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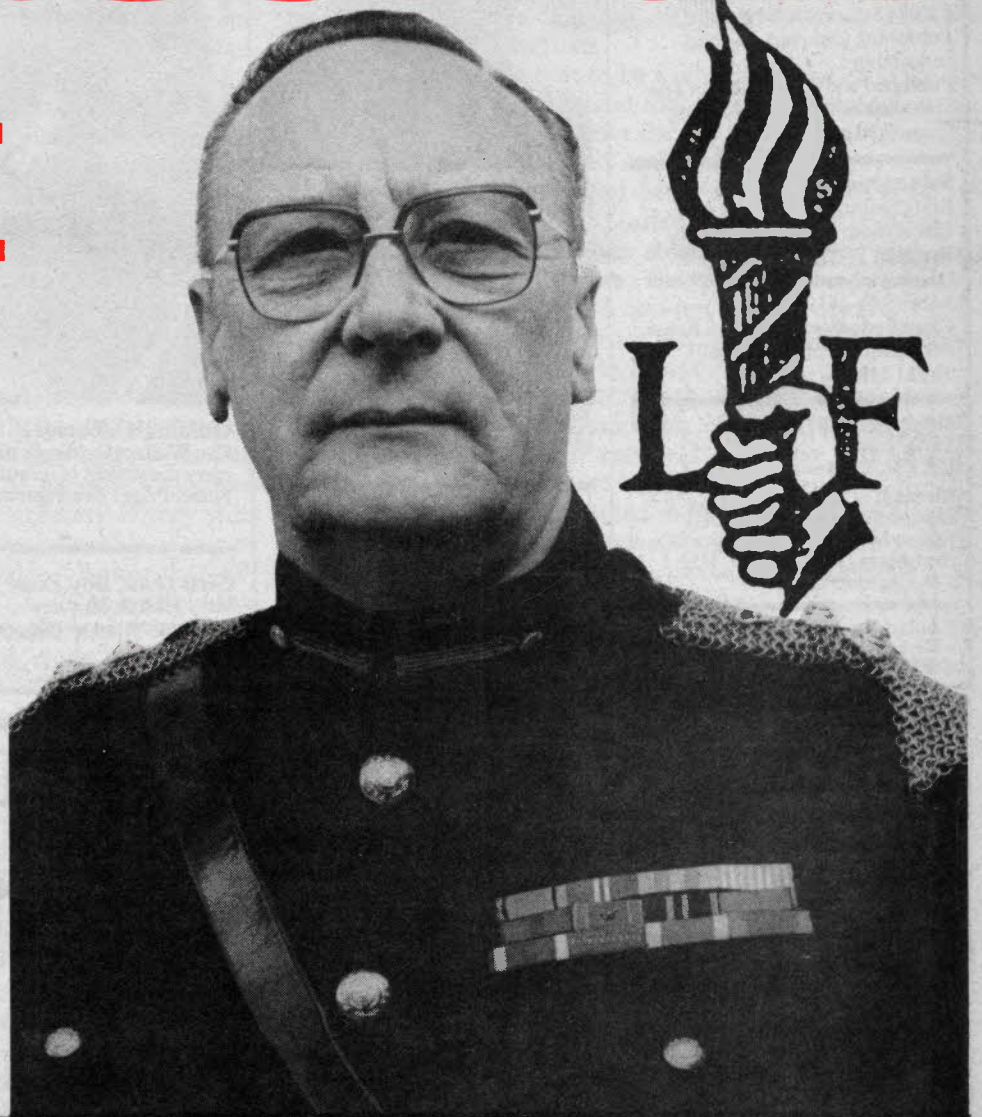
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# Statesman

## PRIVATE ARMIES ON THE MOVE

**EXCLUSIVE**

**Duncan Campbell**



## Private 'military-style force' gets government backing

A LITTLE-KNOWN 'military-style force' has been given government backing to expand and 'legalise' its activities, according to government circulars obtained by the *New Statesman*. Over the last three years, the London-based paramilitary group – the 'Legion of Frontiersmen of the Commonwealth' has, according to its Commandant, become a registered charity at the suggestion of Defence Ministry officials.

Last month the Home Office incorporated the Legion's paramilitaries into its civil defence volunteer programme and announced that the Legion was officially regarded as 'committed to the support of . . . war emergency plans'.

Labour MPs this week expressed surprise that a military organisation whose objects include assistance to the Army in 'war' should have been registered by the Charity Commissioners. Ayrshire MP George Foulkes is questioning the Home Secretary about the Commissioners' decision. Another MP, Denis Canavan, last week asked the Charity Commissioners to justify the registration of four politically right-wing institutions as charities. He will be adding the Legion to his enquiry list. Charities are generally supposed not to be 'political'.

'Peace', paradoxically, is not officially recognised as a charitable activity. Two weeks ago, GLC officials consulted the Charity Commissioners about the Council's plans for a Peace Prize and were warned that 'the promotion of peace as such is not a charitable purpose', according to the law.

Frank Field MP will also be questioning the Secretary of State for Defence and the Attorney General this week about the Legion's claim that the government has authorised the raising of private paramilitary organisations – despite the provisions of the 1936 Public Order Act, which prohibit the wearing of uniforms for political purposes and the formation of quasi-military organisations.

The Legion asserts that it is, in effect, licensed by the Ministry of Defence to operate as an unofficial military force. In a recent letter to an enquirer, the Legion's Scottish Commander, Major T.C.R. Armstrong-Wilson of Dumfries, wrote:

The Legion . . . is a Military (or, rather, Cavalry) style force very similar to the TA, but it is not part of the Ministry of Defence. It is, however, approved by the MoD otherwise it could not exist.

The Legion of Frontiersmen's current Commandant is 'Brigadier' Peter Fitchett, a physiotherapist whose private clinic at Heath House, Bexleyheath, also serves as the national headquarters of the Legion and the drilling and meeting centre for its London area 'Colour Squadron'. He told the *New Statesman* last week that the Legion now had over 2,000 members. With government backing, the Legion has recently embarked on an 'expansion programme'.

The Legion has established a complete military structure throughout Britain, with Squadron headquarters in Scotland, Sussex, Northamptonshire and Greater London. All of its officer cadre use military titles ranging from Lieutenant to Brigadier.

The Ministry of Defence advised the Legion to become a charity. According to Brigadier Fitchett: 'We decided through (advice from the) MoD to legalise ourselves – it's taken three years'. The Legion, although independent, is a member of the government-funded Reserve Forces Association (RFA), which embraces over 200 territorial army-type units. 'We used to use a lot of Territorial Army drill halls and training areas', Fitchett said.

Ministry of Defence officials, however, this week disputed the Legion's claim to have their official backing. 'The Legion', according to a Ministry statement on Tuesday, 'is not officially recognised by MoD. It is not allowed to use our drill halls. We are uncertain of its charitable status, but we have not sponsored it as a charity'.

The MoD says that it does pay about £10,000 a year towards the administrative costs of the RFA.



Some of this money is believed to have been used until 1977 by a secret 'Resistance and Psychological Operations Committee' of the RFA. The Committee was planning an undercover 'anti-communist resistance' network in case of war or



The Legion of Frontiersmen: the Colour Party and Commonwealth Staff Officers

emergency in Britain. Defence Ministry officials this week admitted that the 'resistance' committee operated in this conspiratorial way until early in 1976 when the government advised the Association to disband the secret operation. At the time, members of the Resistance and Psychological Operations Committee had, according to the *Daily Express*, been setting up their own secret national paramilitary and intelligence network.

The Legion of Frontiersmen has no connection with fascist organisations, and members fought against the Nazis in Belgium even before the British declaration of war in 1939. Individual members of the National Front and similar extreme right-wing bodies are, however, known to have penetrated the Legion in the past in the north of England.

According to Legion literature, its training includes plans for 'aid to the civil power'. The Legion's history says that it 'assisted in quelling the troubles in Rhodesia' in the 1950s and that its members fought in both World Wars and several African wars. Formed in 1904, the Legion claims to have had 25 squadrons and 17,000 members during the first world war.

The MPs' questions reflect fears that the 1936 Public Order Act, which was passed to prevent Mosley's blackshirts from training and operating as a military force, may not contain sufficient powers to deal effectively with paramilitary organisations. According to LSE law professor John Griffith, 'The meaning of Section 2 of the Public Order Act (prohibiting quasi-military organisations) is by no means clear in relation to organisations of this kind. There is a wide loophole in the Act because of its lack of clarity about political objects . . . it could let in all sorts of organisations.'

Professor Griffith commented that, although the Legion declares itself to be non-political, this doesn't get it 'off the hook' of the law 'just by saying you're non-political'. Politically-motivated organisations could use the loophole and such claims to set up private armies.

The Legion's activities, which include regular weekly drilling and a members' shooting club, raise the question of whether they are legal under the 1819 Unlawful Drilling Act, which prohibits 'meetings . . . for the purpose of (military) training or drilling . . . without

lawful authority from Her Majesty or a Secretary of State'. The MoD says that no authority has been given.

Yet the Legion's recruiting literature now claims that it is 'fully integrated into the Home Office Emergency Planning Organisation'. Its objects have recently been changed to stress civil emergency operations. The 'United Kingdom Command' of the Legion is claimed in its trust deed to be a 'non-political' association intending 'to protect and restore life in communities affected by disasters or emergencies' and 'to act in support of and in co-operation with . . . emergency services in times of disaster and emergency'.

Its third, purely military, objective is 'in times of war and national emergency, to aid the armed forces in all possible ways'. The Legion also operates a cadet force for 14-18 year olds intended to 'instruct young persons in the principles of discipline, loyalty and good citizenship'.

The Legion's activities have been highlighted by its being recruited to join the government's civil defence campaign by the Home Office's Co-ordinator of Voluntary Effort in Civil Defence, Sir Leslie Mavor. Mavor, an ex-RAF officer, was formerly head of the Home Defence College in Yorkshire. Since his appointment in 1981, he has been writing a highly personal 'Quarterly Newsletter' which is sent direct to

council Emergency Planning Officers, deliberately bypassing councillors and senior officials, particularly in 'nuclear free zone' local authorities. As the Home Office's chief protagonist on behalf of civil defence and nuclear weapons, Mavor writes his Newsletters in a blunt, unrestrained and spirited fashion not normally associated with public civil service documents. Members of Camden Council have, however, obtained recent issues of the Newsletter and passed them to the NS.

In his final 1983 Newsletter, No 8 in the series, Mavor invited his readers to find out more about the Legion. He concluded:

That's it - the last newsletter under the old regime of the flaccid hand in the velvet glove . . . In January, the Civil Defence regulations . . . will be about to burst on a suspecting world.

In the latest Newsletter, issued last month, Mavor wrote that:

It is up to us to show determination, understanding and skill in dismantling, piece by piece, the last filibustering impediments that are put in the way . . . of the government's civil defence policy.

'For once', he commented, 'the opponents of civil defence inside and outside local government (are) going to find themselves on the defensive.'

**Duncan Campbell**

offered what Sheriff's Deputies later described as encouragement. This is illegal under a court injunction prohibiting blocking the entrance to the Williams factory as well as 'encouraging, inducing, inciting and pressuring others' to do so.

At least four plainclothes police were at the meeting. The next night uniformed police arrived at the church with a search warrant, looking for the Greenham film 'Common Sense', and confiscated files containing the names of participants in the Williams blockade.

When Hutchinson appeared at the Covenant's demonstration outside Williams' factory on 2 December as an observer, she was arrested along with 51 Americans. She was held for 24 hours and arraigned 'in a dirty back room office instead of a proper court', she says.

She has been charged with obstruction before, at Greenham and in New York, but not conspiracy. 'I'm very flattered,' she says. 'I was only passing through and hardly had any time to conspire at all.' At the trial on 13 March, Hutchinson will use the American constitutional right of freedom of speech and assembly in her defence.

**Susan Jaffe**

For further information and to contribute to the Greenham suit or Hutchinson's defence, contact Greenham Women Against Cruise, 5 Leonard St., London EC2.

## MISCELLANY

### Nothing you can say . . .

At last, a practical answer to all despairing socialists who want to know 'What can we do to help Labour? Answer: rush out and buy 'My Guy', the new single by Tracey Ullman, the trendy alternative comedian. It will be released on Monday week and the video of the record might even be shown on *Top of the Pops*. All actions to make it a hit and so ensure a large audience for the video will be ideologically sound. Not because she is seen romping round a London council estate, even less because she flies into the arms of a good-looking guy in a dinner jacket - but because of who this good-looking guy turns out to be. He is the MP for Islwyn, the Rt Hon Neil Kinnock.

### When to belt up

Last week's news story about the use of 'mediaeval' metal body belts in British prisons mentioned that the Home Office denied the use of such things. It claimed that it only



used ones made entirely of leather. The Home Office continued to deny the use of metal belts when the 'Watchdog' team on BBC TV's *Sixty Minutes* ran the story. In fact, the Prison Department official concerned, John O'Sullivan, actually telephoned the programme's duty editor while *Sixty Minutes* was on the air to insist that metal body belts were absolutely and categorically not used in British prisons. The duty editor paid no attention, and so O'Sullivan phoned the editor of *Sixty Minutes* the next day to complain. A little later he phoned again. It had been brought to his attention that the Home Office did have metal body belts after all. Sorry about the confusion.

### What's up doc? (1)

Mrs Thatcher was due to be interviewed by the BBC's political editor, John Cole, last week. At the last minute her press secretary, Bernard Ingham, telephoned to make clear that Cole was only

allowed to ask the Prime Minister about her forthcoming visit to Hungary. Cole naturally enough was incensed by the idea that he would not be permitted to ask Mrs Thatcher about such vital subjects as GCHQ, Mark Thatcher and the Tory Right. He refused to do the interview, and a few hours later had a heart attack. So now we know who to blame.

### What's up doc? (2)

Mrs T is certainly going through a bad patch at home, so it must have been with some relief that she actually flew off to Hungary to play at being the Iron Lady on her first trip to a Warsaw Pact country. Apart from shaking the hands of surprised shoppers in downtown Budapest, she had one main aim. It was to find out the truth about Andropov's state of health. Her host Mr Kadar has been very close to Andropov ever since Yuri was Russian ambassador in Budapest and organised the putting down of the Hungarian uprising. But, despite being closeted with Kadar for over two hours, she drew an absolute blank.

### Shermania

Sir Alfred Sherman, the guru to the government, is an enthusiastic rail to road conversionist. He is a member (unpaid) of the team which British Rail set up to look at the feasibility of turning railways into roads. When *The Standard* said last month that Sherman was also a paid consultant to the National Bus Company it quoted Peter Snape MP, a Labour transport spokesman, attacking him. Snape then received the following letter: 'If the *Evening Standard* report is anything to go by, you have grossly libelled and defamed me, accusing me of impropriety and bias.' Sherman says that he cleared the NBC appointment with BR. The letter contains a number of spelling mistakes, such as the Freudian 'red-ploy' for 'redeploy'. He rounds off with: 'No one will impugn my integrity with impunity. I have the resources for litigation and will deploy them without hesitation to defend my honour unless you are prepared to make an appropriate (sic) apology. You will note that Robert Adley [the Tory MP], whom I am honoured to have as an enemy, had the discretion to launch his attacks from the safety of the floor of the house. You did not, and therefore do not enjoy privilege. At all events, I look forward to a prompt reply.'

Snape replied on 26 January: 'Dear Sir Alf, I think you should know that someone is obviously using your writing paper and, judging by the enclosed, it is not someone of a high standard of education. Perhaps you should make some enquiries'.

## Greenham woman arrested in US

A GREENHAM woman on a money-raising tour in the US has been arrested and charged with conspiracy to obstruct, to commit trespass and to disturb the peace. She comes up for trial on 13 March and, if found guilty, faces a sentence of 2½ years in prison.

The woman is Jean Hutchinson who has been raising support and money for the case of Greenham women against President Reagan. (They are claiming that the deployment of cruise missiles is illegal because if used they will kill millions of civilians, which is proscribed under various international laws.) One evening last December Ms Hutchinson spoke to a religious group, Covenant for Peace, at a church in Michigan. In the town, Williams International Corporation is working on its contract to build 5000-7000 cruise missile engines.

During her talk, Ms Hutchinson showed a piece of the Greenham fence which had been torn down - surprising her audience with this evidence of how vulnerable 'their' defences were in Britain. She quoted from the 19th century American philosopher and war resister Henry Thoreau and generally