

News from Somewhere

Miles Kelly

Huddled masses 1: Land of the Free

In Chicago immigration officials raided taxi ranks and found 100 Pakistani, Nigerian, Indian and other "illegal aliens", and promptly arrested them, leaving taxi cabs standing empty at the two main airports and in the city centre. Who said immigrants steal jobs? What would the immigration service do without them? (*The Times* 18.12.85)

Huddled masses II. Jakarta (or did she peddle herself)

It's the same the whole world over. When times are bad in the country the enterprising Javanese peasant heads for the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, to make a living in the flourishing black (state-free) economy. Many become pedicab or pushcart drivers, much to the annoyance of the technocratic elite who want to keep the city "closed", i.e. peasant-free, and also *Becak* (pedicab)-free. The campaign to halt an annual flow of 200,000 peasants into the capital started in 1971. Now, after identity cards, police sweeps, razed shantytowns, and periodic outlawing of pedicabs and street vendors, the annual flow is over 250,000. At last, however, the worth of the *Becak* is being noticed. The Indonesian labour department issued a study estimating that *Becaks* may support up to 6,000,000 people. An average *Becak* (shared between two drivers on shifts) gives cheap transport to about 60 people a day. Pedicabs take children to school, housewives shopping, traders to market, and tourists to see the sights. What money the *Becak* driver saves goes to school fees, debt payments, or even fertiliser to send back to his village. After various attempts to keep the city *Becak*-free (in 1973 mini-vans were imported from Japan and motorised scooter cabs from India - the city got polluted and the poor walked) continuing into 1985, maybe the city governors will learn that *laissez-faire* means lower fares. (*The Economist* 1.2.86)

Huddled masses III: Moscow Dynamo

New Moscow city boss Boris Yeltsin is showing some of the ill effects of Gorbachevism. While South Africa is getting rid of its pass laws and China is introducing enterprise zones, the "tough-talking" Yeltsin wants to crack down on the thousands of provincials who come to the capital each year without one of the hard-to-get residence permits. The police send home any unregistered 'immigrants' they can lay their hands on. It's all part of a general drive against corruption and the easy ways of the past, and the purges have already begun in the Moscow Party. (*The Economist* 1.2.86)

In the Eye of the Beholder

And when the beholder is a state monopoly, you're in trouble. Or at least you are when some judges are able to swing rough justice both ways. In Philadelphia judge Bernard Avellino refused to convict an alleged rapist after calling the plaintiff "the ugliest girl I have ever seen". He told the defendant: "This was an unattractive girl and you are a good-looking fellow. You did something to her which was stupid." Not to be outdone, London judge Neil Denison gave John Maughan four years after he was caught in the middle of raping a twenty-year-old woman. He will of course get time off for good behaviour. Don't think Judge Denison was being unreasonably soft. As he told Maughan (the almost illiterate son of itinerant Irish peasants): "You have had an awful life and I am sorry for you". Meanwhile some people know who the real criminals are. Canadian sculptor Rick Gibson had the temerity to publicly appeal for human limbs that he could use in his sculptures, and was promptly arrested and charged with conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace. Brighton magistrates remanded him on bail for a month to allow him to look for legal advice. (*The Times* 28.1.86)

Polish Post

If last issue's revelations about the GPO got you fuming, think yourself lucky you're not

Polish. *The Times* (29.1.86) reports that the Polish postal service succeeded in delivering Christmas greetings from Opole to the nearby town of Strzelce Opolskie (a distance of 20.5 miles) seven years late. Maybe they forgot to write the postal code - or bribe the necessary officials.

Limbless in Lodz/Pole tax

Maybe Mr Gibson could try Poland for suitable material. One Stefan Zuchor, a tax collector, disappeared after he set out to collect money "owed" to the state by 17 people. First his head and arms turned up in a suitcase. The next day they found his legs in another suitcase. The rest of his body was traced to a house in Lodz. A man and a woman owing more than 12,000 zlotys (£50) in arrears were helping the police with their inquiries (*The Times* 6.2.86)

Lavatory humour

Tax collectors, letter writers, and now we hear there is a public lavatory problem in Warsaw. Firstly there is the paper shortage. Toilet rolls can't be put into the cubicles in case they're stolen, so hopeful users have to buy the standard twelve sheets in advance from one of the attendants. Or else you can get a discount by trading in your own waste paper (6 lb of discarded *Trybuna Ludus* - the Party paper - gets one roll). The second problem is the planning targets (yes, planning targets). Mrs Alina, the woman who runs the lavatories in Warsaw's railway station, has to reach 480 zlotys per hour. The standard charge for using the toilet is five zlotys and to fulfil the quota she would have to pack in 96 people an hour. Her monthly deficit is between 2,000 and 4,000 zlotys (£10 and £20 at official rates). One of Mrs Alina's problems is that some people are a bit too socialist about lavatory charges and refuse to pay. "How can I convince them that combing their hair in front of the mirror is four zlotys?" she wails. However, even though Warsaw's public lavatories are deteriorating fast, as well as not living up to municipal regulations of being within ten minutes walk of each other throughout the city and suburbs, they are not a priority because of the ongoing construction industry crisis (families waiting up to 15 years for their own flat, etc). One paper suggests a

solution which is already working well in at least one suburban railway station - privatisation. (*The Times* 2.12.85)

Manxamillion

How do you make a million? Inherit it? Steal it? Win the pools? Make a hit record? Well, that's not how most millionaires did it according to a recent survey. "The real way people make money is hard work for years, six days a week," says Professor Thomas Stanley (*Daily Telegraph* 6.1.86). By the end of this year there will be one million millionaires in the United States (one in every hundred households). 80% of millionaires did not inherit their wealth, but came from middle - or working-class backgrounds. Entertainers, athletes, writers etc make up less than one per cent of the millionaire total. The typical millionaire runs a business "catering to the ordinary needs of his neighbours". And good luck to him (he's also male). In America they concentrate in Florida but here they could try the Isle of Man, where nearly 100 entrepreneurs and millionaires arrive each month after a campaign by Manx MPs to advertise the island's tax and other attractions. "The vast majority are younger entrepreneurs and semi-retired businessmen who want to use the island's resources as a secure base for their global interests", says an economic adviser to the Tynwald. "We have all the benefits of living in England but without the aggravation", claimed one new resident. (*The Times* 28.1.86)

Thatcherism

Some of these aggravations just won't go away. The lower paid are now paying more in tax and national insurance than when the Conservatives came to power, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies. (*The Times* 19.2.86)

Free Speech on Command

Given that our MPs have Parliament, Parliamentary and party political broadcasts, and in fact control the broadcasting system anyway, you would have thought that they would have plenty of opportunity to mouth off whenever they wanted. But apparently not enough for some. Now a collection of

The Libertarian Alliance is an independent, non-party group, with a shared desire to work for a free society.

MPs want to impose themselves on the student population. Mr Frederick Silvester (Cons. Withington) has introduced a Private Member's Bill to "safeguard" the right of free speech in universities and institutions of higher education, including student unions. Mr Silvester described the people who had been "preventing" (mainly Tory) MPs from speaking on campuses as "fascists masquerading as students"; not as dishonest as politicians masquerading as libertarians (after all, maybe some fascists really are students - and vice versa). The State has given us the Official Secrets Act, the Obscene Publications Acts, the Race Relations Acts, the Video Recording Acts, etc, etc. The State can't give us free speech - it can only take away free speech or leave us alone. So *laissez-faire*, Mr Silvester (*Daily Telegraph* 12.2.86)

Sell and let live

Blinded by the hysteria over video nasties, surrogate mothers, drug use, and scented erasers you may have missed a minor flurry about kidney selling. Apparently some enterprising medical types have endeavoured to buy kidneys from people in India and Pakistan for transplanting into British patients. This marvellously beneficial scheme, which combines redistributing wealth towards the "Third World" with saving lives at home, is, however, 'strongly disapproved of' by the British Medical Association (who only last year were decent enough to "approve" surrogate motherhood). Doctors are advised to "check ethically what they are doing". In defence of kidney selling, transplant surgeon Michael Bewick does, however, suggest that he could "in exceptional cases" envisage circumstances where a paid donor could be justified. Well, thanks Mike. Meanwhile, at the end of 1985, 1,428 people had had kidney transplants, 3,443 are still waiting and the lack of donors is reaching "crisis proportions". (*The Economist* 8.2.86 & *The Times* 10.2.86)

Professional Woman

In February this year women were found to hold the majority of professional jobs in the United States. America now has more female than male psychologists, statisticians, editors and reporters. They have also made advances

in medicine, law and engineering. But it is in the high status (and paying) jobs that men remain in the majority - for now. (*Daily Telegraph* 20.3.86)

Free Life