

# FACTORY FLOOR FURY

As a growing tide of political correctness pervades public life, we launch a big debate asking if this is a New Labour project that's gone too far. In this, the first of two pieces on the subject, Ian Newton reveals his hatred of the 'thought police'

**I am in my mid-fifties and I do not know if it is just my hormones, or whether I'm on the downhill slide out of this mortal world, but I seem to be getting angrier and more irritable by the day.**

Whatever the reason for my growing anger there never seems to be a week that does not go by when something doesn't crop up to rub me up the wrong way. I thought maybe it might just be the male menopause or perhaps even the additives they put in foods by the bucket-load these days that was making me feel like this, but enquiry and a bit of banter with my mates and work colleagues makes me believe that I am not the only one who is suffering from this 'growing anger and frustration'. In fact why not call it GAAF syndrome? If we can get it recognised as a psychiatric condition maybe some of us sufferers can jump on the litigation claims culture bandwagon and sue some of those that are imposing their values and attitudes on the rest of us to such an extent that they are becoming a seriously oppressive force in the everyday lives of ordinary working people.

I have always been an independent person with a mind of my own, I have a strong social conscience and a strong working class sense of principle, which rarely bends for convenience and has got me into no end of scrapes, including a big one with John Prescott that got me kicked out of the Labour Party.

I am not a racist, I am totally indifferent to the sexuality of others, could not care less if you are a Jew, Catholic, Moslem, black, White, Chinese or even a New Labour Cabinet Minister. No, I like to think that I am above all that, and just so long as you are not one of those that makes a bolt for the toilets on your round, you can be my mate.

So why suddenly I ask myself, am I being told what I can and cannot say, think and laugh at, given that it does not cause offence to the many? I make that proviso because someone somewhere will always be offended by something. I am talking of course about what is slowly becoming known to many these days as the all pervasive politically correct brigade of the liberal left and I am sure will be more officially known in the future as The Thought Police.

A friend this week told me of a memo from

on high, which stated that it was now official policy that male staff members "should refrain from calling female members of staff, girls or lasses". I thought he was winding me up and I started to laugh but his face remained angrily straight. It was not a wind up and I cannot report the remains of his conversation because of the number of profanities he used to describe his employers, and also because someone could well read this article before the watershed, and be so upset they might well forget to tune into *Footballers Wives* or another episode of

## What sort of God forsaken social wilderness would we live in if we all had the morality of our politicians?

*Shameless.*

I suddenly found myself having one of my 'rant attacks' there and then in the pub, and likewise was effing and blinding at this brigade of semi-official and seemingly invisible beings who are responsible for the evolution of a whole new form of workplace bullying against working peoples' culture. The whole phenomenon seems to have come out of nowhere and just crept up on us. Only now are questions, resistance and anger at grass-roots level beginning to bubble up.

And these beings are everywhere spying on you and ready to report you to 'Big Brother' for an inadvertent comment, or perhaps a smile at a female colleague, as I found out not long back.

"Could I have a word with you Ian," said a forceful voice from the office door. I knew from the tone of the request that they had found out it was me who let the office manager's tyres down after the Christmas party, and I was in for it. In fact, the crime I had perpetrated was much more sinister.

"Sit down Ian," he said brusquely.

"It has been brought to my attention, that you were having a discussion in the office about old television programmes the other day?"

I was suddenly looking around and over my shoulders like I had missed something. "I can't remember, but go on," I said with bated breath. Then came the devastating allegation. The manager leaned across the table with a great accusing face, and announced in a voice reminiscent of the Mysterons from the puppet show *Captain Scarlet* in the 70's, "You made a joke about *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, and you should be more than aware that we have a black member of staff."

I had been reported by an agent of 'The Thought Police' in the office. I could feel the volcano inside me beginning to rumble. I knew if I did not get control of myself *Miami CSI* could well be investigating one more horrifically mutilated body like the ones they like to show in full colour every Thursday on Channel Five.

I suddenly thought of a very simple answer to these scandalous allegations. "In fact it was not me," I said, "It was the black guy who made the joke." A long awkward pause followed. And to push my point home, I got up walked to the door, opened it and shouted in the black guy who was sitting in the open plan office outside, and who was in fact one of my drinking partners. The manager's face was a picture to behold and he asked me to leave the office, after my workmate came in.

"What the 'ell was all that about?" my mate said to me later. "Didn't he ask you for tickets to the *Black and White Minstrels*?" I joked. And no, my mate was not offended. It transpired that once I had left the office the manager had asked him if he knew who had let his tyres down after the Christmas Party.

What this white middle class manager was trying to do was effectively accuse me of racism. And that made me angry, bloody angry. No one can accuse me of being insensitive to race or colour, mainly because I come from the ethnic community, and my name is in actual fact Ian Achmed Deboni, and I only changed my name when it became obvious that it was a handicap to gaining employment in my 20s. I also had a young family who were patently white British and personally I did not want them to grow up with all the baggage of a divided identity. I chose positively that my children would be British.

I am extremely proud of being working