

News from Somewhere

Stuart Blade

Workers' Paradise (1)

It's not clear if the full implications of the market system have been digested by the Gorbachov boys. Leonid Abalkin, head of the Economics Institute at the Academy of Sciences has spoken favourably of the New Economic Policy of 1921-1928. This policy marked a retreat from "War Communism" (abolition of money and all that jazz) to a greater measure of free enterprise and private property. According to Mr Abalkin, "We must change the present mechanism, as against the old one, in as deep, radical and principled a way as the New Economic Policy." (*Daily Telegraph* 1/11/86)

Workers' Paradise (2)

But the deeds are not always living up to the words. Gorbachov has backed up the anti-alcohol measures with a growing campaign against prostitution. *Moskovskii Komso-molyets*, a newspaper of the young communists has published an exposé entitled "The night-time hunters". Another Russian newspaper, *Soviet Byelorossya*, reported that "Some foreign guests actually turned to Intourist officials with the request that they be protected from such attentions". But what about foreign guests who do not want to be protected from such 'attentions', who don't mind a bit of slap and tickle with Svetlana? And what about all that valuable foreign currency going begging? (*The Times*)

Who Won the War Then?

The Japanese need no lessons on the workings of capitalism. An American housewife was 'aghast' when she turned over a small souvenir statue which showed the American flag being raised by marines at Iwo Jima, a great victory over the Japanese. On the back was the motto "Made in Japan". It may be such examples of the ruthless and heartless Japanese entrepreneurship which now make the Americans favour limits on imports by a majority of 51% to 38% - if we are to believe a WSJ/NBC poll. (*The Times* 18/12/86)

Not-so- "Old Blue Eyes"

Frank Sinatra has been awarded \$300,000 damages because the *National Enquirer* magazine revealed that he underwent 'rejuvenation' treatment in a Swiss clinic. Because American courts believe that Sinatra owns his reputation, it is no longer sufficient for Sinatra to look young. Now we must all believe that he is as young as he looks. (*Sun* 18/9/86)

A Tale of Two Chip Shops

It's becoming increasingly difficult to hide how hopeless the British National Health Service is. Two ambulance men rushing a heart patient to hospital stopped en route for some fish and chips. Little did they know that the heart patient's wife and daughter were following them. The ambulance men were subsequently sacked but all is not yet lost. They have claimed unfair dismissal and their case goes before an industrial tribunal in Hull. (*Sun* 28/6/86)

Marion Cheung came to Britain only 15 years ago from Hong Kong with his parents who opened a fish and chip shop. Now aged 30, he works as a project leader in the computer division of United Biscuits in Liverpool. He thinks about going back to Hong Kong where "there are still opportunities. Here in Liverpool it's not competitive enough... If anything happens to you the state will take care of you". (*Observer* 9/2/86)

Oily Politicians

The Energy Select Committee of the House of Commons had the insufferable cheek to ask for written evidence from the oil companies on the relationship between crude oil and petrol prices over the last twenty years. While they are about it, they should ask the government what percentage of the petrol pump price is taken in taxation. Then they will be able to confirm what the rest of us know. That petrol would be a damn sight cheaper if there were no Select committees on Energy, no Departments of Energy etc. etc. (*The Times* 7/4/86)

The Return of Robin Hood

London's latest street criminals are catching up with officialdom. The muggers take half or more of your money - depending on how rich you look - and then tell you that you have been 'taxed'. "The crime is based on the feeling among some members of the community that cash and property is to be shared - particularly if they don't have any themselves", said a North London detective. "A lot of taxing goes on at street level and is never reported to us. But we know that it started at least a year ago (sic) - it has been going on for some time". 'Taxing' certainly did start at least a year ago, though Libertarians argue about the exact date. This crime is almost certainly based on the desire of some members of the community to get their hands in other people's wallets. As time passed, the crime has grown by leaps and bounds and the clear-up rate has been very poor. Libertarians hope to change all that. (*London Evening Standard* 16/2/87)

The Third World Finally Joins the Rat Race

A village chief in West Java is charging couples 10 dead rats to get married and 25 for a divorce. And there are those who maintain that tribal life is alien to the spirit of capitalism (*The Times*)

Taking Lessons to Heart

A headmaster has banned a pupil from classes for buying ice creams outside school hours. Calvin Crossman has been told that he can only attend Oldbury Wells comprehensive school for examinations. Mr Roger Davies, the headmaster, said the boy had been excluded from the school for defying a ban on junk food and for gross public defiance. He said that Britain had a high rate of heart disease and that healthy eating must be taken seriously. It seems that Edwina Curry, the junior health minister, is gathering support for her attempt to turn us all into healthy (and happy?) subjects of the state. (*The Times* 16/5/87)

Free Life