



File

10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

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PAUL FOOT



reporting

REVEALED: The Thatcher 'aide' who advised the working miners

● A RIGHT-WING columnist on The Times and former bankrupt—described last year as a political adviser to Margaret Thatcher—was active in forming and promoting the National Working Miners' Committee.

The Committee has been hailed at the Social Democratic Party Conference and at last week's Tory conference as a genuine organisation of miners who want to work during the strike.

Mr David Hart attended at least three of the early meetings which spawned the Committee.

This was revealed to me this week by the first secretary of the Committee, Mr Bob Copping. Mr Copping resigned from the Committee after only three weeks because he thought it was "an anti-trade union organisation."

Appointed

Mr Copping, 51, a winner at Houghton Main pit, near Barnsley, says he met David Hart at a meeting at Castle Donington Guest House, near East Midlands Airport.

"I was told before the meeting that he was the money-man," says Bob.

"He was introduced to us as D. H. Lawrence, but he told us after the meeting his name was Hart, though he didn't want it broadcast for obvious reasons."

At another meeting at

Castle Donington on August 19, Bob Copping's own minutes record that Colin Clarke, a Nottinghamshire miner, was appointed President, John Blessington, from Bevercotes Pit, Notts, Treasurer, and Bob Copping, secretary.

This "executive" of three met the following week—on August 25—at the luxury Hambleton Hall Restaurant, near Oakham, Leics.

The only other person at the meeting was David Hart. The restaurant is owned by Tim Hart, David's brother.

Bob Copping's minutes record that David Hart

suggested the miners should meet steel union leaders and visit the docks to meet non-striking dockers.

Clarke and Blessington supported the move, but Bob Copping didn't.

The full committee met again at Castle Donington on August 28. The minutes report "D. Hart present."

David Hart suggested that the miners on the committee who weren't working should be paid £150-a-week out of the fund. He also suggested a £300 "float" for every committee member, to cover expenses.

Vague

Again, Bob Copping objected.

"Mr Hart said he had access to the Prime Minister and had held up the script for Mr MacGregor in his television debate with Scargill," says Bob Copping.

"I got more and more worried. There didn't seem to be any democracy in it. I tried to meet them about it, but they wouldn't see me.

"They had a meeting in Claridges in London, but I wasn't invited.

"My sole aim was to work through the constitution of the union to get a ballot. I realised the others weren't going that way."

Mr Copping resigned on September 5.

Mr John Blessington is now secretary.

Mr Blessington's memory of Mr Hart is vague. "I have heard of the guy, I've met him, I think," he told me.

"There was a reporter there who was helping us with publicity, apparently."

Mr Blessington insisted that he'd never been Treasurer, that he has been the only official secretary of the Committee, and that Mr Copping had re-

signed because he couldn't be secretary.

He said that Mr Copping's minutes were not the official record of the committee.

Asked about the dockers' meetings, Mr Blessington said: "I'm not prepared to comment."

Mr Hart was even less helpful. Four attempts to get him to the telephone in the suite at Claridges, where he spent Monday night, proved futile.

At his office on Tuesday morning, a spokesman said: "He is not available to talk to you, and will not be."

Denied

Mr Hart, 40, was described in The Sunday Times in November last year as "one of the amorphous group which drifts around Downing Street advising Mrs Thatcher on matters of state."

A Downing Street



DAVID HART: "Access to the Prime Minister..."

spokesman was quoted the next day as saying: "He may very infrequently have consulted him."

In December, Mrs Thatcher denied in the House of Commons that Mr Hart was one of her official advisers.

The Coal Board could not confirm or deny that Mr Hart helped Mr Ian MacGregor, their chairman, in his debate with Arthur Scargill on August 22.

In June, 1975, Mr Hart was declared bankrupt. He had debts of £959,259, most of them because of his fantastic life style.

He had bought a coun-

try estate, Rolls-Royce and BMW cars and he commuted by helicopter.

Mr Hart told the court: "I'm afraid I've been very silly."

He was discharged from bankruptcy in 1978 with only half his debts paid.

Modest


On September 13, he wrote an enthusiastic article in The Times on the National Working Miners' Committee. He was full of praise and enthusiasm for the new body.

Modest as ever, Mr Hart did not mention his own part in it.

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The grim price of private care

● FROM all over the country I'm getting complaints about one of the most booming enterprises of Mrs Thatcher's government—private nursing homes.

Ten days ago, for instance, John and Nancy Durrant went to

see their elderly friends, Percy and Elsie Moon.

Mr and Mrs Moon, who are both 85 and are ill and frail, had moved into The Grange, at Bottisham, near Cambridge, where a week's stay cost them £430.

The Durrants were shocked to find the two old people in a tiny 11ft by 9ft room, furnished with

a commode, one upright chair and two beds.

The bedclothes were soiled and Mr Moon had lost his glasses.

The Durrants went back two days later. Things had got worse. They complained to their local councillor.

At once, Cambridge county councillor Janet Jones went to see for herself. She was appalled. Mrs Moons' bedclothes stank.

"There was only one qualified nurse on duty that day, to care for sixteen patients," she says.

Mrs Jones is writing an angry report to the East Anglian Health Authority. "These private homes have sprung up because of a desperate shortage of council-run homes," she says.

"My great concern is that they do not give adequate medical care and are not properly monitored."

The administrator of The Grange, Mr Pat Mungrew, vigorously defends his nursing home. "I have eight or nine qualified

nurses and about seven auxiliary nurses," he said.

He described the Moons as "difficult patients" and complained that their friends had visited them "at the busiest time of day."

Mr Mungrew says he has a law degree, and is a member of the Institute of Directors. He is also a State Enrolled Nurse, though not a State Registered Nurse.

Department of Health rules insist that anyone in charge of a nursing home should be at least a State Registered Nurse.

A fantastic boom in private homes has been oiled by enormous dollops of public money to help pay the fees. In 1979, old age pensioners in nursing homes got £10m of DHSS money, £18.04 per resident.

In 1983, they got £30m; £75.25 per resident.

● IF YOU have something you think I ought to investigate, write to me at the Daily Mirror or ring me on 01-822 3365.

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"I WAS hoping to speak in the law and order debate at the conference today, but I have probably missed that now, because I had to be here."

HUW SHOOTER, delegate to the Tory Party conference, speaking on October 8 outside Brighton Magistrates Court, where he had been fined £200 and ordered to pay £100 compensation for criminal damage. He and a gang of forty law and order fanatics from the Young Conservatives had smashed up a mock submarine put up by CND on Brighton beach.