

Mr Barton
Mr Pichler
Mr Smithies
Mr Moore

MS(H)
To see
4/2 CARU 12

The Northern Echo, Wednesday, February 4, 1987

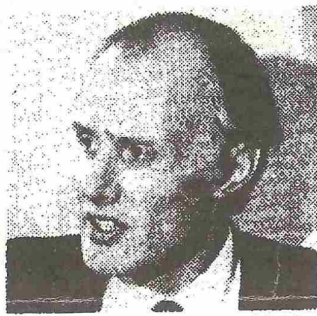
THE NORTH

Minister reaffirms policy on victims

Sympathy, but no compensation



Jack Ashley



Tony Newton — 'difficulties'

Battling Jack joins the fight

THE Labour Party's best-known campaigner Jack Ashley is ready to use his vast experience to help win compensation for haemophiliacs who contract AIDS from infected blood.

The deaf Stoke South MP, veteran of the successful Thalidomide and vaccine damage campaigns, will tomorrow ask the leader of the House of Commons John Biffen for an urgent debate on the issue.

The campaign for justice is being led from the North-East by world AIDS expert Dr Peter Jones, director of the haemophilia centre at Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary, and is backed by The Northern Echo.

By PETER BARRON

Mr Ashley said yesterday The Northern Echo's coverage of the tragic plight of haemophiliacs, who are at risk from AIDS because of the treatment they need to stay alive, had been a major factor in his decision to join the campaign.

He said: "I am normally reluctant to praise newspapers, but I am happy to pay tribute to The Northern Echo for its coverage of this terrible problem. It has done a splendid and impressive job."

He plans to continue pressing for compensation by using the same techniques employed during the campaigns to help Thalidomide and vaccine damage victims.

Last week, he sent a letter supporting the campaign to Health Minister Tony Newton. Now he intends to table a series of Commons motions, approach the British Medical Association, and lobby MPs.

He is also prepared to sponsor a Commons meeting of haemophiliac families, with their MPs invited to attend.

By PHILIP YOUNG

HAEMOPHILIAC AIDS victims have been told once again that the Government does not consider them a special case for compensation.

Health Minister Tony Newton said yesterday in the North-East that although he had sympathy for people infected with the AIDS virus through routine blood transfusions, there were no Government plans for a compensation scheme.

He reaffirmed the stand he made recently in the Commons in reply to questions tabled by Opposition health minister, Frank Dobson and Darlington Tory MP Michael Fallon.

He said then that haemophiliacs would have to seek compensation through their own legal action.

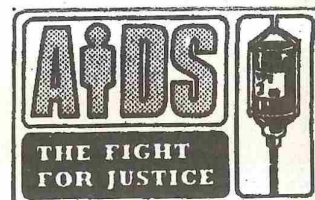
He said yesterday: "Of course, the campaign that the Northern Echo is running and the representations we have received from other quarters will be considered."

"But there have never been general arrangements for compensating people for events of this kind that happen without any question of negligence, so it does raise difficult and wide and general issues."

Supporters of the compensation cause argue haemophiliac sufferers form a finite and easily identifiable group, victims of exceptional circumstances.

Mr Newton countered: "The Government is aware of the points that have been made, but we do see very great difficulties in going down the path that is being urged because of the implications it would have for people who may suffer adverse effects from many kinds of treatment in the Health Service which can arise from a variety of causes without any question of negligence."

"In my judgement, there would be very great difficulties in drawing the distinction between the unhappy cases The Northern Echo has in mind and the un-



happy cases of people who may, for example, suffer adverse consequences as the result of an operation or an error of diagnosis that is made without any question of negligence."

Looking to the future he added: "We are very concerned to ensure that all district health authorities, including those in the North-East, do have the capacity to give all the help that can be given to these very unfortunate people, including of course, the right kind of counselling service. That is something we place great emphasis on."

"I would also want to express my sympathy to the relatives of people who have been affected in this way. It is not in any way a problem we would want to dismiss or make light of."

● The Government's £20m AIDS information campaign is working.

Speaking before the second round of television adverts Mr. Newton said: "We are very encouraged."

"Public opinion work including our own monitoring work, does suggest people are feeling better informed. They are indicating a greater likelihood of behaving in ways that will reduce the spread of AIDS."