

*Leaden Wings*. By ZHANG JIE. [London: Virago Press, 1987. 180 pp. £3.95.]

*Leaden Wings* was published in China in 1980 and describes the post-Cultural Revolution struggle between industrial reformers and their opponents in and around the Ministry of Heavy Machinery. Zheng Ziyun, a vice-minister, is keen to promote new ideas of “industrial psychology,” to improve efficiency and promote production. Parallel to this high-level attempt at modernization, a similar shake-up is described in the Dawn Motor Works where a new manager’s financial initiative improves conditions for the workers after he has dismissed the full-time Party secretaries in each workshop. The opponents of these vanguards are caricatured as corrupt, weak and vengeful.

The novel begins with promise as peripheral characters, many of them women, are introduced in a series of deft sketches. Yet, as Delia Davin points out in her Afterword, many of the female characters “... shock or disappoint more than they inspire.” At best they are worn out by their acceptance of drudgery, at worst, they are scheming and corrupt.

It is said that part of *Leaden Wings*’ success in Germany was due to the number of businessmen who bought it, hoping to understand the machinations of politics within Chinese ministries and factories. These personal and political struggles with their multiple roots and their multiple effects are accurately described as are the home lives of the worn-out women. Though it informs, and despite heroic efforts by Gladys Yang and Delia Davin, *Leaden Wings* remains disappointing as literature.

FRANCES WOOD

#### Erratum

Our attention has been drawn to an error in line 13, page 669 of issue No. 112 December 1987). The last line should have referred to Dr Hewlett Johnson as the Dean of Canterbury.”