

Blair set to accept Tory nursery voucher

JOHN RENTOU
and JUDITH JUDD

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, has decided to accept the Conservative scheme for nursery education vouchers if its nationwide launch goes ahead, and his education spokesman, David Blunkett, is considering a plan to trump it by offering higher-value vouchers.

Such a move could provoke sharp internal divisions in the Labour Party, which has always condemned educational vouchers as right-wing dogma.

Mr Blair and Mr Blunkett today launch a crusade to raise standards with plans to close bad schools if there are spare

places in nearby schools. Otherwise, they should have a "fresh start" and be reopened with a new head and governors. Teachers would have to reapply for their jobs. In *Excellence for Everyone*, the second education policy paper since Mr Blair became leader, Labour says it should be easier to sack headteachers, that heads should have a new professional qualification and a new grade of "super teacher" should be created.

Meanwhile, Labour is planning to pre-empt nursery vouchers. After a small pilot scheme next year, the Government intends to give all parents of four-year-olds vouchers worth £1,100 to buy part-time nursery

school or playgroup places in February 1997, three months before the last date for the general election.

The Labour leader is understood to believe it would be unthinkable to go into the election promising to take the vouchers away. Sources say he is sympathetic to a plan at present being discussed by Mr Blunkett's team to give effect to the party's aim to provide nursery education for all three-year-olds as well as four-year-olds.

This would stress Labour's claim that the Government's vouchers are inadequate to cover the cost even of many part-time places and offering higher value vouchers to pay for

full-time places at age four and part-time places at age three.

Labour local councils have accepted that the party's pledge cannot be delivered quickly enough in the public sector alone. The Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities yesterday set out a plan that would use private and voluntary sectors to top up public provision, but it remains opposed to vouchers, which would subsidise children at private nursery schools and take resources away from councils with good nursery provision. A spokeswoman for Mr Blair said yesterday: "The suggestion we might be backing the Government scheme is frankly absurd."

The Government cannot even get Tory councils to back the planned pilot scheme.

The document published today contains other evidence of convergence between Labour and Tory policy, as it backs several policies recently adopted by the Government, such as testing for five-year-olds and the requirement for inspectors to report bad teachers to heads.

However, the two parties' policies differ on inspection. The Government has introduced four-yearly inspections with privatised teams but Labour says teams should include local council inspectors. ■ Mr Blair will risk renewed controversy with his own party



Future investment: Children at a London nurse

today by announcing plans to tighten up standards in schools.

The Labour leader will announce a National Register of head teachers. To get on the

register, would-be heads have to pass rigorous tests before being considered for a headship. **Leading article**

Question of justice: Crown prosecutor complains of 'undue pressure'

Police accused of forcing trials on lawyers

STEPHEN WARD
Legal Affairs Correspondent

Chuck Nduka-Eze's experience illustrates the day-to-day conflicts between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service over which cases are taken to trial.

Until this summer, he worked as a senior Crown prosecutor in London, bringing cases to Bow Street Magistrates' Court. He left his job after a row which brought to a head his concerns that the CPS was too often taking the police's word that a prosecution was sound, and was not rigorously independent enough.

"The CPS was set up to give an independent assessment of cases, away from the police. We have to decide two things: there must be a realistic prospect of conviction and it must be in the public interest to go ahead. Those are judgements we are supposed to make, not the police," he said.

"The police don't care. Their view is: 'This man has done it. Let's get him into court.'"

He accepts that there has to be give and take with the police, in the pressured circumstances of a magistrates' court.

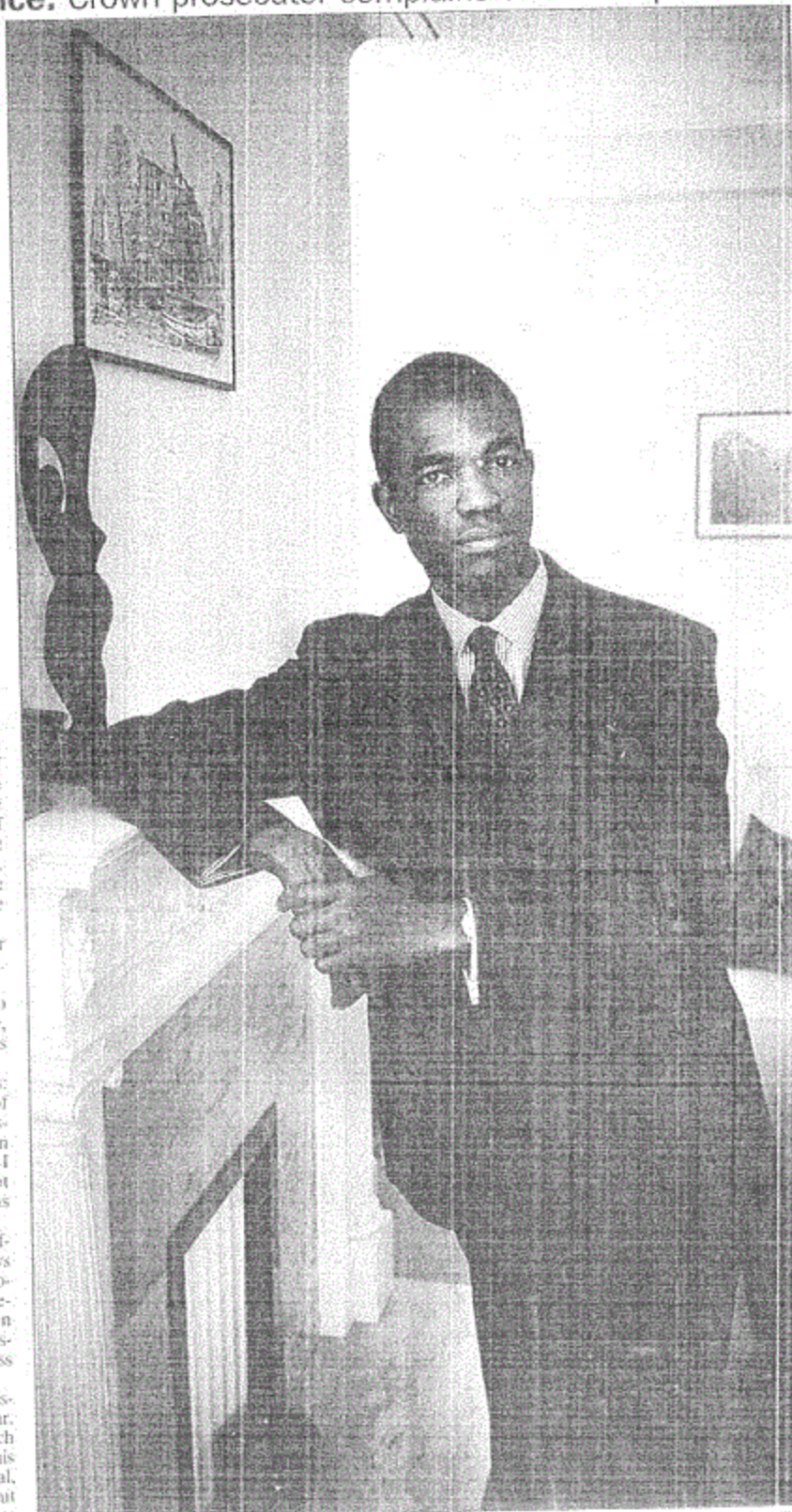
The advice in his office was: "Best keep on the right side of the police," and there was pressure on him to be "a good team player," he said. "By law I should be allowed say I was not happy with any case. That was my role."

He said that different CPS office bosses took different views of their relationship with the police. Some backed their prosecutors more than others when they complained of undue pressure. He contends that his boss did not back him adequately.

Mr Nduka-Eze, 32, a barrister, has now returned to the Bar. He is suing the CPS for breach of contract and is taking his case to an industrial tribunal, claiming that he was forced out of his job after resisting police pressure to bend rules. The CPS has said it intends to defend the case strenuously but would not comment on the allegations.

Mr Nduka-Eze described a case late last year which he says illustrates the way police can exert control from prosecutors.

When the case of a man charged with assault and living off immoral earnings came up



Chuck Nduka-Eze: Says the CPS is not independent enough Photograph: David Sandison

at Bow Street, a constable from the Vice Squad turned up too late for him to see the papers, but offered to go into the witness box to say the man was dangerous and there was a risk of harm to a woman. He refused, and said he needed time to make up his own mind. Within

minutes an inspector arrived to put pressure on him. Eventually, he had to go along with the suggestion, and the police got the man in custody they wanted.

When he later saw the papers, he found the woman had no convictions for prostitution, and the couple had three children

and had been living together for 13 years with no allegations of violence.

The police complaint formally about Mr Nduka-Eze, and although his version of events was eventually accepted by his boss, he was transferred to duties in a different area.

Child asylum-seekers are 'victims of war'

LOUISE JURY

The majority of lone children arriving in Britain to seek asylum are not economic migrants but victims of war and civil disturbance, it was claimed yesterday.

As the Government prepares a clampdown on the unaccompanied arrivals following a 67 per cent increase in their numbers, solicitors and refugee workers described the conditions which forced them to flee their homelands.

Tim Kirkhope, the Home Office minister responsible for immigration, condemned these children's parents for sending them to an "uncertain future", and said he believed many were economic migrants sent to Britain because their families could not support them.

Numbers are expected to top 600 by the end of the year, Mr Kirkhope said, at an esti-

mated annual cost to the taxpayer of £12m.

But refugee workers and solicitors said that although poverty was a factor, many young people faced conscription or risked physical assault at home.

In families already devastated by civil unrest or fighting, often the eldest son would be sent to safety to ensure the family line was preserved.

Peter Bartram, a solicitor whose practice is near Heathrow airport, said they had seen youngsters from countries such as Afghanistan who had already seen frontline action.

Official figures showed that famine and civil war have a significant impact on numbers. Mr Bartram noted increases from Eritrea during its war and from Sierra Leone during rebel uprisings.

Mr Bartram said: "Even if

they haven't actual personal danger, it has often suffered. They are often valed... arriving in a completely alien country they were

The majority are aged 16 and few than 14. Terry Smit, head of the division of Council, said that was undoubtedly better identification by immigration of

As soon as lone identified, they be responsibility of so Roy Mills - spc Hillingdon council Heathrow - said sent have 144 child costing the author year. Unless a traced in Britain remain in council

Day of reckoning for 'de by deportation' Algeri

PETER VICTOR

An Algerian former policeman married to a British woman is today being deported to face what circumstances his friends fear could lead to his death.

Hocine Dib, 29, who has lived in Britain for the last two years, was due to be deported by British immigration authorities at 6am today on the grounds that he is an illegal immigrant. His pleas for political asylum have been ignored, despite mass murder and terror in his home country.

In the past three years, 40,000 people have been killed in Algeria; some 50 people are murdered every night. The GIA (Armed Islamic Group) in Algeria specifically targets policemen, journalists and people with links to the West. The authorities have killed in cold blood people they suspect of supporting the fundamentalists.



Dib: asylum pleas ignored

Mr Dib's wife, Patti, a teacher, said after visiting him yesterday in Rochester prison: "I now have the choice between losing my husband or leaving my mother behind to live in a country the Home Office says is too dangerous for Britons to visit."

Mr Dib arrived in Britain in September 1993 on a tourist visa and applied for asylum. The

couple married a Home Office said he arrived as a te claimed asylum matically an illeg

Mrs Dib said: lists are still dang joined the police like detective w rive in Algiers a make it through

The couple's considering a judicial review.

■ A Home Office terday defender a democracy a Nigeria. Abio claims he faces torture at hom human rights including the w Wiwa, were month. Ann W Immigration ? "Obviously we that anyone in come here in a

'Scandalous' cash cut mad-cow research u

CHARLES ARTHUR
Science Correspondent

The scientist who chairs the national working group investigating mad-cow disease has condemned government cuts at one of the principal centres

said. "It's crazy for the government to do this now." The Edinburgh unit, Professor Almond says, is doing crucial experiments, including one to investigate whether bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) could have already

she had the dis no evidence t passed to him is continuing.

The Minister argues that ment funding BSE will rise n