LONDON CHRISTMAS

Wet streets, wet lights, wet puddles winking back the lights.

Boots. Long boots, short boots, eskimo boots, cowboy boots, suede boots, leather boots, muklucks and welly boots.
Kaleidoscope of shoppers' legs.
Flashcapade of boots.

Queues. Queues of kiddies in the stores waiting to whisper their hearts' desire into Santa's nylon beard.
'And what do you want for Christmas, my little fellow?'
'I want a video game, me Dad says its too expensive but its only 24 pounds!'
Queues for the buses.
Alas Ken Livingstone, where is thy Fares Fair now?
And Dole queues.

Headlines, leaping from the news stands
'Three men murdered at church in Armagh'
'Drought in Africa, Children die of starvation'
'Fresh fighting in the Lebanon'

And so amid the bustle, the push and pressure of yet another Christmas,
The rushing thoughts arrest.
The heart moves on the pricking pulse of unshed tears,
The mind begins to probe again.

What does it mean, what can it mean?

Christmas.

Oh don't offer me the cheap anodyne of a pretty story,
That well-worn pulpit cliché—that peace and hope will flow as if by magic from the stable tableaux.....the ox, the ass, Mary and the baby, the shepherds and the Kings.
Hearts will melt, hard men will change their ways and all will be new!

It doesn't happen, it doesn't work like that.

Men who call themselves Christian descend and massacre their fellow men,
Tanks roll in winter streets and blatant greed in tinsel robes presides at many a Christmas feast.

The truth lies deeper.
Somewhere, within the pain, the simpleness and suffering that is the weal of human birth,
Somewhere, in that star that lit a path beyond the sum of human wisdom,
Somewhere, somewhere in that mystery, renewal's alchemy awaits discovery.

Dear God I wish I were a bigger soul.
I wish I had a Churchill's will, a Mother Teresa's heart!
Your world lies bleeding and there seem so few to stoop and staunch its wounds,
Oh Christ, the human born mid blood and pain and donkey dung,
Oh Christ, the final forfeit for all our human crimes,
Give us rebirth.

Give us the faith and fire and fortitude,
The heart and the humility,
To align our lives to your high purposes,

To staunch the wounds,
To build Jerusalem,
To let thy Kingdom come.

Nancy Ruthven

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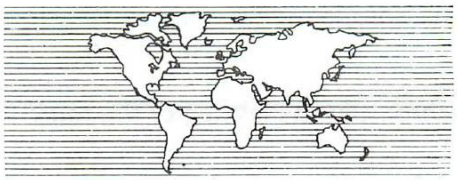


CONTENTS **PAGE**

London Tourist Board

Christmas lights in Regent Street

CLASHPOINT DIARY

NO RETURN TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

In October and November the play 'Clashpoint' was performed in eight British cities and towns. The play, by Betty Gray and Nancy Ruthven, looks at the opportunities and tensions of a multiracial community, through the lives of three pupils at an inner-city school and their families and teachers. Last month we printed the first instalment of the tour diary of CAROL DENYER, one of the play's multiracial cast. Here she chronicles the last leg of the tour:

Manchester, 31 October-3 November

THE SUNDAY BEFORE *Clashpoint* opened in Manchester, our company manager, Howard Bird, Miguel Richards, who plays my son in the play, and I were interviewed on BBC Radio Manchester. The two-hour programme, *I 'n' I Rule, OK?*, produced by Mike Best, concentrated initially on the recent invasion of Grenada. We listened while the First Secretary of the High Commission of Grenada was interviewed and took part in a phone-in. There was an explosive tension in the air, and I wondered what I could contribute to people who had been through so much in these last days.

It was our turn next. I told the interviewer, Julian Sharp, about my own experience—how after my parents and I had emigrated to Canada we heard that my brother had been arrested on political charges at home in South Africa. This nearly destroyed my parents and I became extremely bitter. *Clashpoint* is about reconciliation, not in a fairytale situation but in real life, and that was why I had taken time off work to tour with the play.

'Black and white, you don't change a man by hating him,' Miguel commented. He and Howard told how we work together as a racially mixed company. 'One thing we try to do, if any of us feel any tension or aggro, is to talk it out together,' said Howard. 'Then there is no guilt or hiding behind doors.'

Our first performance in Manchester was in Moston Brook School, just north of the city centre. The school used to be at the bottom of the academic scale locally, but its new headmaster and staff have succeeded in raising its standards.

Students from two other high schools nearby had been invited to see the play. We had to fight to keep our audience with us and we were not sure how well they followed the play. One girl wrote in an essay afterwards, 'The play is so familiar.'

During the fit-up at Moston Brook I fell through a hole in the stage and had to go to the local hospital for x-rays. As a result my impressions of Manchester are somewhat hazy—though I was still able to act!

The next day found us at St Joseph's, a Catholic girls' school where we staged two performances so that everyone from 11 years upwards could see the play. Once again a neighbouring school had been invited in. We were impressed by the order and discipline at St Joseph's—and thrilled by the steel band which we could hear practising as we set up the play. We discovered that it takes part in local competitions and, according to the headmistress, has created a community spirit among the girls.

Our final performance in Manchester was at De La Salle College of Higher Education. Many student teachers were in the audience. After the play we sat on the stage of the well-equipped theatre hall and had an open discussion with the audience. A student told one of the company afterwards that she had identified with the character of Rose Jennings, the bitter political activist, and that she would 'have to write to my father and put things right with him'. A Catholic Father commented, 'This play is like a parable. The meaning of bits of it come back to you afterwards.'

Bristol 7-11 November

It would be nice to say that each performance was easy. But this was not true of the first school we visited in Bristol. The audience of 4th to 6th formers had been given the choice of attending class or seeing *Clashpoint*—guess which of the two they chose! We were later told that there was National Front influence in the school. Each time a black member of the cast walked on stage, they would boo and shout. They became more and more disruptive. When they cheered, clapped and stamped their feet at the end, we didn't know quite what to make of it. Despite all this, we heard later that 20 students told their teacher that they wanted to know more about our company and what we were doing.

Cabot School in St Paul's was a total contrast. The Headmaster, Adrian Smith, exudes optimism and hope. The school's walls are covered with the work of children of all cultures.

The audiences, too, were multiracial. Not everyone agreed with the play's message of reconciliation and non-violence. I asked a young black community worker what he wanted to see for the black man in Britain. 'Respect,' he said, explaining that he meant that people should be given career opportunities not because they are black, but on merit. He thought this would not come without violence. One of the cast, John Locke, said that every bloody revolution in history had led to generations of killings.

After talking to many people in St Paul's, including the

CLASHPOINT contd on p 7

E Howard

Cast member Chris Channer (left) with girls of Whitfield School, Bristol

ONE CHRISTMAS ON THE BEACH

by John Williams **illustrated by W Cameron-Johnson**

CECIL JAMIESON LEANED on the bridge railing and thought of his son. Or rather, tried not to think of his son. Indeed, he'd spent years turning his mind away from Brian. The habit even persisted on this few weeks' visit to him in the farthest reaches of the globe.

To have such heat at Christmastime still felt wrong, almost indecent. The air-conditioned concert hall, where he'd just heard a lunchtime Chopin recital, had been a relief in more senses than one, almost a benediction. But the coolness through which the young pianist's timeless notes had floated only re-emphasised the glaring heat and the brash commercialism of the city outside.

His parcels felt too heavy only half way across the bridge. He was, after all, less than 18 months from his 75th birthday. He'd taken pains to keep trim all his life, but he could be excused a little weariness, surely. And it was in fact a relief that only just over a week remained of what he tried not to call an ordeal.

The concert hall on his left was a squat, round building, only opened the year before. Behind it, a series of State theatres nearing completion; a long fortress-like art gallery, which housed a surprisingly catholic collection. He hadn't expected Australians, who seemed happiest as footballers, lifesavers, swimmers, to take their cultural life so seriously.

Culture! It didn't even swim near Brian's field of vision. Unless you could say that fishing was culture. Leather-jackets, bulbous little cod near the spray-drenched rocks, or saltwater salmon off the long beach where Brian's caravan was parked. On the likes of them he'd spend hours—and, you had to admit, looked every inch the muscled fisherman. But no attention at all to the pleasures of the mind. Even with *his* mind!

There seemed so little of Cecil in his youngest son—and for that matter of Margaret either.

Peter, James and Richard, doctor, stockbroker and company director respectively, seemed to have enough sense not to run away from their heritage. Real pleasure it gave him to take out the Rover—ten years old, but still trusty—from the garage below his Putney flat and spend a few days with each in turn. They all lived at a comfortable distance, in Hampshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk. One didn't have to voyage to the far end of the earth and try and cram into six weeks what ought to have been the normal relationship-building of years.

However, it had gone better than he'd hoped. Brian, though sometimes tense, seemed to have outgrown his childish emotionalism. And it even seemed as if his house-building business might take off before long. There'd been no reference to the stormy scenes, ten years before, lasting months and ending with Brian departing for Australia. Despite himself, his stomach tightened as he remembered Margaret's anguish as she tried to mediate between them. Involuntarily he found himself saying under his breath for the hundredth time, 'You killed her, Brian: you killed her!'

But was that really true?

Both doctors had said her illness had been hastened by her inner turmoil. But the cancer had been on her nonetheless. And perhaps if she hadn't prostrated herself with worry, it wouldn't have been discovered so soon, and her death would have been more sudden and even more devastating.

He really couldn't hold Brian to blame. And he had, after all, had nine years to get used to being alone.

He made himself concentrate on the vista before him.

Rivers, winding through the lives of nations, providing sites for great cities. This broad-streeted metropolis of three million people could scarcely be called great, though there were some rather pleasant gardens. Perhaps it took generations and centuries to produce real character.

Compare this view, for instance, with the Thames at Putney. And how many tens of thousands of times had he walked that particular bridge? Contrast the faceless concrete and granite of this Arts Centre with the simple, shining sandstone of the old church on the ancient river's north bank. On one day in particular he remembered it catching the glow of the sun. To have been in a winning crew in the Boat Race was a greater claim to distinction than any other of the many credits

he'd gathered in a long life. And his Varsity memories paddled through the Thames as much as the Cam.

But enough nostalgia. He still had one more present to get, for Brian and Dina's eldest boy, Petros. Petros Jamieson: what an extraordinary mixture of cultures that name represented! He had to admit that Dina brought to Brian's home a pleasant spontaneous affection. She was the first Greek he'd ever got to know. Underneath her olive skin and black hair, he'd be bound, there'd be lurking a temper he'd do well to stay clear of. But her dozen little gestures of thoughtfulness had touched him, more than he would have expected. And she seemed to be waiting. For what?

He picked up his parcels and trudged back towards the city.

* * *

On Christmas Eve he asked Dina a question that had been in his mind during his whole visit. 'Does he ever tell you of his childhood?'

She stopped wrapping a present as if she was aware that this was no casual query. A slow smile spread across her face, but she didn't answer straight away.

They were at close quarters in the caravan, and talking softly. Brian had just gone out because one of the boys, in the canvas annex outside, had cried out in his sleep. Brian had a fierce protective affection for his two sons. And at five and three, there was a fierceness in their love for their father. (But like so many passionate emotions, would that swing the other way?)

That afternoon they had driven a hundred miles, crawling among a thousand other cars, to this semi-cleared patch of virgin bush. From the caravan window in daylight you could see surf crashing on the five-mile beach. Now, as he watched, there were startling flashes of white water in the full moon. A certain wild beauty, offset by the brilliant diamond stars, he had to admit: but not something to get excited about.

Soon he would have to go to the motel where he had elected to stay. Christmas Day itself would be noisy, and six days after that he'd be leaving. So this was as good a chance as he'd get to ask her what Brian had said of his boyhood home. In other words: how much he had been cut out of his son's life.

'His childhood? Yes. A lot,' she said.

He smiled, welcoming her to expand.

And she smiled back, her eyes glinting under the dark lashes, as if she was trying to make what she said particularly pleasing. 'Yes. He's told me all you wanted him to do.'

But this was not at all what he meant. He tried not to let his annoyance slide over his face.

And then Brian came in from the tent. Obviously he had heard it all.

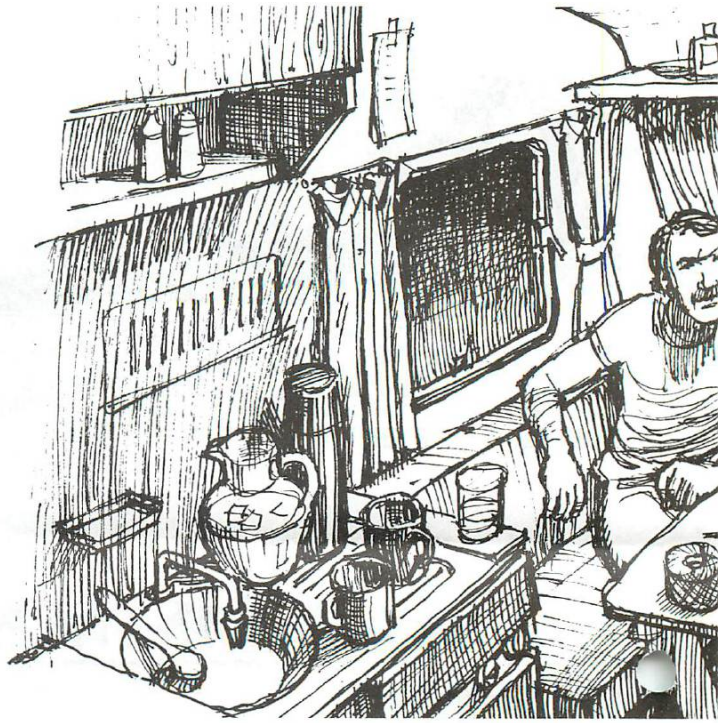
He parked his bulk in a seat and said, forcibly, with a hard smile, 'You did have a lot you wanted me to do, didn't you, Dad?'

Dina threw him a nervous look. But Brian took no notice.

Cecil kept calm.

Brian's eyes shifted to the floor.

But not before that purple flush Cecil remembered so well had spread across his face. Dina quietly put a hand on his arm.



After a suitable time, Cecil said, standing up, 'Well, I'd best be making a move. Tomorrow's likely to be a full day. And I'm not quite settled in to the motel yet.'

Brian still looked at the floor.

'No particular traps, are there,' Cecil went on, 'in that track up to the road? I'm still not quite used to your car.'

He half-expected a quip about sliding into a gum tree. But Brian just shook his head.

Then he looked his father square in the face. 'That was really the trouble, wasn't it, Dad? You've always believed that when I finally grew up, I'd think exactly like you about everything.'

With a considerable effort, Cecil managed to keep silent. Brian had said it intensely but quietly, without the old adolescent shout. Even to such an absurdity he could afford a dignified response.

As he went down the steps, Dina said, 'So you'll be here at a quarter to eight?'

Brian said roughly, 'We'll be able to keep them quiet till later than that. I've already told them no presents till Grandpa comes to breakfast.'

'We're all going to church,' she said.

'Church!'

'It's what your father would like.'

* * *

The congregation was only twenty-strong but filled half the space in the little wooden building. They sat in the front pew, Cecil in a suit, Dina and the children in their best clothes, perfectly ironed, Brian a little sulky in T-shirt and shorts, but with a touch of formality in his long white socks and polished brown brogues.

Cecil had not slept well. A noisy party had been in progress a hundred yards further up the village. He'd turned on the air-conditioner to drown the cacophony. and huddled under the blankets from both beds. But it was a bleak and lonely place to stay.

He relaxed a little in the soothing progression of familiar words, modernised but still echoing King James and

hundreds of years of continuity. The things that last, through wars, depressions, dictators, technological revolutions.

'God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son.' He let the thought rest like a jewel on velvet in his heart. 'So that all who believe in Him should have everlasting life.'

If this son of his could believe in Him...well, then he might get some perspective on life.

A reborn son would be the greatest of presents.

But even as he formulated the thought, he rejected it. 'Re*birth*', like other such words and phrases, was really just not on. Some things had to be kept for the secret places. And if a man was not able or willing to search in them, then so much the poorer he.

As the service ended, he felt refreshed and benevolent, eager to surprise his grandsons with their presents.

* * *

But in the days that followed, the boys' scrimmages, their shouts, their bounce irritated him much more quickly than in Brian's home in the city. A caravan was no place for the generations to meet.

They spent hours of each day on the beach, huddling under a green and orange umbrella, smothered with suntan oil. He took his turns at building sand-castles or jumping through the waves. But the exultation he might once have felt was lacking. Anno domini, he told himself more than once, it catches up with us all.

One afternoon he left them to it and trudged off along the sand.

Seagulls lifted at his approach. There were one or two fishermen on the edge of the water. An occasional car wandered along the road. But for the most part he was alone with the hills and the ugly, straggling trees. He just couldn't understand what Brian and Dina, inheritors of ordered beauty like himself, could see in them. Nothing permanent here, except the waves and their ceaseless rhythm. Every 20 or 30 years the bush was destroyed by infernos of up to 2000 degrees. Ahead of him was a blackened swathe where one had come through the year before. Blacker for the brilliant emerald green of the new growth on the old stumps. Dina had been enthusing about this regeneration.

Which brought his mind back again to his wish for some rebirth in Brian.

But that was stupid. Such things didn't happen.

Then he shocked himself by letting out an anguished cry. Only the gulls, fortunately, would hear.

More than anything else, he finally had to admit, more than anything at all, he wanted a live relationship with Brian.

'You always believed that when I finally grew up I'd think exactly like you about everything.'

What a damn ridiculous thing to say!

What was a father's experience for, except to be handed on to his children!

And Brian had shown such qualities, before something went wrong in his teenage years. A first-class mind, all the assessors had said. Yet he'd left his distinguished school under a cloud. Had chosen to be just a carpenter.

Strangely, he felt himself almost physically back in the little church. Celebrating the birth of....a carpenter....

And he knew he could no longer control his mind and feelings.

He went to the water's edge, took off his sandshoes and walked ten paces into the warm water. Perhaps anyone who passed would think it was salt spray on his cheeks.

* * *

He had no idea how long he stood there. But by the time he turned round his cheeks were dry and his feet were cold.

A high administrative position he'd had, controlling tens of millions of pounds of the nation's money. The sort of career Brian could have had. And instead he'd chosen to work with his hands.

Yet Brian was wholeheartedly involved, he had to admit, in local politics. Reformist politics, of course. Cecil had sat on the edge of several smoke-filled, beer-swilling discussions about how power could shift 'from oligarchies to the people'.

He'd seen with some pleasure how sharp were Brian's views, how keen his interventions. But he'd also noticed, several times in those evenings, that look in his son's eyes. The look he'd hoped not to see again. This wasn't the dabbled-in politics of his own Cambridge years.

Why, why on earth was Brian content to be way out here, on the edges of the world, when he could have been at the heart of affairs!

Quite suddenly, as he walked back along the sand, that sentiment looked stupid. A quite unacceptable proposition.

'All who believe in Him.' All. Did God really look upon everyone as equal sons? Even the ignorant, the starving—and the far away?

Of course he'd doled out from time to time a few crumbs of aid from his spot in the citadel of power, when famine, flood or cyclone had hit Asia or Africa.

But could the truth be that the world had no centre after all—but only a circumference? And that your mind

was less important than....than something else far less easy to define? Something....something that you only began to glimpse if you refused to be....yes, wedded to your power of judging?

* * *

During the days that followed, he kept this extraordinary revelation—he could call it nothing else—in his own secret places. But for the first time, he found he could rollick with the boys in the sand and the water. Some of the meals squashed round the caravan table could only be called hilarious. He found himself counting the hours he had left.

The plan was that on New Year's Eve, at six in the morning, Brian would drive him to a train which would connect with an airport bus. When they'd discussed it in the city Brian had mumbled something about taking him all the way. But Cecil wouldn't hear of interrupting their holiday.

On the last night, three-year-old Andrew was tired after an active day and clamouring for Brian to put him to bed. He picked up the boy and made for the door.

Cecil stood up in his path. 'Petros and Andrew may still be asleep when I have to go. I'd better say goodbye to them now.'

Both boys went completely still and silent. Unnaturally so, as if it was wrong that their grandfather was about to leave. Though Cecil said what he'd rehearsed, and they answered politely, it was an ordeal. Much more so than he'd expected.

'He's just about asleep,' said Brian, and started for the door again.

'No. Stop,' said Cecil. 'There's something I want to say while you're all here. Even though they won't understand....I....Well, I've been thinking about....about what you....what you said on Christmas Eve. It's....it's true I tried to run your life. And I want....I want you to forgive me. I saw you as carrying on all that....all that I'd done....'—this terrible emotion! But he must finish now—'and what my father had done, and his father, and his father....'

He sat down quickly, and looked away from them.

None of them said anything. Which was a relief. He felt, rather than heard, Dina beckoning Brian and the boys out of the caravan into the tent.

They were a long time putting the children to bed.

By the time they came back he'd recovered his composure. Brian sat down, looked straight at him and smiled. 'Thanks, Dad. Of all the things I'd never thought you'd....well! And I did give you a hell of a run, didn't I? Looking back, now I've got these two rascals under my feet, I'm damn sorry. Fact is.... The fact is....'

His face went deep red and he looked at the floor. Cecil had a sudden spurt of fear.

'The fact is,' said Brian again, 'part of me wanted you to lay down the law. It was easier. Gave me something to hit against. Dina's helped me....well, to be myself. But I guess we had to talk it out.'

He looked up at Cecil again. After a minute both of them laughed gently. That seemed enough. Dina's eyes, bright as the diamond stars, went from one face to the other and back again.

'I'd better get a good night's sleep, Brian,' Cecil said at last, standing up, 'so I'll be off, if you don't mind.'

'Let me take you to the motel. It'll be easier in the morning.'

That sounded sensible, because there'd be no need to double in their tracks in the early hours. Six thirty, Brian said, would really be all right. This sounded as if he would have to drive at a dangerous speed, but Cecil felt strangely unlike pointing this out.

Which made it a real surprise when the whole family turned up next morning and Brian said in a tone that denied contradiction that they'd take him all the way to the plane.

He left it till the last call over the loudspeakers before he went through the faceless departure doors. They'd begun to really talk during the drive. On how many things he'd have liked to have had Brian's insights!

He hugged both children and kissed Dina. In the distance, through the glass airport doors, the sun was catching the leaves of a tall, grey-pink gum tree. Stark and magnificent, he found himself thinking.

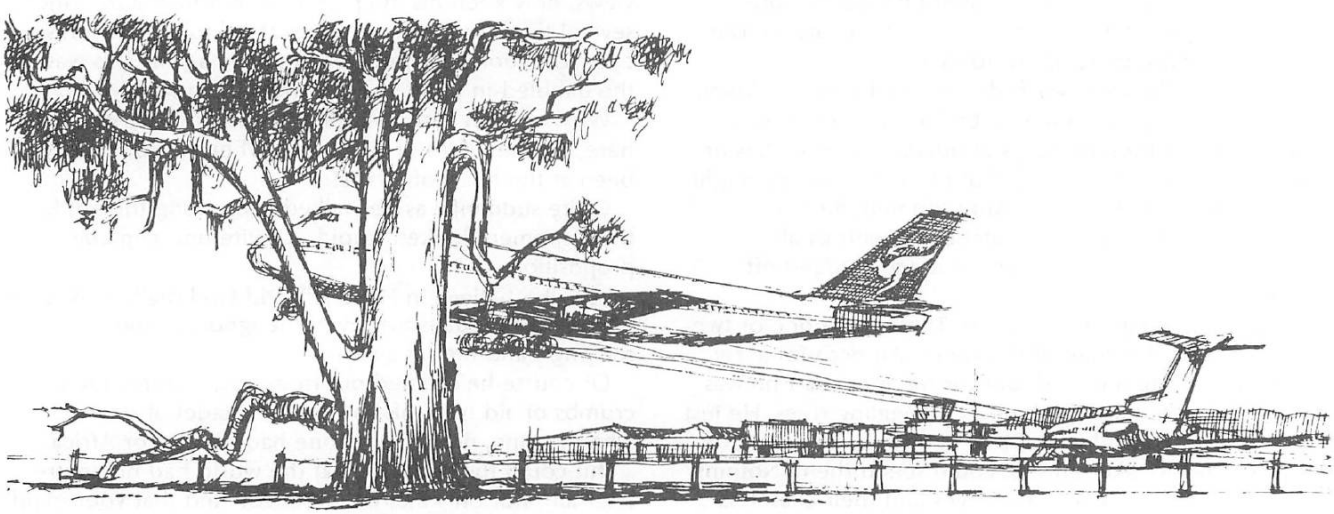
He shook himself back to the harsh present, and held out his hand to his son.

'Come again,' said Brian.

'Why don't you all come and see us? Your brothers need to meet you.'

Dina said, 'That would really complete....' and stopped. Then added: 'We could also go to Greece....'

Brian grinned to himself. 'Well, we just might. If I can get a few of those contracts. And if you can stand such an invasion.' ■



CLASHPOINT contd from p 2

police, we felt that the situation there was critical. It reminded us of Martin Luther King's words, 'Those who hope that the negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to its business as usual.' It is not just a black problem but ties up with many things such as unemployment and lack of education, which breeds prejudice.

After a packed show at the Newman Hall, I met a young white man who was bitter about the plight of the blacks in South Africa. He felt their best bet was to destroy the whites. He had never been to South Africa and would not accept that not all the whites were 'baddies'. I told him about my own experiences and how my bitterness had left me when I met Afrikaners who were working for positive change in South Africa. He was shocked when I drew a parallel with Britain and said that according to his arguments the blacks in Brixton, for example, should come over to his city and destroy him and his family. 'But I am not the enemy,' he said. How are they going to know that?

A young mother said of the play, 'I thought it was about race, later I reflected, it is about us.'

On Tuesday morning Polly and I found ourselves in the modern reception room of Radio West, made famous by the TV programme, *Shoestring*. Peter King, a Baptist minister, interviewed us for 20 minutes. 'What is the play trying to say?' he asked Polly. She replied, 'I think it is, "Listen to your neighbour and to the inner voice, call it God or whatever you choose. Attempt to be guided by basic humanitarian concepts of love, justice, compassion and peace and seek to build bridges between yourself and other people with whom you may have problems." I wasn't unkind to black neighbours, but I hadn't done anything positive. I was a "not-do-harm" person. This play did upend my thinking.'

After the final performance at Whitfield comprehensive school, we met a young girl who had been deeply moved. She had fully lived into the scene where Mr Jennings walks out on his wife. We discovered that her own mother had twice had husbands walk out and the girl was now petrified that her present stepfather would do the same. She felt that it would be a long time before she could commit herself to marriage.

At a farewell supper, Shiv Singh, Chairman of the Bristol Council for Racial Equality, thanked the cast for 'enriching the city'. 'Clashpoint plays a very important role in showing us what can be done,' he said.

Liverpool, 13-18 November

On arriving in Liverpool we learnt from the press about the possible confrontation between the City Council and the Government over local spending, and about a march that was planned for the end of the week over unemployment.

Our first performance was at the magnificent Neptune Theatre in the centre of the city. Among the audience were the Chairman and the Chief Executive of Liverpool City Council, a former chairman of the Community Relations Council, community leaders, teachers, students and young unemployed people. One councillor said afterwards, 'I recognised in that play all the things I lived through in my political career, including the family scenes. Its challenge got through to me several times.' Another councillor commented, 'I think a special meeting of the whole council should be called to see the play.'

E Howard

'Clashpoint' actors Gordon Warnecke and Judy Newell (right facing left) with pupils at Whitfield School

Members of the cast were interviewed on Radio Merseyside three times.

Five of us went to talk to 100 sixth-formers at a comprehensive school. As we came into the room there was a lot of giggling and some instinct told me something was up. There were a row of seats waiting for us, one easy chair and the rest hard and wooden. Luckily we chose these. A teacher came in, sat down in the easy chair and fell to the floor—it had a false bottom. I'm ashamed to say we joined in the roars of laughter!

Polly March and I did a couple of scenes from the play to give a flavour of the conflicts it portrays and then we opened the floor to questions. A black girl put up her hand and asked, 'Why is it that whenever there is a play about blacks they are always West Indian? Why does every play have to have a black one-parent family with a lay-about son, where the mother is always a nurse?' She went on, 'You can see that I'm in the minority in this class, but I get on with everyone. I don't have a bad family life, none of my family are unemployed and I'm doing quite well academically.'

Afterwards I went up to this girl and told her that I had also found that people thought all black people were West Indian. 'I play a Jamaican, but I am from South Africa,' I said. Her face lit up, because she comes from Zimbabwe.

After the show she was beaming, although her friend said she had been in tears by the end of the play. We chatted for a long time and I gave her the issue of *New World News* which contained the first half of this diary. She told me later that she had thrown it away when she got home and her mother had found it and read it and woke her in the middle of the night to ask, 'What is this? It's really good.' They had stayed up talking about deep issues.

The final two performances of our tour were in the Welsh Presbyterian Church Hall opposite Penny Lane. This famous name from the Sixties set us all humming. The hall presented colossal challenges—we had to rearrange the entire staging area for our purposes and rethink all our entrances and exits. The large audiences included several youth groups, senior police officers and a coach party from North Wales. One polytechnic student said, 'It will be difficult to sleep tonight, there is so much to think about.'

After the show the whole company and some of our hosts

CLASHPOINT contd on p 8

TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT FROM BOTH ENDS

by Michael Smith

'IF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN FREEDOM can find no way to get on top of unemployment, sooner or later a chance will be taken by those who do not,' warned John Vickers, Chairman of a lubricant oils company in Leeds, speaking to the annual conference of the Confederation of British Industry in Glasgow last month. 'This is not a political or a class issue. It is a question of democracy or not, in the long run,' he said.

Mr Vickers was proposing the conference resolution on employment and training, which called on employers and individuals to invest one per cent of their annual budgets in locally initiated work creation schemes, as their voluntary contribution to tackling unemployment. The resolution was carried unanimously.

During the conference, Sir Campbell Fraser, Chairman of the CBI, said, 'We have got to live with change as a desirable companion.'

Mr Vickers repeated his call at a recent Moral Re-Armament industrial conference at Tirley Garth, Cheshire, attended by 80 management and trade unionists, from 13 industries.

'Behind every economic question lies a moral issue,' he said. 'Tackle the latter and you can resolve the former. That means accepting that unemployment is *our* problem.' He said that dealing with moral issues produced change in people's attitudes and relationships, and liberated new creative approaches to economic problems.

Mr Vickers later said that some companies were already moving towards forming a 'one-per-centers club' to tackle unemployment on a voluntary basis.

Work-sharing

Chairing the MRA conference, on the theme 'Time for Rebuilding', Christopher Evans said that this would mean multiplying the hundreds of 'micro-solutions' to unemployment which were already being worked out into thousands.

Brian Thirlaway, Secretary of Consett Co-operative Enterprises, described how steelworkers from Consett Steel Works had formed themselves into an unemployed branch of their union when the works was closed down three years ago. They had recently proposed an energy conservation scheme under the Community Programme of the Manpower Services Commission. This would soon employ up to 25 people, said Mr Thirlaway. The Department of Energy was training them to provide an insulation advice and information centre. There was also the possibility of distributing reclaimed wood free to the elderly.

Albert Benbow, engineering workers' convenor at SU Fuel Systems, a BL subsidiary in Birmingham, reported that the output was already £900,000 above the target for this year. 'There is a new breed of hope and life in the plant,' he said. BL Director Ray Horrocks had told him, 'You have performed a minor miracle in this plant. You have achieved the Japanese standard and you have maintained it.'

The conference saw the premiere of a new audio-visual programme, *The Llanwern Story*, which tells of the turn-around in the South Wales steel plant which now has the highest productivity in Europe.

Steve Engleking is an executive in Interflex, a West German computer company that helped pioneer flexible working hours. He explained that a wide spectrum of their employees practised 'work-sharing', working less than full-time. It meant greater co-operation amongst employees, he said.

He himself worked 80 per cent of the time for 80 per cent pay. He had come up against opposition from his fellow managers, 'but the big challenge came when I realised that I didn't have as much money as before. My wife and I spent time soul-searching and we felt we had to change our lifestyle. We started cutting out some of the luxuries that we had accepted as needs, not just wants.' They no longer needed two cars, for instance. The Englekings saw this as part of the search for a personal approach to solving unemployment.

Several of those who participated in the Tirley Garth conference went on to a one-day conference on the following Wednesday in Birmingham on the theme, 'Constructive Initiatives in Industry'. Seventy senior trade union leaders and management from the West Midlands, Manchester and South Wales took part in the conference, held under the auspices of the monthly *Industrial Pioneer*. ■

CLASHPOINT contd from p 7

had a meal in the Penny Lane wine bar. The owners were neighbours of two of our hosts and turned out to be popular local folk-singers. The whole occasion turned into a private party. They got out their guitar and banjo and we all joined in.

Clashpoint's tour 1983 may be finished, but we're already meeting to plan what next. A vote of thanks must go to all our hosts in the different cities, to all who gave food and money, to the employers who allowed some of us time off work to take part in the play, to all who prayed for us, and to God, without whose blessing nothing could have happened. ■

Happy Christmas to all our readers!

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