner shop with "tuffee money" (and come the long way home), the more recent taking him for a couple of jars "man to man" in the local boozier. One of the very earliest, too far back for him to remember, must have been his dad. She wouldn't talk about it, but she said she worried about him not having a father.

Right and wrong

If he'd had a father to leather a bit of right and wrong into him, would he have gone clodhopping into old Stan Wallis's looking for whatever he could lay his thieving hands on? He'd had it all worked out. A Wednesday morning at ten o'clock, when Wallis was at the day centre (the ambulance collected him at nine). He let himself in at the back door, using the spare key Wallis left on a nail in the outside lavatory - so they wouldn't have to break down the door if he had a stroke or fell on the fire. Trigg had heard the next-door neighbour gabbing about it to the woman who kept the beer-off, stupid old bag.

The moment he pulled the door to behind him, he felt oppressed, he didn't know why. The place smelled of stale bedclothes, but that wasn't it. Nothing new about that. It was damp, of course, but so were all these old terraced houses. They grew mould like a mushroom factory. He'd grown up like a piece of mould himself. More likely it was the general air of senile decay, as if nothing new had come into the house for fifty years, while everything already there had continued its slow, inevitable dissolution.

The back door led straight into the dark little scullery, tap dripping like a slow clock tick on a few unwashed pots in the chipped yellow sink. On the windowsill was a tin of denture powder (the same brand his mother used) and a thick, smeared glass with a toothbrush in



it. The place was tidy - not clean, but at least tidy. There would be a home help, though no family Trigg knew of. Wallis was a bachelor, alone in the world. Like Trigg himself. He didn't count his mother.

The living room wasn't tidy at all, like the window of a second-hand furniture shop, so crammed and dingy that for a moment he couldn't make sense of it, as if nothing had a proper shape. Then objects slowly detached themselves from the gloom - a huge oak sideboard, almost the length of the wall, littered with jars, medicine bottles, dishes, matchboxes, tins, vases, bowls, ashtrays, newspapers, books; a spiral-legged table just as cluttered; two or three wooden dining-room chairs with cracked leather seats; a three-legged stool; a bookcase, glass-doored with leaded panes; a small folding table with a crumpling geranium in a tarnished brass bowl; two enormous sagging, threadbare armchairs. And a television, of course. Then odd details caught his eye - on the sideboard a cracked china bowl decorated with pale blue flowers, like a giant blue-veined fungus, half fluorescent in the darkness; on the wall a fly-blown old photo of a football team; on the mantelpiece a big carriage clock with a dark wooden case; on the floor near the ancient black kitchen range a set of fire-irons with ornamental brass handles like door knockers.

He sized up possible hiding places: drawers, cupboards, bowls, jugs, an old biscuit tin with a picture of the Tower of London on it. It was common gossip that Wallis was a miser, which in Trigg's mind meant piles of notes stuffed under mattresses and floorboards, or down the backs of armchairs. Not in the biscuit tin. Too obvious. And what was that under the cracked bowl on the sideboard? A fiver? He pulled it out. A tenner!

"Yer Eunice Trigg's lad, ain't yer?"

His guts melted into iced water. The old man was propped unsteadily in the doorway leading from the front room. Trigg coughed hard and flapped the ten pound note at him.

"Yer shun't leave money lyin' around, Mester

Wallis. It in't safe these days."

He tucked it back under the china bowl. Wallis said nothing.

"Mam said she 'adn't seen yer around for a day or two, so I just looked in to see if yer was all right."

At school they'd said he was sharp but didn't apply himself. He was applying himself now all right, but it didn't sound very sharp. Some of his mates would have kicked the old sod's head in. Wasn't his style, though. Anyway, Wallis knew him. Better to brazen it out. Unless you put him out for good. To avoid identification. One of the fire-irons? Don't be so sodding daft.

The old man saw something in his face.

"That's a kind thought," he said placatingly. "Don't see so many people now I'm more or less 'ousebound."

Non-committal

"The ambulance fetches yer, dun't it ... some days?" Keep your bleddy trap shut, Trigg thought too late. The old man looked non-committally at the kitchen range.

"Aye. Normally I'd 'ave gone today. They're on strike. It's closed."

Trigg edged towards the door.

"So I can tell mam yer all right, then, Mester Wallis?"

The old man looked quickly at him, as if trying to work something out before it was too late.

"Well, I wouldn't say I'm all right, exactly. 'Elp us over to that armchair, there's a good lad."

Now he'd squirmed off the hook, Trigg only wanted to make a run for it, out of this smelly, suffocating hole, but he took the old man by the elbow, repelled by its bony frailty, and guided him to the decaying armchair by the cold grate. He had no idea what was wrong with Wallis, whether it was feebleness of old age, or more definite, like bad legs, but the air itself seemed an obstacle to him, as if he was walking

underwater.

Finally, he sank on to the threadbare upholstery, and Trigg looked down at him, not with compassion, but with a sort of horror that might have been the beginnings of it. Would he be like this himself some day? I'd kill myself first, he vowed passionately. What would Wallis have been like at the same age as Trigg? A biggish bloke, you could see from his frame. But what sort of fat and muscle used to hang on it? Trigg saw now not muscle or fat but skin, in some places stretched tight, almost transparent over the bone, in other places hanging loose in folds like badly fitting clothes. The eyes were sharp, though, an acid blue. They watched Trigg closely, weighing him up.

"It's cowl in 'ere," said Trigg uncomfortably. The dead ashes in the grate were the same colour as Wallis's worn old jumper.

"I din't feel like mekking the fire," said Wallis. "Some days yer don't feel like doin' 'owt at my age."

"Yer should try and keep warm. Owd people die of cowl. 'Ere ..." Trigg stopped, aware that a threshold was being crossed. Recklessly he continued: "... I'll mek the fire for yer."

"No, no. I'll be all right."

Mouldering

Trigg looked round the room, at the grubby paintwork, the mouldering wallpaper, the junk-shop furniture. Even daylight turned greyer as it passed through the dirty windows. Over the rooftops opposite, the February wind scudded the clouds and flattened the chimney smoke across the blue-grey slates like fog rolling over water. In a premonition, he saw himself sitting in the dilapidated armchair, feeling like ... well, he often felt like doing nothing, but he considered for the first time what it might be like if you had to do nothing, whether you felt like it or not. To sit like Wallis with nothing to hope for, perhaps not even caring if there was anything to hope for or not. He felt pity, not for the old man, but for himself, because one day he might be like him.

"I'll do it," he said fiercely. "Where do yer keep the coal? And the owd papers?"

At first the wind pumped smoke back down the chimney in reeking clouds, and as the old man hacked like a sick motor bike, Trigg cursed his own charity. But soon coals gleamed orange among the black, and they sat with mugs of strong tea feeling the damp evaporating from the room like rain fading on a hot pavement.

"D'yer want a roll-up?" said the old man, offering his tobacco tin and cigarette papers.

"Don't smoke." (His mother smoked.)

Wallis rolled a cigarette quickly and neatly, lit it from the fire with a scrap of screwed-up newspaper, and for the first time looked moderately content. Small patches of colour bloomed at the end of his nose and where the skin stretched tight across his cheekbones.

"When I was your age ...," he began suddenly.

Trigg twitched uneasily, but the old man carried on.

"When I was your age, I was a right little sod."

Trigg looked up, startled.

"Well, a right big sod. I was bigger than me dad by the time I was thirteen. They couldn't do owt wi' me. Once I chucked a brick through the

winder after we'd 'ad a barney. I went out in a temper and slammed the back door, and there was a pile of bricks at the end of the yard, so I lobbed one through the winder, straight in the owd man's stoo and dumplin's. What a bleddy mess!"

He chuckled comfortably.

"That's why I never got married, I suppose. Too nasty tempered. Nobody'd 'ave me. Not for good, any road. But I din't go short of women."

He sucked at his cigarette with an asthmatic wheeze and nodded complacently at Trigg.

"Nowadays I'd be a lout or a vandal, I reckon, but opportunities was more limited in my day. No such thing as football 'ooligans or skin'eads. I was born before me time. I could 'ave bin a skin-'ead."

He shook his head regretfully over the fire, one who life had passed by.

"Yer was a miner, wasn't yer, Mester Wallis?"

"Aye. Forty year. Thirty down same bleddy pit. I was luckier than some. Never a bad accident. Plenty of near misses. Closed down fifteen year ago, that pit. I bet yer din't know there used to be a pit a mile from the Owd Market Square, did yer?"

He flicked his cigarette butt into the fire and fell silent. Trigg stood up.

"I'll tell mam yer all right, Mester Wallis."

"Eh? Oh aye. Yer can come again if yer like. What's yer first name?"

"Terry."

"Oh aye. Terry. Yer should call me Stan."

Trigg opened the door.

"I was luckier than some," Wallis said again.

"I even managed to put a bob or two by. I needn't 'ave bothered. It's not a fat lot of use to me now, and I've nobody to leave it to."

He looked at Trigg standing by the door.

"I'm not daft enough to leave it lyin' round the 'ouse. The ten pound's for the insurance man. It's in the buildin' society. Too many of these daft owd sods purrit in a biscuit tin or under the mattress. Aye, come again, lad. I could do wi' the company."

Half-smile

And, six months later, there was the thick, cream-coloured letter. As soon as he was outside the kitchen door, Trigg read it. Then he went back into the room, an odd half-smile on his face.

"All right, mam. If it's money, we'd better go 'alves, 'adn't we? Y'are me mam, after all."

She snatched the letter, fumbled for her glasses, read it twice before it sank in. Then she spat her fag end at the carpet and said bitterly, "The rotten owd skinflint. After all yo did for 'im."

She turned the letter over and glared venomously at the cheque for ten pounds clipped to the corner.

"Yo leave 'im alone," said Trigg. "'E was all right. When I'm owd, I'm goin' to be like 'im."

"When yer owd," she said bitterly, scrabbling for what was already the fifth cigarette of the day. "Yer was as owd as the bleddy 'ills when yer was bleddy well born."

From the kitchen cupboard, a threequarter bottle of sherry sent a friendly invitation. Ganging up. Always ganging up. Even your own son and some old bogger who hardly knew you. A different species. Women were happy before they came. ●