

ANATOMY OF A CRISIS



by Ralph Berry

'All Russia is an orchard' said the dying Chekhov in his last play.

He intended 'The Cherry Orchard' (1904), an elegiac comedy, as the symbol of a regime failing to make the changes needed for survival. A year later the Russian revolution was the dress rehearsal for the real thing.

I have a homelier image for Britain. All Britain is a bath, full and overflowing with the taps permanently left on. The overspill water is fatally weakening the foundations of the house, and has nowhere to go but down. But nobody in authority, or hoping for advancement, dares draw attention to the dangers.

These stem directly from the nature and numbers of the population.

Immigration, uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable, is now changing the face and character of the nation. To take numbers as primary to many issues: Britain is in a housing crisis with no solution in sight. The shortage of affordable housing means that young people in the main have no prospect of getting on to the housing ladder, something that was entirely normal in my early days. (A relative who had no money but had determination bought his first house at the age of 23.) As is the way of England, all discussion of the problem evades the real issue and seizes on to nimbyism as the culprit. This useful word signifies 'not in my back yard', the refusal of householders to admit new housing estates to be built near their properties. This is routinely denounced by the many who think it anti-social but is in fact the common denominator. People want good to be done, but not in their neighbourhood. The attractions of a nice house in the home counties, undisturbed by a host of newcomers near at hand, cannot be overstated.

And that order of reality spreads out from the actual house. It includes the quality of medical care, the state's education and the life-chances of the native children, pressure on the roads and local parking, the sheer availability of space for the incoming tide of migrants who arrive every day on our shores. They are being slotted into hotels, whose space is now denied to the native British. If alternative accommodation is provided, say a disused airfield or army barracks, it will fail to reach the exacting standards of migrants whose claims will be supported by a fishing fleet of lawyers. The many British who would love to live in a 3-or 4-star hotel but are denied the amenities lavished upon migrants look on without pleasure.

They would like a share of the state's bounty.

Only one public figure names the problem, Nigel Farage. He is hated by the Establishment and has received no award of any kind. But he, more than anyone else, was responsible for the

Leave outcome of the referendum. On the day of the vote two prime ministers, David Cameron and John Major, urged jointly the people to vote Remain, and stay in the embrace of the EU. Next day, Cameron resigned at 8.30. Major had nothing to resign from. This was the greatest disaster to the Establishment for very many years, probably since Suez and the fall of Anthony Eden. Since then, the Establishment has gone into franc-tireur mode, blocking and hindering the Government from making full use of its new freedoms. Farage has stepped back from active campaigning, but he still has a regular voice in the TV GB News. His take on the housing crisis is brutally simple: it is all a matter of numbers. The more people are let into this country, the greater the pressure on housing and related services which cannot conceivably be met by conventional methods.

Farage's line is as always outside the realm of public policy. A senior Tory, David Davis, proposes this prize fatuity: the answer to illegal migration is to set up properly organized channels for legal migration, so that the right kind of aspirant British incomers can be welcomed in an orderly way. Since anything up to half the inhabitants of Africa and Asia would pay anything to get into England by any means, legal or illegal, orderly or disorderly, Davis's proposal does not pass the reality test. But no one in office, or public life generally, is saying so. The open, glaring, unvoiced truth is this: the problem is not illegal migration, but legal migration. The chain migration of dependents alone reached 285,000 last year. The housing crisis is beyond the policies of this government to solve, or any government in sight. And David Davis, MP, stands cipher for custodian of the nation's bath taps.