

## NOTES

if inflation is greater than predicted, it will put serious pressure on the cash limit system in 1979-80. The cash limits to be published in the Spring are intended to be based on the figures in the White Paper. Changes in them to take account of higher public sector wages will need Parliamentary approval. The government may prefer to stick to its cash plans, which would mean less spending in real terms. The best economic growth it now assumes - 3 per cent a year - is less than the 3½ per cent which last year's White Paper described as disappointing.

## Juries under attack

**Duncan Campbell writes:** The latest onslaught against the jury system, this time from the Association of Chief Police Officers, aptly coincides with a new publication on the history of the battles over the jury. In their evidence to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure published last week, ACPO propose that wholesale jury 'vetting' should become the norm - involving criminal record, local intelligence and Special Branch checks. Jurors should be obliged to supply details of their date and place of birth. Failing this, ACPO ask for a further reduction in the number of jurors required to agree on a majority verdict (at present ten).

The National Council for Civil Liberties has just published a review of the jury system prompted by the vetting and rigging allegations during the recent Official Secrets case. The authors, Harriet Harman and John Griffith, have established that vetting practices first appeared when so-called 'special juries', loyal to the Crown, were abolished in 1948. More recent democratisation of juries, by qualifying almost anyone entitled to vote, has been compromised by other adjustments, such as the removal of details of occupation from lists, reduction of the number of defence 'challenges', and of course by secret vetting procedures. In addition, many people accused of middle grade offences have been deprived altogether of the right of jury trial. If the ACPO proposals were ever accepted (an unlikely event), they would polish off any vestigial idea of the jury as an impartial and popular arbiter of the facts of a case.

As Harman and Griffith point out, civil liberties have been defended in the past by juries disregarding, at the right moments, the letter of oppressive or unpopular law. Tourists who come to the Old Bailey are sold a lavish pamphlet which emphasises the rights and traditions of juries and recalls the famous case of 1670, when a jury acquitted the Quakers Penn and Mead, despite bullying and threats from the judge, who wanted a guilty verdict. Those who come to the Bailey as prospective jurors today are given quite different information. No lavish pamphlet for them, no reminder of their glorious tradition, but stern advice on a duplicated sheet: 'The judge's directions on the law . . . must be obeyed'.

## Company facts revealed

**Rob Rohrer writes:** The Department of Trade seems to be doing its utmost to frustrate public access to companies' financial records held in London and Cardiff. Companies House, run by the Department, is refusing to continue a highly successful experiment operated last year in conjunction with Liverpool Libraries offering a cheap, efficient company search service to members of the public. In 1975 the DoT stopped their postal search service as an 'economy measure' and in 1976 there was even an attempt, unsuccessful, to close the London Companies House when the new Cardiff HQ was launched. However, last year, Companies House relented enough to co-operate with Liverpool Libraries in running an experimental postal service and for six months Merseysiders could carry out a company search for a mere 30p a time.

The scheme worked well: a group of Courtaulds'

New Statesman 19 January 1979

## FREE SPEECH

### The economics of Sir Fu Manchu



It has been suggested that people should take an essentially *laissez-faire* attitude to Sir Keith Joseph. Let him rant about Adam Smith and Hayek, pressing a sweaty palm to his brow in remembrance of past errors of his own. Let him wallow in his own, essentially private barminess.

It has perhaps gone a little far for this approach, though, when a man who *may* become Chancellor of the Exchequer can say, in an interview with the American business magazine *Forbes* that

It is remarkable that despite such vivid evidence of failure the collectivist idea is still surviving, let alone strong. There are, of course, islands of (free enterprise) encouragement around the world - Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea. You'd think the contrast between what's happening there and elsewhere would have some effect.

You might indeed, Sir Keith. Let's start with South Korea, the great sweat-shop. One inquiry showed that in Peace Market, Seoul - the centre of the textile industry - some of the 27,000 workers might go for three days without sleep. Owners provided injections to keep them awake.

Those who object to this, and to a seven-day working week, are fired. Holidays and safety rules are both non-existent. A woman bus conductor last year told *War on Want*:

We work from five in the morning to one or two o'clock at night. Then we return to the dormitory and sleep one or two hours. I am awakened by the head of the dormitory before four o'clock and leave for work . . . I fall asleep standing in the galloping bus.

As for Hong Kong: Sir Keith may have forgotten the 1971 census, which showed that nearly 36,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 were at work, principally in textile factories, construction and mining. There will be another census in 1981: meanwhile, evidence from the Anti-Slavery Society and a famous *World in*

*Action* inquiry have suggested that there is still a horrendous amount of child labour in the colony. Children are put to work because their parents desperately need the money, and because schooling is neither free nor compulsory for those over 12.

One notable account of Hong Kong comes from Henry Keswick, who was worth £20 million by the end of his stint as chairman of Jardine Matheson (after which he retired to buy the *Spectator* and look for a Tory seat). Hong Kong's great strength, he said, was that it was

crude capitalism at work. Nowhere else in the world will labour take a cut in wages without creating.

Workers in his own factories were forced to take wage cuts of between 20 and 30 per cent. Does Sir Keith really propose this as a model for British industry?

Singapore, his third 'island of encouragement' is perhaps the most curious choice, in that it is run by a man who calls himself a social democrat. But titles (except his own) don't matter to Sir Keith: what counts is the smack of firm government, which Lee Kuan Yew certainly deploys. Even our own Jim Slater has declared that one cannot expect to receive justice in the Singapore courts - something which quarrels slightly with the Josephite argument that free markets and human dignity are indissolubly linked.

Lee has in the past two years detained correspondents for such subversive journals as the *Financial Times*, the *Economist* and the *Far East Economic Review* - keeping them in the slammer until they were ready to admit to being red agents. Under Section 8 of the Internal Security Act a policeman can, without warrant, detain without trial any person who is likely to act in a manner prejudicial to the security of Singapore. Trial by jury was abolished for capital offences in 1969, having been abolished ten years earlier for all others. Newspapers critical of the government - the *Singapore Herald* and the *Eastern Sun* - have been closed down.

Just how serious Sir Keith ever is may be open to question. What is pretty certain is that in a country like Britain, which has slightly stronger traditions of individual liberty than Sir Keith's utopias, any attempt to apply 'encouragement' to the working class along such lines would be a flawless recipe for revolution.

**Francis Wheen**

shop stewards, for instance, armed themselves with the fine detail of their company's performance, helping them to outmanoeuvre local management and win a hefty pay rise. Other provincial libraries want to follow suit but Companies House has declined to extend the service. The reason - coinciding with a £3 million surplus on Companies House operations - is that it would overstretch resources: recently there has been an increase in enquiries at London, which handles 10,000 searches a day, and at Cardiff, which handles 1,000. The Liverpool experiment generated only ten enquiries a day - it was a condition laid down by Companies House that the service was not advertised beyond library walls. Companies House say their staffing ceiling prevents them taking on more people.

Last week Companies House, Cardiff, was advising telephone callers to consult Yellow Pages for a professional search agency. In Liverpool there are

two; one of them - Jordans - charges £10.10 plus VAT per company search. Jordans have another profitable sideline: Companies House records are on film and while microfiche negatives produced from the original are given away to anyone visiting Companies House and paying the 5p search fee, Jordans charge £3.00 simply to forward the microfiche to a customer (another local Liverpool firm wanted £7) - an exorbitantly handsome mark-up, some would say. Jordans call it a 'nuisance fee'. Whatever this profitable re-sale of public information is called, the Department of Trade clearly has no interest in ensuring that the public's right to know is cheaply and easily met.

## Palestinians silenced

**Ian Black writes from Jerusalem:** While members of the Palestine National Council meet in Damascus to