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This Land is Our Land

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Sample Sections

PART ONE: POINTS OF REFERENCE

Chapter 1: The World

Today, the British system of rural land ownership, in which owners have absolute control of their domains, can be found in many different parts of the world. As far away as you can get from Britain, in New Zealand, sturdy farmers of largely Scottish descent run their holdings on much the same basis as their counterparts in Ayrshire. But we need only contemplate the way things were before Captain Cook landed at Tolaga Bay on the eastern knuckle of North Island in 1769 to appreciate that the traditionally British approach to rural land management is far from being the only one.

The Maoris had no conception of the freehold ownership of land. The idea that one man could posses all rights to one stretch of land to the exclusion of everybody else was outside their understanding when the first British settlers arrived. Maori land was owned not by individuals, but in common by all the members of whatever tribe had laid claim to the area. Even the chieftain had no greater rights in the tribe's land than anybody else.

What was distributed to tribe members was not plots of land but rights of use, or usufruct. Though all land 'belonged' to all, one family might have the right to snare birds in a particular tree and the right to cultivate a particular plot. A different family might enjoy the right to glean the edible roots of the fern growing around the same tree and to catch birds on the same plot that the first family was cultivating. The distribution of these rights was based on the principle that every individual or family was entitled to an equal share in the community's resources. To make sure nobody acquired an excessive hare, a right of use was forfeited if not continually exercised; and no man had any right to more produce than he could glean. So nobody was going rebuild up capital for expansion or become an absentee owner.

Small wonder then that when the Maoris encountered British settlers there was some misunderstanding.[1] The tribe which sold 200 acres of land to The Reverend Samuel Marsden for twelve axes in 1815 literally did not know what it was giving away. Nor did the other Maori tribes which were to make similar deals during the next quarter of a century. Under the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840, the Maoris became subjects of Queen Victoria. But by 1980 only 4.5 per cent of New Zealand belonged to Maoris.[2] They had been dispossessed by the new class of

landowners from Britain. Today, the descendants of once proud tribesmen are to be found aimlessly hanging round the street corners of Auckland.

Elsewhere in Britain's former dominions, settlers encountered other attitudes to land ownership among indigenous peoples. In Canada, the Ojibwa Indians of Ontario organized their society on a fiercely individual basis.[3] Co-operation and even contact between households was reduced to a minimum. In winter, when the Ojibwa hunted big game and fur animals, their lands were divided into tracts subject to total individual ownership. A trespasser in another man's territory could be shot on sight. Every hunter was absolutely dependent on his own efforts. In summer, when individual households came together in groups as villages, activities like the gathering of berries, fishing and the trapping of rabbits were also carried out on an aggressively individualist basis. Individuals, not households, owned things: a husband needed his wife's permission to use her fishing net or to eat her berries or her rice. Similarly, a wife needed her husband's permission to use his canoe or to use the game and fish he had caught. A man owned land outright and in his own name only. He could transfer it when and to whom he pleased; relatives had no claim upon a man's land.

These two examples show how different are the ways in which mankind's key resource may be apportioned. Among 'primitive' tribes, however, the Maori approach is far more common than that of the Ojibwa. Co-operative arrangements reflect a generally lower level of commitment to personal wealth than we are used to encountering in 'advanced' societies. Many tribes have devised sophisticated mechanisms for ensuring that land is used in the way which best suits most members. Although substantial rights in plots of land may be allocated to individuals or households, mechanisms often exist to prevent the strong from appropriating the lion's share. The Zuni Indians of New Mexico are one tribe which has taken elaborate measures to keep individual members' land hunger in check. The forefathers of the Zuni once occupied territory in Utah, ...

PART ONE: POINTS OF REFERENCE

Chapter 2: The Past

[.....]

Ideology and Power for Owners

[.....]

(I) Death To Poachers

It was in a revision of the game laws that the new ruthlessness made itself felt most starkly. If the wild creatures which roamed the land were property, then their owners' rights in them were going to receive the fullest protection the law could devise. By the mid-eighteenth century, deer stealing had become a capital offence; indeed, a man's life could be taken for catching one fish or damaging a young tree. The landowning classes' new passion for justice had done nothing to diminish their old passion for blood sports. 'The game laws, therefore, united the two great preoccupations of the landed ruling class in one knot of emotion', as historian Douglas Hay has put it.[26]

The screw began to tighten with the Restoration Parliament of Charles II, which enacted our first national game laws in the late seventeenth century.[27] These laws took away from the vast majority of people not only the right to take traditional game animals like deer, pheasants and partridges but also the right to fish and the right to kill some animals (hares and rabbits in particular) which provided the only source of meat for many people. The Game Act of 1671 forbade all people to hunt game except those who (a) held freeholds worth at least £100 a year or (b) held leases of at least ninety-nine years worth at least £150 a year or (c) were heirs to esquires or persons 'of higher degree' or (d) held a royal franchise of a park, chase or warren.

Through this high landed property qualification, the game of England was appropriated not by the mass of the people, nor even necessarily by the wealthy, nor by all owners of land, but by one group - the country gentlemen.

The main problem these men faced in protecting all the game they now 'owned' was that it was to be found not only on their own land but also on the commons and the land of small holders. To meet this difficulty, not only poaching itself but the possession of implements like dogs, nets and snares that could be used to take game was made a punishable offence. A mass of statutes re-enacted and stiffened the penalties for taking game unlawfully. There was to be three months' imprisonment or a £5 fine for killing rabbits in warrens, the same for keeping dogs or snares, a year's imprisonment or a £30 fine for taking deer. Three months in gaol may not seem too bad, but in those days the incarceration of a breadwinner for three months could bring a whole family to the brink of starvation. Gamekeepers were empowered to search houses and confiscate nets, snares and guns: this right to search soon became the keepers' most potent weapon.

The law-makers did not only rely on the sanctuary of property to justify measures like these. They also argued that the new laws were of benefit to the poor in that they saved them from idleness. The game laws were 'to prevent

persons of inferior rank from squandering that time which their station in life requireth to be more profitably employed'.[28]

The poor, however, were not convinced, and in the early 1720s in places like Windsor Forest, Richmond Park, Enfield Chase, Waltham Chase and Woolmer Forest, gangs of men, their faces blacked to escape detection, made night raids to take deer. The areas most affected were the royal forests, over which control had slackened since the days of the Norman barons. The new game laws were seen as an attempt to reassert control and were bitterly resented. At the same time, deer, which relish young corn and vegetables, had to be allowed to eat growing crops in the fields unmolested. Small wonder, then, that those who staged the 'Blacking' attacks were fired by rage as well as hunger.

Parliament's response to these local disturbances was the introduction in 1723 of the death penalty not just for poaching deer, but for taking rabbits and fish. For the sake of the deer, not only was poaching being outlawed, but so were the collection of firewood (the main and in many cases the only source of fuel for heating and cooking), the cultivation of waste land and the cutting of turf peat and heather by the poor. At a stroke, what came to be known as the Black Act created fifty new offences punishable by death. 'It is very doubtful whether any country possessed a criminal code with anything like so many capital provisions as there were in this single statute', the eminent historian of criminal law Professor Leon Radzinowicz wrote in 1945.[29]

Sixteen of the 'Blacks' from Windsor, Hampshire, Enfield and Richmond were hanged in the first two years of the Black Act's operation. The number of deer the accused had killed is not recorded, but two gamekeepers were killed and several injured. An unknown number of Blacks died in gaol; others were transported, while some forty who escaped arrest became outlaws. As the century progressed the Act was successively renewed, extended and enlarged through both statute and case-law. It remained on the statute book for a century, until its virtual repeal in 1823. As the years passed, recourse to the Act occurred most frequently in response to the riots which were often sparked by enclosure. As it fell to the justices of the peace to decide whether or not the full rigour of the game laws was to be applied, their importance in their local communities grew even further.

From his study of the operation of the game laws in Cannock Chase during the eighteenth century, historian Douglas Hay concluded:

> Such discretionary power, exercised directly as a prerogative of class, was an integral part of the justice of the eighteenth century: it was used to legitimize power, to tie men in gratitude, to prove the humanity of the English law. At the highest level, royal pardons mitigated the barbarous criminal code by commuting death sentences, to transportation or imprisonment; and at the lowest, in rural parishes the power to intervene in the execution of the laws gave landed gentlemen and peers the opportunity to exercise the same prerogatives of 'mercy' and 'justice'.[30]

Nonetheless, the introduction of the game laws was not the only or even the main unwelcome consequences for the poor of the ferocious possessiveness now coming to the fore among the landowning classes.

(II) The Loss Of Common Rights

It was not long before the landowners of the eighteenth century turned their attention to the most obvious legacy of the spirit of compromise of previous centuries - common rights.

The early method of enclosure - private agreement, sometimes confirmed by court decree - could be awkward to implement. In the eighteenth century, however, the landowning oligarchy was able to ....

PART TWO: WHO ARE BRITAIN'S LANDOWNERS?

Chapter 3: In Search of Ownership

[.....]

Oddballs

[.....]

The Crown Estate

Who owns the sea-bed round the 2,500-mile-long coast of the United Kingdom out to the limit of territorial waters? Who is therefore in a position as landowner to charge others for the privilege of laying pipelines over this land, extracting minerals from it, dredging sand, building marinas and jetties and establishing fish farms? Who is also the owner of the bed and banks of all Britain's tidal rivers, such as the Severn, the Clyde, the Tyne and the Thames? Not the British people, either as individuals or collectively through local or central government. This land - together with a great deal more above the high water mark - is the property of the Queen. As Sovereign she has inherited an estate that dates back to the time of the Saxon King Edward the Confessor, known as the Crown Estate. When she came to the throne, she could have kept the estate as her own and held it as a private citizen. If she had, she and her family would have had to forego the Civil List, the money Parliament allocates to the Royal Family each year for the staff salaries and other expenses of the Royal Household. Instead, the Queen chose to continue the practice started by George III two hundred years ago of passing to Parliament the net receipts derived from rents, mineral royalties and so on from the Crown Estate and receiving in return fixed annual sums in the shape of the Civil List for herself and all other members of the Royal Family (except the Prince and Princess of Wales, who have income from the Duchy of Cornwall).

It is open to the Queen's successor to terminate this arrangement when he or she attains the throne and to appropriate the income from the Crown Estates. In view of the fuss over the Queen's regular 'pay rises' which the Civil List system seems to provoke, such a step might have its attractions. In the year ending 31 March 1986, the revenue to the Exchequer from the Crown Estate was £26.5 million (an increase of 9 per cent over the previous year), while only £5 million was paid out through the Civil List during 1985. Not that the Civil List covers all the costs associated with the Royal Family, however. Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle are maintained separately by the taxpayer through annual payments from the Department of the Environment, while revenue from the Duchy of Lancaster, which is the other main estate owned by the Queen because she is sovereign but which is not surrendered to the Treasury, goes to feed and clothe Her Majesty.

In the main, the Crown Estate is an accumulation of land that has come to the Crown by a variety of routes since about the tenth century.[34] At the time of his death, William the Conqueror owned an estimated one-quarter to one-third of the landed wealth of England. The Conqueror's successor so ld or gave away much of this land, but other kings and queens bought other areas or came by land by other routes, for instance through the dissolution of the monasteries, or

through escheat, by which the property of an owner who dies intestate or without heirs passes to the Crown. By 1986, the Crown Estate included 335,402 acres of farmland in England, Wales and Scotland and 38,285 acres of commercial forest.[35] The Crown Estate's urban lands, which provide about 60 per cent of its annual rental income, are widely spread. They include some of Britain's most lucrative sites - in Regent Street, Oxford Street, Kensington, St James's and Victoria - as well as profitable stretches of land in Richmond (Surrey), Edinburgh, Eltham, Egham, Ascot, Bagshot, Oxshott, Devizes, Taunton, Bingham (Nottinghamshire) and Swinley (Berkshire). Two hundred and sixty-six acres of chiefly residential land in Windsor town is also owned by the Crown Estate; the Windsor Estate alone, which also includes the Great Park, Home Park, two farms and much woodland, covers 12,378 acres.

Apart from the tidal rivers and continental shelf, the Queen as owner of the Crown Estate also owns about half of the foreshore of the United Kingdom. (Over the years, the Crown Estate has made grants of part of the foreshore to other owners, while the foreshore around the coasts of Lancashire and Cornwall is the property respectively of the Queen in her capacity as Duke of Lancaster and of the Prince of Wales as Duke of Cornwall.)

The land the Queen owns is by no means confined to the Crown Estate. As a private citizen, she is the owner of 50,000 acres at Balmoral in the eastern Highlands, forty-eight acres at Buckingham Palace and 20,000 acres at Sandringham in north Norfolk. The Duchy of Lancaster covers 50,000 acres of land together with the foreshore of Lancashire.

The Queen does not, of course, have time to see to the day-to day running of her vast domains; to run the Crown Estate she has appointed eight Crown Estate Commissioners. These men are given a wide measure of freedom under the Crown Estate Act, 1961 to buy, sell and lease land (leases to be for no longer than 150 years) and generally to manage the estate with the overall objective of maintaining and enhancing its value and the return from it, but with due regard to the requirements of good management. The only exception relates to Windsor Forest and Park where the Commissioners are charged with maintaining its character as a royal forest and park, and where they may not sell any land unless it is needed for development by a public authority.

Who are the men the Queen appoints to manage this vast estate of land, river, shore and sea-bed? Are they drawn from backgrounds likely to produce a view of land management different from that of the private landowners among whom they operate? The answer is no. The Crown Estate Commissioners are drawn from backgrounds likely to reproduce on the Crown Estate exactly the sort of approach to the use of land and the relationship between landowner and the rest of society as that evolved over thousands of years on Britain's large private landed estates. They are landowners themselves, or comparable figures like the agents that administer large privately-owned landed estates. In 1986, the First Commissioner and Chairman of the Board was Scottish landowner the 8th Earl of Mansfield. The Earl was reported to own 33,800 acres of Perthshire in 1970,[36] though he told me in 1986 that this report was inaccurate. (He would not give a figure of his own.) Three of the other eight commissioners were also the owners of large private landed estates, one of them a former president of the Country Landowners' Association. The other commissioners were two chartered surveyors (one of whom has been a trustee of the Duke of Westminster's

Grosvenor Estate since 1977), a chartered accountant and a former high ranking of official in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Although the rental income from the Crown Estate goes into the Exchequer, the people of Britain have less say in the decisions of the Crown Estate Commissioners than they do in those of most other landowners. For the Commissioners are accountable only to the Queen, who appoints them and to whom they present their annual report. This freedom from public scrutiny is confirmed in law since the Crown Estate Act, 1961 lays down in Section 1(5) that:

> The validity of transactions entered into by the Commissioner shall not be called into question on any suggestion of their not having acted in accordance with the provisions of this Act regulating the exercise of their powers, or of their having otherwise acted in excess of their authority, nor shall any person dealing with the Commissioners be concerned to inquire as to the extent of their authority or the observance of any restrictions on the exercise of their powers.

Since the Crown Estate Commissioners are answerable only to the Queen, they are immune from the public accountability through Parliament which applies at least in theory to landowners like the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of Agriculture, though they share some of the special privileges enjoyed by government departments in respect of land-use change. Thus the Crown Estate - like government departments - is exempt from the planning controls that affect building, quarrying and the change of use of urban buildings. This is because it is a general rule of English law that the Crown is not bound by any statute unless that statute specifically says so. 'Crown land' includes land that belongs to a government department or which is held in trust for Her Majesty for the purposes of a government department. But it also includes land in which an interest belongs to the Queen because she is the monarch, and this includes not only the Crown Estate but also the Duchy of Lancaster and the Duchy of Cornwall. All three of these landowners make it their practice to consult local planning authorities over proposals for which they would otherwise have to apply for planning consent, but they do not require the authorities' approval to proceed

Two Nations: Landowner and Landless

Britain remains sharply divided between those citizens who own land and those who do not. Two examples. In May 1981, unemployed, thirty-two-year-old Dave Batty walked from Hull to the Houses of Parliament to deliver a note to the Prime Minister drawing attention to the plight of the unemployed. Mr Batty, an ex-farm worker and ex-lorry driver had called at every Jobcentre along the way, but none had been able to offer work. As he waited in the Commons Central Lobby, he said: 'My idea of heaven would be ten acres of land. If I had that, I'd happily go away and nor bother anyone about work ever again.'[37] The chances of Mr Batty getting his hands on ten acres of Britain are virtually nil. In 1981 that amount of land would have cost him about £17,000. No bank would have advanced him that sort of money because, although he could probably grow enough on ten acres to feed himself his wife and his two children, he would not have had sufficient land to grow food for market and so would not have been able to repay a mortgage. Even if he were in work, on a farm worker's wages

£5,000 a year for a forty-six-hour week in 1981), he would have had little hope of saving the sum he would need.

In August 1984 Simon George Strangways Morrison was born. Baby Simon is the heir through his mother to a 3,000-acre Nottinghamshire estate with two mansions, 15,000 acres of Dorset centred on an imposing seventeenth-century mansion called Melbury House, as well as a valuable parcel of London bounded by Holland Park and Kensington High Street. Without any exertion on his part, Simon can look forward to joining a small élite whose grip upon the broad acres of rural Britain is as absolute as that of the Norman barons. Simon's good fortune is bad news for Dave Batty. But what does it mean for the people of Britain as a whole that the land is in the grip of a privileged few?

The answer to that question turns on the use to which Britain's landowners put their property. They turn out to be motivated by whims and aspirations reflecting the peculiar national experience of their breed. Three things obsess them above all: wealth, power and privacy.

[.....]

PART THREE: WHAT LANDOWNERS WANT

Chapter 5: Power

Through the ages it is the power wielded by landowners over the lives of others that has marked them out most clearly from other groups. Today, how much of this control do they retain at local, regional and national levels?

Local

High on an isolated spur of the Lincolnshire Wolds where Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire meet rises an imposing and many-towered castle. Its mellow gold stone walls, towers and ramparts crown the lush, tree-clad hill rising out of the flat Vale of Belvoir below from which it takes its name. This castle is the fairy-tale Leicestershire home of Charles John Robert Manners, CBE, 1Oth Duke of Rutland, and the headquarters of a 15,000-acre landed estate. The estate includes one sizeable reservoir, two large lakes and several small ones, 300 cottages mainly in five villages, a mausoleum, kennels for hounds and various other buildings, 10,000 acres of tenanted farmland and 3,000 acres of land farmed direct by the Duke and his agents together with woodlands which include the largest heronry in Leicestershire.

Forty-two miles away to the north-west lies the Duke of Rutland's Derbyshire residence, Haddon Hall, a romantic medieval castle-cum manor house in gracious parkland above the Derbyshire Wye. This 3,000-acre estate, which abuts the Duke of Devonshire's vast Chatsworth kingdom to the north, also bears the conspicuous imprint of the Manners family: Manners Wood, for instance, runs for two miles along the valley top ending just east of Bakewell. Altogether, the Duke of Rutland owns 18,000 acres of Britain's land - an area fifty times that of Hyde Park. He is also the possessor of mineral deposits in the Midlands sometimes, but not always, lying beneath the land he owns.

Like most landowners, the Duke is most powerful on his own property. Naturally enough, it is he who determines the use to which his land should be put and who should use it. It is up to him to decide whether the minerals he owns should be worked or not. He has it in his power to choose his ninety mainly land-based employees. And he can choose who may live in his 300 houses from the converted dairy in a commanding position high up amid Belvoir's woods to the more modest cottages of Knipton and Woolsthorpe.

The people of Belvoir and the area around may or may not approve of the control which the Duke of Rutland exercises over the lives of others and of the land itself, they may or may not agree with the way he wields his power. But they live with the knowledge that his control will continue more or less unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Visit the vast landed estates of Scotland, however, and a rather different picture emerges. ...

PART FIVE: AT ISSUE

Chapter 11: The Heart of the Matter

The failure of the post-war order to resolve the differences between landowners and the landless leaves a deep gulf between the two sides. When we look carefully we find that the issue is not merely the allocation of a resource which both groups acknowledge must be shared. Instead, two sets of fundamentally opposed value systems confront each other.

The View of the Landowner

On one side stand Britain's landowners. However they have come by their holding, they tend to regard them as theirs to do with what they will. They consider their ownership of land as absolute as their ownership of their household goods.

Samuel Whitbread, the owner of 10,800 acres of rural land in north Bedfordshire embracing several villages, an 800-acre park, a lake and a great house, told me in 1982 how he viewed his domain:

> Possession is nine-tenths of the law. I am in possession here. I control what I have got here. In fact, in my case it happens to be 11,000 acres of farm land and forestry and in your case, if I may say so, it may be a flat in South London. The actual ethics of possession are the same I think one should be at liberty to do what one likes with one's own.

Many people will recognize and sympathize with this naturally human desire to possess. It is part of what makes a child delight in a new toy and helps turn some of us into collectors. But this desire to own absolutely poses problems when it is exercised in respect of things whose fate affects the community generally in some way and not just their owner. Into this category come our children, animals, weapons and chemical plants. The owners of all these things find their ownership rights circumscribed by society seeking to protect its own interest in these 'possessions'. Land, making up the space in which the community lives, cannot escape inclusion in this category. And of course even in the case of rural land, society imposes its will on owners in certain ways. It insists that certain crops be grown in time of war; it demands that land be yielded up for roads or railways. aA state that had no powers over its own territory but only over its citizens is conceivable in theory but nowhere exists.

Herein lies an enduring contradiction. Though ownership of land can never be complete, it is also the thing which Man most covets. As individuals, we all want to claim territory of our own, be it a suburban house and garden or a vast ranch in Oklahoma; but as members of a community, we must seek to claw back the meaning of title from those of our fellow-citizens who happen to be fortunate enough to secure it.

For British landowners, however, there is no contradiction. They do not wish to perceive the claim of society to rights over their land. If landscape quality, wildlife habitats or recreation opportunities are incompatible with a landowner's pursuit of financial gain, he usually feels these things can go by the board. The feeling is strong and genuine and is often unaccompanied by any perception that an alternative attitude is possible. As a Sussex farmer told me when I asked him

whether he had cleared away a sixty-nine-acre wood he had intended to convert to more profitable use: 'It's none of your business.'

Some landowners do, of course, have a genuine interest in conservation. Others may conserve features for the sake of game. Others who sense a challenge to their own way of thinking may temper the pursuit of commercial advantage with concessions made in the interests of self-preservation. But they expect any concessions to the rest of the community to be made on their own terms.

The present struggle over the consequences of the commercial exploitation of land does not mean that contemporary landowners have lost all of their predecessors' concern with land as a status symbol and as a place for their own recreation. The idea of land as capital has been comfortably added to these older considerations. Together they all give rise to an awesomely comprehensive sense of possession. Our landowners tend to see all access to their land as at their behest, to be granted as a privilege if they wish it and more often to be withheld. Where existing law recognizes the rights of others in their land, it may be flagrantly violated. Public rights of way along footpaths and bridleways are now obstructed by ploughing, barbed wire or bulls to an extent that would have shocked the people of medieval, nineteenth century or even pre-war Britain.

The View of the Landless

Pitted against the attitudes of Britain's landowners are those of the landless. Within this very much larger group there is of course plenty of apathy, but growing numbers are coming to care about the countryside. Among those who care can be found feelings at least as intense as those of the landowners. But the ideas behind them are often fundamentally at odds with those of the landowners.

Not only is the landowner's claim to control his property contested, the right of any man or men to absolute sway over the natural environment is now widely questioned. The old Christian notion that God created the earth for Man to have dominion over it is no longer universally accepted. As traditional Christianity has withered, many people have come to see the environment as something in which all creatures have rights - not just human beings without title deeds but even animals. As animal rights campaigner Margaret Manzoni explained in 1983: 'We don't distinguish between animal life and human life. All life is equal.[1] Or, in the words of Roger Smith, then chairman of the Scottish Wild Land Group and commenting on the chopping down of a 9,000-year-old pine wood: 'Trees like these have righis too, and we should treat them as such, not merely as a "crop" to be exploited when the time is seen to be right.[2]

Even those who still see the natural environment as there to benefit mankind increasingly see it as something to provide recreation or spiritual refreshment for everyone and not just owners. And people who 'own' no particular stretch of land have come to consider themselves more and more entitled to influence what happens to the countryside and to be provided with access to it.

The 1949 legislation was designed to cater for these feelings, which swelled further after it had been passed. In the late 1960s and early 1970s a series of environmental disasters which included the wrecking of the Torrey Canyon in 1967, the poisoning of the fish in the Rhine, and the widespread death of wildlife caused by DDT, dieldrin and other chemical pestkiller abuse spread interest in the natural world deeper and wider- In 1965, a timely bestseller, Rachel

Carson's *Silent Spring*, brought awareness of the threat to the environment to a far larger number of people than had ever cared about the countryside before. More people became aware of the Earth as an ecological system upon whose fragile health depended the survival of human beings as a species. It came to be generally appreciated that Man's ability to exploit his environment had been enhanced by technological development to the point where further unrestrained exploitation could kill the goose that had been laying the golden eggs. Soon everyone seemed to know all about the vulnerability of many different parts of the global environment: the seas and rivers which were being polluted by oil, oil dispersants, radioactive waste, industrial waste, sewage and chemical fertilizers; the ozone layer which was threatened by super-sonic transport and aerosol sprays; the air by sulphur dioxide; and the soil which was being contaminated by heavy metals and pesticides - or simply being ground to dust and blown away.

This new concern spawned a host of voluntary pressure groups, such as the Ecology Party and Friends of the Earth. The number of newspaper column inches devoted to environmental issues tripled between the period 1965 to 1973, according to one study.[3] By 1983, one in every ten of the British adult population was a member of an environmental group - 2.5 to 3 million people, or more than the membership of any political party or trade union.[4] At first, the response to environmental problems from the urban population was largely fired by guilt. The cause of the problems was usually seen as greed - for cars and other consumer durables, for transport, for holidays, for food, and above all for babies. It was the sheer pressure of growing numbers of people that was identified as the prime concern. 'No Standing Room: Population Control for Britain?' an article about the threat to Man's survival from over-population, was, significantly, the first article in the first issue of *The Ecologist* magazine in 1970. It was feared that the population explosion would spawn houses and roads which might simply bury the countryside in concrete. 'As far as Europe is concerned, it is prophesied that it will become a continuous conurbation from Manchester to Milan,' wrote Robert Arvill in 1967 in *Man and Environment*, a book that encapsulates as well as any other the mood of the time. Arvill went on: 'In the USA in particular, the problem is causing great concern. The pressures arising from the arrival of a new baby every twelve seconds and a new car every five seconds are estimated to lead to the loss of two acres of countryside every minute.[5]

Not only would huge swathes of the earth be engulfed in concrete, but the cultivatable lands that remained would be degraded if not completely sterilized by the over-application of pesticides and fertilizers. Man's demand for more and more recreation opportunities would also have catastrophic results. 'On public holidays, huge populations surge to and from the coast and the countryside is bestrewn with cars,' wrote Robert Arvill. 'These mass movements are like a floodtide in their impact on the environment. They are creating a wear and tear never known before.'

During this period, the talk was of population control and even of banning people from the countryside lest they destroy the very thing they had come to enjoy. But as the 1970s wore on, urban Man's attitude to the issue of the environment changed.

First, the assumption that the blame for environmental problems lay with the sheer numbers of townspeople and their demands came to be undermined.

Particular cases like Rio Tinto-Zinc's application to mine for copper in the Snowdonia National Park made people realize that it was the drive for profit on the part of particular groups or individuals that really mattered. Rio Tinto-Zinc argued that copper from the Coed-y-Brenin Forest was required to meet global demands for the metal that could not be met any other way; but groups like Friends of the Earth which opposed the application - successfully - challenged this claim and pointed out that it was the company's drive to increase its profits which actually inspired the proposal.[6] Gradually the threat to the environment came to be attributed less to population pressure than to the untrammelled workings of capitalism. And during the early 1980s, as the extent of over-production of food became apparent, agriculture came to be seen as more and more akin to other forms of profit-motivated environmental despoliation.

A second change was a broadening of the philosophy of conservation. People whose concern had been aroused by self-interested anxiety for the survival of mankind came to take a rather different attitude, echoing that of Wordsworth and the nineteenth-century conservationists. More and more people came to see the environment as something to be respected for its own sake, rather than merely as a support system for their own species. The whale and the panda came to be symbols of conservation, defending the earth and its creatures from commercial exploitation - a rather different matter from defending mankind's habitat from over-population. Among the creatures with a right to enjoy their environment urban Britons included themselves. If their countryside was being damaged this was their concern. And if they were being denied access to it, this was a breach of their rights.

It was quickly appreciated that some of the phenomena identified as deplorable in the world as a whole had manifestations extremely close to home. Proposals to build a third London airport at Foulness, for instance, created controversy which quickly spread beyond the issue aircraft noise to questioning the ethic of growth on which demand for the new airport was based and to the assertion of the rights of the Brent Geese that inhabited Maplin Sands. More alarming for landowners was the emergence of fox hunting and factory farming as important and extremely emotive political issues, while opposition was also mobilized against practices as central to agricultural practice as stubble burning and hedge removal.

The ideas emerging in the cities quickly developed in directions even more subversive of the rural status quo. Enthusiasm developed for forms of agricultural exploitation that were contained by natural limitations such as the size of a man's family or the amount of work a man could do with his hands in one day. The methods of 'primitive' tribes acquired more respect as the destructive effects of the introduction of Western technology into Third World agriculture came to be appreciated and a general revulsion against automation and the alienation it induced gathered pace. Some groups of city-dwellers went back to the land, living in communes and trying to develop a life-style rooted in subsistence farming. Many people who would never have dreamed of entering a rural commune shared the reaction against the ruthless exploitation of the Earth. By 1980, a new set of attitudes could be found not only among the middle classes but throughout the urban population. The natural environment and all its living creatures were generally regarded as the precious and threatened property of all people, rather than merely being available for exploitation by the

'owners' of the land. And although the environmental movement sprang in the 1960s from a sense of self-preservation, it soon took on an almost religious dimension as it became a creed to which people attached themselves altruistically.

On Course for Collision

In response to the new challenge to their values, few landowners today have resorted (as their medieval predecessors might have done) to the argument that God made the earth for men to exploit. Instead they have tended to rely on the more contemporary but hardly less theological argument that the creation of wealth is an absolute good which benefits everybody and must on no account be obstructed. One Norfolk farmer put this argument in typical fashion in 1977 when he said: 'I believe that while the rich are rich, the poor have a good standard of living. But when the rich are poor, God help the poor. If it wasn't for people like me who take risks, and thereby feed people, employ people, service industry, provide fodder for the workforce everything would come to a grinding halt.'[7]

Unfortunately for the landowners, this argument has not been sufficient to dispel criticism of them from the rest of the community. One reason is that the argument seems rather less valid in the case of agriculture in Britain today than it might be in other areas. It is by no means clear that the present model of land ownership optimizes the dispersal of the economic benefits to the community at large. Farmers pay a far smaller proportion of their income in taxes than other groups; and very few people are employed in present-day British agriculture. Much agricultural activity is now directed towards the consumption of subsidies to produce surpluses which then have to be disposed of at further cost to the taxpayer.

In any case, despite the efforts of the Thatcher Government, a large proportion of the population remains obstinately unpersuaded of the need to see wealth creation as an absolute good. The twentieth-century reaction against untrammelled capitalism persists, and there is instead general acceptance of the need to regulate the pursuit of profit in the interests of society as a whole. If urban capitalists have to put up with health and safety standards, equal pay, pollution control and so on, their rural counterparts cannot expect to be left alone purely on the grounds that they are creating wealth.

In view of this some landowners have tried a very different tack. This is to present themselves not as the target of conservationists but as the best possible instrument for implementing the conservationists' objectives. These landowners do not emphasize the wealth they are creating. Instead they suggest that absolute owners though they may be, their primary motive is not to make money but to care for the land. That is, they are to be seen as custodians, not exploiters. The land agent responsible for managing the Duke of Northumberland's 105,000-acre estate in Northumberland, W.F.P. Hugonin, told me in an interview in 1982 what he considered to be the typical attitude of large landowners:

> The actual fact of ownership is less important than the fact that they feel that they are stewards, that they have been handed down to look after something for a very short number of years which they would hope to leave in a better state than when they took over. They are the arch

> conservers and the stewardship involved is management and control and what that word management involves is something that is very little understood.

In fact, this kind of stewardship often turns out to be very different from what a conservationist might imagine it to be. Many landowners who talk of themselves as stewards see no contradiction between such a role and the destruction of many of the attractions of their property in the pursuit of profit. Nor do they feel that as stewards they are required to allow their fellow-citizens to share with them in enjoying the benefits that their land can bestow. For the kind of 'stewardship' that landowners usually have in mind is not exercised on behalf of the community, but on behalf of their sons and their sons' sons. They want to pass on property as extensive and lucrative as that which they inherited or acquired. Indeed primogeniture provides an extension of ownership into the future which makes it even more 'absolute' than it appears at first sight.

In view of this, it is perhaps not surprising that landowners have failed to win the unqualified endorsement of society for their 'stewardship' of the countryside, just as they have failed to convince their fellows that activities which appear environmentally destructive are economically beneficial. The gulf between the two sides yawns deeper than ever. So where do we go from here?

The answer seems to be that we must now review the character of land ownership in rural Britain. We must seek out new arrangements which enable the feelings of those citizens who do not happen to be rural landowners to find adequate expression. 'Ownership' already takes many different forms in our society. If somebody who owns a transistor radio chooses to take a hammer to it and dash it to pieces, no one is likely to complain, so long as the pieces are tidily disposed of. Somebody treating his child or pet dog in a similar way would quickly discover that society considered his ownership less than absolute. Clear limits are placed on the extent to which we may exploit our children for financial gain. This is for the benefit of the children. But if we contemplate the condition of the owner of a building protected from demolition on account of its historic importance or architectural merit, we see that limitations may be imposed on ownership in the wider interests of society as a whole. The fact that historic buildings are subject to planning permission, repairs notices and listed building consents means that nobody owns them quite as absolutely as our landowners like to believe that they own the land. In other times, in other places, very different arrangements have related the land to those who have exploited it. If we wish, we can revise the concept of land 'ownership' in Britain to accommodate the rights of others than the land 'owner'.

So what can be done to take some of the benefits which our countryside can bestow out of the hands of a privileged élite and into the bosom of the nation as a whole? Support is growing for some attempt to modify the rights of our rural landowners. More and more ideas for protecting the rights of the rest of the community are now being put forward. It is to examine these ideas that we now turn.

PART SEVEN: THE WAY FORWARD

Chapter 16: A Tax on Land

> I am a twenty-eight-year-old dairy farmer from the Lorton Valley in Cumberland. I do not like just keeping milk cows. I would rather keep twenty cows, thirty-five sheep, a few beef animals, free-range hens and some ducks and pig. That would be farming and enjoying my way of life the way I always wanted to. ... This is not possible for me now. I would like to keep all my dykes (hedges) in order (l am laying one at the moment), but on ninety-three acres with forty-five milk cows and rent, interest and loan repayments on the scale I have it is impossible to make a good job of the farm. ... I cannot refuse to use high levels of nitrogen because I could not keep enough cows to pay the rent or the interest rates on all the money I had to borrow to get a start. ... Capital grants are no use to me if I do not want to put up a building or drain a field. But the NFU men who matter tell us that the farming 'industry' is better off with capital grants. ... I want to be able to farm this farm as a mixed farm. I want to stop making myself old quickly by chasing my tail producing food surpluses. I would like to have the pride in the appearance of my farm that there was forty-five years ago. ... This is what is called rural life.
>
> *Letter to the author, 1980*
>
> What is objectionable is that subsidy should destroy important sites irretrievably in order to add to surpluses. ... Anyone who farms in a highly populated country should embrace the concept of stewardship. He has a responsibility to hold the land in trust for the future. ... Where farming is inherently unprofitable, and needs to be sustained for social reasons, some support system sympathetic to the environment must be accepted. j
>
> *Kenneth Carlisle MP, Conserving the Countryside: A Tory View, Commiserative Political Centre, 1984*

If there are limits to what could be achieved through planning controls, there is a completely different approach to the problem of protecting our countryside which is being discussed increasingly widely.

Since it is an economic process which is damaging our countryside, it has come to be argued by some people that economic counter-measures are the appropriate response. An early idea was that subsidies for conservation activities should be made available alongside the existing agricultural subsidies which turn out in practice to amount to subsidies for the destruction of the rural environment. However. it quickly became apparent that pressure on public funds would not permit the creation of a whole new set of subsidies in the countryside, especially in view of the fact that the existing subsidies to agriculture are now widely considered to be a waste of public money. Attention therefore turned to the idea of redirecting certain of the present subsidies in ways that made them supportive rather than destructive of the environment. UK capital grants to agriculture, for example, might no longer be given for the reseeding of chalk downland turf but made available instead for its

reinstatement. Unfortunately, however, the modifications that could be made without calling into question the whole price support structure of the EEC (an impracticable objective) would not be anything like large enough to outweigh the remaining incentives for destruction.

A more radical form of economic attack on the problems confronting the countryside is however conceivable. This would involve applying taxation - not in order to raise revenue for the Exchequer but as a means of regulating economic activity in the public interest. Because agriculture and forestry, supported as they are by almost unlimited bounty from Brussels or Whitehall, seem set to remain profitable industries, they ought to be able to bear the imposition of a new form of taxation. A new tax with relief for those who meet conservation requirements could conserve the countryside at no cost to the Exchequer.

Such a tax could take the form of a new rural land tax, payable annually on every acre of rural land in the United Kingdom. This would immediately serve to counteract the financial incentives for landscape destruction provided at present by national farming and forestry subsidies and by the Common Agricultural Policy.

To achieve its full effect the tax would need to be levied negatively as well as positively so that a taxpayer whose relief amounted to more than what he was obliged to pay could be given the difference. In this way, some of the proceeds of the take from the great wealth of the landowning community could be redistributed towards its more public-spirited members. Where an owner was managing his land in ways deemed conducive to the national interest he might be rewarded by payments from the tax fund. Such payments would overcome the real problem faced by well-meaning landowners today that they cannot afford to maintain landscape features.

This would need to be a tax earmarked for specific activities - like the television licence fee but unlike vehicle excise duty - if it was to work purely as a regulator of the rural scene. Clearly, the cost of collection would have to be deducted from receipts. But what was left could be used solely to fund activities which had been rated negatively for land tax purposes. A landowner, say, who owned commons in Dorset with Dartford warblers on them and who proposed to keep them as commons rather than ploughing them up would get a subsidy through the land tax.

Of course the land tax would make intensive agriculture and forestry less profitable. But if the profitability of agriculture and forestry were reduced, there would be less incentive for owners to plough up the marginal land on which the quality of our landscape and the future of our wildlife depends. Some low grade agricultural land could therefore be expected to revert to the roughland, woodland or marshland from which it had doubtless been reclaimed. Obviously the owners of such land would lose out financially. But landowners are a group capable of incurring some such losses without suffering unduly. So who would suffer? Not the workers, as agriculture and forestry have become so highly capitalized on the back of subsidy that employment in the industries is now minimal. Certainly not the citizen, who would have to fund less stockpiling of surplus food and provision of tax relief to conifer forests.

Existing Fiscal Sticks and Carrots

It might appear that a rural land tax would involve a quite new and daunting level of state intervention in the economics of land-use. Already, however, there is a vast amount of sate intervention in rural economics. Some of this is destructive. Some of it is beneficial. But all of it is haphazard and because of this it cannot serve as an effective tool of coherent policy-making.

Inheritance tax exemption is one of the obvious existing forms of intervention which would be superseded by a rural land tax. As we have seen (Chapter 10), the inheritance tax exemptions fail to achieve their supposed purpose of safeguarding the countryside and instead serve to enhance the position of landowning families. These exceptions would be swept away if a land tax was introduced and replaced by tax credits which would apply whether or not land changed hands, in line with clear policy objectives. But the story of these exemptions highlights one important point about a rural land tax. It would have to operate in public. Inheritance tax exemption is enveloped in a cloak of secrecy on the grounds that it concerns an individual's private affairs. It is this characteristic which has helped landowners turn the system to their own advantage and prevented citizens from assessing what benefit, if any, they are receiving from these subsidies. A rural land tax would firmly establish the principle that land is different from other capital assets. Because the community as well as its 'owners' has a stake in it, the terms on which it is held must be made known to all. In so far as this would involve a further sacrifice from landowners it is one they ought to be required to make. Arrangements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for conservation in return for compensation are already made public. Details of the deals struck between landowners and the rest of society over the national landscape heritage through the land tax should be equally fully within the public domain.

Another existing form of state intervention in the rural economy which would be superseded by a rural land tax is the direct subsidies paid to farmers and foresters by central government, such as farm capital grants. These would disappear to re-emerge as positive or negative payments under the land tax in so far as national policy dictated. Where such payments remained - as might those from EEC sources - the land tax could simply be adjusted to take them into account. In place of the counter-productive mish-mash that exists at present, there would be a means of implementing a genuine national policy on the countryside which would be nor only effective but also capable of responding quickly to change in society’s demands from rural land. If at some future date field drainage became nationally desirable again, there should be no need to reinstate the capital grants system to encourage it. Drainage could simply become tax deductible while undrained but drainable land could be made to attract a high rate of land tax. Indeed, if agriculture as a whole were to become unprofitable and Britain seemed in danger of losing an effective agriculture industry, it would be possible to provide immediate support through adjustments in the land tax rates.

Imagine the impact of such a scheme on the farmer in the Lake District, who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. He would lose his capital grants (which he does nor want) and his headage payments (which encourage him to intensify production in environmentally harmful ways). Instead, so long as hill-farming was accepted as an activity to be encouraged, he would get a single subsidy

designed to encourage the environmentally desirable activities in which he wishes to engage now but cannot afford to. The new subsidy would be continuous, rather than a one-off payment, so fencing to allow the natural regeneration of woodlands, for example, could be erected in the knowledge that funds would exist for its maintenance. The enhancement of his holding would not be brought about at the expense of the general taxpayer as are the constraints on changes in land-use wrought by management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The money would be generated from the profits of other landowners whose activities were more economically successful than his but less socially desirable.

Introducing Democracy

If a land tax of this kind were to be created, there would still be the question of just what activities it should encourage and discourage. This is clearly something in which the community at large should have a say, and decision-making could and ought to take place at both national and local levels.

At national level, priorities would have to be set, based on a clear view of the public policy priorities of the day. One government department would have to be responsible for setting rates, positive or negative, for each major form of land-use in each region of the United Kingdom. This would be the Department of Environment, the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office or the Northern Ireland Office. In setting rates, these departments would consider representations from other affected departments, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Defence, the feelings at local level as represented through county structure plans and the views of pressure groups. But eventually, from Whitehall would come rates per acre of tax for, say, cereals (doubtless positive in most regions), broad-leaved woodland (doubtless negative in most regions). Superimposed on these basic rates, however, could be a subtle fine-tuning of the system at local level that could allow for the achievement of almost any kind of objective.

All this would provide a means of determining the different policies which the tax would bring about at different places within the United Kingdom. But what mechanism would ensure that the tax levied accurately reflected a landowner's actions? For this an instrument would be needed which would allow scrutiny and influence by the general public but which would also exploit a landowner's own instinct for change on his land. The instrument would be a land plan.

Essentially, landowners would be entitled to certain levels of relief from the land tax if they were in possession of a land plan for their holding approved by their local planning authority. Local authorities, instead of devoting time to rural development control, would negotiate the contents of these plans with landowners in the light of local feeling, the country structure plan and guidelines from the Department of the Environment. Clearly, the maintenance of landscape features of value might be an ingredient of an approved plan. But a landowner might qualify for relief at a higher level if his plan showed that conserved features were to be adequately maintained or that new features were to be created through reconstitution.

Local opinion would make itself felt through the consultation process that goes with structure planning. Agreed land plans would be open to public inspection. Citizens who felt their council was being too easy on landowners as well as

landowners who felt the council was being too hard could appeal to the Department of the Environment.

Suppose, for instance, that in west Bedfordshire, songbird populations were at a dangerously low ebb. Birdwatchers might bring this to the attention of their county council. The structure plan would set targets for the reinstatement of features that songbirds particularly favour like hedgerows and copses, while observing that such features should, where they already exist, be retained wherever possible. Landowners would note these objectives in preparing their land plans for approval.

Such a system might seem extremely radical but many of its principles would be familiar enough. Already the Department of the Environment determines the character of the built environment through the development control appeals system. It has to arbitrate the potential conflict between fulfilment of the national objective of job creation and hence factory building and the safeguarding of the residential environment. What would actually happen if this process were extended to the countryside not through the extension of development control, but through the workings of a land tax?

A dialogue between the structure planning process and the Department of the Environment would yield regional policies for the countryside. This would doubtless mean that certain parts of the United Kingdom, because of the inherent fertility of their soils and their special climatic conditions would be designated prime farming regions. But in such areas, like East Anglia, where very little uncultivated land survives, landscape reconstitution could be encouraged. The structure planning process would identify particular types of landscape feature it would be desirable to reintroduce, whether for wildlife or landscaper reasons. Negative rates of land tax would not only protect desirable forms of landscape, say, rough heathland; they would also encourage their reconstitution.

In some areas, like perhaps the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the Scottish Office might well conclude that agriculture and forestry should be supported for reasons of employment. Here, particular rates of land tax might encourage labour-intensive agriculture like crofting. But in areas of grade 4 or 5 agricultural land where agriculture employs few people at present, such as parts of Surrey and Dorset, the land tax rates and management plan requirements might encourage the retention of many of those landscape features that remain and the reinstatement of many more. In areas such as this landowners might find that it paid them to turn substantial areas back to nature.

More than anything else, however, the emergence of the land plans would make every landowner (or at least every landowner interested in tax relief) think hard and continuously about conservation, harnessing and rewarding his own creative instincts. Each plan would be the owner's statement of the steps by which he proposed to meet the objectives set down in his country structure plan. It would differentiate between land now and in the future committed to supporting natural features like marsh, meadow, moor, heath, hedge, stream, salting, wood or copse and land under crop, rye grass or conifer. In the case of a conifer plantation (which might be attracting a high rate of tax), a landowner could pledge that he would make provision for wildlife conservation within the

plantation, and arrange felling in stages and other ways that would benefit wildlife.

When the plan was submitted to the local planning authority it could be approved as meriting a certain level of tax relief, or made the basis for the negotiation of something very different. Some landowners might of course refuse to submit a plan, preferring to pay the full level of tax. If too many did this the system would fail, but the evidence is that Britain's landowners respond well to financial incentives if they are big enough.

The procedure for submitting a land plan for approval to a planning authority could follow the well-tried model of the planning application. This would mean that an authority would have to advertise the plan and receive any objections to it from members of the public. The authority could be required to issue a decision on any plan within a certain time of receiving it, as in the case of planning applications. Approved land plans would be available for perusal at council offices, and concerned citizens, seeing for example a wood being cleared away, would be able to go and check its status on the approved plan. If they considered the activity in question was in breach of an approved plan they could inform the planning authority, which could then order the owner to take whatever action it deemed necessary to bring things into line with the plan. Its sanction would be immediate withdrawal of all tax reliefs.

Each land plan might last for five years. But within that time, the advent of a new owner or changes in financial circumstances or methods of cropping might mean that a landowner wished to alter his land plan. In that case, he could get a form from his local planning authority and send it in, completed, to his planning officer, indicating what departure he wished to make from his approved land plan. Such forms would go in a batch before the planning committee, after opportunity for public comment, following again on the model of the planning application.

Decisions on changes to an approved land plan could be taken, as for the plan itself, not by reference only to the feature in question, but within the context of the overall land plan. Thus, if a planning authority considered a landowner was making good provision for conservation, perhaps by creating ponds or tracts of roughland, they might allow him, say, to remove a hedgerow so long as it was not itself of outstanding historical or other significance. In other words, decisions could be taken within the overall context of conservation requirements, not on a site exclusive basis, as occurs in the planning system as it exists at present.

Some may detect in all this the ghostly voice of Henry George. But the proposal differs in one important respect from the nineteenth century calls for a land tax. George advocated an across-the-board tax on site values, all of the revenue from which was to have gone direct to the Exchequer, reducing the need for other forms of national taxation, in particular taxes levied on income. The land-tax-and-grant scheme I envisage, on the other hand, would involve the redistribution of wealth not within society as a whole, but within the landowning community. Nonetheless the two proposals share common features. In particular, the underlying objective of both is to enable the land to be put to the optimal use for the whole of society. George deplored the existence of idle land badly needed for housing or factory building but which its owners were holding back, often in the hope of higher profits in future. The new rural land tax would

encourage the optimal use of land, though in some cases this might mean turning land over to the needs of recreation and conservation.

Of course, a land-tax-and-grant scheme could be put to other uses other than safeguarding the rural environment. It could be used to encourage organic farming, or free-range hen rearing while discouraging the use of certain kinds of chemicals and battery cages. It could also stimulate the growing of certain crops or uses of farmland compared with others - say fruit and vegetables as against dairying, if that were considered a desirable component of agricultural policy. The tax could regulate the use of environmentally undesirable fertilisers and pesticides. And it could be used to stimulate employment on the land. The massive reduction in the numbers of people employed on the land has damaged the countryside by undermining rural communities. One day it might be considered sensible to support forms of labour-intensive farming which might provide work for the urban unemployed.

All of these things are examples of the rural policy-making for which a rural land tax would be such an effective tool. Any such policy-making would of course undermine the power of the landowner to do as he wishes with his land. But it would do so in a way which ought to allow for the maximum possible interplay between the landowner's ancient desire for control and the legitimate but long-ignored interests of the rest of the community.

§ - Ends -- §