

Diary

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The Guardian (1959-2003); Jul 29, 1988;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Guardian* (1821-2003) and *The Observer* (1791-2003)

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DOUGLAS HOGG, the Home Office minister responsible for piloting the post-Hungerford Firearms Amendment Bill through the Commons, knows the shortcomings of existing law through personal experience. Four years ago, while in the company of Lord Kimball on the peer's Alt na Harra estate in Sutherland, he shot a stag illegally. Lord Kimball disclosed the offence — but not the identity of the offender — during a firearms debate: "I am very conscious that the Minister's honourable friend committed an offence when he shot a stag using an estate rifle." He had been arguing for the

liberalisation of the law: at present shotguns can be licensed to an estate and used by guests, but not rifles. "It was a genuine mistake," he added yesterday, "and if the person had been under 18 it would have been legal. It's jolly nonsense. We want the legislation to cover good sporting practice, otherwise it will mean more people having to own rifles and travel around with them." Under the 1968 Firearms Act, Mr Hogg could have faced a fine of up to £2,000 and a maximum of six months in prison if the case had been heard at a magistrates' court, or three years' gaol and an unlimited fine if tried by a crown court. Whoever handed him the rifle would also have committed an offence. The Home Office is thinking of changing the law, a spokesman confirmed last night.

OLLIE AND BETSY North need your help — now," says a quarter-page ad for the North Defense Trust being run currently in the Wall Street Journal and other American papers. "After 20 years as a marine, a highly decorated hero, after 5½ years at the National Security Council where he worked so hard to rescue hostages, combat terrorism and fight communism, Ollie North was thanked by an indictment . . . official Washington stands idly by to watch North fight this out alone, his adversary an independent counsel with unlimited funds, 30 attorneys and 50 investigators. He needs your help." If you're daft enough to be touched by this, you can buy an appropriate US newspaper and fill in the form which starts: "YES, Ollie and Betsy, I am making a contribution of \$. . ."

THOSE DOUGHTY anti-fascists at Searchlight magazine were somewhat discomfited this week to find the publication's east London address — long a closely-guarded secret — splashed, with photograph, across National Front News. Given the extreme-right's continuing and recent penchant for firebombing its opponents — the leader of the Newcastle section of Anti-Fascist Action was the most recent victim of an arson attack at dead of night — this is no laughing matter. How, then, to explain the leak? Infiltration can be ruled out. There is, however, convincing evidence to suggest that the source lies within British Telecom. If so, as Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn pointed out in a letter yesterday to the Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, asking him to order an investigation, this would

contravene the Data Protection and Official Secrets Acts.

DR AUSTIN MORGAN, the author of the first due of five books about Harold Wilson, is indeed, as I suggested yesterday, experiencing some difficulty over his publishing contract with Dent — now taken over by Weidenfeld, itself the publisher of Philip Ziegler's authorised version. His original editor, Bill Neill-Hall, left the firm before the takeover was concluded last December. His successor, Peter Shellard, the former Dent managing director, was summarily fired three weeks ago, leaving only a handful of the 30 editorial staff once employed by Dent. Several months ago, Dr Morgan delivered the bulk of the manuscript, but has heard not a word in response — leaving publishing

circles wondering whether Lord Weidenfeld might not be displaying understandable reluctance at publishing what is expected to be a critical biography of the man who made him a peer in advance of the official volume. "The whole position is very bizarre," said Dr M (whose initials I incorrectly stated as F.O. yesterday), "and I would like it resolved." Lord W's spokeswoman insisted that the book, when completed, would come out as planned.

FROM THE new edition of Canadian air regulations: "Except as authorised by the minister, no person shall enter or attempt to enter any aircraft in flight, or leave except for the purpose of making a parachute descent, or give upon aircraft in flight any gymnastic or otherwise exhibition."