

COLUMN 88

categories; para-military training, such as that now exposed as having been taking place in isolated forests in England; intelligence-gathering, particularly on other right-wing groups, but probably on the left as well; and infiltration of right-wing groups in an effort to inject pure nazi doctrines into their political platforms.

Its top leadership is believed to consist of specialists in these three fields. The man whose name is most frequently mentioned as being at the very top of the column is a former head of a private security agency, with a long history of involvement in the extremist right.

Secrecy

Absolute secrecy about the column was broken for the first time last year, when a story surfaced in the press about a celebration of Hitler's birthday. What is surprising is that since that time — exactly 12 months ago — a slight change appears to have taken place in the column's policy.

The exercise in Savernake Forest in Wiltshire, which included members

of the TA (whether the rank-and-file were aware of it or not) indicates some willingness on the part of the column's leadership to expose itself to outsiders. Whether this was stupidity or a calculated risk is not known.

Calculated

If it was a calculated risk — and even if it were not — the joint exercise shows that the column's leadership is in contact with that level of the TA which authorises exercises. That is no mean level of contact.

The long-term aim of Column 88 is to provide a highly trained and efficient cadre for a national socialist party of the future. Its members claim ability to keep together for as long as necessary. Whether or not a nazi millenium comes — and it seems hardly likely — the point is what the column gets up to in the meantime.

This may all sound alarmist; a trained band of nazis in England? Don't be ridiculous, you may scoff.

All right: it is not large — nor, in terms of the greater scheme of things, is it very influential. But it does exist, and its members are without doubt extremely dangerous men. It should not be forgotten that the European nazi groups of the '20s began as tiny disciplined bands.

Special Branch

The Special Branch of the police is investigating the latest set of allegations about the column, which surfaced as a result of two years of undercover work by a man who decided to devote himself to finding out about the extreme right from the inside.

But this is not the first time the police have heard about the column, or about those who fill its ranks. Why, we are entitled to ask, is it still in existence? Private armies for political purposes are, under the Public Order Act, illegal, and have been since the days of Mosley's blackshirts.

Column 88 is a private army. It is illegal. There is no legitimate reason why it should be allowed to continue.

BRISTOL

Mrs Gillian Beedell, Liberal councillor for the Cabot ward in Bristol, found herself acting as a 'spokesman' for the National Front when she presented a Front sponsored petition to the Bristol council.

Councillor Beedell acknowledged the National Front connection in a letter to the Western Daily Press on April 15th when she stated that her agreement to hand in the petition "appears to need some explanation."

The letter goes on to make the point that she supports the rights of all citizens to petition the council, a right that must firmly be upheld without prejudice, and concludes with an expression of her determination to uphold the freedom of speech.

It could be claimed that the use of the phrase "without prejudice" rolls very strangely off the tongue when related to the National Front which of course publicly revels in its prejudices by boasting that "we are racist and proud of it."

Councillor Beedell's topsy-turvy attitude is taken a stage further when she relates freedom of speech to the activities of racists. On the one hand she is strongly opposed to the National Front and all it stands for, but on the other hand is prepared to support them. That is a subtlety the victims of racialism will be unable to appreciate.

A more positive attitude was taken by Young Liberals at their recent conferences when delegates from Reading and Bradford universities called for full participation in the counter demonstration in Bradford on April 24.

John Evans from Bradford denounced the National Front demonstration as an attempt to intimidate immigrants and cause racial incitement.

LEICESTER

The local election results came through as we went to press and a full analysis will be made in our next issue when all the figures are available. What can be said at this stage is that the National Front vote in Leicester (43,500), Bradford (10,000), West Midlands (8,000), are cause for concern. They are also a sharp lesson to those who still think that if they ignore the fascists then they will just fade away.

One of the big surprises was the election of two National Party members to the Blackburn council. Another factor that should be noted was the number of contests in which the Liberals were pushed into fourth place by the National Front.

*And today's will stay that way!
O it's history (secret) need!*