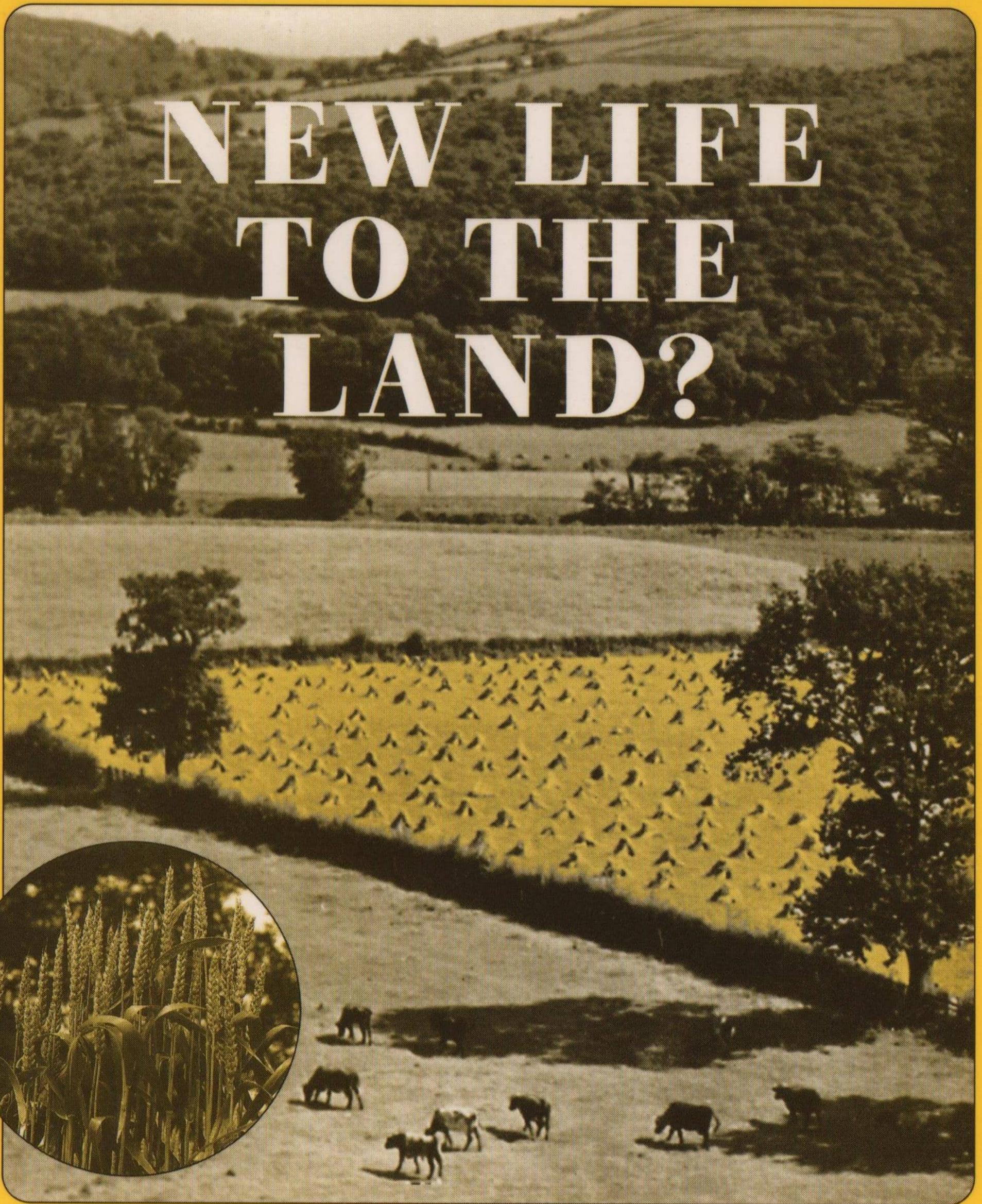
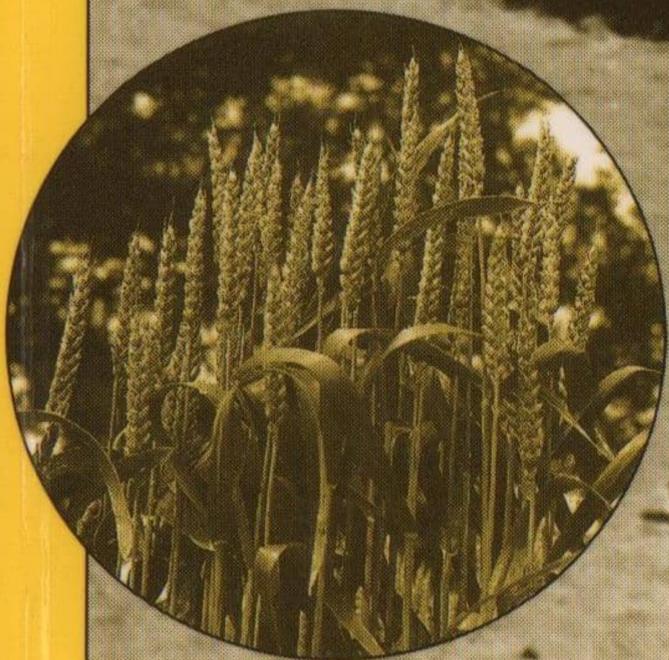


NEW LIFE TO THE LAND?



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Editor's Introduction

When in 1942 Freedom Press published George Woodcock's pamphlet *New Life to the Land* – with no question mark! – farmers and farming had suddenly become important for this island at war and surrounded by U-Boats waiting to sink the merchant ships bringing foodstuffs. Pre-war Britain imported most of its food from those countries that would then have the currency to buy our manufactures.

But war changed everything. All of us who lived in the cities were desperately looking for allotments. Large areas of London's parks were made into allotments. Farmers found themselves in 'reserved occupations' and the slogan 'Dig for Victory' was plastered everywhere. Flower gardens were transformed into vegetable plots and window boxes 'conscripted' to grow tomatoes!

Farmers, after years of hard times with imports so much cheaper than what they could produce at home, were being pampered and they certainly did well financially out of the war, and some in the Black Market as well. In my opinion, they have done very well ever since. Where some of them have come unstuck is in imagining that the banks and other money-lenders were *amis du peuple* and that they would provide the wherewithal when a parcel of land nearby came up for sale. To this day farmers cannot resist buying more land (and bigger machines!) in spite of always moaning about managing to make a living. The fact is that farmers owe the money-lenders anything up to £10,000 million. Many of the smaller farmers, who couldn't pay the mortgage and interest repayments, have given up the struggle. Incidentally, nowadays a 'small' farmer in this country is one who cannot make a living on less than 100 acres! Which is not surprising since the farmer-broadcaster Oliver Walston goes on saying that but for the subsidies he couldn't make a living off 3,000 acres!

This explains, of course, why over the fifty years since the end of World War Two the farming population has dramatically decreased. Since we have no modern equivalent in this country of the Domesday Book, we don't know who and how many own the land. However, in 1942 when we published *New Life to the Land* the figures Woodcock quoted were that:

In farming the employing class bears a substantial ratio to the employed. All told, there are some 370,000 farms and holdings of one kind and another in this country. There are approximately 800,000 regular agricultural workers,

so that it will be seen that there is approximately one master to every two men. Almost all these farmers take an active part in the work of their farms. Many of them employ no labour – some 60,000 of the holdings are below five acres, and 165,000 between five and fifty acres.

Today there are fewer than 150,000 farms and a lot fewer farmers. As to farm workers, their numbers must be down to less than 200,000 including part-time operatives. In *The Raven 17* on 'Use of Land' I was already then (1992) pointing out that to my knowledge four local 'farmers':

... with at least 1,000 acres each in one corner of Suffolk have recently sacked their staff, sold their machinery and put their farms out to contract.

and I commented that *they* were not farmers "nor are the contractors who direct operations from offices in Colchester or Chelmsford".

Since then more large farmers have employed *local* contractors to work their cereal farms.

And in a recent BBC farming programme comparisons were made between cereal yields – 19 cwts in 1945 and today's 3½ to 4 tonnes per acre which was explained by the ever-increasing 'productivity' – and the new varieties of cereals and the massive machinery. Farmers interviewed boasted of being able to combine 250 tonnes of cereals in a day! And also that today a 1,500-acre cereal farm could be dealt with by three workers, but at a pinch with two! One thing the salesmen for factory farming didn't mention were the quantities of pesticides and herbicides and the tonnes of nitrogen applied to these cereal prairies, which are now polluting our streams and rivers for decades to come.

Nobody in their right minds, least of all anarchists, would reject any advances in technology to make the life of farmers and farmworkers less arduous than it was in the distant past, but so long as farming is part and parcel of the capitalist system the farmer will seek to maximise his profits by hook or by crook at the expense of any employees and, in the final analysis, of the consumer. And last but not least, in this age of European Union subsidies fraud is on a massive scale.

Anarchists are utterly opposed to the private ownership of land. As one writer gave the title of his book *Whose Land is it Anyway?*, this is the basic question and until not only the land but also the oceans that are being fished to extinction by ever-larger machines and trawlers, are declared to be our heritage and that of future generations, there

can be no stopping the massive trawlers fishing the seas dry and the equally monstrous tractors and factory farming techniques poisoning our environment, and with it mankind.

Of one thing I am certain and it is that so long as the land is privately owned with lavish subsidies for the owners there can be no agricultural and horticultural system which is in the interests of the consumer. And let's not forget that set-aside has been introduced since Freedom Press published *The Raven 17* on 'Use of Land' (1992) and involves more than *a million acres of arable land in this country alone* for which farmers are being paid anything up to £100 an acre to do nothing. A number of Major's ministers are each benefiting from this bonanza to the tune of up to £150,000 a year!

New Life to the Land without a question mark implies not only that the land should be taken over by the people but that there are 'armies' of youngsters longing to go back to the land.

Reflecting on 27 years (admittedly late in life) working as an organic market gardener, my experience convinces me that most youngsters are not interested in working on the land. I hope I am wrong, for until the new generation claims that the land belongs to all of us and also want to experience the joys and the disappointments, but above all the deep satisfaction from the feeling that however badly remunerated is work on the land one is producing something *worthwhile* nothing will change.

Today millions of salary-slaves 'commute' to the big cities five days a week and spend their 9-5 jobs producing pieces of paper which help to keep the rich rich, but nobody as yet can survive on a diet of paper!

When will the people of the western capitalist world realise that there is a different kind of life – free from all the current 'diseases' of 'stress', 'having no time to do all the things one would like to do' – available if only they don't expect others to take decisions for them.

I hope this issue of *The Raven*, which apart from the concluding articles by Woodcock and Malatesta which suggest what agriculture *could* be in an anarchist society, presents all the *problems* of wresting the land from private or state ownership. Both Colin Ward's piece on the failure of the Land Settlement Association and the article on the demise of the kibbutz movement in Israel are serious setbacks for those of us who passionately believe that we shall only discover the joys of life when we learn to appreciate the satisfaction that a return to the land can provide. But this surely will only be possible when private ownership has been abolished and the land is worked collectively and with the production of *quality* produce for the consumers in mind.

Today horticultural production is determined by the supermarkets, more concerned with a standard-sized product which will fit in their standard-sized packaging than with quality (flavour). And since they have now managed to dominate 80% of the horticultural market in this country it is not surprising that *they get what they want and are able to brow-beat growers on price*. It is estimated by the supermarkets that some £5,000 million of horticultural produce that could be grown here is imported. Unlike the arable farmers, horticulture gets no subsidies and so the supermarkets sell onions from Tasmania and carrots from the USA, all subsidised!

And as to the organic movement, more than 70% of so-called organic produce sold in this country is imported. And who checks whether it is grown organically?

The Soil Association is now part of the European Union establishment¹ and unless an organic grower pays the exorbitant membership charges he/she cannot declare that their produce has been grown 'organically', that is without sprays or artificial fertilisers.² I have never belonged to the organisation. Instead from the beginning, 27 years ago, with Wholefoods in Baker Street, London, and the group of families I supplied in London, it was *mutual trust* not *inspectors* that was the link between us. Needless to say, they were free to 'descend' on me whenever they wished.

Capitalist society makes the rules and appoints inspectors to see that they are observed. What a joke! Even assuming there were enough inspectors, when will people realise that capitalism by definition *is* corruption. The police are riddled with corruption. The tax authorities have revealed corrupt inspectors. But without detailing more individuals, surely all the sleaze in European politics is enough to convince even the simplest mind that the ABC of capitalism, PROFIT, is the corrupting drug. We live in a capitalist society, so draw your own conclusions!

VR

Notes

1. Which is now part of the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.
2. Which is what this writer declares on his invoices since he cannot afford, on a small acreage, to pay the £300 per annum for membership of the Soil Association. Apart from the fact that there can surely be no rapport between an organic grower and the Ministry of Factory Farming!

Freedom Editorial (1887)

Land Nationalisation

The rupture between Henry George* and the American Socialists at the Syracuse Convention, whence the Social Democrat delegates were excluded, will deeply afflict many of Henry George's supporters in this country. Having received from his powerful attacks against the idle land-grabbers their first impulse towards Socialism, and having seen in him one of those who undoubtedly have contributed towards preparing the ground for Socialist ideas in this country, they will be grieved to see the man whom they considered as an earnest champion of the oppressed turning now his back on the workers and entering into a union with the middle class.

For a union with the middle class it was, this Syracuse convention of the United Labour Party, at which Labour was *not* represented even by a feeble minority; while lawyers (fourteen lawyers!), doctors, parsons, employers and grocers fully represented all factions of the middle classes. Its platform is a middle-class platform throughout.

Many of Henry George's supporters will be deeply grieved at what they will consider as his new departure. But if they now revert to what was the real meaning of his teachings since the very first day he began to expound them, they will see that his present tactics constitute no new departure at all; and they will understand why the middle classes have shown, from the beginning, so much sympathy with his teachings. The present position of Henry George is a logical development of the ideas he has professed since his first start; and the whole doctrine of land nationalisation – as it has been expounded and professed in this country – never was anything but a theory inspired by the desire of the middle classes to have the lion's share in the profits and political importance derived from the possession of land. What we say now is not new; many years since, comrade Hyndman powerfully exposed the defects of the land nationalisation schemes;

* Henry George (1839-1897) economist, journalist and newspaper proprietor. His fundamental remedy for poverty was "a single tax levied on the value of land exclusive of improvements and abolition of all taxes which fall upon industry and thrift" – Editor.

and neither Social Democrats nor Anarchists have entertained delusions as to their real meaning.

When the land-nationalisers denounce the idlers who pocket the surplus value given to land by the aggregate efforts of the whole nation, one can but fully agree with them. But one is inclined to ask why they, who are so keenly conscious of the evils of private appropriation of land and so boldly denounce them, are so blind as not to perceive the evils which have arisen in our industrial and trading century from the appropriation by the few of the unearned increment on the industrial field? How is it to be explained that the identity of the two means of appropriating for the rich the fruits of the labour of the poor escapes them, while it is clear even to the most bourgeois of writers? And how is it that they continue to launch their thunders against one class only of the two great classes of exploiters?

The rank and file of the land-nationalisers – those honest workers who earnestly believe that land nationalisation is preached in the interest of the workers – do not understand how anybody can denounce the land-grabber, only that he may the better become a land-grabber himself, and they answer to these questions, ‘Let us only undermine the landed property; its evils are better felt and understood; then the capitalist oppression will receive a mortal blow at the same time’.

Immense illusion! Because the real result of the land nationalisation schemes would be to divert from the middle classes the blow which the working classes are preparing to strike at their exploiters, and to direct it to their only competitor in exploiting – the landlord. During the Chartist movement the workman was used by the middle classes to snatch away the political power from the landed aristocracy. Now he is to be used to snatch from them the land and to hand over this real foundation of all power to the middle classes.

The rank and file are too honest to see it; but the leaders know well that it is precisely so. And H. George himself is not mistaken on the subject. In his last leader in the *Standard* (10th September 1887) he openly says: “It is evident that the change would profit the *capitalists* and labourers” and goes so far as to argue that “we have few capitalists who are not labourers”.

The bourgeois leaders of the land nationalisation movement are perfectly aware that their scheme would first profit capitalists, just because it would increase the range covered by capital; and we know that everything which profits capitalists and widens the field of their powers will ultimately result in a further enslaving of the workmen.

In fact, two separate things must be distinguished in land nationalisation schemes: the title, and the contents; the banner with its fine inscription, and the merchandise covered with the banner.

The banner which bears the words 'Land Nationalisation' may be indicative of a grand aim; but all depends upon what is understood by land nationalisation. It may mean the nation taking possession of the land; everybody entitled to till the soil if he likes; everybody entitled freely to organise in order to produce plenty of food for humanity. It may mean also – and so it did in France by the end of the last [eighteenth] century – the state confiscating the estates of the priests and nobles and selling them to those who have the money to buy; that is, partly to peasants but chiefly to the 'Black Bands' of 1793, the bands of money-grabbers enriched by speculating on the people's starvation, or on cardboard-soled shoes supplied to the armies of the Republic. It may mean even less; and so indeed it does, for in the mouths of our Land Restorers and Nationalisers it simply means this: everything remains as it is. But a Parliament converted to the ideas of land nationalisation imposes heavy taxes on land values, and thus compels the rascal lords to sell their estates. This is the bottom of all land nationalisation schemes, nothing else has been preached by their supporters.

No revolution, of course; no sudden changes. No expropriation of manufactures, or railways; that would spoil the scheme. The East End people must continue to starve and the West End people to squander the money; cottagers' families must continue to live on nine shillings a week; parliament be elected as it is now; money remains almighty; but the landlords are to be compelled by the said parliament to sell their estates.

The dream of the turnip-jam, cotton-silk and poisoned beer manufacturers is realised. One poor furniture-millionaire who died the other day, notwithstanding his millions, never could attain his ideal of being proprietor of a 'Shaftesbury Castle' and invite hunting parties there! All his life long he was compelled to stamp his note-paper merely 'Three Poplars Mansion'! Why did he not live on until the land taxation scheme of the supposed Land Nationalisers had become a reality? But the retired butcher next door hopes not to die without having seen it, and then he will finally buy the long-coveted corner of the park on the top of the hill, and erect there his castle decorated with his leg-of-mutton arms. I understood that he, too, is a Land Nationaliser! The nation – it is *he*, and the nationalisation is nothing but a taxation which will permit him, too,

to have a park and a castle. He *can* pay the Georgite taxes for the corner of the park, while Lord So-and-So is unable to pay them for the whole of the park.

And, while our furniture-millionaires and our retired butchers will peacably enjoy life in their mansions, creating twenty parks where there was one, the remainder of the land will be bought by capital-owners who are now at their wits' end where to invest their capital, and a new landed aristocracy as bad as the old one will issue from the scheme. The bourgeois will become the owner of the land, the manufactures, the railways, the trade!

Maybe, the amount of cultivated land and of corn grown in this country will increase. There will be no need to import so much corn as we do now. But, will the workman be better paid for his labour? Who will pay the land taxes – who can pay any taxes at all if it is not the producer of wealth, the labourer who pays them with his labour? And if he dares to claim more than nine shillings a week, can he not be ousted by Chinese and Hindus who will be satisfied with three shillings a week? Can the labourer who has no capital beyond his own hands afford to compete with the capital-owners in the prices they will offer to the State, in case the State should retain its rights in land and rent it to the person who offers most for it? Can the labourer compete with the capitalist, who *can* afford to pay more because he can get good machinery, and import Chinese to serve it, with the money stolen from the workman's pocket?

The middle classes have understood at once that the land nationalisation scheme, being a mere scheme of land taxation, is much to their profit. Therefore, their tenderness to the scheme and their harshness to Socialism. What a pity that so many honest workers, led by loud phrases of sympathy and by the word *Nationalisation* inscribed on the banner, have followed the Land Reformer's flag without asking themselves: what does it cover?

We are not grieved about what is described as a new departure of the Land Nationalisers. There is no new departure at all; they have remained what they were, advocates of land taxation. Feeling hindered by their Socialist tail, they have merely cut it off. That is all. Those honest workers who joined their leagues for their banner's sake, without inquiring more closely into the real content of their teachings, surely will be grieved by their own mistake. But they will profit by the lesson.

They will know that the great words Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, Home Rule, Radicalism, Socialism and Anarchism may

be mere words. All depends upon the contents, and they will see that the content may be best judged by the *means* proposed to attain the end.

Shabby means imply a shabby end. Those who propose to change all the present state of society, put an end to oppression, put an end to poverty, regenerate social life by a few shabby means – whatever the title they assume – have no grand end before them. They usurp grand names to cover the hollowness of their contents.

Herbert Read

The Open Fields System

The Open Fields by C.S. and C.S. Orwin is a work of historical research which in the publisher's opinion could have no interest for readers of *Spain and the World*.^{*} Actually it is of great importance for anyone concerned with the practical realisation of anarchism. It does not describe an anarchist system of agriculture; nor a system which in any of its details we would like to revive. Nevertheless, it is a book from which the anarchist can derive considerable support for his theories.

Most people are aware that until a comparatively recent time much of the land of this country was common land – that is to say, communal land, cultivated by the community for the common benefit. They are aware that gradually, but for the most part during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these common lands were enclosed and divided among individual owners. It is true that a considerable number have survived as 'open spaces' or 'recreation grounds', but the commons as agricultural units have virtually disappeared. They survive actively in only two or three places, one of which is the subject of this book.

* Herbert Read (1893-1968) contributed this article to the anarchist fortnightly *Spain and the World* for December 1938. A long biographical essay by David Goodway is included in *Herbert Read – A One-Man Manifesto* (Freedom Press, 205 pages, ISBN 0 900384 72 7, £6.00 post free inland).

The system of agriculture practised under this communal system of ownership is known as the Open Fields system – a system which lasted in this country for at least two thousand years, and which was only destroyed by the industrialisation or commercialisation of farming – by the introduction of the profit motive. The Open Fields were originally clearings made by settlers, who then proceeded to work the land in common for the common benefit. But these early settlers were not theorists; they were realists driven by practical and urgent needs to devise the most productive method of farming. This method was one which preserved individual initiative whilst submitting everything to common control. They divided the land into three parts.

A large part ... was kept under the plough to produce corn for man and straw for his beasts. Another part, much smaller, consisted still of the natural herbage though cleared of trees and bushes, and this was mown yearly to give hay for winter feed for livestock ... The third part comprised all that was left of the area under control of the community, and it remained in its natural state of woodland or waste, except in so far as this was affected by grazing and by cutting timber and scrub for building and fuel.

The extent of the arable land was determined by the number of ploughs in the community and it was allotted amongst its members in strips representing a day's work with the plough, so that each man's strips alternated with those of his neighbours as day followed day. The strips varied in size and direction according to the nature of the land, and their position changed with the rotation of the crops. The fallow land was used for common grazing. The meadow land was divided in the same way as the ploughlands, each man getting his strip to mow for hay.

One of Mr and Mrs Orwin's objects is to show that this system, which at first sight looks so impracticable and uneconomic, was really the best system under the circumstances, and did incidentally result in giving everyone an equal share in the advantages and disadvantages of soils and situation. Inevitably it also involved a pooling of the common stock of knowledge which redounded to the general benefit of the community.

The greater part of the volume is taken up with a detailed examination of the only Open Fields still surviving in England as an economic unit, those at Laxton in the county of Nottingham. In addition to the actual survival of the system, an unusual quantity of documents and maps relating to the parish have survived which make it possible to trace the historical evolution of the Open Fields system

with great accuracy. The whole community comes to life – their names, the extent of their holdings, the rents they paid and the daily and yearly round of their activities. But it is the community life itself, the way in which the parish lived as an economic unit, that has most interest and significance for us today. In particular there are two points to emphasise.

In the first place, the government of the Open Fields was (and still is at Laxton) a pure democracy. The administration of the system was in the hands of the manor court, which consisted of all tenants and freeholders and appointed juries and officers to carry out its regulations. Every member of the community, therefore, had a direct responsibility, not only for the decisions of the court but for their enforcement. Or, in the words of the authors, “both legislative and executive functions are vested in the people themselves”. Originally these functions had a far wider scope than the actual farming system. They included the relief of the poor, the repair of the highways and the keeping of the peace. At this point I would like to quote Mr and Mrs Orwin at some length:

All these voluntary services, which everyone might have to perform, have now been merged in larger administrative units, but in the personal responsibility for the preservation of the general good, which still devolves sooner or later upon everyone, Laxton has retained something which has been lost everywhere else in the process of the enclosure of the Open Fields. Its people control their own affairs in the daily incidents of their work, by a scheme of voluntary administration maintained by public opinion without recourse to the law of the land and without the expenditure of a single penny. Encroachments upon the highway and upon the commons, trespass by straying stock, disputes as to boundaries, the cleansing of ditches and watercourses and the cutting of hedges – all of these things, together with the observance of the agreed system of husbandry, are settled here by the community at its own court. In other places recourse must now be had to the law, failing compliance with the instructions of paid officials in whom are now vested the powers once exercised by the community. In place of attendance at the court, of sharing in the responsibility for the regulations made thereat, of serving on a jury charged with the duty of securing the observance of such regulations, the dwellers in other parts of rural England can do no more than cast a vote for the election of someone to represent them on some local administrative body. After holding up his hand at a parish meeting or making a cross on his ballot paper, if, indeed, he do so much, the ordinary man thinks that his responsibility for local administration is fulfilled. Small wonder if his attitude towards it thereafter is one of complete detachment or of unconstructive criticism.

We may therefore say that up to the beginning of the eighteenth century the agricultural system of this country, upon which the subsistence of the whole people depended, was carried on without any State interference, without legislature and without a bureaucracy. And this was a system which had endured for thousands of years. As a system it was destroyed by capitalism – by the substitution of farming for profit in place of farming for subsistence. Capitalism has introduced many improvements of a mechanical and technical nature, and there is no necessity to dispense with these. At Laxton the system has adapted itself to such improvements without any surrender of the communal principle. What exists at Laxton today could exist again in every parish; it does exist in the agricultural collectives established in Spain.

There is a second point to emphasise. The members of a village community such as Laxton not only have a direct personal responsibility for its social institutions, they have also an equal economic opportunity. Again I will quote the Orwins:

Examples of ascent of the agricultural ladder from the bottom rung may be met with commonly enough all over the country, but nowhere else in England will there be found a village community nearly every member of which is at one stage or another in his progress from the bottom to the top. The rate of progress varies, of course, and not everyone reaches or expects to reach the top. But the opportunity is there, and it arises solely from the organisation of farming in the Open Fields. A man may have no more than an acre or two, but he gets the full extent of them laid out in long ‘lands’ for ploughing, with no hedgerows to reduce the effective area and to occupy him in unprofitable labour ... Moreover, he has his common rights which entitle him to graze stock over all the ‘lands’, and these have a value the equivalent of which in pasture fields would cost far more than he could afford to pay.

But however much such a man ‘progresses’ he still remains a responsible member of the community, enjoying exactly the same rights as the poorest cottager.

It is not claimed that the Open Fields system was ideal; poverty and hardship existed, and in the background was the feudal system exacting service rents, payments in kind, tithes, etc. But at any rate the system demonstrates two facts so often denied: that a democracy does not necessarily imply a State or a bureaucracy; and that an industry can be administered by the workers themselves, without capital and without overseers. In short, the history of the Open Fields is a proof of the validity of the main principle of anarchism.

Neil Birrell

Land and Liberty in Mexico

The uprising in Chiapas which began on January 1st 1994 – coinciding with the signing of the NAFTA agreement – immediately confirmed two open secrets. The one was that the Mexican economy was in a mess. Despite the efforts to achieve equal status with the rich nations this top-of-the-form pupil of IMF and World Bank policies suffers from such serious internal divisions that it just doesn't make the grade. The second was the knowledge that an uprising would occur for the actions of the Zapatistas had been long in the coming.

This could in some ways be traced back to the eve of the Olympic Games which were held in Mexico City in 1968. A student demonstration at the time was brutally put down by the military/police killing some 200 demonstrators in the process. Hundred more were imprisoned – in many cases held for up to three years without trial. This was one of the key factors giving birth to the Generacion de 68. Many of those imprisoned were intellectuals coming from a variety of Maoist, Marxist-Leninist and anarchist persuasions. It is in many ways these same people who were the key figures in preparing and executing the Chiapas rebellion.

But in another sense the rising had a much longer gestation period and is firmly rooted in the indigenous people's sense of injustice and their awareness of a cultural identity which has more in common with anarchism than the neo-liberalism of the current regime.

I wish to show in this essay that the culture of the indigenous people of Mexico historically displays many of the traits that would be necessary to any definition of anarchism; that capitalism was an unnatural system forced upon them by a process of colonisation carried out by European statisticians; that this perversion has, down the years but with particular reference to the immediate past, brought into being a crippled development and that the state, being instrumental in this process, has been unable to solve the inherent social problems of the people of Mexico even when occasionally its intentions were benign. I will argue that the root of this continuing problem is traceable to the continuing crisis in Mexican agriculture –

exacerbated today by the forces of global integrationalism – which can only be solved by the people organising themselves into social organisations capable of solving the land problem that the political parties have proved themselves unable or unwilling to deal with effectively.

The historic relationship between the people and the land

Peter Newell in his book *Zapata of Mexico* includes an interesting appendix where he considers amongst other questions the close relationship between the people and the land in this area of the world. The first settlers in the central area around what is now known as Morelos held their fields in common, were largely self-sufficient – an important factor for anarchists I believe – and advanced in their agricultural techniques being extremely productive and producing crops several times per year. It was about 500 years later that the Toltecs – one of the main groups in Chiapas – arrived. Likewise they were skilled farmers cultivating a wide variety of domesticated plants.

These early societies had little concept of landed property. Even when the groups became sedentary the concept of individually or even family owned property was long in the forming. Indeed even as late as the 15th century Newell quotes Parkes as saying:

The mass of the people cultivated the land. Land was not held as private property. Ownership belonged to the tribe or to some smaller unit within it. Each family, however, was allotted a piece of land which it cultivated independently. Certain lands were reserved for the expenses of the government and the support of the priests, these lands being cultivated by the common people.

Clearly government in some rudimentary form had already appeared. Indeed it was firmly established in those areas where the Aztecs held sway where also – as might be expected – the notion of slavery had already made an appearance. Yet even here Newell quotes Lewis Morgan Henry saying that, “The Aztecs and their Confederate tribes still held their lands in common ... land belonged to the tribe, and only its produce to the individual”. Thus the land was, throughout the region, owned in a communistic fashion. This was seemingly so natural that – despite the intervening colonial period – Ricardo Flores Magon was able to write in 1906 that:

... in Mexico there are some four million Indians who lived, until twenty or twenty-five years ago, in communities that held land, water and woods in

common. Mutual aid was the rule in these communities and authority made itself felt only when the rent collector made his periodic appearance ... Each family cultivated its special strip of land, which was calculated as being sufficient to produce what the family required; and the work of weeding and harvesting the crop was done in common, the entire community uniting to get in Pedro's crop today, Juan's tomorrow and so on.

Clearly the notion of government and authority was not absent from all of this. Mayan civilisation as well as Aztec was highly theocratic with a priestly caste which along with any warrior class helped establish in time honoured fashion the trappings of government. However, amongst the Mayans, power was highly decentralised which proved one of the main problems for the conquering Spaniards when they arrived meaning that they had many centres of power to conquer rather than just one head to cut off.

I do not wish to devote much space to considering the role of the Spanish – the story is well known. Briefly the Spanish sought to dismantle the natural social forms they found by stealing land from the Amerindians and giving it out to settlers who, supported by the Church, were charged with socialising the locals with religious propaganda and its attendant values systems. Of more significance, however, was the new attitude to land which was foisted onto the area and which sowed the seeds of the current crisis. Indeed what the World Bank has called the “best example of a bi-modal system” was brought into being by the Spaniards. They introduced two forms of land ownership which I must now introduce and which will be important for the rest of this essay.

The local people were given a degree of independence by being granted tracts of common land called *ejidos* which allowed for subsistence farming. This was no charitable project. Indeed given the continuing class stratification taking place at the time this was of use to the emerging landowners who could make the Indians work on their own land (they owned the Indians along with the land – the system introduced by the Spanish was essentially feudal) but could do so without remunerating them given that the *ejidos* presumably gave them what they needed for basic survival. Still the owners of society were not satisfied. They continued encroaching onto the *ejidos* until they had succeeded in creating the enormous *haciendas*: the other side of the equation that has blighted Latin American agriculture for so long.

Whilst the *ejidos* could still be seen as part of an economic system geared to use-value the *haciendas* were geared solely to the capitalist

notion of exchange-value. European 'civilisation' had successfully been imposed on the naturally anarchic domestic culture.

The role of the state

Although the *conquistadors* were little more than pirates it is vital to realise that the conquest was achieved not simply by a bunch of bloodthirsty sadists. It is well known that infections such as influenza and smallpox were the two major generals in the imperial army and indeed it is arguable that the Americas might never have been conquered without them. In North America smallpox was deliberately introduced in an act of genocide which perhaps has few historical parallels. More importantly it must be emphasised that New Spain was simply an outpost of the Iberian peninsular and subject to direct Spanish rule. As always, therefore, the new social stratifications were introduced by means of state power. The *conquistadors* were controlled by agents of the Spanish crown known as *gachupines* and the Viceroy's rule over the whole show was indeed despotic. Property laws – a new phenomenon even in Europe – were the means by which the *haciendas* came into being. All land belonged to the Spanish crown thus dispossessing the Indian villages. These lands were slowly and progressively seized and after an elapse of time the situation was regularised by the legal system. Thus, over a period of time, the lands which the *conquistadors* originally owned became the new ... covering most of the fertile lands of central Mexico.

Independence in 1821 did little to improve the situation. Legislation like the *Ley Lerdo* (1856), despite the hopes of some of its supporters, failed to improve the lot of the underclasses. Its practical effects were to allow those with wealth to increase their control of land at the expense of the many. It was this situation which sparked off the Mexican revolution.

In the long term this also did little to help the people who gave their lives for it. But it did usher in the new era. One in which at various stages attempts at land reform were made (more than can be said of other countries in the region) but which all ultimately failed to one degree or another essentially because of the involvement of the state in the process which had of course caused the situation in the first place.

The state almost by definition is a conservative force. It presides over a social set-up which has willingly or otherwise allowed it to achieve and keep power. Any tinkering with the basic social infrastructure is

not in the interest of any state given the possibility of apple carts being upset. Thus in the early days when presidents like Obregon and Calles made some moves to redistribute land to the *ejidos* the larger landowners were handsomely compensated and the peasants were subsumed into the clientelistic political apparatus. Instead of land and liberty at best the people got land and the state.

In the thirties Cardenas succeeded somewhat in breaking up the feudal system allowing for Mexico to develop industrially. However the reforms introduced during this period simply organised co-operative farms dependent on the government for finance. The government also successfully controlled the campesinos not only in this economic way but also politically by channelling demands for land and services through organisations under its control by incorporating the *ejidos'* *comisariados* into the structures of clientelism and political patronage. This corporatist approach had the long term effect of creating a dependent, passive agrarian sector – again indicative of the conservatism of the state.

Coming up to date

The land crisis at the heart of the Mexican problem has not been solved although certainly political lessons seem to have been learnt from the past. The EZLN has stated repeatedly since the uprising began that land reform is crucial to their programme. For example on March 1st 1994 they stated that, “we want the great extensions of land which are in the hands of ranchers and national and foreign landlords and others who occupy large plots ... to pass into the hands of our people”.

The crisis in Chiapas is not a local one and it affects the whole of Mexico. This agricultural system that I have traced back to the time of the *conquistadors* is in the words of the world bank, “probably the best representation of a bimodal agricultural system”. That is to say that there is a small number of enterprises which are well capitalised and tied to the governing elite who have over the years dedicated to them state financial and technical resources. On the other hand there are the impoverished many – about 7,000,000 (some 10% of the national and 40% of the rural population of the country) live in conditions of desperate poverty. Chiapas offers us a microcosm of a far larger picture.

In Chiapas the bulk of the population is dependent on agriculture. Over half the population earn less than US\$3 per day. This however,

contrasts with the overall agricultural wealth of the state being in the top three for production of coffee, maize, bananas, tobacco and cocoa.

However this is not because the land is mainly owned by the commercial landowners. Indeed it isn't – over 50% of the land is owned by the *ejidos*. We need to look beyond this simple explanation. A study by ECLAC helps.

11% of agricultural producers in the *ejido* sector are commercially viable – marketing about 90% of their produce. At the other end is a further 31% who, marketing one third or less of their produce cannot obtain the basic necessities of life. The remaining 58% whilst marketing a significant proportion of their produce can still barely eke out an existence on their land. Thus about 90% of the *ejido* farmers are not economically viable.

The neo-liberal solution to all this is well known – those who fail must go to the wall. This reason is tragically flawed for at least two reasons. Firstly, as the process of integration continues (the NAFTA being one milestone along the track) the competitive arena will progressively be that of the global market. Given Mexico's inability to compete here the already small number of 'successful' *ejidos* will fail as will those more privileged landowners, outside the *ejido* section, who traditionally enjoyed state protection but who will, as the natural shelter of the nation-state is taken away from them due to the development of trading blocks, also fall into the arms of bankruptcy. The idea that Mexico can compete with its Northern neighbours due to the cheapness of its labour fails to take into account the capital based nature of the northern agricultural systems. But secondly, once again the above statistics don't paint the full picture and indeed to the extent that they suggest that the *ejido* sector is unproductive they falsify the truth.

The top 11% of the *ejido* do not owe their success to control of large tracts of land. The ECLAC study puts their success down to easy access to bank loans which has allowed them to capitalise the agricultural process. But does this mean that capital intensive farming is naturally superior to labour-intensive farming? The answer is far from clear. According to Barkin the land reforms introduced by Cardenas, insufficient as they were, encouraged most farmers to dramatically improve their production:

Contrary to what many experts predicted, these poor, unschooled peasants were able to increase the productivity of their lands at an average annual rate of more than 3% following the redistribution of the 1930s, doubling their meagre yields to more than 1.2 tons per hectare by 1960. The system put in

place by Cardenismo encouraged the peasants to achieve substantial improvements in productivity by the back-breaking application of inherited cultivation practices, together with the fruits of local experimentation with seeds, fertilisers, and soil and water conservation techniques. Despite this encouragement, however, the peasants were condemned to poverty by a rigid system of state control of credit and the prices of agricultural inputs and products.

Given the right conditions it can easily be argued that traditional farming techniques are equal to if not superior to those which are encouraged by the neo-liberal policies. To this equation we must of course also add the important factor of the quality of the land and the irrigation infrastructure that attends certain areas.

Here we turn away from the *ejido* sector – even that ‘successful’ part of it – to look at the private sector located in the more favourable parts of the state. Soconusco, the region of the state with the most developed commercial sector is a case in point. Here 18% of the population lives on 7% of the best land. The plantations are exchange-value based – that is essentially geared to the international economy rather than satisfying local need. Beef cattle raised for the international market is one of the products raised on the plantations where the average private land-holding is about 8 times that of the average *ejido* holding. At the top of the pyramid are some 150 holdings (with all the built in privileges I have described) which are between 50 and 100 times the size of the *ejido* sector and a further 100 which are more than 100 times the size of the *ejido* sector.

The overall picture therefore is one of where the private sector reap the benefits of an unfair share of the best lands in the state. Such an unlevel playing field cannot be studied with a view to drawing conclusions about the relative merits of two different approaches to the land question that is on the one hand a neo-liberal system geared to an international economy and motivated by profit and on the other hand a labour-intensive system based on popular control and geared towards serving the needs of the people. Clearly the regime as one might expect stands for the former and the uprising seeks to advance the possibilities of the latter winning through. What are the chances of success for each approach?

The Mexican crisis and the NAFTA

The Mexican economic ‘miracle’ is in large part dependent for its analysis on those parts of the economy which are geared towards the

international economy. In considering the issues involved here I wish to bracket certain questions from the outset. Firstly, the argument as to the nature of change in the global infrastructure and indeed whether change is/has occurred/occurring. This is important but I feel the realities of the situation can be discussed without direct reference to the nature of the changes that are taking place. Secondly, we need to confine ourselves to the land question. The arguments we are putting forward therefore may take on at the very least a different hue when applied to other parts of the economy. So having entered these caveats what are the prospects for the two agricultural models we are considering?

Neo-liberal economics is tied to the historical straightjacket of classical liberal economic theory (or at least one interpretation of it) which in part is dependent on a Ricardian notion of comparative advantage. In the hustle and bustle of *political* debate regarding integration (federalism, democracy etc.) the underlying concept of an *economic* structure within which each region seeks a trade advantage is often lost. However, it is the validity of this argument upon which the whole structure is essentially based. As in the words of the former leader of the GATT Sutherland "We are all winners". This might be true if we all had a role to play. So what is the role for Mexican agriculture?

Capitalism suffers from a central economic weakness which is that once scarcity has been solved as a problem it has no project. This whole problem is academically subsumed into the question of price elasticity. Basically if you produce a commodity where need/want has been fundamentally satisfied you are a loser and if you produce a commodity where need either has not been satisfied or can be generated by advertising you are a potential winner. To give an example you won't buy more coffee tomorrow even if the price were to halve (or at least not significantly so) whereas you might run two cars if the cost of running one halved (and you live in a social unit comprising of two potential car drivers).

Agriculture (apart from for example asparagus ferns for Interflora packaging) is largely a price inelastic market. The capitalist project of supplying demand has been solved and so within a capitalist system those involved in this area are redundant. Those who will make a success of this sector will be capital intensive.

This is of necessity a simplistic version of an argument which is just as applicable in its more sophisticated version. Its consequences are far reaching but in terms of Mexican agriculture the results are pretty

stark. Even in this field where the capitalist economic problem has largely been solved we are considering, within the confines of the NAFTA a third world country (for indeed that is what Mexico is) competing with the most capital intensive agricultural system in the world. We are comparing some of the richest lands in the world with farmers dealing with hillsides that never had rich and deep topsoils. This isn't competition, it is a rout. Some figures:

The impact of NAFTA is illustrated by the productivity figures on corn, the single most important crop of the Mexican peasant. While Mexico averages 1.7 tons of corn per her., the United States produces seven tons. One might think that Mexico could remain competitive because its labour costs are only a fraction of what they are in the United States. But this is not the case. To produce one ton of corn in Mexico 17.8 labour days are required, while in the United States only 1.2 hours are needed to produce that same ton of corn!

Figures on bean production, the other historic Mexican staple, also reveal a dismal future for Mexican peasants. Mexico produces about half a ton per hectare, while the US. weighs in with 1.6 tons. In Mexico 50.6 labour days are needed to produce each ton of beans while in the United States, just over half a day of work is required.

Such figures were produced prior to the economic collapse last December. In theory the revaluation of the peso within the global system should make Mexican exports more competitive but the theory goes up the Swanee as I have said given the inelasticity of the products involved. Some advantage will be gained by those farmers already geared towards an exchange-value economy rather than a needs value economy but it will be slight and the whole of Mexican society will have to pay the social cost (unemployment austerity programmes etc.) which even before the crash painted a bleak picture.

The neo-liberal route which has tied its colours to the NAFTA mast doesn't look too promising even from the World Bank's viewpoint, who concluded in a plan that it funded but didn't endorse that the changes to Article 27 of the Mexican constitution relating to land reform "are unlikely to achieve the lofty goals of enhancing productivity and modernising agriculture that are desired by the Mexican government". Instead foreign capital (what there is of it) will invest minimally in the *ejido* sector, given its general marginality and poor quality lands. As a result some *ejidos* will shift to less capital intensive private livestock. Only a few of the "best endowed agricultural areas" will consolidate under large scale entrepreneurs who will concentrate on providing inputs for food processing operations, that is the external market. Given the propensity for the

large landowners to direct their efforts to the international arena staple food under the neo liberal framework will not be produced in sufficient quantities for any degree of autarkic development. Currently the *ejidos* produce two-thirds of Mexico's beans and corn and 70 percent of the rice.

The Search for Alternatives

An alternative to this exchange-value approach has to begin by recognising that the Mexican state's policy of intervention in the campesino economy has failed. It is not because of any inherent 'backwardness' of the *ejido* or because of a lack of initiative on the part of the Mexican peasantry. It is the development strategies of a 'modernising' Mexican state that have created and perpetuated poverty.

As David Barkin has argued "in spite of innumerable government programs created precisely to aid agricultural modernisation, the history of institutional intervention in Mexico demonstrates a definite socio-economic bias against the majority of poor farmers". As we have seen the priorities of the Mexican regime were, as is the case with the statist approach, not geared towards the resolution of economic problems by addressing the agricultural question but rather the putting of political control before economic development and favouring the urban industrial economy at the expense of the agricultural sector.

This further demonstrates that the only solution for Mexico's food crisis is a real agrarian reform, not one where peasants are once again relocated to the country's worst remaining soils, while the best lands are held in larger estates.

It follows, surely, therefore that ultimately, the key to a new agriculture is the empowerment of the peasantry. The *ejidos* and agrarian communities have to have the resources they need and empowerment to find their own solutions. Clearly the question of social and political organisation is crucial here.

Political organisation

In the past the movements against clientelism tended to be spearheaded by national leftist parties, and this centralised control meant that the organising agendas of local campesino organisations were determined by the political strategies of Mexico City-based

parties. There has also been a history of more independent political party organising by campesino organisations that have attempted to pursue their demands through political channels. In Morelos, Sonora, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, campesinos joined with workers and other popular sectors to create home-grown political parties to challenge PRI hegemony. In all instances, the government responded to such political challenges with repression, largely discouraging further attempts by campesinos to organise in this way. Somewhat as a result of this more recent campesino organisations have tended to eschew all political activity all together. By the late 1980s this commitment to political independence and autonomy became an increasingly evident strategy. Fearful of being subsumed by corporatism, the more radical wing of the campesino movement declined to support the opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas in 1988.

Issues of Internal Democratisation

The campesino movement has in recent years become increasingly concerned with issues of internal democratisation. More grassroots involvement and control of the new campesino organisations increased with the fading power of the ejidal comisariados and the emergence of new credit, food distribution, and other service organisations in the mid-1970s. The declining influence of the government-sponsored National Campesino Federation and the creation of new local and regional organisations linked to national networks also created room for a more democratic campesino movement. Also important was the participation of the 'generation of 1968' as technical advisors and academic consultants to the new organisations.

The increasingly democratic character of the campesino movement was also a product of the integration of traditional community organisations into producer networks. This was especially evident in the National Network of Coffee Growers Organisations (CNOG), which was firmly anchored in local and regional organisations that combined the structures of direct and representative democracy. The vibrant democracy of village assemblies and the regular regional meetings of village delegates contrasts sharply with the top-down character of Mexican political institutions and demonstrates the viability and efficiency of bottom-up social structures.

Since the 1970s campesino organisations have made great strides in creating more democratic structures. But many shortcomings

remain. The clientelistic, elitist, and paternalistic behaviour for which Mexican political parties and government agencies are criticised is also found within campesino organisations. Over-dependence on one leader or honcho persists in many organisations, the most prominent case being that of the EZLN and its 'spokesperson' Subcomandante Marcos.

Certainly the EZLN can be seen to be tainted in this way but it was essentially the EZLN which has been instrumental in organising in Chiapas a grassroots movement for democratisation that was at least as important as the electoral aspects of democratisation. In Chiapas, a State Assembly of the Chiapanecan People formed as a loose coalition of citizen groups, campesino organisations, democratic union currents, and NGOs. Responding to the call of the EZLN, a National Democratic Convention was held immediately before the August 1994 elections that brought together human rights groups, leftist academics and scholars, and popular organisations, united in their conviction of the lack of real democracy in Mexico.

Formal institutions such as the National Democratic Convention and the State Assembly of the Chiapanecan people were established largely as a result of the EZLN's call for organised civil society to take the lead in pushing for an up-from-the-bottom process of democratisation. This grassroots movement for liberty took hold at the village level in Chiapas as communities began to challenge the pervasive hold of the caciques in the Altos de Chiapas and to confront municipal authorities with charges of corruption. The rising recognition in Mexico that the deep racial and caste divisions need to be addressed and a re-invigorated sense of indigenous identity have also been important advances in the creation of a more democratic society in Mexico.

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Colin Ward

COLONISING THE LAND: A TWO-PART ENQUIRY

I Official Initiatives

In *The Raven* No. 17, for January-March 1992, I described a series of utopian ventures for re-colonising rural Britain, and their ultimate failure. When official policy explored the same territory it was shaped by this experience. Now I want to describe, firstly the nature of governmental initiatives, and secondly the experience of settlers.

A recurrent issue in British politics all through the nineteenth century was the elimination of the peasantry through the effect of the Enclosure Acts and the amalgamation of holdings. Britain was thought unique in Europe for having no peasants. There is some evidence that pockets of subsistence survived, and that "beneath the simplicities of historiographical orthodoxy, there lies a complex situation whereby small farmers, tradespeople, even labourers, were able to sustain agricultural undertakings greater and more diverse than would seem possible at first. To be sure, few survived solely in this way, agriculture usually being only one aspect of their work".¹ Opposition politics all through the century, especially after the extension of the franchise, led to competition for the landless rural worker's vote. Agitation for smallholdings was linked with the campaign for allotments, resulting in the ineffective Allotments Act of 1887, even though as a future Conservative prime minister noted, the two issues were different: "A Smallholdings Bill aims at creating a peasant proprietary; an Allotments Bill aims at improving the position of the agricultural labourer while leaving him in the position of an agricultural labourer".²

Arthur Balfour's observation was necessary precisely because legislators and the press, with little appreciation of the problems of the poor, confused the two campaigns. A vast, if vague, public

sentiment supported the right to dig and the allotments issue had actually caused a change of government in 1886.³ The Small Holdings Act of 1892, the response to years of agitation, allowed county councils to buy or lease land, to provide fences, roads and buildings, and sub-divide it to re-sell on long-term cheap credit arrangements. Since most would-be smallholders were not in a position to enter into such commitments and simply wanted to rent, it was correctly described as a window-dressing act. By 1908 it had only provided 244 holdings. It was followed by the Local Government Act of 1894 which empowered councils to provide both allotments and smallholdings for re-sale. It too provided for smallholdings.

It was the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908 which, at last, enabled county councils to provide smallholdings for rent. As an American student of the British system, Newlin Russell Smith, put it: "At last they were to assume permanently the landlord's risk, buy land and hold it, and rent it to suitable applicants in holdings of from one to fifty acres. At last councils could compel the supply of land ... They were to build buildings where necessary and, far beyond the buying and the building, they could borrow from national government funds (at rates of 3½ per cent). Exchequer funds were also to be granted outright for the council's use. These grants were to be spent to find out the demand for small holdings, advertise small holdings, draw up detailed plans of buildings for and layout of small holdings", and so on. The Board of Agriculture was given power to appoint commissioners who "were to stimulate the local demand where the county councils were farmer or landlord-ridden and unwilling to assume the responsibility for providing smallholdings ... Power and later funds were provided to the Board of Agriculture to promote and capitalise the organisation of co-operative societies among small holders."⁴

It was in fact a very important piece of legislation. Eighty years later there are English counties where, because of this Act, the county council is the largest single landowner. Some counties have a waiting list of applicants for smallholdings and, as vacancies occur, face the dilemma of whether to create a new tenancy or to rent the holding to neighbouring tenants who claim that their fifty acres is too small for financial viability in the modern agricultural world. Other county councils, to raise revenue, are proposing to sell holdings either to tenants or on the open market. County council smallholdings certainly met a long-felt need. They seldom addressed the aspirations that had surfaced unofficially for a community life on the land.

The First World War was a watershed in the aspirations for re-establishing a peasantry. Not only did it provide a short-lived viability for Britain's depressed agriculture and horticulture as a result of the submarine blockade, but it left an aftermath of desire for a life on the land.

Lloyd George, as war-time prime minister, declared in a speech which, as Newlin Smith comments, "epitomised, stimulated and perhaps exploited" the land settlement idea, that "there must be a scheme for settling the gallant soldiers and sailors on the land ... The vast majority will return to their old occupations. But I am told that a good many of those who have been living an open-air life do not want to return to the close atmosphere of workshop and factory. If that is the case, they ought to have the opportunity of living on the land ..."⁵

In terms of aspirations this was certainly the case. Land came onto the market on a scale never known before. The pre-war introduction of death duties, coupled with the slaughter of inheritors in the First World War, resulted in a situation where, as Howard Newby put it, "in four years between 1918 and 1922 England, in the words of a famous *Times* leader of the day, "changed hands". One quarter of the area of England was bought and sold in this hectic period of transaction, a disposal of land which was unprecedented since the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century".⁶

Not very many of these transfers of ownership actually served the needs of the ex-soldiers for whom the Land Settlement (Facilities) Act of August 1919 was intended. Its provisions, which came to an end in 1926, had not had the anticipated effect, neither through county councils nor through direct provision by the Ministry of Agriculture, even though these included farm colonies with central farms attached, profit-sharing farms and co-operative marketing. Newlin Smith concluded that whether viewed as a demobilisation measure or as a reward to heroes, the results were not outstanding. "Of the millions demobilised only 49,000 applied for smallholdings by December 1920, and only about a third of these had received statutory smallholdings by December 1924".⁷ All the same:

... as a result of this war-induced land settlement, statutory smallholdings were more than doubled in number, and the number of houses on smallholding projects quadrupled ... By 1924-25 the 30,000 holdings of the combined pre-war and post-war estates had about 8,200 houses upon them ... A further 3,600 of council's holdings were 'partially-equipped', usually with buildings only. The remaining 60%, or 18,000, were bare land holdings without houses and buildings and were supplied close to the applicant's established residence.⁸

In Scotland the issue of resettling ex-servicemen on the land was given additional impetus by historical circumstances. The 'Clearances' of the crofters in the Highlands and Islands had left appalling grievances which had not been rectified by the Crofting Act of 1886 which had controlled rents and given security of tenure, but not the return of land to the descendants, and in the period leading up to the First World War there had been a series of widely-publicised land raids.⁹ "Recruitment propaganda for the Great War promised men who enlisted voluntarily that they would get land on their return. Those who fought and survived and wanted holdings were widely considered to deserve them".¹⁰ Land raids by ex-service families hastened the pace of government activity. Four months after the English Act, the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act of 1919 came into force and was rather more emphatic than the English legislation. The Board of Agriculture and Fisheries report for that year reported that there had been extensive land raiding and "feared that seizures in the North and West will increase in number, and will tend to spread to other parts of the country unless a more rapid rate of progress is secured than has hitherto been possible".¹¹

Were the attempts to revive the crofting industry of the Highlands and Islands essentially utopian rather than economically viable? The experience of the Clearances had become myths, cherished by one generation and ignored by the next until, as that generation grew older, it began to understand the dreams and aspirations of its elders:

In those days, among my father's generation, they still talked about the Crofters' Revolt of forty years before, argued about it, fought the old battles again. It's hard tae speak about all that now, all that heat, all that strong feeling, yes – even the fighting spirit – it was all real tae us! We youngsters were brought up in all that. And so we joined in the new upsurge of shouting about 'crofters rights' and so on even though we didna' understand *any* of it. All we were doing was repeating the talk we had heard ever since we were children.¹²

About 90% of the land acquired in Scotland by public bodies as land settlement between 1919 and 1930 was in the crofting counties, and these constituted about 60% of the 2,536 holdings created, and this was largely in an attempt to fulfil "the long-standing cultural and political aspirations of the crofting population".¹³ As to its economic effect:

it has become increasingly apparent that the changing circumstances for ancillary activities have severely affected the economic basis of crofting. The

decline in weaving, fishing and quarrying, coupled with the uncertainties of tourism, means that there is no longer sufficient extra income to support low agricultural earnings from the diminutive croft. The result is that living standards remain low and that heavy out-migration persists.¹⁴

Were these resettled crofting utopias genuine communities? Leah Leneman collected an impressive series of testimonies to the nature of their lives from the children and grandchildren of settlers. Mrs Anne Mackinnon told her that "the first twenty years in the new village, until the outbreak of the Second World War, were very happy for all the new settlers, the majority of whom were hardened veterans from the trenches of France or had been to war at sea. There was a spirit of achievement and victory, living conditions were vastly improved and they settled down in harmony, which gave rise to much spontaneous entertainment and many community activities". May Manson recalled that "there was very little but just struggling I would say ... but they were happy as the day was long and they had their own entertainment you know, and we would have ceilidhs, one visiting the other". Liz Sutherland remembered that "it was very neighbourly and the community life was good", and Catharine McPhee said that "we were so happy together. One helped the other ... Haymaking or gathering the corn, the whole place came together. It was happy times. We were poor, but we were clean, and clean-living, you know what I mean. Yes, we were happy".¹⁵

These recollections, even allowing for the healing power of time, contrast with those of the children of far more affluent pioneers of utopian colonisation of the land (see *The Raven* No. 17).

For the Lowlands of Scotland, both policies and motivations were different. Quite apart from the yearnings of ex-servicemen, the pattern of land-ownership frustrated any aspirations of the local population to make a livelihood in animal husbandry, agriculture or horticulture. As in the Highlands, the landlords "enjoyed the greater comforts to be found in lowland England or the south of France" while employing "a new salaried bureaucracy, equivalent to the English and Welsh land agents and known as the 'factors', to manage their estates. As this revolution became complete, the vast majority of the people who owned no land found themselves at the mercy of whatever form of land-use an owner or his factor considered likely to produce the highest money rents".¹⁶ Every kind of sporting land use, whether deer-stalking, grouse-shooting or salmon fishing, took precedence over farming and growing. Families emigrated to Canada, Australia

and the southern counties of England simply because access to land was easier.

In the counties of Fifeshire, Berwickshire, Kirkcudbrightshire, the Lothians, Dumfriesshire and Ayrshire, land was acquired by the Board of Agriculture for ex-servicemen, with considerable opposition both from land-owners and the Treasury, even though many such sites were far more viable for both animal husbandry and agriculture, because of accessible markets in the cities. Slowly the emphasis shifted away from applicants with specifically ex-service credentials to those expected to be successful in keeping pigs and poultry and in horticulture. Subsequent legislation: the Land Settlement Act of 1934 "supplied funds for the rapid creation of 1,000 smallholdings in the Lowlands of industrial Central Scotland, a policy aimed partly at supplying employment in the area".¹⁷ But the post-war years brought changes in official thinking that "brought the land settlement programme to an end in the 1950s", as well as "the more recent attempts by the government to sell as many existing holdings as possible to the sitting tenants".¹⁸

As in the crofting counties, Leah Leneman sought the recollections of settlers and their children. "Those who had succeeded without previous agricultural experience emerged", she found, "as characters of enormous grit and determination". In spite of the fact that their own holdings were now supporting a third generation, to Robert Kirk and Bob Fraser, "the claim after World War One that ex-servicemen would be able to stand on their own two feet with 'just five acres and a cow' was a terrible con. Not that they thought that those who formulated the policy had been insincere, but rather that it had been lunacy from the start although ex-servicemen had believed what the government told them".¹⁹ The son of another responded that "it will be civil servants who dreamt that up, because they couldnae have been practical men or they would never have gave anybody a holding of four acres, say, to make a living out of". Others of the second generation explained that their fathers survived with a second job, working at Parkhead or on the railway or for nearby farmers. "One holder with only six acres was a stamp dealer and did well out of that". For others, how indeed did they manage? "There were two answers which applied to all the holdings, of whatever size. Firstly, they managed by unremitting back-breaking work. The second answer was the crucial participation of the women and children".

They also relied on each other. As one settler's son, William McNay (who from the age of nine had milked the cows before going to school

or work, and after his return), told Dr Leneman "it was great how they all worked together when you think back on it, like, say, at millin' times and everything ... a sort of 'I'll help you and you'll help me' – there weren't any money come into it". Similarly, "the strong sense of community which holders felt was not, of course, confined to work; 'they made their own entertainment' was a phrase more than one person used in this connection".²⁰

One veteran of the English land settlement scheme described his experience in 1935:

I have worked on the land all my life. In 1915 I joined the army. I was then seventeen, and served in the 2/9 Royal Scots in Ireland and France until I was invalided out in January 1918 with a pension of 28 shillings.

In 1919 the Lloyd George Land Settlement Scheme was started. I applied for land and was interviewed by the Bedfordshire County Council, who were handling the scheme in the district, to see if I was a sufficiently capable man to undertake a smallholding.

I was allotted a plot of five acres, and my two brothers, who were also ex-servicemen, also secured land under the same scheme. We all went in together as partners. Together we had about 23 acres of land and we had about £200 capital between us. In addition, my father lent us £150 to buy carts, horses and implements.

The land we were allotted was grassland which had never been ploughed before. We paid £5 an acre rent and the rates were 15 shillings an acre on top.

There was an enormous amount of work to be done on our holding, but we got down to it and the first year we managed to make enough money to pay our rent.

The second year we made a dead loss. We went on to our holding in a 'boom' year, but the second year, although our expenses were just as heavy, prices 'flopped' and our stuff fetched very poor prices on the market.

For the next three or four years we struggled on. Prices were bad and we continued to lose money, and our capital gradually dwindled and vanished. Because we had no money to spare we could not afford to properly manure the ground, and so gradually the ground became poorer and poorer and crops got less and of poorer quality. But still we had to pay the excessive rent of £5 an acre and rates. This was a crippling burden.

In 1924 we had a bad blow. We had to plough in five acres of spring cabbage because there was no market for it – the price it would have fetched wouldn't have paid for transport to market. This was a dead loss of about £100. In 1926 we simply couldn't pay our rent, with the result that in July, when the crops were ready, the Bedfordshire County Council put the bailiffs in and seized our crops. These were sold and the balance, after deducting the rent and heavy expenses, handed to us. The balance wasn't much. In 1927 the

same thing happened, and again in 1928, and so in 1929 we were bust absolutely. We hadn't enough money or credit to get seed for cropping and so we were forced to give up the land. I got a job on a farm and my two brothers went into a town and got jobs there. Mine was a typical experience of a Land Settlement Scheme. Three hundred of us were settled in this way, and of those only four or five are still in possession of their land. All the rest have gone out like me; have been squeezed out.²¹

In England and Wales the direct intervention by central government in the provision of smallholdings for ex-servicemen came to an end in 1926. But this was also the year of the General Strike, bringing to a head the crisis of traditional extractive and heavy industry that was to be felt even more strongly after the collapse of the American stock market in 1929.

The Religious Society of Friends, popularly known as the Quakers, organises itself through a series of 'meetings' and in 1926 its Meeting for Sufferings and its Watching Committee sought to find ways of alleviating the hardships endured by the miners. It found that some allotment gardens were going out of cultivation as plot-holders lacked even the money to buy seeds and fertilisers, and that men who did cultivate their allotments were penalised for unemployment pay because of the suspicion that they might be selling the produce. "The Friends Committee was enabled to get clear statements from the Ministry of Labour that the small amount of produce which a man could sell from his allotment would not affect the amount of his dole",²² and as a result of appeals the Friends were able to provide seeds, seed potatoes, tools, fertiliser and lime.

By the 1930s the Friends were exploring the possibility of 'Group Holdings' using a piece of land larger than an allotment but smaller than a smallholding:

In 1931-32 many of the unemployed men had intimated that they could very well manage a plot larger than an allotment if some help could be afforded for them to obtain, in addition to seeds, the necessary equipment for small stock. It was felt that, by these means, a man's immediate family needs might be more adequately met and – more important still – he might be helped one step up the ladder leading out of unemployment to independence on the land.²³

This Group Holdings scheme began in County Durham in 1933 and within the next twelve months sixteen groups were started in the North East, and "also took root in South Wales, Monmouthshire, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire, Cumberland

and Northumberland".²⁴ The significance of this Quaker initiative is that it laid the foundations for the longest-lasting government-sponsored venture in collective horticulture, the Land Settlement Association. It was the logical step beyond the Group Holdings scheme, but in the account of one of the participants, its actual origins seemed accidental:

During the summer of 1933 a visitor called at Friends House to discuss a scheme which he had in mind. This was an experiment for moving unemployed industrial workers from Durham, providing them with full-time holdings of about five acres in another part of England, giving them training and providing marketing facilities, with a view to their becoming, in two or three years' time, once more self-supporting citizens. This gentleman (Mr --- now, Sir Malcolm Stewart) said that he had £25,000 which he wished to devote to this purpose, and he asked if the Friends Committee or the Central Allotments Committee would consider such a scheme, provided that the Government were willing to give a similar amount. This proposal was very carefully considered by both of the Committees mentioned ... The Society of Friends being a religious body, it was felt that any relief work should be the concern for a particular piece of service, rather than the management of a very large organisation ... In the course of discussion Mr A.C. Richmond (a member of our Central Committee and also, at that time, Deputy-Secretary of the National Council of Social Service) was consulted, and it was agreed that if the proposal were carried through and Government help could be obtained, a separate body should be set up to carry it into effect ... Ultimately, in October 1933, representatives of the Friends Committee, the Central Committee, the National Council of Social Service and others interested (including Mr Malcolm Stewart) were invited to Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister (Mr J. Ramsay MacDonald) and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr Walter Elliot).

At this interview the Prime Minister expressed himself as being wholeheartedly in favour of the proposal, and invited Mr Elliot to discuss the matter further with our delegation. The matter hung fire for several weeks. However, in January 1934, Mr Malcolm Stewart invited Arnold Rowntree and John Robson to accompany him to an estate at Potton, near Bedford, which he was disposed to buy ... The Minister of Agriculture was then notified that Mr Stewart had fulfilled his part of the bargain, and was asked for the Treasury contribution of £25,000 which it was understood had been promised. The official reply was that, on the formation of an Association, the Ministry would be in a position to state the terms upon which the Government would provide funds.²⁵

Consequently the Land Settlement Association was formed and at its first meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture, the Minister announced his terms:

that money would be available up to £50,000 per year for three years on a £1 for £2 basis, the other to be raised by public subscriptions or grants from various bodies. A strong protest was made against the inadequacy of the Government's offer; but Mr Elliot said that was all he was prepared to provide at the time. It was then agreed to accept the offer and proceed accordingly.²⁶

The Association did proceed accordingly, at a pace which seems astonishing from the standards of fifty years later. It acquired the site at Potton on the basis of a £1 for £1 grant, and was then given substantial grants from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees, and (on condition that the Association established holdings for London unemployed men) further funding was received from the London Parochial Charities Trust. Then the government appointed a Commissioner for the Special Areas to find remedies for unemployment in County Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland and South Wales. The commissioner invited the association "to train and settle a number of men whose prospects of future employment in industry were slender",²⁷ and several county councils leased or sold estates to the Association.

By these various means the Association had developed rather more than 1,000 holdings by the time war broke out in 1939. Other estates containing a total area of 1,113 acres had also been acquired but had not been developed. At that date 440 tenants had been established and 409 men were undergoing training for tenancies.²⁸

The founders of the Association were aware that behind their venture was a history of disappointments, whether in 'utopian' colonies, charitable enterprises or the experiment in settling ex-servicemen on the land. They adopted four fundamental principles:

1. Assistance would be given only to group settlements, not to individual smallholdings.
2. Co-operative methods would be adopted for the purchase of the smallholders' requisites, the marketing of their produce and the general working of the scheme.
3. Settlers, both men and their wives, would be carefully selected. In general, the Association proposed to select men who had successfully cultivated allotments.
4. Adequate training and supervision would be provided.

This last provision also implied that no scheme would be assisted that was not large enough to justify the employment of a full-time supervisor.²⁹

On both the political Right and Left, such plans were seen as

'utopian'. Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, who held the picturesquely-named Scottish office of King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer to the Treasury, had warned of the post-war projects that "I have very grave doubts about the wisdom of the policy, but none as to the cost it is going to throw on the country" and considered "land settlement policy a terrible mistake. As a Treasury man he was naturally appalled at the amount of public money poured into the programme with little hope of return".³⁰ On the Left Wal Hannington, the recorder of the struggles of the unemployed, reported at the very time when the Land Settlement Association was brought into existence, that

In 1935 seven hundred Scottish smallholders, who had been encouraged by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland to become tenants on the land, found themselves running hopelessly in arrears with their rent and repayments of building and equipment loans to the Government. Their plight found expression in a collective petition to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland for remission of their rents and loans. The petition makes sad reading. It spoke of 'good men sinking into difficulties, labouring for less than nothing, becoming discouraged ... men heartily wishing they had never been settled on the land ... their debts piling up, credit being refused them, their families suffering, their stock failing' ...³¹

Hannington's comment was that "those who advocate Land Settlement under capitalism as a solution for industrial unemployment are either blind to the consequence of such a policy, or they are deliberately deceiving the unemployed". And he quoted the view of the Bedfordshire ex-service smallholders, whose experience has been described above, watching the new impetus of the 1930s:

At Potton, three miles from here, the Government are now settling forty miners from Durham and are telling these men that they have a chance of making good. These poor fellows haven't a dog's chance. If experienced men cannot make smallholdings pay, how on earth can these inexperienced men hope to make a go of it?³²

The eager founders of the Land Settlement Association were not deterred by the climate of gloom and, with access to their modicum both of government funding and private capital, set about getting back to the land.

Notes

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3. *ibid.*, pages 57-58.
4. Newlin Russell Smith, *Land for the Small Man: English and Welsh Experience with Publicly-Supplied Small Holdings, 1860-1937* (Morningside Heights, New York, King's Crown Press, 1946), page 77.
5. *ibid.*, page 96.
6. Howard Newby, *Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1980), page 35.
7. Newlin Russell Smith, *op. cit.*, page 110.
8. *ibid.*, page 109.
9. David Craig, *On the Crofters' Trail: In Search of the Clearance Highlanders* (London, Cape, 1990).
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13. John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, 'Land Settlement Policy in the Scottish Highlands: A Study of Land Reform in a Developed Nation' in *Nordia* issue 16, 1982, pages 129-133.
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16. Marion Shoard, *This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for Britain's Countryside* (London, Paladin Grafton Books, 1987), page 73.
17. Gold and Gold, *op. cit.*, page 132.
18. Leah Leneman, *op. cit.*, page 52.
19. *ibid.*, page 186.
20. *ibid.*, pages 187-188.
21. Gathered by Wal Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1937), quoted in Dave Elliot's 'Lessons of Land Settlement' in Herbert Girardet's (editor) *Land for the People* (London, Crescent Books, 1976), pages 93-94.
22. John Farmer, 'The Growing Years - 1930-1970' in *The Gardener's Companion and Diary* (National Society of Leisure Gardeners, 1980), page 16.
23. Joan Mary Fry, *Friends Lend a Hand in Alleviating Unemployment* (London, Friends Book Centre, 1947), page 36.
24. *ibid.*, page 34.
25. *ibid.*, pages 40-42. For other accounts of the origins of the Land Settlement Association see Arthur Richmond's *Another Sixty Years* (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1964) and Peter Clark's *The Land Settlement Association 1934-1974: The Evaluation of a Social Experiment* (London School of Economics, unpublished PhD thesis, 1974).
26. Joan Mary Fry, *op. cit.*, page 43.

27. Land Settlement Association, *An Experiment in Smallholdings* (London, Land Settlement Association, no date but c. 1947), page 3.
28. *ibid.*
29. K.J. McCready, *The Land Settlement Association: Its History and Present Form*, Occasional Paper No. 37 (London, The Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, 1974), page 1.
30. Leah Leneman, *op. cit.*, page 204.
31. Wal Hannington, quoted in Elliot, *op. cit.*, page 95.
32. *ibid.*, page 94.

II

The Experience of Settlers

When the Land Settlement Association was finally founded, early in 1935, having adopted its basic principles, it had now to apply them. The original donor of the estate at Potton had asked that "this first settlement should be used for the transference of unemployed families from Durham" and "the first batch of settlers arrived at Potton on 1st March 1935, where there were thirty holdings completely equipped, introducing a new community of over 150 people".¹ This donor, Malcolm Stewart, had meanwhile been appointed as Commissioner for the Special Areas and instituted land settlement schemes in the Northumberland and West Cumberland Special Areas, to be developed by the LSA with the initial costs borne by the Commissioner. "Mr Stewart also wished the Land Settlement Association to be responsible for purchasing estates in various parts of England, with a view to transferring unemployed men and their families from the Special Areas to those estates".²

Where the Association was not tied by prior commitments it tended to acquire estates in areas with an established tradition of market gardening and with rail access to wholesale markets. All estates were bought with vacant possession since it was axiomatic that no-one should be put out of work by a scheme designed to provide employment. Considerable capital expenditure was needed in the building of houses and stock-buildings, the provision of land drainage and water supplies and of new roads, as well as the building of houses, either singly or in pairs.

A characteristic LSA landscape emerged, recognisable today, even in places disposed of by the Association long before its final closure. There was a small home farm, usually the original farmstead, occupied by the supervisor or advisers, with central buildings for grading and packing of produce, and beyond it about forty holdings of around four to eight acres depending on the original assumptions about horticulture or stock-rearing as the basic activity. The tenants' houses, each with a small front garden, were built when possible on existing roads. Where necessary new access roads were developed on a grid-iron layout. Close to the dwellings were glasshouses, pig sheds and chicken-houses, followed by a patch for fruit and vegetable cultivation, and beyond that an area designed to be ploughed and harvested together with neighbouring plots, should this be necessary. Sometimes there was also a large-scale orchard.

This picture of self-sufficiency and communal marketing was in a very raw state in the late 1930s and the task of the members of the Land Settlement Association was to populate it. Neither they, nor prospective tenants, had a complete freedom of choice. From the Association's point of view, one historian, K.J. McCready, gives an understanding account of the factors involved in selection:

The Ministry of Labour and the Unemployment Assistance Board, whose collaboration was essential to the success of the scheme, were reluctant to see it opened to young strong men who had been unemployed for a relatively short period and whose chances of re-employment were good. They were prepared to continue the payment of maintenance, plus a training allowance, to intending settlers for a period covering at least one complete rotation of seasons, provided selection was limited to married men of middle age who would have difficulty in regaining a footing in industry. The choice of trainees was undertaken by selection committees composed of members of the Executive Committee and one or two local persons of each district. Both men and their wives were interviewed together and separately. After selection, at first only the men were moved to the estates, where they were billeted in central farm buildings whilst their families remained at home. The men were set to work preparing the estate for cultivation in smallholdings. This was regarded as serving two purposes – giving men an immediate personal interest in what would be their land, coupled with physical reconditioning. During the first weeks few men were capable of strenuous labour, but it was found that good food and open air work quickly built up their strength, and that by the end of about three months most of them could do a fair day's work. Once the smallholdings had been established the men could move on to their individual holdings.

It was still, however, the Warden's duty to guide and advise the men in their

daily work, but the aim was to make the men independent in the conduct of their holding as soon as their experience was sufficient. It was realised from the beginning that the social problem would not be easy to solve. Most of the settlers would be townspeople accustomed to live amidst a dense population with shops, schools, churches, hospitals, cinemas and public transport all within easy reach. This they were asked to exchange for what to many seemed extreme rural isolation. It was not easy to assimilate a population of 150-200 newcomers with different habits and accents into the general life of quiet country districts, nor were the newcomers a ready-made community since they were nearly all strangers to one another. Moreover physical facilities, especially schools, were often quite inadequate. Nor was the problem only external. To be a successful smallholder a man must have ambition, enterprise, unremitting industry and a love of the land for its own sake, qualities which his wife must share. They must be prepared to work for long hours for an uncertain and irregular income. A long term of industrial unemployment hardly tended to bring out such qualities.³

Two life-histories from the first generation of tenants illustrate the uneasy link between the personal dreams of selected settlers and the aspirations of their sponsors.

Sam Mills was a miner from South Shields in County Durham. He was a socialist and pacifist, and as a miners' 'official' (i.e. shop steward) he was blacklisted by the colliery management for his part in the General Strike of 1926 and was never employed again, apart from a fortnight when he went down to a mine in Doncaster where, through unfamiliarity with a different kind of coal stratum, he returned home with a crushed foot. With his friend Jim Smith he was active in the Allotments Association and it was this that brought him in touch with the Land Settlement venture. In early 1936 they were both accepted for training at the estate at Foxash in Essex (in the parishes of Ardleigh and Lawford) south of Manningtree. For six months they lived in 'The Men's Hut' and in September that year were joined in a new house by his wife and three children and his mother. His second son George was 11 at the time and remembers the surprise of the Church of England primary school at Lawford "where most of the lessons seemed to be about religion", but then moved happily to the new senior school at Manningtree.

As he remembers, almost all the settlers were mining families from Northumberland and Durham counties, the one exception being an ex-miner from Whitehaven in Cumberland. The allotment-holding background had been useful, since "to have half a chance they had to know something about gardening". Jim Smith became chairman of the Tenants' Committee and Sam Mills became its secretary. In his

son's recollection each family was credited with a sum of £2,000 to set up the holding, most of which was to be worked off over the years. The houses cost about £350 and were provided with a piggery and stock of two batches of 15 pigs at 5-6 weeks old to be fattened for market, and could have about 100 laying chickens. Goats were encouraged. There was a choice of 30-foot or 40-foot greenhouses. As his family perceived it, "the holding was at first about 20 acres, of which 5-6 were around the house and the rest in orchards which the men had planted but which was later taken from them".⁴ The official view on this point was that this fruit was:

... to be managed centrally and worked by the part-time labour of the settlers in return for wages. The idea was that when the fruit trees were established and in full production the area would be let to the tenants to be conducted by them on a co-operative basis. This scheme was eventually rejected for several reasons, perhaps the most important being that it would be wrong to encourage the settlers to revert to a wage-earning way of thinking, particularly with such a speculative crop as fruit.⁵

The significance of the orchard story is simply that it was perceived in quite different ways by the Association and its tenants. There were, of course, other reasons for disappointment. George Mills estimates that about a quarter of the families that arrived at the same time as his left to go back North, as "a lot of people couldn't take it". The LSA's own figures for the pre-war years indicate that a large number of people dropped out during the training period:

Of the total of 1,709 recruits sent to the various estates, 772 or 47% had given up or had been sent back as unsuitable. Out of the 459 men whose reasons for termination of training are recorded, 41% returned home within four months, 14% returned after 5-8 months and 45% returned after nine months or more. The main reasons for leaving were: the physical inability of man or wife to work on the land; dislike of rural life; dissatisfaction with conditions of the scheme or uncertainty regarding prospects for an adequate livelihood. Only 13% had their training terminated by the Association.⁶

It is hardly surprising that in selecting wardens for the new estates the LSA found it very difficult indeed to find people with the unusual combination of management skills, marketing skills and, above all, communication skills. "Decisions were made over the heads of tenants and hit them hard", explained George Mills about his father's experience.

That was why he left, actually. You had to do what you were told, and beyond the beans and the potatoes was this area for long-term crops. One was

asparagus and the other was strawberries, both crops that in the end would promise a good reward. I don't know why but for some reason in came the tractor and they ploughed the whole lot in.⁷

He left in 1938, after two years, and rented a five-acre smallholding while working for the farmer next door.

This was not necessarily a failure from the LSA's point of view, since it was later accepted that:

... it is for the tenant himself to decide on his own future if he wishes to use his holding primarily as an economic stepping-stone to a holding involving greater responsibility and if he succeeds in doing so, the Association will have discharged one of the functions for which it exists.⁸

Many of the children and grandchildren of those Durham migrants live in the district to this day.

Joe Chapman was a plasterer in Hayes, Middlesex, unemployed for eighteen months, who applied for training at an LSA estate in Bedfordshire in 1938. His son explains that "When we were going there he thought he was fulfilling his dream. He thought he was going to stay". But what was his dream? "I think that ultimately he was a romantic communist, probably a utopian socialist before that. What he read was books about *Island Farm* or *I Bought a Mountain*. He would really have liked to take over a deserted island". He was installed in an empty house on the LSA site, and learned from the LSA advisers the secrets not only of horticulture but of goat culture:

By the time we arrived four months later, he was very happy and had all sorts of things to show us, and it was all very exciting. We moved into no-man's-land where there were rows of houses that were empty still, and by the time we left the Land Settlement tractors were ploughing it all up. On the abandoned plots that no-one was looking after, there were the separate glass-houses and cucumber houses and at the end of the plot there was the soft-fruit, but I think that by the time we left they were grubbing those up and bulldozing through the plot. There were lots of advisers who he liked very much. There was a man who advised on pigs and a man who advised on glass-houses, and he enjoyed all that, but maybe had a feeling that it was all going sour. By the end of a year he had cycled over to Suffolk and decided that this was the place and had the great good luck to find this farm where the whole family has been ever since. It seems to me that we lived on tomatoes and goats-milk for years. I dare say that my father was almost unique, apart from his neighbour who was a Welsh miner, in living out his dream of self-sufficiency on the LSA estate. I remember particularly the goats and the Angora rabbits. We all loved it.⁹

The Second World War both denied the LSA its triumphs and spared it the problems of its failures. Those settlers who had failed to adapt to the growers' life moved back to their home regions, where suddenly mining and heavy industry had become important. Those for whom this transition in their lives was the fulfilment of a dream were able to make a living, inside or outside the holding. Food production was a national imperative. The LSA's painstakingly-gathered advisory staff were in demand in a wider field. As land became a vital asset, unoccupied plots were ploughed up and empty LSA houses occupied. Those tenants who relied mainly on stock rearing suffered from the lack of feeding-stuffs but those whose income derived from horticulture prospered. The LSA fell into the direct control of the Ministry of Agriculture:

The Special Areas Act had been repealed, and the Association's role of settling unemployed men on the land was inconsistent with the Government's policy for maintaining a high and stable level of employment ... The 1947 Agriculture Act stated that the Minister's policy towards the LSA was that it should be used as the basis for experiments in different types of farming organisation, particularly in relation to co-operation, whilst continuing to manage the existing smallholding estates. After discussion with the Minister the Executive Committee entered into a legal agreement with the Ministry whereby the debts of the Association to the Government through the old Special Areas Board were liquidated, and the assets passed to the control of the Minister. Since then the LSA has acted as the agent for the Minister ...¹⁰

Post-war policy was to restrict applicants for holdings to people with proven farming experience and with access to enough capital to maintain both the holding and the family until they were self-supporting. A government committee, chaired by George Brown MP, was convened in 1947 to enquire into the LSA and reported in 1950. It found among other things that "the principle of compulsory co-operation as applied to the marketing of smallholders' produce and the purchase by smallholders of their requisites under the Association's scheme was sound". But it also found that "although the Association had encouraged the formation of tenants' organisations, the relationship between the smallholders and the Association was unsatisfactory in many respects".¹¹

From its headquarters in Cromwell Road, South Kensington, the Association's staff attempted to adapt its activities to modern conditions of horticultural marketing. The era of multiple retail supermarkets, and subsequently out-of-town hypermarkets, was still ahead. As to utopian aspirations, it is worth listening to the testimony

of LSA tenants from this generation who accumulated the accepted experience and the modicum of capital to be accepted. One was Tim Meadows, who wrote:

There are so many apparent answers to the question 'Why do you work on the land?' that it took some time for the full implication to sink in. It is really a question of what I want out of life ... I determined to do a job I enjoyed for its own sake and not for the money involved. No one works on the land because of its financial attractions. Each year brings its problems, and what was right one year could be disastrously wrong another. For the discerning eye there is something new each day, which cannot be said about most jobs; and therein lies the challenge and the appeal of the land.¹²

Another was Ted Dunn, a veteran of the Friends Ambulance Unit in the Second World War who became an LSA tenant in Essex in 1948 and has been there ever since. His son is a member of the growers' co-operative that took over the closure of the Association in 1983. In spite of his pioneering experiments in organic growing, following the precepts of Sir Albert Howard, and watched with scepticism by his neighbouring growers, Ted Dunn is more readily associated with a whole series of books he has edited or written on the preconditions of world peace.¹³ Pinned down on the question of whether his LSA estate at Foxash could be considered to be a community, he replied:

It was a community of individuals, as you might expect. The original settlers had everything against them. The organisation was very poor. The soil was poor. The markets were against them ... My first main recollection from a community point of view was of harvesting ... because in those days you had ten or twenty of us who would all join in together to stook, thrash and all the rest. It was that kind of community. That only lasted for a few years actually, for then the combines came in and all you did was to pay the contractor ... There were also the monthly meetings, and through having the central store, that was a wonderful place for meeting other people ...¹⁴

In 1963 the Minister of Agriculture appointed a committee under the chairmanship of the geographer, Professor M.J. Wise, to review and report on the statutory provision of smallholdings, both those established by county councils and those of the LSA. The LSA report, submitted in April 1967, concluded that the concept of the Association's estates as "the first step on the farming ladder" was no longer relevant, and that its role as an experimenter in agricultural co-operation had not been fulfilled since its board was appointed by government and not by the tenants and since they themselves were constrained by involuntary contractual obligations.¹⁵ Two

alternatives were offered to the Minister, summarised by K.J. McCready:

Scheme 'A' maintained basically the existing arrangements, with the LSA continuing to act as an agent for the Minister. The Association would continue to provide the main propagating and marketing services, which the smallholders would be obliged to use at economic rates. All other services would be eliminated as quickly as possible, and the LSA would encourage voluntary co-operation amongst the tenants in order that responsibility for organising cropping and for propagating and marketing should be taken over by these new organisations.

Scheme 'B' was essentially a proposal for transforming the existing Scheme into a group of independent estate co-operatives which would be federated under a central co-operative. During a transitional period the detailed plans would be drawn up by the tenants' Committees for organising these new co-operatives, and at the end of the period control of the estates would be handed over to them, whilst the Minister retained ownership and the right to select the tenants.¹⁶

When the Minister of Agriculture of the Labour government finally responded to the Wise report, he rejected both options and decided that the LSA should continue in its existing form which had "achieved a striking success in the marketing of the produce grown by some 500 smallholders on widely scattered estates" and which in his view offered "better prospects for the tenants than the Wise Committee's alternative of creating independent co-operative units".¹⁷ He agreed, however, with the Committee's recommendation that three more estates, Oxcroft, Elmesthorpe and Harrowby, should follow the four in the north of England which had already been sold off by the Ministry.

Meanwhile, the pattern of retailing in Britain was rapidly changing. The concept of local independent greengrocers and fruiterers buying in the nearest wholesale market, dominated by Covent Garden in London, was being replaced by direct purchasing by multiple chain-stores making their own deals with suppliers for selling among a multitude of groceries in high street supermarkets and out-of-town hypermarkets, with a high degree of pre-packaging and standardisation.

The LSA management took the best possible marketing advice. The mixed approach of poultry, pigs and vegetables had long since been abandoned in favour of intensive production of salad crops and soft fruit. Every tenant found that the road to success was an increasing area of heated modern glasshouses or plastic tunnels, and to adapt to

ever more rigorous standards of quality control. The LSA contracted directly with large multiple stores and supplied a small range of salad crops in vast quantities – lettuces, tomatoes, celery and radishes and a few others for firms like Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, the Co-op, Tesco and International, as well as for the ordinary wholesale trade. The demands of the big buyers dominated growers' activities. One explained that "Marks & Spencer insist on a California-type lettuce, which means a large, very firm round heart with no outer leaves, while Sainsbury's are happy with a smaller-hearted crisp lettuce enclosed in four or five outer leaves".¹⁸

By the early 1970s the average earnings of the Association's tenants were well above the average agricultural wage. For some tenants, growing provided a good living. But this was subject to several qualifications. Concentration on a few, high-quality crops brought a particular vulnerability. Some estates were more successful than others, and even on the same estate some tenants were more skilful, more hard-working or even just luckier than others, or had been able to invest more in glasshouses and equipment, as encouraged by the Association's central office. In any case, the income represented a *family* wage, for it usually resulted from the labour of the tenant and his wife, and often their children. Earnings which depended on being able to pick, trim, wash and package thousands of heads of celery in the early morning because one of the multiple stores were having a Celery Week, could not have been achieved otherwise.

The later 1970s brought hard times for LSA tenants, as to the growing industry in general. They blamed a variety of factors: the enormous increases in the price of heating oil after 1973, the ever-increasing competition from imports, especially from the Netherlands where smallholders benefited from subsidies (including one on the cost of fuel for heated glasshouses), the escalating costs of everything, including high interest rates on the bank loans they had been urged to incur. Because of the national pooling of incomes between estates, the more successful growers blamed the less successful ones, especially those who had left the Association with a mountain of bad debts. Most of all, perhaps, they blamed the organisation itself for its high overheads and for the rising standard charges which each tenant was obliged to pay. The Ministry of Agriculture commissioned two separate reports, one from the Central Council for Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operation and another from PA Management Consultants. The management report exonerated Head Office, finding that, given the rules, the costs and

charges were reasonable. The marketing report echoed the view of Professor Wise's conclusions that the element of compulsion was at the root of all the Association's troubles.

The end of the Land Settlement Association was announced, just as Parliament went into its Christmas recess in December 1982. The then Minister of Agriculture, Peter Walker, told the House of Commons that tenants should take over responsibility for marketing their produce, and that this should happen as soon as possible. The decision covered the remaining ten estates, comprising 3,900 acres with about 530 tenants, as well as a staff of about 300. Tenants were to be allowed to purchase their holdings at half the current market price.¹⁹ But the Ministry cut off any further short or long-term finance.

At Newent in Gloucestershire, where the 57 five-acre holdings had always been most sought-after, would-be purchasers were told by the local managers of both Lloyds and Barclays banks that loans would not be forthcoming. At Newbourn in Suffolk, few tenants could find the money to purchase. Keith Stainton, the local Member of Parliament, found that up to a quarter of tenants were in receipt of social security Family Income Supplement.²⁰

This was in the year which Sir Brian Hayes was to call the *annus mirabilis* of British farming, since farmers' total net incomes rose by 40%.²¹

Some of the growers cut adrift simply moved out, and their homes and land were sold on behalf of the Ministry during the property boom of the 1980s. The plain little houses were expanded into ranch-style homes and the land was either neglected or flourished as paddocks for horse-owners. But at the two estates at least, genuine co-operatives were formed like Foxash Growers Ltd in Essex or Newbourn Growers Ltd in Suffolk. The members continued to produce in an extremely specialised way for the retailing supermarkets and at their behest the produce is picked in the early morning, washed, graded, trimmed and packaged and provided with the seller's label, bar-code and sell-buy-date, ready for the truck. When questioned, the co-operative members, heavily dependent on bank loans and at the mercy of policies of a handful of big customers as well as that of the ever-present possibility of crop failures, claim that they are more content than in the days of their dependency on the Land Settlement Association.²²

But these survivors felt bitter about the abrupt closure in 1982 and started legal proceedings against the Ministry claiming that the LSA had been falsely presented as a sound investment and had run tenants into debt by selling produce at too low a price. "After several reports

and inquiries by experts and protracted legal action, a date was fixed for the case to go before a judge in October 1991. Then the Ministry of Agriculture came up with an offer of £6.5 million compensation, cancellation of tenants' debts and all costs – while continuing to deny liability".²³ The solicitor for 292 of the tenants accepted the offer, since the risks of testing the argument in court were too great.

However, by 1994, ten of the Newbourn Growers who had formed a co-operative to recapture the market, were defeated by cheap imports. The local paper reported that "large areas where once a thriving community of families worked the land now look like a bomb site. Acres of glasshouses stand idle, many derelict, overgrown. Clearing the glass costs £10,000 an acre, and with 25 to 30 acres of glass on the LSA site, this means a £250,000-plus bill". They want to sell up, but the local council, in pursuit of its planning policy, has banned any new building and wants the site to retain its horticultural character. Nick Packer, a grower for seventeen years, remarked that: "There's just no future in horticulture; it is obsolete and we can no longer make a living at it. They want our holdings to be left as museum pieces, but without the curator's wages".²⁴

This was the messy end of the longest-lasting largest-scale venture in getting 'back to the land' in Britain, as well as the only one, apart from its precursors in re-settling ex-servicemen, to be sponsored and funded by government. Could it be called 'utopian' and could its estates be described as 'communities'?

Undoubtedly its Quaker founders were seen as utopian even though they were conscious of experimenting, step-by-step, with measures to relieve unemployment. In ordinary political circles very few alternatives other than Keynesian public spending programmes were being advocated in the 1930s. There is also some evidence that the men who were willing to commit themselves and their families to this leap into the countryside, far from home, were people who cherished the ideal of a return to the land. It is doubtful whether many were inspired by the concept of communal living. But as far back as the Clousden Hill Free Communist and Co-operative Colony, the pioneers, as we have seen, were warned by Kropotkin "that barrack-like living conditions should be avoided in favour of combined efforts by independent families".²⁵ The Land Settlement Association was, in retrospect, an attempt, and the largest ever made in Britain, to accommodate utopian ideals of recolonising the land, with the harsh realities of ordinary life. For its tenants there were few alternative choices.

Notes

1. Joan Mary Fry, *Friends Lend a Hand, in Alleviating Unemployment* (London, Friends Book Centre, 1947), page 47.
2. *ibid.*, page 46.
3. K.J. McCreedy, *The Land Settlement Association: Its History and Present Form*, Occasional Paper No. 37 (London, The Plunkett Foundation for Co-operative Studies, 1974), pages 6-7.
4. Recollection kindly provided by George Mills, Clacton, Essex, 11th November 1991.
5. K.J. McCreedy, *op. cit.*, page 13.
6. *ibid.*, page 9.
7. George Mills, *loc. cit.*
8. *Land Settlement Association*, Annual Report for 1944- 45.
9. Recollection kindly provided by Martin Chapman, Hitcham, Suffolk, 18th November 1991.
10. K.J. McCreedy, *op. cit.*, page 23.
11. *ibid.*, pages 26-27.
12. Tim Meadows, 'Why I Work on the Land' in *Anarchy*, Vol. 4, No. 7, July 1964, pages 203-205.
13. Ted Dunn (editor) *Alternatives to War and Violence* (London, James Clarke & Co., 1963), *Foundations of Peace and Freedom* (Swansea, Christopher Davies, 1978).
14. Recollection kindly provided by Ted Dunn, Lawford, Essex, 17th October 1991.
15. Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Small Holdings (Professor M.J. Wise, Chairman), *Report, Part II: Land Settlement* (London, HMSO, 1967).
16. K.J. McCreedy, *op. cit.*, page 36.
17. Statement by the Minister of Agriculture, House of Commons, May 1968.
18. Bob Norman, 'LSA Search for Crops to Suit the Supermarkets' in *The Grower*, 6th September 1979, page 29.
19. Statement by the Minister of Agriculture, House of Commons, 1st December 1982.
20. Colin Ward, 'Growing Pains' in *New Society*, 20th January 1983, pages 107-108.
21. 'Farmers have record year' in *East Anglian Daily Times*, 6th January 1983.
22. Interviews, August-December 1991.
23. 'Bitter Taste to £½m Payout for Growers' in *East Anglian Daily Times*, 2nd August 1991.
24. Colin Ward, 'Fringe Benefits' in *New Statesman & Society*, 25th November 1994.
25. See note 23 to Colin Ward, 'Colonising the Land: Utopian Ventures' in *The Raven*, No. 17, Jan-March 1992.

The End of the Kibbutz Movement?

For anarchists and old fashioned socialists the kibbutz movement in Palestine, which preceded even the collectives in revolutionary Spain in July 1936 was an example of how people could live and work together without the state, the boss and the incentives of capitalism. Alas, it would appear that the kibbutzim now exist only in name in that they have abandoned all the values and objectives that made them unique.

We reprint below part of an article on 'Privatisation and the Israeli Kibbutz Experience' first published in the *Journal of Rural Cooperation* (1994) as published in the spring 1995 issue of the *Bulletin of the International Communal Studies Association* (Yad Tabenkin, PO Ramat-Efal 52960, Israel) under the name of Amir Helman with the title 'Reforms and Changes in the Kibbutz'.

The complete solidarity and responsibility of the 'extended family', which characterised the original kibbutz, is now changing in favour of higher individual's freedom and responsibility for his own consumption and production. The two main developments in the kibbutz occurred both in the consumption and production spheres.

1. *Consumption*: increasing of the personal budget (decreasing the collective expenditures); increasing the individual's freedom to choose; transferring of the responsibility for members' needs from the collective to the families and individuals.

2. *Production*: separating the firms (production branches) from the community; building of 'responsibility (or profit) centres'; managing according to the rules of the free competitive market; introducing the new institution of the board of directors; recognising and legitimising hired labour, adding of outside partners, etc.

All these moves have the same direction: decreasing the level of participation, togetherness and mutual guarantee and the full responsibility of the society for each member as a consumer and producer.

The main reforms are:

1. *Changing the methods of distribution and allocation of consumer goods*
The kibbutz was well known for its free distribution and quota (or 'norm'), which were the two unique methods supplying 85% of the goods and services. The office holders, the committees and the

general assembly (the collective) were the 'institutions' which decided what to buy and how much. During the last few years there has been a strong tendency to increase the private personal budget and to let each member decide according to his own preferences. In some kibbutzim the personal budget (which is quite similar to the usual 'wage') is now over 30-40%, and in one kibbutz the new decision is to increase it to almost 90%, which means that only 10% will be allocated according to the two special methods of the 'old' kibbutz.

The justification for these changes is to increase the member's freedom, and to avoid waste, to enable saving, i.e. to increase efficiency.

2. Changes in the role of children houses (at night)

After many years, in which all the kibbutz children (aged 0-18) lived in their own houses, they now live with their parents. The pressure of the families (which also meant huge investments in enlarging all the flats) is part of a broader tendency to emphasise the family as a basic and dominant unit in the kibbutz.

3. Decreasing the mutual guarantee

The kibbutz was characterised by its total mutual guarantee, for each person inside the kibbutz, and also among the kibbutzim. Every member knew that he would always 'get according to his needs' and every kibbutz, even if very poor, could keep the same standard of living as all the other kibbutzim. The economic crisis cast doubts on the possibility of keeping to the ideal of complete mutual guarantee. Several strong (rich) kibbutzim are now trying to rid themselves of their obligation to poorer kibbutzim, which depend on them for their success. Their claim is that in order to force the weak kibbutz to increase its efficiency, it should not rely on the commitment of others.

4. Strong pressure to establish 'pension funds'

The founders of the kibbutz took it for granted that society would always take care of all its members. The veterans used to say: 'Now we work for our children and in the future they will work for us'. But now, when the veterans are old, they are not so sure about this. There are many young people who prefer to leave the kibbutz, and members feel they need to ensure their own future, like all other people in the country, by a formal contract. Individuals want to ensure that they don't have to depend on the good will of the collective.

5. Legitimation for a long vacation

In the past, a full membership in the kibbutz meant a permanent dependence on kibbutz arrangements and compliance with the work

co-ordinator. Formally, everyone could be transferred to every job, any time, and the allocation of the workforce was the prerogative of the collective. Today, almost everyone has his own permanent job, and only from time to time one has to participate and contribute to the general effort by serving (in rotation) in the dining room, the kitchen or as night guard. Much more important is the phenomenon of 'long vacation' from the kibbutz. An individual member can require time off from the kibbutz, usually for one year, with no obligation on either side: living and working outside the kibbutz, he earns his own money and he chooses his job. A member can ask the kibbutz to stay out even longer, and has the freedom to return home any time.

Many members, mainly young and single, are happy to take the opportunity to travel around the globe, to earn private money, to become acquainted with other lifestyles and to introspect.

6. Tendency to legitimise private property

In order to keep to the kibbutz ideal of equality, a member is not allowed to have any private property or any outside sources of income. An important ideological test took place in the 1950s when hundreds of kibbutz members received restitution payments from Germany. There was a unanimous stand on the member's duty to hand over all restitution moneys to the kibbutz. In spite of the success in this early test case, dissatisfaction increased during the 1970s. The ideal did not seem as strong any more and the younger kibbutz generation was not so keen to avoid the issue of private property.

Research about kibbutz members' attitude to private property revealed a large gap between the 'ideological line' and member attitude. Only 25% still believed in the pure principle of avoiding any private property; 70% have some private money and 84% predict that the kibbutz will gradually become even less equitable in the future. The conclusion from this research was:

The amount of money members own privately is quite small and cannot change their basic standard of living, which is still dependent on the kibbutz income. Thus perhaps it is the desire to have something of one's own that matters, rather than a real income need. (Helman et al, 1989, page 74)

All these changes are characterised by increasing individual member's independence: he has more money for his personal budget, more responsibility for his children, less participation in mutual guarantee programmes and legitimation for a long vacation and private property.

This shows a strong tendency to give up the unique rules of the kibbutz, and to adopt standards of the surrounding society.

John Myhill

Land is my Life

*'All property is theft'*¹

But what do you do when you inherit a hundred acres, which your family have farmed for two hundred years? When the grand old trees, planted by great-grandfather, are personal friends? When to sell is to sell-out to huge landowners who turn soil into desert, pollute waterways and increase unemployment. Let me tell you what I did and why I remain convinced that land use is the key to an anarchist community.

Division into working units

The Chartist land movement of the 1840s aimed to re-settle urban families on six-acre plots. I had an aunt and uncle who survived for forty years on less, so I attempted to rent the land out in small parcels: ten acres for a co-op, forty acres for an organic horticulturalist; but accommodation was difficult and the schemes fell through. I still believe that Henry George's² Land Tax could be used to bring about the Chartist ideal, but it would have to be combined with planning legislation. (Where land tax has succeeded it has tended to speed up factory development and non-sustainable land use, rather than organic labour-intensive small units.) Anyone wanting to work co-operatively on the land should first gain practical experience, and find like-minded friends. The land is the easiest part of the equation, as land values fall and fewer folk desire the hardship of horticulture. Successful revolutions have always depended upon those with military experience: and land use revolution depends on some anarchists having practical experience.

Organic farming

Being unable to organise the sharing of the land immediately, I set about attempting to grow vegetables organically. I had some very basic knowledge of farm machinery from working in the modern

chemical agribusiness, and confidence in my organic gardening skills, but I greatly underestimated the problems of scale. For example, tons of 'green manure' can turn into sludge rather than compost, whereas small quantities had always done well. If my ten acres of carrots had all succeeded, how would I have harvested them all, let alone marketed them? The cows (manure providers) multiplied well, but we became so attached to them that they soon became pets and I moved from vegetarian to vegan.

Thus the grand objective of proving that organic methods can be profitable had to be left to 'green capitalists' (if such a combination is possible). The real objective must be to defend the land against those who would exploit it to death. That defence depends wholly upon an informed majority changing its patterns of consumption. The health of the people and the health of the planet are inseparable.

Selling ethical products

The farm shop was intended to bring customers to the farm by offering ethical cleaning products at wholesale prices, but even this could not entice people away from their supermarkets. Novelty ensured that sales started well, but it was too intimate and co-operative for those saturated in the privacy and anonymity of the single checkout.

Similarly I tried to encourage people to take holidays on the farm. Surely urban anarchists would appreciate a time of rural relaxation. Whilst they discovered the peace of the countryside they could provide a market for my vegetables! Again, novelty drew a few at first but most missed the excitement of daily urban conflict.

Co-operation

Many farm jobs require great physical strength, whilst others require considerable mechanical expertise. Having neither, I have been dependent on others who were willing to accept exchange of services rather than payment of cash. I preferred this to a formalised LETS scheme; but beware, informality can backfire. One of my helpers felt that I owed him more than I was able to pay. He made a false accusation against me which ended me in prison until the courts eventually discovered the truth.

Co-operation depends on trust, and trust is always a high risk. It is the widespread unwillingness to take that risk that keeps the moribund capitalist system in existence.

Saving the planet

Seven thousand broadleaf trees, of ten native species, was probably the most obviously worthwhile thing to do with fifteen acres spoilt by chemical agriculture. Perhaps that would have been the best action for the whole farm but, once done, it rules out all other possibilities for the next hundred years. Decisions like that require the confidence of 'developers' who are certain that they know what is best. Modernism, as the universal application of apparently rational principles, is a disease I have escaped. Such long-term decisions on land use need to be taken by an involved community, not left to the increasingly small number of landowners.³

Nature conservation and public access

The anarchist revolution must take place where most people live. In England that means change in the cities. Re-settling urban people compulsorily in the countryside, as in Mao's China, shows state power at its worst. Capitalism re-settles only the wealthy, whilst the poor farm workers are driven into the cities. Idealists will always seek the 'Good Life' but the simplicity of their way of life will always be bourgeoisified and perverted into marketable products for the fleecing of the gullible.

Land, left to itself, passes through fascinating stages. I watch, like Gilbert White of Selborne, and note the changing flora and fauna from year to year. No stable eco-balance has become established, but the chaotic⁴ rise and fall of dominant species is fascinating. This year it is butterflies, crickets and ragwort – previously thistles and birds of prey, rabbits and orchids – have risen and fallen, like Rome, like Thatcherism.

I wanted to step back from horticulture, to cease attempting to control nature, to leave her to herself and try to learn wisdom from her anarchy. It was not that I had tried to control her and failed, though my neighbours (good corn and sugar beet chemico-capitalists) must surely think so.

Rather the Protestant Ethic of my childhood compelled me to be in control, to act responsibly, to try and extract value from my inheritance (the Parable of the Talents). Yet I could never reconcile this exertion of unequal power with my anarchism.

Ironically when I let go, became an observer rather than actor, peasant rather than farmer, and let the land own me, there appeared

subsidies from the EC and Countryside Commission paying me to do what I had really wanted to do from the start.

Don't get me wrong, I am no conservationist. I have no scheme to save species from extinction in some time-warp museum. Many conservationists are as arrogant as the agribusiness men they seek to circumvent. I have no certainties about what must be done to save the countryside or the elephants or whales, but I know that human beings can be relied upon to get it wrong and the less we interfere the better (and that includes my rare-breed cows, who are not there to save a genetically rare bloodline but because they are beautiful individuals and I love them, romantically and sentimentally).

In the same way, public access to the countryside does not lead to more people appreciating and respecting the magic of nature. On the contrary, here it has led to increased vandalism and the use of isolated spots for drug taking. People must be allowed to roam, not from an absurd faith in the educative power of beauty but because it is their right. Every increase in the leisure time of the working classes has been matched by state restrictions on their freedom of movement (most recently seen in the Criminal Justice Act of 1994). We must unite to reverse this trend and never be distracted by the tiny number of 'permissive footpaths' like mine, which governments use to hide the more general erosion of our freedom.

Self-realisation through hard manual labour⁵

Experience has taught me that there is no abstract value in hard work. It is certainly not a means to wealth, which depends entirely on luck or corruption, but the physical labour of growing food, the direct involvement in seasonal change, the dependence on weather rather than the state, has made me more content. The solitude, silence and exhaustion all contribute to make social contact with others a positive delight. There is great joy in seeing the good in other people, but that joy was far harder to find when I was employed to constantly interact with people. If we are to co-operate as anarchists we must first wear out our egotism in the wilderness. For me, peasant labouring has been profoundly helpful towards this goal.

I shall never be a craftsman⁶ as that requires dedication of hand and eye to a single skill from early youth, but there is pleasure in becoming at one with the soil. We belong to the land, not the land to us. I am not the caretaker of this farm, conserving it for the next generation. The farm guides me and gives me strength to continue the struggle

against the few who are taking the freedom of the many.

To sum up, an anarchist society would make land available for those who wanted the peasant way, land would be farmed without chemicals, trees and wild nature would flourish and the city dwellers would feel fully involved in the natural cycles of the land. Utopia? I doubt it. Seeing how difficult it is to realise these goals on a hundred acres, I can imagine the heartache involved in trying to achieve this for a whole country. But there will never be an anarchist society until the mass of the people *use* the land, co-operating together to discover *how*. Try to think in terms of *use* rather than ownership.

Notes

1. P.J. Proudhon, *What is Property* (William Reeves, 1st edition 1898).
2. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (Everyman, 1st edition 1880).
3. J. and K. Janaway, 'New Leaves' in *Movement of Compassionate Living*, quarterly from 47 Highlands Road, Leatherhead, Surrey.
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5. Leo Tolstoi, work pervades his novels and tracts.
6. H.J. Massingham, *The Wisdom of the Fields* (Collins, 1945).

Richard Boston

Allusions to Grandeur

Le Facteur Cheval is not well known, even in France, and when you mention his name people find it funny. Postman Horse sounds a bit like Jacques Tati's bicycling postman in *Jour de Fête*, but he was a real man and the reason why he was called by this name is quite simple. Just as the Douanier Rousseau had worked as a Customs Officer, Joseph Ferdinand Cheval (as unusual a name in French as Horse is in English) was *un facteur*, a postman.

Certainly he worked like a horse. "If anyone wants to show more determination than me, they'd better get on with it", he said. He was born in 1836 in Charnes-sur-Herbasson (in the Drôme, east of the Rhône, north of Romans-sur-Isère, which is on the way from Valence to Grenoble). After a childhood in the extreme poverty prevalent in agricultural France of the time, he worked for a baker, knocked about a bit, was virtually a tramp for a while, and there are some years unaccounted for. He seems to have spent most of his time daydreaming.

In 1869 he became postman for the village of Hauterives, about five miles from where he was born. His mail delivery every day was a 20-mile round trip on foot over rough country – hard going, but still giving plenty of time for daydreaming. When he was 40 and, like Dante, in the middle of the road of life (*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*), he tripped over a stone. What the apple was to Newton or the kettle to James Watt, this stone was to the postman.

Cheval looked at it and was intrigued by the shape. He thought about the stone, returned to the spot and found other stones with even more curious shapes, eroded by the elements over centuries. In river-beds and on the hillsides, he found more and more stones, fossils and shells from the sea-beds of millennia ago. He put them in his pockets, then he carried them in bags. And when there were too many for the bags, he left them in heaps and collected them later with his wheelbarrow.

This delightful piece was first published in the *Guardian* weekend magazine, 19th August 1995, and is reprinted in *The Raven* with the kind permission of the author.

That wheelbarrow was the only help he ever had.

His thoughts seem to have run along lines something like this: these stones have curious shapes. They were made by nature. If nature can make curious shapes, then so can Ferdinand Cheval. And after all those years of dreaming, the time had come to turn dreams into reality. Events were given a further shove by the death of his first wife and his second marriage in 1878. The second Madame Cheval was illiterate (the illiteracy rate was such that one wonders who read or wrote the letters the Facteur walked so far to deliver). Be that as it may, she had a small dowry which the Facteur spent on buying a plot of land. On this, in the same year that his daughter was born, he began to build in 1879.

He was a small man, with a rather distrustful expression, very tough and (as he said) very, very determined. "I was the first to agree with those who called me insane", he said. "I was not a builder, I had never even handled a bricklayer's trowel. I wasn't a sculptor, I'd never even used a chisel. I knew nothing about architecture and it is a subject on which I am still ignorant."

Every day started with the 20-mile postal round. When the day job was done, he got down to work on the Palace, Le Palais Idéal, for eight or more hours, sometimes with another few hours' walk to collect stones from his heaps. He worked by candlelight way into the night, and often got up at two or three in the morning.

In 1896 he retired as postman at the age of 60. From then on it was building full-time. In 1905 an article in *Le Matin* for the first time brought his work to the attention of those outside the village, but the final stones were not laid until 1912. Single-handedly, he had created an edifice 26 metres by 14, and nearly 11 metres high. He had used 3,500 bags of lime and cement and it had taken him (as he recorded on a wall) 10,000 days, 93,000 hours, 33 years. Clearly his challenge to anyone to show comparable determination was in no sense an idle one.

A rest was by now surely well earned, but at the age of 74 he started work on an enormous family vault in the village cemetery, which he managed to complete before he was finally laid to rest in it in 1924 at the age of 88.

Rather late in the day, he was discovered by André Breton and became greatly admired by the surrealists. In 1969, André Malraux as Minister of Arts called the Palais Idéal a unique example of Art Naif and had it listed as an historic monument. And what greater honour to the memory of the old postman than for his work to be on

a postage stamp? One only, perhaps. In the same, 1984, a statue to the Facteur Cheval was put up outside the village post office of Hauterives, where in his lifetime he had been treated with little short of derision. After ten years of repairs and restoration, the Palace was opened to the public last summer.

To say that the place is extraordinary is a feeble understatement, but no words can be adequate for somewhere that is to be experienced rather than described. Perhaps only Coleridge in laudanum-fuelled *Khubla Khan* mode could have done justice to this – well, this stately pleasure dome. It's a bit Arab mosque, a bit Hindu temple, and Cambodian and Egyptian; there's a castle here, a chalet there; there are bits of all sorts and they somehow add up. There are sculpted deer, dogs, crocodiles, elephants, camels and angels. And presiding over all and protecting the entrance are three huge figures of (in Cheval's words) Julius Ceasar the Roman conqueror, Vercingetorix the defender of Gaul and Archimedes the great Greek man of science. They are as elongated as figures by Giacometti, but not gaunt or angular. If anything their contours are rounded and their pebble-dash texture gives them a knitted appearance. They wear funny hats and on their spindly legs there are something like plus-fours. By any standards they ought to be ridiculous, but instead they contrive to be impressive, dignified and friendly.

Between them stand the Druid Goddess Valeda and the Egyptian Goddess Isis. And all around there are towers and pinnacles, tunnels and caves and grottoes, vaults, stairs, crenellations and aloes and semi-tropical trees made of cement. The images are assembled with the all-embracing (though not indiscriminate) hospitality of an autodidact. Images and references are taken from all nations, all religions, all cultures. Here the lamb may lie down with the lion and sleep safe and sound. Scattered over the walls are words of wisdom as homespun as poker-work: "The weak and the strong are equal in the face of death"; "In the minutes of leisure my work has allowed me I have built this palace of One Thousand and One Nights and carved out my memory"; "Winter and summer, night and day, I have walked, I have roamed the plains, the hillsides and the rivers to bring back hard stones chiselled by nature. My back has paid for it. I have risked everything, even death"; Remember that to want something is to be able to do it".

There is a constant emphasis on equality. The high and mighty are equal with the humble and meek, all the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, all religions, all beliefs are equal. And so is the

partnership in endurance shared by Cheval and his wheelbarrow. Most touchingly, he has built a grotto to enshrine the wheelbarrow, his saw and trowels. The wheelbarrow speaks on behalf of the other tools: "1906 I am the faithful companion of the intelligent worker who every day fetched from the countryside what he needed. Now his work is finished, he is at rest from his labour and I, his humble friend, have the place of honour."

Then, it seems, all the tools speak together in honour of Monsieur Cheval: "We say to future generations that you alone built this temple of marvels. The purpose was to show what could be done by sheer willpower, the possibility of overcoming mental and material obstacles. All civilisations and religions express the same great sentiments, the unity of the works of man and nature."

Cheval was not only a great sculptor-architect. He was also quite an engineer. Since the surfaces of the building are all covered with decoration, it is hard to see quite how the structure works, but as you walk about it, under it and over it, the whole thing feels absolutely sound, and it is a very big building. I would welcome expert opinion on this, but it seems to me that Cheval was using reinforced concrete some time before it is supposed to have been invented. There's no doubt that a lot of cement has gone into it. The prevailing greyness that is the result looks just right, but the fact that he worked so much at night may also explain the general lack of colour.

Near the Palace, Cheval built a garden house where he could sit at sunset and look at his great work, and doubtless think up more adages to write on its walls. "This marvel, of which the maker can be proud, is unique in the universe"; "My willpower has been as strong as this rock".

It could all so easily be absurd, but it is magnificent. The atmosphere is mysterious but, in spite of all the grottoes and caves, it is never threatening. There are no horrors. It is certainly the stuff that dreams are made on, but not nightmares.

I have the feeling that unlike almost any other great artist, Cheval was a good man. If Cheval wasn't a great artist, then words have no meaning. If he wasn't a good man, then nothing has any meaning.

Cheval anticipated Dali and Gaudi and much else in twentieth century art. If by conventional standards he was a bit cracked, then it is too bad for conventional standards. He was cracked like the Douanier Rousseau and William Blake, and Christopher Smart, and in a mad world it is people such as them who are sane. Those of us who think we are not cracked have much to learn from them, and from children and animals.

Another who belongs in that company is Raymond Isidore. As with Cheval, the main events of his life can be summarised with a few dates. He was born in Chartres in 1900, spent his whole life in Chartres and died there in 1964. He served an apprenticeship in a foundry, but for most of his life worked as a sweeper in the town cemetery. In 1924 he married a widow who was eleven years older than himself and they had three children. In 1928, Isidore bought a scrap of land on the outskirts of the town and started building his house. He had hardly any money and (like Cheval) no help other than that of his wheelbarrow and his own two hands (we have Madame Isidore's word for it that her two sons never did a stroke). He found his building materials where he could, even scavenging pieces of marble to make the foundations.

After four years he had built three small rooms, but this was enough for preparing and eating meals and a bed to sleep in, and Isidore reckoned that these were the basic requirements for happiness. He thought a lot about happiness. As he said: "I think too much. At night I think about people who are wretched. I would like to tell them about the spirit which told me how to embellish life. Many people could do as much but they haven't the wish to. I have used my hands and they have made me happy. We're not living in a very good century. I would like to live among flowers and in beauty. I'm looking for a way to get people out of misery."

He bought an adjacent parcel of land, making a long narrow site 12 yards wide and a full 50 yards long. There were gardens for flowers and vegetables, and the rabbits and hens. And the building went on – a chapel, a workshop, a privy, and walls and walkways and arches.

Throughout this time he was collecting like a jackdaw – broken bottles, pieces of flint, old clocks, porcelain, broken plates and cups and saucers, anything durable and preferably brightly coloured or patterned. He did this without any apparent end in view, just piling the fragments in heaps.

Then in 1938 (nearly the same age as when Cheval had his toe-stubbing enlightenment), he had an idea. In his own account: "I built my house first of all to put a roof over our heads. I had gone for a walk in the fields when by chance I saw little bits of broken glass, fragments of china, broken crockery. I gathered them together, without any precise intention, for their colours and sparkle. I picked out the good stuff and threw away the bad. I piled them up in a corner of my garden, and then the idea came to me to make a mosaic of them

to decorate my house. To start with, I thought I would just decorate part of the walls. I often walked miles to find my materials: the broken plates, bottoms of perfume bottles, medicine bottles, things that people don't want and throw away in quarries and rubbish dumps but that are still useful. I took the things that other people throw away. So many things are thrown away that could be used to give life and happiness."

From his heaps of unconsidered trifles, he made art. He was an avid Bible-reader and must surely have remembered the verse in Psalm 118: "The stone which the builder refused is become the head-stone of the corner". It was true not only of his pioneering recycling but of his attitude to human life. He said of his employment as a cemetery sweeper that it was as though he'd been "thrown on the rubbish-dump of the dead when I was capable of doing other things, as I have proved."

For Isidore, there was no such thing as rubbish, material or human: rejects can be made into things of beauty.

His single-minded collecting is what led to his being called Picassiette. This is quite a clever name. The Picasso of plates, but in the dictionary *picassiette* means a scrounger – not a pick-pocket, but a pick-plate. But Isidore didn't pick from plates, he picked the plates themselves.

When he'd done the walls of the house, inside and out, he just kept going, covering everything with mosaics, the walls, the floors, the paths, the ceilings, the courtyards, the chapel, the summerhouse and finally the furniture itself: the wheelbarrow, the flowerpots, the stove, the bed, even the radio.

The buildings, rooms, walls and garden that Picassiette created are in their way as encyclopaedically rich as Chartres Cathedral itself. All creation is here, in gorgeous colour, with the blue of the cathedral glass predominant. What Chartres Cathedral does in glass and sculpture, Isidore did after his fashion in mosaic. There's fish, flesh and fowl, butterflies, dogs, cats, giraffes, camels and every manner of living thing. There are monuments, castles, cathedrals and thrones. There are the rose windows of Chartres, all the houses and streets of Chartres and, on the skyline of the wall, the very cathedral itself.

The richest man in the world couldn't possibly afford what Isidore owned. He had his own Eiffel Tower, his own Mona Lisa. He had Mont-St-Michel, and from postcards he took landscapes from all over the world. He had flowers, he had stars. He had everything really.

His neighbours were amazed at the way he would work through the

most extreme conditions at every spare moment of the day and often much of the night. Though some of the later bits look like clumsy sketches compared with the meticulous earlier work, he declared (at a time when he estimated he had put 29,000 hours into his work) that it was nearly finished. Not long afterwards in 1964 he dropped dead from exhaustion.

In Raymond Isidore's garden and house there are bits as beautiful as Matisse, as joyous as Klee or Dufy. It is like Smart's *Jubilate Agno*, like Blake, like the *Douanier Rousseau*. It is like Gaudi, it is like St Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. It is like nothing else. It makes the heart leap with joy. It is the distilled quintessence of happiness. It's wonderful, full of wonders and to be wondered at. It is a wonder of the modern world.

Most of Colin Ward's excellent Folio Society book on Chartres is about the cathedral, but at the end he turns to Picassiette's house and says that its message (and the same could be said of Cheval) "is the one a whole stream of moral philosophers of art, John Ruskin, William Morris, Eric Gill, have drawn from the wonderfully sensitive and sophisticated but totally unknown creators of the cathedral. The artist is not a special kind of person. Every person is, or could be, a special kind of artist."

Harold Barclay

Comment on John Zerzan's Critique of Agriculture

John Zerzan's critique of agriculture entails a romanticised notion of hunting-gathering peoples on the one hand and a contrastive highly jaundiced view of the peasant and farm life on the other. Hunter-gatherers do not all sit around the fire discussing Plato or the equivalent, or playing games and feasting in a "oneness with nature". As tiny isolated homogeneous communities, they had little intellectual stimulation from outside the narrow confines of their band. They also lacked one of those alienating systems – writing – which is essential to the development and diffusion of highly complex thought. Certainly they produced ideas, some fairly sophisticated, as Paul Radin shows in his *Primitive Man as a Philosopher* (although even here most of the examples are drawn from people who have already succumbed to the evil of agriculture).

Further, the hunting-gathering life may be freer of drudgery than that of factory worker or nineteenth century peasant. Yet there was 'work', although it might have been in fits and starts: several days of rigorous toil followed by several days of leisure. It is interesting that the examples Zerzan offers are all people of sub-tropical and tropical climates. Life among hunters and gatherers in the sub-arctic and arctic was not so easy and too often was just plain brutal.

Zerzan says production, like work, begins with agriculture, but hunter-gatherers engage in production as well. They produced a great variety of tools, dwellings, clothes, works of art, containers, paints, dyes, medicines, etc., etc. And they even sought to control their external environment. Important in this respect was the controlled burning of different areas so as to manage the types of plants which

In 1988 the editors of the American journal *Fifth Estate* asked Harold Barclay to write a commentary on John Zerzan's criticism of agriculture and advocacy of its abolition! For reasons not given by *Fifth Estate*, it was never used. We are using it here, as well as one of fourteen essays on a forthcoming Freedom Press title *Culture and Anarchism* by Harold Barclay.

grew, thus encouraging specific game species. Another less common control was the attempt to divert water resources. It has been suggested that certain divination techniques resulted inadvertently in a kind of wild game management programme, so that all game in the surrounding vicinity remained at a constant number, one area not becoming depleted while another over-populated. Hunter-gatherers were not nature children. They, too, were 'alienated' and like all humanity lived in that world of culture and symbol so divorced from nature.

Of the longevity of hunter-gatherers Zerzan says "current hunter-gatherers *barring injury and severe infection*, often outlive their civilised contemporaries" (italics added). It is precisely injury and severe infection which took such a toll of these people. Aside from accidents, the mortality of women in childbirth and of infants is important. Zerzan does not mention that hunter-gatherer societies were invariably plagued by sorcery and the frightful domineering power of shamans.

Zerzan is contemptuous of the agricultural life: "the human captivity of being shackled to crops and herds". He joins Marx in believing in the "idiocy of the rural life". Apparently Zerzan is unaware that there are millions of perfectly intelligent human beings who actually enjoy working in the soil and with livestock. They do not view it as drudgery and many would not consider it 'work'. In North America today farmers and ranchers cling tenaciously to their way of life and would dread having to take other employment. There are fewer occupations which allow more personal independence and self-direction. But I cannot delineate here the advantages of an agricultural life, only emphasise that Zerzan's view is dimmed by an urban myopia.

Zerzan blames the curse of work upon agriculture. But clearly pastoralists – those who specialise in herding livestock – are only one example of people who do not regard their activities in maintaining herds as 'work'. Look, for example, at Fulani or East African cattle herders or the horse-cow-sheep herders of Central Asia.

Agriculture, says Zerzan, turned women to beasts of burden and breeders of children. Does he not think women also engaged in these tasks among hunter-gatherers as well? It is pretty clear that the domestication of large draft animals associated with true agriculture relieved women *and men* of acting as beasts of burden.

Zerzan blames domesticated sheep and goats for the denuding of the Circum-Mediterranean forests, but the truth is that the main culprit was humans seeking timber for ship-building and more land to put under the plough.

Zerzan outlines the follies of modern 'agribusiness' and describes the relation of humans to domesticated animals as one of domination and breeding for submissiveness. With these views I am generally in accord, yet on the latter subject of domesticated animals he is typically selective in his argument. A species of the intelligence of *homo sapiens* could hardly have a relationship with cattle, etc., that was not for the most part dominant. After all, a central feature of evolution is adaptation in which inevitably some species compete with others and in so doing one or more become dominant.

One statement of Zerzan's cannot be allowed to pass, particularly since it is an example of his attempt to humanise animals. Zerzan claims that in domesticated animals "courtship is curtailed". The nearest thing to courtship amongst wild relatives of domesticated mammals is the competitive fighting which goes on between rutting males. The sexual relation between male and female is perfunctory – one and off in a matter of a few seconds. There is no 'courtship' here in the wild or in the tame.

One further point on the domestic animal issue. Human-animal relationships are not exclusively those of dominance and submission. There are also those in which humans and animals operate in partnership – or at least they must work together. And the animals even appear to enjoy the tasks, for example dogs in the hunt and in sheep herding or horses cutting and herding cattle, racing and riding in general.

There are presently no satisfactory explanations for the origin of agriculture. Indeed, there may not have been any single cause. For one thing the domestication of plants was independently invented in at least four different places (South West Asia, South East Asia, Central America and West Africa) and there may have been other centres as well. Thus there were different times and different places and so likely different causes. Secondly, the variety of plants and animals were not all domesticated for the same purpose. Domestic fowl were probably domesticated for religious purposes (for use in divination), but there is nothing to suggest such a cause in the domestication of dogs, donkeys or horses.

Zerzan's central thesis is that the origin of agriculture is a part of some massive evolving process of increasing alienation incorporating within it a drive to control and create uniformity. This is very speculative and not a hypothesis one could test. The historical record clearly shows the correlation of agriculture with the state, government, nation, social class and caste, slavery, warfare and

militarism, destructive technologies and the urban life. If these are signs of our species' alienation and desire for domination, we must ask why are alienation and control apparently so central to humankind. Here I can only throw out a couple of thoughts on this matter. As I have argued, all *homo sapiens*' – hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists alike – are 'alienated' since they are dwellers in the very human world of culture (cf., Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*). *Homo sapiens* original alienation commenced with the appearance of a brain which was sufficiently intelligent that a sense of self-awareness could arise. The separation of the self from the non-self is the first act of alienation. In our species it appears to be quickly followed by an awareness of our finite existence and probably fifty to a hundred thousand years ago language was invented, initiating that special symbolic world of culture. In short, intelligence in the context of this world would seem to lead to further alienation. As to domination, one universal feature of *homo sapiens* is the desire for esteem and recognition and the acquisition of influence. The line between this and the 'will to power' is ambiguous indeed.

Certainly modern agriculture needs to be transformed. Mono-cropping, the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, feed lots and gasoline engines are only some of the elements of contemporary farming practice which must be challenged and ecologically-sound alternatives introduced. But to suggest that agriculture be abolished is absurd. Zerzan seems to be saying that it should be replaced with hunting-gathering, in which case we'd have to get rid of more than 99% of the world's population, to say nothing of the innumerable good things of life which agriculture and civilisation have brought and which Zerzan, along with the rest of us, takes for granted. Liberation does not come when agriculture disappears. The implication of Zerzan's view is that liberation only comes with death. I would contend that liberation is not absolute. It must be defined within limits circumscribed by the human situation. That human situation currently means, among other things, a world population of nearly six billion. We must find ways to contend with this and at the same time become a more liberated and conserving society. In any case, we cannot contend with such a population without agriculture.

Harold Sculthorpe

Reclaiming the Land

Over vast areas of our country British citizens enjoy no right of freedom of movement. Over much wild land our freedom of movement is barred by aggressive and intimidating notices saying Trespassers will be prosecuted, Keep out and Private, No entry. Such notices are an insult to the people of a supposedly free and civilised country. Scrap the lot of them. Freedom to roam should be accorded the same protection and reverence as other cherished human rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship and freedom of assembly. Our freedom to walk peacefully over moors, mountains, heaths and downs of Britain ... should not be something for negotiation. It should not be something for haggling over and paying for, acre by acre, mountain by mountain.

Stirring words from Janet Street-Porter at the 1995 National Council of the Ramblers' Association, and received with enthusiasm, but does it mean that the Ramblers' Association is about to adopt a more robustly radical approach to the access campaign or was it just empty rhetoric? Time will tell. However the campaign by walkers to gain greater access to the uncultivated land of Britain is gaining a momentum not seen since the mass trespasses of the 1930s and there is evidence that the large landowners are now on the defensive, desperately offering compromises involving limited and controlled access.

The rambling movement, as distinct from just walkers, dates back about a hundred years and developed initially in response to attempts by landowners to stop people from walking on their land, particularly by blocking long established footpaths. The three national organisations concerned with different aspects of access are the Ramblers' Association, The Open Spaces Society and Red Rope. There are also a number of local associations and campaigns which concentrate on problems within their own locality. Complementary to these, the recently established Land Reform Movement campaigns for greater access to land with a much broader programme.

The Ramblers' Association, formed in 1935 by the amalgamation of a number of local groups and federations, is by far the largest and with a membership getting on for 110,000 it is a force to be reckoned

with. In the year that it celebrates its 60th anniversary it can claim to have successfully combined a programme of political lobbying with the provision of an excellent service to its members. But its size is both a strength and a weakness. Like a trade union, the more aggressively it pursues its political aims, the more likely it is to alienate its more timid members and those who would prefer it to be just a service organisation. Policy has to reflect the relative influence of moderates and militants. The very successful annual initiative, *Forbidden Britain Day*, in which rallies have been held since 1986 all over the country on a Sunday in September demanding greater access, has now had its name changed to *Open Britain Day* because many members considered the old title too aggressive in tone. With the present leadership apparently ready to step up the campaign, some members think that the possibility of a split cannot be entirely discounted. With the more militant members concentrated in the north, this would present as something of a north-south divide.

The Open Spaces Society has about two and a half thousand members and, formed in 1865, it is the oldest of the access organisations. It is particularly concerned with preserving and increasing access to the remaining 1.3 million acres of common land of which only about 20% is now open to the public. In its early years as the *Commons Preservation Society* it had many successes, saving many open spaces near large towns from the ravages of rapacious landlords and speculative builders. That Wimbledon Common, Epping Forest, Hatfield Forest, Selsdon Wood, Cookham Common and Berkhamstead Common survive today is in no small measure due to the efforts of its members. In the 1930s it seemed more concerned to protect the interests of landowners and condemned the mass trespass of Kinder Scout in 1932. In 1939 it collaborated with landowners in promoting legislation to make trespass a criminal offence. But today it is the most active organisation campaigning for the right of all to enjoy the common land, open spaces and footpaths.

Red Rope, the smallest of the three, with less than a thousand members was formed in 1985 and is an organisation of walkers and climbers with socialist aims, that tends to encourage mass trespass as a campaigning weapon.

Two locally based organisations which illustrate the range of activities around the country are The Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland and The Access to Boulsworth Campaign.

The Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland (SCAM) describes itself as a voluntary organisation campaigning for free public access to moorland and for the right of 'Freedom to Roam' over open land. It was formed in 1982 following the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Mass Trespass over Kinder Scout. Inspired by the moorland battles of the 1930s, SCAM recognised that there was again a need for direct action and has organised a series of mass trespasses over the extensive moorlands west of Sheffield. It lobbies landowners, countryside and political organisations, holds public meetings and organises regular monthly walks over the moors bordering the city, e.g. Snailsdon, Thurlstone, Broomhead and Bradfield Moors. As 50% of this land is technically closed to walkers, such rambles often invoke an element of symbolic trespass. Terence Howard in his book *A Moorland Notebook* gives a personal account of these moors with a great deal of information about the geography and history of the moorland roads and tracks which have been lost to public use, often because of annexation by adjacent landowners, together with details of a number of walks that he particularly enjoys.

The Access to Boulsworth Campaign (ABC) was re-launched at a public meeting in Hebden Bridge Methodist Church Hall in April 1995 to a flutter of media attention. However nearly half of those who attended were farmers or employees of the major landowner, vociferously protesting at the very idea of access. Few will have heard of Boulsworth Moor and Lord Savile, who owns a lot of it, would like to keep it that way, but it is an exceptionally beautiful area of wild unspoilt upland, which, rising to almost 1,700 feet, is the highest in the main body of the South Pennines and has magnificent views. Whiteley-Turner in his book *A Spring-Time Saunter* published in 1913 gives this account of a walk in what is now forbidden land:

Boulsworth rises immediately on our left, and we commence the ascent, which we find comparatively easy, and boggy places, thanks to the long spell of drought, are literally dry. Forty minutes steady climbing from the sheep-pens, and we have reached the summit. We feel half inclined to throw our caps in the air and shout 'Hurrah!' Standing on the highest of the multitudinous stupendous rocks ('Weather Stones', which we saw so clearly through our glass at Fly Flat), far 'above life's turmoil', a strange sense of loneliness possesses us.

Boulsworth somehow to us resembles a large oval-shaped table set lengthwise NW and SE, and having a deep overhanging cover of sheepskin, variegated in shade and colour. We take up a position on this, the south-eastern side of the 'table', and admire a glorious panorama. The

atmosphere is remarkably clear, so we are particularly fortunate. The ocean of hills tumbling away southwards have a striking similarity to those seen from Slade, though standing out more clearly at 1,700 feet – 350 feet higher than the keeper's house. Beyond Hardcastle Crag, Heptonstall Church and Stoodley Pike are landmarks in the picture. More to our left is Nab Hill, readily located, Fly Flat, and the buildings thereon; we even single out the barn roof of the home of our friends Sam and Betty. We tramp across the 'table-top' to get a view north. The breeze, so efficacious in cooling us after our climb, fans our cheeks, but is just a trifle provoking as we endeavour to study our map, which we find of infinite value. As we advance, the first mass which appears in view is Pendle Hill, as if determined to be noticed, and looking down from its height of 1,831 feet in stern dominion, as it were, upon the series of little hills around, between which are dotted cotton towns ...

Down the north-western side we look on to a stretch of moorland descending sharply to a plain. This, according to our map, is the forest of Trawden. It may have been a forest at one time, but all traces of it are gone. At present, presumably, it is a wilderness of swamps. On the farther side is Trawden, and a little further back its neighbouring village, Winwall. More west, Colne is seen to good advantage: 'a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid'. The atmosphere westward is not nearly so good as northward, else we might catch a glimpse of the sea.

Due north, nothing obscures the view. How very clear! What a panorama! The hills round Skipton – ten miles away – appear like so many huge mole-hills. Even Great Whernside and Little Whernside, fifteen or sixteen miles in a straight line further back, are faintly visible. More to the left Fountains Fell and Penygant [*sic*] – twenty-two and twenty-six miles distant respectively. Straining our eyes to the utmost, we persuade ourselves we now and again catch a glimpse of Ingleborough, six miles still further away.

Of the five who claim ownership of some of this land, North West Water own part of the Western slope on the Lancashire side that does contain two concessionary paths to the summit and it is purely coincidental that these have been inadvertently omitted from the recently published current O.S. map of the area. When approached by ABC, North West Water said that walkers could have effective access, except when it interfered with the shooting of the grouse. Losing no time, ABC organised a walk to take advantage of this concession and in July '95, twenty of us used North West Water land to walk to the summit Lad Law, on Boulsworth Moor. We can confirm that 80-90 years have not diminished the magnificence of the views nor the sense of peaceful isolation experienced by Whiteley-Turner so long ago.

Yorkshire Water, who also own some of the moor, have at the time of writing only agreed access to their land on specified dates. Savile

Estates, who manage most of the land on the Yorkshire side for Lord Savile, are prepared to consider, on their merit, requests for access on specified days, if made well in advance (months?), come from recognised and approved groups which have also obtained permission from the Countryside Commission, English Nature, the estate's tenants and those groups that have grouse shooting concessions. Most people would call this refusing to negotiate, but the story is not over yet.

The Land Reform Movement is a recently formed movement that questions the whole nature of land ownership. It describes itself as a coalition of people and organisations engaged in environmental and social justice campaigns. Concerned about the exclusive nature of the private ownership of land, its initial programme lists four elements of land reform:

- 1) a universal right of access to the countryside;
- 2) restitution of common spaces in towns;
- 3) planning permission for agricultural change, e.g. ploughing a virgin meadow or removing a hedgerow;
- 4) planning presumptions in favour of low impact development so that settlers can live on their own land.

It is a non-membership organisation that from time to time invites anyone interested to briefly and peacefully occupy and cultivate some land of symbolic importance. The aim is to do no damage and to leave the land in a better state at the end of the occupation. The first of these took place in April 1995 and was a week-long occupation of a disused airfield, thirty acres of set-aside and a copse, three miles to the south of St George's Hill, near Weybridge, Surrey. This action was seen as a re-enactment of the year long settlement on common land on near-by St George's Hill in 1649 by Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, when they called for an end to enclosure and access to the land for all the people of England. Since then there have been local occupations, of both rural and urban land, in Nottingham, Manchester, Birmingham and Oxford.

These mass trespasses are a symbolic gesture for land rights. Non-violent land occupations are designed to avoid antagonising local rural communities, except of course possibly the owner of the land, by occupying and cultivating land not at present cultivated, e.g. set aside. This movement, now so new and very small, could become more significant than the much larger access campaigns by walkers.

The opposition

The National Farmers' Union is primarily a trade union representing the interests of its members. It has on occasion had differences with walkers' organisations but is more concerned with lobbying parliament and the government.

The Country Landowners' Association (CLA) with its motto "Terrae Servinas" would like its members to be seen as stewards of the land, holding it in trust for future generations, of their own families of course, but be otherwise accountable to no one. They have at times been willing to negotiate and in the 1980s, as members of the Common Land Forum, they achieved a consensus with recreational groups on public access to common land, but the government reneged on its promise to implement these proposals, following heavy lobbying by the Moorland Association. Their present policy is to oppose the tradition that twenty years of usage establishes a right of way and favour payment for access to common land.

The Moorland Association was formed in 1987 and now claims to represent 90% of moorland owners. The most militant of the landowners' associations, it is aggressively opposed to any access to open moorland except on a limited number of specified paths and then only when this does not interfere with operational or management considerations.

The Duke of Westminster, as the second biggest individual landowner in Britain with almost 300 square miles, (too many noughts to use acres), deserves a paragraph all to himself in this section. Around thirty of these are in the Forest of Bowland, the largest area of uncultivated upland in England and despite its name a treeless moorland. Of its 100 square miles, it is the 30 owned by the Duke that have provoked one of the longest and least successful access campaigns in the country. Every year on that Sunday in September at a rally nearby, speeches are made and negotiations are promised by Lancashire County Council, but then nothing happens. In 1992 a mass trespass was organised and hundreds of us walked across this moor, on land that they had said was too fragile for the feet of walkers. But we trespassed not, for the wily Duke had declared his moor open to the public for the day and telephoned to wish us luck. These protest rallies held in village halls on the edge of the moor have become so tedious and ineffectual that many are not finding them worth the journey. Fine words came from the Ramblers' Association president

Janet Street-Porter at the 1994 rally: "*this land is part of our heritage. The human spirit needs to experience the emptiness and solitude of places like Bowland now more than ever. The right to roam is a basic human need.*" But what we get are agreements to renew existing arrangements and just a few more miles of footpath. The Duke must be feeling well pleased with himself.

The Criminal Justice Act and the walker

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) has been concentrating the minds of many left libertarians recently and has aroused the most widespread opposition since the defeat of the poll tax. Section 68 (1) creates a new offence of aggravated trespass which states:

A person commits the offence of aggravated trespass if he [*sic*] trespasses on land in the open air and, in relation to any lawful activity which persons are engaged in or about to engage in on that or adjoining land in the open air, does there anything which is intended by him to have the effect – (a) of intimidating those persons or any of them so as to deter them or any of them from engaging in that activity, (b) of obstructing that activity or (c) of disrupting that activity.

Although designed to harass new age travellers, ravers and hunt saboteurs, many ramblers believe that it could also be used to curb their activities as well. Everyone is of course still subject to the pre-existing general law of trespass whereby a landowner or his agent can ask trespassers to leave the land by any reasonable route and may use reasonable force to eject if such a request is not heeded. The main effect of the new Act may well be to deter many walkers from trespassing for fear that they may be accused of a criminal act although they may have no intention of doing anything other than peacefully walk across the land. The CLA's legal adviser has warned its members that "it would be imprudent in the extreme for members to misuse the provisions to cover ordinary forms of trespass" and goes on to suggest "it should not be used to curtail peaceful forms of protest". The CLA are clearly aware that if owners take an aggressive attitude and instigate prosecutions, it could result in unfavourable publicity and even provoke mass trespass from campaigners who are seeking a confrontation. However it would appear that any campaign to trespass, whether symbolic or mass, would contravene this law and sooner or later some landowner will decide to invoke it. Then walkers really will find themselves living in interesting times.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

The government has many ways of bolstering the wealth of large landowners, but there is one which, for lack of publicity, you may have missed. A government plan, started in 1991, is giving landowners 8 million over ten years to carry out environmental improvements to their land and increase its accessibility to walkers. It is called the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and pays £28-100 per acre per annum for environmental betterment, such as reducing stocking rates to improve land quality, with an additional £20 per acre per annum if people are allowed to walk on it. If it is just a matter of letting people use a path that crosses the land, then the rate is a single payment of £100 plus 10p per metre per annum, plus the cost of any styles, gates and footbridges needed. After the ten years there is no obligation to continue allowing access. This comfortable arrangement between the Countryside Commission and the landowners would have attracted little interest if the Ramblers' Association had not decided to monitor the scheme to see how the money was being spent. Some 200 volunteers checked on 641 of the new access sites over three years and their report, published in Spring '95, described how the money was being misused. Nearly half the sites had already been open to the public and many of the paths had obstructions, being blocked by overgrown hedges, barbed wire, electric fencing, or even in one case a firing range. Lack of signposting in many cases meant that the paths remained secret. In some instances, where a more detailed study was made, it was found that the land could have been bought at market value and opened to the public in perpetuity more cheaply than the cost of the ten year access arrangements.

Independent research by the University of Reading Centre for Environmental and Land Tenure Studies has also condemned the scheme as being not value for money, primarily just increasing the farmers' income and the capital value of their land. This scandalous rip-off is exposed in *The Countryman* (1995) Vol.3 No3. and in the 1995 issues of *Rambling Today*.

Military Madness

There are 2,266 weapons firing or war training areas in the UK, all an intrusion on the landscape, and an article on access could hardly avoid referring to them, particularly as the MoD, whilst claiming to be reducing the size of its army, always seems to be wanting more

land. Around 110,000 acres are in National Parks where people might expect to be able to find peace and quiet, not a battlefield with live firing by tanks, artillery and low flying aircraft. Of this MoD land which affects seven of the National Parks, two sites are of particular concern to walkers.

The Otterburn Training Area occupies 58,000 acres of the Northumberland National Park and the MoD has a £23 million Development plan here, to enable it to accommodate two armoured brigades which the Germans are no longer prepared to tolerate, and so that it can play with its 45 tonne AS90 self-propelled guns and its 22.3 tonne Multi-Launch Rocket Systems. This plan is being opposed by the National Parks Authority and a coalition of local environmental groups, but sadly some locals would welcome a military expansion for the jobs it would provide. The army is already the second largest employer in the area, after agriculture.

In Wales, part of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path is blocked to walkers because it is affected by the nearby 6,000 acres the MoD uses for tank training and firing. On certain weekends, when there is no firing, recognised and organised groups with an approved leader may use the path after they have signed a chit indemnifying the military in case of injury.

The successes

There must be some, and here they are:

- 1) the government abandoned its plans to privatise the two million acres of public woods and forests which belong to the Forestry Commission and which would have led to loss of access to most of it. However it still plans to continue selling off 37,000 acres each year and surveys suggest that this leads to loss of access to 40% of the land sold;
- 2) the government abandoned plans to combine the Countryside Commission with English Nature. It was widely believed that the Countryside Commission was more sympathetic to walkers, but after the fiasco of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme one has doubts;
- 3) there are some very limited restrictions on what water companies can do with their land;
- 4) in 1988 the government abolished the tax concession to landowners who cover their uplands with conifer forest.

Not much to show for the years of campaigning, however one must not forget that there have been hundreds, probably thousands, of local successes: a footpath reclaimed here, a woodland opened up there, a common saved somewhere else.

In conclusion

One per cent of the population own 50 - 70 % of the land of Britain. If this figure appears to lack precision, this is a reflection of how difficult it is to find out how much is owned and by whom. Establishing the owner of a house, office block or company is not usually too difficult, but if it's a field, hedgerow or wood then it's not so easy. There is no comprehensive register of land ownership in Britain and all attempts to establish one have been successfully resisted by the major landowners since the 1875 land census, so that now we know less about who owns our land than did the Victorians, despite the billions paid to farmers for growing and for not growing crops. The British establishment, and not least that part of it whose power and influence rests in the vast acreage it owns, has an ability to survive by making last minute concessions to those who threaten it, just sufficient to satisfy enough of those who protest, so that it retains its power. We must not let it happen this time.

We are entering a period when large landowners are increasingly conscious of the pressure building up for recreational access to their land and when even their rights of ownership to large tracts of open uncultivated land are being questioned by the many who don't subscribe to the dogmas or support the agendas of the political parties. Most of these landowners will choose to keep a low profile, ignoring single or small groups of people who walk on or even temporarily occupy their land and so become trespassers. Even a mass trespass can conveniently be ignored because by its nature it is likely to be a one day affair.

They are likely, when under pressure, to try to negotiate local agreements, but bind them with all kinds of restrictions and stipulations, justifying these as being necessary for land management, operational or conservation reasons. Other ploys will include a demand of payment for access, prior booking and approval of groups and their leaders and claims for compensation from government for resulting loss; always secure in the knowledge that their rights will be defended by the establishment, not least because they are part of it. We need strategies to deal with this. The land is for all to enjoy and

not just the wealthy few. How to achieve this could not be better expressed than in the words of one Ramblers' Association member writing to *Rambling Today*: "The only way to get anywhere – literally – is to go there personally, in large numbers and often."

Tony Gibson

Food Production and Population*

It is now the fashion to write books and articles prophesying doom for the human race because our planet lacks the possible agricultural resources to feed the increasing population. I am no prophet and cannot foretell whether this hungry doom will befall my species, but if it does it will not be for the reasons propounded by the enthusiastic Jeremiahs. If such civilisation as we have crashed in ruins, it will not be for lack of agricultural resources or the will to utilise them, but for reasons which are more complex in character.

Let me hasten to disassociate myself from the anti-Malthusian. I have no quarrel at all with Malthus's unanswerable mathematics. A conservative estimate allowing four offspring to every mated pair leads us to calculate that a single pair of humans will produce a population of two million million ancestors in forty generations if the human reproductive process suffers no check from disease, war, etc. Now, if

This important article was first published by Freedom Press as an 8-page pamphlet in 1952. Yet the passage of the years has, if anything, confirmed all the arguments advanced. And with millions of acres of arable land set-aside in Europe and the USA and with millions of people starving in the third world, the world's problem is not one of production but of distribution of the wealth of this planet. Tony Gibson is a lively octogenarian and has recently produced a Freedom Press title *Love, Sex and Power in Later Life: a libertarian perspective*, 101 pages, £3.50, and an equally valuable *vade mecum* for we oldies *On the Tip of Your Tongue: your memory in later life*, 151 pages, £7.00, both available from Freedom Press.

mankind order their social relations properly, which is all that we anarchists advocate, they will certainly have the power to reduce these disastrous checks to a minimum. What then – do we complacently approach to a time when the Earth is chock-a-block with human beings and we have to colonise the other planets? The limitation of breeding by contraceptive methods is the obvious solution, and if we do reach a condition of social harmony which makes the conquest of death by disease and violence a practical possibility, we will also have the opportunity to render rational contraception a worldwide practice.

The problem, however, is what to do in the interim period. The population of the Earth is about 2,500 million people* and it appears to be rapidly increasing. There are about 33,000 million acres of the Earth's land surface, but according to most authorities only a small part of this is suitable for cultivation. The United States Department of Agriculture gives the figure of 4,000 million acres; other authorities place it as low as 2,500 million acres of cultivable land. So it appears that we have between one and two acres of land per head to support us at present, and if anyone has old fashioned ideas as to the sufficiency of 'an acre and a cow' let us remember that Lord Boyd Orr declares that two and a half acres per head are requisite for a proper diet. So, according to the statisticians, the world population had *already* passed the limit at which human life can be properly supported, and every year brings an increase of population to help us on the way to worldwide famine. Again, other statisticians point out that the cultivable surface of the Earth is actually shrinking at an alarming rate, due to soil erosion, and that all we can hope to do is to fight a stiff losing battle against the impoverishment of our resources.

Such a world picture of the plight of *homo sapiens* contributes somewhat to the hysteria and short-term policies of the ruling states of the world today. It does not seem such a lunatic action to burn foodstuffs to stabilise a market, or to massacre a million to simplify the science of government, if mankind is probably doomed anyway, and that the best hope lies in devastating half the planet in order that one power bloc may seize what remains. I am not suggesting that the adoption of a war policy by the great states is entirely due to a conscious fear of world over-population in relation to food supplies,

* The world population was 5,000 million by 1990 but, as we point out elsewhere, the problem of hunger in the world is not a lack of land but the maldistribution which will not be solved under capitalism – Editor, 1995.

but this fear is undoubtedly operative both in ruling circles and among those whom they rule.

Before joining in the general hysterical stampede into totalitarianism and accepting the necessity for global war, let us examine rather closely the fundamental premises of the prophets of doom. Is there, in fact, even at this present time with our present knowledge of agriculture and our present potential resources an absolutely fixed relationship between acreage and population? It occurs to me that many of the popularisers of the famine-scare are forgetful, if not entirely unaware, of certain elementary facts about food – where it comes from, what its nature is and why we need it – and in their too-hasty judgement they make economic and political assumptions which are unwarranted. At the risk of labouring the point, therefore, I propose to go over some elementary scientific facts which are perhaps not as widely appreciated in their proper significance as they might be.

All foodstuffs are primarily dependent on the sunlight which floods so abundantly on our planet. Green plants trap the energy which comes from the Sun and by its agency synthesise foodstuffs from certain gases of the air, water and chemicals of the soil. The energy supplied by the Sun is incorporated into the foodstuffs and the need which we humans and other animals have for food is primarily to get at this store of energy and utilise it for our own life processes. When we have done with the food we return (by excretion or by our death and decay) precisely the gases, water and chemicals which the green plants require to synthesise more foodstuffs. So plant life and animal life play an endless game of exchange with the same elements, the whole motive force for the game coming from the energy received from sunlight. There is no 'using-up' of the elements of the planet. The nitrogen atoms which were in a pharaoh's beard may very well be in my body now; carbon atoms that rose up in the smoke of burning Rome may well be in the apple that now lies before me. As far as the *quantities* of the elements necessary for animal and vegetable life on this planet, a millionfold increase in living matter would reduce the world resources very little. The one limiting factor to an almost infinite reproduction of life (besides the obvious one of living space) is the amount of energy conveyed by sunlight, which we cannot increase. But such is the enormous difference between the number of calories per year which the earth actually receives from the Sun and the number of calories which are actually trapped by plant life and made available in foodstuffs in a year, that the problem will remain academic for a long time to come.

This crude picture of plant and animal life playing their endless game of rotating elements in order to utilise the Sun's energy, is not the whole story, but it is basic to the understanding of the origin, purpose and eventual destination of foodstuffs. Plants need more than sunlight, aerial gases, water and chemical salts to maintain healthy growth; they need a complex balance of living organisms in the soil and certain climatic conditions suited to the different plant species. Wheat will not grow in a marsh, nor rice in a sandy plain. But Man, for unrecorded centuries, has been an interfering creature altering the ecology of plant life wherever he has scratched a living. Let there be no mistake about this; farming is an essentially *unnatural* occupation. Its object is to interfere with the balance of nature and to make certain plants grow in situations and under climatic conditions quite foreign to them. The townsman looking at well-cultivated farmland thinks of it as something 'natural', something as inevitable to the landscape as bristles on his own chin. But in reality he is looking at something as artificial and man-determined as a motor car factory. He is seeing cross-species of American potatoes growing where bog plants would naturally grow, root vegetables from Mesopotamia growing where native gorse would flourish, and artificially produced species of cereals growing on the ancient site of woodlands. A farmer has only to neglect his constant task of interference and the natural ecology will soon re-assert itself and oust his artificial crops. There is so much mysticism and crass ignorance mixed up in the general concept of farming and food production that it is difficult to get people to approach the problem rationally. Man exists on this planet by his ability to oppose, to alter the forces which are loosely referred to as nature, but there is a current superstitious dread of admitting that our means of life are 'unnatural', i.e. instead of largely adapting ourselves to the general conditions prevailing on this planet, we depend upon adapting the planet to suit ourselves.

I have referred to the fact that of the 33,000 million acres land surface of the earth only 4,000 million acres are alleged to be cultivable: this pronouncement by the United States Department of Agriculture simply means that the conquest of the ecology of one-eighth of the land surface has been achieved, and the remaining seven-eighths has an ecology which, *in the present state of things*, is too difficult to master. A similar pronouncement may well have been made about England by the Domesday surveyors of AD 1086, but since that time a considerable amount of the ecology of England has been altered by the draining of swamps, clearing of forests, dyking of tidal

areas and the introduction and breeding of new varieties of plants which now take the place of the old native flora. Our enquiry must therefore lead us to a consideration of *the present state of things* in which seven-eighths of the land of this planet is unproductive of food, although most of it receives the essential energy from the sun just as the fruitful one-eighth does.

I am not going to begin dealing with the Sahara desert or the Himalaya mountains or the equatorial forests of South America, but with a country which I know personally and which, it is alleged, cannot feed half its population. I refer to Britain. Passing northwards from Carlisle, I noted the barrenness of the hills; apart from magnificent crops of bracken, heather, reeds and scant rough grass, these thousands of acres grow nothing at all, except where the Forestry Commission has caused a few stands of conifers to be planted. Occasionally, a single cottage stands on a bare hillside and in its little garden grow vegetables. If anyone points out that the garden is part of the hillside and asks why vegetables do not cover the whole hillside, the question appears naive and ridiculous. Vegetables grow in the garden because care and patient labour is applied to the soil there; vegetables *could* after a time be grown on the hillside by the application of sufficient labour to plant windbreaks, level terraces and generally 'work up' the soil to take on a new ecology, but the price of such labour would be prohibitive. The cash return would not pay any landowner.

So we arrive at the plain fact that the barrier to growing food on certain land is not one of biological impossibility but of economic impossibility, *within the framework of things as they are*. I am not impressed by the technical objections to bringing poor, barren land into cultivation; we spend the greater part of the wealth of the community in doing far, far more technically difficult things than that. The amount of labour, skill and ingenuity spent on such industries as armaments, plastics, electronics and atom fission make the problems of overcoming difficulties in crop-growing child's play by comparison. But our economic system is so taken for granted by Socialists and Tories alike that even the threat of world starvation cannot make them think in other terms. Such inanities as the following are produced by any attempt to consider increased food production at the expense of the economic system:

It is true that there are people who refuse to accept Malthus ... they are quite convinced that there are still huge tracts of land literally [*sic*] shrieking to be

cultivated, and only the crass selfishness of the 'workers' prevents these lands from providing teeming millions with the highest possible standard of living. Alternatively, the fault is due to the 'capitalist class' (always unnamed) who deliberately refuse to allow immense quantities of food to be cultivated, who are always ready to destroy millions of tons of food 'to keep the prices up' and who, no doubt, eat huge quantities of food themselves which could be better distributed among the 'workers'.

This extract is from a review by A. Cutner on *Population Trends and the World's Biological Resources*, by Dr G.C.L. Bertram. Mr Cutner further confuses the issue by assuming that those who try to point out the relevance of the economic system to the non-cultivation of land are "anti-Malthusians" whereas Malthus's thesis is not in fact questioned at all.

Where then does the key lie which will unlock the economic bar to land development and food production? It is useless to expect to find a solution from state enterprise in this direction, for the state cannot act otherwise than according to its own nature. In this country it is committed to the policy of developing industrial interests (nationalised or privately owned) and in order to sell the products of industrial production foodstuffs produced many thousands of miles away must be imported – and this, of course, gives a boost to the shipping industry, the coal industry and the steel industry. To grow all the food we require here would create a disastrous short circuit, and industry would suffer. I do not believe this to be a clearly thought out plan manipulated by Machiavellian schemers but, like so much else, it is the inevitable result of a number of conflicting tendencies which make up the balance of the *status quo*. It is unrealistic to expect the state to have a 'change of heart' and go in for production for use on a rational basis; for one thing, the state is an institution and not an individual and therefore has no heart or mind to change.

Progress in the direction of a greater measure of state control and land nationalisation offers no solution to the problems of food production. The late lamented Ground Nuts Scheme in West Africa on which many millions of pounds were wasted, stands as a monument to state enterprise in food production. In Russia, fourteen years after the Bolsheviks had seized the power of the state, their efforts at stimulating food production by bureaucratic control of the land resulted in a famine of fantastic proportions. The famine of 1932-33 stands out in Russian history as a most unnecessary catastrophe brought about by political meddling.

Recent reports from Yugoslavia show that there has been some

withdrawal from the earlier policy of state interference with the management and control of agriculture.

In actual fact the chief agent of stable food production all over the world has always been the small peasant cultivator. Although peasants are often backward and ill-equipped in their methods of farming, their deficiencies are due less to their own innate incompetence than to the drain on their resources by the exactions of landlords, tax collectors, brigands, bourgeois exploiters and other human parasites who drain away the surplus which should naturally go into the improvement of the land. The peasant works like the humble but essential earthworm that churns up a small quantity of soil every year, doing it very thoroughly, dragging the humus down into the earth, aerating it, draining it, and by his vast and greedy numbers and his tireless activity leaves no inch of it untouched. For the soil is a most curious medium: apart from its mineral constituents of sand, clay, salts and the organic humus, there are a host of living agents both in it and on it which are vitally necessary to plant growth – bacteria, protozoa, fungi, worms, insects. All are agents who must work together to produce a particular ecology, and when that ecology is one of food crops, man himself becomes one of the animal agents. I have described farming as an essentially ‘unnatural’ process; by this I do not mean that all that is necessary is for the chemist and the tractor driver to combine and try to force whatever crops they please out of the land. This method has been tried and produced barren deserts. Farming is ‘unnatural’ in that its aim is to create a totally new ecology, but a stable and healthy ecology of food-bearing plants, and this can be achieved only by methods more subtle than those of the chemical land-rapist.

Again, it is useless to achieve high yields of crops (and thus establish statistical records) unless the food itself is of adequate *quality*. Vegetable produce which is apparently sound and healthy may yet lack the proper factors which make it give proper nourishment, and animals (ourselves included) which are fed on poor quality trash not only degenerate in health themselves but even give dung which lacks the proper quality of stimulating plant life to healthy growth. Thus, though the sun shine never so brightly and water and chemicals are plenty in abundance, the wheel of life may run down if abused by ignorant businessmen or politicians who think only in terms of tonnages of food to be sold or doled out as rations.

In considering the human factor in land cultivation we come up against the stumbling block of those who regard the peasant with a sort of mysticism, and revere even his stupidities and unscientific

methods of farming which are the outcome of poverty and his not unnatural mistrust of outsiders. All I am pointing out is that only when the actual cultivators of the soil are given access to the great wealth, technical skill and scientific knowledge that are now squandered on socially useless projects, the problem of producing food from the untapped seven-eighths of the land surface of the globe will begin to be solved. I use the term 'given access' advisedly, for if land cultivators simply have forced on them by decree certain techniques, rule-of-thumb methods and short-term policies, much improvement can hardly be expected. Only when men have a real control over their own work will they be able to take advantage of the collective wisdom and wealth of the community to the general advantage of the community. I cannot see this coming about through political means; what signs of hope there are of sanity in food production at this present time are to be found in a-political bodies such as the Soil Association and in unofficial groups of farmers, market gardeners and biologists who attack their problems directly. In the last analysis, the preconditions for solving the problem of feeding the population will be arrived at only through a worldwide social revolution destroying the power-states, which are today limiting and destroying the world's resources. This solution does not appeal to many people in this country at the moment, for they are as yet unconscious of its relevance to their own work, and mistakenly regard it as yet another 'political' idea – and one of the most extreme variety. Yet there is no doubt that recognition of the validity of the anarchist case is growing.

I cannot leave this subject without a final tribute to *homo sapiens*, without whom the continuation of terrestrial life on this planet will hardly be possible in future ages. We discussed how plants and animals played a round game with certain chemical elements, taking their motive power from sunlight. Water and aerial gases will always be available; but not so with the mineral salts. Gradually, very, very gradually, they are being washed out of the land continents and drained away into the sea. This is an inevitable process which has in the past been compensated for by the rise of continents out of the sea by volcanic action, but as the crust of the earth cools and stabilises, this will no longer happen. Save for *homo sapiens* the continents would become too depleted of mineral salts to support terrestrial life, except around the borders of the sea. We are the only animals (except for a few sea birds) who rescue the mineral wealth from the sea and spread it on the land again by our fishing activities and by the rarely practised art of manuring fields with seaweed. I mention this not out of mere

academic interest or out of concern for terrestrial life a billion years hence, but to point out that available acreages of *land* are not the only source of food. The vast wealth of the sea is hardly touched at present; the seaweeds that grow in such abundance in some areas provide an almost inexhaustible supply of vegetable humus, and the plankton on which the whales feed so leisurely may yet prove a far greater food source than the fish caught by trawlers – and nowadays not infrequently thrown back into the sea.

I fear that the above facts and my interpretation of them will hardly calm the Malthusians, who will excitedly point out that the Earth's population is growing like a snowball rushing downhill, and that only state-administered birth control will prevent a terrible famine. Unfortunately, the states of the world are only too eager to take advantage of the teeming reproductivity of their own subjects to ensure a good supply of cannon fodder. Why kill off the spermatozoa when in seventeen years some of their number can contribute to the war machine? But the Malthusian case can be best met by assuring the conditions in which people will be able to limit their fecundity by rational contraception. When the people are herded into the slums of a big city or the grinding poverty of an exploited village, it is difficult for them to apply contraception properly. Anyone who has himself experienced such a life, even for a short time, will understand how in the dull grind of getting a living, of satisfying one's appetites under adverse circumstances, a hopeless apathetic state of mind is engendered and the idea of cautiously limiting fecundity becomes as ridiculous as the idea of a daily bath. People will only adopt contraception – effectively – when they have a certain decent standard of life. By this I do not imply anything connected with radios, leather shoes, canned goods or mechanised transport, but merely a life in which work is not an enforced drudgery and leisure something to be enjoyed.

George Woodcock

Anarchism and Agriculture

Before I describe the anarchist proposals for agriculture, it is desirable to devote some space to a brief outline of the anarchist social theory.

Anarchism is the doctrine of society without government. It teaches that the major economic and social injustices are intimately associated with the institution of government, which inevitably, in whatever form it takes, creates privilege and a class system, and, even if it may call itself democratic, must base itself on the coercion of the individual, at best to the wishes of the majority, most often to those of the governing classes.

Anarchists believe that society should not take the form of a great super-individual body enslaving all its subjects in the interests of the few, but that it should be based on the free co-operation of individual men and women in fulfilment of their common functional and economic needs. In the words of Saint Simon, we believe that:

A time will come when the art of governing men will disappear. A new art will take its place, the art of administering things.

It is this 'administration of things', in the necessary production and distribution of goods consumed by men, that anarchists see the need for organisation, on a voluntary and co-operative basis, among the individuals whose work actually produces the necessities of a civilised life. The functions of the modern state, represented by its paraphernalia of legal codes, bureaucracy, army and police, we consider to be wholly unnecessary in a society where common ownership has ended privilege and social-economic inequalities. Under anarchism every man, once he has fulfilled his contractual economic functions, will be free to live as he likes, provided he does not interfere with the lives of his fellows, and a free people can be relied on to see that the peace is maintained under such circumstances without the need of police or magistrates.

George Woodcock (1912-1995) was a member of the Freedom Press group from 1942 until 1949 when he emigrated to Canada and severed all links with Freedom Press. 'Anarchism and Agriculture' was a chapter from a 32-page pamphlet, *New Life to the Land*, published by Freedom Press in 1942.

We believe then that the land (like all means of production and the products thereof) should be the property of society held in common, and that only when land has been expropriated can there evolve a satisfactory agricultural system which will both use the land to its full capacity and ensure to the workers a just and adequate standard of life.

We do not, however, desire the nationalisation of the land, as do most of the 'socialist' parties, whether reformist like the Labour Party, semi-revolutionary like the ILP, or merely conservative like the Communist Party. We do not desire a Post Office agriculture in which private or trust capitalism will merely be replaced by state capitalism.

We desire that the land shall belong directly to the people, and that it shall be vested in those members of society who are fit and willing to work it, organised in economic federations to provide for society in general the full benefits of an earth freed from exploitation, either of individual capitalists or of the state. Such an organisation of agriculture, liberated from the selfish motives of vested interests and from the economic necessities that under capitalism force the ruling class not only to neglect but, in times of peace, actively to restrict the production of food from English soil, we consider to be the most efficient for attaining the dual objective outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

It must be emphasised that such a reconstruction can be successful only as part of a revolutionary reorganisation of society on a basis of common ownership and free co-operation in the workers' economic organisations. Without such a syndicalist reorganisation it would be impossible for an agricultural system based on workers' control to function effectively, as, in the very unlikely event of a capitalist government leaving it unmolested, the needs of an exporting industrial capitalism, to which under any circumstances like the present it would inevitably remain subservient, would force it into a similar economic position to that of neo-feudal agriculture today. It is virtually impossible to establish anarchism in one industry in a country whose present form of society would be in economic and social contradiction.

I do not, however, mean that under the present form of society some progress might not be made towards anarchist organisation. Such progress might be represented by the formation of farmers' co-operatives both for selling produce and for buying seeds, fertilisers, plant, etc. It might also be represented by experiments in communal farming, some of which are being evolved in this country at the present time.

But it must be borne in mind that such organisations, whether co-operatives or communities, are dependent on the society in which they exist. Communities live truly on sufferance, and a new move towards large-scale agriculture, such as seems a possible outcome of the advance of real capitalism, represented by industrial concerns, banks, etc., into the system of land tenure, might have destructive effect on them as well as on the tenant farmers. Co-operatives have been successful in several countries, notably Denmark, Holland, French Canada and Ireland (in the last two countries under the influence of the Roman Church). But it is noticeable that their success has been greatest in countries whose agricultural industry rests on an export basis. In Denmark co-operatives and kindred voluntary organisations for such purposes as cattle breeding played a great part in the expansion of farming and, as in other countries where they have been successful, benefited their members by reduced costs for seeds, fertilisers, etc., and higher prices for produce, and also helped independent farmers by forcing the privately owned dairies and wholesalers to raise their prices in order to compete successfully with the co-operatives. Thus in Denmark the co-operatives handled 91% of the dairy produce and 86% of the bacon. They purchased on behalf of their members 67% of the feeding stuffs, 40% of seeds and 38% of fertilisers. In Holland a large proportion of the sugar beet, straw board and potato flour factories were operated by co-operatives, which in all cases forced a general rise in prices paid to producers.

In a declining market however, such as existed in England up to the outbreak of war and is likely to continue afterwards if the capitalist system prevails, the co-operatives would lose much of their value, as the stimulus they gave the Danish farmer to increase his production would in England, under adverse circumstances, become a danger to the farmer by encouraging him to produce more goods than he could sell or, alternatively, so much produce that he would find the prices forced down to an uneconomic level. In any case, farmers' co-operatives would impinge on the Government's policy of marketing boards, and could only become established if the farmers declared a boycott on the government marketing organisations and insisted on trading only through their own co-operatives.

Co-operative or communal experiments in agriculture within a feudal or bourgeois society may, therefore, attain a certain amelioration of conditions for the farming class, but such improvements will be dependent on both economic and political conditions, and can only be regarded as temporary. No stable and

permanent social and economic reorganisation of agriculture can occur except in a revolutionary society. The real Agricultural Revolution will be part of the Social Revolution.

The methods of struggle in the countryside and the economic organisation of the agricultural population will be discussed in the last section of this essay. The remainder of the present chapter will be devoted to an outline of an anarchist agricultural system, for it is necessary to know the nature of our object before we decide on the nature of the struggle we should pursue.

Anarchist agriculture would not be based on growing those crops which would gain most financial profit, nor would it be restricted by the needs of an exporting industrial capitalism to maintain a large market for imported food. It would be founded entirely on the exploitation of the soil to its full capacity in order to grow an abundance of the food necessary for the population of this island.

In order that the soil might be cultivated as intensively as possible, it would be divided into comparatively small units, worked by groups holding the land in common, and organised into collectives or syndicates. In general, the syndicate would correspond with the village, and thus the village commune would be revived as a living functional unit.

The village syndicates would embrace not only the farmworkers but also those rural workers whose occupations, while not directly agricultural, are necessary to farming, e.g. blacksmiths, bricklayers, wheelwrights, carpenters, mechanics, etc. It would satisfy the common needs of its component groups. Farm machinery would be held in common by the workers in the syndicate, which would arrange the allocation of machinery among the groups. It would also arrange the distribution of seeds, fertilisers, feeding stuffs for cattle and other products necessary for agricultural work. It would arrange veterinary services and the destruction of pests and, at times such as harvest when co-ordinated work was necessary, it would arrange this as well.

The village syndicates would be grouped in district federations, and these again would be united in a national federation. The federations would conduct agricultural research and education. Under anarchism the science of agriculture would cease to be academic and would become intimately connected with the practice of farming, so that any discoveries that might heighten the productivity of the soil or reduce the effort of cultivation would find general and immediate application.

The federations would maintain close contact with factories and workshops making and repairing agricultural machinery and the

chemical factories manufacturing artificial fertilisers. They would arrange with the syndicates of food preparation workers and distributive workers the provision of fresh food to the non-agricultural population and of raw materials for manufactured food. Collection centres for agricultural products, dairies, bacon factories, canning factories and other establishments where simple processing takes place and where close proximity to the growing area is desirable would be embodied in the agricultural syndicates.

The federations would arrange with the distributive syndicates for the provision of non-agricultural goods necessary for the farm workers, and with the appropriate service syndicates for the provision of amenities in the country districts such as transport and health services, housing, water and electricity supplies, etc.

Anarchist society in general would be regulated on the principle of 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. The wages system would be superseded by the distribution of goods, and in this distribution no man would be favoured because of his function. A stockman would receive no more than a general labourer. On the other hand, a man with a family – and therefore greater needs – would receive more than a single man with no children.

Administration would be in the hands of the workers. Each farm group would be autonomous so far as its own affairs were concerned, and the assembled members would reach all decisions affecting the work and administration of the farm. The village syndicate would co-ordinate the various groups and all decisions regarding village matters would be agreed among the members, who would appoint a delegate committee to administer the decisions of the village assembly. This assembly would govern not only the agricultural and economic co-ordination of village life, but also the municipal functions of the present parish councils and arbitration in the event of disputes between members. The village would appoint delegates to the regional federations, which in their turn would appoint delegates to the national federations. No delegate would have power to speak for anything but the decisions of the workers who elected him, and would be subject to recall at any time. He would be elected for a comparatively short period, as would any officials who might be found necessary. Neither delegates nor officials would enjoy a standard of living higher than that of the agricultural workers themselves.

With this form of organisation, agriculture, like every other function in an anarchist society, would be administered from the bottom of the pyramid. All decisions would be those of the workers, conveyed by

delegates with no 'representative' role and administered by a minimum number of officials elected for short periods and paid at a rate no greater than that of the workers they served. So would be prevented the rise of a powerful bureaucracy and the appearance of a new class basis within the industry.

An agriculture based on a sound economic and social basis would provide for an increase in the country population, and it is likely that there would be a large and increasing shift of population back from the centres of industry into the rural areas. An industrial system not concerned with exportation on an imperialist basis and in which all the scientific means had been used for reducing labour, would release many workers for the land and with this increase in the working population and a full mechanisation of agriculture, a more intensive cultivation could be introduced at the same time as a considerable increase in leisure.

This is an outline of the proposals which anarchists advance for the reorganisation of agriculture. And it should be emphasised that our ideas are not based on theory merely but also on the concrete example of the land workers' collectives in Spain. In July 1936, at the commencement of the Spanish Civil War, revolutionary action was taken by the peasants and workers in many parts of anti-Franco Spain (in particular Catalonia and the part of Aragon which Durruti's columns liberated in the early months of the war) and they carried out large-scale expropriations of land, as well as industrial and transport undertakings. The factories and transport services were managed, with very much increased efficiency, by the syndicates of the workers in their respective industries, and the land was, for the most part, taken over and worked collectively by the peasants acting in free co-operation. The collectivisation was very extensive: in Aragon it is estimated that some 75% of the land was worked by collectives, and in Catalonia the proportion was even higher, in the region of 90%. But, in spite of the widespread nature of the movement for collectivisation, it was carried out on an entirely free basis and no compulsion was attempted by the anarchists to force individual peasants to join the collectives. On the contrary, where peasants elected to remain independent, the collectives assisted them in every possible way and even allotted to them extra parcels of land to increase their holdings to the size necessary for a reasonable standard of living. Nor were the collectives in any way or at any time due to the actions of the Spanish Republican Government. They were established entirely by the free and spontaneous action of the peasants themselves, and

all the government did was unwillingly to recognise the *fait accompli* and issue decrees confirming collectivisation. When, later in the war, through the lack of vigilance of the workers and treachery of Communists and Socialists, the government had become strong on Russian arms and Bank of Spain gold, it began the destruction of the collectives – which was only completed by Franco's armies.

During the period when power remained in the hands of the workers, the condition of agriculture under the collectives was improved and everywhere the peasant standard of life became higher. There were technical improvements in all types of farming. Selection of seeds, the use of chemical fertilisers and the introduction of farm machinery (often into districts where before it had been unknown) resulted in an increase in the productivity of the land and a simultaneous reduction in the labour necessary for its cultivation. The average increase in wheat yields was approximately 30%, and there were smaller but appreciable increases in the yields of other crops, both cereal and root. Irrigation was greatly extended and new orchards were planted. It was, however, in stock breeding that the most remarkable results were obtained, and in Aragon the number of cattle and pigs was tripled during a period of eighteen months. Owing to a process of selective elimination of diseased beasts, the stock became healthier and the extension of cultivation to hitherto unploughed lands produced an ample supply of cattle food.

This increase in agricultural productivity, together with the application of the principle of mutual aid to village affairs, brought about an improvement of the peasant's life. Each person, working according to his ability, received according to his needs of the necessities of life. The community cared for the aged and the unfit, and through the federations of collectives the poorer villages were assisted by the more prosperous, while by arrangement with the health and education syndicates medical services and schools were established everywhere in the rural areas.

Thus, both by the increase of food production of the country and the amelioration of the conditions of the land workers, the anarchist organisation of agriculture in Catalonia and Aragon, carried out by the free and direct action of the workers themselves, proved in practice the value of the type of revolutionary change we propose.

It must be emphasised that, though certain plans can be laid down for the reorganisation of the farming industry immediately after the revolution, anarchism does not envisage a static blueprint future for the world. On the contrary, when men have been freed from economic

and social oppressions, the evolution of human institutions will probably attain forms we cannot imagine and therefore, though we can make proposals for a scheme of agricultural organisation immediately after the revolution, this must not be regarded as something permanent and therefore dead but as the basis of further social developments.

Errico Malatesta

The Land

The problem of the land is perhaps the most serious and dangerous problem which the revolution will have to solve. In justice (abstract justice which is contained in the saying *to each his own*) the land belongs to everybody and must be at the disposal of whoever wants to work it, by whatever means he prefers, whether individually or in small or large groups, for his own benefit or on behalf of the community.

But justice does not suffice to ensure civilised life and if it is not tempered, almost cancelled out, by the spirit of brotherhood, by the consciousness of human solidarity, it leads, through the struggle of each against all, to subjection and the exploitation of the vanquished, and that is, to injustice in all social relations.

To each his own. The *own* of each should be the part share due to him of the natural wealth and the accumulated wealth of past generations on top of what he produces by his own efforts. But how to divide justly the natural wealth, and determine in the complexity of civilised life and in the complex process of production, what is an individual's production? And how is one to measure the value of the products for the purposes of exchange?

Errico Malatesta (1854-1932). This article was first published in 1920 in the Italian anarchist daily and is one of some 27 included in *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* published by Freedom Press, 300 pages, £4.50.

If one starts from the principle of each for himself, it is utopian to hope for justice, and to claim it is hypocrisy, maybe unconscious, which serves to cover up the meanest egoism, the desire for domination and the avidity of each individual.

Communism then appears to be the only possible solution; the only system based on natural solidarity which links all mankind; and only a desired solidarity linking them in brotherhood can reconcile the interest of all and serve as the basis for a society in which everyone is guaranteed the greatest possible well-being and freedom.

On the question of possession and utilisation of the land it is even clearer. If all the cultivable land masses were equally fertile, equally healthy and equally well situated for the purpose of barter, one could visualise a division of the land in equal parts among all the workers, who would then work in association if they wished, and how they wished, in the interests of production.

But the conditions of fertility, the health and situation of the land are so different that it is impossible to think in terms of an equable distribution. A government, by nationalising the land and renting it to land workers could, in theory, resolve the problem by a tax which would go to the state, what economists call the economic return (that is, whatever a piece of land, given equal work, produces in excess over the worse piece). It is a system advocated by the American Henry George. But one sees immediately that such a system pre-supposes the continuation of the bourgeois order, apart from the growing power of the state and the governmental and bureaucratic powers with which one would have to contend. So, for us, who neither want government nor believe that individual possession of agricultural land is possible or desirable – economically or morally – the only solution is communism. And for this reason we are communists.

But communism must be voluntary, freely desired and accepted; for were it instead to be imposed, it would produce the most monstrous tyranny which would result in a return to bourgeois individualism.

Now, while waiting for communism to demonstrate – by the example of the collectives so organised at the outset – its advantages and be desired by all, what is our practical agrarian programme to be put into operation as soon as the revolution takes place?

Once legal protection has been removed from property, the workers will have to take possession of all land which is not being directly cultivated by existing owners with their own hands; they will have to establish themselves into associations and organise production, making use of the ability and all the technical skills of those who have

always been workers, as well as of the former bourgeoisie who, having been expropriated and being no longer able to live by the work of others, will by the necessity of things have become workers as well. Agreements will be promptly reached with the associations of industrial workers for the exchange of goods, either on a communistic basis or in accordance with the different criteria prevailing in different localities.

Meanwhile all food stocks would be expropriated by the people in revolt and distributed to the different localities and individuals organised through the initiative of the revolutionary groups. Seeds, fertilisers and farm machinery and working animals will be supplied to the land workers; free access to the land for whoever wants to work it.

There remains the question of peasant proprietors. Should they refuse to join forces with the others then there would be no reason to harass them so long as they do the work themselves and do not exploit the labour of others ... The disadvantages, the virtual impossibility of isolated work, would soon attract them into the orbit of the collectivity.

• Comment on Raven 28

The 'Editorial Notes' for *The Raven 28* claim that it is an 'unplanned' issue with no single topic, but it is actually pervaded by the theme of complaint. I don't wish to reinforce this, but I do wish to reply to the more arrogant and ignorant points made against my review of David Goodway's collections of writings by Herbert Read and Alex Comfort.

Tony Gibson is 'somewhat astonished' by my 'curious review', but the reason is that we disagree about Alex Comfort. We shall have to agree to differ about Comfort's later scientific work; but I shall treasure Gibson's remark, 'I really cannot understand why Walter should presume to set himself up as a judge of the merit of scientific writing'. Keep out – experts only! As for Comfort's sexological work, Gibson misunderstands my statement that 'he is best known as an advocate of free and joyful sex ... but this has proved to be literally a dead end in the age of AIDS and anomie'. He claims that 'the implication here is that Comfort has been the apostle of sexual promiscuity, and *that* is what his two popular sex books are about', and that 'the reference to AIDS implies that now God has put a stop to all that nonsense by threatening us with a fatal disease'. Dachine Rainer goes further, accusing me of 'the suggestion that Comfort advocates sexual promiscuity (*and* irresponsibility)'. These claims are ridiculous; I made no such implications; I said nothing about either promiscuity or irresponsibility, let alone God. Comfort's own retreat from his (and our) earlier optimism about free and joyful sex may be seen in the drastic revisions of later editions of the two books, and the failure of his (and our) hopes of the so-called 'permissive society' may be seen all around us. And I didn't give the 'impression' that Comfort 'more or less fizzled out after the 1950s', but stated carefully when I consider which of his remarkable gifts declined.

Dachine Rainer finds my review 'baffling and distressing', but the reason is that she misunderstands most of it. It isn't worth chasing all her mistakes (and misquotations), but it is worth catching a few. She says that 'there is little comparison between Read and Comfort, so to what end does Walter write a twinning review comparing them?' Collections of their anarchist writings were edited by the same person and produced by the same publisher at the same time, so it made sense to review the books together and to compare and contrast the two men. She then remarks that I 'get it "arse backwards"'; I should

hope so – it would look pretty silly the other way round! Seriously, though, none of my comparisons was intended to be invidious. Read really was very brave in the First World War, whatever one may think of it, and even pacifists recognise what is involved in getting medals for gallantry; so was Comfort brave in the Second World War, and I do indeed agree with his opposition to it, though having experienced it I can sympathise with those who supported it. War is not as simple as she thinks. She says that ‘no anarchist is entitled to support one, ever’. What about the thousands of anarchists who fought and died in civil wars in Mexico, Russia, Spain and so on? She asks, ‘What, for goodness sake, is anarchist militarism?’ Hasn’t she heard of Most or Galleani or Zapata or Makhno or Durruti? My characterisation of Comfort was not hostile and contained no ‘loaded words’, except in her imagination. Of course I can distinguish between society and the state, but Comfort really did set the individual against society as well as the state. Has she read *Art and Social Responsibility*? She mentions some of Comfort’s early fiction. Has she read his later novels and poems? She asks ‘what is one to make’ of my statement that his ideas ‘became increasingly mystical and his writings became increasingly mystifying’. Has she read *I and That* or *Reality and Empathy* or *Science, Religion and Scientism*? She says that she found my ‘attack on George Woodcock’ in *The Raven 2* ‘offensive’. But it was a detailed discussion of his books on anarchism consisting entirely of factual statements. Is she really suggesting that anarchist authors are beyond serious criticism?

She asks ‘Who is Nicolas Walter to set himself up on the subject of *quantity*?’ When did I do so? She says that my ‘belittling services’ are ‘not required’. Who is she to say so? She says ‘I want to know how and why Nicolas Walter has become our pre-obituarist’. So do I. She ends up by asking ‘Is there a motivation that has escaped me?’ Yes – the wish to tell the truth about anarchism and about anarchists, including the so-called ‘giants among us’, even if it offends some other anarchists.

Nicolas Walter

• Comment on Raven 29

I would like to make two comments on *The Raven 29*, 'World War Two', which was, incidentally, a pretty good antidote to some of the more inappropriate writings that appeared around the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day.

Firstly I'd like to make a point of information concerning the book *Other Losses: an investigation into the mass deaths of German prisoners of war after World War Two* by the Canadian James Bacque. In *The Raven* Adrian Walker reviews the book in his piece 'Woe Unto the Defeated', while Vernon Richards alludes to it in the introduction when he writes "[Significantly] ... the book exposing the treatment of German prisoners of war by the Americans and French – more than a million were made to starve to death – is published only in Canada". In fact *Other Losses* has been published in the UK. The original edition was published in Canada in 1989, and the first UK edition was by Macdonald in 1990. The hardback copy that I have is a second reprint of 1991, and I have seen paperback copies as well. I'm not sure how widely reviewed the book was, but I remember reviews in CND's magazine *Sanity* at the time of the Gulf War when the reviewer used it to throw doubt on the likely US treatment of captured prisoners, and in *The Economist* which called, to the journal's credit, for a full debate on the subject.

That brings me to the second point and Adrian Walker's review, which is an excellent and accurate statement of Bacque's case. Although there hasn't been a great deal of attention paid to the claims in the book (unlike the publicity surrounding Nicholas Bethell's *The Last Secret* in 1974) there has been a response to Bacque's claims. This has come in the shape of *Eisenhower and the German POWs: facts against falsehood*, edited by Günter Bischoff and Stephen E. Ambrose, and published by Louisiana State University Press. Unfortunately I haven't read the book, which is a collection of papers presented at a special conference called to discuss the subject by the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans in 1990 – a pretty fast reaction to a book that was published only a year before. However, I have seen a review of the book by John Kentleton of Liverpool University that appeared in the journal *History* in 1994. The gist of his review is that the articles in *Eisenhower and the German POWs* effectively demolish Bacque's case, although it is admitted that "a small percentage of prisoners died unnecessarily". Whether or not the issue is closed, I don't know, but it is important to know that that

book has been published freely in Britain and that there has been a response to Bacque's allegations. However, that still leaves us with the deaths of millions of German refugees from the east after the end of the fighting.

My second point is, perhaps, less important as it is a matter of personal taste. I feel that I must express my surprise at the tone of Peter Cadogan's article 'On Being There in World War Two'. It was a long time after the war before I was born, and I have no idea how I would have reacted had I been there at the time, but surely Peter Cadogan in defending his view that the war was right should have avoided a light-hearted, almost frivolous tone. Moreover, it is rather surprising to see in an anarchist journal someone reaching so easily for the phrase "a just war". This pernicious concept was the product of the medieval church when it sought to justify its totally unjustifiable Crusades – the legacy of which still poisons Islamic-European relations today. Needless to say, most wars are described as just wars by the various bosses who instigate them, and lead them from the rear. Also, Peter Cadogan is on shaky ground if he sees the main aim of fighting the war as being the destruction of Hitler's filthy regime or totalitarianism in general. It wasn't until we were well into the war that these became the country's official war aims (or should I say excuses) and, indeed, until the spring of 1940 the government was hoping that Fascist Italy might come into the war on our side in exchange for a bit of territory in Africa. Milan Rai in the conclusions to *Raven 29* gives a far more accurate picture of the real war aims of Churchill and Roosevelt, and they hardly amount to some moral 'just cause'. Also one is tempted to ask Peter Cadogan if he was so keen on destroying murderous totalitarianism why didn't he enlist with the Finns for the Winter War (as many Swedes did) or, earlier, join the Poles to fight the Soviets who were the allies of the Nazis in their attack on Poland in 1939?

It is difficult to view the Second World War with anything except stunned horror and incomprehension, but even if, like Peter Cadogan, we accept the view that it had to be done, then surely we have to recognise that the means were unquestionably horrific, disgusting and inhuman. The story of the Second World War isn't of a 'just war' well fought, but, at the very best, a 'just war' fought, as all wars are, unjustly. And as for the aims? Well, the burnt Battle of Britain pilot Richard Hillary did his best with: "We fought a lie in the name of a half-truth".

Steve Cullen

Raven 17

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