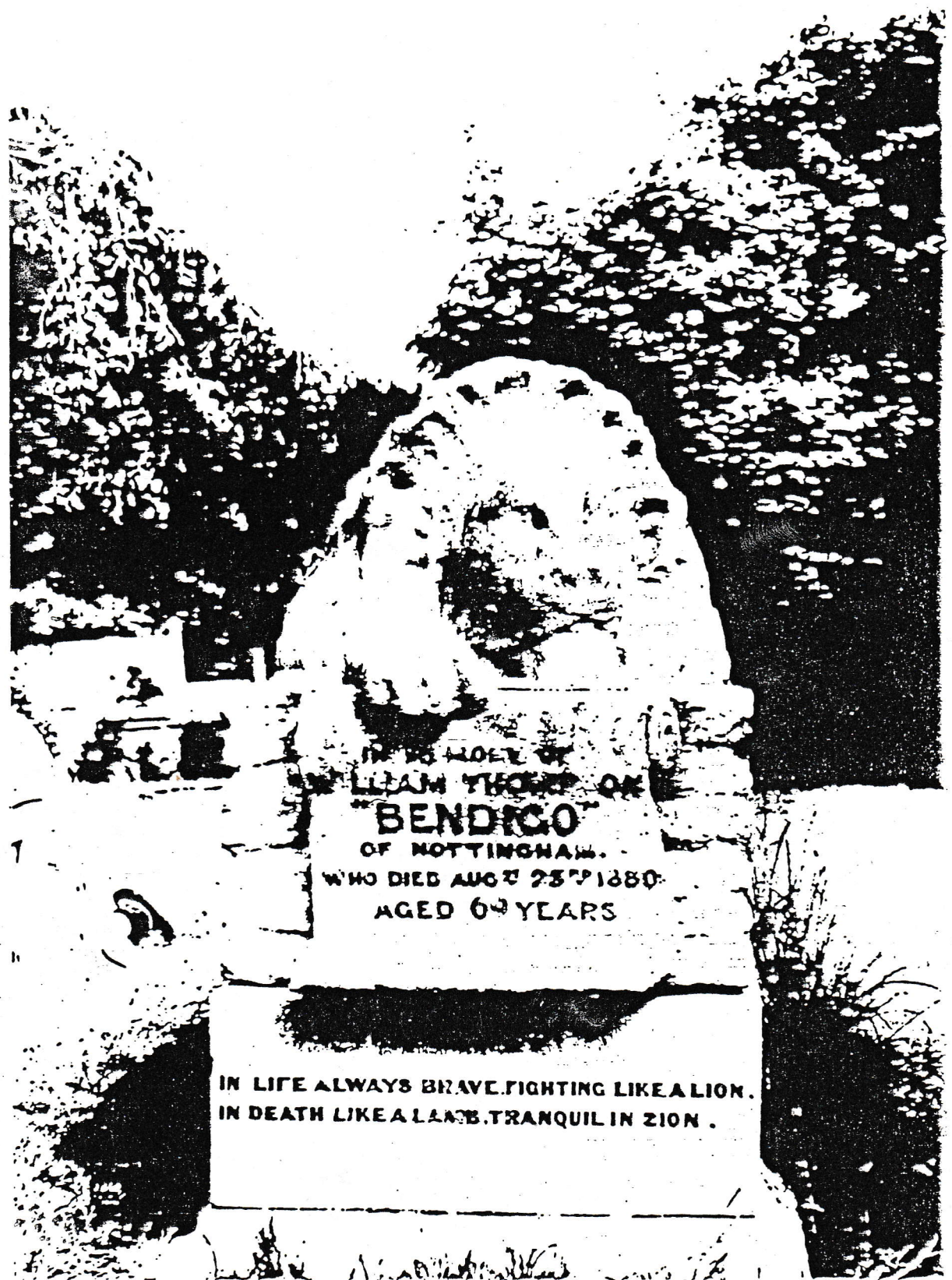


NOTTINGHAM EXTRA

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Nottingham enters the 21st century

IF SPRUCING UP old buildings is a reliable economic indicator, then Nottingham is in the middle of a boom. There is a major article to be written about developments in the city centre, and this isn't it, but a quick check shows the following buildings, old and new, under scaffolding: High Pavement Chapel, the Cathedral, the Elite, Horne's on Long Row, the Thurland Hall Hotel on Pelham Street, Commercial House and the National Westminster Bank on Thurland Street, Collier's on Lister Gate, the Queen's Hotel on Arkwright Street (opposite the Midland Station), and City Buildings (Redmayne and Todd etc.) on Carrington Street.

Nor is this the only cosmetic activity - there are major landscaping schemes on Castle Road and Maid Marian Way and in the Old Market Square (a £600,000 scheme just starting), and complete refits of the old Queen Street Post Office, Exchange Arcade, Yates's Wine Lodge (a 'restoration'), the Classic Cinema (a 'medieval' restaurant), and the former Woolworth's on Lister Gate. Add the redevelopment of the Central Market site (see page 7) and, further out, the conversion of Turneys' leather works at Trent Bridge into luxury flats, and clearly something is on the move.

It's pleasant, of course, to see the geological strata of soot stripped down to their Victorian levels and new uses found for old buildings. The look of the city centre has improved dramatically over the last few years. But why so much spent on the centre, a great deal of it on appearances, when areas further out have more fundamental problems? Isn't it like splashing out on a flash new tie when the shoes are falling off your feet?

There are several answers.

One is that some of the money is earmarked by the Department of the Environment for specific purposes, like 'Operation Clean-Up', and cannot be hijacked for council house repairs and filling holes in the road.

Another answer is that money is being spent on the suburbs, though not nearly enough (the Maid Marian Way and Old Market Square schemes have come in for particular criticism as money better spent elsewhere).

A third answer, by the city council especially, is that they would like to spend more, but the government won't let them.

A fourth answer is that the schemes all help the service sector of the economy, which is seen as vital to Nottingham's future as a regional capital.

And a fifth answer is that they reflect the city's increasing commitment to the tourist and conference industries, where appearances can count for everything.

Few people in the city perhaps realise how serious this commitment is. It explains, for example, why normal planning considerations were sidestepped for the new Royal Hotel. So eager were the city council to secure this vital link with their new Royal Centre that, despite angry protests from the Civic Society and others, the scheme was approved in record time and the developers given a more or less free hand. The resulting building serves its purpose well enough, but is a barbarous addition to the townscape - outside, a glitzy entrance among a random litter of glass, brick and concrete; inside, potted palms and pretension.

But the development of the Royal Centre as a conference complex is a fulcrum of the city centre enterprise, and, whether or not the local citizenry is impressed, the outside world certainly is.

'The new standard of competitiveness which other conference destinations now have to match,' says Municipal Journal (one of the most influential local government periodicals). 'The Royal Centre ... has transformed Nottingham's status as a meetings destination ... Technically, the Royal Centre is labelled State of the Art ... It is very much a Space-Age sell and helps set new standards in the market ...'

The keynote to the centre is its flexibility - the 2,500-seat auditorium can host a huge range of events from ballet to heavy rock, industrial theatre, product launches, plus, of course, the whole spectrum of conferences from serious-minded association events to the hyped-up razzmatazz of the corporate binge ...'

(Admit it - you thought it was just a concert hall!)

'One example ... has been the growing market for major business events in the city, including spectacular product launches, dealer get-togethers and sales conferences. Given the "futuristic" facilities of the centre, the so-called "industrial theatre", using high-technology lighting,

including lasers, has been easy to stage. Recently the bicycle people, Raleigh, spent half-a-million pounds on four separate launches to audiences of 450 delegates at a time - their European retailers.'

So there is more to the city centre clean-up than window dressing. Let's hope the old and rotting suburbs can keep up with the gleaming Space-Age centre. For, according to Municipal Journal, 'Nottingham ... is acquiring something of the imagery of the 21st century: scientific, businesslike and hard-working.'

Clever chap, foreseeing so clearly, if dispiritingly, what the next century will be like. As Lincoln Steffens nearly said, 'I have seen the future, and it's hard-working.' ●

Special people

FOR THE BENEFIT of anyone not entirely reassured by the House of Commons select committee's whitewash of the Special Branch, the Times ran a profile of the Metropolitan section of the Branch (379 strong at the last count). The article did not say how far it applied to provincial forces, but we were obviously meant to be impressed by the high calibre of recruits in London.

'Literacy,' it said, 'is regarded as a prerequisite for the job.' (According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, literacy is 'the ability to read and write'. Is the Times trying to tell us something about the rest of the police force?)

Other conditions are more demanding. 'Applicants are positively vetted by a Home Office unit and face a written examination plus interview. The examination tests general knowledge - to the standard of a quality newspaper reader - vocabulary and comprehension.

'One recent exam paper, comprising 20 sections, asked the meaning of initials such as WHO and Cohse; what sport is played at the Orange Bowl; what was Erica Hess noted for; the connection between a series of words including "argent" and "gules"

continued on page 7

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A new popular paper for the left

HAVE YOU EVER wished there was a good left-wing national newspaper? Would you like to help set one up and have a say in how it's run and what goes in it? Well, now's your chance! The first issue of a popular left-wing weekly, News on Sunday, will appear in October 1986 and anyone interested is invited to join in.

Details were given by two members of the paper's steering group to a hastily assembled meeting in Nottingham on June 4th. It was agreed that other local people would want to be involved, and so an inaugural meeting for a Nottingham support group was arranged. This will be held upstairs at Fagin's, Goldsmith Street, on June 18th at 7.30 p.m. It will be followed on June 29th by an open meeting in Manchester where the aim will be to set up a formal structure for regional support groups.

Plans for the paper are already well advanced, but the meeting was assured that organisation, format and content have not yet been finalised. There are still plenty of opportunities to influence the end product, and very active regional support groups in Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow are already doing just that.

The idea started with a small, London-based group, and has now developed to the point where 'literally hundreds' are involved all over the country. Nor is it simply a left-wing pipe dream. Active support from a number of 'big names' has ensured a flow of funds from trade unions, the Greater London Enterprise Board, and sympathetic local authorities like Sheffield and Manchester City Councils.

A key figure has been Clive Thornton, ex chairman of the Abbey National Building Society and Mirror Group Newspapers. Thornton had exciting plans for separating the Mirror from its parent company, Reed International, and transforming it into a radical and democratically run paper. Then Reed sold out suddenly to Robert Maxwell. Thornton's enthusiasm for the new paper has helped convince sceptics and unlocked various sources of capital.

A £70,000 feasibility study is under way. In the next two months, 15,000 copies of a full-scale dummy issue will be produced to show to supporters, distributors and advertisers. Intensive market research has revealed a potential readership of at least 400,000

(in some projections as high as a million).

The audience aimed for is in the middle of the market, and if the title News on Sunday sounds half familiar, so it should: the researchers think they've found a left-wing, Mail-on-Sunday-shaped gap somewhere between the Sunday Times and the Sunday Mirror - thousands of people with no Sunday paper which reflects their interests.

The paper will be a 35p tabloid of 56 pages with about 10 pages of advertising. There will be a colour supplement, and also colour on the main pages. To keep costs down, surplus capacity of existing presses and distribution networks will be used. There will be no union-busting new technology. Agreements will be negotiated with the NUJ and print unions, though minimum rather than Fleet Street rates will be paid. As well as employing established journalists, News on Sunday expects talent to come up through the regional support groups, and for unqualified journalists taken on to the national staff, a post entry closed shop will be negotiated - i.e. they will join the union and receive professional training.

Estimates are that the paper will cost £4½ million to launch and will break even in its second year. £1¼ million advertising revenue is predicted in the first year, based on 18% advertising space (compared with 35% in existing papers). Advertising will present some ethical problems. Much of the initial revenue will come from cigarette and drink manufacturers because they 'advertise with anyone', regardless of political opinion. However, stories will definitely not be spiked because they offend a major advertiser.

But getting enough advertising will be a problem. Circulation is too low to attract advertisers looking for cheap rates and mass markets, but there are possibilities in more specialised markets, with regional editions and appeals to special interest groups. The Guardian's media and education supplements were quoted.

Advertising agencies have been discouraging, believing their clients will not patronise a left-wing newspaper. But research shows that, approached directly, advertisers themselves are often more favourable. Direct sales are also being considered - i.e. sell-

ing goods through the paper at a discount price.

Subsidy from trade unions was rejected, not because the unions were unwilling but because of fears about editorial independence. The McCarthy report (on the feasibility of setting up a left-wing newspaper) had found that readers would be put off in droves if they thought the paper was controlled by the unions. McCarthy also plumped for a weekly paper because of the prohibitive cost of launching a new national daily.

Unions will put money into the paper, but on the same basis as banks and other investors. To avoid another Maxwell, control of the paper will be split three ways. One third of the votes will go to the staff, one third to investors, and one third to 'founding subscribers' - supporters who donate £1,000 either individually or in groups. Optimistically, perhaps, 1,000 of these donations are hoped for. Unlike the investors, founding subscribers will not receive any dividend. The donation will simply buy a voice in the running of the paper.

There will be an editor, but working within a democratic framework, as yet unformulated. The paper will also differ from Fleet Street rivals in its news values. Instead of conventional trivia and reliance on agency reports, there will be serious news and analysis of the realities behind the news - where the power lies which shapes the events.

Great stress is being placed on contributions from regional support groups who, it is hoped, will feed in fresh, original stories of a kind rarely seen in the existing press.

But News on Sunday will be a genuine popular paper. The comparison with the Mail on Sunday is a very real one in terms of appearance and market appeal. Its touch will be light and it will not be exclusively political. Gardening columns, crosswords and horoscopes are among the possibilities being studied. Suggestions and offers to write columns are welcome.

The project is run at present by a national executive of fifteen people, programmed to self-destruct next April when the serious business of publishing the paper begins. The precise form everything will take is still being discussed - so if you want to be involved, get along to the meetings on June 18th and 29th! ●

A good day for Mr Brandon-Bravo

SHOULD MPs SLAG OFF their constituencies in Parliament just to make a handy party political point - or do they have a general responsibility to the area they represent, independently of party affiliation?

The voters of Nottingham South might well put these questions to their MP, Martin Brandon-Bravo, who in recent weeks has hardly enhanced the city's reputation.

Mr Brandon-Bravo was a member of the Commons Standing Committee on the Transport Bill - the Bill which will open all bus services to competition and privatise City Transport.

Mr Brandon-Bravo very much approves of this. He thinks that, when the Tories were in power in Nottingham, City Transport was well run on sound commercial lines, but whenever Labour has been in office, it has been run politically and therefore badly.

Unfortunately, he has been hard pressed to find any evidence for this, so he has had to be a little creative. It is worth looking at his efforts in some detail, if only as an example of what MPs get up to when they think people back home aren't looking (Standing Committee proceedings are rarely reported in the local press).

In the April 25th session of the Transport Committee, Mr Brandon-Bravo saddled Labour-controlled City Transport with complete responsibility for what, as he put it, 'became known nationally and internationally as the infamous zone and collar lilac leopards scheme'.

He continued: 'It lost Nottingham city council some £800,000, which was a lot of money in the early 1970s. The Bill seeks to ensure that such mismanagement never occurs again.'

Now, as it happens, hardly a word of this is true.

The Zone and Collar traffic control scheme was run by the County Council, which, as Mr Brandon-Bravo surely knows, is responsible for traffic management in the city. The Lilac Leopard 'park and ride' buses were a minor part of the scheme, operated, it is true, by City Transport, but only under contract to the County Council.

So it is semi-literate nonsense to describe the whole scheme as the 'zone and collar

lilac leopards scheme' (heaven knows what members of the Committee thought it meant) and to blame it on the City Council.

As for infamy, the Zone and Collar was naturally unpopular with local motorists, egged on by a virulent campaign in the Evening Post, which knows a good populist cause when it sees one and accompanied each knocking report with a special logo showing a car bursting to freedom through a collar.

But nationally and internationally its reputation was very different. It was seen as a valuable and imaginative attempt to halt the devastation of cities by motor traffic. Visitors came from all over the world to study it, even after it was abandoned. It is still regarded as a worthwhile experiment - and as traffic continues to increase, its day may yet come (accelerated, ironically, by the present Bill, which will almost certainly force more people off buses and into cars as public transport deteriorates).

As for cost, according to the definitive report on the Zone and Collar by the government's Transport and Road Research Laboratory, the scheme cost not £800,000 but £400,000 - none of it paid by the City Council.

But this wasn't the end of Mr Brandon-Bravo's work in committee that day. Seemingly, he was hell-bent on proving that Nottingham is an eccentric city run by loony lefties who must at all costs be curbed by the Transport Bill. In case anyone still thought it was a fairly normal place run by a Labour council who differed from Mr Brandon-Bravo politically but were otherwise unremarkable, he recounted the following little anecdote:

'Although my authority does not have the reputation of being one of the lunatic fringe, I must tell my right hon. Friend Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for Transport, so that colleagues know that there are lunatic Labour-controlled authorities, that our budget was delayed by a month because one Labour councillor held sway - there is a majority of one only - and would not pass the budget because the authority would not provide him

with a gay and Lesbian club in Nottingham. This is the lunacy of local government today ...'

The 'Labour councillor' was, of course, Cllr Richard McCance, the only openly gay member of the City Council. Nicholas Ridley, chief architect of the Transport Bill, was naturally delighted to give Mr Brandon-Bravo's tale a further twist, referring with evident relish to 'proper moneys' being 'invested in buses and not in gay and Lesbian clubs'.

And so this travesty of Nottingham politics was written into the parliamentary record.

For, as Mr Brandon-Bravo knows (he is a veteran member of the City Council, hence the credence given in parliament to his statements about Nottingham), the crisis over the city's budget last year was caused as much by the sudden death of the Lord Mayor, Labour councillor Arthur Wright, as by the opposition of Cllr McCance. Furthermore, as Mr Brandon-Bravo again knows perfectly well, Cllr McCance's hostility to the budget was nothing to do with gay and lesbian clubs. He voted against it because it was a 'cuts' budget which he believed was contrary to the policy of the city Labour Party. His opposition was on a point of political principle.

So Cllr McCance's mini rebellion loomed large in parliament as a major threat to the proper conduct of the nation's municipal transport undertakings. And because no one on the committee but Mr Brandon-Bravo knew anything about Nottingham politics, he got away with it.

Not only got away with it, but was thanked for it!

Said David Mitchell, who was steering the Bill through committee, 'I am grateful to my hon. Friend who, as usual brings to the attention of the Committee his intimate knowledge of what is happening on the ground. It is of great value to us.'

Indeed it is! And no doubt it does Mr Brandon-Bravo's political career no great harm, either - though rarely can such undeserved praise have been heaped on such mischievous and misleading nonsense.

So a good day for Mr Brandon-Bravo, but not such a good day for Nottingham - for its reputation or for the future of its public transport services.●

Youth unemployment - the free market collapses

HOW WORRIED SHOULD we be about youth unemployment? Very worried, according to a recent report, 'Youth Unemployment in Nottinghamshire', by Dr Daniel Lawrence, Senior Lecturer at the University Department of Sociology, and Veronica O'Callaghan. Funded by the University and the County Council, the report collates information from various sources about trends over the six years from October 1978 to October 1984 and gives the first comprehensive view of how serious the position is and the effectiveness of measures to improve it.

Though cautious about interpreting the statistics, the report concludes that the number of 16-19 year olds 'seeking permanent work' in Nottinghamshire rose from 5,316 in October 1978 to 17,896 in October 1984. (The figures include the officially unemployed and those on Manpower Services Commission schemes.) As 'a very crude approximation', the 1984 figures represent about 27% of the age group.

But the problem goes deeper. Not only has there been an increase in the numbers seeking work. There has also been an increase in the average period of unemployment - 5,000 out of work for at least six months in April 1984, compared with less than 700 in April 1979; 2,225 out of work for over a year in October 1984, compared with well under 200 in most of 1979 and 1980; 519 out of work for over two years in October 1984, compared with about 20 in 1979 to 1981.

Even so, these figures seriously understate the problem of long-term unemployment. They do not take into account those who attend MSC schemes or go back to school or college after 16 simply because they cannot find work. Although they do not appear in the statistics, they are also part of the long-term unemployed - as the authors put it, 'part of the same stream ... now moving on from youth to adulthood without any significant experience of regular paid employment.'

If they were included, says the report, the figures would look even more disturbing.

In fact, the way the figures are collected and presented creates significant distortions. By October 1984, 85.5% of those who had left school in Nottingham

in the summer had not found a full-time job. Yet, officially, only 8.8% were unemployed. 32.2% were on YTS schemes and 42.6% had returned to full-time education.

The point is far from academic. If official statistics hide the true extent and nature of youth unemployment, then they obstruct proper understanding of its consequences. Dr Lawrence and Ms O'Callaghan are in no doubt that youth unemployment on the present scale is 'a fundamental threat to the structure of our society. Without regular paid employment young people cannot follow the traditional path into adulthood.'

But perhaps the gravest charge concerns the effects on the economy as a whole: 'The YTS, and its predecessor YOP, may have actually damaged the employment prospects of young people by seriously distorting the normal operations of the labour market.' Ironically, under a government dedicated to the free-market economy, state subsidy is now so pervasive that many employers no longer offer traditional jobs for young people. If present trends continue, there may eventually be a permanent government subsidy for all youth employment.

Nor are young people the only ones affected. Subsidised youth employment drives out not only unsubsidised youth employment but unsubsidised adult employment as well.

What is to be done? Well, certainly not what is (or is not) being done now. The report criticises 'the present narrowly based strategy' and directs some of its severest strictures at present government policy.

'In pursuit of a general economic policy designed, amongst other things, to produce what the government has called "real" jobs in the private sector, in contrast to the allegedly "less real" jobs of the public sector, a massive programme of state subsidy for the private sector has been embarked on which now threatens to have long term repercussions on the whole labour market, without any clear evidence that it will prove of lasting benefit to the young people it is intended to help.'

However, the report accepts its own limitations in dealing specifically with local problems and local solutions. The only real hope of improvement, it

suggests, lies in changes at national level. Moreover, national policies are not only damaging in themselves, but also limit what can be done locally, a position made even worse by increasing central government control over local authorities.

The report does offer a few ideas for purely local action, though so minimal that they only reinforce the general sense of impotence and despair: better information and publicity, present county council policies pursued more vigorously - and a little in-house job creation in the form of more research.

The most interesting recommendations, though of little immediate use, concern the 'hidden' economy - or jobs the taxman doesn't know about (the so-called 'black' economy or the 'ready cash' economy - a nicely sanitised phrase used recently in the House of Commons by John Biffen, who suggested the government rather approved of it). The authors do not condone this 'hidden' economy, since it 'may undermine the position of normal workers and employers', but they suggest that, as it is not going to go away, 'an attempt should be made to evolve a way of making it more acceptable, as well as expanding it in new directions.'

This seems rather optimistic - since the whole point of the 'hidden' economy is to avoid tax and other forms of official interference, any attempt to make it 'more acceptable' would surely be self-defeating.

However, this does suggest an area of debate much wider than the terms the report can allow itself. This debate would be about concepts of 'work' and 'employment', and why our social consciousness and self-esteem are so locked into the idea of 'having a job'.

In 'The Long Revolution', Raymond Williams described how, when a magistrate asked William Morris, 'What are you?', Morris replied, 'I am an artist, and a literary man', understanding correctly that the question referred to his occupation. A more proper answer, thought Williams (who considered the question insolent), would have been, 'A man'. It is all too easy to imagine that millions today might reply, 'Nothing. I'm unemployed.'

A hedgehog comes to town

THE GOOD THING about small, non-professional magazines is that the message is undiluted, with none of the adulteration you find when real journalists get their hands on a story. No misrepresentations, accidental or deliberate, no simplification down to the supposed level of the readers, no bogus mateiness. Badly written, badly spelt, badly typed, badly laid out, badly printed, maybe (though the standard is often high), but at least they say what they want to say in the way they want to say it.

The most riveting example to hit (a few) Nottingham bookstands recently is Radical Hedgehog. This is mostly handwritten (but perfectly legible) apart from a couple of reprints from other papers. It's pacifist and anarchist, though there is an editor - at least, there's an editorial signed by the eponymous Phil Hedgehog. The rest of the staff are Bagpuss Omnipuscle and Spiny Norman.

The paper is full of uninhibited shouts and slogans: 'Orwell was an optimist,' says the cover, and the pessimism is so relentlessly energetic that it's really quite cheerful.

'We wake each morning with a scream of terror,' glooms an article inside, 'because each morning we remember just exactly where we are. Like all living things we breathe, move, reproduce and eventually die, and to us that seems satisfactory. The trouble comes when we realise that between Birth and Death is a huge lump of Shit called Life. Life is unfair at the present time, tho' it's not nature's fault. Normal Service will be resumed as soon as possible. Thank you for listening.'

And, on the same page, more practical suggestions: 'Let's all cause criminal damage shall we, let's burn down the offices of the Sun, let's swindle the army, cripple the banks and cut the phone lines ... sorry, am I boring you?'

But the anarchism isn't all words. Last year the editor and assistant went to Leeds for Stop the City. Bagpuss was arrested. (There is quite a literature now of first person accounts of being

arrested. Someone should bring out an anthology. It wouldn't be very reassuring about British police and British justice, but then no anarchist would expect it to be.)

The police in Leeds made what nowadays seems almost a routine attempt to frame him, claiming that he pushed over an old lady and assaulted a policeman. But their heart wasn't in it. The arresting officer didn't turn up for the trial, so Bagpuss was bound over, the whole affair looking like a tactic for getting demonstrators off the streets, as well as causing them inconvenience - Bagpuss had to travel up to Leeds from Gloucestershire three times for a total of 8½ minutes in court. Effective policing it might have been, but justice it wasn't.

Bagpuss did find out a few things, though: '... this being my first time arrested, I'm hardly a hardened case but what I quickly learnt is: a) YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS; b) you are guilty until proven innocent; c) you "smell like animals"; d) you are "brainless bastards"; e) you are a "shitbag"; f) several officers would like to see you shot at dawn; g) locker keys are offensive weapons. The most important thing to remember is to say as little as possible, don't be cantankerous (overtly abusive), and DON'T SMILE TOO OFTEN! THAT'S TANTAMOUNT TO SAYING, "PLEASE SIR HIT ME!"'

Very instructive. But what makes this issue of Radical Hedgehog particularly interesting is the autobiographical content. Alternative papers are usually obsessively anonymous (for very good reasons, such as the unhealthy interest taken in them by the police and other authorities). Readers rarely find out anything about the people who produce them, their names, their backgrounds, their motives.

But we find out quite a lot about Phil Hedgehog in this issue. We learn, for example, that his name is Philip Tonge, that he comes from Coalway in the Forest of Dean, that he sells Radical Hedgehog at rock concerts and protest rallies, that he is eighteen years old and that he has recently decamped from Gloucestershire to join Peace News in Nottingham, which must be why Radical Hedge-

hog is now on sale locally.

We learn all this mainly because Phil, a trifle naively, as he tells us, sent Radical Hedgehog to the local free paper, the Forest Review, 'asking to be written about but foolishly insulting the Paper'.

Not entirely unpredictably, Review journalist Tom Price, ('an alcoholic hack who has a fine job writing about sheep shit half his journalistic career') promptly showed the police an article in the paper about reusing stamps to get free postage, giving himself a nice front page headline, 'Police study stamp fiddle.'

Phil was so incensed that he reproduced the whole article in this issue of Radical Hedgehog, accompanied by his own indignant comments. Strangely enough, dirty trick though it was, Mr Price's piece presents a not unattractive picture. It gives excellent publicity to some of Phil's views, and even repeats some fairly explicit suggestions on how to vandalise porn shops, and how to attach posters to large shop windows in such a way that the glass has to be smashed to remove them.

Moreover, Phil is allowed a few effective replies. Thus, on the subject of reused stamps, Mr Price reports: 'When I told Mr Tonge that it was a clear incitement to defraud he said: "I don't look at it like that. It is useful for people who haven't enough money and have a lot of mail to send out."'

But, as Mr Price remarks, the most 'intriguing slant' on the business is that Phil's parents run the Forest of Dean Armoury, which 'supplies rifles, pistols, shotguns and hunting knives to a large clientele.

'Mr Frank Tonge told me: "He is totally opposed to our business but we avoid conflict over it within the family. We respect his views - he does a tremendous amount of work for the peace cause - but we certainly don't agree with some of the actions he recommends."'

You begin to see why Phil swapped the Forest of Dean for the East Midlands. Welcome to Nottingham, Phil, home of Peace News and the Royal Ordnance Factory, known locally as the Gun Factory. As Radical Hedgehog says, 'The only good gun is a broken one.' ●

A breath of city air

A TOWN WALK CAN be very informal. No need to go anywhere special. Just start where you are. This walk started very unspecially in the Victoria Centre. Did you know the Victoria Centre is only fifteen minutes' walk from a farm? An urban farm, of course - the St Ann's farm on Stonebridge Road.

Take the back exit into Glasshouse Street (the smelly way out where the drunks pee), cross the road and, ignoring Owd Boots, which used to be a sensible pub called the White Hart, cut through to Huntingdon Street. Cross Huntingdon Street and turn left at the bottom round the big surface car park, which used to be the Huntingdon Street Bus Station.

This is an odd part of Nottingham with no particular character, a feeling of being on the way to somewhere else. The ghost of the old bus station, perhaps. The Central Market site is being redeveloped as offices, not an old-style office block but groups of tasteful officelets in red brick with pitched roofs. A funny sort of an idea, as if it were impersonating a small housing estate of the 'good works' kind usually run by housing associations. It's called King Edward Court, because it's on King Edward Street - a vestigial royal connection which is a developer's dream, gratefully seized by the throat. The signboard opposite the New Market pub has a sort of logo/medallion of the randy old bearded sod (Edward VII, of course), which undoubtedly adds a touch of class. (Before the Central Market was built, the House of Correction, or prison, used to be here, treadmill and all, but that sort of (genuine) association would never do.)

Continue between the Victoria Bingo Hall and the Salvation Army's William Booth Memorial Halls (rival valiums?) and into St Mary's Rest Garden, originally an overspill cemetery from St Mary's Church in the Lace Market and now a pleasant little park, as these converted graveyards usually are, though of course the ground is very bumpy. It is overshadowed by British Telecom's vast Bowman Building, though too close for the electronic dishes on top to be visible (who are they listening to? They can't be just for telephone calls, surely - far too innocent). That's the building one of the construction workers kept trying to burn down, alas unsuccessfully.

One or two of the more classy monuments, marble columns and so on, have been left in place. Bendigo's lion is there, of course. But where is Bendigo? Not directly below. The lion used to be nearer the road. At the top end (there is a steep climb with breathtaking views of the Victoria Centre), a gate leads into Victoria Park by a smartly painted row of huts which used to be school kitchens and are now the Jehovah's Witnesses' 'Kingdom Hall'.

Victoria Park is flat and undernourished. Not enough trees or park benches, too much asphalt, just one row of swings for the kids. No slide, climbing frame, roundabout or seesaw. More could be made of it. The buildings round the park are interesting, and potentially it's a very pleasant spot.

'Pleasant' is not quite the word for Victoria Buildings, the earliest municipal housing in Nottingham (1876-7) and, with their great pointed brick arches, impressive in the heavy Victorian manner. Next to them is the Victoria Baths (the presence of the old queen is pervasive on this walk), now the Victoria Leisure Centre - though that doesn't sound right. 'Victoria' and 'Leisure' don't go together nowadays. What about those Victorian values? The Leisure Centre has an attractive little tower of the sort which used to be a landmark until the Bowman Buildings and Victoria Centres came along.

At the back of the park is the Promenade, a neat nineteenth century terrace, too down market for a London square, but definitely hinting at it. And on Robin Hood Street, next to Lynn's Undertakers', there is a handsome multi-windowed Victorian red brick factory, Bancroft's Lace Factory of 1869, with cream-painted stone trimmings and a weather vane on the corner which

looks at first glance like a clock. Not so long ago, this would have been considered a dark, satanic mill. Now it looks rather good.

Leave the park into Robin Hood Street opposite the back end of the factory and turn first right into Stonebridge Road. This is the edge of the St Ann's estate. There are factory units on the right and houses on the left. Stonebridge Road is a wide, wind-swept road on a long curve, unpromising for a farm - but there it is on the left about two hundred yards down, houses on three sides, factories across the road. A lot of grass, some wooden huts and big tin sheds.

Panning round, you can see on the skyline the top of the Council House dome and St Mary's Church, the Windmill Lane flats at the back of King Edward Park, St Matthias's Church with its small open belfry and, just across the road, a half demolished brick chimney. Very urban, but a real little farm with a paddock, a duckpond with ducks on it, cows, sheep, goats, hens and, in the barn, lots and lots of rabbits.

You can wander round as you please, over the stile and into the paddock to stroke the goats (be ready to abandon your sweets and crisps - goats are greedy, persistent and as bold as brass), into the shed to coo over the baby bunnies. There are two terrapins in a tank in the office, where you can buy eggs and seedlings and put a donation in the box. At the back of the paddock, in front of the long murals of farm animals, there is a small wild patch with bluebells, wild roses and broom. You can dunk your shoes in real cow pats and sheep shit, and go home with them smelling like the proper countryside. All within sound of Little John. Amazing! There should be more of them! ●

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and the correct meaning of turpitude.

'The candidates who get through selection to begin a probationary year are regarded as among the brightest officers of their generation. Ten per cent are female and the Branch has up to half a dozen black officers, higher than any other area of CID.

'Many recruits are the products of public school or other private education. They are also

notable for a level of "social adroitness" which will fit them for protection duties, or the Establishment atmosphere of the Security Service.'

So nothing to worry about. A broad cross section of race, gender, social background and political opinion. No reason to suspect prejudice against left-wing, anti-nuclear, trade union and other dissident organisations. Quite right of the Tory-controlled committee to trust them. ●

No animal magic at the circus

THE CIRCUS HOFFMAN was on the Forest at the beginning of May. There was a demo against exploitation of animals, but I'd already contracted to take my four year old daughter and her friend, and as I hadn't been to a circus since I was a kid myself, I was curious how it would seem.

I was punished. Minutes after we took our seats, my daughter developed a cough. Not any old cough, but an every-twenty-seconds-for-the-whole-performance, sounded-like-bringing-up-her-entire-guts cough. People turned and glared as if I was the rat who brought the Plague to Europe.

Then during the interval her friend dropped her toy plastic ring through a gap in the seating on to the grass below. Tears poured down her cheeks. It was obviously an emergency. Prising up a footboard, I parachuted into the gloom. A man's voice floated down after me. 'Eh mate. While you're down there, can you see a dummy? I think it's by that blue crisp packet.' There were hundreds of crisp packets, but I found it. In fact, I found two dummies. But I didn't find a toy plastic ring. Then the Hyson Green kids came swarming under the canvas like the SAS. Twice they were chunked out by yelling attendants - but they found the ring.

And the circus? Most of the audience were kids, and they enjoyed it, especially the animals. But the demonstrators were right. Children are too young to see the sadness and the seediness. The lions were reduced to overgrown, not quite housetrained dogs, sullenly obeying the whiplashes of a plump, smirking young man with glossy black hair whose name (I swear the ringmaster said) was Louise. They performed ritual acts of human abasement, begging and grovelling as well as jumping reluctantly through flaming hoops. They didn't like it much, but that clearly is the point - man showing how intelligent he is by making animals, especially large and dangerous ones, do pointless things which even animal intelligence revolts at.

The horses, six beautiful tawny coloured clones, were even more pointless. Geoffrey Hoffman, tall and slender with slim hips, small bum and tight pants, and again brandishing a whip, set them galloping round the ring in

untidy bunches. One of them was singled out to bow, or rather grovel, by rubbing its forehead in the sawdust. Then half galloped one way and the other half galloped the other way. Finally, each horse was brought to a halt in turn and sent docilely out of the ring.

The audience was warned not to use flash while the elephants were performing. (Would it set off an elephants' revolt?) They were Indian elephants, small and neat (well, smallish and neatish), with delicate lacy gold head-dresses, suggesting the harem. One of them took a small revenge by scooping up sawdust from the ring in the crook of its trunk and blowing it backwards between its legs over one of the attendants.

The elephants had little piggy eyes, small and knowing with a malicious glint as if tiny, highly intelligent beings were dressed up in great baggy skins. They did unelephantine things. One kicked a red plastic football. Another perched on a tiny stool like a monstrous budgie. Another stepped fastidiously over a ring-side flunkie, liveried in red and black, who then put his head in its mouth. Why the flunkie, not the trainer? To emphasise the subjugation? (Women played a similar role in other acts.) Finally, they formed a line, each with its front feet on the bum of the one in front.

The bears were trained by a Norwegian. You could tell he was Norwegian because he wore black knickerbockers and a red waistcoat with a picture of a Viking longboat on the back, and the band (synthesiser and drums) played the Swedish Rhapsody. Two black bears danced - or rather one wrestled with the Viking, and the other did a slow, graceful pirouette. Then they scootered and pushed each other round in a handcart. A little brown bear slid down down a slide, then did it again to prove it wasn't an accident.

And that was the animals. It was remarkable in its way, and doubtless much of it was done by kindness (sugar lumps were much in evidence), though probably the only real way to be kind to a lion is to lie down and let it eat you. But it was a pretty banal set of tricks - nothing beyond a human child of three. It was only entertainment because animals did it. Three of the four species are approaching

extinction in the wild. The one thing we apparently cannot do is to leave animals alone.

There is a completely different atmosphere about humans performing self-imposed tasks. Rather than persuading an elephant to stand on a stool, human ingenuity, strength and agility is far better employed inventing heart-stopping flights on the trapeze, or creating mind-boggling bits of nonsense like strapping a pole to the strongman's forehead and balancing on it a large blue revolving globe with a silver map of the world on the outside and a pretty young woman inside.

These pretty, flimsily dressed young women are clearly essential to the circus. What are the sexual politics? There was a magnificently lithe female trapeze artiste, in a minority of one among three more fully dressed men. She did everything they did - and in high-heeled shoes. All the other young women were subordinates - fetchers and carriers, strikers of decorative poses, targets for blindfolded Mexican knifethrowers (but, like the joke says, he wasn't very good - he kept missing) - while the chaps cracked whips, chunked knives, humbled the beasts of the field and generally showed they were the lords of creation.

The sole exception apart from the trapeze artistes was the silver and blue globe act, where the strongman was in fact a strongwoman, the strongest in the world, said the ringmaster, a 'female Atlas'. She was superbly top-heavy (no, I don't just mean her tits), emphatically not pretty - and she was German. Somehow, given the ambience, she had to be German - shades of decadent Weimar Berlin? Here the sexuality had a different frisson: could one imagine a young man in the globe? Why not? Well, she did a mini striptease while the world went round, emerging from her little trapdoor even more scantily clad than she went in. Clever stuff, but what sort of message is this sending to the children who make up most of the audience? Should they all read 'Nights at the Circus'?

And the clowns? Only mildly funny. The one who came round selling raffle tickets (the prize was a giant cuddly toy elephant) smelled of drink. But, of course, that's how clowns should smell, like Father Christmases. ●