

NEWSWATCH

FRAUD INQUIRY AT MAGNET DIY COMPANY

Fraud Squad officers are investigating allegations of 'massive' computer fraud within the nationwide DIY company Magnet, based at Keighley, Yorks. A former member of the firm has been questioned by detectives over 'irregularities,' said to involve up to £2 million. Yesterday, Chief Inspector Tony Glendenning, head of the West Yorkshire fraud squad, confirmed that a report would be sent to the Crown Prosecution Service 'in due course.' The Magnet company, which went public last August, doubled its profits in the previous financial year to £44 million.

MURDER DASHES HOPE OF ENDING CIVIL WAR

Some 5,000 people, carrying red carnations and black flags, marched in the funeral procession of Herbert Ernesto Anaya (right), 32-year-old head of El Salvador's independent Human Rights Commission, murdered by two gunmen last week as he was taking his children to school. The shooting has seriously damaged hopes of a peaceful settlement of the country's eight-year civil war, *Tom Gibb reports from San Salvador*. Guerrilla leaders have called off cease-fire talks due to have been held in Mexico City this weekend. El Salvador's Government has accused them of using the murder as an excuse not to negotiate. Anaya's wife, Mirna, has blamed it on right-wing civilian death squads linked to the military.



CLASHES FEARED

Scotland Yard is taking precautions against the threat of violent clashes next Sunday between 3,000 National Front supporters and more than 5,000 sympathisers of Anti-Fascist Action, *writes Arlen Harris*. Both groups are planning to mark Remembrance Sunday by marching to the Cenotaph to lay wreaths. The police said that neither march would be banned, but they would ensure adequate policing to keep the two apart. The anti-fascist movement is to hold a meeting in Trafalgar Square beforehand. One of its officials, Unmesh Desai, said: 'We are having this demonstration to remind people that the forces that caused the Second World War are very much alive today.'

90,000 FACE CUTS

As many as 90,000 young people will find themselves stripped of state welfare payments under the Government's new Social Security Bill to be introduced in the Commons tomorrow, *writes Robin Lustig*. They will include not only those who refuse to participate in the Youth Training Scheme—a development which the Conservatives heralded in their election manifesto last June—but also anyone under the age of 18, regardless of whether they are prepared to undertake YTS work. At least half of the 92,000 under-18s who received state benefits last year were known to have applied for Youth Training Scheme places and been turned away because of a shortage of places. The Government claims it will save £95 million in a full year from the proposed reform. It will, however, be liable to pay out an extra £11 million in child benefit to the parents of under-18s who at present claim benefit in their own right.

SILENT NIGHTS

Jim Crawford, aged 61, an ex-RN chief petty officer whose snoring had been likened to a jumbo jet taking off, was finally married yesterday after a 10-year engagement—thanks to an operation to clear a tissue blockage. Jim, of Torquay, Devon, proposed to American Dorothy Ebright in 1977, but she turned him down until his snores were silenced.

EDUCATION FIGHT

The Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities will make a legal challenge this week against the new Education Bill, seeking a judicial review on the grounds that the Education Secretary, Mr Kenneth Baker, has given local education authorities an 'unreasonable' time to discuss the proposed changes with parents and teachers. *Action* in the courts will not delay the measure's passage through Parliament; but it could embarrass Mr Baker and the Prime Minister, who have always said the proposals were designed to give parents more influence.

NUCLEAR BILL SOARS

The cost of a nuclear weapons plant at Aldermaston has trebled to £1 billion since the project was announced three years ago, it was revealed yesterday, *writes Simon de Bruxelles*. An audit carried out for the Ministry of Defence by the engineering firm John Brown found that some projects were up to 18 months late and that others were now expected to cost at least twice as much as expected originally. The magazine *The Engineer* yesterday blamed the MoD for not giving firms a sufficiently detailed brief.

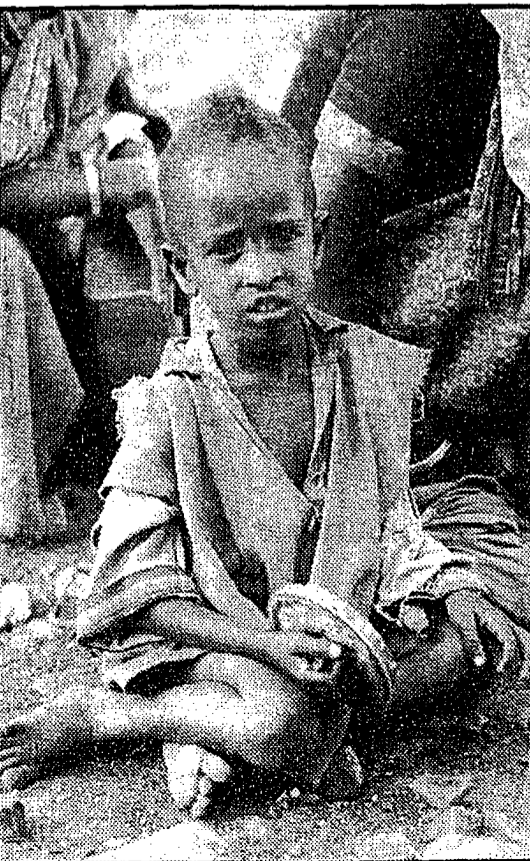
PRISON ACTION

Prison officers believe their leaders' plans to call a ballot on industrial action over the staffing crisis in Britain's jails could split their ranks, *writes Steve Smith*. Moderates fear that the ballot will pave the way for disruption during the run-up to Christmas, when already unsettled and over-crowded prisons will be at their most volatile. The crisis is over 'fresh start'—a new pay and conditions package under which the Home Office is insisting on lower manning levels in return for higher basic pay. Hardliners are delighted at their executive's stance.

ACID GAS THREAT

A cloud of poisonous hydrofluoric acid, which escaped from a ruptured storage tank, injured more than 200 people and caused the evacuation of 4,000 people from their homes in the Houston suburb of Texas City.

TWO MILLION LIVES AT RISK IN NEW DROUGHT



A young Ethiopian boy (left) sits at a food distribution centre in the Hararghe region of Ethiopia, where drought has destroyed crops and is threatening the lives of up to two million people. The international relief organisation CARE is appealing for 45,000 tons of grain to be allocated immediately to avoid serious starvation and dislocation of the population in the area, which lies south-east of the capital, Addis Ababa.

Low rainfall since June has caused almost the total loss of this year's maize crop and substantial loss of sorghum. As a result, severe food shortages are expected to begin in December and continue until the next crop is due, late next year. Unless immediate arrangements are made to ship 45,000 tons, CARE warns, the grain will not arrive in time to prevent mass starvation. A further 20,000 to 40,000 tons may be needed later.