

# Work, play and politics

## Chapter 11: alternatives

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Between 1970, when I left *Welcome aboard*, and 1975, I was involved in four separate schemes to publish “alternative” magazines. The first, actually called *The Alternative*, was planned as a radical news and feature weekly in newspaper format – but all that survives is a printed dummy issue because we failed to raise the money to launch it. My main collaborators were David Driver who designed the magazine and Charlie Gillett, the DJ, rock writer, pioneer of “world music”, record producer and discoverer/patron of Ian Dury, Elvis Costello and Dire Straits, though I still think his most impressive achievement was the book that launched his career – *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*\*. Unlike so much of the tedious self-indulgent stuff published in newspapers, including the broadsheet press from about 1969, and specialist magazines, Charlie’s prose was clear, unpretentious and jargon-free. Just as I was a fan of the kind of music he preferred in the early days – rhythm ‘n’ blues – he was also a radical social critic who’d already written for both *New Society* and *Anarchy*. We shared an interest in sport bordering on obsession; Charlie was a club athlete and Sunday morning footballer. Also he and I lived round the corner from each other in Clapham so meetings were easy to arrange.

\*Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, New York, 1970

*The Alternative* dummy, which featured the Home Office’s persecution of black people and included a huge centre-page spread of Chuck Berry doing his celebrated duck walk, designed as a poster for your student bedsit wall, looked good but we failed to persuade enough people with money to invest in us. Two exceptions were the maverick Liberal peer Tim Beaumont and Pete Townshend of The Who; they both coughed up £100 (£1500 in today’s money). I got a friendly letter from John Arlott wishing me luck (but no cheque) and a less-than-friendly response from teetotal tea-drinker Tony Lefty-Benn who seized on a piece of unorthodox consumer advice (on where to buy cannabis) in the dummy issue and said sniffily: “I don’t think I could support that.” There were a few smaller sums from sympathetic journalists but we had to accept defeat: if there was going to be a successful “alternative” weekly it wasn’t going to be *The Alternative*.

At the time (1970-1) there were several other projects in the pipeline claiming to cover similar ground: Richard Neville, Andrew Fisher and Felix Dennis of *Oz* magazine, plus the trendy literary agent Ed Victor, were planning to launch a weekly paper called *Ink* (it will be “a muck-raking underground newspaper with big screaming headlines like the *Daily Mirror*” was their loud message to a conference of underground hacks); the Marxist left were developing something more serious, which was going to specialise in “radical photo-journalism” (it would appear as *Seven Days* for six months from October 1971\*); and Tony Elliott’s *Time Out* was already covering “alternative” as well as mainstream entertainment and events, though not yet weekly.

\*For a detailed account by Rosalind Delmar see [banmarchive.org.uk](http://banmarchive.org.uk).

When it was clear that *The Alternative* was never going to get off the ground Richard Neville said to Charlie and me: “Why not join *Ink*?” Wisely, Charlie declined the offer on the grounds that we didn’t

have enough in common with them. Unwisely, I accepted it and signed up for several months of chaos and confusion. I was asked to become section editor of the proposed *Inkweek* feature, a three-page entertainment-and-events guide in the middle of the planned paper – intended as competition for *Time Out*. I was given one editorial assistant and a budget of £10 a week. This meant I could contribute to the coffees, tube fares and cannabis joints of 10 people, enthusiasts for dance, film, rock, underground happenings or whatever, who would select and recommend what they thought were the outstanding events of the week in their specialty. There was a single column for each of them but no more.

*Ink's* marketing strategy, if you could call it that, was based on the idea that people who bought the paper for its alternative news and features would also be kept up to date with entertainment and events by *Inkweek*; they wouldn't have to buy *Time Out* as well unless they wanted comprehensive listings. This was reasonable enough. But what I couldn't do, obviously, with just three tabloid pages, was compete with *Time Out* in the sense of providing an equivalent editorial service (by February 1970 *Time Out* was already publishing 84 small-format pages of editorial/advertising rising to 100 in July, according to Nigel Fountain\*).

\**Underground: The London Alternative Press 1966-74*, Routledge, 1988

In his account of the *Ink* fiasco\*\* Richard Neville wrote: "We planned to capitalise on the success of Tony Elliott's *Time Out*, published once a fortnight, and plunder its thriving ad base." This is typical Richard – naive, glib and based on a series of false assumptions. As it turned out, *Time Out* went weekly just as *Ink* launched and from the beginning my *Inkweek* pages were never going to threaten their dominance of the alternative entertainment-listings market. And elsewhere in the magazine nobody seemed to know what they were doing, above all in the key area of layout and production. At one point as *Ink* neared publication day and disaster loomed – icebergs everywhere – I went to Richard and offered to transfer to a subbing and production role, letting someone else run *Inkweek*, but the only thing that happened was that a freelance copy editor from book publishing was recruited via Ed Victor to help tidy up the words. Sadly, like the rest of the *Ink* staff, Steve Cox had no experience of producing magazines on time to a professional standard.

\*\**Hippie Hippie Shake*, Bloomsbury, 1995

For most of us that kind of experience came later. In fact many of the *Ink* survivors went on to successful media careers – from the late Felix Dennis, magazine-publishing tycoon, poet (and self-confessed dissolute), to Marsha Rowe, co-founder of the feminist monthly *Spare Rib*, by way of Andrew Cockburn (US-based specialist in the politics of weaponry, author of various books, now Washington editor at *Harper's*), Anna Coote (feminist and specialist in social policy) and John Lloyd (contributing editor at the *Financial Times* after editing *Time Out* and the *New Statesman*). And we all learnt something at *Ink* – if only how not to do things.

If *The Alternative* added up to nothing more than a dummy issue, the much bigger problem with *Ink* was that there was no dummy and no coherent production plan either: everything was last-minute with people working through several nights to get the issue out – then waking up in a state of exhaustion to the living nightmare of having to start all over again. Two days before the deadline for the first issue the art director collapsed from the strain and was invalidated out. Then the shock-horror front-page lead story ("THE GREAT URANIUM ROBBERY") turned out to have been covered already

by the *Times* in a fairly minor way and ignored by the rest of the press, both overground and underground. In a bizarre twist Alex Mitchell, the ex-*Sunday Times* journalist responsible for writing the story, disappeared – only to re-emerge in the Clapham High Street offices of the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League as an acolyte of the sexist bully Gerry Healy.

In the various accounts of what happened at *Ink* there is one curious discrepancy. Alex\* describes himself as the editor of the paper (“They asked me to be its first editor and I accepted with unadulterated enthusiasm”) and Nigel Fountain uses the same term in his otherwise accurate and informative book on the London underground press. But I can’t remember having a single casual conversation – never mind a scheduled meeting – with Alex about his/our editorial policy in general or his attitude to what we were supposed to be trying to do with *Inkweek*. Certainly Richard Neville, who actually was the nearest thing to an editor of *Ink*, at least in the beginning, doesn’t call Alex the editor. He writes: “For news editor I had a brilliant idea. Who better than a crack investigator from the *Sunday Times*...?” And Marsha Rowe agrees that Alex was supposed to be “the news editor”: “Losing both the art editor and the news editor in the first week didn’t help.” But as far as I know Alex didn’t even do any news editing in his brief *Ink* career; at best, if you’d wanted to give him a formal title, you could have called him the temporary “chief reporter”: he did after all write one front-page story before he walked out.

\**Come the Revolution*, NewSouth, 2011

Underground journalism was supposed to be fun whereas working at *Ink* certainly wasn’t – and we knew we weren’t getting anywhere. But once I managed to strike a blow for the freedom fighters. The photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, best known as a radical chronicler of the Vietnam war, was in a protracted dispute with the right-wing *Telegraph* magazine: until it was resolved they wouldn’t release his entire file of photographs (of, I think, Ethiopia). How could we manage to extract them and get them back to Philip? With Sarah, my *Ink* assistant, I went by tube to a phone box at Waterloo Bridge near the Central Office of Information and I phoned the *Telegraph*. : “COI, here. I understand you have some pix of Ethiopia – could we possibly have a look?...OK, fine. I’ll send a girl over for them right away.” And that was that: Philip got his pictures back.

*Ink* never recovered from its disastrous start whereas *Time Out* went from strength to strength as the alternative weekly that people actually bought because they wanted the events info it provided. Gradually its news and feature coverage improved and it became less hippy and more radical; in the end it even lost its druggy anti-sport prejudice. I stayed with *Ink* for several months out of loyalty and laziness but I was already thinking about my next move: weekly publication was a pipedream – why not go for something less ambitious, a radical news magazine that didn’t need a lot of money to produce, didn’t depend on advertising and was on a small enough scale to be manageable without a large staff? The failure of *Ink* didn’t mean that there was no chance of a radical news magazine succeeding.

The result was *Inside Story*, which came out 13 times between March 1972 and December 1973. Once again it was designed by David Driver, who by day was beginning to make *Radio Times* the go-to place for photographers and illustrators who wanted their work to be intelligently and stylishly used. For *Inside Story*, which would be printed offset litho so we could paste what we wanted onto a layout sheet, we used a cheap manual typewriter for the body copy. And for the title David took the typed words – *inside story* – and had them blown up to the right size. The typist/typesetter was paid

and so was Peter Brookes\*\*, who supplied the brilliant cartoonish cover drawings. The material we published came from various sources – mainly dissident journalists but also activists – with the emphasis on telling people what was actually happening rather than telling them what we wanted them to think or do about it. Illustrations, usually unsigned, came from people in David's contacts book.

\*\*Peter went on to become the chief cartoonist on the *Times* where David was art director after leaving *Radio Times*.

At first the magazine was printed by a small commercial printer and distributed by Moore-Harness, who handled *Private Eye* and various soft-porn mags (ie, anything that WH Smith wouldn't take), but we never succeeded in selling enough copies either in newsagents or on subscription. After a year we moved to a cheaper printer and did the distribution ourselves; we ended up with a duplicated edition of 1,000 copies.

Inevitably the first issue of *Inside Story* was dominated by reaction to the media coverage of Northern Ireland. In August 1971 the Unionist government at Stormont had, with the agreement of Edward Heath's Westminster Tories, introduced internment without trial in a way that was both brutal and utterly inept. Only Catholics and Republican sympathisers were snatched and interned – and the majority of them were not in fact members of the IRA. In the protests and repression that followed, the death toll numbered 20 unarmed civilians (including 10 notoriously shot down by the paratroopers at Ballymurphy, a district of Belfast), two IRA men and two soldiers. Of the treatment suffered by selected internees under interrogation the only question was whether to call it "inhuman and degrading treatment" or bite the bullet and call it "torture". Internment was the IRA's number one recruiting sergeant and what made things worse was the fact that the mainstream British media, with hardly any exceptions, were conspicuously failing to report the repressive behaviour of the army and police.

Peter's cover drawing for the first issue of *Inside Story* showed reporters drinking at the bar of the Belfast Europa hotel where they could be easily reached by the army's PR department. "What do the papers say?" we asked. "What the army tells them" was the obvious answer and we proceeded to illustrate the point by describing the collusion that underlay so much of the coverage. We also quoted an anonymous piece in the *New Statesman* that identified a number of Ulster Unionists influential in the hierarchy of the BBC and ITV and added the name of John Cole, deputy editor of the *Guardian* and a staunch Unionist.

Not surprisingly there was opposition from some journalists to the management, distortion and suppression of news about Ireland. When *South of the Border*, a Granada TV film, was banned by the Independent Television Authority, the journalists who'd made it took the initiative and called a protest meeting at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on 22 November 1971. Two hundred people heard accounts of how the news was routinely distorted and suppressed inside newspapers, the BBC and the independent TV companies. A fiery resolution was passed – but then not very much happened.

I went to that meeting and I'd also joined the Anti-Internment League, helping to produce their newsletter as well as marching with them. Just after Christmas 1971 I went over to Belfast on the overnight ferry with a photographer accompanying a party of London-based pacifist leafleters whose

plan was to approach soldiers on the streets and in their barracks with an appeal “to end repression and bloodshed in Northern Ireland”. Two snaps of soldiers being leafleted\* would appear in the first issue of *Inside Story* and we all got home safely. In the light of what was about to happen, you could say we were lucky.

\*One of them featured the bearded Bill Hetherington, a veteran peace campaigner who died in November 2023 aged 89.

A few weeks later on 30 January 1972, while I was still researching the media coverage of Northern Ireland, came Derry’s Bloody Sunday massacre, an event that still reverberates with the news that one of the soldiers involved – after a delay of more than 50 years – is being prosecuted for murder\*. (The occasion was a banned anti-internment march organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in which more than 10,000 people took part. There were some teenage rioters throwing stones but most of the marchers were just angry and determined.) That it was murder is not now a matter of dispute: the Saville report of 2010 confirmed that none of the 13 civilians shot and killed (a 14<sup>th</sup> died later) had offered any threat to the soldiers – or anyone else – that might have justified their decision to open fire. True, the inquests returned open verdicts, at the time the only possible ones in Northern Ireland where cases had not gone through the criminal courts. But the coroner released a statement afterwards that left no doubt about his interpretation of the evidence: “...the army ran amok that day and shot without thinking what they were doing...it was sheer unadulterated murder...” (Major Hubert O’Neill, a retired British army officer and a Catholic, 21 August 1973)

\*The prosecution of “Soldier F” was confirmed on 14 December 2023. He had been charged in 2019 with two murders and five attempted murders though proceedings were stopped two years later.

A week after the shootings the Australian reporter Murray Sayle, working with another *Sunday Times* journalist on an investigative follow-up, “convincingly demonstrated that the soldiers had faced no fire from those they shot”\*. But his report added a conclusion that “the killings had been part of a predetermined plan” and the editor, Harold Evans, spiked the piece. “It was,” Lewis Chester writes, “the conclusion that caused the problem. Back in the London office it was felt that there was not enough evidence to back this contention.”

\**Making Waves: The Journalism of Murray Sayle*, Lewis Chester, 2016

But was the Bloody Sunday massacre in fact planned? It’s hard to imagine even the most hard-boiled, vicious and cynical British army officer scheming to gun down more than a dozen unarmed civilians in cold blood – and in full view of the media. So if there was a plan, it went badly wrong. But there are some clear pointers to there having been some planning for a confrontation. For example, Major-General Robert Ford, the army commander, who was quite well aware that the paras had already killed 10 unarmed people at Ballymurphy, Belfast, in the post-internment disturbances of August 1971, deliberately transferred them to Derry in an attempt to toughen up the army performance there. He also said in a memo dated 7 January 1972 that selected ringleaders of the rioters and hooligans in Derry should be “shot” (though he didn’t say killed).

On 19 May 2021 the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, “apologised” in the House of Commons for the Ballymurphy killings – 11 years after the “apology” of his predecessor, David Cameron, for

Bloody Sunday. There will never be a last word on these events but a few days later, on 28 May 2021, *Private Eye* quoted the judge's remarks after the collapse of a murder trial of two soldiers accused of shooting an unarmed IRA man in April 1972. "At that time, in fact until late 1973, an understanding was in place between the RUC and the army whereby the RUC did not arrest and question, or even take witness statements from, soldiers involved in shootings such as this one. This appalling practice was designed, at least in part, to protect soldiers from being prosecuted and in very large measure it succeeded." (Mr Justice O'Hara)

What I wrote about Bloody Sunday in *Inside Story* was based on what I was told at the time: "...for weeks before the shooting the army had planned to provoke a confrontation with the IRA. The plan was that rubber bullets would be fired at the crowd and that, when the IRA started shooting back, the paratroopers would be ready for a shoot-out with the gunmen. When the IRA did not react and open fire, the paras opened up anyway – and killed 13 unarmed men."

There certainly was an attempted cover-up of the murders, initially by the army and then by the establishment, notably the judiciary. The Widgery report (aka "the Widgery whitewash") by the Lord Chief Justice in April 1972 is an astonishing read in the light not only of the Saville report that followed it 38 years later but of contemporaneous accounts. "The question 'Who fired first?' is vital," said Widgery. "I am entirely satisfied that the first firing...was directed at the soldiers." You wouldn't have wanted to be a defendant in his courtroom.

The basis for the cover-up was the so-called "shot list" or "Loden list of engagements". It was apparently compiled in the first place by Major Ted Loden\*, who claimed to have interviewed the soldiers under his command immediately after the shootings (though, when questioned by Saville, the soldiers failed to confirm this); then, for no apparent reason, it was transcribed by another officer, Captain Mike Jackson (later the head of the army), before being typed. The list, used as the basis of claims sent round the world to British embassies in a crude attempt to sanitise the atrocity, is total fantasy in places. It cites as the paras' targets not the unarmed civilians who actually died that day but "nail bombers", "snipers" and "gunmen". And as the Derry-born campaigning journalist Eamonn McCann put it: "Some of the shots he describes would have had to go through brick walls to hit their targets. It's nonsense."\*\*

\*once a keen member of the Stonyhurst CCF and a contemporary of mine – see Chapter 2. Colonel (as he became) Loden, holder of the Military Cross, died a violent death, shot dead by armed robbers in Nairobi, Kenya, on 7 September 2013.

\*\*Eamonn McCann, interviewed in *Socialist Review*, July/August 2010

Yet Saville, while having to reject the nonsense, makes no criticism in his report of the officers responsible for it. Loden and Jackson emerge from the report whiter than white. The one discordant note in Saville's review of their actions is this: "It could be said that another officer in Major Loden's position might have appreciated that, in view of the amount of army gunfire, something seemed to be going seriously wrong." This is preposterous: there was an atrocity; the officers in command of the men who perpetrated it bear some responsibility for it; at the very least they were guilty of lying to cover up what happened.

But how come the ludicrous, impossible-to-believe “shot list” was accepted at the time by so many people? We have reached the crux of the matter. The Bloody Sunday atrocity is best explained in terms of its context: the army was used to getting away with murder, a facile phrase and a cliché but in this case the literal truth. And the British media were part of the explanation, as the following *Inside Story* article shows. Headlined “One man who finally quit” it was introduced as follows: “In the week after Bloody Sunday John O’Callaghan, who’d worked for the *Guardian* for 11 years, resigned. Here he explains why.” A couple of extracts follow.

“If a couple of British papers and a broadcasting channel had shared the *Sunday Times*’s occasional scepticism about the performance of the British army in Northern Ireland the slaughter in Derry on Bloody Sunday might have been averted. It is hardly possible to believe that, if those commanding the troops knew that a section of the press would be continuing a rigorous scrutiny of their behaviour, they would have felt able to embark on the adventure that led to the death of 13 people on the Bogside streets...”

O’Callaghan contrasted the *Guardian*’s coverage of Northern Ireland in the early 1970s with its refusal to accept the British government’s version of events in the 1916-21 Irish War of Independence...

“Instead of pioneering the truth-telling about the atrocities this time, the *Guardian* made excuses for internment.

“When it became clear that premeditated atrocities were part of the internment package, the *Guardian*’s comment on the Compton report was: ‘Vigorous and tough interrogation must go on. Discomfort of the kind revealed in this report leaving no physical damage cannot be weighed against the number of human lives which will be lost if the security forces do not get a continuing flow of information.’...”

“Apart from the sickening quality of the bully’s aside – ‘hit them where it won’t show for too long’ – the military must have felt that in the light of the *Guardian*’s previous tradition the open encouragement of vigorous and tough interrogation amounted to what one can only call a licence for mayhem.”

A PS: after John O’Callaghan’s death in 2007 his obituary in the *Guardian* failed to mention the reason for his resignation from the paper, though they did subsequently publish my letter pointing out what he’d written in *Inside Story*.

If internment was the IRA’s number one recruiting sergeant, number two was Bloody Sunday. It was seen by many Irish people as a declaration of war. And in February 2021 Roy Greenslade, ex-tabloid editor and journalism professor at City University (specialising in “ethics” – delicious irony that), revealed in the *British Journalism Review* that he too had started secretly supporting the IRA after Bloody Sunday. Who knows how many other people made that decision?

In the second *Inside Story* we highlighted the abortion issue and published three case histories of women refused the chance of having an abortion. The material had been collected by the Women’s Abortion and Contraception Campaign and was presented to the Lane Commission set up to examine the workings of the 1967 Abortion Act.

But here's a strange thing. A bit like the Committee of 100, the WACC tends to get left out of conventional accounts, perhaps because the activists of the time haven't recorded what they did – and the academics haven't caught up. See, for example, "Timeline of the Women's Liberation Movement" ([www.bl.uk/sisterhood/timeline](http://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/timeline)) which records the founding conference at Oxford in 1970 with its four demands, ratified at Skegness in 1971, then jumps to the formation of the National Abortion Campaign in 1975 "to defend women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies".

But the original body formed to work for "free contraception and abortion on demand" was the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign; for many activists at the time this issue was at least as vital as any other part of the women's movement. As Elizabeth Bird, a Bristol university lecturer, put it, the right to free legal abortion and contraception was "the most important issue" in terms of women's lives and control over them.

This quote comes from *Personal Histories of the Second Wave of Feminism*, 2003 ([www.feministarchivesouth.org.uk](http://www.feministarchivesouth.org.uk)), which is based on a series of interviews with "women involved in feminist action in Bristol in the 1970s and 1980s". Another quote from the document: "The Bristol group was affiliated to the national WACC, a precursor to the National Abortion Campaign (with an obvious difference of emphasis). Ellen [Malos] remembers the priority being women's right to control their own fertility and lives. The slogan of the time was 'Women must control their fate, not the church and not the state'."

Angela Rodaway, stressing that WACC was a "very important" predecessor of NAC, said: "Our first concern was contraception because we felt that if you couldn't regulate your own body then you couldn't regulate anything."

Jackie West's involvement with WACC was "more substantial and consistent than with any other group. WACC was underpinned by a deep commitment to pro-choice, the right to early safe abortion if chosen. The NAC politicised the issue more, and Jackie speculates [that] its roots were more influenced by the left/Trotsky politics, as opposed to WACC's woman-centred perspective." The national WACC, which was based in London, published the evidence they presented to the Lane Commission as a pamphlet, *Women & Abortion* (copies held by the Wellcome Collection, [info@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:info@wellcomecollection.org), and the London School of Economics library).

*Inside Story 2* also reported on the 1971 census fiasco, illustrating the story with an uncompleted form of unknown provenance, though I didn't have to look very hard to find it (the personal details were blacked out obviously). The headline was: "300,000 people in London alone didn't complete this form." And we included an autobiographical piece by Marsha Rowe on working at *Oz* and *Ink* explaining why she thought a feminist magazine like *Spare Rib*, which she was about to launch with Rosie Boycott, was necessary.

To the familiar tale of production problems at *Ink* and an impossible amount of overwork ("On the first issue I went two nights running without sleep and I don't think I had one day off and hardly a night until a month had passed") Marsha added a complaint that in its "hierarchical, arbitrary structure" *Ink* wasn't really an "alternative" to the mainstream media at all. She described the menial routine imposed on her of contacting local paper journalists for their news then "handing the stories over to someone else who would decide whether or not to print them. What's the point of

that?" The last straw was that a 17-year-old Irish typesetter was suddenly fired when she and Marsha were both away "because a change in the system had required it – the typesetting was to be farmed out".

Although *Spare Rib* when it was first published in June 1972 was organised on fairly conventional lines, it became a collective a year or so later, as Marsha emphasised in a letter to the *Guardian*\*. Having been voted in as editor at a staff meeting she decided after three issues "to form the magazine into a collective. I therefore resigned as editor and made the suggestion that we separate out the editorial responsibilities of the magazine. This was based on my own feminist ideals, which were, at the time, not held by many."

\*31 July 2007

The third *Inside Story* showed how using conventional news-gathering methods could work on alternative papers. "Make the calls," apprentice reporters are traditionally told: that is, check with local news sources regularly to see if they have a story. So among the contacts I kept up with was Tony Smythe, then the top man at the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty). Tony was an anarchist with an impressive CV including several months in jail for refusing compulsory military service in the 1950s and another month for refusing to be bound over with the Committee of 100 in August 1961. I explained to him what *Inside Story* was looking for. "I think I may have something for you," Tony said and went to a filing cabinet where he pulled out a series of photocopied sheets. Bylined "Peter Deeley" this was a piece on the police Special Branch written for the *Observer* – with Tony's help – but never published in the paper though it was syndicated for publication abroad. "It's two years old," Tony said, "so it'll need some updating."

I carefully avoided contacting Peter, whom I knew slightly, but managed to secure some snaps of suspected Special Branch men including Detective-Sergeant Roy Cremer, who specialised in monitoring the libertarian left. Peter Brookes had fun with the cover which featured a plainclothes man in heavy boots propositioning several hippy-looking men, also wearing heavy boots, who replied: "But we're already workin' for the Special Branch." After the updated article was published I got a letter from David Astor, the *Observer* editor, complaining that I'd breached his paper's copyright and asking me if I'd got the material on the Special Branch from Peter Deeley. I was delighted to reply that no, he hadn't been the source.

This was a bit of a coup but I suppose the feature I was most pleased about came in issue number eight March/April 1973: "The Spies for Peace Story", which was continued in issue number nine. It was written anonymously by one of the Spies, Nicolas Walter, who was listed in the magazine as the editor in charge of reviews – but as with most of the stories we published we didn't byline it.

"This Easter is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Spies for Peace," we said. "Their achievement was to discover and publish documents describing the plans which had been made for ruling Britain in the event of nuclear war – and also the way these plans had been tested in two Nato exercises during 1962. The moral of the discovery was that the plans, which were undoubtedly known to the governments of foreign countries, were being kept secret from the people of this country – and that they would not work.

“The effect of the publication was to destroy the credibility not only of these particular secrets but of all official secrets – and of the ability of the authorities to keep them out of the hands of the people.

“The Spies for Peace were never caught: here for the first time is a full account of how they carried out their action and avoided detection.”

A more light-hearted defiance of the law was the anti-libel agreement. This was a commitment we thought up and proposed to alternative papers to republish any article by the others that led to the threat of a libel action, which we saw as an attempt to suppress free speech. We announced the agreement in *Inside Story* no 11 (September 1973), saying that two publications had already joined us and signed up: *Peace News*, the pacifist weekly, and the *Catonsville Roadrunner*, once described as “a revolutionary Christian magazine with a bit of anarchism thrown in”. We suggested the following standard letter to be sent to hostile solicitors:

“By threatening one of the publications listed below with a libel action, you have guaranteed that all of them will republish the passages you allege are libellous. We suggest that in future you advise your clients not to use the law to try to silence the press.”

In the following issue of *Inside Story* we were delighted to publish a letter from Peter Hain, the future Labour cabinet minister and later a peer of the realm – in those days a young Liberal activist and anti-apartheid campaigner. As the editor of *Liberator*, a radical Liberal magazine, he endorsed the campaign and enclosed “a signed agreement to join other publications in confronting libel charges”.

We came up against the libel laws particularly because we published first-person accounts of what happened in prisons and places like Broadmoor, officially described as “a high-security psychiatric hospital” and unofficially by inmates as “worse than a prison”. And we were always on the edge of what could be legally published. When we ran Stuart Christie’s account of police harassment between his release from a Spanish jail in September 1967 and his arrest in August 1971 for “conspiracy to cause explosions” (he was acquitted) we illustrated it with an illegally taken pic of him inside Brixton prison.

In *Inside Story 10*, which led on the 13-month occupation and work-in by the London print workers of Briant Colour, we also reported on the goings-on at *Time Out* which was increasingly successful in sales terms but riven by internal conflict. Tony Elliott, who had founded the magazine, was certainly “alternative” – he was very much at home in the underground arts and entertainment scene – but nobody could call him politically left-wing. Whereas many of those who joined *Time Out* certainly were. We wrote:

“As *Ink* collapsed, revived itself, then died – and *Seven Days* too came and went – *Time Out* found a new role employing some of the survivors of these disasters: Neil Lyndon had come from an earlier closure, *Idiot International*; John Lloyd came from *Ink* and Phil Kelly from *Seven Days*. Several of these new recruits accelerated an already clear tendency for some *Time Out* staff to become more aggressively left-wing, both editorially and as workers. In the summer of 1972 an NUJ chapel was formed: the writing was on the wall.”

At *Time Out* there was continuous conflict over who should edit the magazine – or whether there should be an editor at all – over wage rates and over editorial policy until in 1981 the radical section

of the staff split off to found an alternative, to be run on co-operative lines, called *City Limits*. That lasted an impressive 12 years.

Various people contributed to *Inside Story* – writers, artists, designers, typist-typesetters – but the person who was my constant collaborator, who came in very early and stayed until the end was Alan Balfour, the office and circulation manager. I think he was relieved when we reluctantly decided that we'd run out of – not ideas but steam, puff, whatever. After the 13<sup>th</sup> issue, published in December 1973, we called it a day and Alan was able to concentrate on his first love, the blues.

But then, not very long afterwards, several people approached me saying: what happened? Why stop? Why not start again? And (a glutton for punishment, me) I sighed and said: perhaps we need a different kind of paper and perhaps we would need to form a collective to share the work, the responsibility, the aggro. The result was *Wildcat*. I claim responsibility for the title: I had in mind posters and above all stickers that read “WILDCAT STRIKES!” in the traditional anarcho-syndicalist colours of black and red. That ambition was realised, I'm pleased to say, and the paper itself published a lot of stimulating and radical material. It was more of a campaigning, agitator's paper than *Inside Story* but readable, informative and above all not sectarian. The people that worked on it were either anarchists, who thought that radical journalism was more useful than crude propaganda, or left-wing scribblers who were, broadly speaking, libertarian.

A key person in the *Wildcat* package was the veteran anarchist Philip Sansom. He'd been one of the three editors of *War Commentary*, the wartime substitute for *Freedom*, who were jailed in 1945 for nine months for inciting members of the armed forces to “disaffection”: don't hand in your weapons; keep your powder dry ready for the social revolution, was the message. The first issue of *Wildcat* recalled – and celebrated – this challenge to the state. As well as a piece by Philip we reprinted an “Open Letter to British Soldiers”, first published in 1912 by *The Syndicalist*.

As a result our office at Housmans, the pacifist bookshop, was raided under the Incitement to Disaffection Act. When the police approached the *Wildcat* office the business manager of the premises, Harry Mister, told them I worked there. “He's a bit of a rascal, isn't he?” said one of them. To which Harry replied, as he told me later: “There's two sides to that: he might think you were a bit of a rascal breaking into his office.”

Philip was a charismatic figure: fluent as an outdoor orator at Speakers' Corner, highly competent in the editorial skills from scribbling to layout and something of a bon vivant – he could certainly cook, as he showed when he put on a dinner for the Spanish anarchist Miguel Garcia, after his release from prison in 1969. I supplied the wine.

Miguel Garcia (1908-1981) had fought in the Spanish Civil War and later in the anti-Franco resistance as an urban guerrilla. Captured in Barcelona in 1949 he served 20 years in prison where he met Stuart Christie. On his release Miguel came to London where he raised funds for Spanish prisoners, established an anarchist social club, the *Centro Iberico*, and continued to propagandise. According to Stuart, the audience at one of the meetings he addressed included members of what became “the Angry Brigade”. Miguel's memoir, *Franco's Prisoner*, was published by Rupert Hart-Davis in 1972.

One illustration of *Wildcat* editorial policy was a piece by my Oxford contemporary, the feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham, about the life of Lilian Wolfe, an anarchist for whom the term

“veteran” is inadequate: she died aged 98 in 1975 having spent her life as a militant. In our introduction we said: “This article was originally written for the feminist press but was turned down by the two papers it was offered to.”

*Wildcat* didn't last long – 10 issues in all. Number eight, dated May 1975, gives a flavour of what we were about. The front page proclaims: “*WILDCAT* says NO! to the COMMON MARKET REFERENDUM” and below the headline there's a drawing of a wild disreputable-looking cat painting out both the EEC and the UK with a cross with the bubble “Organise to TAKE OVER!” The cat was the creation of the cartoonist Donald Room, who had joined us halfway through at Philip's suggestion, and later carried on with *Wildcat* anarchist comics for many years afterwards. So we did start *something* that lasted.

And once we were in a minor way the story. The *Wildcat* editorial office was on the first floor of Housmans at 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross. We were at the front of the building, above the shop – overlooking a letterbox that had been there for decades, ever since the shop had been a post office. On 25 November 1974 I'd left the office early, posting a couple of letters while Eric R continued to lay out the forthcoming issue. Later that evening three IRA bombs went off in London injuring more than 20 people; one of them was in the letterbox outside our office. Our bomb did not draw blood but Eric had to go to hospital to be treated for shock and spent several days recovering.

I was quite restrained in my comments in the next issue of *Wildcat*, partly because I didn't think the Provisional IRA – the presumed perpetrators – would be listening. But I did ask this rhetorical question of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group, whose policy was to support the Provisionals: if a member of your organisation had died in the explosion would they have been murdered or “accidentally killed”?

Tact, cowardice – political correctness? – stopped me saying then to the IRA and their supporters something that will be obvious to the most naive person now: how come you chose a letterbox outside a *pacifist* bookshop? Was this a deliberate decision or the brain-fade of the bomber? Surely you weren't trying to punish, frighten – or eliminate – the radical pacifists who have broadly supported Irish independence and self-government and opposed the behaviour of the British army? Or did you just not bother to notice who might have been hit by your bomb?

But in the end, who cares about the niceties? Bombing people is brain-dead stupid, whoever does it, whoever it is done to.

Earlier that year (1974) Roy Greenslade (the secret IRA supporter after Bloody Sunday) and I had both been at the National Union of Journalists' annual delegate meeting in Wexford; my branch was London Freelance; his, Central London. As you might expect from the venue and the date, there was much drink taken, as the Irish say, and much animated discussion about the journalistic issues – on both sides of the border – of news management, censorship and so on. But the most pressing one was the Irish government's insistence that IRA voices – and those of their organised supporters – would not be broadcast, although their actions and statements could be reported. A similar ban on IRA speech was imposed by the British government in 1988.

To me as a journalist being a member of the NUJ was axiomatic. I couldn't understand why some of my fellow-anarchists who worked in journalism remained outside the union on the grounds that it

didn't follow classical anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist principles. In fact, compared to most other British unions, the NUJ was quite open and democratic.

I'd first joined in 1964, recruited as a temporary member when I was on the *Daily Mail* in Manchester, and I renewed my membership when I started working for Cornmarket Press in 1967. Then from 1970 I became quite active, joining a loose group of left-wing activists in the London Freelance Branch. We were never a majority of the branch and we never held the top three posts of chair, secretary and treasurer; at most we were six out of a branch committee of 15. But we were certainly influential enough to annoy a lot of important media people with big bylines\*, led by Bernard Levin, once described by the *Times*, the paper he wrote a column for, as "the most famous journalist of his day". Levin attacked us in print as a politically motivated Trotskyist clique and so did a right-wing NUJ activist called Tony Craig in the *Spectator* magazine. Their biggest complaint was that we exploited the alleged fact that attendance was small to commit the branch to left-wing policies that didn't represent members' views.

\*for example, Woodrow Wyatt, Marghanita Laski (no longer left-wing in middle age), John Grigg, Brian Inglis; also Levin's girlfriend at the time, Arianna Stassinopoulou, who went on to simplify her surname by marrying the American Republican politician Michael Huffington (they co-founded the Huffington Post); and the *Daily Telegraph* photographer John Warburton who lived and died an admirer of Oswald Mosley.

Unfortunately for them they'd relied on hearsay: they can't have actually attended the meetings they complained about. As branch vice-chairman (sic) in the relevant year (1975) I went back to the NUJ office and dug out the minutes book. And I was able to state, in a letter to the *Spectator* which they published, that attendance at the 11 LFB branch meetings held that year was between 42 and 85 (average 54.5). The notion that three men (all Trots) and an anarchist dog\* had dominated the branch until Bernard Levin and the *Spectator* gang came along and rescued it in 1976 was demonstrably false.

\*The best-known anarchist dog in London belonged to Arthur Moyse, the bus conductor, artist, writer and agitator.

But the fiction lingered on. Here, for example, is yet another version, this time by an ex-president of the NUJ no less. In July 2010 Francis Beckett wrote: "When Bernard Levin led a right-wing rebellion against the takeover of the NUJ's London Freelance Branch by the far left in 1976, the monthly branch meetings, which had always struggled to get a quorum, were suddenly crowded out with hundreds of people, whipped in by both sides."\*I don't think this is what you'd call eye-witness reporting.

\**What Did the Baby Boomers Ever Do For Us?*, Biteback, 2010

For the record, as they say, I can identify one – and only one – member of a Trotskyist organisation among us: Geoffrey Sheridan (1944-2000) of the International Marxist Group who wrote for various publications including the *Guardian*. There was one emphatically self-labelling feminist: Angela Phillips, then a radical snapper, eg for *Spare Rib*, and later a distinguished professor of journalism. And of course I would have carried an anarchist card if such a thing existed. But the others, as I recall, were essentially NSRL – non-specific radical left – or if they had an affiliation they concealed

it. As a group we were as interested in the bread-and-butter questions of getting work and getting paid for it as in the resolutions on Ireland and women's rights that so annoyed the conservatives. For example, we introduced the idea of work-based freelance meetings to discuss individual publishers' rates and procedures, an initiative that – of course – we had to develop wherever we worked.

At the time most of my paid freelance work came from *Radio Times* so naturally it was their freelances I invited to the meeting I organised in a pub near the office in Marylebone High Street. There was a pretty good turnout, maybe 12-15 people. They certainly found some things to complain about. But they spent most of the meeting having a good moan about the other national papers and magazines they worked for. And back in the *Radio Times* office my reputation as a troublemaker inevitably grew to the point where I got less and less work from them. Fortunately I had somewhere else to go. Just as I had invited Nick Walter to join me on *Inside Story* he recruited me to the subs' desk of the *TLS* (see Chapter 10).