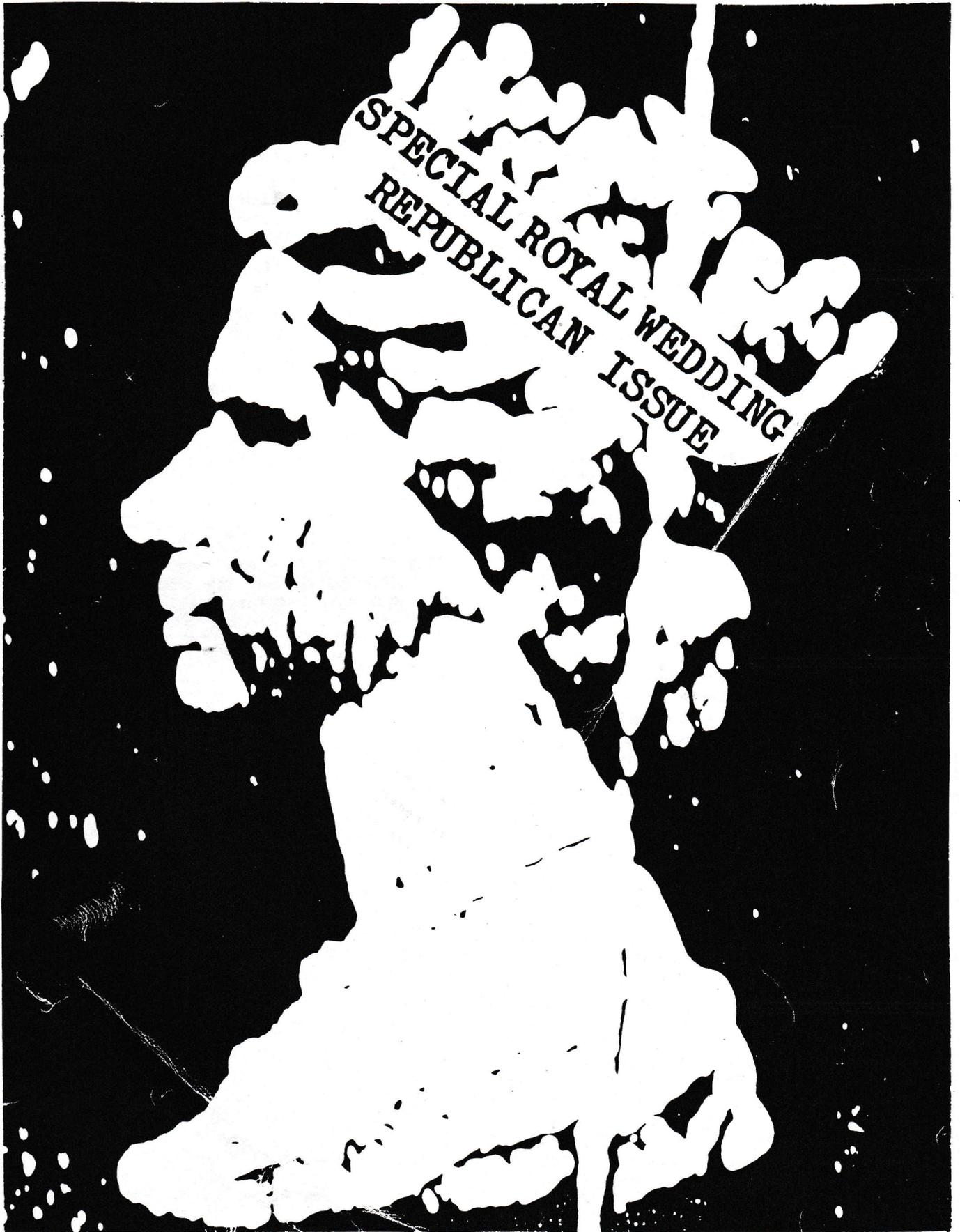


NOTTINGHAM EXTRA

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HEARSAY . . .

Spyball

MOST WORRYING STORY recently was the one about the Czech Embassy official trawling for the names of firms opposed to working on Star Wars. His inept attempt to pose as an Italian (i.e. an ally - they've got cruise in Sicily, site construction by Mafia Inc.) was exposed by a trick question about Italy playing Brazil in the World Cup. Well, I mean, Italy didn't play Brazil in the World Cup, did they?

As the super sleuth explained: "Even an Italian who knew nothing about football - and I don't know any like that - would have known which side his country was playing in the World Cup."

But this is sportism of the most blatant kind. Or are the Italians so very different from the English? I know people who hardly knew England were in the World Cup at all, let alone whether they played Portugal, Belgium or Morocco (yes, no, yes), though I suppose most of them eventually realised England were playing Argentina. Admittedly quite a few of them are spies, but not all of them.

I think it was all a cunning piece of disinformation to obscure the sophisticated counter-espionage methods employed. The real giveaway was the chap sticking to his Czech name of Josef. Not many Italians are called Josef. British agents are trained to spot things like that.

But the really nail-biting thought is that it might catch on - instant nationality tests based on one country's stereotypes of another country's sporting obsessions.

Terrify yourself by imagining the KGB won't believe you're not a Chinese spy (forget you're six feet tall, blond and called Julian - they're masters of disguise, the Chinese) unless you can answer the following questions.

1. In which year were England not in the World Cup finals: (a) 1970; (b) 1978; (c) 1982; (d) 1815?

2. Does the word "Gatting" suggest: (a) a machine gun; (b) present participle of the verb "to gat"; (c) a village in Oxfordshire; (d) 183 not out?

3. When did an Englishman last win the Wimbledon singles title: (a) 55 BC; (b) 1985; (c) 1936 or thereabouts; (d) wasn't it a Frenchman who said that winning is not so important as taking part?

The answers are as follows.

1. (b) and (d), though 1815 was a good year for English sport (we won the Battle of Waterloo on the playing fields of Eton).

2. (d) - though the others are more plausible.

3. (c) would be a reasonable stab, but

(d) is the only decently English response to a question which is obviously intended to humiliate. ●

Chemotherapy

ANOTHER QUIZ. In July's "Nottinghamshire Farmer", Tony Gamble, chairman of the National Farmers' Union in Notts., wrote about his travels round the country. In August 1823, William Cobbett, the great radical journalist and politician, did the same. Which of these two extracts is which?

(1) "Botley lies in a valley, the soil of which is a deep and stiff clay. Oak trees grow well; and this year the wheat grows well, as it does upon all the clays that I have ever seen. I have never seen the wheat better in general, in this part of the country, than it is now. I have, I think, seen it heavier; but never clearer from blight."

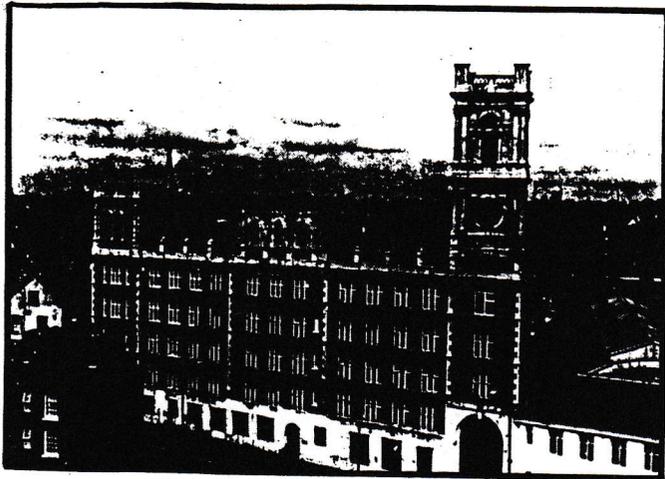
(2) "Nowhere on my travels did I see the crops looking as well as they do in our county. There does appear to have been some economies made in some areas as far as nitrogen and chemicals are concerned. On the second visit especially, there seemed to be some evidence of grass weed control being very patchy, whether the sprayers have been used and have not worked - I don't know." ●

NOTTINGHAM EXTRA is published by John Sheffield, 2 Amptill Rise, Sherwood, Nottingham.

As regular readers will know, the first three issues were solo efforts. In the last issue, however, I said I hoped to include articles by other people from issue 4 onwards. In this issue, accordingly, pages 4 and 5 are by Ross Bradshaw, who plans to contribute regularly, and on page 3 there is a piece on the RSPCA by Murphy Canis, who is pseudonymous for reasons explained in the article. I hope to add more contributors as time goes on. Needless to say, I don't always expect to agree with other contributors' opinions.

Back issues are available. Send an 18p stamp to the address above, saying which issues you would like (the price covers one, two or all three).

Nottingham Extra is an informal publication, so readers should not be surprised if contents, length and cover price vary from issue to issue. This is by way of explaining the vast size of the article on republicanism which begins on page 6. My excuse is that it was meant to be shorter - and it could have been much longer. ●



Monumental follies

LAMBERT'S FACTORY (above) is a grade II listed building on Talbot Street, dating from 1863. The county council, supported by the city planning committee, has applied for listed building consent to demolish it and build new magistrates' courts on the site. At the end of June, a Department of the Environment inspector held an inquiry into the application, which was vigorously opposed by the Nottingham Civic Society and others. A decision is expected by the end of August.

A strange aspect of the affair is the city planning committee's abrupt change of mind. From instigating the listing of the building in 1979 (and taking the developer to court for starting to demolish it), the committee has now decided, against the advice of its own officers, that there is nothing special about it after all. Indeed, Cllr Peter Burgess, who used to work there, and chaired the planning committee when the building was listed, has argued that it is no more than a monument to "long hours, appalling wages and bad working conditions".

And so it is. Let's go and smash the Pyramids too. After all, few of the world's large buildings are monuments to much the Labour movement holds dear. What we really want is a country full of small buildings which look rather like council houses. Not, of course, Council Houses - our own great civic building is certainly a monument to something. "They were the glory of their time" is, as I recall, the modest inscription on a plaque in the foyer commemorating the councillors who had it built.

After you with the sledgehammer, Cllr Burgess!

And what will the courthouse be a monument to? Let's hear it from an architect at the inquiry. The factory couldn't be included in the final design, he said, because its style would be "quite contrary to the welcoming and relaxed character that is appropriate to a modern court building".

Whatever next? A relaxed and welcoming modern gallows? This promises to be one of Nottingham's more intriguing new buildings. ●

It's a dog's life

BY MURPHY CANIS

THE RSPCA IS WELL-KNOWN to most people, respected, donated to. Its officers - usually the uniformed inspectorate - have been given by the public the job of cleaning up some of the worst excesses of this nation of animal lovers, with no state aid. Its fur campaign has produced some of the best publicity against the use of animal skins for human vanity. The RSPCA's condemnation of fox-hunting has done a great deal to get rid of the respectability the bloodsports lobby so desperately craves. I think we should neither devalue nor discredit the RSPCA's very positive role of highlighting some of humans' worst behaviour towards other species. This preface is important.

However, the RSPCA is also autocratic in too many respects. A leading animal rights activist, Kim Stallwood, was expelled for criticising the RSPCA's very considerable investments in big companies which experiment on animals, and membership applications from animal rights activists are currently being turned down in quantity at a time when - in contrast to other animal issue groups - membership in general is stagnating. As an organisation it has become a battleground.

It is in this context that the annual Council elections are used by "moderates" in the RSPCA to preserve power for the few. Locally, Judith Kemp, Nottingham and Notts. Branch Secretary, has written to local members advising them that, "While I cannot suggest to you how you should vote, I can tell you that the following are known to this Branch as moderate people with the best interests of the Society at heart ..."

The letter, on RSPCA headed paper, is clearly designed exactly to suggest how people should vote. Of the four people recommended, one is Chairman (her word) of the Investment Committee responsible for investing in animal experimentation companies, another describes her occupation as being a "married woman", a third uses his election manifesto to attack "extremists ... (who) cause nothing but harm". All are, in fact, the epitome of moderation.

I do not understand how you can be moderately opposed to cruelty to animals. Moderation does not have a good track record - those who like literary references should turn to Ibsen's play "An Enemy of the People". However, the point is less that moderation is a bad thing but that people should not abuse their power as branch secretaries to suggest who mere footsloggers and can-rattlers mark their crosses for. Democracy is a fragile creature, in need of protection at all levels. This letter from the local RSPCA does not encourage.

To protect my own national membership, I have to use a pseudonym here - I have not had to do this with other groups I have joined! ●

ROVING REPORTS BY ROSS BRADSHAW

Mayday Blues

YOU'D HARDLY THINK that Mayday in Nottingham was, well ... Mayday. One hundred years of workers' struggle, the fight for the eight hour day, the Haymarket Martyrs (framed Chicago anarchists in whose memory Mayday started), the brave illegal demonstrations by Solidarity, Chileans and others living under the military ... Voices call out to us from the past, and world-wide still, as working people protest - there's usually little to celebrate.

But here in Nottingham, with only a year of planning, the Nottingham Trades Council sticks to a losing formula. Ignoring both MayDAY and the Saturday nearest when the public are about, the massed ranks (two hundred or so) walk from the Square to Queen's Walk Community Centre, have a couple of speeches and a few pints. I suppose the good thing about choosing the quietest day of the year to march is that it's less embarrassing parading your weakness in front of a single-public.

Advance publicity it seems is by tradition restricted to a circular sent round Labour Party and Trade Union branches. This is not a local speciality. In Aberdeen, the Trades Council also craved whatever is the opposite of publicity. One year, though, the Aberdeen Trades Council did get posters printed by the local community printers, but didn't pick them up. In a fine example of workers' solidarity, some of the print shop hangers-on illegally flyposted them all over the city centre a couple of nights before the demo. There weren't any posters printed the next year.

More and more, the Nottingham Trades Council depends on non-union groups to keep the numbers in triple figures. This year, there seemed even fewer union banners than previously, and union stalls were equally scarce at Queen's Walk. The biggest group this year, in fact, seemed to be from Nottingham Anarchist Group, all wearing black uniforms. The involvement of non-union groups could charitably be called (to use Marxism Today phraseology) a recognition of the new forces, less charitably a recognition that a solely union affair would be telephone-box size (Marxism Today would maybe call that class reductionism). Even those who do go do so more out of hope ("maybe it will be better this year" - it wasn't), duty (to whom?) or habit. There's certainly nothing for the kids to do.

It seems there are four alternatives.

- (1) Give up.
- (2) Recognise that the Trades Council has minimal drawing power and open up the whole organisation to campaign and community groups

which have shown mobilising ability. The GLC and the various Marxism Today events (and even the Labour Party/Red Wedge) have shown that you can attract even the uncommitted public to radical events. Locally, the Peace Festivals have attracted up to 8,000 people even on a relatively small budget. Such events need not be on the theme of Peace, which brings us to ...

(3) Genuinely building a workers' Mayday with, for example, exhibitions of union history, union films, providing space for kindred groups, e.g. a worker co-op trade fair. Unions need not be boring, masculine, resolution-bound turn-offs. Manchester has seen big "union-days" attended by thousands, and unions still have more money, more paid staff than any opposition group to ensure resources.

(4) Organising directly around workers in struggle. Even the two hundred of us on Mayday or nearest Saturday leafleting in support of the South African goods boycott, or in support of the print workers, would do more for the spirit of Mayday than a century of drab marches.

If it's none of these next year, I think I'll just stick to the allotment. ●

Chernoscale

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I went on a tour of Sizewell nuclear power station in Suffolk. There's currently one nuclear power plant there and the government are gearing themselves up to build another. Anyway, so impressed was I by the technological whizzkiddery of it all that I left my coat inside Sizewell. Next day, a Sunday, I rang them and discovered that the only people with security clearance to go into the area where I'd left my coat were playing golf and could not be contacted. I'd left my coat in the visitor centre. I've often wondered whether an industry which can't simply send a janitor into a display area in search of a lost coat is one to entrust plutonium to.

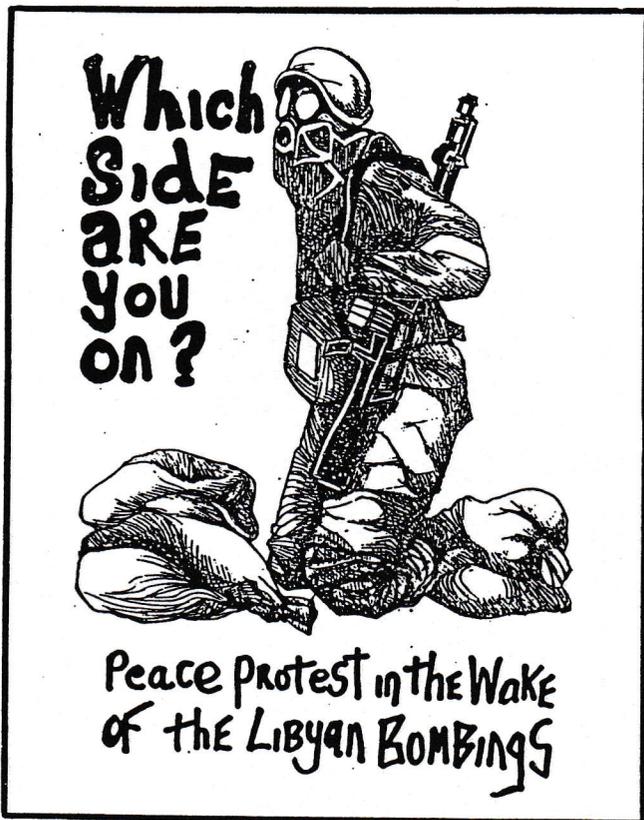
Suffolk is in my opinion a lovely county, and Sizewell shares a coast line with the Minsmere Bird Sanctuary and the famous village of Dunwich which fell into the sea, so I'd especially prefer Suffolk not to be irradiated. On my last visit, there was yet another "no cause for alarm" leak, and the same weekend I came down with vomiting, headaches and lethargy. I did not get paranoid about this since wherever I go on holiday I get ill, but it was rather tempting.

Recently lots of friends, fine sane sensible people, have become paranoid. People who've scoffed at veganism have given up dairy produce overnight, expectant mothers have rung everyone from the family doctor to the DHSS to

ask what will happen to their babies. Afternoon shoppers have found themselves in chemists asking about iodine tablets. None of these people I'm thinking of are usually haunted by fears, or are "over emotional", to quote a platitude one was given.

Paranoia has almost become fashionable. All of my now paranoid friends reported they were not alone. As the weather changed bringing Ukrainian dust over Britain, the nuclear threat was normal everyday shop talk in my local grocer's. Nobody, nobody at all was willing to believe our government, any government, on this one. In fifteen years of politics, I've never come across a feeling like it.

What was especially interesting was the concern felt also for the Soviet and Eastern Bloc citizens - radiation is no respecter of national boundaries. Nor is compassion. I am not noted for my optimism but I do feel that more and more people are realising - and I think Bob Geldof has encouraged this a lot - that people of different nations have more in common with each other than with their own governments. It is only a pity it has taken famines and near nuclear disaster to foster this feeling. ●



Which Side Are You On? Peace Protest in the Wake of the Libyan Bombings, by Les Parsons (Nottingham Peace Action Network). 75p. Available from Mushroom Bookshop

THIS IS AN EXCELLENT pamphlet and should be read by anyone remotely interested in peace action and/or the response of the individual to crisis. Les Parsons is an activist in Forest Fields Peace Group and this is a very personal account of his own reaction to the USA bombing Libya. Les reports on most of the main

local "instant responses" - the instant demonstration in the Market Square, the incursions and break-ins at USAF Chilwell, the long CND march from the city centre, the large national protest in London, the occupation of the Conservative Party roof-top, the Women for Peace sit-down etc. All these actions were within days of the US terrorism and required no "resolutions at branch meetings" but were the spontaneous actions of the "ramshackle urban peace guerrillas, armed with kitchen step-ladders ... the banner made from old sheet."

The pamphlet is not solely, though, a chronicle of events, but a manifesto of the direct action wing of the modern peace movement - a movement based on personal solidarity not politicians. Not just that: Les goes beyond the politics of sloganising and talks of his fear, his hopes and his tears. Such personal writing is quite a new thing for men writing on politics. And Les writes well. The pamphlet - 68 pages - was written fast before the emotions faded and is improved by it. Breathless rushes can often ultimately be fairly shallow, but Les has succeeded in giving clear impressions of what was going on and how he felt, and the pamphlet is both angry (at the bombings, at police brutality) and loving (to his family, to colleagues in the peace movement).

"Which Side Are You On?" is by no means perfect, though. The politics of the bombing fall in with the general peace movement "Reagan is a loony cowboy" view and ignore the reason for US involvement in the Middle East (strategic interests, propping up the Israeli government etc.). Less excusably, Les ignores one of the demonstrations in Nottingham (the same day Les, and CND, were in London) which was one of the biggest black demonstrations here in years. This was organised by the Union of Pakistani Organisations and had only token white support. My final doubt is that for most people work, children, school or whatever preclude the sort of response Les was able to make. Whilst Les is not childless, the people mentioned in the pamphlet as colleagues are largely young, unemployed, full-time peace professionals. I wish to take nothing away from what they do, but we must be wary of seeing their actions as the ultimate in how we campaign for peace. (Personally, I find it harder to talk to neighbours about war than to sit down or march.)

These criticisms apart, I hope the pamphlet needs a quick reprint (500 produced initially). Finally, Geoff Young, who did the typing, layout, printing, collating and sales, deserves equal credit for a fine, inexpensive production. Do buy a copy or two.

PS. Almost immediately after writing "Which Side ..." Les Parsons was to start a forty day prison for a fine non-payment for a previous peace offence. In a later issue of Nottingham Extra, I'll return to the question of "voluntary imprisonment", including interviewing him. ●

Is the Queen really necessary?

IN THE SILLY SEASON which always accompanies a royal wedding, I want to argue the case for republicanism. It is not a very fashionable cause at the moment, and although many people on the left are at least passively republican, it is unlikely to find a place in the Labour or even the Communist Party manifesto. The general attitude seems to be, why bother? Aren't there more important things to worry about in late Thatcherite Britain than the privileged but largely symbolic and only mildly offensive royal family?

The monarchy seems to be regarded as a hermetically sealed institution with minimal influence which can safely be ignored until we've begun to build socialism. Or perhaps adapted, however improbably, to a future egalitarian society - Comrade Windsor, Hereditary Chairperson of the United Republic of Great Britain (though not, of course, Northern Ireland).

Prerogative

Yet almost the first thing Neil Kinnock will have to do if Labour wins the Election is to clock on at Buckingham Palace. He won't be Prime Minister until he's done that. Indeed, he won't be Prime Minister unless the Queen asks him, the choice of Prime Minister being one of the remaining royal prerogatives. And in the case of a hung Parliament (not so unlikely in these three horse days), that choice may not be an insignificant one. Of course, the Queen will act with the utmost constitutional propriety, taking the best possible advice, but her role is not merely decorative.

Nor is this the only point at which the Queen's role is more than pageantry and royal visits (though these too can be significant political events). The monarchy is at the heart of some of our least satisfactory constitutional practices, and a crucially anti-democratic influence wherever it touches our government and our national life.

Not that there is any political mileage in republicanism. The reverse, in fact, which is why the Labour leadership has undoubtedly been right, tactically at least, in its long-standing belief that any attack on the monarchy is an electoral liability, and why this ancient and honourable political creed, with its one equivocal success between 1649 and 1660, seems, publicly at least, to be not merely silent but extinct.

In its thousand year history, the British monarchy has probably never been more popular, and the monarch more widely liked and respected, than today. Contrived though much of the celebration was, the 1977 Silver Jubilee and the 1980 Royal Wedding still inspired widespread displays of affection and



loyalty. Even if many turned up or turned on only to see the show, there was little active hostility except from small groups of "Stuff the Jubilee" left-wingers.

So what is the case against the monarchy?

Every so often articles appear in the left-wing press supposedly attacking the monarchy and putting the case for a republic. They are usually disappointing. Instead of stating the fundamental objections to monarchy as an institution and the case for its abolition, they almost always end up as character assassination jobs on individual members of the royal family. This is largely counterproductive. We all know that some of the royal family are sitting targets for the character hitman, and perhaps Spitting Image-style attacks knock some of the gloss off the royal veneer and make the institution itself more open to question; but unless the entire royal family becomes so obviously despicable that by popular consent the only answer is to do a Duke of Windsor on the lot of them, then personalities are as likely to stimulate interest and support as opposition.

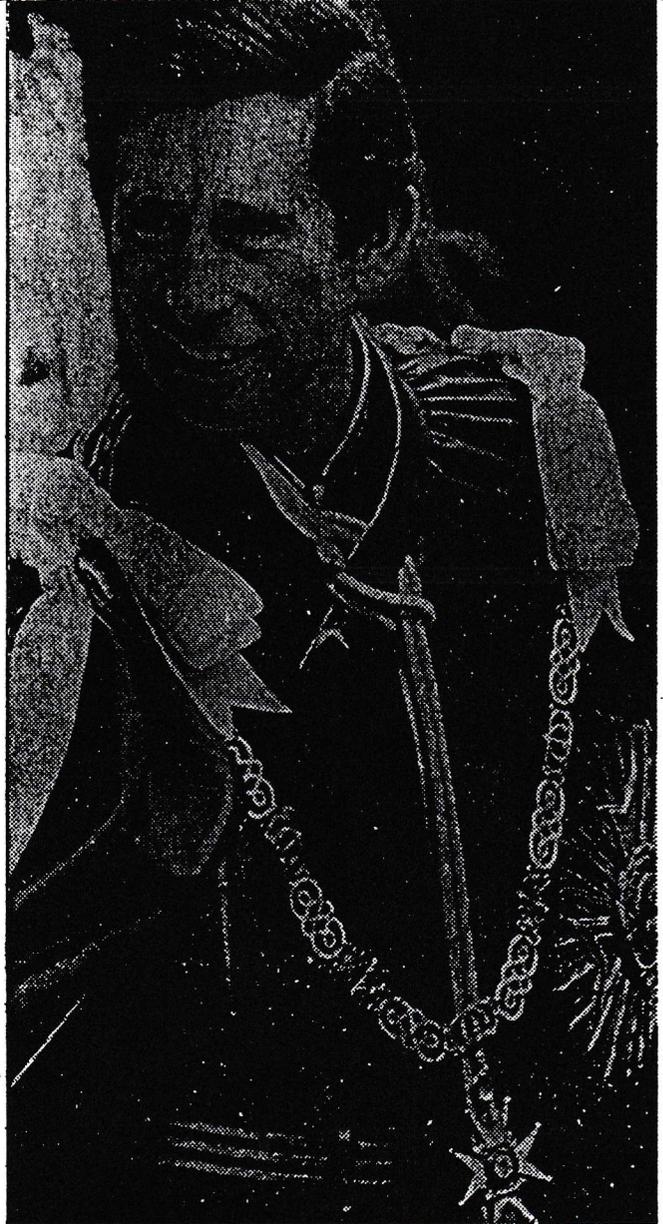
The monarchy has survived far worse than the raffishness of Princess Margaret, the rattiness of Princess Anne (now redeemed by good works), the self-assured simplicities of Prince Philip and the widely publicised pre-marital unchastities of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson. (Interesting that requirements are relaxed for wives of younger sons - her non-virginity would have excluded her as a potential Princess of Wales and future Queen. For the same reason, it was almost inevitable that Prince Charles would marry someone very young.)

Peccadilloes

As with any institution, the virtues or vices of the characters in the royal soap opera will only become significant if they are really spectacular or the show runs into trouble. And, from a marketing point of view, the peccadilloes of Princess Margaret and Prince Andrew are a wonderful foil to the porcelain rectitude of the Queen. If they didn't exist, the public relations people would be sorely tempted to invent them. Perhaps they have.

The monarch is the only one who must not be seriously unfit for the job. That is why it is argued that Wallis Simpson did the monarchy excellent service when she took the wayward Edward VIII off its hands, offering a handy excuse for replacing the unreliable playboy with his dull but conscientious younger brother (and, more important, his sterling old trouserer of a wife).

But how easy it is to slip into personalities when discussing the royal family! And, in the case of the Queen, how unprofitable, so well-hidden is her real personality behind the inviolable mystique thought necessary to the monarchy in Britain. Not for us the bicycling monarchs of Scandinavia, who might



not even be recognised in the street. The Queen likes horses, dogs, and big complicated jigsaws; her cultural tastes are neither adventurous nor intellectual; she is said to have a sense of humour; she is said to be shy; she is rumoured to dislike the petty bourgeois bumptiousness of Margaret Thatcher and to have been quite taken by the caricature West Riding perkiness of Harold Wilson. But what can be made of that?

What seems reasonably certain is that, as a model of diligent constitutional propriety, the Queen is as good as we've had (and, sadly for republican hopes, Prince Charles promises to be just as popular and hardworking).

Compare the Queen with her brooding, meddler great grandmother, sulking in embittered widowhood at Windsor until the bad drains drove her back to London and an old age of undeserved popularity. Or lecherous, gourmandising old Edward VII ("Better him than a poor man's pig," my great grandfather is reported to have said on hearing of his death). Or stiff, neurotic George V,

terrified by the wild revolutionaries of the first ever Labour government (Ramsay MacDonald and Jimmy Thomas, no less!), and desperately afraid of human warmth and contact, even from his own family - "I was always frightened of my father," he said when discussing the education of his sons. "They must be frightened of me." Or the unsurprising product of such childrearing practices, that bundle of chain-smoking, stuttering nerves, George VI, utterly dependent on his durable wife (the true rock on which the present royal family is built), decent, but in all probability driven to an early death by the unwelcome, overwhelming demands of the job (one reason, it is surmised, why the Queen Mother was so implacably unforgiving of the Duchess of Windsor).

The Queen, in contrast, can hardly seem other than balanced, healthy, competent and very proper, both personally and constitutionally.

So, if personalities are tempting but unproductive, in what terms should we argue for a republic? I shall use two lines of approach: from basic principle, and from existing practice.

Antediluvian

The principle is straightforward. If we believe in human dignity, freedom and equality - in democracy, in fact - then governments should be freely chosen, open to scrutiny, criticism and replacement, and should not be swayed by secret, undemocratic influences, including inherited wealth and privilege. None of these criteria can be met by an hereditary monarchy whose very principle (if it can be called a principle) is non-election, especially one as remote and entangled in antediluvian ritual as our own.

In fact, there is very little of principle in either the origins or the perpetuation of our monarchy. We have simply been lumbered with it by an historical process which in most other countries has led to the more rational conclusion of a republic.

Like the rest of pre-history, the origins of monarchy are obscure (though not necessarily discreditable). Tom Paine supposed that the first kings were the leaders of "banditti of ruffians" who imposed their rule by force. But humanity has always needed leaders - those whose knowledge and skills are recognised, valued and deferred to by the rest of the community, preferably by consent, all too often by force. In times of crisis, leadership is useful, even essential. What is not essential is that leadership should become self-perpetuating, parasitic, oppressive and unresponsive to, often contemptuous of, the needs and wishes of the led.

This, sad to say, is a not seriously misleading characterisation of the history of our monarchy and the social system of which it is the apex.



No community organising itself afresh would freely choose to be governed by hereditary leaders, however admirable, whose successors might be as unsuitable as so many of our monarchs have been, except where the power of past habits was too strong or where, as in the rather special case of post-Franco Spain, the monarchy can act as stalking-horse for radical change.

After the American Revolution, for example, there was a move in reactionary circles to make the office of president hereditary; but this was little more than a rearguard action by vested privilege nervous of the thoroughgoing democracy advocated by Paine and his followers.

Now, many apologists for the monarchy cheerfully concede the democratic principle, but argue that it is irrelevant to United Kingdom practice, because the real government is elected, and the monarch has only a ceremonial function as head of state with a few residual powers which reinforce democracy rather than threaten it. Thus the issue can no longer be one of principle, because the principle was accepted long ago when Parliament became supreme. The issue now is how it works in practice: clearly, no one starting from scratch would invent something so delightfully bizarre as the British monarchy - but it has evolved into its present form in response to the needs of the British people and is far too useful to be discarded.

We are confronted, in other words, by classic British pragmatism - it may not be

logical, but it works, so let's hang on to it. Affront to our democratic instincts it may be (though the democratic instincts of our rulers are not always self-evident), but it really is a wonderful British institution, the envy of the world etc. (like British policemen), and if we got rid of it we should almost certainly get something worse:

"... always keep a-hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse."

So let's take a closer look at Nurse - at existing practice. How does the monarchy work? What are its effects on our political and social life? Is it worth the trouble of replacing (or keeping) it?

By the mid-nineteenth century, it was obvious that political power had effectively passed from the monarch to Parliament, and that the powers of the monarchy were not only limited but were still declining, while the powers of Parliament were still increasing to the point where they would inevitably become almost all-inclusive. This was a constitutional development which Queen Victoria never wholly accepted or even understood, but it was clear enough to the doyen of constitutional theorists, Walter Bagehot, who, in "The English Constitution", published in 1867, distinguished between the "dignified" and the "efficient" parts of the constitution. The monarchy was the "dignified" part, providing the pageantry and the illusion. The politicians were the "efficient" part and did the actual governing. The illusion, Bagehot believed, was necessary to prevent the dangerous, untutored masses from realising that they too might play a part in government.

Less deviously

By the 1980s, a Central Office of Information pamphlet, "The Monarchy in Britain", felt free to explain the position less deviously: "The Queen reigns, but does not rule. The United Kingdom is governed by Her Majesty's Government in the name of the Queen." That seems innocuous enough, though there is a rider that "many important areas of government ... still require the participation of the Queen".

The significant word is "participation". The Queen takes part, runs the theory, but in no important matter does she initiate, even where the constitution appears to allow it.

Nevertheless, her role is central and potentially influential, and while her actions are unlikely to be controversial as long as the political waters run smoothly, the key part played by her grandfather in the formation of the 1931 National Government suggests that the Labour movement should be at least agnostic about the innocence of the monarch's constitutional activities. (I shall look at the 1931 crisis in more detail later.)

Nor should we dismiss this as ancient history. If reports are true, Labour governments have been nobbled more recently. It has



been suggested, for example, that, in the 1940s, George VI influenced the Attlee government against further nationalisation, and, in the 1970s, the Queen influenced the Callaghan government against devolution because of fears that it might lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. How often this sort of thing happens is difficult to know. Because of the endemic secrecy of our rulers, we are unlikely to find out, if we ever do, until the memoirs and the official papers begin to dribble out at some distant time in the future.

On the surface, at least, the Queen's role is perfectly represented by the State Opening of Parliament, where her faithful Lords and Commons gather before her (in the House of Lords, it may be noted - the Commons are summoned there by Black Rod) to be told what legislation is planned for the following parliamentary session - but, of course, the words are not her own but her ministers'.

Yet, for an institution whose role is purely formal, the monarchy is woven with extreme intricacy into the fabric of our parliamentary democracy. The fiction goes well beyond opening Parliament as though it were yet another, more ornate, factory or hospital. Together with the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Queen is constitutionally part of Parliament, and constitutionally each Act of Parliament must have the consent of all three parts, the Royal Assent being the final stage before an Act becomes law. (It has not been refused



back ten paces without falling over the stools - which had been carefully arranged so that you did fall over them. Oh dear! We did this from 11.10 to 12.15. At 12.15 all of us went out, each to his own car, and we drove to the Palace and there stood about until we entered a great drawing-room. At the other end there was this little woman with a beautiful waist, and she had to stand with her hand on the table for forty minutes while we went through this rigmarole. We were uneasy, she was uneasy. Then at the end informality broke out and she said, 'You all moved backwards very nicely,' and we all laughed. And then she pressed a bell and we all left her. We were Privy Counsellors: we had kissed hands."

Better things

This productive couple of hours occurred in the middle of the economic crisis which hit the first Wilson government as soon as it took office. Is it ridiculous to suggest that, only six days after the General Election, sixteen Cabinet ministers had better things to do? (Neil Kinnock, incidentally, has already kissed the royal hand: as Leader of the Opposition, he became a Privy Counsellor soon after his election as Leader of the Labour Party in 1983.)

But, after all, does it really matter what trivial royal pantomimes have to be played out, as long as real power lies with the elected government?

Better ask what effect these feudal rigmaroles have on those who take part; what habits of deference, or merely acceptance (however sceptical), they promote; what effect, for example, a weekly discussion of current political issues with the Queen might have on whatever residual radicalism a Labour Prime Minister takes to 10 Downing Street (Harold Wilson became quite devoted; Ramsay MacDonald positively obsequious, as we shall see); what subtle influences might be brought to bear by an essentially conservative monarch who has seen Cabinet papers, Foreign Office despatches and departmental memoranda for the last thirty-four years, and is now on her eighth Prime Minister.

Or does it make very little difference, if only because, after over sixty years of incorporation, most Labour politicians are thoroughly palace-trained anyway.

The initiation in 1924 of the first ever Labour Cabinet into establishment processes is well documented. "Gracious ladies," writes Willie Hamilton in "My Queen and I", his agreeably acidulous account of the monarchy, "alarmed by the advent of a Labour Government and fearing political rape, had their fears immediately allayed when James Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister, turned out in full court dress for his Court levée." (Court dress consisted of blue gold-

since 1707.)

The fiction remains, moreover, that the actual government, the Cabinet formed usually by the leader of the majority party in the House of Commons, is, in fact, merely a part of the Queen's Privy Council, which historically was the vehicle through which the monarch ruled the country. That is why all members of the Cabinet become Privy Counsellors and are obliged to perform an ancient ritual almost as bizarre as the initiation rites of freemasonry. The element of farce was neatly captured by Dick Crossman in his diary entry for 22nd October 1964.

"... we new Ministers were summoned to the Privy Council offices to rehearse the ceremony of becoming a Privy Counsellor. I don't suppose anything more dull, pretentious, or plain silly has ever been invented. There we were, sixteen grown men. For over an hour we were taught how to stand up, how to kneel on one knee on a cushion, how to raise the right hand with the Bible in it, how to advance three paces towards the Queen, how to take the hand and kiss it, how to move



braided tailcoat and white kneebreeches with sword!)

And so with the rest, even the more revolutionary (the most revolutionary had been left out), who donned frock coats and duly trotted off to Buckingham Palace to kneel and kiss the King's hand. Chapter 4 of "My Queen and I", which draws extensively on the diaries of Beatrice Webb, has a grotesquely hilarious account of the early Labour leadership's relations with the Palace.

The psychological processes at work are not hard to guess at. Ralph Miliband indicates some of them in "Parliamentary Socialism.

"Of all the heady experiences which office entailed for Ministers of 'humble origin', there were few more intoxicating than closer proximity to the King and the Royal Family. Leading members of the Labour Party had on occasion met the King and Queen privately, and ordinary Labour backbenchers (and their families) had received their quota of invitations to such functions as Buckingham Palace garden parties. But office was something different. 'As we stood waiting for His Majesty, amid the gold and crimson of the Palace,' Clynes later wrote, 'I could not help marvelling at the strange turn of Fortune's wheel, which had brought Macdonald the starveling clerk, Thomas the engine-driver, Henderson the foundry labourer and Clynes the mill-hand, to this pinnacle beside the man whose forebears had been kings for so many generations. We were making history.'"

The stage was well set for the "great betrayal" of 1931!

The time-consuming formalities of the Privy Council do not end with initiation. Certain legislative measures, such as Orders

in Council (a means of bypassing Parliament, usually in matters of minor importance), require the presence of members of the Cabinet in their capacities as Privy Counsellors. Crossman records journeying from London to Balmoral for this sole purpose in September 1966 when he was Lord President of the Council (one of the resonant feudal titles conferred by our constitutional monarchy on its ministers):

"... the others came in and lined up beside me and I read aloud the fifty or sixty Titles of the Orders in Council, pausing after every half a dozen for the Queen to say, 'Agreed'. ... The Privy Council is the best example of pure mumbo-jumbo you can find. It's interesting to reflect that four Ministers, busy men, all had to take a night and a day off and go up there ... to stand for two and a half minutes while the list of Titles was read out. It would be far simpler for the Queen to come down to Buckingham Palace but it's lèse-majesté to suggest it."

Crossman proposed various reforms, and found Harold Wilson agreeing "in a not very interested way. There he was with his weekly meetings with the Queen, just a little bit jealous of the Lord President for nipping in with his meetings as well".

Strange-sounding

What comes over forcibly in reading Crossman and other descriptions of the monarchy and its relationship with government is the sheer constitutional clutter surrounding it. We are in a world of Prerogatives and Proclamations and Orders in Council, of Letters Patent and Sign Manual Warrants, of Proroguing and Dissolutions. Explanations of these strange-sounding procedures can be found in any adequate textbook on the British Constitution, together with the customary defence that most of them are useful government functions more easily performed by a monarch above party politics than by, say, a president who would probably have emerged through the party process.

From a republican point of view, these arguments are hardly worth the refuting. Most countries manage perfectly well without the inestimable advantages our system confers. Indeed, from an outside point of view, our monarchy is a case of arrested historical development. Whereas two centuries ago almost all countries were ruled by monarchies of one kind or another and republics were the exception, today the reverse is true. Those other countries which have, like the United Kingdom, retained a constitutional monarchy manage with far less procedural and ceremonial baggage. (In this respect, Western Europe is in a little time warp all of its own, a veritable cluster of kinglets and queenlets.)

The truth about the powers and duties of the monarch is that they consist of the bits

1	2	3
THE QUEEN'S HOUSEHOLD		
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and pieces left over after centuries of political power being transferred inexorably to Parliament. We have only refused to take the final, logical step and scrap the monarchy altogether. As it is, those powers that remain with the monarch are there only because it is convenient for them to be there, or, like the tedious nullities of the Privy Council, because no one with sufficient political clout has been irritated enough to abolish them.

Inappropriate

If we wanted a republic, we could easily transfer to an elected president those of the Queen's responsibilities which seemed most useful, and it would be a wonderful opportunity to jettison those which are largely pointless - many of them inappropriate, repugnant even, to a democracy.

Equally inappropriate to a democracy is the social ambience surrounding the Queen, which owes more to the ancient history of the monarchy than to the modern functions constitutional theorists ascribe to it. Reading the Court Circular published daily in "The Times" and the "Daily Telegraph" (instituted by the monarchy's first press secretary in the reign of George II), one is impressed first by how much worthy activity the royal family engages in, opening this, presenting that, attending banquets in support of the other (though it

would be interesting to ask Margaret Thatcher how many of these she would consider "real jobs") - and second by the way it is done, ostensibly bringing the Queen to her people, but in fact blatantly reinforcing our peculiarly hierarchical and snobbish social system.

The Queen opens a newspaper plant in Reading. She is received by Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for the Royal County of Berkshire, Colonel the Hon. Gordon Palmer (all counties, not just royal ones, have a Lord-Lieutenant as the Queen's local representative: titles and military rank predominate; women and trade unionists are in short supply). She is attended by the Hon. Mary Morrison (one of her Women of the Bedchamber), Mr Robert Fellowes (her Assistant Private Secretary) and Major Hugh Lindsay (an Equerry). In the evening, she goes to the Chelsea Flower Show. She is again attended by the Hon. Mary Morrison and Major Hugh Lindsay, and also by the Countess of Lichfield (separated wife of the Queen's cousin, Lord Lichfield, and sister of the Duke of Westminster, a friend of Prince Charles).

What are we to make of this? Again, does it matter? I think it does, because it gives the direct lie to bland assertions that Britain is now almost a classless society and that our constitutional monarchy in some way epitomises this. This disingenuous argument appears, for example, in Philip Howard's

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Master of the Horse, The Earl of Westmorland, G.C.V.O.
Treasurer of the Household, J. Cope, M.P.
Comptroller of the Household, Carol Mathers, M.C., M.P.
Vice-Chamberlain, The Hon. Robert Boscawen, M.C., M.P.
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The Queen's Household

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Chaplain-Hampton Court Palace, Rev. Canon M. Moore, M.A.
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Surgery, Surgeon W. Black, M.B., F.R.C.S.
Surgeon On-call, F. Holmes Sellers, M.A., M.B., B.Ch., F.R.C.S.
Surgeon Ophthalmologist, G. D. Pinter, G.V.O., F.R.C.S. (Edin.), F.R.C.S.
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ASCOT OFFICE

St. James's Palace, S.W.1.
Her Majesty's Representative at Ascot, Col. P. Benson, G.O.B.E.
Secretary, Miss L. Thompson-Royd.

Silver Jubilee Year apologia, "The British Monarchy".

"'Society' and rank," writes Mr Howard, "were killed by two world wars, and today the Queen presides not over a pyramid of the upper classes graded into tidy ranks; she sits in lonely isolation above an egalitarian but divided society ..."

Perhaps that was how it actually looked to an Old Etonian Times journalist in 1977, before Mrs Thatcher began to restore all those Victorian values. But can the rest of us really believe that even in the Panglossian Britain of Jim ("What crisis?") Callaghan egalitarianism was quite so far advanced?

Nearly a decade later, look at the first page of the 1986 "Civil Service Year Book" (page 12, top left), which in proper egalitarian fashion begins with "Chapter I: The Royal Household and Offices" (this is the famous Civil List of the essential royal functionaries paid for by the state).

Democratic mass

Perhaps Mr Howard would argue that all of these elevated places with high-falutin' names have been filled more or less at random from among the great undifferentiated democratic mass which seethes in such indistinguishable egalitarian division beneath the Queen in her solitary eminence (does an elegaic note steal over Mr Howard's prose at

this point? - how very lonely the Queen must be!).

Or, more honestly, might he perhaps concede that the Queen sits comfortably at the head of a snug little set of like-minded members of the well-bred, well-heeled upper classes whose presence in the royal entourage would have elevated not a single hair of her far from egalitarian great great grandmother's eyebrows?

Nor, it is important to remember, are these people merely decorative - harmless ornaments of the constitution. In our (pace Mr Howard) thoroughly class-ridden society, pomp usually means pretty opulent circumstances. These titled and decorated personages are also members of some of the richest and most influential families in the land. The Queen chooses her immediate companions from an almost comically restricted section of the most upper of the upper crust. If the Queen is the glacé cherry on top of the pie, then these are definitely the castor sugar sprinkled over the pastry.

Another revealing slant on the Royal Household is given by "Whitaker's Almanack" (above), which, unlike the "Civil Service Year Book", includes honorary, unpaid posts.

What an astonishing avoidupois of top brass! Enough to sink the Royal Navy or bury the Royal Mint! It reminds us forcibly that the Queen is at the apex of the military as well as the social, political, judicial and



ecclesiastical hierarchy. She is Commander-in-Chief of the armed services and, constitutionally at least, appoints all officers. Their loyalty in theory (and in practice, one suspects, when there is a Labour government) is to the Queen rather than to the political administration of the day. It is no royal whim or the result of an aptitude test which propels the Windsor princes into the armed forces. Military service is not only one of the few "normal" careers open to the royal family, but is thoroughly consistent with the ancient origins and functions of the monarchy. It is also an entirely conventional and congenial occupation for upper class males.

Looking at the Whitaker's list, would it be unfair to describe the royal family as heads of an aristo-military caste? Even when not actually out on manoeuvres, and even after retirement, the male members can hardly keep themselves out of uniform (both Prince Charles and his father were married in theirs; one assumes Prince Andrew will be married in his), while the females do their bit as colonels-in-chief of a wide assortment of regiments. The consummation of the monarcho-military affair is the annual Trooping of the Colour in Whitehall on the Queen's official birthday, when she rides side-saddle like the heroine of a historical romance and wears a kitsch parody of male military splendour that would hardly disgrace a Ruritarian light opera.

With her closest associates freely chosen from among the aristocratic and military classes, are we really compelled to take seriously the Queen's much-vaunted role as impartial advice-giver? Are we really expected to be in awe of the vast political wisdom of a woman with such narrow social experience, to trust the judicious neutrality of her advice to the Prime Minister? Of course her comments will be constitutionally correct; of course they will be based on a

great deal of experience and knowledge of a certain kind; of course they will be honest and made with the best of intentions. But how can she be other than a deeply conservative influence at the heart of the constitution?

This, indeed, is the secret message behind many of the standard arguments for keeping the monarchy - that nothing too wild or revolutionary can happen, thank god, while we have a monarch to ensure continuity and the constitutional proprieties. Here are Harvey and Bather in their "A" level textbook, "The British Constitution and Politics" (the first reprint of the fifth edition - an awful lot of students have been offered this as a gospel of our political life).

"... a crisis may make it desirable that party differences should be moderated for the time being ... the Sovereign can appeal to the party leaders to cooperate in overcoming the difficulties. Thus it was largely through the personal intervention of George V in 1931 that the coalition government was formed."

You would hardly think that this happy constitutional event was the greatest catastrophe in the history of the Labour Party. What Messrs Harvey and Bather do not tell us is that the idea for a coalition led by Ramsay MacDonald was planted in the King's receptive head by the leaders of the Conservative opposition - eager, for far from disinterested reasons, that a Labour Prime Minister should head a government which planned, among other measures, to cut unemployment benefit by 10%. As his past history suggested, MacDonald was entirely susceptible to the flattery of a royal request. ("Tomorrow every Duchess in London will be wanting to kiss me," he joyfully told a colleague.) The consequences were predictable. The Labour Party was split, and, at the election which followed, it was reduced to a powerless rump in Parliament for the rest of the decade.

Biggest ever

In 1929, Labour had been returned to power with 287 seats against 269 Conservatives and 59 Liberals. In 1931, following MacDonald's defection, Labour was reduced to 52 seats, while the Conservatives recorded their biggest ever election victory with 471. A slight recovery in 1935 gave Labour 154 seats to the Conservatives' 387.

Labour Party supporters may perhaps be forgiven for not regarding the King's use of his prerogative with quite the same glow of scholarly approval as Messrs Harvey and Bather.

Is this merely ancient history, or does it suggest that, at the very least, the Labour movement should be profoundly sceptical about the constitutional impartiality of the monarchy? After seven years of the Thatcher counter-revolution, we hear rather less than we used to about the ungovernability of Britain and the contingency plans of various

experts in counter-insurgency like Richard Clutterbuck; but would anyone really care to stake their radical neck on the constitutional neutrality of the Queen and her armed forces if a left-wing government ever developed a sincere interest in the principles of socialism and seemed in serious danger of upsetting the capitalist appletart?

In sum, we could say that, yes, the Queen is constitutionally impartial, and, no, she is not a threat to democratic government - as long as we remember that the constitution itself is not impartial and our democracy is not particularly democratic. Easy for her to be impartial between Wilson and Heath, Callaghan and Thatcher, Kinnock and ...? But we are reliably informed (and not only by himself) that Willie Hamilton was overlooked for government office not just for his intractable hostility to the principle of monarchy but in particular because of his persistent demands that royal finance should come under proper public scrutiny and control. Royal impartiality, like judicial impartiality, rules OK as long as you don't challenge its high opinion of itself.

To conclude, we might look at some of the other justifications routinely offered by monarchists - though it's rarely enough the system is challenged, which is perhaps why many of their arguments are surprisingly feeble.

It should come as no surprise to find a senior Labour politician among them. Harvey and Bather are so impressed by the following



sublimity from Lord (Herbert) Morrison's "Government and Parliament" that they use it as an epigraph to their chapter on the monarchy: "When the people cheer the Queen and sing her praises, they are also cheering our free democracy."

(And when the crowd cheers a boxing champion, they are also cheering peace and friendship.)

Lord Morrison meant, I suppose, that the people were showing their gratitude to the Queen and her forebears for graciously relinquishing their powers and retaining only their wealth and privilege. In some mysterious way, by doing this they have become the very symbol of the process they resisted. Considering that, historically, they consented only under threat (a real one, sometimes carried out) of beheading or deposition, "free democracy" seems an odd sort of thing for them to end up being equated with, especially in view of the extravagant privileges which remain.

Hidden influence

But, casuistry apart, clearly it needs spelling out that the message of monarchy is not freedom and democracy but money, privilege and hidden influence. We are one of the most class-ridden and secretive societies in the world. Every four or five years, we elect another oligarchy (from a severely restricted list). This oligarchy itself has only limited powers. We put up with it, most of us, but we should not also have impudent sermons inflicted on us about how democratic it all is, and in particular sermons about how democratic is the least democratic part of all.

A further delicious twist to this line of thinking is introduced by Philip Howard. "Constitutional monarchy," he tells us, "is, paradoxically, a democratic institution: by giving the official head of state no power, it makes her a representative of all her subjects, particularly the weaker and the powerless."

And black is white, of course (a well-known paradox). But this is very classy stuff indeed. If it were marmalade, you might buy it exclusively from Harrod's. My only reservation is that it lacks detail. I would have liked Mr Howard to list the innumerable ways in which the Queen is such an exact representative of, say, an unmarried mother living on supplementary benefit in the Hyson Green Flats (shall we make her black and disabled just to emphasise the similarities?), rather than, say, her Mistress of the Robes, the Duchess of Grafton.

But paradox by its very nature is a game that two can play. It would be a neat paradox, for example, to stand Mr Howard's paradox on its head and ask what better way could be found of representing the constitutional powerlessness of the present-day monarchy than by making it an elected office with candidates restricted to the poorest 10% of the population.

I suppose it takes the broad social experience of an Old Etonian to see any sort of bond between the weak and powerless and someone generally supposed to be the richest woman in the world. "Supposed", because there is no way of knowing for certain. The extent of the Queen's private wealth is as transcendental a mystery as how she incarnates the spirit of democracy. The monarch pays no income tax or capital gains tax or death duties. Her investments are made confidentially by agents. She is entitled to reclaim income tax paid at source, as, for example, on company dividends. Her fortune has been estimated at between £50m and £100m, but in the absence of hard information this is only a moderately educated guess. It may be much more. It will hardly be much less, given the extraordinary opportunity to accumulate which her tax exemptions confer.

And this is only her private fortune. For her official duties, including the upkeep of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle (Sandringham and Balmoral are her private property), she is paid by the state, as are other members of the royal family who perform official functions. There is the usual secrecy about what the money is actually spent on. Willie Hamilton has periodically made a fuss about it, but increases in the royal salary usually go through Parliament with the minimum of scrutiny. The Queen has become such an object of deference that it is now more blasphemous for an MP to say anything even faintly derogatory about her than for a Church of England Bishop to query the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth.

Brain-rot

Perhaps the surest sign that the monarchy is redundant is the brain-rot which sets in when otherwise sane people discuss it. Philip Howard has written sensibly for "The Times" on a range of issues, including excellent democratic commonsense about current English usage - but what abject nonsense he can be reduced to when the subject is the Queen rather than the Queen's English!

If we turn to the popular press, we find not so much brain-rot as terminal cerebral dissolution. To celebrate the Queen's sixtieth birthday this year, for example, the once radical and tough-minded "Daily Mirror" produced a 50p souvenir magazine which included "Twenty-five things you didn't know about the Queen" (and were always afraid to ask?).

Perhaps it was really a subversive plot to make the Queen look silly, but among other astonishments we learned that the Queen's dogs are not all corgis - some are products of accidental matings with Princess Margaret's dachshunds, which the Queen calls "dorgis" (it's Queenspeak - say it out loud and you'll see); that she has special tapes of military music to play in her Rolls Royce (does this explain the rhythmic arm motion - does she wave to her subjects in 4/4 time?); and that

on the day before the State Opening of Parliament she wears her crown around the Palace to get used to the weight (this conjures up delightful memories of the kings and queens in children's books who, of course, wear their crowns absolutely everywhere whatever they are doing - supply your own details!).

To end on a topical, constitutional note. One arguably useful function of the Queen is to act as Head of the Commonwealth. Acknowledgement of her status is the sole requirement of membership in these post-colonial days, so that the Commonwealth may embrace, for example, India, which is a completely independent republic under a president, and Australia, which, though for all practical purposes a republic, constitutionally recognises the Queen as Queen of Australia.

Seriously

The Queen apparently takes her position very seriously and has considerable personal knowledge of the forty-nine member countries and their politicians (all those royal tours). As a multi-racial, multi-cultural talking-shop, and occasionally something more, the Commonwealth can do a little bit of good in the world, and as I write is doing its best to co-ordinate anti-apartheid sanctions against South Africa. The only recalcitrant state is Britain, or rather its Prime Minister, who has so far been immovably opposed to sanctions. If she doesn't change her mind, we could be in the interesting position of being kicked out of our own Commonwealth; or a number of countries, including India, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia, may leave, leading almost certainly to the collapse of the entire fragile structure.

The Queen, one surmises, is less than happy about this, and one would very much like to be a fly on the wall when she discusses it with Mrs Thatcher at their weekly meetings. If Britain is expelled, the Queen will be head of an organisation which, in her capacity as ruler of the United Kingdom, she has been thrown out of, though she will still be in as Queen of Australia, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea etc. It will take more than a bit of crown-wearing practice to sort this one out.

Morbid interest

Has the monarchy and the "flexible empiricism that is the glory of British government as well as of British philosophy" (Mr Howard on the concept of the Commonwealth - I don't think "empiricism" is meant to be a pun) finally met its match in that other glory of the British intellect; epitomised by Margaret Thatcher - the stubborn and small-minded pursuit of narrow prejudice and self-interest? For that, if for no other reason, the Commonwealth Conference in August will have a certain morbid interest.