

THE BALLAD OF CAPTAIN BOB OR THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

(the strange life and mysterious death of Robert Maxwell)

composed and illustrated by the I.T.M.A. Team



British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Ballad of Captain Bob or the Man in the
Mirror: Strange Life and Mysterious Death
of Robert Maxwell

338.761070172092

ISBN 1-871473-08-X

The Ballad of Captain Bob
OR
The Man in the Mirror

This is the tale of Lajbi Hoch,
A man of mystery, a bok,
To some a saint, to other folk, a sinner;
Ill-educated peasant Jew
Who learned a dirty trick or two,
(Well, thousands actually), a natural winner.

He grew up in a village where
His trader father had a care
To see he got his seven years of schooling;
At sixteen he left with a friend
For Budapest, some time to spend
Avoiding labour, and the Nazis, fooling.

He was overwhelmed by the sight
Of paved streets, for his peasant's mite
Had never seen such wealth, and it inspired
This country bumpkin to become
A hustler, (he was not so dumb);
To greater heights and deeds he soon aspired.

He met up with some soldiers and,
At 19, to the Promised Land
He took off, fighting Germans all the way,
He was tortured and beaten up,
Sentenced to death, poor little pup,
At least, that's what much later he would say.



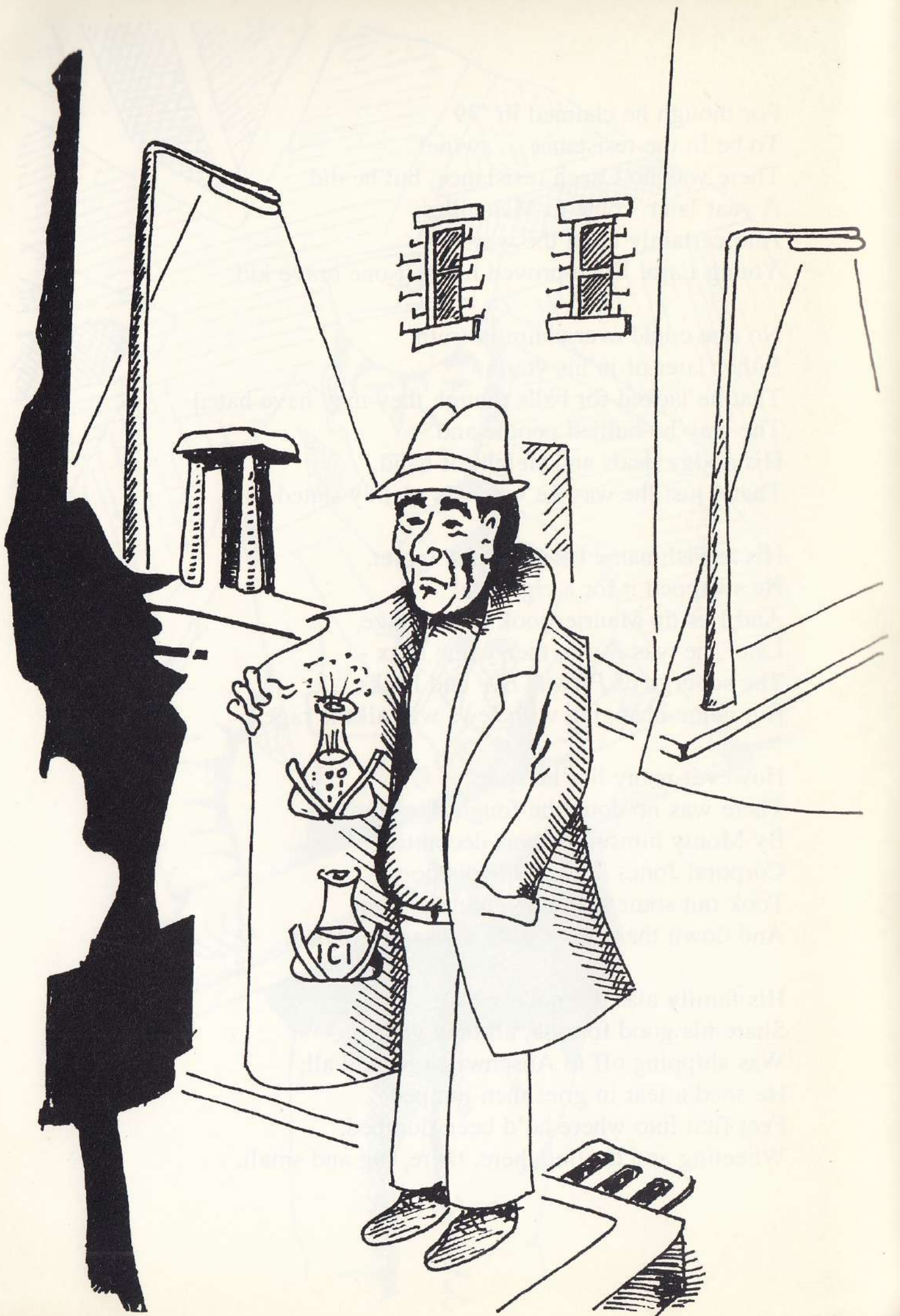
For though he claimed in '39
To be in the resistance ... swine!
There was no Czech resistance, but he did
A year later, come to Marseilles,
And certainly upon the way
Young Lajbi Hoch proved himself one brave kid.

No one could ever claim in truth
Either later or in his youth
That he lacked for balls though they may have hated
The way he bullied people and
His dodgy deals and sleight of hand,
That's just the way he was, it's plainly stated.

His Jewish name caused some regret,
He swapped it for a cigarette!
And Les du Maurier took to the stage,
Later, he was Jones, then came Max -
The scourge of *Private Eye* and hacks,
But name-changing with Jews was all the rage.

However many lies he spun,
There was no doubt he fought the Hun,
By Monty himself he was decorated.
Corporal Jones leading his platoon
Took out some machine gunning goon,
And down the years this feat was celebrated.

His family alas did not
Share his good fortune, all they got
Was shipping off to Auschwitz one and all;
He shed a tear in grief then jumped
Feet first into where he'd been dumped,
Wheeling and dealing, here, there, big and small.



The 1946 demob
Brought welcome change for Captain Bob,
He took shares in a publishing outfit,
(It's rumoured he became a spy),
Bought soda cheap from ICI,
Then sold it for a packet, crafty git!

He dealt in transport and in visas,
Dodgy deals with dodgy geezers,
Wheeling, dealing in journals and paint!
His enterprises were diverse,
His finance, secret and perverse,
And carried on without check or restraint.

Soon things were moving, '48
Was a good year for his estate,
The publishing deals brought a big return;
In '49 his daughter Anne
Made Lajbi Hoch a happy man:
The more he had, the more he had to earn.

A proper fat cat he was not,
But this resourceful polyglot
Began globe trotting, dealing with the reds,
He went to China and the States,
His pushy nature opened gates,
They may have hated him, but he turned heads.

As his increasing wealth he sought,
Another book business was bought,
But debts were quickly mounting up at home,
His firm, Simpkins, was in a mess,
But others at the same address
Stayed solvent: Robert Maxwell used his dome.

And creative accounting too!
A hundred thousand plus was due
When creditors petitioned the Receiver.
He paid out less than fifteen grand,
Just how, they couldn't understand -
But Maxwell was a masterful deceiver.

Fire in the basement - how'd that start?
He didn't take the loss to heart,
And didn't lose quite as much as appears.
He went to Russia and New York,
They watched the bastard like a hawk,
But nothing came to light for many years.

His company expanded by
A double rip-off very sly:
He overcharged libraries manifold;
His authors were paid paltry sums:
To he who has, the more it comes!
Like goes to like, and Maxwell's like was gold.

By 1960 he'd arrived,
Big house, a Rolls, old Lajbi thrived,
And he'd already made up to the Party;
The Labour Party that is, for,
Though stinking rich, one thing's for sure
The Tories wouldn't touch this alien smartie.

So said his secretary Anne,
(Although she quite admired the man).
She asked him once: "Sir, are you Jewish?"
"Yes!
But only when I'm in the States,
In Britain they've such petty hates,
And there's no premium on my Jewishness."

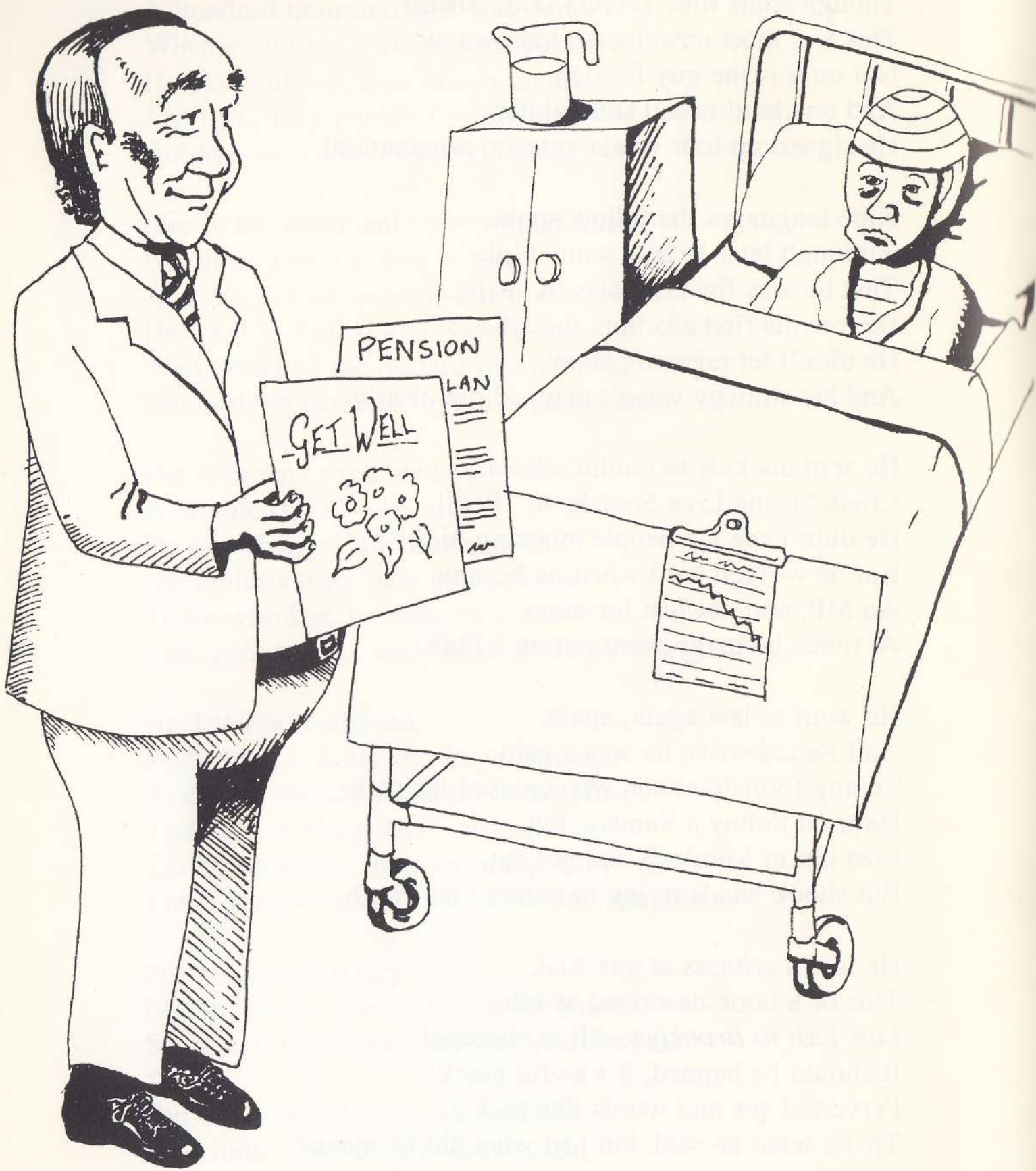
He joined the Party, stood for them,
Though some time-servers said: Ahem!
This is a most unwelcome innovation:
Not only is the guy fat rich
And one hard-nosed sonofabitch,
He signed up four weeks prior to nomination!

Nine languages the fellow spoke,
Although later he told some bloke
That he was fluent in eleven, really.
He lost his first election, though
He didn't let rejection show,
And his strategy wasn't mapped out clearly.

He sent his kids to public school,
Cried: "Long Live Socialism!" Fool!
He didn't see the people mocking him,
But he worked hard when he became
An MP, and not just for fame,
At times he really went out on a limb.

He went to law again, again,
And issued writs, he was a pain
To any foolish wretch who crossed his path,
He tried to buy a Sunday, but,
Lost out to Murdoch and got cut,
But shook hands trying to conceal his wrath.

He was a witness at one trial,
This of a book described as vile:
Last Exit to Brooklyn - "It is obscene!
It should be banned, it's awful muck!
Perverted sex and words like *fuck* ..."
That's what he said, but just what did he mean?



His own shops stocked the self-same book;
A humbug as well as a crook?
Or just a crazy mixed-up sort of guy?
Condemn profit and make a mint;
Although a long way far from skint,
Soon he would nearly be left high and dry.

Pergamon floated in New York
In '68 - fine tub of pork!
But bankers and employees were not happy,
A year on and the *Sunday Times*
On the scent of financial crimes
Turned its attention to this clever chappie.

The bankers found his fatal flaw:
He'd made Pergamon's profits soar
By posting inflated accounts for years,
And a conflict of interest -
Secret deals in shares, all the rest ...
Poor Robert Maxwell was reduced to tears.

"Buy back the shares!" they said to him,
But Maxwell danced to no one's whim
(Except his own), "These charges I'm denying.
You hate me because I'm a Jew,
You fucking ruling class, you do!
It's outrageous you accuse me of lying."

Though anti-Semites were about,
This time there wasn't any doubt
That criticism of Mad Max was fair;
The Rothschilds fingered him as well,
It wasn't hatred, but the smell
Of dirty laundry that hung in the air.

They made him wash his for the press,
He'd ripped old Rothschild off, no less!
The Warburgs wouldn't touch him either, but
Although he tottered on the brink,
He didn't fall, or turn to drink,
He fought back with an iron will and iron gut.

The crunch came when the DTI
Attacked him for his dealings sly,
But then the Labour Party rallied round.
"They hate Bob cos he's one of us!"
Labour's top brass decried the fuss,
And Captain Bob, new champions had found.

In his hometown he made friends and
Was always there to lend a hand,
Or he would delegate, was always pleasant,
A get well card when folk were ill,
That sort of thing, and yet most still
Distrusted and despised this Czech-born peasant.

He lost the next election, for
The long Pergamon saga wore
Away at his supporters, but no mind,
He'd done very well for himself,
The trappings of success and pelf,
But happiness for Bob was hard to find.

In April '75 came
Another chance to secure fame
(As if he'd not enough!) a phone call which
From printers of the Scotch *Express*
Who contacted him in distress
Gave him the chance to scratch that awful itch.

It had been Captain Bob's desire
By fair means or foul to acquire
A national daily, this was his big chance,
He fought accountants tooth and nail,
Alas it was to no avail:
The bastards led him on a merry dance.

The idea was that this would be
A publishing democracy,
A co-op of sorts was to run the paper,
But he was attacked by the *Times*
For nebulous and doubtful crimes,
And that was the end of this tragic caper.

But Maxwell shrugged and carried on,
His will to win was far from gone
Come 1980, Pergamon was booming,
Established now as a tycoon,
He raked it in, aimed for the Moon,
His other interests were also blooming.

Dealing in bonds he made a kill,
Then out of the blue came the thrill
Of taking BPC by a dawn raid,
True, Captain Bob had made a bomb,
But where did all the dosh come from
For all the deals he made, the bills he paid?

He borrowed money, plunged ahead,
Not caring he was in the red,
He cut back on the profligate expense
Of printers paid for four days work,
The unions thought him a jerk,
But many of the things he did made sense.



He fired reps from their cushy jobs,
Attacked the Luddites and the slobs,
And though they treated him with much derision
Under its new, despotic boss,
The company turned round a loss,
Which seemed to vindicate Maxwell's decision.

Though Captain Bob had the last laugh,
The heavy turnover of staff
Proved he was not a very well-liked fella;
And then he sued and promptly lost
A thirty grand case to his cost
Withdrawing a writ against *The Bookseller*.

In 1983 there came
Another twist in Maxwell's game
When he sent in the heavy mob to smash
The presses in his Park Royal plant.
"You can't do that," they said.
"Who can't?"
He said, "I'll do just as I like, you trash!"

He was impossible to stop,
Like a bull in a china shop,
But he was in the right much of the time;
'Twas mostly his pig-headedness
That provoked so much bitterness,
For lack of tact can be a fatal crime.

Also in 1983,
He bought another company,
A football club, another jolly jape,
But three years later, Oxford was
Up in Division One, because
The great bounder had knocked it into shape.



He bought shares in *Central TV*,
A never-ending spending spree,
He seemed to pluck money out of the air,
But he negotiated too,
And haggled like a market Jew,
Before you dealt with him, best have a care!

Then came the thing he most desired
As he sought, stalked and then acquired
His national daily paper, where again
He came upon profligate waste
That's not to any owner's taste,
And quickly he became the printers' bane.

The managers were just as bad,
The privileges these folk had:
Expense accounts and rolling around drunk,
And there were lots of other games,
Clocking on under phoney names ...
No wonder they thought Maxwell was a punk.

The paper was in such a state,
But could he rescue it from fate?
It seems he could, though Reed Group told him rude,
"You'll have to pay a whacking sum
You want the *Mirror*, you Czech bum."
And this time it was Maxwell who got screwed.

So, ninety million pounds the worse,
He started to undo the curse,
And summoned his key men to the *Rotunda*
Where they were given a pep talk.
Though they and he were cheese and chalk,
He saved their precious rag from going under.

“We’re going to outdo the *Sun*,
The *Mirror* will be number one!”
He told them, then he made the chapels cross
By daring to exclaim: “I pay
You lot, so we’ll do it my way,
For ninety million I should be the boss.”

This was a most unwelcome change,
And struck his journalists as strange,
He caused a lot of aggro and more ripples
When he said: “Cheque books by the by,
We’ll give the *Sun* and co the lie,
No nastiness, no fannies and no nipples!”

Another paper was announced,
But this idea was quickly trounced,
It started, went down like a lead balloon,
Goodbye the *London Daily News*,
Such bitter sorrow, these adieus,
Another flop for the *Eye* to lampoon.

And then there came the miners’ strike,
Which wasn’t much to Maxwell’s like,
It was a dirty business, best forgotten,
He went to Addis, what the heck,
A most humanitarian trek,
But his visit to Poland, that was rotten.

Dining with dictators was not
Endearing him to those whose lot
He claimed to be defending, working folk.
He said, “I only want to serve
My fellow man.” That was a nerve!
He never did appreciate the joke.

“I’ll make someone a millionaire
With *Mirror* bingo, I declare!”
He did, but he put others out of work.
He went to law again, the *Sun*
Opposed his injunction and won,
He was left hurt and smarting like a jerk.

His sons came on his *Mirror* team,
As a nightmare grew from the dream,
The paper was still losing money fast.
Sales slumped, he said, “Jobs have to go!”
Bill Keyes and Brenda Dean said, “No!”
And looked at good ol’ Cap’n Bob aghast.

The NGA brought Maxwell strife,
Disruptions at the *Sporting Life*,
He threatened everybody with the sack,
Eventually and with much fuss,
Redundancies, two thousand plus,
Put his Mirror Group back on the right track.

Meanwhile his secret nest egg waxed
In offshore havens, where, untaxed,
The socialist millionaire had invested.
Property deals, shares on the rise ...
All hid from hostile, prying eyes,
To his thrift and good fortune all attested.

The Commonwealth Games was in doubt,
But Maxwell said, “I’ll bail you out!”
And pledged to raise four million in a bit;
He staged the Games and stole the show,
But did he put his cash up? No!
He left the organisers in the shit.

ROBERT
MAXWELL



The more they've got, the more they chase,
He tried to buy out Harcourt Brace,
A publisher and massive US firm;
One critic said: "This guy's a louse,
I wouldn't let him own this house."
Such bitterness made Robert Maxwell squirm.

It was suggested that as he
A socialist professed to be,
That being stinking rich, he wasn't *dinkum*,
He dealt with communists as well,
And others found a fishy smell
When they probed Maxwell's hidden source of income.

But other charges came to grief
And ended to his great relief
With vindication by a judge and jury;
When Richard Ingrams dared to say
That Kinnock was in Maxwell's pay,
He felt the full force of the baron's fury.

He sued and got a mere five grand,
But fifty more would come to hand
As punitive damages for the nerve
Of repeating unfounded claims
Of spurious and dirty games.
Said Maxwell, "That's just what those cunts deserve!"

In 1985, he went
To find his roots and to repent
That he'd paid scant attention to Israel,
Aged 62, he visited
Yad Vashem, moved, dispirited,
He didn't need the Wailing Wall to wail.

While he was there, he met a man
Whose work he greeted with élan;
“My name is Bauer, but call me Yehuda.”
The wandering Jew had come home,
And he was like a Zurich gnome,
A fat, rich and quite fabulous *garuda*.

He financed Bauer’s magazine
On genocide and things obscene,
Feeling that he was no more an outsider,
But in the business world he still
Would stalk his quarry to the kill,
He had more arms, spun more webs than a spider.

His table talk should not be missed,
Especially when Bob was pissed,
He liked to stuff himself with lobster, salmon ...
He smoked cigars but wouldn’t let
His guests light up a cigarette,
But most of all, this hypocrite loved Mammon.

His secret trusts in Liechtenstein
And who knows where else? Clever swine!
Bought shares left, right and centre at strange prices;
Often his companies went bust,
But Maxwell always had it sussed,
Though others were left to their own devices.

By ’86 the *Mirror* boomed
And on the horizon there loomed
Another nugget to adorn his paunch;
He founded *Sportweek*, but, oh fuck,
It didn’t have a lot of luck,
Going down a mere three weeks after launch.

In 1989 he flew
To Berlin where a friend he knew,
(Herr Honecker), he claimed as a reformer;
The man who'd built the Berlin Wall,
In Maxwell's eyes, was ten feet tall,
The way they embraced couldn't have been warmer.

Ardent socialist, yet he snubbed
The workers when shoulders he rubbed
With leaders of their so-called Paradise.
His trading with the reds did not
Endear him to the cause a lot,
Some said he'd sell his soul for the right price.

At times, Maxwell could seem naïve,
He wasn't, but he did believe
That he was doing the right thing, no doubt,
Which meant he could look eye to eye
And with clear conscience, bare-faced lie
To all and sundry in whisper or shout.

Three massive bids made to acquire
What was left of the Bond empire
And other foreign interests came to naught,
He failed to learn the bitter truth,
That though he'd come good in his youth,
The big time was with debt and danger fraught.

And more debt was what he acquired,
Yet never once did he grow tired
Of trying to play Maxwell the tycoon.
His currency deals on the side
(And other things he had to hide)
Would be his only profit makers soon.

The European was a flop
And caught the Captain on the hop,
Making a quarter of the required sales,
Rumours that he was in the red,
By City folk began to spread,
But Maxwell dismissed them all as tall tales.

Then came Guinness and Polly Peck,
But Captain Bob thought: What the heck!
As all around, financial scandals mounted,
With loyal accountants and his sons,
He'd press on, sticking to his guns,
Not thinking soon his chickens would be counted.

A party held for his birthday -
Nearly four thousand came. I say!
He must be stinking rich or a good actor;
The latter, 'twould seem, for the talk
In City circles was to balk
At deals involving the so-called *Max Factor*.

Two billion in the red? It's true!
With mounting debts, suspicions grew,
And he quipped, "My kids will not get a penny!"
This turned out a prophetic joke
For by this time, Big Max was broke,
The only thing he had was bills: too many!

Yet still he borrowed, for some leant,
Not realising that he was bent;
He bought Macmillan and the OAG,
His share price fell again, more loans,
Thirty banks didn't hear the groans
Of those who'd parted Maxwell's company.

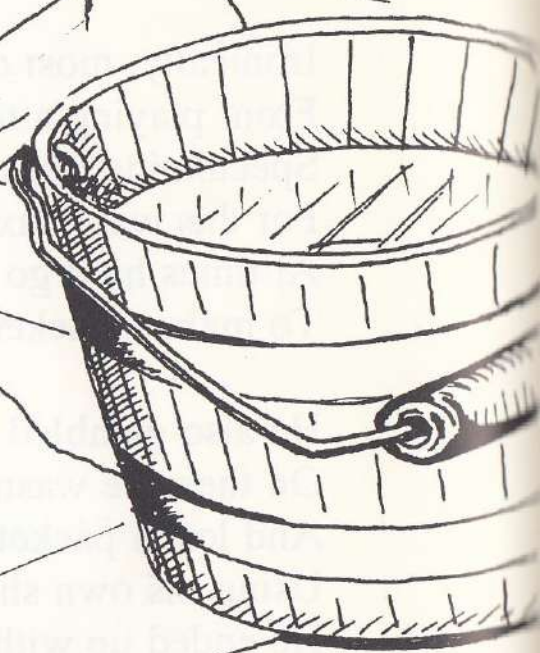
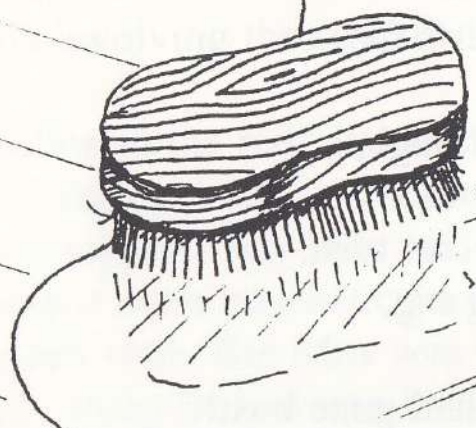
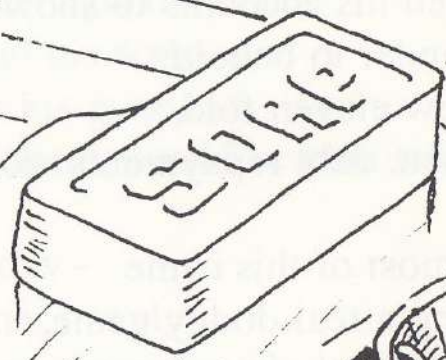
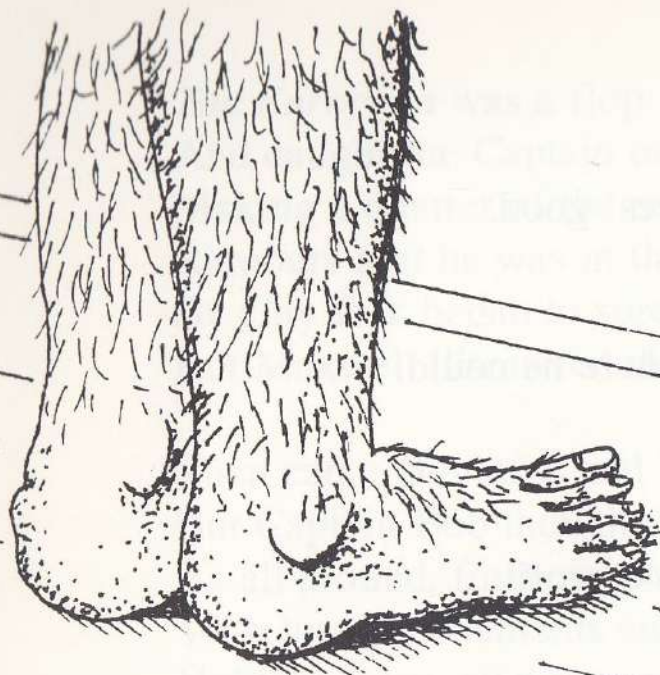
Desperate now, he said, "I'll float
The *Mirror*," and the crafty goat
Made out this was for his employees' good.
He floated it to no avail,
His brokers lost big on the sale,
And still he borrowed when and where he could.

Abetted by his sons and heirs
He mortgaged 13 million shares,
And doctored his accounts to show a profit,
It was a wonder to behold:
13 mill' grew eleven fold,
But even then, debt repayments would scoff it.

Ironically, most of this came
From playing a real dodgy game,
Speculating, mostly in currency,
For this was Maxwell's greatest strength,
At times he'd go to any length
To make a shekel, earn a fixer's fee.

He also gambled on stocks, though,
On these he wasn't in the know,
And lost a packet from his secret trust.
Using his own shares, staking big,
He ended up without a fig:
The mighty Robert Maxwell had gone bust!

In July 1991
He sent Kevin, his faithful son,
To negotiate a loan from the Swiss;
He couldn't try a British bank,
They knew he wasn't worth a wank,
And would've told him not to take the piss.



But Kevin came back with a mint,
Just in time, for his Dad, well skint,
Was getting calls for loans from everywhere;
The Maxwells pledged a tranche or two
This sixty million to accrue,
Which left a stench of bad debts in the air.

The security on this loan
Never appeared; they gave a groan
And vowed to put the Fraud Squad on his tracks.
But all the same, they drew a blank,
More pressure came from Citibank,
And then a frosty call from Goldman Sachs.

As if he didn't have enough
With bad loans, there was all this guff
About his phoney bingo games and things.
Did Maxwell launder Mossad cash?
"I'll sue, I'll sue, it's lies and trash!"
It was, most of it, wild imaginings.

By now he was the king of writs,
"I'll sue them all, the little shits!"
His enemies laughed loud and long with glee.
Eventually he'd had enough,
Of late the going had been tough,
And he sought solace on the open sea.

It was aboard *Lady Ghislaine*
That Maxwell cracked beneath the strain
Of doing all these things he didn't oughta;
It may have been an accident,
But one can't help think that he meant
To take his own life out there on the water.

Perhaps he didn't try too hard
To swim back, but this tub of lard
Weighed in at twenty-two stone when he died;
But if he hadn't drowned, it's sure
He would've ended up in law
(And maybe literally), crucified.

At 5am he was on deck,
The albatross around his neck,
As he stood barefoot, over the side, pissing,
A heart attack, he lurched and fell
Face first, submerged beneath the swell,
Six hours passed till he was declared missing.

The crew turned out and searched the boat,
His naked corpse was found afloat,
His family flew out, shocked and distraught.
"Yes, that's our Bob," his poor wife said,
"I really can't believe he's dead;
Now everything he worked for's come to naught."

The rumours about his demise
Spread, as did other claims and lies,
And mixed obituaries soon poured in,
Some said he was a scheming Jew,
(This, thankfully, a minor view),
And others that he was as black as sin.

"He saved the *Mirror* and our jobs!"
"An egoist," said Old World snobs,
While Douglas Hurd's words provoked many sniggers,
"This is a tragedy," he said,
"Now good ol' Cap'n Bob is dead
We've lost one of our most colourful figures!"

The truth was swift to out, and he
Was branded universally
As a cheat, liar, swindler and a bully,
Which made the words of Douglas Hurd
Sound more like those of Douglas Turd,
But in Israel, the talk was just as woolly.

That Maxwell was an egoist
And improbable socialist
Did nothing to make less his reputation,
He was buried an honoured Jew,
(A Holocaust survivor too),
Who in death had returned to his true nation.

Now he'd gone to his Jewish roots
And would fight no more libel suits,
The City saw an easing of the tensions,
Mirror Group shares were put on hold
As creditors pursued his gold
But found instead his workers' missing pensions.

The pension fund had been debased
And most of it could not be traced,
The loss was nearly half a billion quid;
Maxwell supporters shook with rage,
The story was on every page,
Most people couldn't credit what he did.

He lived in great style, died in shame,
And left his sons to take the blame,
The echoes will reverberate for years,
No sooner was he dead than books
Denouncing him as king of crooks
Filled Dillons, and the gutter press ran smears.

A womaniser too was he ...
An agent of the KGB ...
The ultra-right had a field day, and yet
I can't help thinking that although
He was a weird guy, even so
His passing is the cause of much regret.

The more they've got, the more they want,
He drank too deeply of the font,
Becoming intoxicated with power.
He sued the *Eye*, he sued the *Sun*,
Rode roughshod over everyone,
Lived like a fairy monarch in his tower.

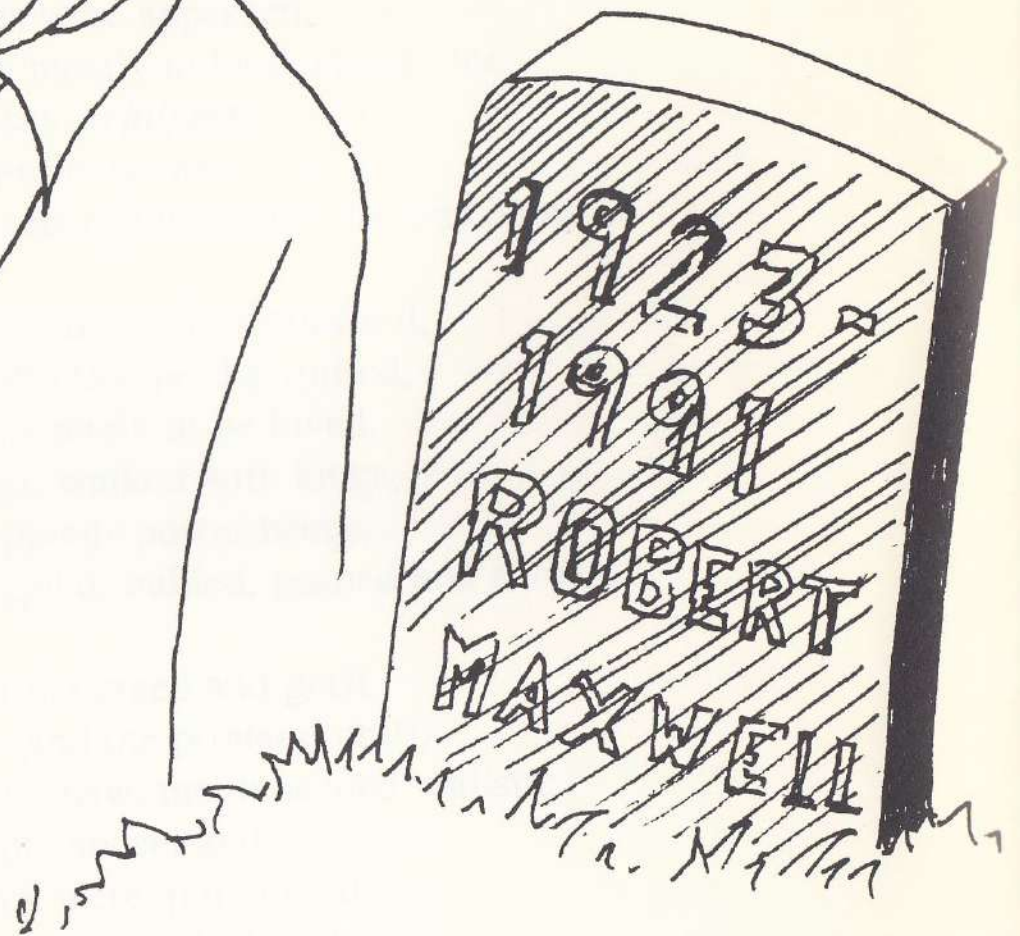
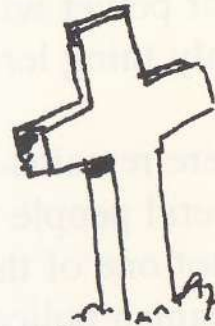
He did just as he damn well pleased
Until his desires were appeased,
And these were mostly to be Number One,
(The Japanese say *itchiban*),
And this extraordinary man
Achieved that sort of fame when he was done.

Though not the fame he most desired,
For all the wealth that he'd acquired,
He wanted desperately to be loved,
He built his ego, walked with kings,
Had all the trappings power brings,
Yet still he haggled, bullied, pushed and shoved.

He also fought the greed and graft
Of Fleet Street and the printers' craft,
And brought it a new, much needed realism;
His ventures into soccer and
His African trek were quite grand:
Was this ego or was it idealism?

Those who condemn him should take heed
That though he was unique, such greed
Is not - it has caused many men to fall.
For the man who has everything
Lust for power will surely bring
The only thing left - that's to lose it all.

But there remains one mystery,
As several people said to me,
(And not one of them was out of his head),
The Spanish police were so thick,
Do you think this could be a trick?
And is the thieving bastard really dead?



Published and distributed in the United Kingdom
by

InfoText MAnuscripts
c/o 93c Venner Road,
Sydenham,
London SE26 5HU.

Tel: 081 659 7713

ISBN 1 871473 08 X

© copyright I.T.M.A. (words and illustrations) 1992.

£2.99