

31 July 1987

PRIME MINISTER

PRESS DIGEST

MAIN NEWS

Press up in arms over Law Lords' ruling in Wright book case; the law is an ass, they say, as it extends coverage. Guardian says it is likely to go to the Euro Court. Kinnock says ruling defies all common sense.

"Poll tax" to be phased in over 4 years.

Reagan asks for Britain's help with minesweepers in Gulf. US Naval helicopter crashes into sea in Gulf operation, killing 4. Mail leader says it is humiliating for the Americans to have to beg for minesweepers but that is all the more reason why the response should be positive.

India establishes peacekeeping force in Jaffra.

INDUSTRY

Electricity profits at a record - up 22%. Some complaints that bills have not been cut and fears that they will rise.

ICI profits up by nearly 50% in first six months to record £691m.

Independent: Standard Chartered likely to sell stake in South African bank.

Times: Barclays Bank makes £40m loss in first 6 months compared with £434m profit the previous.

Times: BA tells Government not to ignore Tory MPs' opinions that merger plans should not go to MMC.

Times: Professional Association of Teachers strongly criticise the "educational factory hands" attitude of the larger unions who are planning strict, clock watching adherence to new contracts next term.

Independent: Fears over future of fast reactor project dismissed by UKAEA.

Independent: Acid rain down by 25%, scientists say.

ECONOMY

Abbey National and Halifax trim mortgage rates.

Express gives substantial P2 coverage to Chancellor's end of term report on economy - "Britain all set to reap rich rewards, forecasts Lawson".

FT: British financial institutions contributed a record £9.4bn in overseas earnings last year.

Times: Bank of England supports sterling after sharp fall in pound hits gilt market.

MEDIA

David Sullivan, owner of Sunday Sport, has bought Morning Star's HQ as the platform to launch a new national daily. Daily Sport would be launched either this October or late February.

LAW AND ORDER

Two families win right to keep their (6) children in Cleveland scandal cases. Stuart Bell MP calls for all children to be sent home.

Double life sentence for Sheffield lawyer who killed mistress and child.

Mail says thugs who carry knives in street are facing a Government crackdown.

Times: North London Polytechnic suggests disused mental hospitals could be converted into prisons.

Times: Mencap calls meeting of medical and legal experts to draw up proposals to reform laws on mental handicap and sexuality following recent judgement over sterilisation; social services departments appeal for more resources to cope with soaring numbers of child abuse referrals.

Independent: Police chiefs told to prove need for more officers.

DEFENCE

Much coverage of the passing out parade of Grenadier Guardsman "first black Guardsman".

PEOPLE

President Reagan to have cancer operation today.

Edwina Currie said to have "boobed" by saying "We've all got to die sometime" in row with doctor over winter hypothermia; Labour say she is heartless; Mirror: callous.

Jeffrey Archer tells American TV viewers you had supported him throughout libel trial.

Queen Mother involved in a minor car accident.

INTERNATIONAL

68 injured in lorry bomb attack on Johannesburg army complex. ANC blamed.

Over 50 killed when racehorse jet crashes on road after take off in Mexico City.

Gandhi shaken by attack by gun wielding Sri Lankan sailor who was part of guard of honour.

George Gale, in Mail, has a big go at Lord Cockfield for persisting with EC VAT proposals. "Get stuffed", says Mr Gale.

Shultz and Shevardnadze will meet in Washington on September 15 to discuss prospects for a Soviet-US summit (FT).

Falklands are on threshold of self-financing because of 150-mile fisheries conservation and management zone (FT).

WRIGHT BOOK

Not a major story in pops, most of whom give it scant treatment, but 'qualities' on their high horse.

Star: Editors hit out at "spy ruling".

Sun: 11 lines headed "Lords vote to back spy ban".

Mirror prints heads of three judges who ruled against publication upside down and heads its front page comment "You fools". It describes the ruling as a monstrous act of censorship. There is only one answer - publish and be damned. Far better to risk contempt of court than contempt of democracy. And on P2 it prints allegations made in Australian court yesterday.

Today: Blanket ban on Spycatcher. Anger over gag by Law Lords; leader headed "ridiculous vendetta" says Government has every right to regard Wright as the opposite of a hero. But a legitimate attempt to bind a civil servant to his oath has turned into something like a vendetta and suppression of press freedom. The horse has bolted and you should now turn your energies to reform of Official Secrets Act.

Express: Delight and fury at new Spycatcher ban.

Mail: Anger as Lords slam door on Wright.

Telegraph P1 lead: Law Lords ban reporting of Wright case. Press freedom appeal sought in Euro Court. Whitehall regards it as vindication of Government's policy. Ministers celebrate. Leader headed "Unwise censorship" has sympathy for those who believe the Lords have lost their way. They have rearmed newspapers and MPs who have been seeking to show that the Government's position is unsupportable.

Guardian leads across six columns with "Spycatcher ruling gags press - Law Lords do more than Government asked. Australian court reports banned". Leader says Wright and his book are a bit of a sideshow. Quite a lot of Fleet Street it admits does not seem excited. But it thinks the law is an ass and sinister that the common law can be so twisted.

FT: Opposition and newspaper editors strongly attacked the Law Lords decision yesterday to widen the ban stopping newspapers publishing; Kinnock said the ruling had disturbing implications for the future of press freedom. FT adds that the case will meander on in its bizarre fashion, but it is not in itself very important.

FT leader says Wright case is like the poor: always with us. First principle is that if it is necessary to have a secret service, then it is reasonable that its employees should be committed to life-long confidentiality. There is also principle which you do not seem to have taken on board - that like any other institution, the secret service must evolve and with it the methods of self or external regulation.

Independent: Press gag on Wright spy book attacked; Campbell-Savours plans to read sections with the record of the House; public reading in Hyde Park by Wedgewood-Benn planned as "chorus of protest greets Law Lords 'Spycatcher' ruling". Editorial calls for an all-party committee to oversee security services and reform of the Official Secrets Act.

Times front page lead describes the Lords' ban on Peter Wright's book as extraordinary and unexpected. Opposition MPs liken Britain to "Stalin's Russia" and an "eastern European communist dictatorship"; Times leader under heading "A very dangerous day" describes the law as an ass. As a result of Lords' judgement it is no longer a dozy, docile domestic creature whom a kick in the right place would restore it to useful activity. In the hands of Lords Brandon, Templeman and Ackner it has become unpredictable and wild, seemingly responsive only to autocratic whims.

Paul Brown, editor of The New Law Journal, writing in Times says the whole soap opera has been misdirected from start to finish. It has brought the law, the Government and the security services into disrepute while failing to address the central cause of all the fuss: the allegations Wright makes.

RATES

Star: Poll tax will be eased in.

Sun: Poll tax blow.

Mirror: Ridley's tax snub.

Today: £100 bill for everyone in 3 years.

Express: Poll tax cash spree warning to spendthrift councils - start curbing spending now; leader headed "This is good riddance to bad rates" says there was a good case for getting the agony over quickly and this would have been more in line with a radical programme. The chosen solution suggests Ministers have shied away from their first tricky hurdle. And it wants the charge renamed "Local Service Charge". It calls for a big propaganda drive.

Mail: How the big rates switch will work.

Telegraph: Cabinet agrees to four-year poll tax transition.

Guardian: Poll tax to be phased in over 4 years.

Times: Government ends weeks of doubt over plans to abolish rating system. Phasing in of community charge marks severe defeat for Nicholas Ridley who wanted immediate changeover. He faced an invincible alliance of you and Nigel Lawson.

Independent: Poll tax will be phased in by 5 instalments.

FT: Government to phase in community charge over four year period.

EDUCATION

Baker accuses Jack Straw of trying to derail Government plans for a far-reaching reform of education in England and Wales by pleading for a two-month extension to the consultation period.

HONOURS

Star: Lord Jim. Peerage for Tory wets and Callaghan.

Sun: Oh Lord! Wets in from the cold - "a galaxy of Tory has been rescued from oblivion"; leader headed "Arise you deadbeats" says the word 'failure' applies to just about every new peer.

Mirror: Sunny Jim leaps to Lords.

Today: Old boys in end of the peer show.

Express: Maggie's Cabinet in exile. Charles Moore says those honoured are almost all victims of your success.

Mail: Maggie pays debts to wets with peerages. But du Cann, Hailsham and Powell are missing. Omission of du Cann inexplicable; leader says the most remarkable feature of yesterday's list is that it contains the names of some of your most eminent rebels. Where there is merit you seem almost incapable of malice. And you are right. It also hails the elevation of Jay and Mason.

Guardian: Thatcher honours Tebbit - "predictable" list. Unconfirmed gossip that du Cann pressed his claims for a peerage; leader says list will cement the assumption that former Cabinet Ministers are assured of a peerage.

Independent: Five sacked Tories join Callaghan and Jenkins in Lords; editorial says you have been more generous than expected to those within your party but characteristically mean to those outside.

Times: Thatcher critics head dissolution honours list.