

Duncan Campbell

Back to the middle ages — official

SECRET GOVERNMENT plans anticipate the return of mediaeval style stocks as a punishment for criminals during a wartime emergency and perhaps other crises. Details of this plan are contained in a Home Office memorandum entitled *Briefing notes for wartime controllers*, details of which have never been published before. The memorandum — issued in 1976 — specifies punishments which emergency-appointed 'Commissioners of Justice' may impose. Punishment number three is 'Exposure to public disapproval.'

However, such an intriguing backward step in history may be preferable to other punishments listed in the memorandum: forced labour ('communal labour') and starvation ('reduced rations').

The memorandum gives further details of the government's wartime legal plans. It warns recipients — all of whom have been designated as wartime 'controllers' — that they should pass its information on to 'no other person'.

Under Emergency Powers legislation, the government assumes, Parliament would grant Regional Commissioners complete, autocratic powers. They in turn would appoint 'Commissioners of Justice' who might or might not have held judicial office before the crisis. Through the Commissioners of Justice, the Regional Commissioner could 'impose penalties as he sees fit'.

Lay Commissioners would sit in twos or threes. But even one 'would still constitute a court'. Contenders for a firing squad would get a jury of sorts — either five ordinary jury members, or three Commissioners. There would be no appeals against verdicts or sentence, however — just an occasional 'review' by 'a Senior Commissioner'.

The Home Office generously notes that certain current 'anti-social activities' such as squatting and 'using chattels' (stealing what the community needs) would become legitimate. Mobile columns of armed



'police support units' would concentrate on other forms of 'anti-social behaviour'.

Other parts of the same document detail the powers controllers may expect to have to seize goods and resources and direct labour. Heavy emphasis is also given to the 'Collapse of the Monetary Economy' and how, eventually, capitalism might be relaunched into a brave new post-nuclear world.

The Treasury appears to reckon that with wise advice from itself 'and the Private Sector', a 'new monetary system' should be established 'as soon as possible — perhaps one year' after an attack. In the meantime, the old baubles might be used as a suitable form of 'token exchange'.