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BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

1141 TELECOM HOUSE

1 GLOUCESTER ROAD

HONG KONG

TELEPHONE: (852) 528 0527

TELEX: 75180 BBC TV HK

FAX: (852) 065 4420

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## Television

**T**HE wind of change that has swept across the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has penetrated some of the darker recesses of that least inviting of countries, Mongolia.

According to reporter Brian Barron in a grim but compelling Assignment (BBC2), the peasantry recently flexed their glasnost-inspired muscles to topple a statue of their oppressor, Stalin — albeit at night so as to minimise any government backlash.

But because of this residue of fear of the party hacks, the protesters left standing a second statue: one of Stalin's Mongolian-born lackey and fellow mass-murderer, Marshal Choibalsan.

To many of us, the late Choibalsan will be a new name to link with loathsome psychopaths like Joe Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot.

# Secret shame of the killing fields



LAST NIGHT'S VIEW

By JOHN SEBASTIAN

But after hearing Barron's account of his crimes, subtitled *The Secrets Of The Steppes*, he fully deserves his place in the Chamber of Horrors.

Under orders from Stalin's Moscow, Choibalsan and his cronies systematically set about destroying pledging allegiance to the Dalai Lama — were murdered.

Extraordinarily, the BBC's Asia Correspondent the only credible opposition to their brand of Communism, namely from Mongolia's Buddhists.

Gaining access to dusty archives and some amazing old footage, Barron estimated that one-tenth of the population — around 100,000 people, most of them Buddhist monks

and his crew tracked down Choibalsan's Head of Extermination Squad.

Fifty years on, this frail old herdsman cheerfully admitted responsibility for 15,000 deaths.

He has never been officially punished, though he is ostracised by his neighbours.

Only now is the wind of change, not to mention the freezing wind over the steppes, turning up the buried skulls in the mass graves.

THANKS to Gorbachev, the Russians now make jokes about the

Communist system they once feared.

But as one Moscovite satirist put it in a timely repeat of *From Russia With Laughter* (CI), it is primarily to enlighten, not entertain.

"In America there are 90 types of yoghurt — just think — 90 types! In Russia only two. Yesterday's and the day before yesterday's."

"What would happen if you built Communism in the Sahara? In three years you'd run out of sand."

Humour seems the only way to survive a food queue. Two strangers queued for so long they ended up counting.

They only gave up their place to get married. (Actually a true story, not a joke.)

Will Mongolians ever make jokes about Choibalsan's appalling regime?

Perhaps it will be a measure of their true freedom when they do.