

Chapter XIV

The NATFHE Left Shoots Itself in the Mouth

(a) The Left's Achilles Heel Attracts its Share of Arrows

The monitoring issue was not laid to rest when NATFHE's Birmingham liaison committee turned its back on the Birmingham Labour group's sordid practice and acted as if it was acceptable to spy on employees. Having decided to follow it through the Labour Party to expose the culprit, Bis Weaver wrote to those Labour Group members, * who attended the meeting that led to her being monitored. She referred to her "movements as an employee of the City of Birmingham [being] the subject of enquiries" and to the rumours circulating around the city of a Labour group member being behind the monitoring. She also put the monitoring into context by pointing out that it occurred immediately prior to her attending an enquiry "to give evidence in a complaint of harassment...brought against some members of the college where [she] work[ed], all of [whom]...are trade union activists, [and] one a member of Sparkbrook Constituency Labour Party." ** Concern was expressed that "a Labour Group member might be responsible for requesting that enquiries be made about [her] legitimate activities as an employee of the city" and as they attended that meeting, she asked for "any information...[on] what could be considered, by the reasonable person, as a form of intimidation given the circumstances at the time the enquiries were made." She made it clear that she saw a strong link between the complaint of harassment at Bournville College and the monitoring. In conclusion, she said that "as the Labour Party is committed to the right of employees and members of the labour movement to work without possible political interference and intimidation, it is necessary to establish whether or not a member of the Labour movement interfered with this right."¹ The letter was signed 'Bis Weaver, Selly Oak Branch.'

The first reply – two others were to follow, came from a member of the Black Section. He wrote of knowing of the "rumours that a member of the Labour Group asked the Chief Executive's Office to investigate [her] movements...[and he] strongly condemn[ed] any

* Councillors Afsal, Arnot-Job, Benjamin, Gray, Knowles, Manku, Murphy, O'Keefe, Rochford

** As previously mentioned, this constituency included the Sparkbrook ward and the Fox Hollies ward. Councillor Knowles was one of the Sparkbrook ward representatives; Councillor Najma Hafeez represented Fox Hollies.

member of [the] Party infringing [her] right of movement as a city council employee.”² The Birmingham Labour Party Ethnic Minority Liaison Committee had already taken up the issue; and the Black Section of the Birmingham Labour Party, which included some Black NATFHE members, became increasingly critical of the failure of the White NATFHE ‘Leftists’ to act positively on a number of issues facing Bis Weaver, including the removal of her union rights. The Black Section, which included Labour councillors, had listened to these Leftists’ rationalisations accompanied by professed sympathies for Bis Weaver’s plight but unlike these so-called ‘anti-racism activists’ the Black Section was prepared to act.

We had already ensured that the Black Section had a clear picture of the situation by putting together a document entitled ‘Details of the Performance of Some of the Labour Left in NATFHE’ and sent it to the Section’s secretary in January 1987. Particular activities of various members of the Birmingham/NATFHE ‘Left’ were described and how they used the Industrial Tribunal hearing as an excuse for holding back and doing nothing on the branch rights and monitoring issues. These were two of the many issues that were separate and distinct from the Industrial Tribunal. A range of other information was provided to show the effort made by her to bring the issue of racist harassment to the attention of these ‘Leftists’ and of their reluctance to assist a Black member. * The Black Section took this up and appealed for assistance from trade unionists in the area.

We suggested that the White ‘Left’ “should come out in the open...[as] it might help Black people, who are struggling against extremely large odds,...to identify their opposition” so that strategies can be formulated, “which will account for unreliable and hypocritical ‘supporters’ of Black people.” We asked, “Is there any basis for dialogue between genuine anti-racists, whose life and livelihood are affected by racism, racial discrimination and racial harassment; and those for whom anti-racism can remain an agenda item in a committee room discussion [accompanied by] pious words of ‘high principle and policy?’”³

When a letter from NATFHE’s Birmingham liaison committee secretary to Bournville officers came into its possession, there were no doubts, from information conveyed by its own contacts in liaison committee, this was an expression of support for the Bournville executive seeking to further isolate Bis Weaver and put additional pressure on her.

The letter was sent to Cave, Bournville branch chair and appeared to be a standard

* A few specific points made by these Leftists were also disclosed: (i) the advice that nothing should be done to assist Bis Weaver because it might split the left in the union; (ii) the comment made for not supporting her, namely, that a racist and sexist could be a good trade unionist; (iii) the negative comment made about a Black woman possibly becoming the liaison chairperson, which had been ignored by most of these ‘activists’

letter outlining the general arrangements of A3 remission sent out to any branch involved in a dispute with management to explain the workings of this arrangement. The secretary went a little further by noting “of late that the College Management seems to refer everything to the City. The running of the College lies clearly with the Principal and the Governors NOT with Margaret Street (the LEA)” - a not so hidden reference to the recent *Beider affair*, which management referred to the LEA. In concluding the letter, almost a postscript, he offered support by saying “I can assure you that the Liaison Committee have every confidence in the Officers and Branch Committee at Bournville College.”⁴ This was a touching description from the secretary, identifying these particular groups and not the branch membership as a whole, bearing in mind that the officers and committee members were on the receiving end of two Rule 8 complaints recently brought to the liaison secretary’s attention.

Familiar with the activities and attitudes of the White NATFHE Left/Labour Party members on the Weaver issues, this letter prompted the Black Section to make a formal approach to those liaison committee members in the Labour Party seeking an explanation for their inaction in a serious situation facing Bis Weaver within the union.

The secretary of the Black Section interpreted the liaison committee’s letter as “stating its support for the Bournville Branch Committee and its Officers...against...a Black member of the Branch” and the Black Section sought clarification of their position. It was also apparent that “those whom Black people should expect support from, i.e., the Labour Left in NATFHE, have not supported her in her struggle for justice. On the contrary, actions have been taken against her at Branch and other levels.” Enclosing a copy of the liaison committee’s letter, the Black Section sought “an assurance that [it] can count on [their] socialist principles and commitment to anti-racism to ensure this Black member’s rights are not only restored to her but are fully protected according to her rights as a trade unionist.”⁵

A reply to the Black Section was sent on the 5th April signed by six Labour Party members, who were delegates/officers of the Birmingham liaison committee, to whom Bis Weaver and I later affixed the pseudonym of the ‘Birmingham NATFHE Six’. Their reply did not reach Bis Weaver until the end of April, whereupon our views on its contents were made known to the ‘Six’ and to the Black Section.

Before receiving a copy of the ‘Six’s’ letter, a copy of the liaison secretary’s letter to the branch chair came into our possession following its distribution around the branch and we went into action with a letter to Doughty. We played on the not so hidden signal of support to branch officers and committee members. We noted that as “we both have Rule 8 complaints against the...Branch Committee,...it might be considered that the [Liaison

Committee] is intervening, with this blanket statement, to show partisanship in favour of the Bournville Branch Committee...” We asked, “if it was the intention of the BLC to show partisanship,...[and] was the assurance...agreed...at a meeting of the BLC? And, if so, when was the meeting...which agreed to it?” If no partisanship was intended “would the BLC make this quite clear...to the Bournville Branch Committee for distribution amongst the membership of the Bournville Branch.” This was necessary “because already some people inside and outside Bournville Branch...are drawing the conclusion that the BLC is showing partisan support for the Bournville Branch Committee...against two...branch members...[taking] legitimate complaints against the...Branch Committee.” In conclusion, we hoped the head office directive to the liaison secretary “not to answer any correspondence from us, will not interfere with the [Liaison Committee] making...clear...its intention.”⁶ As expected, the liaison secretary failed to respond nor did he send a disclaimer to the Bournville branch. Was he still hiding behind head office’s directive or was it because we had hit the nail on the head?

The position of Birmingham NATFHE’s White Labour Party activists was shown by one of its number in a discussion with Alton Burnett, a couple of days before Alton revealed the contents to me at a WMARC meeting on the 8th April. Alton had spoken to him of Bis Weaver’s difficulties – not her general difficulties, of which this officer was well aware, but the problems caused by another postponement of the Industrial Tribunal and the increasing costs incurred the longer it went on. The officer, whom Alton named, did not respond in line with the approach that the signatories of the letter from the ‘Birmingham NATFHE Six’ had tried to portray of ‘fair-mindedness.’ * Instead, he asked Alton “how could he [the officer] support Bis Weaver,...a Head of Department, as it would be supporting management” and he quoted the salary she was to receive in her new post. This was an interesting revelation because Bis Weaver had only received official notification of her new appointment on that very day, 8th April, so from whom did he get the information? ** He certainly had an open line to someone in the city council or at Bilston College.⁷ There were probably a lot more people who knew about her appointment before she did given that this particular officer was

* For the contents of this letter and our response see Sect (d)

** Bis Weaver received notification of the appointment on the day Alton Burnett passed on to me the contents of his discussion with this NATFHE/Labour Party member

well-known as a gossip, relaying information around the union. *

Bis Weaver had faced severe problems for over two years and this officer had done nothing positive for her when in a position to do so. Now he justified his 'reluctance' to support her by conjuring up a truly amazing excuse for withholding support. Did this attempted justification mean support for anti-racist action depended on the income and position of the victim? If so, what was the level of salary beyond which support would be withheld? This would certainly rule him out of the struggle against racism and anti-Semitism as fascists and racists did not, and do not, differentiate against African-Caribbean, Asian and Jewish people on income criteria. This NATFHE officer/Birmingham Labour Party member had introduced a 'means test' for distributing the benefits of 'anti-racism' to the victims. It was open season on ethnic minorities who were above a certain income level – a level with a fairly limited threshold. If NATFHE's Broad Left publicised this as a 'requirement for assistance', it might deter ethnic minorities from seeking promotion rather than be left to fight alone in the workplace as she had been impelled to do. Could this be a strategy for ensuring ethnic minorities remained in the lower grades in the profession to keep aspiring White members contented? Was this a variation of Day's technique for removing ethnic minorities from higher posts? Probably not, but anything was possible in NATFHE!

The next meeting of the WMARC (April) was attended by twelve members of whom ten were Black, including five new members. The two White members were Jefny Ashcroft and me. Bis Weaver was unable to attend as she was still in London involved in the arrangements for the SERTUC Conference.

The liberation of WMARC from the fetters of the BLC/REC had already attracted an increasing number of Black members but this did not seem to be what the REC/BLC had in mind when it 'welcomed' Black participation as the REC/BLC contingent renewed its boycott. The REC/BLC could have crushed the 'uprising' of dissatisfied Black members by packing the WMARC with its full complement of nominees but this was not sound politics. They would have had to engage in a face-to-face confrontation with an increasing number of Black members and show where they really stood on Black rights rather than their usual

* Bis Weaver first thought of getting out of Bournville College the previous year until talked out of it by the Principal. After the grievance was submitted and when the LEA intimated, in February 1987, that Gates would be back in Bournville College by September 1987, she decided to find an appointment outside the LEA's jurisdiction. Her situation had been made more difficult as some members of staff interpreted the branch motion as not only covering union matters but also matters relating to her work, which made promoting equal opportunities difficult when colleagues were unsure as to whether to speak to her or not

manoeuvrings in smoke filled parlours. Would NATFHE want details of an open conflict between White officers and Black members in a NATFHE committee to be available for the applicant at the forthcoming Industrial Tribunal? An easier way for the REC/BLC bureaucrats to deal with discontented Black members would be to bide their time until after the Industrial Tribunal hearing and push through the new constitution. The bureaucrats' reluctance to face new members while waiting to enforce their intentions on the WMARC received further confirmation. This was delivered in a message from the regional secretary to Krishna Shukla stating that only two co-optees were allowed and any new participants had only the status of observers with a ban on speaking and voting. Evans was even more flexible on 'rules and procedures' than already revealed. *

The reinvigorated WMARC showed its own flexibility by co-opting all newcomers on to the committee and disregarded the one-meeting-per-term 'directive' by agreeing to have monthly meetings and rotate the meeting place in order to provide more opportunities for people to attend. The REC/BLC's dismissive attitudes and proposed impositions on Black members were rejected *en masse* and it was recognised that in fighting racism in colleges it would be necessary to fight NATFHE's own patronising assumptions and inadequate procedures.

Alton Burnett, elected as Chair, seized on these proposed REC/BLC impositions to reassert the Black Lecturer's Group's position of Black people being encouraged to join the WMARC to speak on vital issues in the fight against racism with no bar on voting. Black members were not going to passively accept REC directives but take action to obtain equality and justice. As the chair said, this was not South Africa and nobody would be proscribed from participating in the committee's work.

The recommendations of the BLG Conference were presented, with which most of those attending were already familiar. The presentation served three objectives, namely, information for the two non-BLG members; to seek endorsement of the BLG's recommendations from a regional council sub-committee, which was granted; and to be placed on the official record of the appropriate sub-committee.⁸ A significant feature was the considerable difference in the REC/BLC's approach to 'anti-racism' based on presumption compared with the Black Lecturers' approach drawing on their experience of racism. If the REC/BLC objectives for the anti-racism struggle had been genuine, albeit misguided, its

* Evans' directive was incorrect as the number of co-optees was three according to the REC/BLC 'rules' and the time for election of co-optees had not yet arrived

nominees to WMARC would have attended the meeting, not to dominate Black members by sheer weight of numbers, which might have been difficult anyway, but to hear how Black members felt about NATFHE and the REC/BLC's arrogance and patronisation. Had they done so, they would have seen that Black members were keen to have some influence over the way the union dealt with racism in the work situation. Unfortunately, this was one of those *Catch 22* situations.

The mini-campaign we launched against the REC/BLC's latest attempts to discredit Bis Weaver through the *Beider affair*, the *Frew report*, and the Bournville racist motion did not choke off the Bournville branch's rumour machine. To see if she could stem the tide of rumours stirred up, specifically, by the *Beider affair*, she submitted a formal grievance to the Bournville governors. Still awaiting the report of a previous grievance conducted by officers of the LEA on the authority of the chair of governors, this avenue was not likely to provide a satisfactory outcome for her. Nonetheless, taking this route would show the *kernels* that their ill-thought out schemes would not go unchallenged. She did not intend to just sit back and let two of the Bournville 'trio' have free rein in the college.

The grievance specified that Cave and Hartland had "acted unprofessionally and in a manner which could be interpreted as an attempt to discredit [her] professionally, by reporting to Senior Management unfounded and defamatory allegations against her...[with the] intention...to put [her] under additional pressure in the College." She referred to the outstanding grievances against Cave and Hartland, and saw these additional actions on their part as further examples of their attempts "to undermine and discredit [her] in [her] professional role at Bournville College [and] should not be seen in isolation from [their] behaviour...described in [her] letter of complaint...dated 25th June 1986." Copies of the new grievance went to Cave, Hartland, the college principal and the LEA. *⁹

(b) The Labour Party Big Guns Fire Blanks

One of Labour Party's 'big guns' got into the act again but on this occasion not in the darkened corridors of the Council House. In a letter that might loosely be described as a response to her enquiry on the monitoring, Dick Knowles, Leader of the Labour group, wrote an extremely patronising letter which completely ignored her request for information. Despite Bis Weaver writing to him as a member of the Labour Party, on the dubious activities of a

* Bis Weaver registered a formal grievance because a previous written complaint to the Principal, in March 1987, about their behaviour in the *Beider affair*, was ignored¹⁰

Labour Party member, Knowles, the prime candidate for setting the monitoring in motion, replied in his capacity as Leader of Birmingham city council.

He acknowledged hearing “about the problems [she was] suffering from” but claimed not to “know why enquiries should have been made [about her] except that presumably [she was] at the Committee Meeting” following on from the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Meeting. He seemed to know that “certainly no comments were made about [her] attendance [at the first meeting] nor indeed would they have been made because...[she was] a co-opted member on that group.” Knowles put forward his own interpretation of the sequence of events at the second meeting. He explained that “possibly what might have happened is that [she was] present, [he] believe[d], at the Committee meeting afterwards and from what [he claimed to] understand...an officer of the local authority...wondered in fact whether [she] had time off or not.”

In other words, did she have permission to be absent from work to attend the meeting or was she receiving remuneration for which she was not entitled by not being at her place of work as required. The words ‘presumably, possibly, believe, understand’ were a veritable lexicon of bureaucratic muddying of the waters! Knowles then gave her a completely irrelevant ‘lecture’ on what should be done when attending a meeting at the Council House. The ‘advice’ Knowles offered was that “if [she is] not at work on a particular morning, then [she] ought to have a note from [her] Team Leader or Senior Officer, which gives [her] leave of absence...” He thought it reasonable “to suppose, unless [she is] on flexitime and of course taking time off in lieu to attend meetings of a local authority, that perhaps enquiries would be made” and, as he put it, “That’s all I can assume.”

Knowles continued in this vein with another irrelevant exposition on the conditions of employment; reminding her that “as an employee of the City [she is] subject to the same rules as any other employee,...i.e., that if [she] has a contract to do so many hours work that’s presumably what [she is] expected to do.” In the next paragraph, he virtually repeated himself by saying that her “activities as an employee of the City are to do the job of work presumably for which [she is] paid.”

Knowles plodded on by telling her that “activities as an employee of the City...ought not to be confused with [her] activities as a member of the Labour Party.” Exhibiting his overwhelming proneness to pretentiousness and patronisation Knowles went on to ‘explain’ that “If, for instance, a teacher is spending his or her time teaching the people under his or her control about Labour Party general activities, then that would be a misuse of their position as a teacher. In the same way, I think, that could apply to a social worker or indeed to a

bricklayer or carpenter.” But, as far as Knowles was prepared to admit, “no one is pursuing [her] on the grounds that [she is] a member of the Labour Party.”

Based on his own experience as a trade unionist, Knowles suggested she took up the matter with her trade union and if she was being “discriminated against because [she is] a political activist, then he would be very happy to have the officer concerned disciplined in these circumstances.”¹¹ Knowles knew, even if this comment had any relevance to the simple question asked of him, this was a dead end because of the difficulties she was experiencing with NATFHE and the activities of NATFHE members in the Birmingham Labour Party.

Displaying the dubious qualities of an old trade union hack with the paternalistic mentality of a 1950s Labour colonialist, * Knowles had introduced these irrelevancies for a particular purpose. In the same mould employed by Day of NATFHE - peas from the same pod, Knowles had switched the focus and significance from an employee monitored while carrying out her job by interpreting it as carried out against her for so-called political activities in her work situation – a charlatan’s trick! The Owl and the Blade combined!

Knowles’ explanation had a hollow sound to it and there was little doubt in our minds that he knew exactly what he was doing. However, through all the over-inflated irrelevance paraded as an answer, he admitted to knowing that an officer decided to make enquiries, which Knowles claimed, was initiated on that officer’s own authority and not at the request of a Labour group member. Knowles’ account of the monitoring was ludicrous because why would a local authority officer specifically choose Bis Weaver to carry out checks to see if she had permission from her employing institution to attend when several other city council employees were present and not subjected to the same kind of ‘attention’? Furthermore, in the scenario put forward by Knowles, any officer attending meetings when city employees were also in attendance would be under an obligation to check on every employee to establish if they were on flexi-time or alternatively whether or not they had permission to attend. Nor did Knowles’ ‘account’ explain the monitoring of her movements for a second time on the 19th September 1986 – the other occasion for which she had sought information from Knowles and other Labour group members. Knowles did not seem to be aware that employees in professional occupations did not need notes of permission to be absent like a

* Knowles spent time in the 1950s in Central Africa organising trade unions. Knowles told this to Bis Weaver and me after being invited into our home when he was canvassing for election to the West Midlands county council for the Weoley Castle ward in the 1977 election

school child. *

Knowles imitated Day, the NATFHE official, by turning the issue on its head. Day had criticised her competence and integrity instead of dealing with her complaint of harassment. Knowles sought to deflect attention from the monitoring of her movements on to some mythical failure to abide by the terms of her employment. He also deflected attention from the real issue by implying her concern for being monitored was as a political activist rather than as a college employee. The monitoring had nothing to do with any political activity as a member of the Labour Party. Knowles was being duplicitous because she made it clear in her letter that her concerns were as “an employee of the City” and that the “enquiries were made a few days before [she was] due to...give evidence in a complaint of harassment.” In trying to justify the unjustifiable, Knowles had used his ‘tricky Dicky’ practices to re-direct ‘Woodward and Bernstein’ from the real issues into an irrelevant channel and we both knew why he did this – he was the ‘string-puller.’

As with Knowles’ *doppelganger* in NATFHE, Day, it was not difficult for us to show the inadequacy and irrelevance of the ‘upside down’ world created by the Leader in his attempt to confuse the issue. He put himself right in the firing line with this ‘explanation’, so to put him right about the purpose of her original letter and sabotage any attempt on his part to compromise her, she spelt it out for him. She wrote that her letter had been written “to certain members of the Labour Party, including [himself], on an issue particularly concerning the Labour Party, namely, that a Labour Group member might be responsible for requesting that enquiries be made about [her] legitimate activities as an employee of the City.” Her letter had made it clear, or so it would be expected to have done for any reasonable person, that it was about a Labour Party member using his authority in a work-related situation.

Knowles was then asked why he replied in his “capacity as Leader of the Council, to [her] in [her] capacity as an employee of the City” on a request made by one member of the Labour Party to another. Tongue in cheek, she gave him the benefit of the doubt of not intending “to compromise [her] position as a City employee by writing, in [his] capacity as Leader of the Council...on internal Labour Party issues.” There was no doubt in our minds that was exactly Knowles intention.

Bis Weaver then picked out three paragraphs, well over half the contents of Knowles

* In fact, because of the pressure and intimidation Bis Weaver had been put under, she did ask for and got a note from her employer prior to attending

letter, where he had referred to “details of [her] contractual obligations to the City, which [she said] are not matters to be discussed...[with] Comrade Knowles of the Labour Party or any other comrade in the Labour Party, but [for discussion with] the particular department of the City Council in which [she is] employed. Nor would [she] wish to engage the Leader of the Council in matters relating to [her] employment as that would be a matter, initially, for the Continuing Education Department.”

After distinguishing between the two roles occupied by Knowles, she addressed other points in his letter. On Knowles’ ‘understanding’ that a local authority officer “wondered in fact whether [she] had time off or not,” she told him, although it would be known to him, that “the enquiries were made about two different occasions at two different meetings on two different days.” Therefore, Knowles’ “account does not correspond with the full facts” as the rumours suggest “that a Labour Group member was responsible for asking about [her] movements [on] TWO separate occasions - not a casual reference to [her] attendance at one meeting.” As for Knowles’ comment about not confusing her employment activities with Labour Party activities, she referred to the context in which her movements were monitored, which was not “because [she is], like many of the City’s employees, a member of the Labour Party” but the monitoring had taken place “a few days before...giv[ing] evidence in a complaint of harassment...”

Taking a leaf out of Knowles’ book, she turned his comment back on him, by suggesting that in “writing to [her] as Leader of the Council on Labour Party business it could reasonably be argued that [he is] confusing [his] role as leader of the Council and [his] role as a Labour Party activist.”

Knowles’ ‘promise’ to discipline any city officer discriminating against her for being a political activist was a ‘red herring’, which she did not intend to swallow. She reminded him her concerns were “not about the actions of any city officers...[but] about the possible involvement of member(s) of the Labour Party, who asked for [her] movements to be monitored.” However, as Knowles considered “political monitoring...sufficiently serious to...discipline a City officer for any breach”, she confronted him with his own solution by asking him to “honour [his] promise to the Labour Party to find out which member of the Labour Party, if any, was behind these enquiries.” In her conclusion, she made it clear so “there can be no possible misunderstanding [that she was] writing to [him], as in [her] original letter, as one Labour Party member to another...on an internal Labour Party

matter.”*¹²

Knowles kept his own counsel on this request as no enquiry was ever conducted and we, and a few others, knew why he did not follow through on his promise. In case the Leader’s correspondence came to the attention of Geoff Hall, in any attempt to compromise her, Bis Weaver dropped a line to Geoff Hall to let him know the context within which she had written to Knowles,¹³ which was duly acknowledged by Geoff Hall.¹⁴ Informing Geoff Hall was also a way to let him know that we were well aware of what the Labour group leadership had been up to in the background.

An entirely different type of letter to Knowles’ hackneyed and self-serving contribution came from Councillor Roy Benjamin. A member of the Labour Party’s Ethnic Minority Liaison Committee, he had been making his own enquiries and was able “to confirm that the Chief Education Officer, [John Crawford] admitted...he had been asked to make enquiries by the Chief Executive Officer, [Caulcott]” who admitted making the request and was “satisfied with the fact that [she was] there in [her] own time.” However, the chief executive would not divulge, who initiated the enquiries. Eventually, Councillor Benjamin narrowed it down to two officers and two Labour members and had spoken to all four but was unable to “get any of them to admit having instigated the enquiries.” Councillor Benjamin was “not entirely surprised” at what had happened to her “in view of the number of racist actions [brought to his] attention in recent months” and he was “extremely angry about this and any other incidents.”¹⁵

Of the two officers named in Councillor Benjamin’s letter, one, Kurshid Ahmed, had actually invited Bis Weaver to the meeting so would not ‘wonder’ why she was there; and the other, Bruce Epps, was not sufficiently involved in matters relating to employment to ‘wonder’ if she had permission to attend. Furthermore, if either was interested in whether or not she had a ‘note from school’ to attend, they would have gone to the LEA and not ask the chief executive.

The two Labour members were Bill Gray, chair of the Equal Opportunities and Race Relation Committee, and Dick Knowles. Councillor Gray had privately assured Bis Weaver some months before that he was not responsible and there was no reason to doubt his word.

* If Knowles was responsible for initiating the monitoring, he had interfered in the rights of a city employee whether he acted as city council leader or Labour Party leader. This action brought his transgression into the public domain. The purpose of the original letter to those city councillors attending the city council meetings had been to ascertain this; to see if Knowles would reply and what kind of reply it would be

Not only that, he was out of the country on the day, the Chief Executive was asked to make enquiries. Knowles, however, had conjured up some vague excuse for the monitoring before drifting into irrelevant comments about employment responsibilities and political activity. Not only that, Knowles was specifically named as the person requesting enquiries to be made, when the LEA officer, following up the request, contacted Bournville management for information on her movements.¹⁶

In between the letters from and to Knowles, the reactionaries in the Labour group were swimming in the same murky water as their compatriots in NATFHE when dealing with those Black people, who refused to sip at the trough of paternalistic swill. Their strokes had led to Phil Murphy, an outspoken critic of the Birmingham Labour Party's snail-like movement on racism, being suspended from the Labour group. The news hit the news-stands while he was attending a Black Section public meeting at the Summerfield Centre, Winson Green in Birmingham. * Bis Weaver attended this meeting as a platform speaker and was clearly visible in the TV clip covering the event.

Two Labour Group members on the Race Relations Committee jumped on her 'TV' appearance to contact a city council officer to ask if he knew Bis Weaver attended the meeting. Uneasiness in the ranks in the face of attacks on Labour Party racism and demands for Black rights had, as with NATFHE officers and officials, blighted their reason as the meeting was held at night outside working hours. This demand reached Bis Weaver care of her city council contact but he refused to release the names of the politicians, who had taken it upon themselves to deem her outside-of-work legitimate activities as having something to do with the city council or to do with them. **

The contact also confirmed that her June 1986 grievance had taken on a political flavour and "the politicians had decided nothing must come out before the [local] elections" and he referred to Knowles' "directive to the officers" and asked if she had seen it published in the local paper. *** She acknowledged seeing it and had written to Geoff Hall asking if the directive applied to her case. Her informant was asked if the vetting "is what is holding it up." He denied that to be the case and blamed the delay in releasing the report on Geoff Hall not yet having written it up but it would be available by the end of May, which was after the

* For details of Phil Murphy's suspension from the Labour group¹⁷

** They were obviously concerned about the development of the Black Sections and its attempt to influence Party policy but that was a matter for the Labour Party internally and nothing to do with city council officers. These politicians were confusing her Labour Party membership with her role as a city employee

*** This was the article published in the Birmingham Evening Mail on the 19th December 1986

local elections. Her contact had obviously forgotten he told her a week before of having seen the report and would try to get hold of a copy.¹⁸ She disclosed that Geoff Hall had produced a report in November, having written to tell her it would be available for the Industrial Tribunal hearing, which at the time was to be held in December. The contact appeared taken aback to find out Geoff Hall had put it in writing. He further revealed that the city solicitor had informed Geoff Hall “to remove certain directives from the report because it is not legally proper for the Chief Education Officer to give instructions to the Governors.” *¹⁹ The city solicitor’s advice must be what a LEA officer meant when telling her in January the report had been returned from above for alterations to be made.

With Knowles instructing officers to remove all references to racism from reports and the city solicitor advising the removal of directives from this particular report what would be left of the report in the event of it ever being released? The more one came to know of the activities of Birmingham Labour Party politicians and compared them with NATFHE officials and officers, the more erect became the back legs of these Orwellian pigs and the more they came to resemble each other.

This news from her contact prompted Bis Weaver to drop a line to the Department of Education and Science. She explained that it was “ten months since [she] registered the complaint [against three members of staff at Bournville CFE] and six months since [she appeared before] the Inquiry Panel...[and she] still do[es] not know the outcome of [her] complaint...” She described the number of incidents occurring since submitting her complaint – the *Beider affair*, the contact made by union officers and officials “with [City Council] officers conducting the Inquiry;” and the failure of “the political administration...[to] maintain the necessary detachment in an issue concerning the City as an employer and [herself] as an employee...” She asked the DES “to address this serious issue.” **²⁰

By the time Bis Weaver had taken this action, I decided to take the issue of my anti-racism letter one step further before putting it to rest. The officers of the Birmingham Trades Council were introduced to the milieu at Bournville College, albeit only to the letter and matters arising from that matter.

Details were provided of the background events and of my attempts to get NATFHE at all levels to take a principled stand during which the branch removed certain of my trade

* This legal observation was certainly accurate and would soon be confirmed in the *McGoldrick v Brent* case²¹

** A copy of the letter was sent to Geoff Hall

union rights. “The statement put out” by the branch committee when removing those rights “suggests that action was being taken against me because of the support I had been giving to a Black women and her struggle for her rights and justice within the union.” NATFHE’s failure “to defend the rights of anti-racists has clearly indicated to Branch Officers...and to Senior Management...that the interests of Branch Officers take precedence over the interests of rank and file anti-racists...” I expressed confidence in “all progressive members of the Birmingham Trades Council appreciate[ing] how ludicrous, reactionary and anti-trade unionist such a position is...[and that] NATFHE’s refusal to act in defence of an anti-racist has reduced NATFHE’s anti-racism policies to meaningless rhetoric.” Any “appeal to ‘anti-racists and/or radical activists’ in [NATFHE] is of little use because they have, up to now, avoided taking any action on this issue” and, as pointed out to the secretary of the Birmingham liaison committee, “any student of European history...would realise the implications of their inaction.” A belief that the Birmingham Trade Council had a commitment to anti-racism had led me to “expect some action in the defence of my rights as an anti-racist trade unionist, which will also be defending all anti-racist trade unionists.”²² Cave was not mentioned by name; he was referred to as a branch officer but, not being secretive, I sent a copy to him. The Vice President of the Trades Council, Mackney, was also sent a copy.

(c) Once More in to the Breach Brings in a French Ally

NATFHE had tried since June 1985 to close down all avenues by imposing sanctions on her and when this did not work it delivered a series of attacks on her administered by officials and officers alike: from their collaboration with Day in the initial enquiry; through the *Beider affair* and McCarthyite enquiry; to the recent ‘racist motion.’ These activities had stimulated a series of ‘paper bombardments’ from us to bring the issues and NATFHE’s responses to the attention of people in the labour movement. There was to be no let-up in spreading the message and soon it would reach way beyond South-East of Watford to cross the English Channel.

Within the West Midlands region, not all NATFHE branches were susceptible to the plague of misleading information fashioned by the REC/BLC. Branch members at North Worcester College in Bromsgrove, having heard of Bis Weaver’s problems from sources not peddling the ‘official line’, wanted more information and offered their support. This was a welcome approach in contrast to the antagonism of the so-called activists.²³

The administrator of a local non-NATFHE group when formally inviting Bis Weaver to attend an open day * took the opportunity to add a handwritten message to the invitation, which read “Keep up the good work. We too need you.”²⁴ From further afield the *Association contre les Violences faites aux Femmes au Travail*, an organisation in Paris, had heard about her case and sought information on the harassment; ** on the action she had taken; and on the outcome.²⁵

Bis Weaver provided the *Association* with copies of the four complaints *** and background details, such as, the irregularities in the Regional Official’s ‘investigation’; the way the union tried to wear her down by cutting off communication with her; the removal of her rights in the union; the pressures applied by the union on the LEA in favour of those against whom she complained; and NATFHE’s policy of only protecting the tenure of alleged harassers.²⁶ The issue was certainly becoming widely known, far wider than Day could have possibly visualised when commenting in his report that “the issue was widely known” and when stating in a letter that “she is prone to write to a number of different people, including our own General Secretary.”²⁷ Day and his colleagues in officialdom and among lay officers had played a significant part in enhancing this ‘proneness.’

The SERTUC *Fighting Racism* conference had taken place on the 11th April, covering a range of issues affecting Black women in the work situation. It provided a platform to discuss their views and experiences in the trade union movement and to examine ways of dealing with the problems they faced. There was a considerable amount of criticism of the TUC, which in 1985 had produced a report *Black and Ethnic Minority Women in Employment and Trade Unions* without the participation of Black women – a similar formula adopted by NATFHE officials and officers when dealing with matters affecting Black women and Black members in general.

The conference called for a Code of Practice “to ensure greater participation of Black women in any report concerning them.” The TUC Women’s Conference was cited approvingly for recognising that Black women suffered greater discrimination than White women – a fact that had passed completely unnoticed by the West Midlands women’s panel, who appeared to be under the misguided belief, according to one of its leading lights, that Black women who raised issues, going beyond the perception of members of the women’s

* At the Lane Neighbourhood Centre in Balsall Heath, Birmingham

** The Association had heard it was sexual harassment at Birmingham University. This showed how necessary it was to keep open all lines of communication

*** The LEA grievance; Industrial Tribunal application; the complaints in the union against the Full-time Official and the Branch Committee (Rule 8)

panel, were reactionary. The SERTUC conference also heard from a substantial number of Black women aggrieved at the discrimination they faced; and the conference as a whole expressed concern at the large number of Black women involved in grievance and disciplinary procedures with little, if any, support from their trade union. It was decided “to set up a support group consisting of Black women who themselves have been victims of discrimination and harassment.”

The conference stressed how important it was for White women to recognise the failure of unions to support their Black sisters and to voice their opposition in the same way as they did to sexist harassment because “Racism will not be eradicated by resolution. Action is the order of the day.” It was also time for the image of trade unions to change from “the stereotypical view of the white male trade union member...to accommodate [for] black people...” *²⁸

The Black women’s conference had exposed the underlying features of ‘White feminist’ action on sexist harassment, which was its concentration on White women and the failure to recognise the prevalence and specific character of harassment faced by Black women, namely, a combination of both racist and sexist harassment. The West Midlands region’s decision to give responsibility for producing a document detailing the functions of a committee to combat racism to its White regional secretary without any input from the Black Lecturers Groups; accompanied by the decision of NATFHE head office to have a national anti-racism policy drawn up by Triesman and Ms Welch, could only be seen in an extremely negative light. NATFHE certainly needed to re-wire its system and bring in people who knew how to combat racism if it was serious in introducing an effective anti-racism strategy. **

Bis Weaver featured in the articles published in African-Caribbean newspapers, enabling me to capitalise on this in a letter to the press on her situation. Explaining that “much of the detail cannot be discussed...because...[it is] either the subject of an enquiry or pending an enquiry,” the letter focussed on “the removal of certain of Bis Weaver’s trade union rights” and events leading up to and following that decision. The effect of this restriction on her rights had effectively prevented her from “collecting information necessary for her to pursue a complaint...taken out...in June 1985” and also prevented her from nominating candidates in union elections unless authorised by NATFHE’s head office.

* This was the image presented by the West Midlands regional official, judging from his comments in his ‘report’ and subsequent correspondence with Bis Weaver

** Bis Weaver received a letter of thanks from the organisers of the conference for the invaluable help provided in the workshop sessions and she was given an open invitation to participate in forthcoming meetings.²⁹

I pointed out that if any reader of my letter wondered why it was that a man – Bis Weaver’s husband, was “writing on this issue - the answer is simple, the women’s groups and other radicals in the Union have beaten a hasty retreat from this issue [and] it is a clear demonstration of the disregard shown for a black woman’s rights by trade unionists, in the Birmingham Liaison Committee area, who have shown that their rhetoric far exceeds their practice, which is a sad reflection on the trade union movement.”³⁰

This letter was published in the *Caribbean Times* on the 22nd May. The first letter in print on Bis Weaver’s case – many more were to reach the pages of the press once the Industrial Tribunal was over. In the same issue, the chair of the Birmingham Further Education sub-Committee, Najma Hafeez, was featured defending the interests of Black women but, in reality, had done absolutely nothing positive for Bis Weaver despite being in a position to do something.

Bis Weaver’s proneness to write to a number of different people’, which also seems to have infected me, was continually stimulated and it was the mouthpiece of the women’s movement in NATFHE that provided another stimulus. An article written on behalf of the West Midlands women’s panel published in the January 1987 edition of NATFHE’s women’s group’s newsletter *Sister* had fallen fortuitously into her lap.

Bis Weaver responded to the claim in the article that “we (the WMWP) have built up considerable experience in attempting to support and counsel victims of harassment.”³¹ The panel continued to parade an image of itself that did not fit in with reality. Therefore, in the light of the recent conference *Fighting Racism* where White women were urged to recognise the failure of unions to support their Black sisters, she wrote of her own experience with the West Midlands panel to see if the editors would publish it, although she thought it unlikely that they would. She described the several months’ harassment occurring in the workplace in 1985 and of arranging to meet two members of the panel to seek assistance. Of the two members, “one failed to turn up and has never been in contact since”; the other did arrive “but after the initial discussion that was the last...heard of any supportive action.” On two occasions, she attended panel meetings “but when, as the only Black woman at these meetings, [she] was told...by one of the regular members...that Black women were reactionary [she] could see no point in attending...” She also mentioned that “other members of the Panel have acted against her interests and others had avoided doing anything about [her] case.” The reasons for this lack of support was thought to be due to the member complained about being “a Regional Officer or perhaps..., as a Black woman, [she is] the ‘wrong’ colour.” To her, “All this window dressing in the *Sister*, by the WMWP, will not

alter the neglect, and outright partisanship to the male aggressor, shown by the West Midlands Women's Panel with regard to [her] case." As an afterthought, she mentioned the TUC South East Region meeting and remarked that "representatives of the WMWP should have attended the...meeting..., [as] they might have learnt something."³² Not unsurprisingly, this contribution to *Sister* was not published and the editors of this newsletter remained silent on the Bis Weaver case.

The mind-set of the REC/BLC activists and its cohorts in the liaison committee and women's panel was deeply embedded in NATFHE structures. This was illustrated at a college in Birmingham where Robin Doughty and, up until recently, David Evans were employed. A member of the Black Lecturer's group, a recent co-optee to the WMARC, employed as the Equal Opportunities Officer at this college, wrote to Doughty about the Bis Weaver case to find out "if any of the Branch members have been involved in any way" and if so he wanted "to know what they have done and in what capacity." He wanted the case raised at the college's next branch meeting. The author (Eric P) had a long history as an anti-racist – a description that is decidedly different from having a 'long history in the anti-racist movement'; the latter being the description attributed to NATFHE officers in the West Midlands, whose threadbare commitment to anti-racism had been all too evident. Needless to say, he did not figure on Doughty's list of *persona grata* and received no reply. Undeterred, he approached a women's activist, a few days later, to ask the same question and she took him to meet the branch secretary, another women's activist. He told the secretary he "wanted the issue of the deprivation of a Black woman's rights at Bournville College raised at the next [Branch] meeting and...[also] wanted to know what members of [the] Branch had done about it." He was met with the response that it was "a matter for Bournville Branch and they (Garretts Green branch) could not interfere." This did not settle easy with him, who reminded them that a few weeks before they asked him to "come out on strike," which he did, "for people in the Hereford and Worcester area." * They had justified their argument for strike action on grounds that the branch "could not be parochial about these issues." As he put it to them, "it was alright then to get involved in another Branch's affairs but not to protect a Black woman from discrimination." He gave them notice he would raise the Weaver issue at the next branch meeting and have his own position minuted. He described their exit, when they departed, as one of "disgust because he would not see their point [of view]."³³

* The North Worcester College that had written to Bis Weaver telling her to contact the branch if she required support was a college in the Hereford & Worcester area

The dismissive attitude displayed to this Black lecturer, who knew considerably more about the Weaver case than these two so-called feminist ‘anti-racists’, was a clear demonstration that branch parochialism and non-intervention in the Birmingham liaison area was a means to justify NATFHE’s inaction. This branch’s ‘feminists’ differed from the usual NATFHE assessment of the Weaver experience of not being one of harassment; their position was that it had nothing to do with them.

(d) As Soon as this Pub Closes the Revolution Starts! *

Recent events in NATFHE, covered in a series of letters, were brought together and sent to Krishna Shukla – a condensed record and material for Krishna to use as appropriate. The material included the regional secretary’s attempt ** to deflect attention from the REC’s refusal to withdraw the *Frew Report* despite a WMARC motion calling for its withdrawal. Other issues that had arisen over the months were also included.

The overall view of the REC’s recent actions was summed up as:

The ‘procedures and practices’, which appear to have no basis in ‘normal conventions, rules, regulations, procedures and norms of common courtesy and decency’, are clearly apparent and show a marked similarity with the procedures and practices of the Bournville Branch Committee...Is this the “well intentioned but disorganised amateurism” the Regional Secretary writes about?

The reasonable person might consider that these operating practices serve the interests of certain members of the REC and become the ‘normal conventions, rules, regulations, procedures and norms’ of the REC.

A link connecting Bis Weaver and Krishna Shukla was shown by pointing out that Krishna had “been advocating fair and impartial treatment of the complaint brought by a Black woman at Bournville against a...Regional Officer”. Therefore, “the reasonable person, having access to relevant information, might draw the conclusion that the attack on [him] was not unconnected with [his] concern about the situation confronting this Black woman member [and it]...might possibly amount to victimisation...”

Furthermore, the segregated role assigned to anti-racism in NATFHE’s West Midlands’ structure by the REC/BLC when recommending that “cases concerning Black members should be taken up by a Black only support group”, raised an important question: “Are not White anti-racists prepared to support Black members when they are discriminated

* A composition that could have been written with the Broad Left Coalition in mind³⁴

** In David Evans letter to Krishna Shukla 3rd February 1987

against?” Bob Cant’s comment in *NATFHE Journal* about challenging racism causing “an outbreak of cold sweat among a few, wilfully ignorant, white lecturers” was quoted. In applying Cant’s ‘sweat factor’, it was noted that the BLCARC, a committee supporting Bis Weaver, had not met for months, showing the low priority anti-racism has in the Birmingham liaison committee. A number of other points from other letters were included to show the absence of any real commitment to anti-racism amongst the Broad Left Coalition in the West Midlands. *³⁵ The letter would receive a wider circulation to anti-racists in the region in the not too distant future.

Another letter to Krishna was sent the next day on the possible legal implications of the Bournville branch’s racist motion under the 1976 Race Relations Act. In order to establish if a policy has a racially discriminatory impact, it is required to show “whether or not a policy, such as this policy [an adopted motion], would have a disadvantageous effect on Black people.”

Although the ‘Bournville motion’ was “not an open and shut case either way [it] does open the way to test the law...” An example was shown in a scenario:

where two women - one Black and one White, were the subjects of continued harassment from a White male.....The Black women interpreted the behaviour towards her as racially motivated whereas the White woman considered it to be sexually motivated. The Black woman made a complaint alleging racial harassment and the White woman submitted a complaint of sexual harassment. The White woman would be able to publicly air her allegations whereas the Black woman would not be able to.

A case of racial discrimination “would rest on whether or not the Black woman was placed at a disadvantage.”³⁶ NATFHE’s West Midland region appeared to have produced a racially discriminatory policy to complement the one created by NATFHE head office.

A copy of this letter was sent to the regional secretary and to Paul Mackney, whose amendment to the original motion had become regional policy. This letter, too, would be circulated widely among NATFHE branches in the region and to anti-racists in the wider society. We waited expectantly for someone in the REC to advise us not to continue to campaign but no one did. Perhaps, they chose to abide by whoever’s dictat was operating in NATFHE and did not read the letter.

The *Birmingham NATFHE Six’s* letter reached Bis Weaver, three weeks after it was sent, courtesy of the secretary of the Black Section. The signatories of the letter had not shown any constructive support for her and all but one had not even asked for her version of

* A copy went to the regional secretary

events. * Nonetheless, they must have known the details of her situation, that is, assuming they read the letters sent to them or to close colleagues and, if they had, this Black woman's problems had not prompted them into positive action on her behalf. Nor was the BLCARO a surprise signatory as he had already told Bis Weaver he did not know where he stood on her situation.³⁷ He was showing that this comment was fluid since he seemed to have no difficulty in lining up with those whose union patriotism and self-interest outshone any real commitment to anti-racism. ** But why did he sign the letter? He had not been called to account for his failure to act as he had initially rallied to her cause by supplying information to her from liaison committee meetings. We knew that union influence had been exerted on him and it seemed to be getting to him. It was difficult for ethnic minorities, very much in the minority in colleges of further education, to escape this. It also seemed that the other five required an ethnic minority signatory to give the response some credence, as Mel had said at the WMARC "it is easy to use Black people to undermine other Black people."

The 'Six' claimed that the comments in the liaison committee secretary's letter "concerned a dispute between the NATFHE Branch and the College Management...[and] involves an extremely complicated formula...frequently misunderstood by both management and NATFHE representatives at college level." They said the liaison committee secretary's letter took up almost one and a half sides, concluding with two sentences:

Let me conclude by saying that I am surprised your management felt it necessary to issue such a misleading circular.

I can assure you that the Liaison Committee have every confidence in the Officers and Branch Committee at Bournville College.

They stressed that the secretary's letter was wholly concerned with the question of A3

* The exception to this was Sardhul Dhesi, who, at least, had discussed it with her in the early stages of her difficulties following the release of Day's 'report'

** N Barnacle; M Barr; S Dhesi; B Lovejoy; P Mackney; H Stretton. Of these signatories – one had called for action on the monitoring of a NATFHE member but did not pursue it; one told Bis Weaver to go to the branch about the monitoring knowing the Bournville branch had taken union rights off her; one was a Bournville branch officer, who voted in favour of the April motion and was subject to the Rule 8 complaint; two were members of the REC and involved in authorising the McCarthyite investigation, and accepting the Bournville racist motion, albeit proposing an amendment, although anyone would know the motion was directed at Bis Weaver – of these two, one had allegedly advised a Bournville member not to involve herself in the Weaver case as it might split the Left and the other had boycotted the WMARC over the issue of Black officers. Another, who had originally supported Bis Weaver, had shown considerable distance from her after she had submitted her grievance and had applied for an Industrial Tribunal hearing against NATFHE. None had done anything positive about either the monitoring issue or the rights issue

remission and the final sentence clearly refers to that matter and no other.” *

They used considerable space ** trying to tie the secretary’s letter exclusively to the A3 issue before touching on the subject of the Black Section letter. They assumed that the letter referred “to various complaints made by Bismillah Weaver...[and they had] made it clear to a number of our Black comrades (without specifying which Black comrades) that we are willing to discuss the matter with them provided either *none* of the parties or *all* of the parties to the various complaints are present.” (their emphasis) They felt that “Such a discussion would be most productive if it took place in the context of planning a strategy to commit NATFHE to establish a formal Black Members Section and better procedures for dealing with complaints between members.”³⁸

Their reference to the two concluding sentences summing up the liaison committee secretary’s position overlooks a significant comment made by him in the body of the letter that suggests the comments covered both the A3 issue and other issues in Bournville College. The liaison secretary had referred to recent events in the college. He wrote “I have noted of late that the College management seems to refer nearly everything to the City. The running of the College lies clearly with the Principal and the Governors NOT with Margaret Street.”³⁹ Both Bis Weaver’s grievance and the *Beider affair* were referred by Bournville College to the LEA in Margaret Street and with the liaison secretary’s undoubted loyalty to the union and its officers, was it unlikely for him to overlook the chance of showing support to the Bournville variety, especially as the letter would be distributed throughout the college? ***

While the ‘Six’ referred to the ‘various complaints made by Bismillah Weaver they were not as forthcoming or explicit in explaining their reasons for not offering her any assistance as they were in explaining A3 – in fact, they said nothing whatsoever about their failure to offer any support and leaving her with no alternative but to confront the difficulties forced upon her virtually unaided. Not a single word on the monitoring by her employer; the removal of her union rights; the continuous harassment; the REC-inspired *Frew report*; nor

* Perhaps it did concern only this. However, the liaison secretary had shown considerable partisanship in favour of the ‘trio’; and support for the action of branch officers and committee over the *Beider affair* that it leaves open the question as to whether or not the comment had a wider compass

** Four out of six paragraphs; 23 of 32 lines

*** Reliable sources had kept Bis Weaver informed of his partisanship towards the Bournville trio; his opposition to a more influential role for Black members; his lobbying of city council officers; his dogmatic refusal to respond to Bis Weaver’s letters that had nothing to do with the LEA’s enquiry or the Industrial Tribunal hearing; his acceptance of the *Frew report*; and more was to come – during and after the Industrial Tribunal hearing

the Bournville ‘racially discriminatory’ motion. * Their response contained no surprises for Bis Weaver; nor did the format of their response as none of the ‘Six’ offered individual accounts of their inaction; instead they huddled together hiding behind the collective front – definitely no split in the Left here or even the fear of one.

They gave no explanation for their reluctance to defend a Black woman member harassed by a White Broad Left male officer; or to combat head office’s intransigence; or to prevent influential officers in the Bournville branch having unbridled license to attack her. There was no need for a right-wing takeover in the West Midlands as the Broad Left had entered the field of play as a substitute right winger and was playing a blinder of a game. However, although not providing any reasonable answer for their inaction, they introduced the old NATFHE Broad Left Coalition chestnut when confronted with racism. This response was to redirect their failings on to a discussion of some kind of ‘anti-racist’ strategy such as the creation of a formal Black members section in NATFHE, which most Black NATFHE members thought already existed in the Black Lecturer’s Group. The call for the development of new procedures had to some extent been catered for by the new constitution for the WMARC, constructed without a single black member having an input. They were always ready to discuss some kind of strategy while waiting for the pub to close; although this pub seemed to have a twenty-four hour a day, seven days a week licence.

It would be interesting to know the names of the Black comrades to whom they had made clear their views since the ‘Six’s’ Black contacts were close associates of Bis Weaver and she knew the ‘Six’ avoided discussing her situation with these comrades except when blaming NATFHE head office; or using the ‘means test’ evaluation system for assistance. Could the Black comrade they were referring to be a signatory of the ‘NATFHE Six’ letter?

The content of their letter confirmed what had become evident in the past and was now enveloping an increasing number of the left in NATFHE. By having a Black organisation put the spotlight on them, they came out from behind their ‘iron curtain’ and ‘socialist rhetoric’ to respond. However, they were walking on thin ice and this gave her the opportunity to address the true value of their contribution and ‘planning strategy.’

Whatever the ‘Six’ were able to construct to try to explain the liaison secretary’s expression of support, the Black Section enquiry achieved its aim - a response from Labour Party/NATFHE members to Bis Weaver’s situation, which would not have been achieved

* "Silence is all that's needed for evil to be done" (Edmund Burke). "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on" (Albert Einstein).

had she written to them herself. The result was confirmation of where the ‘Six’ really stood.

No direct assistance for victims of racism other than to get together to plan a general strategy and better procedures, with a rather implausible offer on matters relating to her complaints. The ‘Six’ had no difficulty in assuming the Black Section letter referred to Bis Weaver – they could do nothing less, and went as far as putting forward a suggestion for discussing matters with conditions they never sought to apply before – *all or none*. *

Mackney, who tended to quote Black activists when speaking on anti-racism, and the other five, who identified themselves as anti-racists, should have thought on statements from two Black activists of the 1960s. Martin Luther King, who said “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter” and Malcom X, who said “I’m not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner.”⁴⁰ With her plate empty and with a determination not to be silenced, a rejoinder was produced that shredded the ‘Six’s’ feeble attempt to avoid answering the question put to them and provided an opportunity to reveal a few things about their activities.

As most of the ‘Six’s’ reply dealt with the alleged complexity of A3 remission, she skipped to the penultimate paragraph and focussed on their willingness “to discuss the matter with (Black comrades) provided either *none* of the parties or *all* of the parties to the various complaints are present.” Another example of the NATFHE ‘left’ tactic of giving the impression of being prepared to do something while distancing itself from taking action by setting implausible pre-conditions.

She wrote of being “surprised at their insistence on observing the commendable requirement of propriety with regard to procedure and balance (representation of the parties concerned). This would have echoed less hollow/hypocritical if they had acted throughout with the same insistence on [that kind of] propriety...” However, “a discussion ‘with all the parties to the various complaints...present’ would produce a somewhat one-sided situation - but that would be in keeping with the precedent set by them over the last two years, where their involvement has done nothing to provide [her] with a fair and equitable hearing.” She pointed out that all the signatories were “aware of the extent to which [her] casework...as well as...[her] integrity, have been discussed in Union meetings at various levels..., in which they, and the...person against whom [she] complained and his close colleagues, were present

* This *all or none* stipulation did not seem to apply when Mackney released information to the press on ‘confidential racism’ without waiting for all the other members of the MSC to discuss the conclusions and the actions to take. Whistleblowing on NATFHE did not have the same appeal for those NATFHE officers seeking to garner a radical reputation in the labour movement

BUT [SHE] WAS NOT.” (Bis Weaver’s emphasis) She cited six occasions when her “casework was continuously discussed and [she was] continuously attacked with [Gates] * always present, though [she] never was,” ** which “H Stretton would be familiar with [as] she attended every one; [and] B Lovejoy attended one.” There were also occasions, “reported to [her] by two different sources,” when she “was discussed at Birmingham Liaison Committee meetings” in the presence of a number of the signatories; as was Gates and his close colleagues. “On one occasion [she] was accused of blocking someone’s appointment to a post at Bournville College – a serious defamatory allegation. *** On another occasion, a confidential discussion between” Bis Weaver, Dhesi and one other liaison committee representative, “was reported to the Birmingham Liaison Committee Executive in the presence of [Gates]. This CONFIDENTIAL information was relayed to [Bournville] Branch where it was included in a misleading manner in a document... broadcast[ing] details of [her] case to the whole of the Branch in a distorted and partisan manner” and, unquestionably, not favourable to her. This was on the 29th April 1986; the day when “certain of [her] trade union rights [were] removed...when [she] was off work ill [due to] the pressure [she] had been put under by the Union at all levels” – a motion supported by H Stretton; with B Lovejoy witnessing this as a visitor to the branch meeting. H Stretton then refused to provide “a list of Branch members” to whom she wished to circulate a rejoinder or “to allow [her] to see [her] casework file” until head office gave its approval; unlike Gates and his close associates who had access to this file. Bis Weaver did not doubt that “these ‘six progressive anti-racists’ support...the right of the individual to have access to information that concerns the relevant individual – freedom of information. However, it does not seem to apply when that individual is...a BLACK woman.”

She moved on to the REC meeting of the 14th May when the Bournville statement was discussed at length without her being present or even informed that her case was on the agenda but B Lovejoy and P Mackney were there. She had been a recipient, along with eight other people, of a copy of a letter dated the 16th May 1986 sent to the general secretary. “The REC did not even have the courtesy to write to [her] direct to inform [her] of their action.” Her subsequent requests for “a copy of the Minutes of that meeting [were] ignored.”

* Bis Weaver used the term ‘complained against’ not Gates in the letter although everyone would know to whom it referred. Gates is used here for ease of reading

** for example, 9 Dec 1985; 28 Apr 1986; 21 May 1986; 9, 18 & 25 June 1986

*** This concerned Ms Pattinson and the post of Access course coordinator

As for the monitoring, she disclosed that “H Stretton informed [her] that N Barnacle had mentioned [to her]...the movements of a union member being monitored by the employer” and he added that something should be done as he “considered it was a bad precedent to be set.” This “commendable comment,” as Bis Weaver described Barnacle’s proposition, was not in fact followed up.⁴¹ In November 1986, Bis Weaver asked Mackney what the liaison committee intended to do about it but her request was similarly met with no action;⁴² a further request to Barr – Stretton’s partner, brought the response “that [she] should ask the Union to do something, although he was aware that [her] Branch had passed a motion refusing to answer...[her] correspondence.”⁴³ As she put it, “Nothing on this issue has been done to protect [her] rights as a trade unionist. Nor to restore [her] rights in the Union.” She asked, “What have these seasoned ‘anti-racists’ done to protect a Black person’s rights in the union?”

She drew attention to “one of the implications behind...the Branch motion,” namely, she cannot “nominate...a candidate for a union position without Head Office authorising acceptance of [her] letter of nomination” and she suggested the Black Section Secretary confirmed it with H Stretton because she would know that to be the case. There was a catalogue of “other examples...but this chronicle of [the ‘Six’s’] partiality should be sufficient to show the reality [of the ‘Six’] from the self-righteous piety exhibited in paragraph six” of their letter where they set the conditions for discussing the issues.

The ‘Six’ had tried to give the impression of remaining neutral and if they had adopted such a position “they should [have thought] carefully on Freire’s maxim *...but as can be seen they are not neutral.” Their commitment to fairness only applied when the principal critic of their actions, Bis Weaver, would either not be in attendance, as was the usual scenario, and unable to ask them ‘awkward questions’ or when the attendance would be swamped by the ‘other parties’ - a less usual practice but one that was not unknown.

Bis Weaver was not surprised at the Six’s behaviour because the “The colonial mentality has...pervaded the institutional structure of this society” and the Left had failed to realise that those “brought up under colonial rule, [as she was], are well aware of, and can easily recognise, its guises and practices.”

Picking up on the final paragraph of the letter – ‘planning strategy’ and ‘better procedures for dealing with complaints,’ it was not difficult to see this as “referring to the

* “Washing one’s hands OFF the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral”⁴⁴

union's structural inadequacy (institutional racism) in defending the interests of Black members,...increasingly being referred to in informed circles as NATFHEism.” She deigned to suggest that “the first constructive act of the ‘Six’ could be to defend the rights of Black members and not leave them, as in [her] case, to fight virtually single-handed for 26 months in the pursuit of their rights. Perhaps, as incumbents of roles in that structure, dutifully protecting those structures, they have travelled too far in defence of those structures to do anything constructive...” She saw “Their Unionalism (my union right or wrong) [as] visibly at odds with their declared aim of wanting to change these structures.” After repeating the quote made to the LEA in February, she said “the only thing the Republicans learned from Watergate was to burn the [Irangate] tapes” and asked “What lessons have ‘these anti-racists’ in the union learned about the Fernandes case? Certainly not the defence of Black members.” Turning to the positive lessons to be gained from her experiences, she said “Black people cannot consign the struggle against racism to the periphery even if some think they can [because] Whilst supporting ‘other objectives’ [Black people] are in no position to switch off from the anti-racism struggle, unlike some ‘anti-racists’ whose support for the rights of Black people is...of minor consideration compared to ‘other objectives.’” Linking this directly to the relationship between the Broad Left Coalition and Gates, although not naming him, she wrote of “the democratic principle of free choice (that) enables these activists to choose their ‘running mates’, e.g. as on the Broad Left slate, with little consideration for the rights and she said “Perhaps, Black people should consider adopting a similar principle and chose their associates...on the basis of a proven record...in supporting and defending the rights of Black people, outside of Committee rooms and the occasional march, demonstration and social gathering. It would certainly narrow the field.”

Bis Weaver, supported by me, was writing off the White NATFHE Left and NATFHE in general in their present forms as not having the capability of developing an anti-racism strategy or in not being prepared to adopt one that was produced by more informed policy makers. The Left was tied too much into its imperial historical antecedents – the civilising mission, and NATFHE struggled under its structural inertia to tackle racism in any positive way.

Taking note of the desire of the ‘Six’ to discuss the establishment of “a formal Black Members Section for the union,” she pointed out that “one of their number decided not to attend meetings of the WMARC after it was agreed in principle that in FUTURE the Committee would have Black Officers only.” She added that it was a good job Black people did not “boycott Committees when [they] can’t have [their] own way or when the

Committees have White Officers only and there is no possibility of even one Black Officer being elected.”

Discounting any useful discussion with the ‘Six’, she asked “What useful strategy for defending the interests of Black members could possibly be discussed with those who use the union’s structural inadequacy to camouflage, to outsiders, their own ‘partisan neutrality’?” It had become “plainly obvious, [that] the time for meaningful dialogue with ‘anti-racist activists’ such as these has long since passed” and the time has arrived “to differentiate between the ‘Committee anti-racists’ and the committed anti-racists.” * This rejoinder also went to the ‘Six’;⁴⁵ copies also went to the Black Lecturers Group and other interested parties.⁴⁶

Bis Weaver had had more than enough of NATFHE and decided to draw its reckless neglect of Black members to the attention of the Birmingham Trades Council providing examples of the practices of those dominating the Bournville branch, which was in the Trades Council’s area. She described the way the branch acted, “exactly a year ago [to] remove certain of [her] trade union rights without [either] a formal charge...[or] a hearing...[or] representation; and in [her] absence.” The reasons for imposing these restrictions, she explained, was “to prevent [her] from collecting information on [the] investigation procedures and related matters ...concerning a formal complaint registered with NATFHE...[in] June 1985...which ceased” to be the concern of the union in June 1986. “Therefore, this issue has nothing to do with any other formal complaint concerning [her] and NATFHE or members/full-time officials of NATFHE, which was the subject of an enquiry or is the subject of an enquiry or is pending an enquiry.” She made this point in order to subvert any attempt by NATFHE officers connected with the Trades Council to claim that her complaint to the LEA and an Industrial Tribunal prevented any action on the grounds of the issue being ‘*sub judice*.’ Following the NATFHE debacle over the ‘racist motion’ anything was a possibility! The Council was told she had been “the only Black...member of staff” at the college and that all levels of the union had been informed of these restrictions, “but they have done nothing to restore [those] rights.” NATFHE head office had, apparently, issued a directive to “officers not to respond to any of [her] correspondence and...[her] requests for action have been ignored.” This restriction “violates the principle of freedom of information” and “breached trade union principles and practices” at a time when “the trade union and

* A quote by Thomas Paine came to mind - “Attempting to debate with a person who has abandoned reason is like giving medicine to the dead”

labour movement is...supporting Black people, both inside Britain and outside, in their struggle for equal rights..." Whereas, "NATFHE has deprived [her] of... [the] right to equal and full participation in the democratic processes of the union."

She contrasted the trade union movement's attempts to "recruit Black people into the movement" with the practices of Bournville branch, including its delegates to the Trades Council. The branch's activities have "shown Black people that its concern for [them] was merely rhetoric and that it is prepared to act against the interests of Black members to serve other vested interests." In an attempt to get some action from the Trades Council, she felt "sure that all progressive members of the Birmingham Trades Council will denounce this contravention of trade union principles and practices and...demonstrate to Black trade unionists...that the Birmingham Trades Council has credibility in defending the rights of Black members."⁴⁷

The president and secretary would surely have been astounded if they had known the full extent of the situation not only in Bournville College but also in NATFHE at all levels and the failure of local officers, including the vice president of the Trades Council, to do anything to defend Bis Weaver other than to make a belated offer to the Birmingham Labour Party Black Section to discuss future policy.

(e) "Prone to Write to a Number of Different People" * – Almost the End of an Era

After Day released his draft 'report' in October 1985 bringing news of a *Whitewash*, Bis Weaver's correspondence sought a re-investigation of the complaint and the regional official's 'enquiry'. When she recognised that objective to be naught but a forlorn hope, her correspondence, and to a lesser extent mine, had the purpose of exposing the lengths to which NATFHE officials and officers would go to protect their self-interest. We did this by putting everything in writing and on the record, giving the opportunity to anyone to contest the contents. This particular way of dealing with NATFHE was about to come to an end but, before putting the pen to rest, Bis Weaver did receive a positive response from one organisation in the trade union movement.

May Day, that historic date in the labour movement's calendar, brought a letter from the regional secretary of the West Midlands TUC showing a different side to the one frequently displayed by NATFHE officials and officers and the Birmingham Labour group.

* As Day, the regional official put it in August 1985⁴⁸

He wrote in response to “the considerable batch of correspondence” sent to Muff Sourani, secretary of the Race Relations Advisory Group, which the regional secretary had read “with care.” He explained the difficult position the TUC regional council was in with regard to the points made by her and the fact that “the relationship and duties owed by a trade union to its members, and vice versa, is governed by the rules of that organisation.” Therefore, “it is not possible for this Regional Council or any of its constituent bodies to act in effect as an appeal body in respect of internal union procedures.” He was sorry for this disappointment but felt it “wisest...to make the situation clear.” In conclusion, he disclosed that “Muff Sourani has now resigned as Secretary of [the] Race Relations Advisory Group, and no successor has yet been found.” *⁴⁹ Bis Weaver’s correspondence and Muff Sourani’s undoubted support had brought the first formal expression of sympathy with her plight from a trade union official and when the Weaver case became more widely known it would not be the last.

This breath of fresh air was followed by two communications from Knowles and Dawson demonstrating their usual lack of interest combined with a well-practiced avoidance technique. The one-time union official and now labour movement paternalistic dinosaur, Knowles, had re-entered the scene briefly. During this brief re-entry, he, yet again, failed to deal with the issues at hand but went on about the roles he occupied. The Leader wrote:

I read your letter carefully and as far as I can see you are confusing the whole business of my role as Leader of the Council and my role as a member of the Labour Party. I must make it clear to you that I would not be the Leader of the Council or want to be one, if I were not a member of the Labour Party. I cannot, therefore, divide my role as a Labour Party member with my role as Leader of the Council, although it has an effect on it. I thought my letter was quite clear. It certainly was clear to me and I stand by that letter. If you can produce any evidence to the contrary then indeed I shall be happy to receive it.⁵⁰

As he had not addressed himself to the subject matter of either the first or second of her letters, it was difficult to provide the contrary evidence that Knowles appeared to be inviting. But it did seem that Knowles was asking her to provide evidence to show he did not interpret his roles in the way described. This was something she could not do because, unless she was a psychiatrist or a mind reader, how could she see into his head to establish whether or not Knowles saw these two roles in the way he described. Knowles was either writing gibberish or had written a poorly constructed letter that fell short of what he was trying to convey. The

* Muff Sourani had been present at the NATFHE anti-racism conference at Middlesex Polytechnic in December 1985 when Bis Weaver attacked Rule 24; and he had tried to raise the issue at the Race Relations Advisory Committee in October 1986 but was thwarted by some of the delegates, including NATFHE’s

letter was meaningless so the letter was left to stand on its own 'merits', and it remained the only letter sent to her to which she did not respond. What it did confirm was Knowles' obvious determination not to answer questions that brought the monitoring anywhere near to him.

Another letter received the same day did warrant a reply. Five weeks after she had written to NATFHE's general secretary about impartial procedures; access to materials; and restoration of rights, Dawson dropped a line to her in the manner typical of NATFHE bureaucrats to which she had become accustomed. Dawson apologised for the delay in responding; attributing it to "pay negotiations...conferences and a period of leave." In the same vein as Knowles, he avoided any reference to the contents of her letter other than to describe her complaint as "of various events which took place in 1985." He then revealed his intention "within approximately a month...to investigate [the] complaint thoroughly...with both care and fairness and...will inform her of his conclusions."⁵¹ This was the way Dawson proposed to conduct an investigation of the serious charges levelled against his colleague, a regional official - the not unexpected NATFHE-style *House of Mirrors Enquiry* where every deficiency cited against the accused is reflected on to the complainant. In line with Triesman's refusal to investigate Day's actions in February 1986, Dawson had no intention of allowing Day to be the subject of an impartial investigation. This was another example of a wilful refusal to act in a principled manner. Nothing new here!

In her reply, she picked up on Dawson's description of her complaint against Mr Day as "various events which took place in 1985". She reminded him it was "a formal complaint of negligence and related matters, including the contravention of [her] rights to natural justice" made against the regional official. The complaint had been submitted because "of NATFHE's reluctance to take up this serious issue" despite her requests to both Dawson and Triesman, in 1985 and 1986, "to act on...the way Mr Day carried out the investigation..." She then asked him to provide details of the procedures for investigating the complaint. These covered:

- (a) "the date of the hearing into [her] complaint;"
- (b) "the number of persons [on] the adjudicating panel [and] the body from which... [they] will be drawn;"
- (c) the form of representation allowed to her – lay or legal;
- (d) "the provisions for witnesses to be called;"
- (e) "the appeals procedure, should there be cause for an appeal;"
- (f & g) copies "of the relevant rules...and Standing Orders... governing...complaints against full-time officials;"
- (h) access to "any submissions [by the regional official] in response to [her] complaint."

Venturing to stress the need for impartial procedures, she expressed “concern if the General Secretary...[was] involved in the investigation of [her] complaint against Mr Day.” She thought “Such an investigation involving Mr P Dawson, a colleague of Mr Day and on whose behalf Mr Day carried out the investigation of [her] original complaint, might introduce the likelihood of bias and contravene [her] rights to natural justice.” In addition to that, “NATFHE Head Office officials have already committed themselves by making a statement in favour [of the regional official].”⁵² This commitment was made in NATFHE’s submission to the Industrial Tribunal and it should have ruled out NATFHE officialdom as adjudicators on the grounds of potential bias. She knew there was no possibility of receiving an answer to her questions or of NATFHE carrying out an investigation that had any semblance of ‘care and fairness’; something this outfit had already shown itself incapable of honouring.

A copy was sent to the TUC general secretary with a covering letter pointing out that as previously stated “NATFHE’s ‘procedures’, such as they appear to exist for investigating complaints against full-time officials, do not appear to be satisfactory...and...confirms [her] earlier concern.” She reiterated how NATFHE’s manner of dealing with complaints led members to use “non-trade union bodies in an attempt to obtain justice.” Now it seemed to her that NATFHE was forcing her “in that direction yet again with the consequent stress and pressure that such courses of action cause to the individual member concerned.” NATFHE was also risking “disrepute accruing to the trade union movement because of its failure to address, justly, the needs of individual members...” She had no expectation of anything from the TUC general secretary, nonetheless, she concluded by saying “the trade union movement needs to develop effective...procedures for investigating grievances to ensure that its affiliated...members... actually serve the interests of their members.”⁵³ A year later, Norman Willis was to show how little the interests of rank and file members concerned him. *

I turned my attention back to the Birmingham Labour Party and wrote to a Labour party member in the Moseley ward, Najma Hafeez, Councillor for the Fox Hollies ward, as one Labour Party member to another. I stressed the member-to-member communication in the hope she did not confuse her roles as did the Labour group leader. The issue raised was the monitoring of Bis Weaver’s movements prior to giving “evidence in a complaint...against three men at her work place, one of whom was a member of the Fox Hollies Ward Labour

* See Chapter XX Sect (b)

Party.” * After explaining the background details and drawing attention “to the right of people to work without political interference and intimidation in their everyday lives...I am sure...[she] would want an investigation to be carried out in the Labour Party...” She was reminded of a telephone conversation with me in September 1985 when, having heard of Bis Weaver’s difficulties, she offered assistance. I explained I was contacting her now on the basis of that offer and hoping “that [her] concern extends to the difficulties [Bis Weaver] has experienced as a result of [this] monitoring...”⁵⁴ On this occasion, it was the Labour Party member who failed to respond leaving my letter to rest on its ‘merits’. As her response to Amir Khan via a LEA officer had shown, Najma Hafeez was reluctant to stand up for Bis Weaver’s rights either as an employee of the city council or on a Labour Party issue. **

(f) Ring-a-Ring of Roses

NATFHE in the West Midlands had quietened down since the fall-out from the *McCarthyite enquiry* and the ‘racially discriminatory motion’; or perhaps the REC/BLC had achieved its objective in the proposals for the new WMARC constitution.

When the REC next met on the 13th May, the Black Lecturers’ Group motions were submitted. The discussion developed into a one-sided debate on the status of the BLG itself; Krishna Shukla versus the rest. The kind of odds the Broad Left and the Birmingham NATFHE Six seemed to prefer. There was initial opposition to the BLG motions being discussed – the argument revolved around the BLG’s status, which did not have equivalent status to other NATFHE committees, therefore, motions must be submitted to the WMARC for approval – a position that assigned the BLG to ‘second-class citizenship’ in a region projecting itself as the trend-setter for greater participation by Black members. ***

This objection was rendered untenable when Krishna informed them that the BLG motions had been endorsed by the WMARC. Upon hearing this, Mackney said the REC

* This was included to let her know that we were aware of her connection with Hartland, in the Fox Hollies ward and the Labour Coordinating Committee

** Najma Hafeez and Bis Weaver had several things in common; both were women; members of an ethnic group; Muslims; members of NATFHE; and Bis Weaver had campaigned for Najma Hafeez for councillor in the Selly Oak ward in May 1982. Najma Hafeez was chair of the Further Education Committee which oversaw the activities in colleges and also a member of the Bournville board of governors. They were also members of the Indian Workers Association

*** Constitutionally, this was the position occupied by the BLG but that should have presented no problem since all that was required was to introduce a motion to the regional council to give the BLG the same constitutional relationship as the all-women’s panel – after all they were about to introduce a new constitution for the WMARC

would have to accept them for discussion at regional council. The REC/BLC boycott of the WMARC was more than useful as it was undoubtedly essential for the development of anti-racism in the region. More than ever, Krishna's revelation made it imperative for the REC to have the new constitution for the WMARC come into force without delay.

When the BLG motion on the restoration of Bis Weaver's rights came up for discussion, the regional chair, Gates, declared an interest and vacated the chair * to be replaced by Mackney. Did it not occur to REC members that Gates and Ms Pattinson, with a direct partisan interest in the motion, should be excluded from the meeting while that particular item was discussed? Apparently not, nor did *all or none* seem to apply but perhaps that condition only applied when brushing off Black groups seeking justice for Black people.

Following a discussion, the REC decided, despite Krishna's objection, that the issue should not be discussed by the council because of its legal implications and was referred to head office, which, as the REC was well aware, already knew of it and had done nothing. The objective of this proposal was obvious – a packet of vested interests lurked in the REC and an admission of injustice was not going to be allowed to undermine those interests. Or perhaps, the re-direction of the 'rights resolution' to head office, following the debacle of the *Frew enquiry* and the 'racially discriminatory' motion, was to ensure nothing was done again in matters concerning Bis Weaver until after the Industrial Tribunal hearing. No objections were voiced on the other BLG motions.⁵⁵

The word going the rounds among the Broad Left and fellow travellers in the West Midlands was that officialdom was convinced Bis Weaver did not have a chance at the Industrial Tribunal. Such overriding confidence on NATFHE's part worked against Bis Weaver because if the outcome had been seen as favourable to her it might be expected that one, two or more REC/BLC members would be rallying to the cause of a disgruntled Black member or at least showing some distance from the dominant interests in the union.

While the REC/BLC pressed on regardless, Krishna, Bis and my letter on the McCarthyite enquiry brought a belated response from a contributor, which received in early June. The letter epitomised the path chosen by the 'enlightened' few in NATFHE in the West Midlands to justify inaction but paraded as a commitment to anti-racism. It had taken the correspondent eight weeks to get around to writing it and yet again it was necessary for us to

* Further confirmation that the April motion was introduced for Gates' benefit during the period when Bis Weaver's complaint was in the union

reveal reality to someone conjuring up illusions for themselves and for others. *

From outside of NATFHE, Bis Weaver received a letter from the Birmingham Trades Council outlining the position of Trades Councils, which like the TUC, did not intervene in the internal affairs of affiliated organisations. However, it was obvious the council was concerned about what was happening. The secretary stated that:

The matters raised by you in your letter are, of course, of concern to any trades unionist interested in defending individual trade union rights. However, each union has its own autonomy in relation to matters between it and its own individual members. Individual members of any union are entitled to the same rights and responsibilities as any other member as provided within the Rules and Constitution of the union. Moreover, there is a common law requirement for the principles of natural justice to apply in any dispute. In extremity these rights can be enforced by recourse to the Civil Courts. I, personally, do not recommend recourse to the courts unless all avenues for resolution within the union have been exhausted.

The Trades Council secretary sent a copy of this letter together with Bis Weaver's letter to the secretary of the Bournville NATFHE branch and to the secretary of Birmingham NATFHE liaison committee.⁵⁶ Perhaps, NATFHE might benefit from the references to 'natural justice' and 'unless all avenues...within the union had been exhausted'. Perhaps not! If she had provided the full extent of what had been happening to her in NATFHE in the Birmingham area, the Trades Council secretary would have recognised NATFHE had no interest in applying the concept of 'natural justice' to Bis Weaver, or any Black victim as was evident at a NATFHE conference on its Anti-racism Pack in December 1985 at Middlesex Polytechnic.

A similar letter was sent to me referring to the Trades Council's limitation in internal union matters. However, its conclusion showed how the council felt about the matter. It said "The circumstances...do give cause for concern but in view of the above ** we do not have the jurisdictional authority to interfere in the affairs of NATFHE...I trust that you will be able to obtain some resolution to the matter..."⁵⁷

The purpose of our paper bombardment over the previous months had been achieved - to let members of the labour movement have some knowledge of what had been happening in NATFHE. Within a few days, a new chapter would open as NATFHE faced the consequences of letting sleeping dogs bark and bite.

* See Chapter XIII Sect (f)

** The limitations on Trades Council action in internal union matters

(g) 'Tishoo 'Tishoo - All Fall Down

Attention again turned towards the impending Industrial Tribunal, although it was never far from Bis Weaver's mind or mine during the skirmishes with the 'anti-racists and feminists' in NATFHE. I had written to Tony Rust to explain recent events in NATFHE that had a discriminatory impact - the *McCarthyite* enquiry; the 'racist' motion, and Krishna Shukla's attempts to get NATFHE to respond to Bis Weaver's complaints at WMARC and the Anti-Racism National Panel. Krishna, himself, had previously fallen foul of NATFHE's West Midlands regional official and had "'registered' a complaint...for racial discrimination in 1985." Apparently Day had mishandled his case against the employer and Krishna was prepared to make himself available if it would "assist in any way at the Industrial Tribunal..."⁵⁸

Prior to each previously arranged Industrial Tribunal hearing, I produced papers covering various points of the case, complete with dates, to enable the barrister to quickly refer to any documents to be used at the Industrial Tribunal. Pen-portraits of NATFHE local officers and members, nineteen in all, detailing their involvement in Bis Weaver's case and their partisan links with Gates and NATFHE officialdom were prepared in case NATFHE called them as witnesses. I now revisited the documents to bring them up to date. On the 29th May, Tony Rust wrote to confirm a "conference with Counsel [on the 5th June] prior to the hearing of [the] case on the 8th, 9th and 10th of June."⁵⁹

On the Whitsuntide weekend, prior to our conference, there had been the gathering of the elect, NATFHE's Annual Conference, where the High Priests presided over the usual rituals of showering each other with praise. The usual platitudes were emblazoned on the union's standard and the year's bonding exercise between senior lay officers and head office officials reached its pinnacle. The retiring President, Childerhouse, to whom Bis Weaver had written in September 1986 about her difficulties and received nothing but an acknowledgement, called for the assembled delegates to "pay an enormous tribute to all the staff at Head Office ably led by our General Secretary, Peter Dawson, whose professionalism and basic hard work cannot be called into question." Dawson accepted the plaudits and went on to claim "We have a proud record of serving our members needs and recognising our wider responsibilities as teachers and trade unionists. We've kept that duty and vision in the past. We're going to keep it in the future." Neither of the keynote speakers identified the beneficiaries of that professionalism, hard work, service, duty and vision but there was one Black woman in Birmingham who, from personal experience, had considerable evidence to

show it had not benefited her, and she was not the only Black person in NATFHE not to qualify as a beneficiary.

The West Midlands women's panel, flying its own flag of concern for women in education, drew attention to the findings of a survey in Birmingham into sexual harassment in schools and colleges, showing that over two-thirds of women in the survey had experienced sexual harassment. The results also disclosed that women were left to cope with that harassment by: avoiding offending males; steering clear of certain rooms; and ultimately leaving their jobs. Delegates from the West Midlands criticised the union's appalling record in failing to defend women and this failure was likened to the record of the employers - the Birmingham Local Authority, which had also done nothing; and they urged the union to adopt a different approach to the issue of sexual harassment. * A motion moved by the West Midlands calling on the union to defend victims of sexist harassment had a notable opponent – yet again supporting officialdom, Nan Whitbread, who wanted the motion remitted.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding her opposition to the motion, the West Midlands women delegates had a lot in common with Ms Whitbread: equating racial harassment with interpersonal dispute was one common factor; another was standing on the side-lines while intimidation and harassment by union officers was continually dished out to a Black woman, who was left to fend for herself.

These West Midlands women delegates accepted without question the high incidence of sexual harassment reported in the Birmingham survey and the union's lack of interest in defending women victims yet in less than three weeks, a West Midlands women member, who unsuccessfully appealed to the women's panel for assistance in January 1986, would be facing NATFHE officialdom at an Industrial Tribunal, also in Birmingham. She would be giving evidence on the appalling way her complaint of harassment had been dealt with by the West Midlands regional official and head office officials, implicitly aided and abetted by the 'all-knowing' vanguard of women's rights in the region.

If these feminists had a commitment to anti-racism Bis Weaver would have been saved a lot of anxiety and stress – the common affects associated with harassment, so readily acknowledged in other women in the survey by the Birmingham NATFHE women's group. However, these 'feminists' did not appear to recognise that these debilitating consequences also affected Black women in the same way as they affected White women as implied by the actions of the women's group at Bournville branch and the women's panel in the West

* They had assisted in the production of a survey on sexual harassment in colleges in Birmingham.⁶¹

Midlands. Understandably, women took offence if told by men what constituted sexist harassment and how victims felt about the experience, yet too many feminists * did not extend their 'gender experiential understanding' to Black women or acknowledge Black people's expertise in interpreting what constituted racist harassment. These feminists were comatose when confronted with racism and their only means of resuscitation would be to have swallowed their pride and listened to and learned from others, especially from those at the butt end of racist discrimination and harassment but, as was so readily observable, this they were not prepared to do.

Despite the union leadership's self-congratulatory drivel in "recognising our wider responsibilities", a piece of news travelled from the North West Coast at Blackpool to Bis Weaver that Whitsun weekend that should have vindicated her completely from the scurrilous attempts to debase her experiences by the REC/BLC in the West Midlands; and have its members scurrying down the M6 to offer their apologies.

Krishna Shukla phoned with news of a bombshell sufficient to cause the edifice constructed by REC/BLC members and its whole defence system to come tumbling down. The chickens of reality coming home to roost that weekend were capable of prising open the most closed of eyes and minds - always assuming they wanted to see and understand. However, not even this glaring example could cure the astigmatism of the 'anti-racists' in the West Midlands region or head office.

Gates, chair of the regional delegation, had resigned his post and left the conference in disgrace. Ms Pattinson, the vice-chair and chair-elect had also resigned and left. Apparently, Gates, in an argument with several delegates, had used "physical violence, actual and threatened"⁶² towards a woman delegate, who ended up on the floor. The delegate was Julie Frew. This assault led to an altercation between Gates and Ms Frew's partner, Lovejoy, and the police were called in by the conference hotel management.

A meeting was convened to discuss the incident. Ms Frew, one-time colleague and ally of Gates, made it perfectly clear that as long as Gates remained in the delegation she felt intimidated. She was obviously determined not to have to face again Gates' 'abrasiveness' to use an all-inclusive word in NATFHE's lexicon to describe harassment, racism, sexism, intimidation and bullying. Mackney, acknowledging the many disagreements he had with Gates, thought Gates was entitled to present his point of view.

* Nan Whitbread, Penny Welch; the recently appointed West Midlands women's rights representative; the West Midlands women's panel; and the Bournville branch women's group

Gates, who was waiting outside for the decision, was approached by Mackney and the regional official, Day. Such was the mood of the delegation, Gates was advised to withdraw or he would be excluded. Called into the meeting, Gates apologised for the incident, offering up as mitigation the pressure and stress he had been under for a couple of years and asked to be released from the delegation. The delegates let it go at that and agreed to let him leave without further action. Gates, together with Ms Pattinson, left without anything outstanding against him – a repeat of the NATFHE-engineered LEA inaction. Members of the REC/BLC seemed not to take into account that Bis Weaver had suffered considerable stress at the hands of Gates and others in NATFHE. They were unable to recognise that state of affairs because they were part and parcel of the stress she endured – part of the problem. Bis Weaver, as a Black person, was truly an invisible person in their eyes.

A written apology was sent by Gates to Ms Frew. * Twice in just under three months Gates had apologised for his treatment of two women. In the Frew incident he had taken but one day to apologise for one incident, unlike the twenty five months, from the first of many incidents, it had taken him to apologise to Bis ‘Weaver or any other colleague.’ On two occasions, two different bodies, one dealing with assault (NATFHE West Midlands) and the other with harassment (LEA) had allowed Gates to leave their ‘jurisdiction’ without action being taken against him. The press covering the conference heard of the incident but the West Midlands delegation closed ranks to keep it under wraps. **⁶³

The Gates/Frew incident also torpedoed Day’s judgement when claiming in his ‘report’ to “have total confidence in his (Mr Gates) ability to reassure anyone who may feel threatened by him.”⁶⁴ Gates was unable to reassure Ms Frew – a close colleague of his, as she felt intimidated by being in the same room as Gates even though she was surrounded by

* Gates had sent an apology to the LEA two months before about his behaviour to Bis Weaver, stating “It happened at a moment of great stress...and I can assure you that it will noyt (sic) happen again.”⁶⁵

** NATFHE’s Annual Conference was remarkable in more ways than one. While Gates was leaving his union post after physically assaulting a women delegate and NATFHE was soon to face an Industrial Tribunal for racial discriminatory policies, NATFHE broke one of its barriers by announcing the appointment of an ethnic minority woman, the Mauritius-born, Christianne Ohsan, as a regional official in London.⁶⁶

many other delegates. *

Gates was now perceived as an intimidating figure by a fellow officer and comrade in the Broad Left Coalition as a result of this one off incident. Yet previously, despite months of intimidating Bis Weaver, Gates was thought to be no threat to anyone, merely a party to an ‘interpersonal dispute’ – the catch-all phrase for ‘plastic-antis’ in the West Midlands. Did the delegates not think to interpret the assault on Ms Frew as another example of an ‘interpersonal dispute’? Will they parade him now as someone with a long history as an anti-sexist? Whatever definition they give to this incident, Ms Frew found it impossible to stay in the same delegation as Gates and NATFHE West Midlands delegates responded to her fears by excluding him. Among the delegates were those who left Bis Weaver in the position of having to meet Gates often in Bournville College when no one else was around, as had happened on many occasions, for sixteen months between February 1985 and June 1986.

Members of the REC/BLC went along with ‘forcing’ Gates to leave the delegation in the dying embers of his tenure as regional chair following this incident with Ms Frew. The action of the delegates should be applauded but, in the wake of this, officers in the West Midlands still continued to embrace illusion by interpreting Bis Weaver’s experience with Gates as nothing more than a five hundred day long ‘interpersonal dispute.’ This self-deception had enabled the Broad Left Coalition to ignore the continuous harassment of Bis Weaver when backing Gates to be chair of the region in 1986.

Bis Weaver and I, for a brief period, thought that Gates’ political allies, perhaps even the ‘vanguard of the anti-racism movement’ located at head office, would now accept the credibility of her claims of being threatened and intimidated by Gates. They might now recognise from behind their ‘rose-tinted glasses’ that if Gates was capable of physically assaulting a fellow Broad Left comrade-in-arms in a one off disagreement in public, what might he be capable of doing to someone, not his ally, who came up against him over a long period of time. Surely his ‘flag-waving, arm-jerking’ supporters might now accept what Bis Weaver had said of her experiences at the hands of Gates and recognise what she had been

* The consideration given to this woman member by these delegates – a victim of a one-off incident with Gates should be compared with Triesman’s complete lack of understanding of how victims of harassment feel about being in ‘discussions’ with the harasser. On the 12th June 1986, Triesman expected Bis Weaver to sit down with Gates and the Bournville *kernels* in a branch committee meeting dominated by them to discuss the situation. The harassment of Bis Weaver by then had gone on for 16 months. Those members of the delegation who were part of the Birmingham NATFHE ‘Six’ should also have taken note of Ms Frew’s response if she had been offered its *all or none* condition. Ms Frew’s position appeared to be ‘no discussion but Gates out’ and they complied with it

campaigning about while they sat back defending his actions as of no significance or playing games with unstamped correspondence or trying to protect the unity of the 'Left.' NATFHE officials and officers confronted with this irrefutable evidence would conjure up something in its own Orwellian *Ministry of Truth* to avoid facing reality and turn it into illusion as had been done in NATFHE's submissions to the Office of Industrial Tribunals when the term 'friendship' was used instead of 'enmity'; and the 'falling out of friends' instead of 'harassment of a work colleague.'

Triesman would inevitably be informed of the circumstances surrounding Gates' departure, yet for some considerable time in the future, Triesman continued to defend Gates to the hilt although he was unable to sustain the myth indefinitely. The smokescreen manufactured by officials and officers to screen the truth about Gates and themselves had been effectively blown away by Gates' physical assault on 'one of their own women members.'

In the field of anti-racism, NATFHE was taking on the appearance of a spent and discredited force as the Bournville fiasco became common knowledge throughout the region and began to seep onto the national scene. NATFHE's feeble pronouncement on tackling racism was as feasible as a publican extolling the virtues of abstinence. This was just the beginning as NATFHE was to be even more discredited within the next twelve months.

¹ BW to BLP Group Mbrs 25 Mar 1987 File N 46

² GM to BW 27 Mar 1987 File N 47

³ BLPBS to Trade Unionists March 1987; and 'Details of the 'performance' of some of the Labour 'Left in NATFHE, GW to BLPBS January 1987 File F 24 - 28

⁴ RDty to NC/BCtte 18 Mar 1987 File W 34 - 35

⁵ BLPBS to BhLCtte Mbrs 31 Mar 1987 File G 31

⁶ BW/GW to RDty 2 Apr 1987 File G 33

⁷ AB & NATFHE Sen Off reported by AB to GW at WMARC Mtg 8 Apr 1987 File Y 11

⁸ Mins WMARC Mtg 8 Apr 1987 File U 65 - 66

⁹ BW to Ch of B/V Govs 7 Apr 1987, Copies to NC, BH, PMT and the LEA File G 40 - 41; GW to JC 10 & 11 Jul 1987 File P 37 - 38 & 41

¹⁰ BW to PMT 3 Mar 1987 File P 1

¹¹ RK to BW 7 April 1987 File N 48 - 49

¹² BW to RK 12 April 1987 File N 50 - 52

¹³ BW to GH 12 April 1987 File N 53

¹⁴ GH to BW 14 Apr 1987 File N 54

¹⁵ RB to BW 15 Apr 1987 File N 55

¹⁶ T/p conv JC to PMT 21 Oct 1986; Conv Mgt & BW 21 Oct 1986 File V 27

¹⁷ Post 4 - 8 Apr 1987; Campaign Briefing No 37 Jan 1988

¹⁸ Conv SS to BW 23 Apr 1987 File V 16

¹⁹ Conv SS to BW 30 April 1987 File V 19 - 20

²⁰ BW to DES 25 Apr 1987 File P 3 - 4

²¹ McGoldrick v London Borough of Brent [1987] IRLR 67

²² GW to BTC President, VP and Sec 19 Apr 1987 File M 56 - 57

²³ NWC to BW 10 Mar 1987

²⁴ ZB, Worker with Asian Women, to BW 14 Apr 1987 File G 42

²⁵ ACVFT to BW 16 Apr 1987 File G 43

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- ²⁶ BW to ACVFT 24 Apr 1987 File G 46 - 48
²⁷ AD to SN 13 Aug 1985 File A 19
²⁸ CT 24 Apr 1987; The Journal 2 May 1987
²⁹ SERTUC to BW 21 Apr 1987 File G 45
³⁰ GW to CT & Journal 25 Apr 1987 File G 49 - 50
³¹ Sister, NATFHE Women's Group Newsletter, Jan 1987, London
³² BW to *Sister* 28 Apr 1987 File G 55
³³ Conv EP & BW/GW 27 & 30 April 1987 File Z 31
³⁴ Glasgow A 1935 – 2001 File Z 28
³⁵ GW to KS 19 Apr 1987 File M 52 - 55
³⁶ GW to KS 20 Apr 1987 File M 58
³⁷ T/p conv BW & SD 18 Dec 1986 File Z 20
³⁸ BhLC 'Six' to BLPBS 5 Apr 1987 File G 35
³⁹ RDty to NC/BCtte 18 Mar 1987 File W 34 - 35
⁴⁰ Malcolm X in 1964, quoted in Rosen M & Widgery D (ed) [1991 *Chatto Book of Dissent*, Chatto and Windus, London
⁴¹ Conv HS to BW 2 Dec 1986 File R 37 - 38
⁴² Conv BW to PMc, recorded in document 'Details of the 'performance' of some of the Labour 'Left in NATFHE, GW to BLPBS January 1987 File F 24 – 28; and BW, countersigned by GW, to LPBS, copies to the BhLC 'Six' 28 Apr 1987 File G 51 - 54
⁴³ Conv BW, GW & MB 20 Dec 1986 File Y 8, recorded in document 'Details of the 'performance' of some of the Labour 'Left in NATFHE, GW to BLPBS January 1987 File F 24 – 28; and BW, countersigned by GW, to BLPBS, copies to the BhLC 'Six' 28 Apr 1987 File G 51 - 54
⁴⁴ Freire P [1984] *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*, Begin & Garvey, Massachusetts, USA
⁴⁵ BW, countersigned by GW, to LPBS, copies to the BhLC 'Six' 28 Apr 1987 File G 51 - 54
⁴⁶ GW to BLG & others 17 May 1987 File M 60
⁴⁷ BW to BTC 29 Apr 1987 File G 56 - 57
⁴⁸ AD to SN 13 Aug 1985 File A 19
⁴⁹ TUC WM to BW/GW 1 May 1987 File H 1
⁵⁰ RK to BW 5 May 1987 File N 57
⁵¹ PD to BW 6 May 1987 File H 2
⁵² BW to PD 7 May 1987 Rec'd Del J 632268 File H 3 - 4
⁵³ BW to NmW 8 May 1987 File H 5
⁵⁴ GW to NH 17 May 1987 File N 58
⁵⁵ REC Mtg, KS (Notes) in conv GW 13 May 1987 File G 64
⁵⁶ BTC Sec to BW 2 Jun 1987 File H 9 - 10
⁵⁷ BTC Sec to GW 2 Jun 1987 File M 61
⁵⁸ GW to AR 10 May 1987 File H 6
⁵⁹ AR to BW 29 May 1987 File H 8
⁶⁰ NJ Summer 1987
⁶¹ Report on the result of the Sexual Harassment survey carried out in Birmingham Schools on behalf of NATFHE, NAS/UWT & NUT, Birmingham, 1986, available in Birmingham Reference Library.
⁶² Reg Sec Rept on Annual Conference, in mins WMReg Coun 20 Jun 1987, ss 11 - 12 File H 22
⁶³ Conv KS & GW 29 May 1987 File Z 32; Reg Sec Rept on Annual Conference, in mins WMReg Coun 20 Jun 1987 ss 11 – 12 File H 22
⁶⁴ Day's Report, p19 s7(vi) BW IT Bundle 14
⁶⁵ DG to GH 11 Mar 1987 NATFHE IT Bundle 188
⁶⁶ NJ Summer 1987