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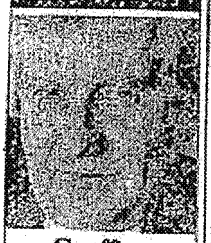
Commentary



Geoffrey Smith

It is hardly the best advertisement for the dream ticket in its waking hours that Mr Neil Kinnock and Mr Roy Hattersley should now be favouring different candidates to be the new general secretary of the Labour Party. That is some indication of the relief into which Labour has got itself over the appointment of a successor to Mr Jim Mortimer, which is to be made by the national executive committee tomorrow.

The choice is critical for the party's future. Only a strong and administratively capable general secretary will stand a chance of sorting out Labour's internal mess. Yet nobody has been found who is generally acceptable to the leading figures in the party, and the balance of forces which is shaping up for the election will make it harder for whoever wins to do the job effectively.

Most of those who were earlier considered potential front-runners are not available. So the effective choice lies between Mr Larry Whitty, the research officer of the General and Municipal, who is supported by Mr Kinnock; and Mrs Helen Liddell, secretary of the party in Scotland, whom Mr Hattersley would prefer.

That is not a simple left-right contest. The G and M, which is campaigning hard for Mr Whitty, is not a left-wing union. The Transport and General Workers' Union, which is reputed to be backing Mrs Liddell, is decidedly more to the left. The issue is complicated by union obligations and rivalries.

Second ballot decisive

But the broad picture is that most of Mr Whitty's support in the first ballot will come from the soft and middle left – if Mr Michael Meacher and Mr David Blunkett can nowadays be put in that category – and from those associated with his union. Mrs Liddell's support will come mostly from the right, and the hard left will support either Mrs Joyce Gould or one of the other outsiders.

Neither Mr Whitty nor Mrs Liddell is expected to have an overall majority on the first ballot. On the second ballot some of the hard left may abstain, but enough of them seem likely at this stage to vote for Mr Whitty to give him the edge.

It thus happens Mr Whitty will be seen as having been propelled to power by the left. That would be damaging for him and perhaps rather harsh.

The right have definite misgivings about him. He is reputed to have supported Mr Tony Benn against Mr Denis Healey for the deputy leadership in 1981, although it would be more accurate to say that his position was anti-Healey than pro-Benn. He declined to work for Mr Healey's re-election even though the Healey campaign was largely being organized from the union.

Reforms need right's support

Mr Whitty is a man whose political instincts are to the left.

Brittan defends Special Branch right to spy on strikers

By Richard Evans, Lobby Reporter

Mr Leon Brittan, Home Secretary, last night defended the right of the Special Branch to spy on strikers and suspects not directly involved in criminal activity.

But he denied that trade unionists were picked out specially for surveillance and said there was a "clear distinction" between subversion and active opposition to government policies.

Responding to complaints from Mr John Prescott, Labour's chief employment spokesman, about recently issued Special Branch guidelines, Mr Brittan said picketing would be of no interest to special branches if it was conducted peacefully and within the law.

"But where picketing may pose a threat to public order it is entirely right that a chief officer should have access to any relevant information that his Special Branch can provide to help him determine an appropriate level of policing."

Mr Brittan, who is to give evidence on the Special Branch to the Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs tomorrow, said the concept of subversion "is interpreted no differently in relation to trade unionists than in relation to any other group in society".

But he insisted that the definition of subversive – activities that threaten the safety or well-being of the state and which are intended to undermine or overthrow parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means – was not limited to criminal acts.

Mr Brittan, who will be questioned by MPs about the definition, said that in an open society it was all too easy to use tactics which were not themselves unlawful or subversive.

"Those who are entrusted with safeguarding our democratic institutions from subversive attack, must not be prevented from looking into the activities of those whose real aim is to harm our democracy but who, for tactical or other reasons, choose to keep, either in the long or the short term, within the letter of the law in what they do."

Mr Brittan denied a suggestion from Mr Prescott that the existing definition allowed Special Branch officers to make "political judgements" about subversives involved in industrial activity.

"Under the definition an activity is subversive only if it is carried on with the aim of undermining or overthrowing parliamentary democracy and only if it threatens the safety or well-being of the state itself.

"There is a clear distinction between subversion and opposition to the policies of the government of the day or peaceful campaigning to bring about changes in those policies or to influence public opinion generally."

'Spying' ridicule

Allegations of a secret surveillance operation to monitor objectors to the Sizewell nuclear reactor inquiry in Suffolk were ridiculed yesterday by the man at the centre of the controversy.

Mr Peter Hamilton, a private detective and former military intelligence officer, was named in *The Observer* as the mastermind behind the spy network.

But he said that the operation, for a private client in the United Kingdom, was a non-political assignment.

Teenagers' killers get life

The leader of a gang which savagely murdered two innocent teenagers in the Peak District was jailed for life yesterday with a recommendation that he serves at least 25 years.

Mr Justice Jupp sentenced Peter Murray, aged 36, to three life sentences for the murders of Mitchell Egar, aged 17, a student, and Martyn Pollitt, aged 19, and for conspiracy to murder Mr John Redfern, aged 21.

The other members of the gang, Michael Bailey, aged 20, John Bannister, aged 21, and Michael Howe, aged 20, were each given three life sentences.

The jury had been told that the gang picked its victims off the streets and offered them jobs with a fictitious foreign business. The teenagers were lured to an isolated spot at Goytscough, near Buxton, Derbyshire, where they were brutally beaten on the orders of Murray and Bailey.

Murray, unemployed, of Stockport Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, Greater Manchester, and Bailey, unemployed, of Worrell Crescent, Cheadle Heath, both changed their pleas to guilty to all three charges during the 10-day trial.

Howe, a part-time salesman, also of Stockport Road, and Bannister, a labourer of no fixed address, had denied the charges. The jury took 80 minutes to return guilty verdicts on all three charges.

Drink case judge is banned

A judge who pleaded guilty to driving with excess alcohol in his blood after a day sitting in court was banned from driving for 18 months and fined £300 by magistrates yesterday.

John Bolland, aged 64, a judge at Chichester Crown Court, pleaded guilty through his solicitor at Arundel Magistrates' Court, West Sussex.

The court was told he was involved in an accident on the A27 road at Patching, near Worthing, driving back to his home in Firle Road, Lancing, last September. Mr David Adams, for the Director of Public Prosecutions, said that Judge Bolland's Daimler was the only vehicle involved in the accident. He was arrested after failing to provide a breath specimen.

A blood sample analysis later showed he had 201mg of alcohol to 100ml of blood in his system. The legal limit is 80mg.

Mr Ian Lay, for the judge, said: "My client much regrets the whole affair. He had finished his normal public work at the court and then finished his paper work before enjoying some sherry.

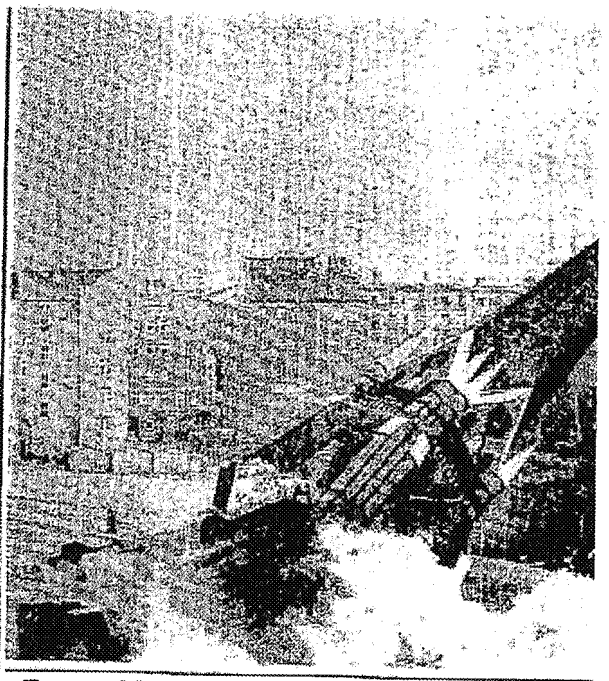
"The accident had shaken him and he drank from a flask kept in the glove compartment in the car."

Passing yesterday's court case, Judge Bolland had been transferred to Croydon Crown Court and told not to try drinking offenders.

Free daily battles for slice of £25m adverts

By Craig Seton

The Birmingham Post and



Israelis hope to solve mystery of their lost submarine

From Christopher Walker
Beersheba

Israel is optimistic that one result of the talks with Egypt here will be a solution to the mystery surrounding one of the country's worst maritime disasters – the loss 17 years ago of the submarine Dakar and all 69 members of its launch crew.

The British-built submarine disappeared without trace on its voyage to Haifa from Portsmouth, where it had been refitted and lengthened by 16ft to pack in extra men and secret equipment.

"We have reason to believe that the wreck may be lying on the seabed in Egyptian coastal waters and we intend formally to request permission to conduct a search there to find it," Mr Ehud Gol of the Israeli Foreign Ministry told *The Times* yesterday. "We are confident that the Egyptians will agree to such a humanitarian gesture."

The Dakar was last heard of in a coded radio message sent on January 23, 1968, nine days after it had left Gibraltar and was making the last dangerous leg of its voyage under water at a speed of seven knots.

A French and an American submarine also disappeared at roughly the same time.

Kidnapped envoy seen on video

Mr William Buckley, the US diplomat kidnapped in Beirut 10 months ago, was alive and well as recently as last week, a video film released yesterday showed.

On the film obtained by Visnews, the international television news agency, he said that fellow-Americans Mr Jeremy Levin and Mr Benjamin Weir, also kidnapped last year, were alive and well, too.

The Islamic Jihad, (Holy War) group said it was holding the men hostage with two other US citizens.

A search extending over tens of thousands of square miles conducted by the rescue services of five countries and run from Cyprus found no trace of the Dakar until a year later, when an emergency flare was washed up on the Mediterranean coast in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip.

The mystery was deepened by the unexplained fact that two radio messages purporting to be from the submarine were received in Israel at the time of the disappearance, but were dismissed by the intelligence services as misinformation [illegible] to disrupt the hunt for the [illegible]

Because of the "decoy messages and the fact that so [illegible] Soviet submarines [illegible] believed to have been in [illegible] area at the time of [illegible] disappearance, there are those who have never completely [illegible] hope that the vessel was seized and the crew taken prisoner. Official sources have [illegible] covered this theory.

"Our main concern is to [illegible] to find the remains of the dead seamen and bring them home to Israel," explained Mr G[illegible]. "One of the central tenets of our armed services is that the [illegible] will make every effort to bring back any member lost above [illegible] for burial in Israeli soil."

The disappearance of [illegible] Dakar has long haunted [illegible] public imagination in Israel [illegible] this smooth family menu[illegible] secondary to emotional [illegible] official service for the lost [illegible]

A special subbotnik disp[illegible] was made to allow [illegible] wives of the missing crewmen to adopt the status of widows under Jewish religious law [illegible] widowhood. Preliminary feelers have been put to the Egyptians about the chances of the [illegible] people search along the underwater shelf where the Israelis believe the wreck may be lying 1,000 [illegible] deep.

Couple who kept sex slave jailed

Düsseldorf (AP) – A court yesterday convicted a West German couple of sexually abusing their child's teenage nanny and sentenced them to long prison terms.

Dieter Engelbrecht, aged 48, the wealthy owner of a cable factory near Düsseldorf, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, and his 29-year-old wife Helena was given a six-year prison term for keeping Miss Silvia Hanke as a sex slave over a 15-month period.

They were found guilty of procreditating rape, sexual coercion, causing severe bodily harm and deprivation of personal liberty. Engelbrecht's sentence was more severe because he was the instigator, the court said.

The case came to light when Fräulein Hanke, now 19, went to police after she was released by Engelbrecht. She said she was lured in 1982 when she was 16 to care for the couple's five-year-old daughter, Paula.

Instead the couple held her a windowless basement room in their house, where she was sexually assaulted, threatened and beaten.

Three killed as gunmen take over in Sidon

From Robert Fisk, Beirut

As Israeli Army convoys continued yesterday to stream south down the coast road from Sidon in advance of the Israeli withdrawal from the city, the growing anarchy in southern Lebanon continued, with gun battles in the large Palestinian camp at Ein Helwe and three reported killings, including that of a seven-year-old schoolgirl.

The overnight fighting in Ein Helwe – between guerrillas and [illegible] came under fire from Israeli troops at a checkpoint.

Western correspondents – whom the Israelis are again trying to exclude from southern Lebanon – were unable to visit the scene of the shooting, outside Tyre.

If there was any hope for Sidon yesterday, it came in Beirut, where the Education Minister, Mr Selim al-Hoss, withdrew his resignation and [illegible]

Kremlin's silence fuels talk

From Richard Owen
Moscow

"Mark my words", [illegible] veteran Kremlin watcher said. "These rumours about Chernenko are going to become more ludicrous the longer he stays out of sight."

One drawback of a closed and authoritarian society like the Soviet Union is that, in the absence of official information [illegible]