

# WORKSHOP PAPERS

for

## Land & Farming

**Workshop Leader - Sir Julian Rose**

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**Prepared for 'The Radical Consultation'**

by

**CESC**

**21st August 2001**

**The Lore of The Land by John Seymour**

The 'owner' of a piece of land has an enormous responsibility, whether the piece is large or small. The very word 'owner' is a misnomer when applied to land. The robin that hops about your garden, and the worms that he hunts, are, in their own terms, just as much 'owners' of the land they occupy as you are. 'Trustee' would be a better word. Anyone who comes into possession, in human terms, of a piece of land, should look upon himself or herself as the trustee of that piece of land — the 'husbandman' — responsible for increasing the sum of living things on that land, holding the land just as much for the benefit of the robin, the wren and the earthworm, even the bacteria in the soil, as for himself.

Of course we have a right to use the land for our own purposes, to grow food, for example, or timber, or to make it beautiful to our eyes. We have a right — and a duty — to maintain a due order and balance among all the other forms of life on it. Man is part of Nature too and must take his part in the dance of Life and also of Death. If the caterpillars destroy our cabbages we have a right to sort 'em out. We do *not* have a right, though, to sort 'em out by using some indiscriminate poison that is going to do all other kinds of living things to death.

As well as rights, we have a positive duty with regard to land. According to the Book of Genesis, God put the Man and the Woman in the Garden to 'dress it and keep it'. Whether we look upon Genesis as divinely inspired or not, it is obvious that we should do just this. We should hand the land on to the next trustee better, more fruitful, more beautiful, and richer in living creatures than it was when we took it over. The trusteeship of land is a daunting responsibility. It is part of the Earth's surface that we are given charge of, full of living creatures other than mankind, in trust for future generations of humans as well as all forms of life.

The reason why our land is so desperately badly husbanded now is that it is held in too large units.

The loving care that a good husbandman can devote to a piece of land can only be spread so far; when one person 'owns' hundreds of acres he is forced to resort to mechanical and chemical warfare; the bulldozer and the poison spray take the place of Adam's spade and Eve's pruning shears. I am not inveighing against chemicals and machinery but simply against the thoughtless abuse of these things made necessary by over-swollen land holdings.

It can be seen over and over again that a smallholding is more fruitful, more beautiful, and richer in varied life than a vast agribusiness. This book is not intended for the agribusinessman, but for the holder of a piece of land of a size that he can really husband and cope with, and treat with the tender loving care that we should always give to the soil and its denizens.

Neither does this book tell people how to grow food: there are plenty of good books on that subject. It is to exhort people to care well and humanely for the land in their charge, to show how it is possible to tend the land beautifully: to plant it with trees, to establish well cared-for hedges instead of wire fences, to build good timber gates instead of buying steel ones that quickly rust and become eye-sores, to drain wet places where drainage is needed and to do all the other operations that generally come under the heading of 'estate management' when applied to huge estates.

If the 'estate management' side of things is looked after, the food production part comes much more easily and will be more successful. And, further, when you come to hand over the land to the next generation, you can do so with pride.

*The first chapter in 'The Lore of The Land' published by Whittet Books in 1982*

### **Hebenschhausen Declaration On Soil by Ivan Illich**

The ecological discourse about planet earth, global hunger and threats to life impels us to look upon the soil, humbly, as philosophers. We stand on soil, not on earth. From soil we come, and to soil we bequeath our excrements and remains. And yet soil its cultivation and our bondage to it, is remarkably absent from those things clarified by philosophy in our western tradition.

As philosophers, we search beneath our feet because our generation has lost its grounding in both soil and virtue. By virtue, we mean that shape, order and direction of action informed by tradition, bounded by place, and qualified by choices made within the habitual reach of the actor; we mean the adoption of practice mutually recognized as being good within a shared local culture which enhances the memories of a place.

We note that such virtue is traditionally found in labour, craft, dwelling and suffering, supported, not by an abstract earth, environment or energy system, but by the particular soil these very actions have enriched with their traces.

And yet, in spite of this ultimate bond between soil and being, soil and the good, philosophy has not brought forth the concepts which would allow us to relate virtue to common soil, something vastly different from managing behaviour on a shared planet.

We were torn from the bonds to soil, the connections which limited action, making practical virtue possible, when modernization insulated us from plain dirt, from toil, flesh, soil and grave.

The economy into which we have been absorbed, some willy-nilly, some at great cost, transforms people into interchangeable morsels of population, ruled by the laws of scarcity. Commons and homes are barely imaginable to persons hooked on public utilities and garaged in furnished cubicles. Bread is a mere foodstuff, if not calories or roughage.

To speak of friendship, religion and joint suffering as a style of conviviality, after the soil has been poisoned and cemented over, appears like academic dreaming to people randomly scattered in vehicles, offices, prisons and hotels.

As philosophers, we emphasize the duty to speak about soil. For Plato, Aristotle and Galen, it could be taken for granted; not so today.

Soil on which culture can grow and corn be cultivated is lost from view when it is defined as a complex subsystem, sector, resource, problem or 'farm', as agricultural science tends to do.

As philosophers, we offer resistance to those ecological experts who preach respect for science, but foster neglect for historical tradition, local flair and the earthly virtue, self-limitation. Sadly, but without nostalgia, we acknowledge the pastness of the past. With diffidence, then, we attempt to share what we see: some results of the earth's having lost the soil. And we are irked by the neglect for soil in the discourse carried on among boardroom ecologists.

But we are also critical of many among well-meaning romantics, Luddites and mystics who exalt soil, making it the matrix, not of virtue, but of life.

Therefore, we issue a call for a philosophy of soil: a clear, disciplined analysis of that experience and memory of soil without which neither virtue nor some new kind of subsistence can be.

*Sigmar Groeneveld, Lee Hoinacki, Ivan Illich*

*December 12th, 1990*

**This Awful Place by John Seymour**

*The author has written more than 30 books. He farms a smallholding in Ireland and is a regular contributor to these columns.*

There was media uproar some time ago when a certain clerk in holy orders of the Anglican communion claimed that it was not a sin to steal from supermarkets. It could be looked on as 'a fair redistribution of wealth', he said. Well, I cannot take advantage of the implied plenary indulgence of the statement because I took a vow some years ago never to enter a supermarket again.

But the controversy brought me into a long but friendly argument with a friend who is a prime exemplar of the 'more is marvellous' and 'big is best' philosophy. I will try, as fairly as I can, to tabulate his side of the argument below.

**More is marvellous**

1. Supermarkets are more efficient.
2. They create 'jobs'.
3. They have improved the quality of life.
4. They have improved the quality of our food.
5. They save labour.
6. They have reduced prices.
7. They improve our towns.
8. They improve food hygiene.
9. They encourage trade.
10. They are a boon to the poor.

**My replies**

For what?  
 They destroy them.  
 They have worsened it.  
 They have worsened it.  
 See reply to No. 2  
 For how long?  
 They destroy communities.  
 They worsen it.  
 How sad.  
 They corrupt the poor.

Now I wish to put forward my own arguments on the subject.

Supermarkets can out-compete traditional shops because they employ less labour, and also because they can buy produce more cheaply in bulk and drive much harder bargains with the producers. As they very soon effectively knock out most of the competition they can also drive much harder bargains with their employees. Therefore they can sell produce at a cheaper price than can conventional shops. But consider the *hidden* costs - the costs that the supermarket doesn't have to pay but the rest of us do. Here are a few:

- The dole, or other government financial assistance to people thrown out of work by the supermarkets. *They are* more labour efficient than shops, therefore they *do* put people out of work in the long run. *They don't* have to pay the cost of supporting the people thrown out of work - we do.
- The environmental costs of the vast amount of long-distance road transport that they create. Anyone who has driven on Europe's motorways knows that a large proportion of those enormous articulated lorries thundering along either actually belong to supermarket chains or are carrying goods to supermarkets. One thing supermarkets are very bad at is buying locally produced goods; they are really only good at buying in the greatest bulk and that normally means carrying goods long distances.
- The cost of treating the increasing number of cases of respiratory diseases caused by the increased road traffic density.
- The cost of keeping the network of motorways and highways in repair from the damage caused by traffic generated by supermarkets.
- A cost that our orthodox straw-man economist is not even allowed by his discipline to consider: the awful environmental damage to our villages, town centres and cities by the progressive dying-off of their former commercial centres. Another thing that our potential economist could not even dream of considering is the aesthetics of the thing. Have you ever seen a supermarket that is not ugly? If you are a water-colourist or an oil painter, have you ever felt an urge to paint a supermarket? Do you find anything pleasing about a town main street in which many of the shops are empty and boarded up - or else turned into things such as amusement arcades? Come on - be honest!
- The vastly increased motor traffic made necessary by the demise of the local shop to which you could easily walk and the faraway super or 'hyper' market to which you have to go by car. This process has only gone so far in Europe: I spent some weeks in a house that somebody kindly leant me near a suburb of San Francisco. The nearest retail outlet of any sort was seven miles away and there was no public transport. You would have actually starved there if you did not have a car. The awful congestion of the traffic in most major cities nowadays is caused more by people travelling to and fro to supermarkets than any other factor.

- The evil effects the supermarkets have on producers. Having knocked out all the small-shop competition, the supermarkets quickly get a monopoly and can impose what terms they like on their suppliers. These terms are onerous, and lead to the worst sort of sweated labour and shoddy workmanship.
- The quality of goods in supermarkets is not better, it is worse. This may be a matter of personal opinion but it is certainly my opinion. Where do people who value real excellence buy their goods? Supermarkets? Where do very good restaurants buy their raw materials?
- Until the supermarkets knock out all effective retail competition their prices will be lower than those of the shops. But when they *have* knocked it out then they have a monopoly and can (and do) charge what they like. The supermarkets compete against each other? You've got to be joking!
- And now we come to what is, for me, the worst thing of all about supermarkets. They siphon wealth out of an area into the big financial centres. If you spend a pound in a local shop the pound stays local, and if you are in business you will probably get it back again, if you spend it in a supermarket it goes into the pocket of some billionaire in some distant city and it will never come back. A supermarket set up in some local community is like a giant pump, sucking wealth out of that community and delivering it far away. It is the most efficient method ever devised for impoverishing local communities. Yes, supermarkets are efficient all right - efficient for that! The giant English supermarket combines are at this very moment engaged in trying to buy up all the Irish supermarkets. If they do this most of the wealth of Ireland will be pumped across the Irish Sea and it will not come back again. What, the English companies will send the money back to buy Irish goods with it? They damned well won't. They will buy their goods from the sweatshops in the Far East, like they do now.

So what can we few - we happy few - who think these supermarkets are evil do to fight them? Well, don't go to them, that is all. This would still be possible in Europe - it is possible, I do it and I am still alive. In the United States, it would not be possible in most places. The process has gone too far.

Unless you were self-sufficient in most items (as indeed I am) you would not be able to survive without the supermarkets. There is just no alternative: *all* the real shops have been destroyed. But in Europe we still have the chance to bring this horrible process to a halt. Let us for God's sake take it. Let us swear an oath and keep it with an equal mind...

There is a sort of slightly less undesirable alternative to the supermarket in some places: the 'shopping precinct' or 'shopping arcade'. Here a lot of shops, nearly all of them branches of chain store companies, are gathered under a huge roof, or several huge roofs. To see one of these at its peak of development you have to go to Milton Keynes. I went there once, to buy a book.

I parked in an enormous car park - which must have taken up at least 100 acres of excellent farmland - and entered a huge complex of vast arcades, all hideous in the extreme. I set out to find a bookshop. Nobody working in the place seemed to know anything at all. Eventually, weary and footsore and with my morale in rags, I found a bookshop. It sold only remaindered books, and rubbishy ones at that. So I soldiered on. At length, nearly dropping with anguish and fatigue, I tracked down the only other bookshop in the 'precinct'. It was closed and boarded up.

For some reason those despairing words that the immortal Captain Scott wrote in his diary just before he died in a blizzard in the howling wilderness of the Antarctic welled up in my conscience. 'Great God!' I cried aloud. 'Great God, this is an awful place.' Unlike Captain Scott I got out to tell the tale.

*First Published in 1999 in Fourth World Review Nos. 90 & 91*

## **We Have Betrayed The Land of Our Fathers by William Rees-Mogg**

Yesterday Somerset was at its most beautiful. The grass, beneath the February sunshine, was glowing through a soft dusting of snow. The church bells were ringing across empty pastures; the landscape could remind one of the opening lines of Gray's *Elegy*: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, the lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea."

We even had the good news from Sri Lanka that Marcus Trescothick had scored a century for England — the first century by a Somerset player for England since the glory days of Ian Botham. One does not need to be an unabashed Somerset romantic, as Auberon Waugh was and I am, to recognise that this is one of the blessed plots of the world, a special place, a special people, a land of summer in the west.

Yet there is something tragically wrong. For the past year about a dozen Somerset farmers a month have been retiring from the milk business, which is still the backbone of Somerset farming. No farmer goes into milk lightly or leaves it for light reasons. It takes money to pay for the capital plant of a good dairy unit; it takes years to build up a good milking herd, and such cows have always commanded a premium price. Yet for centuries Somerset farmers have thought this investment was well worth making. Somerset is ideal dairy country, among the best in England, which means among the best in the world.

Somerset is an almost perfect grass-growing county. It has light soil, though some of the Mendip clays are very heavy; it has the temperate climate; above all it has the rainfall. It also has the tradition of good animal husbandry, which itself goes back for centuries. Given equal competition, given the so-called "level playing field", Somerset milk producers could match anyone in the world. If they are being driven out of business, it is not because they are marginal producers or less efficient than the milk producers of the Continent. The opposite is nearer the truth.

Nor is this mass closure happening because the typical Somerset farmer is operating on too small a scale to compete. Even in my childhood the typical Somerset dairy farm was a holding of 60 to 100 acres. Now it is more likely to be between 200 and 500 acres, far larger than the average peasant holding on the Continent.

Last week Malcolm Pearce decided that he had to go out of milk. He was the biggest dairy farmer in Britain, with a herd of 3,000 cows. His decision was taken before the threat of foot-and-mouth disease reappeared, or the restrictions on movement.

The reason Pearce is going out of milk production is that he lost £800,000 last year because of the fall in the price of milk. He is being quoted as saying: "The price we get for milk now is less than it was 12 years ago...if a big dairy farmer like me cannot make it work, there's just no hope for the majority of small British farmers." Many small farmers have indeed left the business already; some are surviving on a subsistence basis, with no money to spend on the maintenance of hedges, ditches or gates. He also says, which I am afraid is true, that "the mood is now so desperate that farmers are becoming anarchists". The anger of Somerset farmers is the dangerous anger of quiet men who feel that they have been betrayed.

I do not know Pearce personally, but I do know his reputation. Among Somerset farmers he has the highest possible reputation as a farmer; among Somerset businessmen he has the highest possible reputation as a businessman. He also has the reputation of being a good neighbour. The local parish magazine recently reported that the *'Hinton Blewitt Women's Institute'* had been shown round his farm, and given tea, and had greatly enjoyed their outing.

Yet we have the most successful dairy farmer in Somerset, perhaps in Britain, saying that the business has become impossible, that it is now a licence to lose money, and that the farmers are desperate to the point of outrage. In 1999, the last year for which the figures exist, no fewer than 77 farmers in Britain committed suicide, and 25,000 left the land.

Somerset is, of course, not the only county where farmers are suffering; this is a nationwide blight. I recognise the same problems when I visit my son Jacob in Shropshire. Out of the windows of his house near The Wrekin, I see a beautiful herd of Friesians. I am sure every one of these well-cared-for cows represents a money loss to the farmer even before the ban on movement.

There is no single reason for this farming slump. 'BSE' was a blow; the fall of the euro was an even worse blow; the closure of 800 local abattoirs for supposedly hygienic reasons has increased travel and therefore spread disease as well as raised costs; 'Dairy Crest' is a near-monopoly milk processor, whose profits go up as the farm profits go down. Banks lent money freely in good times and, as is their custom, want it back in bad times.

Yet the main reason is the 'Common Agricultural Policy'. It is not an even-handed policy. For Britain's farmers it has become a ruinous trap - in the past five years, farmers' incomes have fallen by 70 per cent; the continental farmers have higher incomes based on larger subsidies, larger tax concessions and often cheaper credit.

The main reason has, indeed, been the fall in the euro, and the Treasury's refusal to follow European practice in compensating farmers for the consequent loss of value of the subsidy. Some people have suggested that farmers would be better protected if Britain were to join the euro, but this is an argument that they rightly distrust. There would need to be a 30 per cent devaluation of the pound on joining the euro to restore the 1995 level of British farm subsidies.

There is no possibility of the euro group of nations agreeing to give Britain such a massive competitive advantage. To enter the euro at the present exchange rate would mean that our farming would be ruined not just for now, but for decades to come. Indeed, a permanently overvalued pound would ruin the whole country, not just farming.

If foot-and-mouth disease does not make it impossible for the 'Countryside March' to go ahead on March 18, there will be many Somerset farmers in London on that day. Their protest will have only something to do with hunting; most of these dairy farmers have neither the time nor the money to hunt, though they support the right of their friends and neighbours to do so. They want to make a protest about the collapse of the farming economy.

They find themselves swallowed up in a catastrophe not of their own making; as they see it, this catastrophe was made in Europe, packaged in Whitehall and gift-wrapped for delivery by politicians of all parties, Conservatives, who ought to have known better, Labour, whom they see as an uncaring, even hostile urban elite, and Liberal Democrats, whom they now regard as mere fellow travellers of Labour. The attractiveness of the Liberal Democrats in Somerset was their independence; they are no longer seen as independent.

Farmers no longer trust any political party. They do trust some independent-minded local candidates - like David Heathcoat-Amory in Wells, whom they know has a real loyalty to the land. Farmers are naturally conservative: rearing animals teaches conservative lessons both about animal welfare and about human nature. Now they have become so angry at the failures of the Labour Government that they will mostly vote Conservative; they do not expect their votes to do more than decide a few marginal rural seats.

It is the smooth indifference of urban politicians which angers them most; it angers me too. During this crisis, which has grown worse month by month, the Government has persisted in legislation they see as anti-farming. As the farmers go bankrupt, the hereditary peers - who included almost the only working farmers in Parliament - were excluded, the right to roam was made law, a right for urban folk to wander across the land of bankrupt farmers and the 'Hunting with Hounds Bill' had the Prime Minister's support, though not his actual vote.

Faced with ruin, the Somerset farmers know that the mélange of public relations men and Islington barristers who govern the country do not give a damn for them; one may be sure that this attitude is fully reciprocated.

*First Published in The Times on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2001; © 2001 Times Newspapers Limited*

### **Farmers & Free Trade by Lord Beaumont of Whitley**

The dictum has gone forth that farmers should be paid to look after the countryside rather than to produce food. Many arguments are set out as to why this is desirable. No explanation has yet been given as to what it actually means in practice on the farm. Farmers would like answers to some of the basic questions that arise from this policy. Among them are these.

By what means will the countryside be cared for? Is it to be cultivated and grazed; or have conservationists invented a new way of maintaining an attractive landscape full of biodiversity? What size of farm, and how many working farmers does the nation need or want? Is the nation happy to eat mainly imported food?

The historical way of caring for land has been to farm it. Some 6 per cent is afforested. It has been cultivated to produce crops which are consumed either directly by people or grazed by animals which, in turn, feed humans. This activity has produced the traditional variety of colour and texture in fields which is an attractive and unique feature of many parts of Britain. It has also, until comparatively recent times, produced plenty of biodiversity.

Unfortunately, food production has never been very profitable, except during wars. Most foods can be produced more cheaply in some other part of the world, and the availability of cheap imported food has always held down the prices that farmers receive for their home-grown produce.

The poor financial return from farming has led to a steady outflow of people from the land. Smaller farms have been amalgamated into larger ones. The process is nothing new, but it has accelerated alarmingly recently as profitability has fallen to zero and below. More foreign food has become available, and food retailing has become concentrated in a few large supermarket chains which are able to drive hard bargains with individual farmers.

Many farmers have given up; indeed, a number have committed suicide. But the more determined have been doing their best to survive on the very small margins that remain. Some have expanded greatly and thoroughly embraced modern technology, substituting machinery, chemicals and IT for human labour. Even this does not always ensure profitability and even those with the largest farms have been happy to receive the subsidies which have been vital to keep those with average sized farms solvent.

The first reaction to reduced profitability is to intensify and to try to produce more--the "perverse supply response" now recognised by the 'RSPB'. But eventually there is a quitting point when farmers can no longer cope as prices fall steadily. If farmers can no longer afford to produce food, how are they to manage the land to produce the desired environment?

While there is no obvious demarcation line between those who have large and small farms, the great disparity between those who count their acres and animals by the thousand and what used to be the average farmer with 100 to 200 acres greatly complicates policy-making.

The average size of farm influences many things in the locality. Smaller farms are more likely to keep stock and have smaller fields, making for a more interesting landscape with greater biodiversity. They are also likely to have smaller incomes and thus an incentive to provide 'B&B' for tourists. Ten farms of 200 acres will employ more labour and are likely to provide more trade for local businesses of all kinds than one 2,000-acre enterprise.

At the time of the last 'Common Agricultural Policy' reform there was serious talk of progressively reducing the rate of subsidy for production over a certain level. This was called modulation, but is a totally different concept from 'Ministry of Agriculture, Farming & Fisheries' reduction of all payments by 4½ per cent - sometimes called modulation or 'recycling' - most of the money being put to activities other than food production. In the event, it was decided that, whatever the obvious and ethical advantages of such a policy, it would be, "detrimental to UK Agriculture PLC".

If farmers are to be rewarded solely, or even mainly, for conservation of the countryside, the issue will have to be faced: how many farmers should there be, and what should be their level of reward? If there are to be no food-related subsidies, and if the 'World Trade Organisation' forces us to accept whatever food anyone cares to send us, it must be faced that food production will not be a profitable activity and will be largely abandoned.

A two-tier market could well evolve with ordinary, imported food for the masses (including schools, the services and hospitals) and high-quality, home produced food for the fastidious. The fastidious will also, of course, have to be reasonably well off as the price differential between food produced abroad by giant international corporations without regulations and that produced at home to our high standards will probably be considerable.

Economists are not concerned about food security; there is plenty of food available worldwide, they say. Ordinary citizens are not so sure. It occurs to us that many things could happen to interrupt supplies from overseas, such as war, climatic disasters or pestilence. We have had plenty of opportunity to see what might happen in the latter case. People also worry about methods of production. The 'WTO' is already trying to force us to accept hormone treated, meat and milk. Some countries pay their workers very poor wages and do not recognise environmental restraints, others have little regard for animal welfare.

Economists may be happy to eat food produced in ways that are illegal in Britain, or perhaps they have faith that the proposed European food authority will somehow ensure that only high-quality food is imported. Most ordinary people would prefer to rely on British regulations to control the way their food is produced. But will they be able to afford home produced food if its producers receive no subsidy? How many consumers will be able to resist the temptation to buy the imported product with a much lower price tag?

Clearly the present regime is totally daft.

The 'WTO' ensures that imported food bought at the 'world market price' keeps our farmgate prices below the fair cost of production. Government (British and European Union together) step in with a 'CAP' regime which provides just enough subsidy to keep farming just alive; traders and retailers are sufficiently well organised to ensure that they receive by far the largest share of the money consumers pay for food. And the countryside is not being universally well cared for - farmers have no spare time or money for that work.

Everyone wants the 'CAP' reformed, but it is the 'WTO' which will govern farming. Should we not reform that first? Until 1995 farming was not much controlled by 'GATT' rules. Then came the 'WTO' and its 'Agreement on Agriculture' and also the resolution to tighten the rules progressively. This is called liberalising trade. Do we really need this 'Agreement on Agriculture'? It is supposed to be beneficial to developing countries, is it not? However, they tend to be getting poorer, not richer.

Surely the effects of the 'AOA' should be properly researched before it is made more comprehensive, which is the goal of many powerful members of the 'WTO'. There is much worldwide disquiet about the current negotiations, the details of which are very hard to discover. We need to know much more about what is going on. If farmers could earn a proper price for the food they produce, they would be much better able to care for the countryside in the process.

One or two speakers have commented that there was nothing in the 'Queen's Speech', or in the previous 'Queen's Speech', about agriculture. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Hereford was one of them.

It is not in the slightest surprising that that is the case. Nothing serious can be done for agriculture -except alleviating minor difficulties - short of a major move away from free trade, or at least a total modification of what the 'World Trade Organisation' is doing. Until there is that total volte-face on the part of the Government there will be no hope for British agriculture or the British countryside. It is time that the Government realised that.

*Speech in the House of Lords on the evening of 26th Jun 2001 (unreported in the national media)*

### Five Acres & A Cow by William Shepherd

Most party politicians, mass media commentators and corporate executives are genuinely perplexed by the antics of our apathetic youth as they drag their anarchist circus around the globe from Seattle to Washington, Prague, Nice, London, Gothenburg and Genoa. 'What a nerve!' they cry. 'How dare they pitch their tents across the street from our luxury hotels and disrupt our democratic deliberations!' I was first introduced to the full force of the *'World Trade Organisation's Multinational Agreement on Investments (MAI)'* in the summer of 1998 at a seminar put on by the *'Swedish Green Party'* for *'Almedalsveckan'* on the Baltic island of Gotland.

During the seminar it was pointed out that had this agreement been in force during South Africa's apartheid regime, all government boycotts and sanctions against South Africa would have been illegal...with the result that apartheid might still be the policy and Nelson Mandela still in jail.

Nor was this the least of it. States rights in the USA would have gone out the bathroom window as no country or city would have been allowed to introduce zoning laws or permits favouring its own nationals or local residents. As for notions such as community reinvestment acts, these too would have been outlawed along with anything else that sought to shift the balance of power away from outside interests and in favour of locality.

Unfortunately there is too little recognition of the extent to which governments...and in particular 'Big Government' as a species of governance...have brought this corporate backlash upon themselves by their 'rule of lawyers' and their 'government by regulation'. But a response that sets a new corporation-friendly set of regulations against the old government-friendly regulations is not the answer. If we are to grapple seriously with the global crisis, which is first and foremost a crisis of power brought on by giantism, then we must go further and come to terms with the 'Who? Whom?' of the regulating process itself. Who has power over whom? With whom do they wield it? And to what ends? Not that this is the first time that the question of 'the rule of law' has boiled down to the rather different question of 'who's law rules'. Sir Thomas More run foul of an earlier engagement.

But there are grounds for hope because as legitimacy drifts away from the *'WTO's'* member governments so niches will start to open up for legitimate governance representing real people in real communities. Before long someone will need to invent the idea of *'The League of Real Nations'* to help these new nations fight their corners. The side effects may be the main effects and the bad news may not turn out to be so bad after all. Nor is that the only piece of good news in these troubled times.

Quite unwittingly, the New York lawyers commissioned by the *'WTO'* to draft their *'Charter for Corporate Global Business'* have done a tremendous job on our behalf. In aikido terms, this *'MAI'* provides an excellent first draft for a *'Real Communities Charter'*.

Power only flows one way at a time, so by shifting the nexus of power in the *'MAI'* from the *'World Trade Organisation (WTO)'* to a myriad of *'Village Common Sense Trusts'*...and this can be done by inserting a few 'not's and 'no's here and there and reversing the flow of power in most of its clauses...we will have a manifesto for globalising economic activity within the confines of our own little local worlds...many millions of them...each stretching little further than 35 miles from where we live.

Once these are in place 'locality' could come into its own and begin its long fight back against 'interests'...particularly those of the 'riding roughshod over' type. Localization with self-sufficiency has the potential to cause much more damage to the anarchy of corporate power, with its mindless pursuit of bigger and bigger profits, than any anti-capitalist protest.

Besides, what would better revitalise national democracy in these time of electoral apathy...with turn-outs at elections sliding towards the 50% of that beacon of democracy the United States of America...than voting for parliaments that have the real power to choose between two identical charters; the one...where all the votes are...giving sovereignty to local communities; and the other ceding power and sovereignty to boardroom barons shuffling papers behind closed doors...and steel barricades...in unhealthy buildings?!

And what better way for a county (*sic!*) to deal with the bad new times ahead than by issuing five acres and a cow instead of the dole to its younger citizens. There is no reason why the Queen should not carry on sending telegrams to our mothers on their hundredth birthday. But her son would be better advised to devote himself to doling out cows and land deeds to every able-bodied male in his kingdom on their eighteenth birthday. Any Lord Lieutenant of the County that managed to push this through County Hall would soon be the envy of the country. 'All power to the parish' is the fastest way to ensure that all wealth stays in the county!

### **The Agricultural Crisis and Common Sense by Sir Julian Rose**

The current agricultural crisis is much more than simply a litany of disasters for the farming and rural communities. That is its most visible manifestation...and an ugly and deeply sad picture of disintegration it is.

But the roots of this crisis thread their way back through history...more than 250 years...to the first 'Enclosures Acts' and the dawn of the industrial revolution. The momentum of industrial urban enterprise, on its throne of "production equals progress" has never really looked back since then.

At first it just infiltrated the bucolic life style of the countryside, but later came to dominate it. Its early years were exemplified by the writings of Adam Smith whose thesis 'The Wealth of Nations' pronounced on mankind's natural drive to self-betterment as the main force behind commercial expedience "Let the invisible hand of the market do its work".

Well, it has. Letting the market economy dictate economic trends is now the accepted political position and anything that stands in its way is treated with disdain. Along the way there have been some notable examples, some of which had a massive impact on the countryside...as when Prime Minister Peel repealed the 'Corn Laws' in 1842 and opened the UK market to floods of cheap grain from the U.S., ejecting thousands of farmers from the land and into factories, thereby setting an early precedent for the globalisation of the food market.

The exodus from the land was also propelled by new technology on the farm, such as Jethro Tull's invention of the seed drill, which began its working life at Wallingford in Oxfordshire over 200 years ago. At one stroke, this sophisticated piece of machinery cast aside the need for lines of workers broadcasting the grain with seed fiddles, and replaced them with one man, a horse and the drill.

Farmers protested but, as with the 'Luddites', were duly swept aside by the march of "efficiency and progress". And so this march has continued, effectively unchallenged, into the 21st Century, and the birth of agrichemicals, advanced seed and animal breeding and the monocultural mass production of livestock, grain and horticultural products that we see today.

From a farming population equal to 60% of the U.K. workforce 250 years ago, we are down to just 2% today, and still falling. The countryside as a working community has died. Those who hang on now do so either by strategic marketing 'nous' or sheer scale, a trend likely to increase as more and more insolvent small to medium-sized farms come on to the market and are snapped up by large farmers intent on getting larger still, in their attempt to match the economies of scale seen as necessary to compete in the world market.

What 21st Century men and women nourish themselves with bears little resemblance to the fruits of the land enjoyed by even our more recent ancestors. Just four varieties of apple and three of potato claim 90% of the U.K. market today. In the 1950s over 50 well-known varieties of U.K. apple and some 30 different potato varieties graced our tables.

There were around 20 different types of dual purpose (beef/milk) regionally distinct breeds of cattle. Now just one breed of cow, the Friesian Holstein, dominates the marketplace. Lousy milk and lousy meat...but lots of it.

"Lousy meat and lousy milk...but lots of it" seems to sum up the state of play of European and North American agriculture today. The megalithic institutions that stand behind the mass-produced, processed foods of today are an iconoclastic symbol of the sterility of our land, and its pesticide-ridden soils and depleted flora and fauna.

We cannot understand the extent of the rape of our land and its workers, or the impoverishment of the human diet, without being aware of the contribution that five major players have had in the unprecedented carnage of the past four decades.

Transnational food, seed and chemical corporations, supermarkets, the 'World Trade Organisation', the 'EU' and the 'UK' government. They have come together in some sort of Holy Alliance for the Faustian reward of an unchallengeable control over our planetary resources.

Thousands of ancillary organisations shelter under this umbrella, each spreading tentacles of uniformity and insidious, hypnotic conformity on all they come into contact with...the McDonaldisation of daily life.

The agricultural crisis is itself just a mirror of this more pervasive crisis, which could be summed up as a crisis of scale and of humanity. Both of which can only find expression under appropriate conditions and within the framework of communities of human proportion.

The solution to the current agricultural crisis and the wider crisis facing society is dependent on an underlying recognition of the need for a major shift towards more localised patterns of production and consumption and living.

A revival of pride of product and place, and more autonomy within local populations. This needs to be set within a policy of regional renewable resource management of food, fuel and fibre, an exercise I have referred to elsewhere as the '*Proximity Principle*.'

Recognition of this principle needs to be pan-European, not just national, since '*CAP*' reform is an essential prerequisite for such a policy shift. Currently, '*CAP*' farming subsidies remain as wedded to the grandiose efficiency-led production ethic as the '*UK Ministry of Agriculture*'.

Thus European regions suffer the same absurd subsidised distortions as does the UK. Olive groves on 40% slopes ripped up to make way for monocultural wheat. Oil seed rape replacing mixed pastureland and the tramlines of pesticide and nitrate sprayers over everything. The artisan and peasant farmers, possessors of the true skills of the land, swept aside for the clinical technician, exploitative executive and cunning middleman.

Sir Richard Body in his book '*The Breakdown of Europe*' has spelt out the likely future if this sort of regime is not seriously reformed. I would agree with much of his prognosis. The cost to the environment, the taxpayer, and to human health of maintaining the monstrous distortions of the current '*CAP*' has already proved that we are living beyond our means.

The arrival of the Eastern European second tier candidate countries on the scene in 3 to 5 years time will almost certainly underline this fact and knock a large hole in '*EU*' coffers, 60% of which are used to support the current distortion of agricultural production and trading patterns...a package designed to shore up '*Fortress Europe*' and fend off '*Fortress NAFTA*' and '*Fortress Pacific Rim states*', the trading block divisions of the world.

Yet precisely because of this impending crisis, a new hope emerges.

A combination of '*World Trade Organisation*' pressures on the '*EU*' to cut out all production subsidies by the year 2003, and the post '*Mad Cow Disease*' and '*Foot and Mouth*' traumas sweeping through Europe, has opened a unique window of opportunity for change.

Add to this the emergence of a radical Green German '*Minister of Agriculture*' and a singularly motivated Italian agriculture minister, a very pro-organic Danish Prime Minister and equally supportive Swedish one - and the whole new alignment starts to take on some real significance.

We are now supping in the last chance saloon. The survival of our finest European food and farming traditions and the maintenance of a real foundation of Pan European and global biodiversity rests on a rash of common sense breaking out here and now. Common sense has always been thought of as a particularly British gift, but in my observation it remains the gift of a rare breed, not the common parlance of the '*Friesian Holsteins*'.

So the solution is to go back to the rare breeds and build from them. They have in them the thoroughbred authority of genuine survivors. They have adapted to the diverse pastures of old Britain, the climate and topography of their native regions. They have fine, strong immune systems that have withstood '*BSE*' and the worst of '*Foot and Mouth Disease*', whose '*MAFF*'-inspired control policies have brought UK farming to the bone in its knees, and to our best chance yet for a new beginning. They have one more great attribute - they produce real milk and real meat of distinction, subtlety and flavour.

The new beginning also needs to have these attributes, if it is to be the harbinger of a genuine renaissance. No convenience-dependent supermarket society in its bacteria-free, wrapped and sterilised cling film will ever serve the cause of sustainable, ecological organic farming.

“The consumer” is one reductionist commercial concept too far, the change at hand means getting back into the skin of sentient beings with real feelings and a sense of worth, swapping the supermarket for the market town and its productive hinterland, from whose humble origins the patterns of a sustainable rural trade once emerged...and will do once again.

Man’s worth, as man, has been shaped by the land - and has in turn shaped it. The future of each depends upon the other. It will be ever thus, so we had better make peace with nature, now, and give up the useless plundering.

*Julian Rose’s article “The Proximity Principle” sets out the basis for local sustainability. A copy can be sent on request by emailing [jrose.hardwickestate@talk.com](mailto:jrose.hardwickestate@talk.com). This paper was prepared as the post-prandial paper for Inaugural Dinner of Swindon Academic Inn on 15th September 2001*

### **De Foribus - Of Markets by Peter Thornber**

For upwards of a generation, various factors have conspired to jeopardize the livelihoods and very way of life of traditional livestock farmers in and upon our land so that they are now an endangered species for whose survival we must fight.

The current foot-and-mouth crisis is only the latest blow...however, Lord Ernie, in his '*English Farming Past and Present*', showed how the 1860's epidemic was followed by a resurgence of British agriculture, such as in the establishment of the breed societies and their development of pedigree blood-lines some of which have been imperilled or indeed wantonly exterminated today.

This paper is arguing for a similar regeneration to safeguard the future of farming through a return to, and a robust deployment of, traditional farming methods.

One threat to farming is externally imposed - that is, by Europe, the so-called '*Common Market*', and by the '*World Trade Organization*'.

We are robbed of our own freedom to farm as we wish, building upon the traditions of British agriculture which historically has led, and indeed still leads the world. We are supposed to be no longer self-sufficient agriculturally. Nor to be able to export our meat, milk, wool and other agricultural products but to be exposed to imports of inferior products from abroad with all the social, economic and health disadvantages that would involve.

At the same time, the oligopolistic stranglehold of the supermarket sector critically depresses livestock prices. The continued use by farmers, butchers and dealers of the auction system as a mechanism for setting livestock prices is perceived as an anachronism, really a threat as it secures a price that is both the best for the farmer and also transparent.

It is a public forum where prices are reported in the press so that both the housewife and the trading regulatory authorities are enabled to compare prices and price fluctuations as between the mart and the shop or supermarket counter.

Remove the tried and tested auction system from the equation and you have a system of direct buying where the fanner is at the mercy of the supermarkets. There is an analogy in the antiques trade with its awful warnings of old ladies paid a pittance for valuable heirlooms by '*totters*'. The demise of the auction system would be the triumph of a totter system which would at the same time remove transparency and thus remove the consumer's safeguard against overcharging.

It is ironic that the city slickers, civil servants, supermarket executives who write off livestock markets as outdated and out-of-place are the very folk who might well have collections of antiques, pictures, fine wines, rare books. They and their estates will not for a second entertain the '*totters*' but rather will entrust their effects to the auction houses - such as Tennants of Leyburn whose founder was also involved with the local mart from its earliest days and who are still inextricably linked with that mart which is a leader in livestock and landed property sales.

In an eloquent article in '*The Independent*' of May 17th 1977, the lay theologian Margaret Atkins contrasts the supermarket counter, where quick 'through-put' and profit are all, with the traditional village shop with its sense of community and sociableness.

Likewise, the auction mart is a meeting- place where week by week you greet and catch up with old friends and make new ones too and find relief after the solitude of the fields and the fells. That social aspect of the auction mart system was well recognized by '*Marks and Spencer's*' technical director Dr van Zwanenberg when at the '*Oxford Farming 2000 Conference*' he roundly asserted his firm's support of the marts as a matter not just of animal but also of human welfare.

The supermarkets are parasitic upon the communities they profess to serve: the marts are symbiotic.

For the most part, marts are farmer-owned cooperatives who plough back to rather than drain off their profits from, the customers and the community they serve and their directors and staff are drawn from that community. It is a matter of autarky rather than commercial 'colonization'.

The local auction mart is a valuable and often proudly-valued community resource lending its premises for theatre-in-the-round, meetings, exhibitions, accommodation for banks, shops, agricultural merchants. It draws folk from the surrounding catchment area and gives meaning to a market town.

At the same time it attracts school parties and tourists alike and thus acts as a much-needed ambassador for agriculture and rural life and a place where town and country can meet and learn anew to understand appreciate and respect each other and to live together in harmony.

Also being itself a farmer-owned business, a mart company is ideally placed to be able to establish, and provide expertise and administrative and other services to, the sorts of farmer-owned businesses and cooperatives which are being 'flagged-up' as the way to assist in the regeneration of farming and ancillary rural life through delivering added value, premium brand products.

Again the auction mart sector is essential to the restocking programme. And again through its long established and intimate relationship with its farming base, the trust it has won, the expertise it has built up, it is the main provider of support advice and help for farmers.

And it provides the perfect example of a market – away from the laissez-faire, monetarist pretence. Here there is a level playing field as between buyer and seller and a regulator – the auctioneer – who 'holds the ring'.