

Cybertech Out!

A screenplay by Peter Cowlam

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SCENE 1

An office somewhere in the Westminster Village. In a flap, Nigel SLYTE MP, in a meeting with his SECRETARY, who appears with rather more composure.

SLYTE God what next! Some zealot from *The Guardian* says she's got 'categorical evidence' that I – with a 14,000 majority – took a bribe from a man called Moonburger. In the Republican Party... *[Disrespectful]* Moonburger!

SECRETARY *[efficient]* Ah yes Moonburger. That was the signature on all those cheques that paid for the California trip – as I recall.

SLYTE Correction. SUCCESSFUL trip! Upshot is, Cybertech Systems Inc, so soon as I smooth the path, is setting up a data centre. In the heartland of *my* constituency. Believe me, Cybertech's the name that's going to revolutionise AI. When I think what that will do for the local economy....

SECRETARY Talking of which – shall I bin the BIN IT pile now?

SLYTE *Is* there anything new?

SECRETARY Just the usual anti-American hate mail....

SLYTE Well you know my views haven't changed. We children of the free market can't be bound by a handful of leisured eccentrics, who don't want their fields dug up. Send them the standard reply. Then bin it. I'm off. It's Question Time.

SCENE 2

Town Square, small market town. SECOND CITIZEN, bearing a placard, whose legend is NO TO CYBERTECH. With him/her FIRST CITIZEN.

FIRST CITIZEN What's it all about then?

SECOND CITIZEN You not 'eard? That stink goin' up for them there plans for Doolittle Meadow.

FIRST CITIZEN What, you mean Cybertech, there?

SECOND CITIZEN That's what they'm say. Should've made it a golf course, likes they was gonna. Shouldn't of they?

FIRST CITIZEN Yep, s'pose so.

SECOND CITIZEN Arp.

FIRST CITIZEN Well, I'll be seein' you.

SECOND CITIZEN Arp.

SCENE 3

Office as of Scene 1. SLYTE and SECRETARY.

SLYTE Lord, PM got a roasting today! Those backbenchers won't let go. All these goodies we've been getting...

SECRETARY And cuts in services for everyone else...

SLYTE Not to mention Welfare. It's all they ever talk about.

SECRETARY So how *are* you going to explain that generous donation from the President of Cybertech, when it comes to light?

SLYTE No reason at all why it should come to light. And besides, that's all perfectly legitimate. Nothing wrong with that at all.

SECRETARY And the fact that you showed him round the House of Lords?

SLYTE That? Well let me see. That's neighbourly curiosity at our quaint English ways.

SECRETARY *[ironic]* All scrupulously innocent.

SLYTE Absolutely!

SCENE 4

Town Square as of Scene 2. An OPPOSITION BACKBENCHER, FIRST, SECOND and THIRD CITIZENS.

BACKBENCHER ...and of course yes, the world doesn't stand still, so that even an old town like ours must face the challenges of a hi-tech millennium, what with its fibre optics and Lord knows what else. Even so, I repeat, this scheme for Doolittle Meadow is ill-conceived and smacks of the old backhander. What do the local people really want, I mean really really want, with Cybertech – not even English...

SECOND CITIZEN Don't want it at all, that's what I say – bound to be an eyesore.

FIRST CITIZEN That's absolutely it – been no thought at all for the local people, let alone consultation.

THIRD CITIZEN Though I do wonder if perhaps we should welcome any new trade coming in to the town.

SECOND CITIZEN *You* would, what with all them bloody charity shops you've opened up.

BACKBENCHER But what about the ripple effect, and all the jobs it's likely to bring?

FIRST CITIZEN Slyte, you know, he's bin ultra-quiet on that.

SECOND CITIZEN Where IS Slyte huh!

BACKBENCHER His press people say, a prior commitment.

SECOND CITIZEN Sunnin' 'isself, more like!

Laughter, uproar.

SCENE 5

A Westminster bar. SLYTE, with glass in hand, enter OPPOSITION BACKBENCHER, also with glass in hand.

SLYTE Well, thanks again, Winnie-Frieda-Simone... I'll get the next one.

BACKBENCHER Pleasure, Nigel. It's Simone, by the way.

SLYTE Simone, yes-of-course. So, Simone, what's your leader got ours hasn't?

BACKBENCHER Knows how people live. Knows the real world. And above all, speaks for the people.

SLYTE The people, yes, I'll have to try that.

BACKBENCHER You'll *all* have to try something. Your ratings are plummeting. *[She clinks her glass with his, then heartily swigs].* Cheers!

SLYTE As they say, bottoms up!

BACKBENCHER Actually only Brexiteers say that. Prosit!

SLYTE Prosit!

BACKBENCHER You'll have hell to pay with this Cybertech thing. You know, I hear they're even going to wheel out Lady Smugs down on Doolittle Meadow.

SLYTE *[indignant]* Lady Smugs, of Smugsbury! That old crock, coming onto *my* patch!

BACKBENCHER 'Fraid so, old boy.

SLYTE What does *she* know about global economics! In fact that's a very good question for PMQs!

Exit SLYTE, tempestuously.

BACKBENCHER *[raises glass]* Bottoms up! *[Drinks.]*

Exit BACKBENCHER.

SCENE 6

Town Square as of Scene 2. LADY SMUGS of Smugsbury, wielding dynamic megaphone. FIRST, SECOND CITIZENS, and BACKBENCHER.

SMUGS It's all very well getting up a local protest, but the only way they ever listen is from the heart of government. We need to march on Downing Street...and of course it's as true now as the day I first entered Parliament, incredibly over fifty years ago. Dependence on overseas industry is a blight on the polity. Keep up the fight, the letters, the protest. And remember...Cybertech out! Cybertech OUT! CYBERTECH, CYBERTECH, OUT! OUT! OUT!

FIRST/SECOND CITIZENS, BACKBENCHER *[mantra]* CYBERTECH OUT! CYBERTECH OUT! CYBERTECH, CYBERTECH, OUT! OUT! OUT! *[ad nauseam]*.

They all march off in procession.

SCENE 7

Office as of Scene 1. SLYTE with SECRETARY.

SLYTE Suppose YOU think it's funny!

SECRETARY *[holds up single A4 triumphantly]* Not as funny as this. It's from the Minister. He says *[reading]*: 'Keep a steady nerve, don't deviate from policy, let the whole thing just blow over.'

SLYTE *[explosive]* Just blow over! Get me that flight for California.

SECRETARY You wouldn't want that to coincide by any chance with tomorrow's march on Downing Street?

SLYTE March on Downing Street!

They disperse, in separate directions.

SCENE 8

Coach station, coach waiting. FIRST/SECOND CITIZENS, BACKBENCHER, with placards etc.

BACKBENCHER A great day's protest, I'd say – thank you all so much. Now, I'm going to call out the register for coach number one. Please file up and grab what you can: Monde, Osbert, Mayne, Willins, Clownes-Orll; Higgs, de Billet, Hawsons....

SECOND CITIZEN We're all here, let's all just get home....

FIRST CITIZEN Just one last refrain, hey?

Orderly procession, with chanting, banner-bearing, placard-waving etc.

ALL [*somewhat lacklustre*] CYBERTECH, CYBERTECH, OUT! OUT! OUT! CYBERTECH, CYBERTECH, OUT! OUT! OUT!

FIRST CITIZEN Hope this is doing some good.

BACKBENCHER Well of course it's doing good. Because look, here comes Nigel Slyte, hotfoot from the USA I'd bet. Let's hear what he has to say.

Enter SLYTE, in the demonstrative way of a chat-show host, attempting to whip up adulation.

FIRST/SECOND CITIZENS Hmph.

SLYTE Now I know what you're all thinking, but let me put your minds at rest. I just wanted to reiterate our continuing commitment to the IDEA of local community.

SECOND CITIZEN [*obedient whimper*] No more Cy—

SLYTE Cybertech I know. But of course I also know, because it's my business to know, that a successful economy, meaning prosperity for ALL the people, not just the chosen few, has to be a balanced economy, and that sometimes means painful decisions, and sometimes imported expertise. Not only are we winning on this, we have to be thankful for a VERY responsible Chancellor who's done wonders since the election, balanced the budget no real progress can be made and I don't have to tell you good people without a balanced budget. Let's get an even keel let's get it right GETTING IT RIGHT FOR YOU.

FIRST CITIZEN [*just about still smouldering*] Where's the public consultation then, what about that, it's a disgrace, I'm disgusted I am, it's a disgrace....

SLYTE Now you know I can't add to the very extensive planning already in place, completely vindicated, the government is, completely YOU DO UNDERSTAND.

SECOND CITIZEN But all them there's plans it's just you lot lookin' out for number one.

Protestors get restless and rowdy. SLYTE, with his hands up, tries to appeal for calm.

SLYTE Not number one at all. Think of the benefits. Think what Cybertech can bring – TOMORROW'S FUTURE NOW. Only think of it – interactive megachannels everywhere you look. Home, town squares, public loos, even the humble wristwatch. Television everywhere. All thanks to AI.

BACKBENCHER Yes, of course the world doesn't stand still, even an old town like ours must face this new millennium, what with its fibre optics and Lord knows what else. Even so I repeat, this scheme for Doolittle Meadow is ill-conceived, for what do the local people really want, I mean really really want with

Cybertech – not even English....

SECOND CITIZEN Not English at all, American. We don't want it, we don't want no Cybertech, don't want it at all, that's what I say, inter-galactic television, only clog up the town, more traffic an' all, and that's bad enough, 'specially on market days, can't swing a cat.

FIRST CITIZEN Abso-bloody-lutely, no thought at all what with my hip and it's bound to mean more lunch-time drinking and as you know that's a problem with the young, strong lagers they've all got these days. I want to see them swept off the street, we want to drive these problems out of town, not bring in we don't know what, 'specially them Yanks, think I speak for most of us here.

SLYTE And d'you know what, folks, I am *not* one of these politicians who just won't listen. I for one am one hundred per cent behind you. All the Doolittle development, WE DON'T WANT it. Cybertech, WE DON'T WANT YOU. Jobs you say, what jobs! no one in our town has got the skills for Cybertech. My country needs your vote, it's all down to basic trust and the good people of England. I trust you to cast your vote responsibly these are difficult times need to pull to pull to pull together one community AS ONE UNITED ARMY we can get there together WE can get there because of one thing because we're UNITED as an army we're UNITED.

FIRST/SECOND CITIZENS, BACKBENCHER UNITED! UNITED! Kerm On You Reds! Kerm On You Reds!
[Repeat et cetera, flourish of football scarves, all process off.]

Cast in order of appearance

Nigel Slyte MP
Secretary
First Citizen
Second Citizen
Opposition Backbencher
Third Citizen
Lady Smugs of Smugsbury

Distribution

Scene 1

Slyte
Secretary

Scene 2

First Citizen
Second Citizen

Scene 3

Slyte
Secretary

Scene 4

Backbencher
First Citizen
Second Citizen
Third Citizen

Scene 5

Slyte
Backbencher

Scene 6

Lady Smugs
First Citizen
Second Citizen
Backbencher

Scene 7

Slyte
Secretary

Scene 8

First Citizen
Second Citizen
Backbencher
Slyte

Suggested Props

Scene 2

A placard, whose legend is NO TO CYBERTECH

Scene 5

Two shorts glasses

Scene 6

Smugs' megaphone (or perhaps a walking stick)

Scene 7

Single A4 sheet, preferably crested

Scene 8

Two placards