

Britain in brief

Ports hit by new series of walk-outs

FRESH industrial action by Customs officers caused chaos at another four British ports yesterday as harbour officials were fighting towards normal services after earlier strikes. Members of the Society and Civil Public Servants at Poole and Hull joined colleagues taking strike action at Dover and Ramsgate over pay. Lorry drivers facing six-hour delays at Dover were said to be planning a blockade in protest. Customs officers at Felixstowe refused to return to work after a 49-hour stoppage.

NUT appeal

TEACHERS needs more training if they are to help fight child abuse, the NUT said yesterday. Responding to a Government consultation paper on child abuse the union said teachers were often the first to spot children with mystery injuries, and urged a system of confidential reporting in schools.

New heart

HAREFIELD Hospital in West London yesterday revealed a 41-year-old man suffering from a rare type of lung cancer was recovering well after donating his heart and undergoing a heart-lung transplant. The 51-year-old heart recipient was also said to be doing well.

Power plan

A CERAMIC-based engine is being planned as the secret supersonic successor to power a new Concorde it was revealed yesterday at the Paris Air Show. Rolls-Royce engineers are developing ways of designing the engine to be quieter and use less fuel.

Signed on

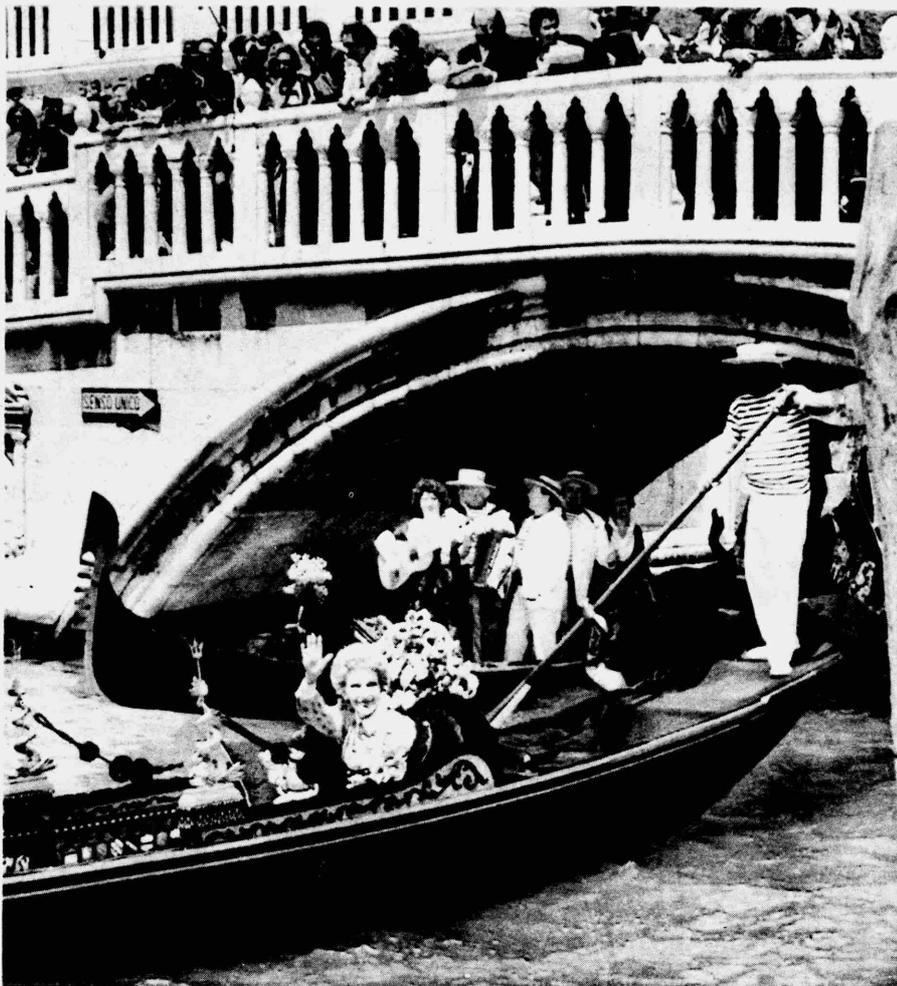
A NATIONAL anti-apartheid petition was launched by trade unions and anti-apartheid groups yesterday, calling for the release of apartheid detainees in South Africa. TUC general secretary Norman Willis and Bishop Trevor Huddleston, president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, launched the plan in London.

Rover sale

ROVER Group yesterday announced that it had completed the sale of three quarters of Istel, its computer, communications and systems development services subsidiary. The buyer is a consortium of Istel managers and staff with institutional backing.

Apricot in bid

REVISED refinancing plans proposed yesterday by office automation specialist Wordplex failed to impress Apricot, which is bidding £14 million for the firm. Apricot says the new proposals do nothing to enhance the position of Wordplex shareholders.



● Nancy Reagan is serenaded as she takes a gondola trip in Venice. Meanwhile President Reagan was wrapping up talks at the economic summit and reporting that the chances for a new superpower summit were improving.

DoT not to press Herald charges

THERE ARE to be no prosecutions by the Department of Transport over the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster.

Officers of the ill-fated cross-Channel ferry who still face losing their certificates should not stand trial twice, said Richard Stone, counsel for the DoT.

Beginning his closing speech to the seven-week inquiry into the tragedy Mr Stone said the inquiry itself might still feel the ferry's owners and masters should face criminal charges after the Herald put to sea from Zeebrugge with its bow doors gaping open.

"I would submit that the ship is in a defective condition if she sails with her bow doors open," Mr Stone said. "There is little difference between that and going to sea with a hole in her side that it is not intended to repair."

Legislation

Mr Anthony Clarke QC, counsel for operators Townsend Thoresen, said it was "comforting to the owners and masters to learn they would not be prosecuted.

"But it is strange," he added, "to invite this court to say that a criminal offence has been committed."

Meanwhile, it was learned that a Belgian judge is still considering whether anyone should face prosecution in Belgium over the disaster. He has said he would not make any decision until the outcome of the British inquiry.

Charles Haddon-Cave, representing survivors and relatives of the victims, put forward ten steps for safer ferries from the passengers.

Britain poised to cut links with Iran

BRITAIN is on the verge of breaking off relations with Iran over the kidnapping and beating of a British diplomat in Tehran and a series of tit-for-tat expulsions. Iran yesterday expelled four more Britons.

Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, speaking at the NATO meeting in Iceland, called the Iranian order expelling four more British diplomats within 72 hours, "totally unjustified".

Foreign Office sources said one option for Britain could be breaking off relations with Iran.

Howe said the latest expulsion order "was all the more regrettable when we had tried to give an opportunity of putting our relations on a sensible long-term basis."

He added: "We will be giving urgent and serious consideration to our response and this would be made known as soon as possible."

Foreign Office sources said among Britain's options could be the expulsion of more Iranian diplomats from London or breaking off all relations with Iran.

The Iranian expulsion order yesterday was the latest in a series that began two weeks ago when Revolutionary Guards abducted and beat up British diplomat Edward Chaplin in Tehran. He was released, bruised but unharmed, 24 hours later.

The Foreign Office asked Iran for an



● Sir Geoffrey Howe: regrets expulsions.

explanation and an apology. In turn, Tehran asked Britain to explain the arrest and alleged assault by police of Ahmad Ghassemi, its vice consul in Manchester. Ghassemi was charged with shoplifting.

When no apology came from Tehran, Britain ordered the Iranian consulate in Manchester to be closed, and told Ghassemi and another four diplomats working there to leave the country within a week.



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