

□ I doubt whether the Chancellor had to think very hard before he dismissed the suggestion that since each Permanent Secretary would be getting a big increase next January, Ministers also deserve a rise. True enough, at the time when the Labour government gave MPs the rate of pay recommended by the Lawrence Committee, it cut the proposed increases in ministerial salaries by 50 per cent and froze them 'for the duration'. Labour ministers soon got used to the idea that they were worth far less than their senior officials and it will be difficult for their successors to reverse the decision. Nevertheless it is a fact (as the resignations from the GLC recently proved) that when the parties change places the Conservative incomers do feel sorry for themselves and regard as privations the conditions which socialist politicians in local as well as central government take for granted. Certainly I know of one or two members of the present cabinet who have been sadly disconcerted when they find that expenses which they were entitled to charge as mere MPs – part of the cost of their London house, for example – are disallowed by the tax inspector. Even more embittering, they discover that the existence of the government hospitality fund is ruthlessly used to exclude any kind of entertainment allowance for Ministers and to ensure that they pay for every working lunch with officials and even for dinner for a distinguished visitor out of their taxed income. Public opinion expects top people in government to set a good example by accepting far harsher treatment from the Inland Revenue than top people outside; and the Lawrence Committee no doubt took all this into account when it fixed the level of ministerial salaries. How harshly the rules work depends partly on what the Minister did in opposition. Mr Maudling, for example, who concentrated on his business interests while he was out of office, can grin and bear it provided he can find a tenant for his Chester Square house at £250 a week. Others who lived a life of politics are much harder hit. I hear that Iain Macleod was already finding life at No 11 as difficult as his predecessor – and for the same reason. If he has not taken time off to make some money the Chancellor finds it difficult to live in the style expected of him.

□ We live in a permissive society in which nudity is *de rigueur* on the stage and Sir William Armstrong urges that civil servants should expose themselves in public as defenders of the policies they evolve. But what should we think of a serving officer who writes to *The Times* in order to reveal the deplorable plight of the army in general and the infantry in particular? Of course there was nothing in Colonel Ackland's letter that has not been repeated by military commentators over many years. But the decisions to which the Colonel took exception were political decisions and even under the Labour government it was clearly understood that serving members of the forces were not entitled to engage in public controversy. To allow them to do so with impunity would be tantamount, it was held, to taking a first step down a very dangerous road. Surely Lord Carrington must take some disciplinary action even if only to discourage a rash

of public outbursts from disaffected ex-servicemen. Perhaps a suitable punishment might be a three-year tour of duty at the Ministry of Defence.

□ Long before the election the Land Commission had become a white elephant and the government's decision to get rid of it releases the Opposition from one of its most embarrassing commitments. Of course no one expects Mr Mellish and Mr Arthur Skeffington, who was one of its main authors, to wrap themselves up in white sheets and announce this publicly. Nevertheless Mr Skeffington's passionate plea against its abolition which the *Guardian* published recently makes one realise the need for a new socialist policy on land acquisition. It is a sad story. Unfortunately this was one of the projects in which the Labour Party invested a great deal of hard work and a great deal of hope. Though it was vaguely foreshadowed in a number of speeches, its precise details remained a close secret shared only by the members of the Transport House committee which worked them out. Publicity, it was felt, would give the land speculators warning and so frustrate the Commission's work. After the 1964 election a special new Ministry of Land and Natural Resources was created and it was only then that the secrets of the Land Commission were revealed. From the start there were doubts about the whole idea, which was based on the assumption that there were thousands of acres of building land in the Midlands and around London which were being held back from the market by the speculators. This assumption was challenged by civil servants as well as politicians who suggested that more could be achieved by increasing the compulsory purchase powers of the local authorities and leaving the betterment levy to the Treasury. Alas! After the Land Commission with its 4,000 civil servants had been established, the doubts of the sceptics were vindicated by the discovery that the speculative land hoarders were a figment of the radical imagination. It could function where it was not needed: where it was, building sites could only be made available by persuading county councils to release land they had designated as unsuitable for development. And that was not a job for a specially constituted Land Commission!

□ Some years ago a charming young salesman persuaded me to buy the most recent edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The final argument which tempted me into this wild extravagance was the plea that I could claim it as a legitimate business expense, but scarcely a week passes without my wrath being reawakened at a surrender that I shall regret for the rest of my life. Last Sunday, for example, my small daughter complained that no one could tell her how to distinguish a male from a female swan. Here at last was a chance to revive my faith in this increasingly Americanised product. What I actually found was a miserable 12-line summary of modern swan lore which omitted the vital fact. In desperation I went to the bottom shelf to which we relegated the tattered volumes of the 1870 edition we had kept only because it had been described as

worthless by the bookseller to whom we had tried to sell it years ago. The covers of the volume had come loose and the back slipped off in a cloud of dust. But what paper, what printing, what illustrations, and there, at the right place, were four columns. It included everything I could want to know about swans, including a fascinating description of their royal history, and a reference to a farm in Norfolk where they were fattened for the table. And of course the vital fact was there. The male swan is distinguished from the female swan by the enlarged berry or lump on its black beak. But I notice that the American editors had not bothered to order a new up-to-date article; on the contrary they had merely abbreviated the one they inherited from the *Encyclopaedia* which was then truly Britannic. And this is not an isolated example. In numerous other cases, particularly biographies and place descriptions, each new edition of the *Encyclopaedia* retains an article first written 50 or 100 years ago and abbreviated in each successive edition so that it contains less and less information. Even the most conscienceless night editor would be ashamed of such subbing in a newspaper.

□ I only got to know Hugh Anderson after the accident which caused his cancer. I have never known any young man conquer pain with such quiet courage or face death with such an intense delight in living. With a unique mixture of very human careerism and superhuman selflessness, he was the outstanding student of his generation. We shall miss him as much as we remember him here in Great Turnstile where he was due to launch and discuss his next contribution to the paper on the day of his death. What I liked best about him was that despite the brilliance and force of personality which enabled him to stand up to any professional politician in debate he retained an inner innocence which helped him to put his elders at ease in the company of an intolerant and alienated younger generation and, when they disappointed him, to put them to shame in the nicest possible way. Like E. M. Forster his motto was 'always connect' and I fancy that the intensity of his life and of his friendships was due to his awareness that he had a lot to give and not much time to give it in.

CruX

## This England

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□ The chairman (Mr H. S. Holman) said his attention had been drawn to the fact that the illegitimacy rate in the Dulverton district appeared to be about double the national average. 'In defence of Dulverton', said the Member for the district, 'I would say that a high illegitimacy rate is a sign of good morals. In a big town they are all learned in contraception. In a rural area they aren't. I should say it was a sign of good moral tone.' – *West Somerset Free Press* (R. M. Pointon)

□ 'Sir – I have every sympathy with C. Corney's complaint, gulls are not only a great nuisance but also a menace to health and property. Protests are useless, we should shoot the things and blow the regulations. Many of us have shot Germans and Turks who did us no personal injury until we declared the war.' Letter in *Hastings & St Leonards Observer* (Bridget Stevens)

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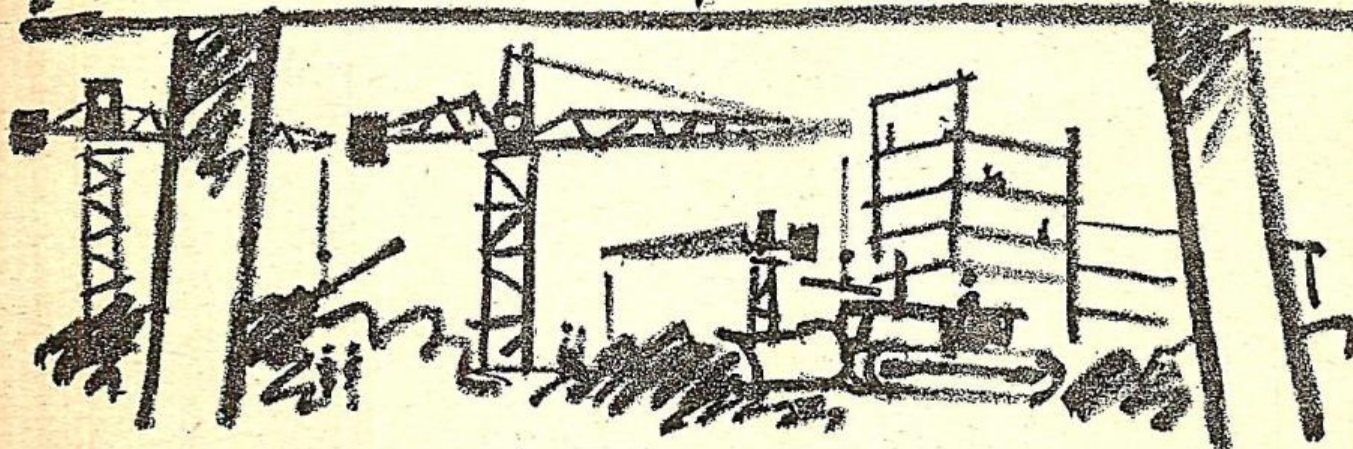
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