

THE LAND

Issue 1

Winter/Spring 2006



woody Guthrie

THE LAND: A MANIFESTO

In all the hoo-hah surrounding the G8 summit last summer, did you hear anybody with access to a microphone mouth the word “land”? All the demands to “make poverty history”, and the responses from those in power, revolved around money: less debt, freer and fairer trade, more aid.

That is because economists define wealth and justice in terms of access to the market. Politicians echo the economists because the more dependent that people become upon the market, the more securely they can be roped into the fiscal and political hierarchy. Access to land is not simply a threat to landowning elites - it is a threat to the religion of unlimited economic growth and the power structure that depends upon it.

The market (however attractive it may appear) is built on promises: the only source of wealth is the earth. Anyone who has land has access to energy, water, nourishment, shelter, healing, wisdom, ancestors and a grave. Ivan Illich spoke of ‘a society of convivial tools that allows men to achieve purposes with energy fully under their control’. The ultimate convivial tool, the mother of all the others, is the earth.

Yet the earth is more than a tool cupboard, for although the earth gives, it dictates its terms; and its terms alter from place to place. So it is that agriculture begets human culture; and cultural diversity, like biological diversity, flowers in obedience to the conditions that the earth imposes. The first and inevitable effect of the global market is to uproot and destroy land-based human cultures. The final and inevitable achievement of a rootless global market will be to destroy itself.

In a shrunken world, taxed to keep the wheels of industry accelerating, land and its resources are increasingly contested. Six billion people compete to acquire land for a variety of conflicting uses: land for food, for water, for energy, for timber, for carbon sinks, for housing, for wildlife, for recreation, for investment. The politics of land - who owns it, who controls it and who has access to it - is more important than ever, though you might not think so from a superficial reading of government policy and the media. The purpose of this magazine is to focus attention back onto the politics of land.

Rome fell; the Soviet Empire collapsed; the stars and stripes are fading in the west. Nothing is forever in history, except geography. Capitalism is a confidence trick, a dazzling edifice built on paper promises. It may stand longer than some of us anticipate, but when it crumbles, the land will remain.

...AND AN INTRODUCTION

The Land is a magazine written by and for people who believe that the roots of justice, freedom, social security and democracy lie not so much in access to money, or to the ballot box, as in access to land and its resources.

The Land will appear two or three times a year. It combines the readership and reflects the preoccupations of two previous publications:

The Land Is Ours Newsletter, which for nine years informed people about land campaigns, in the UK and abroad.

THE LAND

Editors: Simon Fairlie (home affairs); Jyoti Fernandes (foreign affairs); Lilia Patterson (graphics and layout).

Office address: The Potato Store, Flaxdrayton Farm, South Petherton, Somerset, TA 13 5LR, UK.

Tel/fax: 01460 249204.

E-mail: chapter7@tlio.org.uk; jyoti@tlio.org.uk.

Website (same site, two addresses): www.tlio.org.uk;
www.thelandisours.org

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Chapter 7 News, which since 1999 has published news and views about the UK planning system.

The views expressed in *The Land* do not necessarily represent those of *The Land Is Ours*, Chapter 7, or the editors. We encourage debate and will consider for publication any material submitted relating to the politics of land, provided it is not racist, sexist or similarly inflammatory. However, editorial policy will reflect the basic objective of *The Land Is Ours* - which is to “campaign peacefully for access to land, its resources and the decision-making processes affecting them, for everyone, irrespective of race, creed, age or gender.”

We welcome articles, letters, artwork, photos, press clippings, and other contributions on anything relevant to the politics of land. If you wish to propose an article, please contact us and we will supply you with our writer’s guidelines, which you can ignore if you are a gifted writer, but should pay some attention to if you are not.

If there are subjects or perspectives which appear to you to be missing in the magazine, then do let us know, as we may be able to address them in subsequent issues.

The Land currently receives no funding or advertising revenue, and is staffed by a team of part-timers on a restricted budget. If you wish to subscribe or can assist in distributing the magazine in any way, please see the insert which comes with this magazine or contact the editors.

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EDITORIAL

BENEFIT CULTURE

Changes in farm subsidies are setting the mould for a new brand of environmental imperialism.

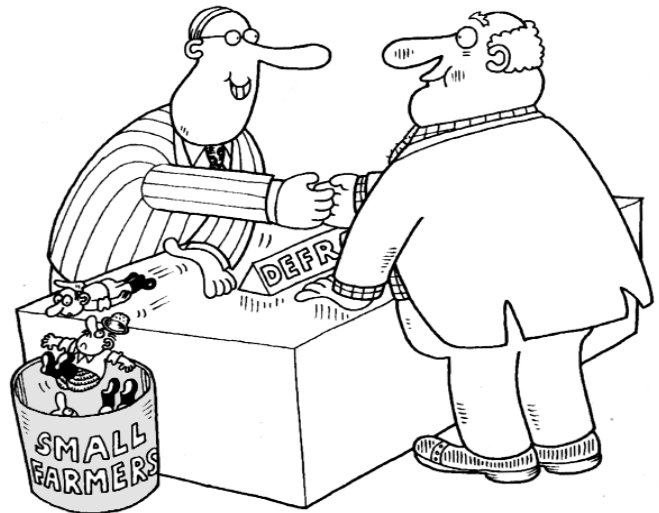
The consensus across a wide body of opinion seems to be that changes in the Common Agricultural Policy, involving a move away from EU production subsidies and towards environmental subsidies, are to be welcomed. But to anyone concerned with land rights, the new Single Farm Payment Scheme signals a leap out of the frying pan into the fire. "Paying farmers to look after the land" in effect will mean paying landowners to do next to nothing; and, by any standards, from those of Adam Smith to those of Karl Marx, paying wealthy people to do nothing out of the public purse is an economic distortion of the first magnitude.

According to estate agent Mark Youngplum, interviewed on page 14 of this magazine, by 2010 all farmers will have to do to receive subsidies will be to top their weeds once every five years. Not being entirely reassured about Mr Youngplum's credibility, we thought we'd better check the matter. At a 'Farming Any Questions' event held in Somerset recently we put it to Anthony Gibson, SW Regional Director of the NFU, that farmers were being paid for doing nothing, 'Nonsense' he responded 'they are paid to look after the land.'

"But all they have to do under the Single Payment Scheme is top their fields once every five years", we replied. "Er yes", Gibson mumbled, "that's correct" and then moved the conversation on.

That was at the beginning of the discussion. During the next two hours, although the panel of four farming experts was subjected to heavy duty questioning from the floor on matters such as GM and food safety, not one person returned to the matter of farm subsidies. The silence, in the media as a whole is perverse. For the last 10 years everybody has been slagging off farmers because they have been receiving EU payments for producing our food under very difficult circumstances; now everyone seems happy to pay landowners money for doing sod all.

What will happen if this system of handouts is allowed to continue? Many existing farmers will continue to farm productively, because that is what they like doing; and no doubt many landowners will apply for the additional payments available for actually doing something such as planting woodland or managing hedges. But a new breed of landowner will take advantage of the fact that the best economic option is to do as little productive land management as possible and 'diversify' out of farming.



Neil Bennet - ECOS

People with no interest in agriculture beyond sticking a few four-legged lawnmowers on the land, will buy up farms because they provide a nice place to live, a tax haven and an income courtesy of the tax-payer. If you look at the estate agent's websites and in-house magazines you will see that this is precisely how their properties are being marketed, to people who are happy to pay a million pounds for a holding worth not much more than half that a few years ago. About half of all farms are now acquired by non-farmers who have the capacity to send the price of farmland soaring to a level where it becomes unaffordable for new entrants who want to produce food on it.

There is no single explanation for the public willingness to pay enormous sums of public money to an idle elite: but it is clearly linked to an unspoken agreement to induce people in other parts of the world to produce our food and fibre, so that we, on our overpopulated island, can enjoy the wildlife habitat, native woodland and pseudo-wilderness that we threw away when we set out to become the world's first industrial economy.

Having pioneered global capitalism, we are now setting the mould for a new brand of environmental imperialism. If we carry on bribing landowners to produce nothing, the UK could eventually become almost entirely reliant on food sourced from overseas - much of it grown on land in developing countries from which local farmers have been ejected, or under environmental conditions which we would never allow here. Skylarks will return to our fields, as orang-utans retreat in the face of expanding palm oil plantations, the Amazon rainforest makes way for beef, soya and chicken production, and displaced peasants head for the cities. Over the last decade the UK's food self-sufficiency decreased from

73 per cent to 63 per cent. Twenty years of paying landowners to do nothing could probably bring it down to 23 per cent.

Perhaps, as some people are predicting, this subsidy regime will not last very long. If oil prices rocket, global food production will suffer; if, on the other hand, the global economy continues to expand, more and more people in the developing countries will demand an extravagant meat-based diet, while water supplies become scarce. In either case, there

is a high chance that food will become more expensive, and the requirement in the UK will turn back towards agricultural production. When it does, it will be something of an embarrassment to have a countryside monopolized by a parasitic landed gentry whose expertise in farming extends to the management of overpriced alpacas and horses that have to wear overcoats, while our remaining skilled farmworkers are earning their living driving Tesco lorries.

A COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BUY FOR ENGLAND?

The most exciting development in the politics of land ownership in the UK in the last few years has been the emergence of the community right to buy in Scotland. The process began a decade ago when a number of Highland communities - such as Assynt and the Isle of Eigg - succeeded in raising the money to buy their own land back from feudal owners on the open market. The 2003 Scottish Land Reform Act takes the process further, by allowing crofting communities to force a sale on reluctant owners - and allowing other local communities under 10,000 to exercise a right to buy when land or buildings come on the market.

So far, landed interests in England and Wales have consoled themselves with the knowledge that this barbarian assault on property rights couldn't happen here. "Time and again" writes Robin Maitland of estate agents Strutt and Parker, "when legislators south of the border have erred on the side of caution, the Scottish Executive has chosen to take one big, bold step further... Call me an old Scottish cynic, but I can't ever see that happening in the Home Counties."

Or could it? On 12 October, in a speech to the British Urban Regeneration Association, David Miliband the Minister of Communities and Local Government, announced that he wanted:

"to look at more radical options. In Scotland, legislation has created a 'Community Right to Buy'. It is focused on rural communities, and allows voluntary organisations to establish an interest in land or buildings - be they owned by the public or private sector - so that if the asset comes up for sale they have first refusal, subject to a community ballot.

The proponents of Community Right to Buy argue that it would represent as big a transfer of wealth and power to communities as housing Right to Buy represented for individuals. We are not talking about an alternative to major development. We are talking about the potential of the voluntary and community sector to take disused or under-used land and buildings - youth or community centres, unoccupied housing, and undeveloped land - and turn it into a vibrant resource for the community, raising not just morale but the value of other properties. We are determined to look at this issue as we develop our vision for sustainable communities."

For a New Labour Minister - even one whose Dad was a Marxist - this is indeed a radical option. When he talks

about taking disused buildings and empty houses and turning them into vibrant resources for the community. Miliband is using the language of the squatter. Inadvertently, of course. If his proposed right to buy ever comes to pass, then the matter of who represents 'the community' will require statutory definition - and it is a safe bet that the definition will focus around the section of the population most adept at drawing up feasibility studies and funding proposals, rather than those who physically take over an empty building and use it. But even if the good and the great in each community are those most likely to secure these resources, a right to buy will still strengthen the hand of squatters who will be better empowered to negotiate for a happier ending to an occupation than the inevitable court order, followed by demolition.

According to the Scottish land reform campaigner Andy Wightman "This looks like being far more radical than the Scottish model as it will apply to urban areas where most people live and where wealth can most easily be generated." From an urban perspective this is true; but as regards the countryside the proposal is less radical than the Scottish model, because it doesn't appear to apply to agricultural land. The subsidized estates and conglomerates which tie up the land market in so many pockets of England and Wales will no doubt remain immune from any community right to buy for a considerable time to come.

Nonetheless the proposal is very much to be welcomed, and could be the best thing to come out of the Labour government since the establishment of the minimum wage. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office have set up a Working Group to develop proposals for a community right to buy in England and Wales.

However, as always, there is a concern that the minister who is steering this through may suddenly be shunted off to another department, and the matter will fall off the agenda. All of us who have an interest should make as much noise as possible to ensure that the Government carries through these proposals. A good way to start may be to write to your own MP expressing support for the proposal, and asking him or her to obtain more information from Mr Miliband as to how the Working Group is progressing, and whether there is any opportunity for public input.

DIME-STORE COMPUTERS

The case for progress now relies more on the argument that it is unstoppable than that it is desirable.

The Media Lab at MIT have announced the imminent arrival of a \$100 lap-top, designed for users in developing countries. The makers claim that with a projected life-span of over five years, the computer will cost no more than the \$19 per child which China spends every year on text-books.

This fold-up, wind-up, solar-powered computer, with the ability to illuminate its monitor directly from sunlight, may be simpler and more desert-friendly than an I-book, but it will not exactly class as intermediate technology. If it is as successful as its protagonists hope, it will propel every peasant child world-wide into contact with the wonderful world of MIT, Kate Moss and the Simpsons, probably before some of them have access to piped water. The makers don't even bother with marketing it to adults, who shouldn't be trusted with the delicate task of assessing whether it's suitable for their offspring - school kids will pick it up quicker and the whole package will be paid for by World Bank funded education programmes, and the like.

The marketing of this machine to juveniles at peasant friendly prices is a belated reminder that the impact that computers have upon our world is more immediate and more radical than any other technology. Hydroelectric dams, pesticides and GM crops have all played their part in undermining indigenous cultures, but as engines of social change, they don't even begin to compare with TV screens and lap-tops. How can the sanity of any modest, evolving, land-based culture be maintained when access to everything that an American shopping mall has to offer, and more, is dangled in front of every child at the touch of a button?

So why haven't those of us in the global resistance movement who have criticized dams and pesticides and GM crops been equally vociferous about the far more profound levels of social destruction that will be wreaked by the computer? The answer is obvious: because we use computers ourselves; and we use them (whether we like them or not) because if we didn't we wouldn't be heard. Information technology is like weaponry: if you don't update, you die. The pen may be mightier than the sword, but who cares? The computer licks both of them.

And so, as the wheels of technology roll on, Bill Gates and Google get an easy ride (and open source technologies such as Linux are adulated) while Monsanto gets taken to the cleaners by the environmental movement. Yet without Microsoft's megabytes, the spinners of synthetic DNA would still be doing long division, and Monsanto's researchers would be splicing in the greenhouse rather than under the nanoscope.

In a few short years the information industry will have done more than the whole of the rest of capitalism put together to hasten the collapse of human culture - that is to say, of systems of living with the land which have evolved steadily over thousands of years and which therefore (according to the

SCOTTISH LANDSCAPES

'This land is my land, this land is your land'

so the Woody Guthrie song goes. But we all know fiscally the land is in the hand of the few, not the many. Sometimes 'the few' preserve certain features, a fine woodland or hedge for example, perhaps for hundreds of years. And this landscape is part of the mindset of many locals and passing travellers. Everyone has certain small or large landscape features etched in their head and associated feelings and memories. These are very precious to us, and changes to these mutual scenes when we return to them are sometimes very upsetting.

Very often 'our' land is managed badly. Degraded bracken-infested sheep walks where once there was tree cover, settlements, and lots of folk. Above the sheep ground are vast monoculture crops of Sitka spruce, a lifeless world that renders the landscape featureless for the sake of heavily subsidised almost industrial use of our land. Is this what we pay our taxes for? Why not think long-term and grow quality hardwoods?

Think of sustainable small-scale self-sufficiency. Barter and banter with our neighbours to keep big business and government at bay. Enjoy the countryside, cherish and care for the land without exploiting it, the plant-life, the creatures on it and in the soil.

We need to break free of the chains of siege mentality, change planning laws and make tens of thousands of small areas of land available for ordinary people to fulfil the dream of a home, a small croft or business, - ventures to revitalize the countryside after centuries of clearances continued to this day with not one man and his dog, but one man and his forest harvester.

Hold on to your mindscapes, protect them and dream of new ones. This land is your land. *Gilbert Milne*

principles of evolution) are likely to be close to the optimum for a given set of circumstances.

To throw all this away in so short a time prompts even those of us who normally shy away from alarmism to wonder, at least once in a while, whether humans may not be accelerating up an exponential curve which can only exhaust itself in a cataclysm of collective folly. The consensus is still to press onward and upward; but the case for 'progress' now relies more on the argument that it is unstoppable, than that it is desirable. Those who decry Luddites most vehemently are starting to resemble the proverbial homophobe whose aggressiveness derives from the need to suppress his own doubts.

In the event of some kind of technological nemesis, our only compensation will be that matters may not be irremediable. Computer culture relies upon the maintenance of complex and vulnerable networks for producing electrical energy, currently derived mostly from fossil fuels. Traditional cultures rely upon the earth, the sun, and word of mouth - all of which, even the last, are fully capable of outlasting the rise and fall of the cyber-industrial complex. In the long run, human memory may prove to be mightier than the computer.

E.L.

UK ISSUES

WILD SCOTS AND BUFFOON HISTORY

ALASTAIR MCINTOSH *responds to fashionable claims that the Highland Clearances never happened.*

The latest book by the historian Michael Fry has caused quite a “stushie” in Scotland. But the issues it raises are also relevant south of the border. So what is it about *Wild Scots: Four Hundred Years of Highland History* that, for example, caused the BBC to dig me out late on the eve of its publication for irate comment? Why is Fry accused, like those who question the authenticity of the Holocaust, of ‘Denying the Clearances’?

The so-called Highland Clearances are, like the earlier Enclosures in England, the central fact of much Scottish social history. But just as the Americans ‘don’t do body counts’ in Iraq because they would not assist their self-image, so those who controlled history in Scotland traditionally watered down the Clearances. It was thanks to an English historian, John Prebble, that the culture of silence was first broken through in 1963.

“This book” says Prebble in his Foreword to *The Highland Clearances*, ‘is the story of how the Highlanders were deserted and then betrayed. It concerns itself with people, how sheep were preferred to them, and how bayonet, truncheon and fire were used to drive them from their homes. It has been said that the Clearances are now far enough away from us to be decently forgotten. But the hills are still empty - and if their history is known there is no satisfaction to be got from the experience.’

Prebble’s revisionism was met by howls of horror from an

“How fitting that a failed Conservative Party candidate should take it upon himself to become Historiographer Royal to the Landed Classes.”

Anglicised academic establishment. The Historiographer Royal for Scotland, Professor Gordon Donaldson of Edinburgh University, objected in the strongest possible terms. “I am sixty-eight now” he proclaimed, ‘and until recently had hardly heard of the Highland Clearances. The thing has been blown out of proportion.’

As the Native Americans say, “Where there is no victim, there was no crime.” Prebble’s work languished in an academic backwater, until 1976 saw the publication of James Hunter’s seminal work, *The Making of the Crofting Community*. A host of other research followed in its wake.

Interestingly, there was still no reliable body count of how many people had been subjected to diaspora. Some estates kept meticulous records; others kept none. Some estimate a million souls directly or indirectly cleared from their homes over 200 years. After discussion with colleagues, I generally work with the safer but still anecdotally gu-estimated figure of half a million. But the bottom line evidence of the evil remains, as Prebble suggests, the ordering of the country as it is today. Andy Wightman’s research is incontrovertible. Just 1,000 owners continue to control nearly two-thirds of the private land in Scotland.

There is enough land in Scotland to give each man, woman and child 5 acres. And yet, the cry all around the Highlands is that local families cannot get a housing plot for less than fifty grand. Even where land is available, the landed classes in the past stitched up the very conception of the countryside to represent it as rightly being an empty wilderness, for the rich and their servants. Planning policy therefore also gets in the way of reform. You can build huge ugly barns in the country with EU grants, but not convivially toned-in eco-homes for the poor.

Thanks to the Land Reform Scotland Act 2003, this logjam is finally starting to clear. The best source on this is Andy Wightman¹, who has undertaken an incredible job with very little funding. Land reform has guaranteed, (1) the right to roam, including wild camping, (2) the right of pre-emptive purchase at government valuation by a community of rural land that is put up for sale, and, (3) in areas governed by crofting tenure, the right of a community to buy their land at valuation even when the



laird has not placed it on the market. Some will say that this third measure is no different from a 1976 act that allowed individual crofters to buy their patch. But the difference is huge. The 1976 act forced individualism and so was shunned by many indigenous tenants. The 2003 act allows land to be bought and tenancies held by the community. As such, our innate theological sensitivities are not offended!

THE LARGESSE OF THE LAIRDS

To the right wing press, land reform marks the “Mugabification of Scotland”. To 5 million Scots, it is, at last, the start of a reversal of the ongoing wrongs of the Clearances. How fitting, therefore, that the failed Conservative Party candidate, Michael Fry, has taken it upon himself to make out that the Clearances never took place. How fitting to have, shall we say, a Historiographer Royal to the Landed Classes! His work is not an attempt to edify us about the past. It is, rather, a highly politicised attempt to turn back Prebble’s and Hunter’s tide of historical revisionism that has undergirded land reform as the flagship policy of our new Scottish

How does Fry do it? Basically, he is a historian of the ‘Great Men’ approach. History is about chaps just as geography is about maps, and like most reactionaries, Fry sees history through the eyes of those swashbuckling types who put the Great into Britain. This is what makes his writing so entertaining, but it also averts our gaze to underlying social processes and structures. Fry’s aim, I infer, is to convince us that the landed Powers that Be are the right ordering of the countryside; that they always meant well, but have been misunderstood and misrepresented. The lairds (or Scottish lords) were forced to modernise land tenure through “improvement” because rising population made the people’s condition untenable.

Fry’s evidence on this is slim. The Highland population, he says, rose from 337,000 in 1755 to 382,000 in 1801, the half century immediately preceding the main wave of Clearances. But that in itself is hardly grounds for saying that the lion’s share of Scotland’s 20 million acres were insufficient to support them. What made the quantity of available land insufficient for the people, and thereby made them vulnerable to the Great Potato Famine of 1845 to 1850 (which hit the Highlands of Scotland as well as Ireland), was not for the most part population growth. It was population stricture as people were forced off their chosen homelands into “townships” where the Apartheid-minded lairds wanted them.

Why? For the same reasons as Lord Delamere did it in Kenya, and in a host of other colonial situations. Delamere told the Native Labour Commission of 1912-13: “If ... every native is to be a landholder of a sufficient area on which to establish himself then the question of obtaining a satisfactory labour supply will never be settled.” In the Celtic lands, that waged labour was needed in landowner-controlled industries such as fishing and processing seaweed for industrial uses. But equally, the vacated land was wanted for sheep farming, wool being more profitable than tenants. As for the Potato Famine, that was a political famine. In both Ireland and Scotland tenants had no choice but to become over-reliant on the single crop that could produce high yields from little land. Meanwhile, as the people starved, food was exported from Ireland to English cities. These are colonial realities that have to be faced so that our peoples can move on.

In Scotland, many of the lairds were themselves Scottish, as Fry rightly says. But their “spirit of enterprise” that he so admires was seeded into them by Anglicised public schooling, forced by the 1609 Statutes of Iona and King James’ subsequent Education Act. Paulo Freire of Brazil would have



Murdo Macleod

Dunroamin? No - The Duke of Sutherland preferred to call his home Dunrobin.

called it “cultural invasion”. As Prebble observes: “Once the chiefs lost their powers many of them also lost any paternal interest in their clansmen. During the next hundred years they continued the work of Cumberland’s [of Culloden] battalions. So that they might lease their glens and braes to sheep-farmers from the Lowlands and England, they cleared the crofts of men, women and children, using police and soldiers where necessary.”

In other words, the Highland Clearances were part of the internal colonisation of the British Isles that made Great Britain. Like much subsequent colonial policy, they also constituted an “inner colonisation” of the minds and social structures of Highland peoples. Fry’s “spirit of enterprise” defeated the “primitive communism” (as he calls it) of the traditional way, where land was valued not for how much profit it could produce, but for how many of the clan or “family” it could support. The early modern era in Highland Scotland, initiated by King James’s 1609 Statutes and consolidated with a vengeance in the reprisals that followed the Battle of Culloden in 1746, turned land from being God’s providence into a mere commodity, to be bought and sold to the highest bidder. That is how matters still stand today. Most rent is but a tax on the poor, payable to maintain the idle mores of the rich.

But should we not be grateful for the largesse of the rich? The Duke of Sutherland, Fry tries to impress upon us, was the richest British subject of his day, nicknamed the “Leviathan of Wealth.” His investment in “improving” one-twentieth of the surface of Scotland - according to Prebble he commissioned 34 bridges and 450 miles of road - was the economic regeneration of its time. Today it bequeaths the nation a fine crop of old masters hanging in the National Gallery. How petty of the people to have fussed so much about being moved around by their master. And if awkward tenants did have to be burnt out, the excesses were down to his factor or his advisor, one James Loch whose meddlings are interpreted by Fry as an early attempt at - wait for it - “land reform!” As for his wife the Countess of Sutherland a.k.a. Lady Stafford (these people collected titles like land) she who hosted Harriet Beecher Stowe of Uncle Tom’s Cabin fame, could hardly be considered culpable. Her estate was an “object of curiosity”. We should be grateful for her husband’s millions, “much of it paid by tenants in the fertile Midlands of England.” Well, precisely! That is what built Dunrobin Castle and a fitting name it is too! Indeed, my own great-great grandfather was sent by the Church to work there. Common people gave huge chunks of their lives to fit the fancy of the duke’s whims. He had the power because he had the money because he had the land. And so he had people’s lives in his palm, and to this day his statue, paid for by public collections, dominates the Dornoch Firth. People talk about blowing it up and so we should.

SLURS AND SLURRY

Deconstruction of Fry’s language, lays bare the scatological depths of his prejudice. It is not just his sweeping caricatures, such as opening a chapter on “eviction and development” with the block-capitalised statement, “SCOTS LIKE FIGHTS.” Talk of victim blaming! But that at least is blatant. My argument is more with the insidious distortion of perception, which is to say, distortion of the reader’s consciousness, that

Fry conceals beneath his outwardly avuncular mask of bonhomie. For example, he twice chooses not to refer to the native people as “putting manure on their fields” as would be the normal agricultural turn of phrase. Rather, he says, they engage in “throwing excrement over a patch of moorland.” In other words, Fry takes a natural process of traditional rural life and by his twist of terminology heaps contempt upon it. This not only degrades the people and their organic agricultural practices. It also implies that their homelands were worthless, thus making it easier to justify the oppression practiced by their “humane, liberal, progressive landlord[s],” typically “amiable but businesslike” and including “achieving Scots”, who were merely advancing “the spirit of enterprise that flowed from “an enlightened education.”

The bottom line, Fry says in a clever framing of the debate that focuses on a particular narrowly-defined era but infects the reader with a much wider impression, is that there was no ‘first phase of Clearance’ in the late-eighteenth century. Not “if ‘clearance’ [he uses a lower-case c] is taken to mean the disappearance of a population from its habitat - such as the disappearance of Albanians in Kosovo in the Serbs’ ethnic cleansing of 1998 or, to go further back, of the Jews from Berlin after these were transported to the camps by the Nazis.” This, “Fry surmises, having carefully framed his definition of Clearance in totally over-the-top terms, ‘vindicates a denial that in this era any Highland clearances took place.’” So there we are! The “excrement” in question grows the wherewithal to construct a classic “straw man argument”; that is to say, an argument that dishonestly sets up a flimsy or contrived opposing position, so that it can be easily knocked down. If I might underscore this point of discourse analysis (for that is one way in which we need to learn to approach and tackle these people!), Fry’s false syllogism is that Kosovo and Berlin were Clearances; Scottish history has nothing as bad as Kosovo or Berlin; ergo there were no Clearances in Scotland and the lairds stand exonerated.

OBSESSIVE ECCENTRICS

The purpose of Fry’s re-revisionist history becomes clear in his various jibes at land reform. Land reform, he tells us, has been “an obsession with Scots” thanks to nineteenth century agitators like John Murdoch and Professor John Stuart Blackie whom he portrays as eccentrics for “countering the forces of the market with the call of a culture.” Blackie, we are told by the incredulous Fry, even “decided ‘ownership in land exists for the people; not the people for the sake of ownership’ - a tenet of the Scottish left ever since.”

But the point of Fry’s attack is not just to poke fun at history, as becomes apparent in his concluding chapter, “The land’s for the people: The Highlands under devolution”. It is not just land reform but modern land reform that is the target and motivation for writing this book. Here is why it has been so indulgently reviewed in the establishment London press - the Times Literary Supplement says “It should be prescribed reading”; The Times maintains “He overturns the conventional demonology.” It is in the interests of a certain class of powerful people to have Fry pontificate as their propagandist precisely because the growing success of modern Scottish land reform is a threat to their interests. Let me illustrate by focussing on one of his case studies about which I happen to know a lot as my book, Soil and Soul:

People versus Corporate Power is substantially about land reform and the community land trust of which I was a founder on the Isle of Eigg.

Fry's treatment of this is a dogs' dinner that libels the people's cause. He makes no mention of the buy-out bid being led by a community trust. Instead, He gives the impression that the initiative was led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, which then handed it over to the community trust after pulling in a huge cache of public money. This was simply not so. There was only some £30,000 of public money applied to the buyout. The major sums Fry talks about came in after the buyout for developments like broadleaf forestry and community facilities - catch-up assistance from public agencies that had not been able, in preceding years, to give Eigg the level of public sector intervention taken as normal in most other communities of the United Kingdom.

The balance of £1.6 million that secured the community's buyout came from a mystery woman who gave £1 million, and 10,000 small donations totalling £600,000 - 70% of them, I might say, from England! Indeed, I vividly remember being present when an envelope was opened containing £2 from "unemployed of London" with a note on a scrap of paper

which said, "It gives me hope." Such are the kind of people who backed the spirit of Eigg, and who demonstrate that land reform is needed as much in England as in Scotland. As for the composition of the buyout partnership, the SWT was a 25% partner in the final consortium but it certainly did not lead the charge. That was the part of the people of Eigg, working powerfully in partnership with Highland Council representative of the wider local democratic constituency and the SWT representative of wildlife. We could not have done it without the SWT's fundraising network which included its generous sister agencies in England, but equally, they could never have led a popular revolution. It was partnership in unity against oppressive landlordism that made Eigg happen. That's the kind of fact that Fry doesn't let his readers see and that's what renders his history, in my view, buffoon history.

What does this book say to the English? I think it is a warning. In Scotland we have succeeded in naming, unmasking and engaging the power of the lairds. It is now no longer an honourable thing to be a landlord. We have successfully attacked the psychological root of the affectation. Most lairds now claim they are merely farmers. Indeed, the Scottish Landowners' Federation in March 2004 euphemistically re-branded itself as the Scottish Rural Property and Business Association (SRPBA).

Watch out in England for similar dissembling if the politicians start waking up to the fact that land reform can offer big political impact on the rural housing crisis for very little cost.² Watch out for more dodgy histories, and not just the usual ones that set out to try and make us identify with our "noble" families and their landed estates. In short, watch out for those that would keep your minds clapped in irons.

Book reviewed: *Wild Scots: Four Hundred Years of Highland History*, by Michael Fry, John Murray, 2005, £25. Alastair McIntosh is a Fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology at Strathclyde University and author of *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power*, which has been described by George Monbiot as "world-changing," by the Bishop of Liverpool as "life-changing," and by Thom Yorke of Radiohead as "truly mental." Many of his publications are available online at www.alastairmcintosh.com

REFERENCES

1. see www.andywrightman.com
2. In England, the Country Land-owners Association, whose members own approximately half of England, changed its name to the Country Land and Business Association. While both bodies chose to get rid of the word "land-owner", only the Scottish organization chose to dispense altogether with the concept of "land." (Editor's note)

Murdo Macleod



Scots land-reformers pursuing their "obsession": Eigg Islanders gather beneath their famous volcanic 'sgurr' to celebrate what The Guardian called "A Scottish Land Rights Revolution".

Chapter 7 News 15 featured a proposal for Forest Crofts - sustainable woodland villages carved out of conifer forest which the Forestry Commission doesn't know what to do with because its value has plummeted. The idea is still being taken forward, albeit under a different name. DAVID BLAIR reports.

FOREST VILLAGES

HOW TO MAKE USE OF SITKA SPRUCE

A Forest Village community is a group of people living and working in the forest to earn a living. Forestry work takes a lot of energy and is best achieved by a group of people acting co-operatively, especially if the full life cycle, from the tree to the finished product (housing, crafts, wood fuel and so on) is happening in the forest.

But that doesn't mean it has to be in the middle of nowhere, with few amenities. Many of Scotland's rural towns and villages back onto forests which currently provide few benefits to the local community. There should be a mutually beneficial relationship in having a forest village community close to (but not in the face of) an existing community. As well as managing the local forest and providing timber, affordable houses, fuel-wood, crafts, and employment opportunities, the forest village community would bring in more people to support the local school, shop, post office and so on.

For a forest village community to be viable, many of the basic needs of its members must be provided from the forest that surrounds it. That means that its housing, water and much of its food and power should be produced locally and sustainably.

As the price for pulpwood has collapsed, the much maligned "dark ranks of Sitka spruce" have become almost un-saleable, and something of an embarrassment to the Forestry Commission. But Sitka is a perfectly acceptable building wood and a resource which should not be wasted - it has a role to play in the construction of affordable sustainable housing.

Judicious removal of mature conifers will provide space not only for housing, but for more durable timber species, such as European larch, Douglas Fir and Scots Pine. If shelter belts are left around propitious areas, pigs can be run to clear land and fertilize it for types of crop production which could never have

been envisaged on open moorland. One ingenious permaculture proposal is to run pigs on slopes and trap the eroding soil with living willow barricades, thus forming flat terraces.

Where access or soils are poor, then the land would be encouraged to regenerate naturally to provide native woodland, and the forest managed with a view to enhancing biodiversity and providing for the needs of the local and the wider community.

These proposals are attracting widespread interest within the Scottish forestry establishment. The Minister for Forestry and Rural Development has asked the Forestry Commission to produce a report into the possibility of establishing forest crofts along these lines, and an officer has been appointed by the commission to look into their potential.

The Forest Village Project is advancing a pilot project close to the village of Tighnabruich in the Cowal peninsula of Argyll. The Planning Policy Department of Argyll and Bute Council has responded positively and an area of forest has been identified, and will be ring fenced in the local plan for such a project. On 17 and 18th of August an exhibition was mounted and local people were invited to meetings to learn about the project and give their feedback. A local housing association and a firm of architects in Glasgow are expressing interest in the project.

We initially put forward these proposals under the heading "Forest Crofts" but we have discarded this name because crofting legislation does not offer an appropriate model for the forest communities we envisage. Our aim is that forestry land would be held in trust, and rented or sold to people wanting to work in the forest. Crofting rules make it difficult to ensure that land is returned to the trust should someone leave, rather than sold on the open market; we view that the proposed forest communities should develop their own constitution, rather than inherit some of the assumptions that might be associated with crofting.

For more information visit www.dunbeag.org.uk



The Roundhouse at David Blair's woodland holding in Argyll

COMMON LAND IS CONTESTED LAND

by HELEN BACZKOVSKA

200 years after the Enclosure Acts, the Government is still trying to sort out how we manage our few remaining commons.

The common lands of England were born from a history of conflict, rebellion and archaic law. Even today, common land and the frequent misunderstanding of the laws pertaining to it can result in little battles - as happened in two incidents in rural Norfolk this year.

In the first case, residents of quaint and sleepy Morningthorpe, just south of Norwich, woke up one spring morning to find a local farmer excavating a trench around a common. Apparently aimed at preventing travellers from stopping on the common, the ditch also prevented access for the right holder, who takes an annual hay crop from the land, and for the many ramblers and dog walkers who visit this local beauty spot.

A barrage of complaints to local authorities initially brought no comfort, as neither district nor county council seemed confident of the law or prepared to approach the landowner. In fact, a breach of section 194 of the 1925 Law of Property Act had occurred. This stipulates that any works “whereby access to [common] land... is prevented or impeded, shall not be lawful”.

Frustrated locals, drawing their inspiration from Robert Kett, who in 1549 led a rebellion against the illegal enclosure of common land near Norwich, decided the time was right

for action. Taking up hoes and shovels, an alliance of travellers, locals and ramblers started filling in the ditch, aided, unlike Robert Kett, with much local media coverage. Eventually, persuaded that an offence had occurred, the local authorities convinced the farmer to fill the ditch in.

This incident underlines some of the misconceptions often held about common land, the most frequent being that no-one owns the land. This is simply not the case: common land is mostly privately owned land where certain people have legal rights of common over the land. The rights are usually attached to property (like a cottage) and are defined by delightfully archaic terms, such as common of pasture (grazing), estovers (collecting firewood) and piscary (fishing in ponds or streams). These rights and the commons themselves were registered under the 1965 Commons Registration Act and copies of registers are usually held at county council offices.

The actual owner, often referred to as “Lord of the Manor”, has no right to do anything at all with the land, unless he also has registered rights, i.e. is a commoner. The landowner does not, in fact, even have a right of access onto the land, nor the right to fence, ditch or plant a hedge on it. The law is complicated by separate legislation for Metropolitan Commons, where mainly urban land is preserved for the enjoyment of city dwellers, and also for certain commons managed by a “Scheme of Regulation”, where a local authority invokes the 1899 Commons Act, so they can assume responsibility for a common.

In the second Norfolk instance, a barbed wire fence was erected around Hanworth Common, which, at the time of registration in the late 1960s, was apparently handed over to the care of the parish council by the local estate. Early in 2005, the heir to the estate claimed ownership of the land and erected the fence, to a huge local outcry. The ownership issue may have to be tested in court, but as with

Morningthorpe, the obstruction was still an offence and with a court order pending, the fence was finally removed by the would-be owner. Again, confusion seemed to arise from what ownership of common land actually means and what works actually constitute a breach of the law.

As I write, a new Commons Bill is in front of the House of Lords. However, as travellers, ramblers, dog walkers, owners, right holders, residents, conservers of wildlife and landscape are all stakeholders in common land, there are boundless opportunities for conflicts of opinion.



Modern levellers filling in the encloser's ditches at Morningthorpe

These issues lie at the very heart of rural communities and it is unlikely that the new laws will make the legal situation easier for lay people to grasp. Proposals for management associations contained in the bill (see box) may make management simpler in some cases, but it is likely that the gulf between the ancient, agricultural uses of the common, the role of the landowner and the modern perceptions will remain. The proposals are sound enough in seeking to bring all interested parties together, but it is doubtful if even legislation is enough to quell the powder kegs of local politics.

Reference

Our Common Land: the Law and History of Commons and Village Greens. Paul Clayden, 1985. Available from the Open Spaces Society, 25a Henley on Thames, Oxon, RG9 2BA

CURIOUS, MESSY, AND DELICATE

“The common lands of England and Wales are in a mess” writes Oliver Tickell in *The Guardian*. “As many as one in 10 of our commons may have been lost since 1970, while many more are suffering from damage, neglect and encroachment. Robert Greenly, treasurer of the Open Spaces Society, and his wife Joan recently carried out a snapshot survey of 62 registered commons in Lincolnshire and Leicestershire. They found that they had been converted, variously, into car parks, fenced orchards, arable fields, private gardens, an apiary, a Christmas tree plantation, allotments and quarries. In one case, a village pond had been filled and turned into hard standing. Many more were suffering from neglect - overgrown with impassable scrub, or strewn with rubbish.”

There is an argument here, that the individuals who established allotments, orchards, conifer plantations or apiaries were acting more in the spirit of the commons than the communities who abandoned their commons to scrub and rubbish. There is another argument which might state precisely the opposite.

The curious and delicate politics of modern commons enclosure is depicted in a lengthy appeal decision where the Secretary of State, no less, is asked to decide whether or not fencing erected around 45 acres at Liddaton Down Common in Devon should be retained.

At Liddaton the traditional method of open grazing had died out largely because it was incompatible with motor traffic. Commoners argued that the fencing (initially erected as a means of preventing travellers from moving on) was beneficial for the management of the land, because grazing kept it open. Others, mostly picnickers and dog walkers, argued the fence inhibited access to the land - and some claimed that since enclosure no effective grazing regime had been established. Seven parties spoke in favour and 13 parties spoke against the fencing, which contained grazing valued at the princely sum of £500 per year. Clearly a lot of people care about this piece of land. But which side is acting in the spirit of the commons? The Secretary of State found against the enclosure.

“Grounds for Complaint”, by Oliver Tickell, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2005.

Appeal ref CYD 1077 1125. Thanks to Theo Hopkins for sending us this.



The trial of a landlord during John Kett's Rebellion of 1549. 16,000 insurgents formed a camp near Norwich and "scoured the country around, destroyed enclosures, filled in ditches, levelled fences."

SUMMARY OF 2005 COMMONS BILL

The central aim of the bill appears to be to tidy up the existing range of legislation, some of which dates from the thirteenth century and to implement some of the suggestions made by consultation with access groups and other stakeholders. The Bill relates only to England and Wales, Scotland having different common land laws.

Proposals contained in the Bill include:

An opportunity to rectify mistakes on the register;

Potential changes to rights, with the opportunity to transfer them to conservation organisations, extinguishing some rights and re-defining those not attached to property. Right holders, even those not exercising their rights, would do well to check on these.

Setting up management associations: this is a very new idea and rests largely on proposals put forward by the Open Spaces Society. The Bill sets out the function, remit and constitution of the associations.

An update of Section 194 of the 1925 Law of Property Act, making enclosure and obstruction a little clearer and more modern, but in line with existing practice.

Increasing opportunity for amenity and especially wildlife issues to be taken into account in the management of commons, including ensuring that the exercising of rights does not conflict with sustainable land management.

GUIDE TO THE SINGLE FARM PAYMENT SCHEME



We couldn't find a picture of Mark Youngplum; this is Alex Rew of Stags Estate Agents.

The system for doling out European agricultural subsidies is changing. Whereas subsidies were formerly allocated on the basis of what farmers produced, they are now to be 'decoupled' from production, and instead will be based on the area of land owned and farmed. Few people seem to understand how the system works so The Land interviewed Mark YOUNGPLUM of Savvy's estate agents, who helped us compile these Pass Notes.

Forgive my ignorance, but how does the Single Payment Scheme work?

In order to claim subsidies, you need to have

- (i) Agricultural land under your control.
- (ii) What are called "Entitlements" to receive payment for each area of land you control.

If you have land without entitlements, or entitlements without land, then you can't claim.

Isn't this something like the milk quota system?

A bit. In order to sell milk you need (a) cows and (b) quota; in order to claim subsidies you need (a) land and (b) entitlements. I suppose you could call it a subsidy quota system.

How much are the subsidies worth?

The system is being phased in. This year it will only account for 10 per cent of the total agricultural subsidy; but this will rise to 100 per cent by 2012. The full subsidy is expected to be worth about £60 to £90 per acre per year.

That's roughly equivalent to what the land is worth isn't it?

Well done, its about the same as the current rental value of agricultural land.

How does a farmer or landowner acquire these entitlements?

Entitlements were dished out free on the basis of what land a farmer or landowner had at his or her disposal in the reference period running up to 2004. A number of entitlements are kept in a National Reserve, which recent new entrants could apply for. The deadline date for establishing entitlements was May 16 2005.

So I'm too late to get my free entitlements?

'Fraid so. From now on, the main way to obtain entitlements will be to buy them. Entitlements can be sold on their own, or with land, or they can be leased with land.

Like dairy quota?

Yes. Firms like mine deal in entitlements, just like we deal in dairy quota.

So in effect, DEFRA have invented another new commodity?

That's right.

What do people who own entitlements have to do to pocket their annual payments?

They have to be farming land of an area equivalent to the entitlements for a period of 10 months within a given year. The land must not be used for non-agricultural purposes.

Such as keeping racehorses?

Aha, there you're wrong. The EU has ruled that grazing horses on land counts as farming. But camping sites and car-boot sales don't count as farming.

How exactly does DEFRA define "farming"?

Farming means "you must either be producing agricultural commodities or maintaining the land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)".

So farmers don't have to produce anything on their land any longer, just keep it in good condition?

That's right.

What does keeping it in good condition involve?

Topping the weeds and scrub a minimum of once every five years.

Did you say once every five years?

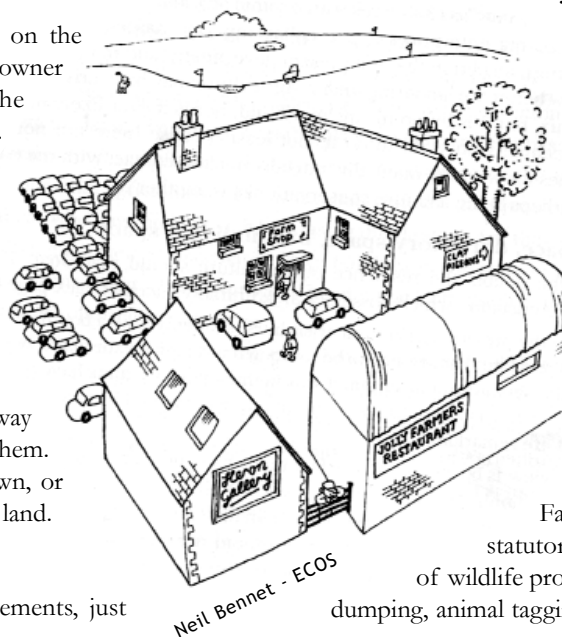
You heard me. That's what it says in the guidelines. However some farmers might have to top it more frequently or use weedkillers if they have notifiable weeds like ragwort, thistles or dock.

Is that all they have to do?

Yes. I mean, no, farmers also have to meet the conditions which come under the heading of Cross Compliance.

What does Cross Compliance involve?

Farmers have to comply with all the statutory management requirements, in respect of wildlife protection, groundwater protection, sludge dumping, animal tagging...



But if these requirements are statutory, they have to comply with them anyway, don't they?

Er, yes; but they also have to meet GAEC standards.

Which are?

Not running a tractor on waterlogged soil, not burning crop residues, not damaging SSSIs or scheduled monuments, not disturbing rights of way, not overgrazing, not removing stone walls or hedgerows, not cultivating right up to hedgerows, not removing protected trees.

So taxpayers will be paying landowners just for not doing things that they shouldn't be doing anyway?

Don't exaggerate. As I said, they have to control the weeds.

And all I have to do to become a farmer is buy a farm with entitlements, stick a few cows on it, knock the weeds down every few years and the EU grants come sailing in? £18,000 per year on a 200 acre farm.

That's right. You don't even have to put animals on it. According to Strutt and Parker you'll make £8000 more money from not milking 150 cows than you will from milking them.

I'm not sure I fancy being a non-dairy farmer. What if I become a non-barley baron?

"Custodian of the Land" please. Even better: you'll reap



New House Farm, a rundown farm, auctioned in September. 62 acres of average looking bare land pasture and arable, with entitlements, went for £220,000 or £3,500 per acre, - well over the guide price of £160,000. Are we seeing entitlements jacking up the price of larger areas of farmland? The house, barns and 37 acres went for over £650,000.

£15,000 more profit from not growing crops on a 400 hectare arable farm, than you will from growing them.

And I'll get relief from inheritance tax as well?

Well, no-one's sure about that yet, because the Treasury still run with the old-fashioned idea of a farmer being someone who actually produces something. Lack of joined up thinking in government. I dare say the CLA will sort that out in time.

And then there's relief on capital gains tax, business rates and VAT?

You forgot to mention red diesel.

Meanwhile, the 4x4, the insurance bill, my daughters' ponies and so on will help to ensure the

enterprise makes a loss which can be offset against my other taxable income.

I think you're getting the hang of it. Stump up £700,000 and you can join our club.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Single Payment Scheme: Information for Farmers and Growers, July 2004 update, Nov 2004 update and Feb 2005 update, DEFRA.

Articles by the likes of Mark Youngplum:

Breaking the Link, Land Business, published by Strutt and Parker, Summer 2004.

Tax on the Menu, Land Business, Spring 2005

Why Buy a Farm?, Farm Focus, published by Stags estate agents, 2005.

BOOK REVIEW

THE LAST VOYAGE OF HMS DAHLIA

A Manufactured Plague: The History of Foot and Mouth Disease in Britain, Abigail Woods, Earthscan, 2004.

Abigail Woods' excellent history of Foot and Mouth Disease, *A Manufactured Plague*, hasn't received nearly enough publicity, and part of the reason for that may be that we omitted to review it in the last issue of Chapter 7 News. To atone for that, here is a short appraisal of an essential book for anyone wishing to understand the history and psychodynamics of English agriculture.

FMD arrived in Britain in 1839. It spread, as it often does, like wildfire, but farmers were not unduly concerned because animals quickly recovered, losing only five per cent of their value if they were beef, rather more if they were dairy; some farmers even believed it was beneficial because "animals seemed to undergo a growth spurt on recovery" Most farmers kept cattle, "not to make money but to prop up the mixed farming system": their hardy beasts were not unduly bothered, and by 1841 the epidemic was dying down and symptoms were becoming less severe. In 1848, one commentator claimed of FMD that "like the measles or whooping cough in the human subject, all cattle are expected to have it once in their lives."

But there were a few influential sectors of the agricultural economy whose profits were severely prejudiced by FMD: for

example the breeders and exporters of pedigree stud cattle which were more susceptible to the disease, both physically and in terms of their monetary value. Abigail Woods shows how these interests managed to turn FMD from an "inconsequential ailment to an animal plague". Furthermore, "the factor most responsible for transforming FMD from inconsequential ailment to foreign animal plague was the legislation used to control it". The fear of FMD is not fear of pustules on lips, but fear of mass slaughter. Finally, she relates how the initially Anglo-Saxon perception that FMD is a serious "foreign" contagious disease has spread to other countries, as if fear itself were a disease.

The silliest episode in Woods' story is when, just before the World War I, English vets decided that it would be safer to carry out investigations into FMD well away from our shores, so they set up a research team in India. The team couldn't carry out work effectively because the Indian cattle were naturally resistant to infection, so the project was shelved. Instead field work into FMD was conducted upon a disused warship, the HMS Dahlia, moored off Harwich. Its worth pausing for a moment to imagine what conditions might have been like on this floating farmyard.

But there's no point in giving away any more of the story. Get hold of a copy of *Manufactured Plague* and read it for yourself if you want to understand how the paranoid Anglo Saxon approach to animal epidemiology has infected the world, and why 10 million animals were slaughtered in 2001 to prevent the spread of a disease which, for cows, is no worse than measles.

URBAN ISSUES

FIXED ASSETS

TONY GOSLING looks at the scams which ensure that office rents stay high while acres of office space remain empty.

“Why should a coal miner dig extra coal for a few pounds more while he has seen property speculators grow wealthy looking at empty office blocks?” Labour Party Manifesto 1974.

Several years ago the Bristol Evening Post led with a story about the shocking and dangerous lack of office space in the city. Ironically, opposite the Post's headquarters on Temple Way stands Castlemead, a seven-storey office block, empty ever since being built five years before.

The rationale behind the Post's headline about the lack of office space became clear the day after it appeared. A planning application was being considered for a massive new office development which planning officers had recommended be refused. The article had no doubt been gullibly copied out from an industry press release.

Currently new offices are rearing their heads up all over the city centre: Bristol bristles with 200 foot cranes. But at the same time hundreds of thousands of square feet of office block are left vacant. These zombie-like edifices evoke a peculiar sense of outrage every time they darken our horizons. How can any landlord afford to leave an entire office block empty?

Doesn't it cost a fortune to protect these buildings? How many small businesses could be using the space at low rent? And how many disillusioned city-dwellers would that allow back into creative employment?

Moreover what is this “free market” in which so many office owners can't be bothered to rent out their acres of desolate floor space? Even at a low rent it surely has to be more cost-effective than padlocking the doors, shuttering the ground floor windows and sealing the place up. At least that's what you would have thought. I decided the matter was worth looking into further.

TALE OF TWO SURVEYS

Bristol City Council couldn't tell me how many empty offices there were in the City. “I have no figure to this effect - and no idea of where it might be possible to find it” their Head of Corporate Communications told me. I eventually discovered that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister publishes a national survey of empty office space known as “Commercial and Industry Property Vacancy Statistics” on the web. These are calculated from business rate relief returns. Unfortunately the statistics they contain are contradictory to the point of absurdity.

Going through the ODPM's spreadsheets I found some glaring inconsistencies. Between 1999 and 2004 there has apparently been



Tollgate House, former home of the Government Office for the South West, and of the Planning Inspectorate, which has remained empty for three years, and is scheduled for demolition. Meanwhile, in Birmingham the Government Office for the West Midlands is paying £1.1 million a year to rent empty offices it moved out of last January.

no official change in the amount of empty offices in Bristol. The figure remains at 11% each year despite the opening of the extensive Temple Quay office zone in 2002-2003 which emptied two other city centre tower blocks, one belonging to the Bristol & West Building Society, and the other Tollgate House, former home of the Government Office of the South West and the Planning Inspectorate.

Meanwhile a map produced as part of the ODPM report clearly colour-codes Bristol as over 15% offices vacant which doesn't tally with their own previous figure. The national map also marks Bristol out as having a 5 to 20% empty office increase while their spreadsheet gives a 1% decrease!

These statistics were useless, so I decided to do my own survey. In October 2005 I walked around the Redcliffe and Temple area of Bristol counting all the office blocks of over 8 storeys and, of those which were in use, I made a guesstimate of what proportion of it was rented out. Signs in the lobby often give a good idea of how many floors are actually occupied. A few buildings were overgrown and in bad repair, some even had boarded up windows but the majority were ready to be used, if a little shabby.

My quick survey gave a ball-park figure of 45-50% of offices vacant in 22 separate buildings, suggesting considerable massaging of the figures. Now granted, my survey was close to the centre of the city's commercial district but could their figures really be so far off by accident? It did, and does, appear to me that something strange is going on that demands an explanation.





“COMPETITION IS SIN”

“Competition is sin” is a phrase the banker David Rockefeller allegedly comes up with from time to time. It appears to be a throwaway comment, designed to shock by contradicting everything free market capitalism is supposed to stand for. But it accurately reflects the ethos which ensures that office owners collaborate to maintain as high a rent as possible, even when there is an excess of supply.

But the government have set regulators up to make sure this sort of thing doesn't happen, haven't they? Indeed they have, but the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers commission, just like OFCOM and other gummy mouthed watchdogs, have been paralysed by the very cartels they were set up to restrain. The entire economy relies on the buoyancy of the property market, so no government can afford to be too pedantic about its interpretation of the term “free market.”

In a fixed market it is crucial that no office landlord with vacant space undercuts the tacitly agreed overpriced rents, so landlords have to be persuaded to comply. Gangster tactics and protection rackets are unsavoury, but there is nothing wrong with a little sweetener. This comes, from the government in the form of partial or total relief from Business Rates, the business equivalent of council tax, for all empty offices.

For a time I was under the impression that it was 100 percent relief, because that's what a Bristol City Council official informed me. On investigation I established that the statutory level is 100 per cent for the first 3 months, then 50 per cent thereafter - but that the local authority have the discretion to grant 100 per cent relief on any building, if they wish. So (given what my informant told me) are any of the empty office blocks in Bristol subject to indefinite 100 per cent relief? I contacted the City Council to find out.

I got a reply from Simon Caplan who holds the post of Head of Corporate Communications. He doesn't know. He did tell me that empty buildings in Bristol are exempted from business rate tax relief to the tune of £12 million per year. This is nearly 7.5 per cent of the total Business Rates bill (including exempted properties) of £164 million. But Caplan could not provide any breakdown of how many empty commercial properties in Bristol benefited from 100 per cent relief, and how many from 50 per cent relief. All one can deduce from his figures is that somewhere between 7.5 and 15 per cent of all commercial properties are empty at any one time.

Incidentally, while empty property relief was £12 million, rate relief granted for reasons of hardship was just £12,000 - a thousandth as much. A tenant whose business is in difficulty is unlikely to get relief; but once he's gone bankrupt and vacated the premises, the property owner who has been extracting the inflated rent gets a free ride.

ACCOUNTING TRICKS - PLANNING PLOYS

But rate relief is not sufficient on its own to explain why leaving offices empty is profitable. Another reason is that rent, as a source of income, is secondary; the prime role of the office block is as a fixed asset on the annual company balance sheet. Offsetting the office block

on the annual return are the liabilities, such as bank loans. All too often the value of the building underwriting these loans is the only thing keeping the business afloat. And yes, even if the building's been empty for twenty years it's still valued as if it were being fully rented out at the artificially high rent.

If rents in the block were to go down with market forces (perish the thought), the building would take on a more realistic, lower value which could tip the scales on the balance sheet. Those bank loans might suddenly become unsecured and the entire business find itself over-extended.

A third reason why many office blocks remain empty is that the owners are hanging out for permission to convert to more lucrative residential use. According to a researcher at the Adam Smith Institute:

“For a developer to gain permission for office space to be converted to residential use, he must demonstrate to the planning officer's satisfaction that the space has been actively marketed to potential tenants without success for two years. So if a developer is determined to convert the building, he must market it at a price and perhaps with restrictions above what the market will bear.”



This is the same ploy as is used by owners of tied agricultural dwellings, who market their holdings at unobtainable prices to demonstrate that there is “no demand” and get the condition removed.

CORPORATE BENEFIT CHEATS

So how about if we stopped all business rate relief for empty buildings - even jacked it up after an extended period? After all, an empty building is not poor, sick or disabled and its owner is not likely to be in dire need of public support. Yes, let it be the responsibility of every office owner to keep his block occupied. This would encourage landlords to give long term leases and give stability to the businesses they host. If he can't fill his building he can either lower the rent or sell it. No state handouts.

This would lead to a national revaluation downward, which would give smaller businesses access to affordable office space. But the shakedown might be more radical than this. The empty office accounting trick has gone so far that a sudden return to a free market in office space would mean a day of reckoning for many of the businesses that have been entering artificially inflated figures all these years.

But then, on reflection, it wouldn't because the Bristol Evening Post



would come to the rescue with another headline “Too Many Office Blocks Blight City Centre”. And Regional Government, from their new offices in Temple Quay, would respond by introducing planning policies that made it easier to convert unwanted offices into luxury apartment blocks - which is what some landowners have been hoping for all along.

A MANCUNIAN ABC



overburdened voluntary sector.

K is for **Knowledge Economy**. The universities are no longer for study or to explore ways of improving the lot of the human race but to find new ways of making money whatever the cost to society. See GM Crops, nanotechnology, messing with mice, sheep, etc.

L is for **Life Expectancy**. Men can expect to die at 71 and women 77 in Manchester, earlier than anywhere else in England.

M is for **Manchester City Centre Management Company**. Keeping the streets safe for Marks and Spencers.

N is for **Neo-liberalism**. Having abandoned any pretence at socialism in the late 1990's, Manchester City Council now adopts an aggressively macho 'mine's bigger than yours' tasteless capitalist money making enterprise. The much ridiculed 'talk up, make over, trickle down' theory of city development

will see us all working in call centres or cleaning toilets in exclusive apartment blocks, while the newly installed rich professionals lord it up at Council sponsored regeneration mock carnivals.

O is for **Olympic Games**. A bit like the Commonwealth Games. Will give us the opportunity to hang up bunting in East Manchester and call it regeneration.

P is for **Piccadilly Gardens**. Flogging off half of it for an ugly empty office block that ruins the view, giving the £25 million building labourers on £5 an hour to do critical safety work. Sparking (no pun intended) an industrial dispute in the heart of the city. Always on the lookout for workers' safety, Council

A is for **ASBO**. A new way to lock up the homeless, young people and anyone different without any need for evidence

B is for **Broken Windows**. The right wing, and widely discredited, theory of crime prevention that state that one broken window in a neighbourhood leads to more and eventually to more serious offences. This is the justification used to remove the homeless and young people from the streets, claiming that these people spoil the image of an area and therefore lead to crime.

C is for **Cancer Capital of England**. Death rates in Manchester are twice those of some parts of London and a third above the national average.

D is for **Democracy**: where you vote for the same policies in one of three colours; red, blue or yellow.

E is for **Entrepreneurial**. The description for the philosophy the City Council is run by. Basically if it ain't making money they don't want to know.

F is for **Free Trade Hall**. Built on the site of the Peterloo massacre the Free Trade Hall stood as a simple of political struggle and independence. It was given to the people of Manchester in perpetuity but unfortunately the documents were lost by the City Council who sold the building to a developer. The developer maintained the facade but tore out the rest to build a luxury hotel.

G is for **Green Quarter**. Just like a park but with buildings. And roads. And concrete. And astro-turf instead of grass.

H is for **Hacienda** Now the party's over... you can fuck off!

I is for **New Islington**. Or the Cardroom Estate as its really called. Ship out the scallies, build fake canals so that every one of the new twats will be blinded by the veneer of regeneration and can have a waterside view of what used to be Manchester.

J is for **Job Centre Plus**. Once the scourge of the jobless, but now they're all forced into the modern day workhouse - the call centre. Its only job now is to conspire with the Council to tip the remaining jobdodgers - those on sickness benefits - out of their wheelchairs and into inappropriate jobs in an already



CCTV cameras were trained on the picket line... Oh and a note on the fountain - will undesirables please stop using it to wash their kids...

Q is for **Quango**: quasi autonomous non-governmental organisation Faceless bodies set up by the council to funnel money from central government into their friend's bank accounts. See Manchester Enterprise, GM Waste etc, etc

R is for **Real Environmental Criminals**: Shell, BP, Toyota, Ford, ICI, ASDA WalMart...

S is for **Street Warden**. A central government initiative lapped up by overstretched Councils who can't bare the brunt of failed poverty reduction strategies. Simple idea: can't afford to train police? Can't afford to help the poor or invest in our marginalized youth? Just get a private firm to administrate an army of the terminally unemployed to chase other terminally unemployed (or terminally bored teenagers) out of prime shopping areas.

T is for **Twits...** ...and a city soon to be full of 'em once the BBC relocates.

U is for **Urban Splash**. The sound created by celebrity footballers' girlfriends being shoved into the canal at Deansgate Locks.

V is for **Vandal Proofing**. I don't know about you, but I'd rather look at nice colourful stickers on lamp posts than that ugly, abrasive, anti-poster paint. Frankly, they could smear excrement over public bins and it wouldn't look any worse.

M is for **War**: that thing the Labour Party took us into in Iraq. But not the Labour Party in the Council, they are a totally different Labour Party who were really against the war so please, don't confuse the two.

X is for **Xylophone**.. Obviously



Y is for **Yuppies**

Z is for **Zoo**. As in the Lou Reed lyric, 'This here's a zoo, and the keeper ain't you.'

Text taken from the website www.100days.org.uk

All artwork by **BANKSY** from his book *Banksy - Wall and Piece* published by Century ISBN 1-8441-3786-4



INTERNATIONAL

Venezuela

WE SHALL BUILD HEAVEN ON EARTH'



Hugo Chavez - 'We Shall Create Heaven on Earth' is Chavez's favourite call to arms, repeated in many of his speeches. Recently Chavez expelled the notorious right wing US outfit The New Tribes Mission from the country, stating that Venezuela had no need of missionaries for "we shall create Heaven on Earth"

Land is the resource most essential for life and most coveted for wealth, so it is no surprise that attempts to redistribute land unleash bitter tensions and expose deep divides. The land reform policies introduced by Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's left wing president, are no exception. Jyoti Fernandes examines some of the reports coming out of a country in upheaval.

Venezuela is a country where five per cent of the population own 80 per cent of the land. There is a vast amount of oil wealth, but the majority of Venezuelans live in chronic poverty. Hugo Chavez sees himself as a modern day Robin Hood, claiming that 'the poor elected him so he has a responsibility to the poor'. Since being elected president in 1998 by popular support, Chavez has instituted a revolutionary programme to give land to urban slum dwellers, tribal people and rural peasants, with mixed results.

The most successful of these has been the programme for urban land rights. In the capital, Caracas and other urban areas where the vast majority of the population now reside, the Chavez government has funded the setting up of neighbourhood assemblies called Urban Land Committees. Families who squatted land and built their own houses in the barrios on the urban fringe have now been given legal title. Since 1958, barrio inhabitants have built more homes than all government departments have.

The legitimacy of this land rights movement derives from the constitution, which states that all Venezuelans have a right to a home: therefore, it is argued, since the government cannot guarantee this right on its own, via its public housing projects, it is up to Venezuelans themselves to claim this right. Part of the success of the projects is due to the process of participatory democracy recognised and encouraged by the state. This programme, built on independent grassroots committees, is proving much more successful than programmes instituted by state-run committees, run by the *chavistas* - the party faithful. It is also serving to boost Chavez's popularity with the urban poor, who have enormous voting power, without having to use vast amounts of government resources.

YOU HAVE THE LAND BUT WE TAKE THE COAL

In another popular move, Chavez recently granted 15 indigenous communities titles to their ancestral land. This included 314,000 acres in the eastern states of Anzoategui and Monagasby now owned by six indigenous communities with some 4,000 people. But in the middle of the congratulatory speeches, Chavez warned that the process of granting legal ownership must respect Venezuela's "territorial unity," and urged other indigenous groups not to ask for "infinite expanses of territory."

"Don't ask me to give you the state's rights to exploit mines, to exploit oil," Chavez said. "Before all else comes national unity."

Chavez considers that his government could not survive without the exploitation of indigenous lands. In recent months, the Venezuelan government has announced its intentions to quadruple its extraction of coal in the western state of Zulia from 8 million to 36 million metric tons per year. This long-term, energy-sector expansion project falls into a much larger development plan, which has come into sharp conflict with communities and environmental interests in the region. In seeming contrast to the anti-imperialist rhetoric of President Chavez, increased exploitation of coal and oil figures heavily in Venezuela's plans for development and the "revolutionary process."

This has forced many traditional indigenous communities continue to defend their last-remaining ancestral lands. For decades, Bar, Yukpa and Wayæu tribes - who practise traditional cultural methods such as shepherding, farming,



Squatters at El Charcote, one of about a dozen ranches owned by Lord Samuel Vestey. The Vestey's are so rich that they are said to live "not on the interest built up by their estate but on the interest of the interest".

hunting and gathering - have resisted encroachment by oil, mining, ranching and timber interests. In the last 15 years, entire Wayæu communities have been forced off of their lands. The primary culprit in the relocation has been the metal-laden dust produced by the two open-pit coal mines run by Corpozulia (the regional development agency), along with foreign, private mining firms. Along routes used to transport coal for export, according to Jorge Hinestroza of the Front for the Defence of Water and Life, "the water is polluted, waterways are obstructed, the air breathed by humans, animals and plants is contaminated, the habitat for aboriginal peoples is disturbed and peasants and indigenous peoples are forced off the land they have traditionally farmed."

This is not hypocritical, Chavez argues, but a necessary balancing act between the rights of the indigenous communities and the needs of an extremely poor populace. The government highlights that 83 per cent of Venezuelans live below the poverty line, in a country which is one of the world's biggest oil exporters. Until now, that wealth has only belonged to a minority. Chavez's government claims it is trying to reverse decades of under-investment and neglect, using the country's wealth that has been generated from fossil fuel extraction to fund hospitals and schools.

MOVE ON FIRST - GET PERMISSION LATER

Land reform has become one of the Chavez government's most controversial political endeavours. The Venezuelan government under Chavez is the only government in Latin America that is currently trying to pursue an ambitious land and agrarian reform program. Chavez has also introduced new agricultural policy principles, such as those of food sovereignty and the primacy of land use over land ownership.

The move has been greeted with fierce opposition. The sacred principle of private property is as zealously protected by those who benefit from it as it is in Britain.

Shortly before the land law entered into full effect, the Chavez government's land reform efforts were dealt a serious blow when Venezuela's Supreme Court annulled Article 89 of the Land Law. At the time, the Supreme Court was narrowly

controlled by opposition sympathizers, which led Chavez supporters to argue that this was a political move and not a legal one.

Article 89 allowed the government to authorize peasants to pre-emptively occupy expropriable land (*ocupacion previa*), while the landowners appealed their right to the land's ownership in court. *Ocupacion previa* is the principle tactic used by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in their relatively successful "land reform from below" in Brazil. To prohibit *ocupacion previa* is to seriously slow down and weaken the peasant movement on land reform issues.

As a result of this, until last year most land reform efforts focused on distributing under-used state owned land, but the slow pace of the reform frustrated the peasantry. Chavez's government has instituted a more radical programme that allows the state to seize underused ranches and factories to set up farming cooperatives or restart production for the local community. The government has sanctioned the take-over of large farms, including the 13,000 hectare, El Charcote, belonging to Britain's 56th richest man, Lord Vestey.

In many of these take-overs there are disputes as to whether or not the land is actually under-used; and whether or not the owners should receive compensation also seems to be up for debate. The government says that it will be paying compensation, but refuses to pay it if the title to the land cannot be proved, as is the case with the Vestey estate. In many cases, the government claims that the land was originally stolen and enclosed from land that was worked by peasants in the first place and says that in the interest of food sovereignty, land use takes priority over formal land ownership.

EVIL LAWYERS AND LOCAL MORONS

The "modern" world has little sympathy for such a different conception of property. The opposition thus enjoys some moderate success in making the government look unreasonable and "radical" whenever private property is threatened, thereby undermining the land reform's legitimacy both nationally and internationally.

For example, the following email from a Briton, married to a Venezuelan and allegedly "deeply involved in popular reform" was sent to an e-mail discussion group which had previously posted pro-Chavez material. His opinion was:

"The news that implies that what Chavez is doing is positive is simply sickening. He has destroyed a country. There is now no judicial system whatsoever. Homicides runs into the 100's every week, thieving is now deemed legal on the grounds of poverty regardless of whom you steal from.

Chavez is entirely corrupt, in the same vein as most powerful men in countries with no levels of education.

There is NO popular demand for land reform. There are hundreds of evil lawyers who stir up local morons to move in on property owned by 'absent landlords', then claim, and stir up the shit. They then work with the chavistas to get the land registered to the morons, and then they offer the morons money for their bits, and... bingo, a senior chavista suddenly is absent landlord of a nicely organized but run down 3 million hectare ranch.

The senior chavistas, are stealing prime, fully utilized land, utterly and totally illegally. The millions and millions of un-used hectares out there are being ignored, because they would need working. The word, "work"



Bari communal fishing, near Bokski, Sierra de Perij, 1993 © Fiona Watson/Survival

never fully understood in this banana republic, is now an alien word used only by capitalist oligarchs who want to exploit the workers. In this context, the word 'worker' translates as, 'one who is blindly and unquestioningly loyal to the party'.

Latest victims in the land reform - get this, on grounds of being unused land - is a working Polar beer distillery¹, and a Heinz factory. The most productive and efficient, and one of the very biggest cattle ranches, was invaded over and again by local morons. The owners, enlightened Brits, incorporated these people into the ranch, organizing their work and contribution, and sharing results with them. Within five years productivity was down to one fifth what it had been. The government took it over because the land was being unused. All this is blatantly in utter contradiction to the constitution, which guarantees impartial (*sic*) judicial review and full compensation at market rates."

What are we to make of this? The tone of the letter, arrogant and more than faintly imperialistic, suggests that the writers interests are bound up with those of the "enlightened Brits" etc., in which case it would hardly be surprising that he should view the land-invaders as "morons". Colonialists, enclosers and improvers for centuries have cast small-scale and subsistence farmers as "idle" with such monotonous regularity that alarm bells should sound when we hear it mouthed, once again, by an "enlightened Brit".

On the other hand, there may be a ring of truth about it. It is by no means inconceivable that the land reform process could sometimes be taken over by apparatchiks and profiteers; perhaps that is what one might expect to happen when land takeovers are instituted, somewhat haphazardly, by top down decree. However a request for further information from the person who posted the email led only to a reply that the source could not be divulged for fear of reprisals from chavistas - which casts a large shadow of doubt over the report.

'MAGNIFICO'

Other less anonymous witnesses report that the squatters are by no means "morons who don't understand the word work", but landless peasants who aim, not necessarily to be commercially productive, but to survive and feed their children. Karen Hill of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

visited El Charcote in September 2005. There, some 800 families, organised into 24 cooperatives, have been granted a part of the property, and have begun to work 7,000 hectares. Fields of maize, papaya, beans, yucca and other vegetables now surround palm-roofed ranchos and a wooden school that the campesinos have built. They also built the bridges needed to access the area, and now drive across them in tractors and trucks bought with government credits.

One of them, Jesces Vasquez boasted that he and his colleagues were doing well: "Last year we harvested two tonnes of maize. This year we reckon we'll get up to six tonnes and much more later on...

People are growing things and have got enough to eat. It's a magnificent development."

Jose Pena, another of the El Charcote occupiers told her "We are not squatters, or land invaders but honest hardworking people. If we were in your land you would have kicked us out. We are claiming what is owed to us: the land of our ancestors."

LAND REFORM AND THE GLOBAL MARKET

Land takeovers are symbolically important because they seem to expiate past injustices, but it is important to question the effectiveness of them in terms of long term security. Though the government is supposed to provide training, technology, and credit to land reform beneficiaries, it has been extremely slow to do so. It has paid relatively little attention to the infrastructure and support side of the land reform, in favour of the more visible land redistribution aspect. Programmes to help peasants market their new agricultural products, have not even gotten off the ground yet, over three years after the official launch of the land reform program.

Part of the problem is that the country's dominant oil industry brings in large amounts of foreign currency, which is used to buy cheap imports which in turn make domestically produced products uncompetitive. Unless the government protects Venezuelan agricultural products against imports, it is unlikely that any domestically produced products can be sold at a good price.

The Chavez government has publicly stated, that most agricultural production should be oriented toward supplying the domestic market, but at present the country imports about 75% of all food products it consumes. It might make sense to focus on ensuring that Venezuelans consume domestically produced food products whenever they are available, and where possible to impose import tariffs on competing imported goods. The international farmer and peasant movement, the Via Campesina, which is advising the Chavez government, has proposed that the Venezuelan government phase out food imports at a rate of 5-10% per year, with a corresponding plan developed with Venezuelan peasant

organizations to receive the credit, land and other services and inputs needed to make up the deficit each year.

So far it is unclear, though, whether the government will really pursue such a strategy. Chavez has not as of yet, broken any global ties.

“Our comandante, President Hugo Chavez” may not be an angel creating heaven on Earth, but he remains a hero in the eyes of the poor of Venezuela. The past two decades of neo-liberal economics have not delivered their promise of greater prosperity for the majority. The poor are in desperate need of hope and if nothing else Chavez’s fiery programmes have given them that. So far his revolution may have had little real impact on many ordinary Venezuelans’ lives, but the hope, the vision, and what appears to be a genuine attempt to provide access to land are giving the poor the passion to solve their problems for themselves. Quietly, or even openly, people are

warning, “If they take all this away from us, there will be civil war.”

FOOTNOTE

1. It is not clear whether the writer really means distillery or is talking about a brewery. The owners of Polar beer (the largest industry in Venezuela after petrol) import all their hops from the United States.

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Indigenous Peoples

PRIVATIZING TRIBAL LANDS

The UK government, along with France and the USA, is blocking the recognition of indigenous people’s collective rights at the UN. This has stalled negotiations on the draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Full collective rights over land and resources are essential for the survival of tribal peoples. “Collective rights are essential for the integrity, survival and well-being of our distinct nations and communities. They are inseparably linked to our cultures, spirituality, and worldviews. They are also critical to the exercise and enjoyment of the rights of indigenous individuals.” (Letter from 40 indigenous people’s organisations to Tony Blair, September 2004) A tribe’s right to decide, for example, whether a mining company should be allowed to operate on its land only makes sense as a collective right. The UK claims however, that these collective rights should be individual rights “exercised collectively”. In the USA, the infamous Dawes Act of 1887 demonstrated the danger of this approach. The Act turned communally-held Indian lands into individual plots; 90 million acres of Indian land were removed at a stroke, and the reservations were broken up.

This refusal to recognise collective rights is more than an ideological clash. At the moment, the Australian government is being pressurized by American think tanks to privatize aboriginal lands. The ideologues from these think tanks are backed by mining companies and investment groups that want easy access to

Aboriginal land. Though their arguments now stress the benefits to Aboriginal communities through mortgage and lease facilities, the unspoken danger is that Aboriginal communities will be dispossessed of their land a second time.

This is a pattern seen in Papua New Guinea, where there is still customary title over 97% of the country. The Australian government and the World Bank have embarked upon programs to “register” and “mobilise” tribal peoples lands. Some communities have been persuaded (with small amounts of money) to register, mortgage and run the serious risk of alienating their land. The result of such land deals has been that the few thousand dollars and a few motor vehicles that some groups have gained have been used up and rusted out in a few years, while communities have lost their main asset - their land.

Collective Rights: UK Government Blocks Historic UN Declaration, Survival International Bulletin, Feb 2005. Survival International, 6 Charterhouse Buildings, London EC1M 7ET, UK - Tel: 020 7687 8700 - Fax: 020 7687 8701 - Email: info@survival-international.org - www.survival-international.org

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

International land rights issues are regularly reported by The Legacy of Colonialism’s e-mail digest, run by TLIO stalwart Mark Brown. To subscribe see:

www.legacyofcolonialism.org

(note that this may change to www.legacyofcolonialism.net in the future.)



Sri Lanka

AFTER THE TSUNAMI

A second wave, of planners and developers, is threatening to engulf the coastline of Sri Lanka.

In the last issue of *Chapter 7 News* we expressed concern that some of the money destined for Tsunami relief would end up in regeneration schemes which would cleanse the coast of its “vulnerable” inhabitants and pave the way for tourism, capitalist prawn farms etc.

Sure enough, this is exactly what seems to be happening in Sri Lanka. According to Sarath Fernando of the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform:

“Within days of the disaster, the Government announced that people should not rebuild their homes on the coast. A few weeks later an exclusion zone of 100 to 200 metres was announced. Shortly thereafter, exceptions were announced for tourism operators. Throughout the recovery process, the Government has continued to talk about the need to promote tourism... The Sri Lanka Tourist Board says, ‘In a cruel twist of fate, nature has presented Sri Lanka with a unique opportunity, and out of this great tragedy will come a world class tourism destination.’”

Plans are now being developed to transform 15 coastal towns around Sri Lanka into up-market tourist resorts as part of the post-tsunami reconstruction process. The first plan to emerge was for the re-development of Arugam Bay, a small town nestled on the edge of a 300 hectare lagoon on Sri Lanka’s east coast, which is favoured by back-packers, surfers and the more bohemian kinds of tourist.

Fernando observes that the Arugam Bay Resource Development Plan, *Reconstruction Towards Prosperity*:

“will transform what were once fishing and agricultural communities, which offered some services in the way of seasonal guesthouses, into an extensively developed area complete with hotels for anyone from a ‘low cost budget windsurfer to a 5-star tourist’. The transformation also includes a commercial ‘shoppers’ paradise’, a yachting marina, a float plane pier and a helipad.”

This up-market tourist paradise differs considerably from the image which these ‘seasonal guesthouses’, who are competent enough to have formed the Arugam Bay Hotels Association (ABHA), project on the home page of their website:

“International studies seen by ABHA have shown that on average the so called ‘budget’ traveller actually injects at least as much if not more cash into the local economy. Often this money goes direct to the lower income classes rather than to a large hotel chain. As ‘quality’ tourists only stay for a week or two they do spend a lot more each day. But a typical Arugam Bay visitor often remains the entire season and what they spend in 3 or 6 months in Sri Lanka is a great deal more than any high class tourist does!”

So the hoteliers are discontented because the beach bums are lucrative for local people. But what concerns the local fishermen most is the exclusion zone. Where the new hotel



development is planned it occupies a kilometre wide stretch running along the coast; housing for the 5,000 displaced families will be behind the buffer zone, without any access to the sea. The chairman of The Sri Lanka Tourist Board, Udaya Nanayakkara, bluntly informed local people at a meeting “if you build any illegal structures in Arugam Bay, the army and the police will have to come and remove them”.

This, not unnaturally, prompted a series of street protests. Here is what purports to be an eye-witness description:

“With banners reading ‘People not profit’, ‘Haven’t they suffered enough?’ and ‘Save Arugam Bay’, they chanted and stamped the ground for more than three hours on Monday, blocking the only road into the village. Troops patrolled the area with sub-machine guns at the ready, as burning tyres stoked with driftwood cast pungent black smoke into the air. Amid the smoke, the people carried effigies, vaulting them high in the air. ‘It’s our tourist chairman,’ said one protester in broken English.”

The initial investment for Arugam Bays’ makeover as an up-market tourist paradise is estimated at \$80 million, of which a substantial chunk is earmarked for a new 700 metre bridge over Arugam Lagoon. Much of the funding comes through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the bridge is to be built by CH2M Hill International of Colorado. By 8 April 2005, USAID had already published a pre-solicitation notice for a contract to construct the bridge and other infrastructure. The first the residents of Arugam Bay heard of this plan was at a meeting organized by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board in Colombo five weeks later on 17 May.

Altogether more than \$3 billion has been committed to Sri Lanka for Tsunami relief by bilateral and multilateral donors. According to the Alliance for the Protection of National Resources and Human Rights, a network of some 200 local organizations, much of this money is in the hands of a small group of businessmen. “It is being used not for the recovery of the affected people, but to push through previously rejected plans for neo-liberal economic development.”

Community groups in Sri Lanka have responded by setting up a People’s Planning Commission, launched on 30 September in Colombo, which will work towards giving affected people an appropriate reconstruction process that will lead to a “meaningful rebuilding of their lives and livelihoods”. They have staged a further demonstrations at Arugam Bay, and their cause is being championed, in the UK and Brussels, by Green MEP Jean Lambert.

THE MALDIVES

Meanwhile, about 600 miles away in the Maldives Islands, planners are using the Tsunami to precipitate an already predetermined evacuation of people out of the smaller islands onto the bigger ones “so that they can access better health care and education facilities.” Patricia Stevenson, a British planner doing VSO work claims that no one will be forced out: “The people at a meeting I went to were quite willing to move... Despite just two day’s notice, 25 per cent of the population came to the meeting.”

The interview with Stevenson was published in *Planning Magazine* on Feb 18, so consultation meetings were held only a few weeks after the Boxing Day Tsunami. Doesn’t it seem a

bit hasty to be making decisions about disbanding entire communities so soon after such a traumatic event? No prizes for guessing what will eventually happen to these empty tropical islands once they have been “voluntarily” vacated by their former inhabitants.

Principal sources:

Sarath Fernando, *After the Tsunami: Rebuilding for Tourists*, Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform, 2005,

www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/IPS_article_7Oct2005.doc

www.arugam.info

www.ezilon.com/information/article_5498.shtml

People’s Planning Commission: www.geocities.com/monlarslk

Fishermen and tradesmen to benefit from US funded \$33 million contract for post-tsunami infrastructure projects, US Embassy in Sri Lanka Press Release, September 2005 www.usembassy.state.gov/srilanka

Nigeria

MASTERPLANNERS OUTDO MUGABE

We have heard a great deal about Mugabe’s forced evictions of squatters in Zimbabwe recently; but similar evictions happen all the time around the world, and when they are initiated by potentates who are in favour with the G8 nations (or even by the G8 nations themselves) then the press is less keen to report them. The Land recently received this report from the Italian based human rights organization International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI).

“On November 28th 2005, President Obasanjo of Nigeria gave the go-ahead for the most massive and violent operation of forced evictions in living memory, not just in Africa, but in the world. The demolitions and forced evictions affect over 4 million inhabitants, out of a total of 7 million residents in the federal capital, Abuja. Acting on the orders of the Minister, Mallam Nasir El Rufai, Chairman of the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), officials of the FCDA escorted by the police, the army and bulldozers, began to destroy the houses, schools, hospitals, churches and mosques of Abuja.

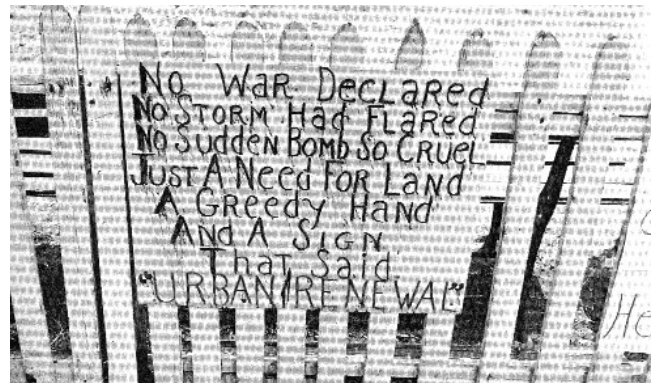
No adequate notice was given; no government plans were proposed for the re-housing or compensation of those evicted; 800,000 people were forced into homelessness particularly in the area along the International Airport Road, at Pyakasa, Kuchingoro, Garamajiji, Aleita, Chika, Galadimawa, Gosa A., Gosa Sarki, and Sabon Lugbe.

The reason for all this cruelty lies in the decision to implement the master plan drawn up in 1978 by the International Consortium of Planners, Urban Designers and Architects (USA), to develop the city of Abuja, which at that time had just been nominated the new federal capital of Nigeria. The master plan, which has been in the pipeline for years, envisages a population of 3 million inhabitants at the most. According to the logic of the master plan, therefore, the extra 4 million inhabitants are outside the legal limit and must be expelled from their homes.”

IAI have launched a web appeal. So far only a handful of UK people have signed it. To sign the appeal, or for more information, please go to the website below.

Meanwhile in Bombay, India, in December 2005, 50,000 huts belonging to squatters were demolished by bulldozers. Of Bombay’s 2 million squatters, over 250,000 have been evicted by police recently, and are now living in the open, nearby. Once again this ruthless persecution of poor people is being carried out in fulfilment of a development plan designed to make Bombay a ‘world class city’.

Just in case you think it couldn’t happen here, this is former



editor of *The Times*, Simon Jenkins:

“It was astonishing that people calling themselves planners could have driven not thousands but millions of people out of their familiar and restorable homes in central Liverpool and Manchester in the 1970s and 1980s, to spread over the green belt and countryside of South Lancashire. I watched people in tears being bussed like Balkan refugees away from friendship and family ties and from any hope of informal employment. The city centres were denuded of economic activity and the countryside destroyed into the bargain. I repeat, I regard the people who ordered these clearances as guilty of crimes.”

Nigeria: <http://en.habitants.org/article/articleview/1577/1/439>

India: <http://www.achr.net/EvictionsAsia/India202005.htm>

Simon Jenkins quote from *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*, edited by Jennifer Jenkins, Profile Books, 2002, pg.112.

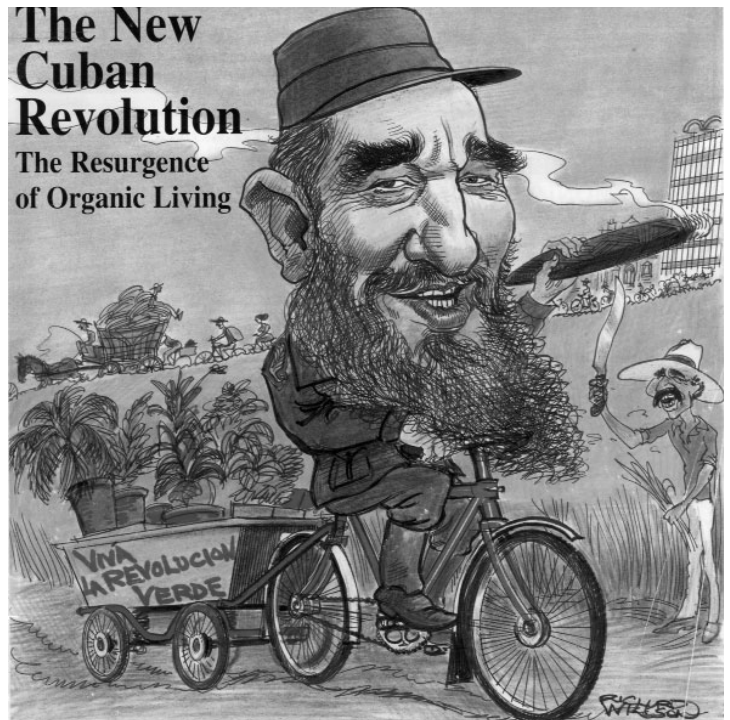
Cuba

THE CUBA DIET

In December 1999, the cover story of *The Ecologist*, by Hugh Warwick, described how Cuba, having lost the support of the Eastern bloc and subject to a US trade embargo, was undergoing an “organic revolution”, because it couldn’t afford to buy oil or fertilizer. The mainstream media runs about 5 years behind the alternative media, so it was not altogether surprising to see the New York magazine *Harpers*, in April this year, run a very similar article by Bill McGibben entitled “The Cuba Diet: What You Will Be Eating When the Revolution Comes”.

Despite being twice as long, McGibben’s article does not add much to Warwick’s except up-date it; but it is good to know that the thousands of urban organic gardens, the 280 centres around the country for producing and distributing biological pest controls, and the revival in the use of oxen are all still going strong.

McGibben’s main achievement is to have managed to place his essay in a prestigious magazine published right in the belly of the beast. To make it acceptable, he had to lace it with reassurances that Cuba, despite being impeccably organic, well fed and highly educated on a tiny budget, is actually not a very nice place to live compared to the USA. To be fair, he wrote the article before the recent hurricane season, in which Cuba managed to evacuate 1.5 million people by bus from the path of category IV hurricane Dennis, resulting in a death toll of 16, while we all know how



Richard Wilson’s cartoon of Fidel Castro which provided the cover for the December 1999 edition of *The Ecologist*.

the Great Car Economy coped with hurricane Katrina.

We considered reproducing McGibben’s article in a condensed form in *The Land*, as it is an important reminder that alternative ways of managing land can and do exist, but we were defeated by lack of space.

You can find the article on Bill Totten’s blogspot at www.ashisuto.co.jp/english/

India

COCA-COLANIZATION

The Government of the Indian state of Kerala is challenging a judgment of the Kerala High Court allowing Coca-Cola to draw groundwater for its Plachimada bottling unit in the southern Indian state.

Coca Cola stands accused of over-extraction and pollution of water resources in Plachimada, Kerala. The impact of Coca-Cola tapping underground water upon the level of the water table has been established through various surveys. The Coca-Cola plant siphons off 1.5 million litres every day, at massively subsidised rates. There has been a devastating effect on local water levels and farming in the surrounding area.



Thousands of people are reported to have lost their livelihood, with the worst affected being the landless Adivasi (indigenous) and Dalit (so-called untouchable) communities who depended on wage labour on farms for survival. Women are forced to walk up to 7km to get water because all that remains at the bottom of Plachimada’s wells is a residue of turbid, brackish water which is high in dissolved salts, as a result of the discharge of pollution from the factory into the groundwater. Local people have held a 24 hour vigil outside the Coca-Cola bottling plant since April 2001.

A BBC study also found that waste product from the factory, which the company were selling to local farmers as fertiliser, was contaminated with toxic chemicals.

Protests are also going on around Coca-Cola plants in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra, where their operations have had a similarly devastating impact.

In keeping with the law of karma, sales of Coca-Cola have plummeted over the past year after it was revealed that the drink contained excessive levels of pesticide contamination; sale of the product was temporarily suspended at one time. This fact was given further publicity when it was revealed that farmers in some areas were finding that it was a better pesticide to use on crops than conventional products!

Sources: www.indiaresource.org www.downtoearth.org.in

In August 2005, the Soil Association proposed to its members that all use of nanoparticles below 200 nanometres in size should be prohibited on organic farms. A nanometre is one billionth of a metre. Nanotechnology - the manipulation of matter at the scale of atoms and molecules - is rapidly converging with biotech and information technology to develop organisms that cross the barrier between living beings and machines. The impact that these technologies will have upon the way we produce food and manage land is only beginning to be understood, yet agribusinesses are pushing ahead, developing and marketing nano products with minimal public debate, and in the absence of regulatory control. If you think GM crops are scary, then take a look at the likely effects of nanotechnology...

DOWN ON THE FARM

by ETC

The following article is adapted from ETC Group's report 'Down on the Farm: The Impact of Nano-Scale Technologies on Food and Agriculture', published in November 2004.

In an interview in 2003, Nobel laureate and nanotech entrepreneur Richard Smalley expressed his frustration with what he viewed as exaggerated concerns over the safety of nanotechnology: "After all", he told the *New Statesman*, "we're not advising that you eat nanotech stuff".

Oops! By then, the nanotech market for food and food processing was estimated to be in excess of \$2 billion, and it is now even bigger. Perhaps Smalley temporarily blacked this fact out because, like most Nano proselytizers, he had got into the habit of wooing audiences by focussing attention on trivial and ostensibly harmless applications. The classic lecture theatre stunt is to pour coffee over a pair of trousers made of a special nano-material - if all goes well the coffee beads up like mercury and the trousers remain unstained.

While the public can decide not to buy "smart" trousers, or use nano-suncream, all of us have to eat. Moreover the land that produces our food and fibre occupies a large part of the world's surface, and employs a large percentage of the world's people. Food and farming looms large in the nano-researchers' sights and the changes they have in store for us are awesome.

In December 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture drafted the world's first "roadmap" for applying nano-technology to agriculture and food. A wide collection of policy makers, academics and corporate scientists met at Cornell University, NY, to share views on how to restructure agriculture using nano-scale technologies.

Agriculture, according to this new nano vision, needs to be more uniform, further automated, industrialized and reduced to simple functions. In our molecular future, the farm will be a field-scale biofactory that can be monitored and managed from a laptop, and food will be crafted from designer substances delivering nutrients efficiently to the body. Nanotechnology will increase agriculture's potential to harvest feedstocks for industrial processes, while commodities such as rubber, cotton and cocoa will be viewed as quaint and irrelevant in a new economy of "flexible matter" in which the properties of industrial nanoparticles can be manipulated to create cheaper "smarter" replacements.

The research necessary to deliver this brave new world is still in its infancy, but it is happening in research laboratories around the world. Here is a catalogue of some of the innovations that the nanotech industry has in store for us.



FROM GM TO AM: ATOMIC MODIFICATION

Unsurprisingly, nanotechnology is being roped in to extend the range of the genetic engineering project. For example scientists are developing techniques that use nanoparticles to smuggle foreign or artificial DNA into living cells.

In Thailand, at Chiang Mai University's nuclear physics lab, researchers have "drilled" a hole through the membrane of a rice cell to insert a nitrogen atom that would stimulate the rearrangement of the rice's DNA. So far the researchers have managed to change the colour of a local rice variety from purple to green; their next target is to alter the properties of Thailand's famous Jasmine rice.

At Oak Ridge National Laboratory (the US Department of Energy lab that played a major role in the development of enriched uranium), researchers have developed a technique for injecting DNA into a multitude of cells at once. Millions of carbon nanofibres are grown sticking out of a silicon chip, with strands of synthetic DNA attached to them, and then living cells are thrown against them - "like throwing a bunch of baseballs against a bed of nails". Once injected, the synthetic DNA expresses new proteins and new traits. The

technique is currently being used for the genetic manipulation of loblolly pine, the primary source of pulpwood for the USA's paper industry.

These approaches raise a number of safety questions, in particular because nanoparticles are so small they can be absorbed into the human body undetected by the immune system and other protective mechanisms. Initial toxicity studies on some carbon nanofibres (which are similar in form to asbestos fibres) have demonstrated inflammation of cells, and have linked nanofibres with silicosis. Where will the nanofibres go when the plant decomposes in the soil? What will happen if the nanofibres are ingested by wildlife or humans? What are the ecological impacts if the nanofibres enter the cells of other organisms and induce changes?

NANOCIDES

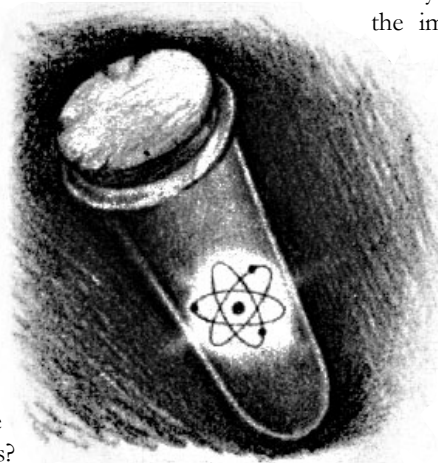
Pesticides containing nano-scale ingredients are already on the market and many of the world's leading agrochemical firms are conducting R and D on new nano-scale pesticides. Syngenta already sells pesticides and growth regulating products - such as its MAXX range for golf-course turf - which are formulated as emulsions containing nano-scale droplets, 250 times smaller than typical pesticide particles. These nano-emulsions make it easier to dissolve the pesticide, prevent clogging of the spray nozzles, increase stability and improve absorption by plants. Bayer and BASF have applied for similar patents.

A more sophisticated approach to formulating nano-scale pesticides involves encapsulation - packaging the nano-scale active ingredient within a tiny envelope or shell, like pelleted seeds. The purpose is to control the release of the active substance, either by exuding it slowly, or else by withholding release until it is triggered by certain conditions (such as changes in temperature, moisture or acidity) or in response to a magnetic or ultrasound signal. The technique has been pioneered by Syngenta, but other firms are in hot pursuit. Monsanto embarked upon an abortive joint venture with Flamel Nanotechnologies to develop nanocapsules of its block-buster herbicide, Round Up, but according to a Flamel spokesman, the real driver for the deal was Monsanto's desire to secure a patent on Round Up for a further 20 years.

These new methods of pesticide delivery raise all sorts of questions. Their stability and the ease with which such tiny droplets can be absorbed may affect not only the target plants, but also wild plants, animals and humans. Microcapsules (one size bigger than nanocapsules) are the same size as pollen, and so "micro-encapsulated insecticides are considered more toxic to honey bees than any formulation so far developed". Although the emulsions behave differently from standard pesticides, they do not, at present require regulatory re-examination, because, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency they do not constitute "a new chemical, new chemical form, nor a 'significant' new use."

A further concern is that nano and microcapsules make an

ideal vehicle for delivering chemical and biological weapons, because they may be able to enter the body undetected by the immune system. The same features which make them attractive to the Gene Giants could make them potent vehicles for biological warfare.



PRECISION AGRICULTURE: SMART DUST FOR SMART FIELDS

"It is 5 am. A Midwest farmer sips coffee in front of a computer. Up-to-the-minute satellite images show a weed problem in a field on the northwest corner of the farm. At 6.30 am, the farmer drives to the exact location to apply a precise amount of herbicide."

This is from a press release for the Illinois Laboratory for Agricultural Remote Sensing. If the farmer had already applied a nano-encapsulated herbicide, then he might not even have to drive but could just press the right buttons on his computer to trigger release of the appropriate chemical.

Remote sensing typically uses satellite imaging of fields to sense crop pests or evidence of drought and then automatically adjusts levels of irrigation or pesticide application as the tractor moves around the field. But in the future ubiquitous wireless sensors - otherwise known as smart dust - are likely to become an essential tool for bringing this vision of precision farming to maturity. The idea that thousands of tiny sensors could be scattered like invisible eyes, ears and noses across farm fields and battlefields sounds like science fiction. But a decade ago Kris Pister, professor of Robotics at the University of California, Berkeley, secured funding from the US Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to develop autonomous sensors that would each be the size of a match head. Using silicon-etching technology, these "motes" or "smart dust" sensors would feature an onboard power supply, computation abilities, and the ability to detect and communicate with other motes in the vicinity. In this way the motes would self-organize into networks capable of relaying data using wireless technology. DARPA's immediate interest was military, but like its other groundbreaking project, the internet, it soon became clear that there could be civilian applications.

Smart dust, or "ambient intelligence", is being touted by *The Economist*, *Red Herring* and *Technology Review* as the next big thing,

and is manufactured by a handful of pioneer companies - such as Crossbow Technologies and Dust Inc. At present the dust motes are no smaller than a bottle cap, but they are already being used to monitor seabirds' habitats, microclimates around redwood trees and vibrations on the Golden Gate Bridge. Larger companies such as Motorola, Philips and Intel are muscling in on the act, and it will only be a matter of time before the sensors are reduced in size, perhaps eventually to something that could realistically be described as dust.

Scientists are looking at nano-sized sensors, for example, made out of nano-cantilevers (balanced weighing devices,

"Imagine smart farmlands, where literally every plant will have its own sensor, making sure that it gets exactly the right nutrients, exactly the right watering..."

small enough to trap and measure individual proteins, or even molecules). Nano particles, or nano surfaces can be engineered to trigger electrical or chemical signals in the presence of a contaminant, such as bacteria - a signal that could be picked up by a micro-encapsulated pesticide for example. These are the sort of technologies that provide the basis for the future of farming as depicted by Pat Gelsinger, Chief Technology Officer of the Intel corporation:

“Imagine smart farmlands... where literally every vine plant will have its own sensor, making sure that it gets exactly the right nutrients, exactly the right watering, Imagine the impact it could have on difficult areas of the world for agricultural purposes.”

Imagine indeed. It is not small-scale farmers who will benefit from ubiquitous sensor networks. but the giant grain traders who are positioned to aggregate data from several thousand farms in order to determine which crops are grown, by whom and what price will be paid. Sensors will marginalize farmers’ most unique assets - their intimate knowledge of place, climate, soils, seeds, crops and culture. Why employ the experience of farmers when sensors and computers can make smart farms operate without them?

NEW MATERIALS: NEW COMMODITIES

In its glory days Burlington Industries was the largest textile company in the world, but by 2001 it had filed for bankruptcy. When Wilbur Ross bought it for \$620 million in 2003 - outbidding fellow mogul Warren Buffet - his plan was to revive Burlington by using technologies developed by a small subsidiary, NanoTex, in conjunction with Burlington’s fabrics, and then license the technology to other producers.

NanoTex engineered a way to attach “nanowhiskers” to textiles to prevent liquids from penetrating the surface - hence the famous stain-free trousers. Other synthetic fibres developed by NanoTex, “Coolest Comfort”, and “Nano Touch”, are designed to replicate the texture, coolness and strength of cotton.

Synthetic materials have been around for over 50 years, and have made massive inroads into the market, but they have so far been unable to replicate the natural materials that they imitate. Cotton and rubber still command large sections of their respective markets because for many purposes they remain superior to the synthetic opposition. But once fabrication of nano-materials kicks in, growers of fibre crops may find that their product has fewer advantages over artificial alternatives.

Indeed, as Athene Donald, a researcher at Cambridge University points out, owing to regional differences of soil, climate, and cultivar, natural products tend to be “unreliable” and “essentially uncontrollable”. The fabrication of materials at a nano level offers the prospect of making them both equivalent in quality to natural materials, and more reliable.

But this does not mean that farming for fibre will cease to exist - some renewable farming technologies may prove to be more reliable than mineral deposits which are exhaustible, and economically inconsistent. At present most fabrication processes for a certain kind of particle called a “nanotube” use petroleum or graphite as a raw material, but a team at Cambridge University, led by Dr Alan Windle, is exploring ways of making feedstock out of maize-derived ethanol. (Ref

102) And at Cornell University another team is refining an older process called “electro-spinning” where plant cellulose is dissolved in a solvent and then squeezed through a “pinhole” of nano-proportions - ie a good deal smaller than a pinprick.

According to Margaret Fey, assistant professor of textiles at Cornell “Cellulose is the most abundant renewable resource polymer on earth. It forms the structure of all plants. Although researchers have predicted that fibres with strength approaching Kevlar could be made from this fibre, no one has yet achieved it.”

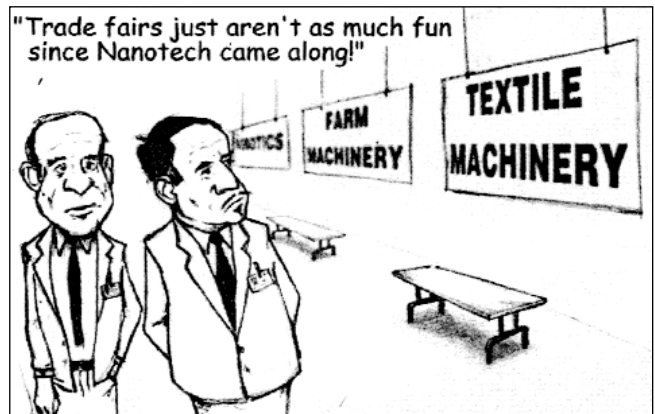
It is too early to map with confidence how a new nano-economy of designer particles, fibres and fabrics will alter production of traditional agricultural commodities, but it is clear that it will. There will be a push to replace tropical commodities such as rubber and high quality cotton with cheaper commodities that provide reliable raw material for the nanotech industry to process. We are not arguing that peasant workers should remain dependent upon notoriously fickle export crops; but a move away from site-, climate- and cultivar-specific products towards crops that provide no more than base material for industrial manipulation will not be in the interest of small farmers. Tiny tech will bring titanic socioec-onomic disruptions for which society is ill prepared, and, as always, it is the poor who are most vulnerable.

NANOMAL PHARM

The livestock sector of farming has also begun to see nanotech innovations, such as biochips, and micro or nanofluidics, which will dramatically increase the ability to monitor and regulate performance. In addition, livestock offers a useful proving ground for medical nanotechnologies that might later be applicable to humans.

A biochip (or micro-array) is a device typically made of thousands of short strands of artificial DNA deposited precisely on a silicon circuit. Each strand acts a selective probe, so a biochip inserted into a blood sample or semen sample can report back on the genetic sequences it uncovers. Biochips can be used not only to detect diseases, but also genetic traits such as proneness or resistance to disease and leanness of meat.

Micro- and nanofluidics is a newer technology which makes similar analyses by controlling the flow of liquids or gases through a series of tiny channels and valves. The technology can be used to sort male and female sperms for sex selection. Matthew Wheeler has gone one step further by developing a microfluidic device that not only sorts sperms and eggs, but brings them together in a way that mimics the movement of natural reproduction and then handles the resulting embryo.



According to Wheeler, this will make mass production of embryos cheap, quick and reliable.

Meanwhile, the field of nano-veterinary medicine offers ever more breathless promises of new diagnoses and cures. Biochips and nanofluidics open the door for more precise drug design and prescription, including genetically targeted drugs. Nano-sized structures have the advantage of being able to sneak past the immune system, and across barriers such as the stomach wall which the body uses to keep out unwanted substances. Pharmaceutical companies are developing nanocapsules and similar techniques to provide “smart delivery systems” whereby molecular coded “address labels” ensure that the packaged pharmaceutical reaches its intended destination. And so on . . .

Similarly, smart surveillance techniques are being developed for livestock tracking just as they are for crop management. Little Bo Peep may lose her sheep, but Nano Bo Peep should have no such problems. The USDA envisions the rise of “smart herds” - cows, sheep and pigs fitted with sensors and locators relaying data about their health and general location to a central computer.

This is a vision of precision agriculture on the hoof. The long-term aim is not merely to monitor, but also to intervene automatically with small drug delivery devices that can be implanted into the animal in advance of illness. The notion has been called the “fuel injection principle” since it mimics the way modern cars use sensors to time fuel delivery to the engine. One of the current barriers to implantable medical devices is that their composite materials are often incompatible with living tissue. New materials, engineered at the nano-scale to be biocompatible, seek to address this problem. Implanting tracking devices in animals is nothing new - but retrofitting animals with sensors, drug chips and nanocapsules will further extend the vision of animals as industrial production units.

Animals are also likely to be used as the testing ground for humans. Using microfluidics for breeding is likely to accelerate genetic uniformity within livestock species and also opens up the possibility of applying new nano-eugenic technologies to humans in the future. In October 2004, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the use of implantable microchips in humans to provide easy access to an individual’s medical records. As healthcare is driven more and more by the bottom line, the future use of implantable chips for automated drug delivery may become economically preferable to nursing - just as cyber and nano surveillance of animals is scheduled to replace the skills of the stockman and the shepherd.

MOLECULAR FOOD MANUFACTURING

Such is the vision of farming as put forward by the less radical protagonists of nano-technology. But nanotechnology is a honeypot for every kind of techno-extremist, and more radical prophets from the academic and corporate sectors are picturing a world with no agriculture (or forestry) at all - where molecular engineering will enable us to “grow” unlimited quantities of food and fibre without soil, seed, farms or farmers - and will wipe out global hunger in the process. Here are some examples:

“Nanomachines could create unlimited amounts of food by synthesis at the atomic level, which would

eradicate hunger.”

Carmen I Moraru, professor of food science Cornell University.

“In the first primitive stages of molecular assembly, we’d build packaged greenhouses, radically different from those today, that would allow local or individualized production by millions who know nothing about farming . . . At the next stage of molecular manufacturing, food synthesis could occur without growing crops or livestock.”

Douglas Mulball, Our Molecular Future

“Why can’t human beings imitate nature’s methodology? Instead of harvesting grain and cattle for carbohydrates and protein, nanomachines (nanobots) could assemble the desired steak or flour from carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms present in the air as water and carbon dioxide. Nanobots present in food could circulate through the blood system, cleaning out fat deposits and killing pathogens.”

Dr. Marvin J. Rudolph, Director, DuPont Food Industry Solutions, in Food Technology, Jan 2004

“Why waste energy growing grass to feed to animals when you could be rearing pure muscle in scientifically controlled vats?”

These visions still remain for the future. Present day research on nano-foods mostly focuses on cosmetic alterations, extending shelf-life and targeting delivery of nutrients. Nonetheless tissue engineers in New York and South Carolina have taken the first step down the road of molecular food manufacture, attempting to grow meat by “marinating” fish muscle cells in

liquid nutrients to encourage the cells to divide and multiply on their own. The logic behind this research is impeccable, if you are an economist: why waste energy growing grass to feed to animals who spend half the time falling ill and the other half trying to break out of your fences, and why bother to produce all that superfluous brain, lung, stomach, bone and hoof tissue, when you could be rearing pure muscle in scientifically controlled vats?

SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY AND GREEN GOO

At the dawn of the 21st century, genetic engineering is suddenly old hat. The world’s first synthetic biology conference convened in June 2004 and two months later the University of California announced the establishment of the first synthetic biology department in the US. In the words of science reporter W Wayt Gibbs, one of the goals of synthetic biology is to “stretch the boundaries of life and of machines until the two overlap to yield truly programmable organisms.”

Although synthetic biology is not always synonymous with nanobiotechnology, the programming and functioning of “living machines” in the future will frequently involve the integration of biological and non-biological parts. Scientists at Berkeley’s new department, for example, are particularly interested in the design and construction of “bio-bots” - autonomous robots designed for a special purpose, which are the size of a virus or cell, and composed of both biological and artificial parts.

Scientists have been honing their ability to build life from nano-scale matter for some time. In 2002 researchers at Stony Brook (State University of NY) finished building a live polio virus from scratch, but it had taken them three years. Less than two years later Craig Venter (formerly of the Human Genome Project) was able to synthesise a slightly smaller virus in just

three weeks. Venter's team is now building a new type of bacterium, using DNA manufactured in a laboratory, and Venter has hinted that he will unveil a novel artificial genome which will be larger than a virus but smaller than a bacterium.

Venter gives rather tame reasons for breaching the barrier between living organisms and dead matter: "the development of better vaccines and safer strategies for gene therapy, improving agricultural crop yields" and so on, as if these goals weren't achievable without calling into question the distinctiveness of life. More convincing are the words of one of Venter's colleagues, Professor Clyde Hutchinson: "The advantage of a synthetic organism over manipulating natural organisms . . . is then you would have a lot more control over the properties of the cell than if you rely on natural mechanisms. For either good or bad purposes... you'd be in a better position to design exactly what you want." Of course the "you" exerting this control, and designing exactly what is wanted, for either good or bad purposes, would not be you or I, but state or corporate funded scientists.

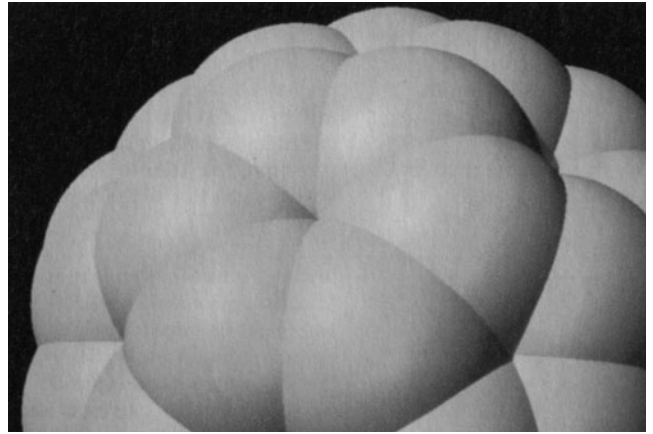
"Green Goo" is the term ETC group uses to describe the most lurid dangers associated with synthetic biology or nanobiotechnology. Researchers are interested in crossing machines with living organisms because machines can be programmed, while living organisms are capable of self-replication. But what if artificial life forms designed to reproduce autonomously are not as easy to control as Hutchinson anticipates? What if self-replicating synthetic bacteria start to replace natural bacteria, spreading across the eco-system ad infinitum? Or, as Bill Joy suggested, self-replicating "plants" with photosynthesizing "leaves" out-compete grass, crowding the biosphere with inedible foliage? That is the scenario of Green Goo.

Those who evoke the spectre of Green Goo have been characterized by nanotech supporters as hysterical alarmists conjuring up nightmares which could not possibly happen in the foreseeable future. But that is not the point. Critics of nanotech know perfectly well that Green Goo is not just around the corner, but use it as a symbol of what could be around the corner. Everyone knows that King Midas' desire to turn everything he touched into gold could never actually happen, but that does not diminish the potency of the myth as a warning to those who attach too much value to money. Green Goo - whether technically it could happen or not - is a symbolic reminder of the direction in which the scientists who want to reinvent life are taking us.

LEARNING FROM THE MISTAKES OF GM

Some researchers in the field of synthetic biology have begun to acknowledge the potential risks and ethical implications of their work. An editorial in *Nature* in 2004 suggested that it may be time for an "Asilomar-type" summit to demonstrate publicly that members of the synthetic biology community "are willing to consult and reflect carefully about risk - both perceived and genuine - and to moderate their actions accordingly."

Asilomar refers to the California conference centre where prominent molecular biologists gathered in 1974 to draft guidelines for genetic engineering research. Given what has happened with GM, it provides an unacceptable model for



A buckyball or fullerene - a man-made carbon molecule. Research carried out at Rice University in Houston, Texas found that this innocuous looking nano-particle could cause brain damage to fish.

regulating nanotech advances in today's world. Asilomar was restricted to a handful of elite scientists, and the scope of discussion was limited to hazards and safety, while broader social and ethical issues were specifically excluded. According to historian Susan Wright, several reporters who covered the Asilomar meeting concluded the conference "was intended to avoid public involvement, rather than to encourage it."

As a result, genetically modified crops came to the market less than one decade ago with virtually no public discussion of their risks and benefits, and within regulatory frameworks that have been described as inadequate, non-transparent or non-existent. Questions surrounding the social, health and environmental impacts of GM foods are unresolved, and millions have spurned GM products.

"The advantage of a synthetic organism over manipulating natural organisms... is then you would have a lot more control than if you rely on natural mechanisms."

By allowing nanotech products to come to market in the absence of public debate and regulatory control, governments, agribusiness and scientific institutions have already jeopardized any potential there might be for nano-scale technologies to be used beneficially. That there are no regulations in place anywhere in the world today to evaluate new nano-scale products in the food chain represents unacceptable and culpable negligence.

The most important single recommendation we at ETC make is that society become fully engaged in a wide discussion of the role of nano-scale technologies in food and agriculture. Any effort to sideline this discussion into a meeting of experts or to focus solely on the health or environmental aspects of the new technologies will be a mistake. Unlike the early GM debate, discussion must not be confined to technical issues alone - social and economic issues must be on the table. Who will control the technologies? Who will benefit from them? Who will play a role in how nano-technologies affect our future?

REFERENCES. The references for this article are too extensive to reproduce here. The full report with references can be found on the ETC website, www.etc.org - If you seek a reference concerning one or two specific matters, have a problem locating a reference, or do not have access to the web, please contact the editors of *The Land*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: ETC, the Action Group on Erosion Technology and Concentration, (formerly RAFI) is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable advancement of cultural and ecological diversity and human rights. Contacts: ETC Group, 1, Nicholas Street, Suite 200B, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N 7B7; tel 613 241 2267; etc@etcgroup.org; www.etcgroup.org

CHAPTER 7 NEWS

SEND A BRICK TO JOHN PRESCOTT

Is the new consultation draft of PPS3, the government's planning policy guidance for housing worth responding to? To anyone unfamiliar with the nuances of "spatial planning and regional and sub-regional housing market areas", it doesn't look very different from the previous one, which came out in 2005, or from the 1992 version. A stranger who looked at it would never guess that housing prices have escalated out of all proportion over the past decade or that there was any kind of crisis in the provision of affordable housing.

As always, the government advocates the allocation in development plans of a limited number of sites within or on the edge of existing settlements for the bulk of new housing. As always there are no measures to prevent these sites being cornered by corporate house-builders; and no measures to prevent the price of this scarce land being hiked up to ludicrous proportions.

And, as always, there is no mention of self-build; nor any reflection why self-build constitutes only 9 per cent of the UK's new housing (mainly at the up-market end) whereas in Germany and France self-build is around 40 per cent of the market, and in Ireland and Austria it is around 70 per cent.

So what changes are advocated in the new draft?

Very little. But there is more emphasis on the use of brownfield sites (now officially called brownfield sites instead of 'previously developed land'). This is the proposed policy:

"The priority for development is developable brownfield land. Local planning authorities should review all their non-housing allocations when preparing or reviewing their site allocation development plan document and consider whether some of this land might be more appropriately used for housing or mixed use development... Local planning authorities, working with development partners, should seek to ensure the redevelopment of brownfield land, by developing a brownfield strategy aimed at identifying and removing constraints to its development local planning authorities should make full use of their compulsory purchase powers and work with key stakeholders, such as relevant public sector agencies and private sector partners, to bring forward brownfield sites for development."

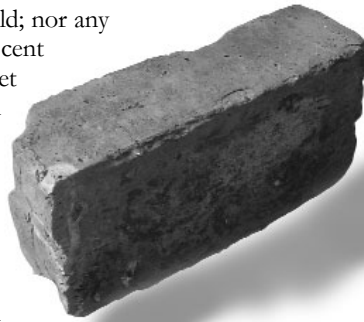
This is a further concession to all the cotton-wool environmentalists who advocate that the best way to prevent unsustainable development and suburban sprawl is to cram everyone into "compact cities". What it means is that local authority planners, in collusion with developers, will scour their domain looking for every available nook and cranny where more housing can be sited in order to meet the prescribed target of 60 per cent brownfield sites for new residential development. The last remaining employment land in villages and small towns will be flogged off for more lucrative housing development (for example see Oxford Boatyard article page 35). Nothing will be spared, unless citizens fight tooth and nail for it: vacant factories and schools, community centres, allotments, yards, squats, wildlife refuges, every little space that provides some measure of accessibility or potential for low income urban

people will be swooped upon by developers, working "in partnership" with the local council, for so-called "sustainable housing".

Of course, the sustainability is a complete sham: most of this brownfield residential development is dependent upon greenfield development by the back door. There is no 60 per cent target for employment land, so ousted factories and workshops move to brand new out-of-town industrial estates which are the epitome of unsustainability and ugliness, but which are beloved by planners because they provide "employment". Or else they move into "diversified" farm buildings, while farmers erect new agricultural buildings through permitted development rights. Any remaining employment land within city centres is taken up by office

blocks, half of which remain empty, and which derive much of their inflated value from the potential to be

converted into flats (see Tony Gosling's article on p16). Pressure to locate housing on brownfield sites is the very opposite of sustainable development: it gives undue priority to what has been artificially turned into the most lucrative land use; it eviscerates communities of everything which isn't housing, and turns them into dormitories.



AFFORDABLE FOR SOME

As for affordable housing, probably nothing much has changed. Guidance on the rural exceptions policy, which allows affordable rural housing to be built on sites where market housing would not normally be allowed, is now much less detailed. Unlike before, draft PPS3 does not restrict rural exception sites to areas within or adjoining villages; and it does not reserve them exclusively for "local people". But it is not clear to what extent these matters are being left for local authorities to determine, or whether they will be laid out in the promised "practice guidance and companion guide" to PPS3 which has not yet been published. A phone call to the ODPM failed to clear this up.

There is no mention of the measure, proposed in the 2004 draft circular on Gypsies and Travellers, that travellers should be eligible to use the rural exception sites policy to establish caravan sites. The final version of this circular was originally due to come out in September and keeps being delayed. As well as being an enormous help to the travelling community, this measure could help open up the rural exceptions site policy to low impact housing, wooden chalets, mobile home sites etc. Hopefully it hasn't been ditched.

As usual, the new PPS3 makes absolutely no mention of caravans, mobile homes, trucks, ecohomes, ecovillages, cohousing, low impact dwellings, shacks, chalets, canal boats, yurts or any of the other ways in which people can house themselves affordably. It defines "housing need" as "households who are unable to access suitable housing without some financial assistance" as though everybody in housing need is saving pennies to buy a home on a poxy housing estate.

There are hundreds of thousands of people in Britain who are perfectly capable of creating their own home, and what they most need is land, not finance. Given affordable land, they would be happy to conform to whatever strictures are necessary to ensure that the development is sustainable.

Instead of tapping into this potential, and giving people the scope to build sustainable homes, lives and surroundings, the government persists in restricting the supply of building land, increasing its value two-hundredfold, and then selling it off to the highest bidders. Unsurprisingly, the highest bidders are a cartel of specialized housing developers who pump out the most unsustainable, slipshod houses and communities anyone could possibly dream up, and a considerable number of people refuse to live in them.

The new PPS3 does nothing to change this state of affairs. And there is no reason to believe that anything anybody submits to the consultation process will make the slightest bit of difference. For seven years, Chapter 7 and similar groups have been responding to government planning consultations, and advocating that our supporters do so, without a single shift in policy, or even any acknowledgement that the sort of people we represent actually exist.

KEEPING SELF-BUILT HOMES AFFORDABLE

People who want to build their own house under policies which allow for affordable homes on the edge of villages are being systematically refused. Planners claim that there is no way to secure the affordability of an owner-occupied house over successive changes of occupation. But where there's a will...

David R. rang us up the other day with a query. His son had put in an application for an affordable eco-friendly home, on the edge of a village. The application more or less conformed with the Rural Exception Sites policy in Planning Policy Guidance 3, which allows for affordable housing inside or on the edge of a village in areas not allocated for open market housing development. However the planning officers stated that they would recommend refusal of the application because the affordability of the dwelling could not be secured over subsequent changes of ownership - even though Mr. R. had offered to draft a Section 106 Legal Agreement to this effect.

This is by no means the first time that Chapter 7 has had an enquiry of this kind. There are plenty of people in rural villages - not least farmers' sons - who are desperate for local housing and who are perfectly capable of building their own home, often for considerably less than Prescott's target figure of £60,000. Such people typically have access to land, are handy, and have good local contacts so they will, for example, know a bloke with a JCB, or even own one themselves. But almost invariably the local authority won't give permission, because they will only countenance rural exception sites applications from Housing Associations or other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

There appears to be no grounding for this in Government Guidance. Circular 6/98 on Planning and Affordable Housing specifically states that "isolated single homes ... should be considered with reference to rural exceptions policy in the development plan". But most local authorities are lazy, when confronted with anything difficult, and screen out one-off self-builds with a statement on the lines of this (from South Somerset local plan): "In practice, any development which satisfies the requirements of the rural exceptions policy is likely to be managed by an organization which is capable of ensuring its proper management."

We've had enough. This time, we advocate that you do not respond in writing to the consultation draft. It's a waste of time. Instead, find a brick, parcel it up, and send it to the minister with a message along these lines.

Dear Mr Prescott

I am sending you this brick because, despite numerous representations, government planning guidance still fails to provide land for people who can create their own sustainable and affordable homes. Actually I feel like sending a brick sailing through your window - but I'm not that sort of person.

Yours sincerely

Jo Bloggs

Do you ever get the feeling that the threat of civil unrest is the only popular response that decision-makers react to? Don't be shy. Send your brick to:

FAO the Rt. Hon. John Prescott c/o Alex Lessware Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Planning Policies Division (2), Zone 4/J5, Eland House, LONDON SW1 5DU, Telephone: 020 7944 6288, Fax: 020 7944 3949, e-mail: pps3consultation@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Fortunately one local authority has refused to adopt this head in the sand approach. South Shropshire's policy document, *Affordable Homes for South Shropshire's People* (December 2004) contains policies which specifically encourage the development of one-off self-build homes. The mechanisms they propose - a "silent equity mortgage" supported by a deed of covenant - mean that the owner, if he or she wishes to move, must sell the house at an affordable price (determined by a formula which factors in the cost of the house and the average cost of housing), preferably to a local person in need. If no such sale can be achieved, the local authority or an RSL nominated by them, can buy it at the formula price. In the unlikely event that there is no need at all for affordable housing, the house can be sold on the open market, with the profits over and above the formula price being shared by the owners and the local authority.

Although we are not in a position to assess whether South Shropshire's proposals are watertight, their policy document is full of constructive ideas, and a rare example of what an inspired local authority planning department can achieve it sets out to find the answers to a problem. Anybody who finds themselves in the position of David R.'s son, would do well to get hold of this document and plonk it on the table of their local planning officers.

We were put on to the South Shropshire policy by West Dorset's tireless Rural Housing Enabler, Andy Lloyd. Andy has been pursuing another solution to this problem. Why not have an ad hoc national agency whose sole purpose is to regulate the affordability of houses - in other words which would fulfil this function of RSLs without interfering with the construction or management of the houses in any other way. Want to build an affordable house? Then contact the National Affordable Homes Register, sign their standard legal agreement, which means that you can't sell your house for more than the price

determined by a specific formula, and there you are. Why should it be any more difficult than that?

Meanwhile, we have talked to an inspired individual in the lower echelons of the ODPM's Gypsy and Traveller Unit - the first civil servant we have ever heard bubbling over with enthusiasm for caravans and benders - who assures us that she is pressing the chaps upstairs to sort out a simple mechanism

by which groups of travellers or self-builders can create their own RSL.

Affordable Homes for South Shropshire's People is available from Steve Price at South Shropshire District Council, steve.price@southshropshire.gov.uk

Andy Lloyd can be contacted on A.Lloyd@westdorset-dc.gov.uk.

ETHNIC CLEANSING IN BASILDON

Report from Grattan Puxon

The Commission for Racial Equality is backing a judicial review of Basildon council's decision to bulldoze Dale Farm, Britain's largest Gypsy settlement. Chairman Trevor Philips has as good as said that the £4 million eviction plan is racially tainted.

The blue-print for the eviction, drawn up by self-styled Gypsy clearance company Constant & Co, was pushed through by Basildon's far-right Conservative leader, Malcolm Buckley, against united Labour and Liberal opposition. Buckley has vowed repeatedly to rid the town of unauthorised Gypsy caravans. Officials put their current number at 220, most of them belonging to the Sheridan clan.

"The courts can only delay this eviction by making us re-consider," Buckley contends. "The outcome will be the same and the sooner we get on with it the better."

Two private yards at nearby Hovefields Avenue have already been cleared, though Constant succeeded only in moving caravans a small distance. The operation, during which two women pro-Gypsy protesters were arrested, was hailed as a prelude to the mother-of-all-evictions at Oak Lane, Dale Farm.

CIVIL RIOT

A planning inspector has warned that the demolition of so many homes within a village community numbering over a thousand persons could take a week and escalate into a civil riot. The policing bill alone has been put at around £2 million. Fire and rescue officers point out that entry of heavy machinery could endanger children's lives and contravene safety regulations. Trade unionists are being asked to consider a boycott.

The Sheridan clan, who bought Dale Farm and converted a car-wreck court into the original trailer park, are determined to avoid violence. They have set up a meeting with neighbouring house-dwellers at Crays Hill to try and sort out differences and have lodged fresh appeals for planning consent.

But members have told the local press repeatedly that they will not give up their homes and land without a fight. Spokesman Richard Sheridan, who received a volunteer of the year award at the House of Lords last week for his work in the community, says Buckley's hardline racist attitude can be traced to Conservative Party policy adopted before the last UK general election.

On the eve of polling day, the then leader of the Tories, Michael Howard, stood at Dale Farm's perimeter fence for a



photo-shoot, pledging the Tories would take tough measures against such illegal encampments around Britain. This was the same Michael Howard who as Home Secretary steered through the 1995 Criminal Justice Act, which abolished the requirement for local authorities to provide travellers sites.

In the past two years, hundreds of Gypsy families have had homes bulldozed and their land seized. Several thousand more face being forced back on the road simply because planning permits have been withheld by prejudiced local authorities like Basildon.

On 16 December a delegation from the UK attended the newly-created European Roma and Travellers Forum, meeting in Strasbourg. The forum agreed a set of proposals to outlaw direct action evictions and compel local authorities either to pass planning applications or provide acceptable alternative sites. According to Cliff Codona, a gypsy who has faced violent eviction from a site in Bedfordshire, "The Council of Europe endorsed our blue-print for reform and now we want the UK Government to accept these recommendations."

Information from Grattan Puxon, 01206 523526

NEW TRAVELLER POLICY IMMINENT

In *Chapter 7 News 16* we voiced fears that draft government guidance on gypsy sites might lead to discrimination against travellers who were not "traditional" gypsies with a "cultural preference" for living in caravans.

The final policy document is scheduled to be published as we go to press. Hopefully the recent case *Drury v Rutland County Council*, is not a taste of what is to come. In it Mr Justice Collins "noted that the families were not ethnic Gypsies and had become travellers a few years ago. In that light he held that the offer of traditional housing on a temporary basis was reasonable." In Chapter 7's view, to decide whether or not a family should be forced into housing on the basis of their ethnic origin is racist.

For a much more helpful decision on gypsy status, see *Llwynpiod* on p.45. The expected Gypsy and Traveller circular will also reveal whether exception sites for affordable rural housing on the edge of small villages are going to be opened up for caravans as mooted in the consultation draft.

BOAT-DWELLERS SQUAT

Half a dozen canal boat-dwellers at Oxford, with their boats, have occupied a marine repair yard threatened by development - and for the time being have seen the developers off. The occupiers aim to "hold the site to the exclusion of British Waterways and their agents until such time as an equitable and legally binding agreement can be made with British Waterways," and keep it functioning as a working boatyard.

The 80 strong residential boating community in Oxford has been campaigning for sometime to save the Castle Mill boatyard, which provides essential repair facilities, including the ability to lift boats out of the water. The yard is being shut down to make way for a development comprising 46 dwellings, a restaurant, a chandlery and a footbridge. The site is owned by British Waterways Board (BW) who (like the Church and other ostensibly non-profit making organizations) is selling off or leasing out its assets for lucrative redevelopment.

Fortunately for the boaters, in August the developers lost an appeal against local authority refusal of the scheme, partly on the grounds that the repair yard fulfilled a genuine need for the boating community, which could not be replaced in another equally suitable and accessible location. The nearest comparable facility at the moment is a day's travel away by boat. However British Waterways have already refused to renew the yard's lease and given notice to quit, and have invited bids from a selection of favoured developers (including Bellway who designed the previous plan). At the time of writing BW claim to have fulfilled the planning inspector's ruling of providing alternative boatyard facilities in an equally accessible place. They clearly have not done this. In the meantime BW took the boaters to court on the 9th December 2005 to evict them and tried to impose costs on them of £3,880. The judge had much sympathy with the boaters' cause but ruled that they must leave the site by the 28th February 2006. He also reduced the costs award to £2500.

Weeks prior to the court case Oxford City council voted unanimously to support the boaters and wrote a letter to BW asking them to allow the boaters to stay until planning permission had been granted; pointing out that it would be in everyone's interest.

One of the supporters who spoke at the planning appeal was Philip Pullman author of *The Amber Spyglass* etc. (like Harry Potter but for intellectuals' kids) who explained in his evidence:

"The reason I respond so warmly to the boatyard's case is that when I look in at it, I recognise the kind of thing that's going on, this jumble of untidy-looking activity. There's a boat out of the water, there's someone welding, there's a pile of rusty-looking sheets of metal, there are lengths of timber and cans of paint; but the untidiness is deceptive. Everything is there because it's needed, and it's in that position because it's immediately to hand, and it's that shape and size because it's exactly fitted to its purpose. Because work is going on, work on a human scale. And it has connections of a hundred



kinds with the life around it. It's creative work: new boats are being built. It's restorative work: old boats are being repaired. It's historic: there's been a boatyard here for many years, and the canal is part of the very fabric of the city. It's work that belongs to the future: if it continues, the canal will prosper in all its richness."

The Inspector's take on the community function of the boatyard is interesting but different:

"The existing boat repair business at this site has been established with the benefit of a series of short-term leases where the proprietor has paid a significantly lesser rent than would be the open market rent for a longer term established situation. This has led to a very relaxed approach to the use of space and a sense that the space is a community facility for the boating community. The proprietor of the existing business believes that he could maintain the service that he currently delivers to the boating community on a commercial lease with some 25 per cent of the land presently used. In my view, it is clear that continued use of the site for maintenance or repair work, would have to be on a more commercial basis and so some of the sense that the space is a community facility for the boating community would be lost."

In other words (i.e. in language that the Inspector wouldn't include in his decision letter) capitalism requires that the maximum rent should be extracted from every resource, and consequently 'relaxed' community uses are driven from the spaces they occupy. One might be forgiven for thinking that the main purpose of the planning system is to protect low rent but highly esteemed community uses from economic forces. But that purpose is unlikely to be well understood by most planning practitioners until the profession arrives at a more articulate analysis of the conflict between capitalism and the commons. Bellway (or another developer) and BWB will come back again: the planning system cannot be trusted to fend them off indefinitely.

The boat people are right - the best way to save community space is direct action: occupy it, fight it in the courts, lobby council and don't move.

Information and photo from Adrian Arbib.
www.portmeadow.org; info@portmeadow.org

RE-INVENTING THE MOBILE HOME

“Why don’t we aspire to be eco-trailer trash?” asks CHRIS COATES. And SIMON FAIRLIE reports on a mobile-home dweller who has been asking this question for the last three decades.



Aranya

A mobile home featured two years ago in *Permaculture* magazine. The photo was taken in happier days. Recently, the land it was sited on, comprising a cottage, outbuildings and two acres, was sold at auction for £560,000.

ECO-TRAILERS FOR SALE OR RENT

I say, I say, I say! What’s the difference between a mobile home park and a low-impact development?

Answer: one is a form of development clearly understood by the planning authorities and regularly granted planning permission across the country on sites that would otherwise be refused permission for housing - and the other isn’t.

Of course there are a few other differences and a huge cultural chasm between the two, but on examination they start to look rather smaller than at first glance.

When I was 12, I had a school friend whose family lived for a while in a set of what I can only describe as permanent tents (a series of frame tents with wooden floors joined by canvas corridors) in a large clearing in Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire (compare photos on p.45). There were other chalets and caravans arranged around the edge of the field, but I can’t remember now whether they were occupied permanently. My friend’s family eventually moved into a “proper” house when his father found work as the local gravedigger, a job that came with a house in the cemetery.

I forgot about the little settlement in the forest, until a couple of years ago I happened to be out walking in the Charnwood

area and stumbled across a thriving community of now somewhat more substantial chalets looking well cared for and certainly well used. The big difference was in the occupants. No longer was it a shelter for unemployed families and there was nothing that could be called a “permanent tent”. By the look of the cars parked outside them, these were occupied by middle income or retired couples enjoying a weekend rural retreat or their retirement in the countryside. Somewhere along the way from the late 1960’s what had once been a housing option of last resort became a desirable retirement home in the countryside, almost certainly fetching a price well beyond anything a low income family could afford today.

Having spent the previous 5 years, if not longer, looking unsuccessfully for a plot for a group self-build scheme I was intrigued by these chalets in the woods. Building plots were starting to go for silly money, making affordable self-build a pipedream, and I wondered whether there was any way you could build anything similar to these chalets today. I started to do some research into what I now know are called “Park Homes” or mobile home parks. I wanted to know quite what constituted a mobile home: are we just talking glorified caravans here? Courtesy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s website I got a very interesting answer

A mobile home turns out to be a single-storey structure, up to 111 square metres (see box on facing page), designed for people to live in which is physically capable of being moved along the highway either by being towed or else in no more than

two sections on the back of large trucks. I later found out that the ability to move was largely theoretical, as in practice once they are on site they are very rarely moved again. The other gem from the ODPM's website was the news that John Prescott was talking about mobile homes as having a place in helping meet the supply of affordable housing.

A quick conversation with the local planning office confirmed what I thought: that mobile home parks are not seen as housing developments and so can utilise land not designated for housing in local plans.¹ They are granted 25 year renewable planning consents and turn out to be regulated by a licence issued by the local Environmental Health Dept. A couple of emails got me a copy of our local licence (they are probably broadly the same everywhere, but check out your local council for details). The licence mainly seemed to be concerned with imposing some basic fire protection conditions; minimum distances between homes and provision of communal fire extinguishers. This worry about fire would appear to be due to mobile homes not having to comply with the building regulations - perhaps an opportunity for some cutting edge eco-building there?

There is a fairly new British Standard for Residential Park Homes - BS 3632:1995 which sets some basic standards for construction. The rest of the licence and other regulations, The Mobile Homes Act 1983 and parts of the latest Housing Bill all relate to how the site is managed. Reading through all this bureaucratic bumf I was struck by the strange similarities between these rules and regulations and those of emerging co-housing groups. The sites are in single ownership, usually private, but there is no reason why it couldn't be a co-op or company.² Each unit is in individual leasehold ownership with the right to sell/inherit etc. There is an assumption that there will be communal facilities provided and often the social community side is the big selling point in Park Home sites publicity. This is co-housing in all but name. Except instead of each unit costing £120,000 to build they could surely be in the £30-£50,000 range.

The Segal Trust spent many of its early years vigorously denying that a timber-frame Segal style house was "nothing more than a mobile home in disguise", in order to persuade Housing Associations to work with it. But with a modest change in design so that it could be brought onto site in two sections there is no reason why a Segal building or similar would not fit the legal definition of a mobile home. You could then have a well insulated, high environmental spec, decent sized Eco-Park Home that is affordable and could get planning permission on land not designated for housing. Sounds too good to be true? I have a feeling that planners could be persuaded about this for a group scheme perhaps on the edge of a town or village, but would still resist single units in the countryside for all the usual reasons..

The other big obstacle to Eco-Park Homes popping up across the country appears to be eco-snobbery. Lots of people I've mentioned the idea to really can't cope with the idea of being eco-trailer trash, or even eco-trailer push! The thought of living on what amounts to a souped-up caravan site simple doesn't have the eco-cred of a BedZED or a Strawbale cottage. In reply I would suggest that rather than seeing Eco-Park Homes as an extension of caravan culture we perhaps look on them as licensed plotlands - a chance to reinvent that classic urban escape route, not this time from the slums of early 20th century cities but instead from the crazy overheated housing market of the early 21st century.

1. Note however that some local development plans have a policy stating that permission for mobile home sites will be given on the same basis as permission for housing.

2. Unfortunately the legislation is such that when the site is owned by a private individual it is open to abuse. See "Greening Mobile Home Sites" in C7 News No 2 and "The Hidden Scandal" by Ron Joyce of PHRAA in C7 News No 8, as well as the following article. The Government is supposed to be tackling these problems, see Government Response to the Report of the Park Homes Working Party, at www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/divisionhomepage/033464.hcsp

Chris Coates is an editor of *Diggers & Dreamers the Guide to Communal Living*, and a Trustee of the Walter Segal Self Build Trust. He is also a Green Party Councillor in Lancaster and sits on the local planning committee. He can be contacted at: chris@utopia-britannica.org.uk

A WOMAN OF MEANS, BY NO MEANS

The name of Maureen Boustred probably strikes fear into the heart of a number of Kentish housing professionals. For 30 years this redoubtable woman, now a pensioner, lived on an old plot-land site at Knatts Valley in Kent, where she saw the locality change from a scattering of dispersed shacks and smallholdings to a concentration of mobile home sites, posh gypsy haciendas and upmarket conversions: and as it has changed she has not been afraid to give the local authority, Sevenoaks, a piece of her mind.

The changes, Maureen reckons, have been for the worse. Mobile home site owners have made repeated applications to increase the density of units on their site, packing more and more concrete pads and static caravans into the once leafy area. Some are unscrupulous operators who take advantage of poorly drafted mobile home legislation to bully their tenants, while better managed sites cater for the lowest common denominator of petty bourgeois gentility (no vegetable gardens, no kids, no pool, no pets) - fine if you like that sort of thing.

Whenever a new application is under way, Maureen is down at the council offices or Westminster, hand-bagging every

DEFINITION OF CARAVAN BROADENED

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently proposed increasing the statutory maximum width of caravans in order to allow extra external insulation to be added, stating that external cladding "is the preferred method of insulation". The dimensions are to be increasing from 20 foot wide (6.096 metres) to 6.8 metres - and from 60 foot long (18.28 metres) to 20 metres. This is enough to allow for timber clad or rendered straw bales on one side and both ends, but not on both sides on a full size twin unit. The encouragement to add insulation of this thickness is an indication that the Government is unworried by people taking measures to make their homes more permanent.

At present, this is only a consultation paper, available on www.odpm.gov.uk (click on "housing" and then on "consultation papers").

official she can find. She has also produced a number of reports outlining what a sustainable mobile home park ought to look like. Static caravans, she argues, provide an affordable opportunity for the many people who seek a sustainable, semi-rural lifestyle, or prefer to live in something like a wooden cabin. They can be clad in timber, insulated with straw bales, or passively solar heated with conservatories. They can be sold as cheap shells, which owners can deck out as they see fit. Set into woodland eco-hamlets of eight or so units, with opportunities for renewable energy, allotments, animal grazing and so on, her schemes present a way of managing land rather than simply developing it - an opportunity for the idealistic of all ages, rather than just a cheap retirement home.

So far Maureen's militancy has been in vain, and has cost her dearly. The owners of the site where she lived bulldozed her garden, carting potato plants, compost, tyres and other kitchen garden paraphernalia to the tip, and then they (quite legally) kicked her out on the grounds that her aging mobile home was not up to the standards of the park. Now she is in concrete sheltered housing: "They don't let chickens live on concrete floors, but its OK for us" she says. "Once you're shovelled into one of these places you might as well turn your toes up."

I hope Maureen doesn't turn her toes up before some of her ideas become a reality. It takes years for good ideas to seep into public consciousness. Over the last decade her proposals have occasionally been taken up - a few years ago Amadeus, a group of active 60-somethings who didn't want to vegetate in retirement, worked up a bid for a similar scheme, which (as far as I know) came to nothing. But in the last year I have met more and more folk thinking on these lines, and it is only a matter of time before a group of competent people put their heads and their money together and get such a scheme off the ground.

One of the advantages of a mobile home park is that it can bypass much of the housing legislation. Once you have permission for a site you can bring on anything that meets the definition of mobile home, which allows for a multitude of sins and virtues. If it is a commercial site you have to conform to the design standards laid down in BS3632, but you don't have to comply with building regs or apply for permission for each unit.

British manufacturers are gradually cottoning on to the benefits. Peter Caunt, of Quercus has already installed an example of his larch-clad Heartland timber chalet, made in Scotland from both Scottish and Scandinavian timber, at Dalraddy Holiday Park, near Aviemore in Scotland.

Another UK supplier of timber chalets, Mark Barber of SLCD, entered his zero-carbon timber chalets in Prescott's Design for Manufacture competition to design an affordable house costing less than £60,000. Barber acknowledges that his chalets are not manufactured in the UK, but claims that the manufacturers, Jörnträhus of Sweden, support local village economies of the kind that the Scottish ruling classes and the Forestry Commission have done their best to eliminate over the last 200 years. And he claims that he can produce decent houses for considerably less than £60,000. He was short-listed to the last 33 in Prescott's competition, but not to the nine finalists, which were headed by Barratts, and included Wimpey and Redrow.

It was no surprise that Prescott passed over SLCD's timber chalets, in favour of designs which according to the Guardian's architecture correspondent, Jonathon Glancey, reflect the design codes of Crawley, Basingstoke and Washington New Town. Not that we should have any confidence in Glancey's judgment: the thrust of his article, worthy of Private Eye's Order of the Brown Nose, was that Wimpey should have won the competition because Sir Richard Rogers had a hand in their design.

The large numbers of people in this country who would rather live simply in a wooden cabin surrounded by trees, grass, potatoes and animals than in a Wimpey home on a sprawling tarmac estate are not going to get any help from the ODPM, from the house-building industry, or from architectural pundits. Eventually, they will provide for themselves, and when they do, Maureen Boustred can turn her toes up in the knowledge that 30 years of handbagging have not been in vain.

Article by Simon Fairlie, first published in *Building for a Future*, Autumn 2005. Maureen Boustred is a member of Park Home Residents Action Alliance www.phraa.co.uk Telephone 01902 373462.

Other Contacts include:

National Park Home Council. www.nationalcaravan.co.uk
Telephone 01252 318251

National Ass. of Park Home Residents www.naphr.co.uk
Telephone 01492 535677

Independent Park Home Advisory Service (IPHAS) www.iphas.co.uk
Park Home Legal Services Telephone 01275 373762

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Park Home web pages:
www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/divisionhomepage/033464.hcsp
www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/divisionhomepage/033464.hcsp



The Heartland larch clad mobile home, made by the Scottish firm Quercus. Contact Peter Caunt, Sunnyside Studio, Heriot, Midlothian, Scotland EH38 5YE, 01875 822960, quercus@ednet.co.uk

CHAPTER 7'S HOUSE PRICE MONITOR WHO INHERITS WHAT?

Housing is the single greatest repository of wealth held by individuals in the UK. Housing wealth averages about £40,000 per person, though many people have none. Under New Labour the gap between rich and poor is growing, and this widening gap is reflected in the amount of housing wealth available to the richest and poorest sectors of society.

Do we need anyone to tell us something so obvious? Only if we need to quote the exact figures, and Danny Dorling (the geography professor whom Radio Four wheels on every time they want to cover the gap between rich and poor) has provided the figures in a report, published by Shelter, called *Housing Wealth and Inequality in Great Britain 1980-2003* and Beyond.

To pluck just one figure, out of all the areas in Britain, the best off 10 per cent have seen their housing wealth per child increase by £61,842 in the last decade - 20 times the amount that housing wealth has increased for each child in the poorest 10 per cent of areas. So if you were born a rich kid, you've become even richer by around £60,000 over the last 10 years; if you were born poor, you're £3,000 better off.

That's Blair's idea of socialism for you. According to another report, by Standard Life Bank and the Future Laboratory, this wealth enables those who inherit it to "start new businesses, live a more leisurely lifestyle, or embark on new risks and adventures". But George Monbiot has called it "a very very major problem of intergenerational justice." And Dorling concludes:

"There is time for a debate on whether people in Britain wish to live in a society where the richest tenth of children have future recourse to most of the wealth of their nation."

SELF BUILD HOUSE PRICES

In C7 News no 8 we reported that although the number of self-built homes in the UK had risen dramatically since the 1970s, the self-build sector was going up market, squeezing out low income people for whom self-build had been a cheap option. The average cost of a self-build home then was £150,000, while the average cost of a plot was £44,183.

That was in 2001, when £150,000 seemed expensive for a house, but of course we'd not seen what was to come. The state of the self-build market in 2005 was described in a recent Independent pull-out section on Self-Build where the cheapest house depicted, a masonry building in Yorkshire, cost £150,000 to build, and most others were twice the price.

GO BACK TO OLD KENT ROAD

"The rent of land is naturally a monopoly price... not at all proportional to what the landlord may have laid out upon the improvement of the land" Adam Smith

"Land Monopoly is not the only monopoly but it is by far the greatest." Winston Churchill.

"Land is a scarce good" The Barker Report.

Citing quotes such as these, James Armstrong recently wrote to the Office of Fair Trading, requesting that house-builders' land banks should be referred to the monopolies commission. A representative of the Office wrote back:

"The Director can refer monopolies to the Competition Commission... However the legislation only allows for references to be made in respect of commercial activities involving 'the supply of goods and services. Having taken advice on this matter, it is my understanding that, for the purposes of the statute, the supply of goods and services does not cover the ownership of land." So there!

"Where does the money go?" the Independent asked, giving the following guideline prices for a four bed-roomed house of 175-200 sq. metres: "Land £140,000; preliminary costs and foundations: £25,000; structure up to wall-plate level £30,000; roof and weatherproofing £22,000; plumbing, electrics and plastering: £25,000; kitchen, bathroom and landscaping £35,000. Total, including VAT, £277,000.

Admittedly, this is for a biggish house; but with land costs at £140,000 you would be foolish to build anything smaller. And 140K seems to be cheap for some areas. The Independent had a photo of a banal plot squeezed in between two semis in Alton, Hants, currently occupied by a large puddle, selling for £200,000; and another of a large house built at a cost of £160,000 on a plot near York which cost £189,000.

THE FOURTH OPTION

"The ODPM's ideological war against council housing and council ownership is a war against the tenants. They mostly want to stay with the council." So says Labour MP Austin Mitchell, who is not exactly a raving lefty. He continues:

"It costs millions to give away billions of pounds worth of public assets. It is purely ideological since councils have lower costs and can renovate and repair less expensively. It results in no real improvement in the lot of tenants but an increase in rates and charges. It distracts attention from the main housing problem: the need for far more public housing for those who can't get on a house price escalator accelerating beyond them. It's time to change the policy."

Mitchell is the chair of the House of Commons Council Housing Group, whose report *Support for the "Fourth Option" for Council Housing* was published earlier this year.

To obtain a copy (£10 to organizations, free to individual tenants) contact Austin Mitchell MP, House of Commons Council Housing Group, London, SW1A0AA; phone 020 7219 4559, info@support4councilhousing.org.uk www.support4councilhousing.org.uk

HOMES FOR FORMER FARMERS

A leaflet arrived through the post the other day requesting donations for a scheme to provide five affordable homes at Trevorva, in Cornwall, for people working (or last working) in agriculture or other land-based industries. Great, we thought, until we read on and found that the houses were to be converted from farm buildings provided by Cornwall County Council. A phone call to Ian Bell, of the ARC-Addington Fund, confirmed what we feared: that the farmyard had been sold off from Cornwall's County Farms Estate, while its land was divided up between another two farms who were having difficulty making ends meet.

The rural economy was in a sorry state, we observed, when an affordable farm had to be broken up to provide affordable homes for former farmers, and Bell agreed. In the past, he said, farmers could retire into council houses, leaving the farmhouse empty for an incoming farmer, but now council houses weren't available. A lot of farmers, he added, were pursuing the "least loss" option - staying on in unprofitable farms because the loss they made wasn't as great as what they'd have to pay for a home somewhere else.

Cornwall County Council sold the farmyard for £280,000, a lot less than the market price, Bell assured us, and we don't doubt it. But £280,000 divided by five equals £56,000 which only leaves £4,000 to work with to keep the houses beneath John Prescott's target figure for affordability of £60,000. No wonder the developers need to put out an appeal for donations.

To give to the Trevorva Appeal, contact ARC-Addington Fund, Stoneleigh Park, Warks, CV8 2LZ, 02476 690587, enquiries@arc-addington.org.uk

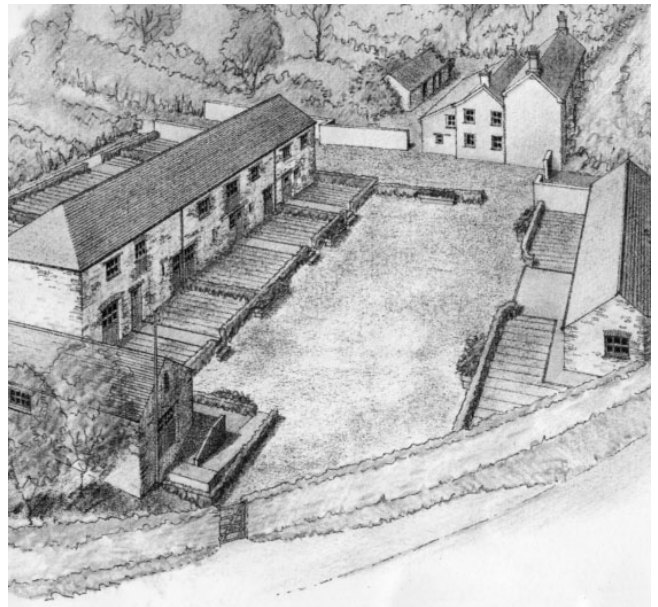
FAIRY TALE

At least the £280,000 from the sale of Trevorva (see above) is going towards the taxpayer. The housing market is so screwed up nowadays that your average journalist is having a hard time distinguishing between generosity and greed. This is a reporter for a Devon local paper.

"Farmer Michael Waycott makes an unlikely fairy godmother. But that's what he has turned out to be for six friends who thought they'd never get the chance to live in their home town again. As he winds down his farm to retire, he has offered to sell them plots of land at half their market value, to enable them to self-build their own homes in the place they grew up."

Half the market share turns out to be £65,000 per plot, about 100 times the agricultural value of the land assuming quarter acre plots. The houses will cost in total £155,000, a price which is affordable only for someone with an income over £40,000.

The journalist then turns on the planners and lambastes them for refusing permission - though since the "hard up Devonians" only offered to secure the resale value of their homes at 25 per cent of the market price, we reckon the planners were right. There are plenty of good things about this project, and there is no doubt a need for it - but affordable?



Five houses for former farmers at Trevorva

SELF BUILD GROUPS MUSHROOM

This is how the Royal Town Planning Institute magazine, *Planning* (2 September 2005) chose to applaud one local authority's attempts to confront the rural housing crisis.

"Good use is being made of the planning system to deliver affordable housing, an inspection of N. Devon District Council found this week. The Audit Commission awarded the council one out of three stars for its effort to provide affordable housing. Although the council has good strategies for delivering affordable housing, it has yet to do so. The commission advises the authority to bring empty homes back into use."

With local authorities like North Devon leading the drive to provide affordable housing, it is no surprise that people are taking matters into their own hands, and self-build groups are popping up all over the place. In the Somerset/Dorset area a group of would be self-builders, several of them timber framers, met in October to establish whether there was any common ground upon which they could work together. The invitation to the meeting contained a questionnaire with questions such as "how much land do you want?" and "what level of co-operative facilities are you looking for." Chapter 7 is interested in hearing from such groups, and putting people in touch with them. Please see our free ads column, on pg. 47

PERMACULTURIST TAXED, NOBS EXEMPT

C7 founder member Judy Say wrote to us recently:

"Now we live in a place which is on a two acre plot I am not so keen on land taxes. We have discovered that there is potential capital gains tax liability on houses with gardens more than half an acre. But not if the size and character of the house means a larger garden is required for its reasonable enjoyment as a residence."

In other words, if you have a 33 roomed mansion -for example Melville House in Fife - the 15 acres that are "required for its reasonable enjoyment" come tax free: but if , like Judith, you have a run-down labourer's cottage on a permaculture plot, then you are liable for tax on the land.

The ruling that denies to smaller houses the exemption granted to Melville House is found in *Longson v Baker 2000*.

choice of this type of farming is no more an expression of merely personal preference than the choice of anyone who decides to pursue more conventional farming methods.”

In reaching this conclusion, the Inspector referred to the judgment in *Petter and Harris v SoSETR* which states:

“an... undoubtedly genuine application, by somebody living what amounts to subsistence farming, requires not a rigid application of criteria designed for commercial agriculture, but a practical adaptation of these criteria to secure the underlying purposes of the policy. I do not accept (the submission) that to do this is to introduce impermissible personal circumstances into the planning judgment.”

The Peter and Harris case revolved around the financial test, and it was influential in persuading the ministry to insert a sentence in PPS7 (Annex A para. 8) acknowledging that subsistence enterprises could be viable (see *C7 News 15*). Up till now it has been difficult to persuade Inspectors that this judgment may also be applied to the functional test, but Mr Wilkinson makes it clear that it can:

“The Council suggest that the implications of this judgment are taken into account in Annex A (specifically paragraph 8). This may well be so but paragraph 8 applies mainly to the financial test and does not, in any event, undermine the wording used in the judgment.”

This is extremely helpful for smallholders, because it is a rigid application of the criteria relating to functional need given in para. 4 of Annex A which is most frequently used by planners to refuse applications that they don't like the look of.

Rather bizarrely, in the middle of the appeal, the local authority's agricultural witness suddenly acknowledged that he had changed his mind, and he now thought that there was a functional need for one couple to live on the land, but not for two. The Inspector was so taken aback that he summoned an *in camera* meeting between the two counsels while the agricultural consultant was still in the witness box. The question then became: is there a need for both couples to live on the land, or could just one manage?



Beetroot Harvest at Fivepenny Farm

The Inspector considered that the occasional emergencies that might arise could be probably be dealt with by one couple, but not the day to day management of the enterprises:

“I cannot see such a situation [one family living off site while the other lived on site] being practicable or successful. The diversity and character of this enterprise is bound to give rise not only to the occasional emergency, but also to a constant stream of smaller problems. These would demand attention on an immediate, or at least urgent, basis throughout the working day, but also during the early morning or long into the evening. A single dwelling on the site could provide at least one person to meet such needs and sometimes, subject to the exigencies of child care, two, but I do not consider that this would be enough. I have no doubt that a family living in a nearby village could turn out to help in a real emergency. However, it would not be reasonable or practical to rely on them to do so for the minor but much more numerous daily crises inevitable in an enterprise as diverse as that involved here in such an early stage in its development.”

How lucky to tumble on an Inspector with a grasp of how smallholdings work (he did at one point say to a witness “you don't have to explain all the agricultural detail to me, I am a keen gardener”) and it is an additional bonus that he expresses himself so clearly. This is a very helpful decision and it should be studied by anyone putting in a similar application.

Appeal conducted by Chapter 7, with help from Travellers Advice Team, who instructed the barrister. The appeal decision can be obtained from Chapter 7.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - BUCKINGHAMSHIRE STYLE

Holywell Fields, an organic community and box scheme on rented land in Buckinghamshire, has collapsed, almost entirely because of the fierce opposition from the planners, described in *C7 News no 14*. Mike George writes:

“We are down to two people so we have decided to close the project down. We have already handed back the lease of the land and most of it is up for sale and will no doubt go for horse-culture. Last year the house and the land next door was sold to a race-horse enthusiast for £1.2 million. Our other neighbour has knocked down one old shed and built an indoor swimming pool, converted another barn and increased the property value from just over £1 million to just over £2 million. Meanwhile, the old farm hand died at 82, so his two-roomed log cabin now has to be removed - that was a condition of the permission to replace his caravan some 20 years ago (he'd lived in the caravan for about 15 years). At least they waited for him to die rather than perpetuate the Highland Clearances.”

TINKERS BUBBLE: LOW IMPACT MANSIONS

While the planners at Aylesbury Vale have stuck the knife in at every opportunity, South Somerset planning department seems to want to wash its hands of all responsibility for Tinkers Bubble. The community, which won a five year temporary permission for 15 small low impact residential structures in 1999, after a five year battle, put in an application for renewal early in 2004. The planning department did nothing for a year, and then suddenly, without referring to the committee, granted permission for 17 wooden buildings for 10 years, even though the applicants had only requested another five years.

Even more bizarrely, the planners relaxed the conditions, without consulting the applicants. They dropped the condition limiting the size of the buildings, and dropped another restricting construction primarily to on-site and local materials, even though both conditions had formed part of the application, and of the previous permission. The Bubbles now, apparently, have permission to build 17 huge timber or even half-timbered mansions on brick or concrete footings, though in theory these might have to be taken down in 10 years time.

Why have the planners been so slack at imposing conditions, when they fought

the application tooth and nail for the first five years? This is by no means the first time in our experience that the planners have declined to impose conditions that the applicants themselves submitted, after bitterly opposing the application in the first place. Indeed something similar happened at Fivepenny Farm (see above).

What it seems to boil down to is that planning officers don't actually care very much about the impact that any development has upon the countryside. All they care about, or all they can be bothered to attend to, is whether their policies based on location are being observed. Once a permission has been given in a certain location for a certain kind of development, they shrug their shoulders and lose interest - in which case it is hardly surprising if the development gradually progresses from a molehill to a mountain. That would explain why, when someone applies for a molehill, the planners treat it as though it were a mountain.

YOKE FARM

The "new age" traveller site at Yoke Farm in Herefordshire, has finally acquired planning permission at appeal, for all it pitches, after a battle lasting 12 years. The inspector ruled:

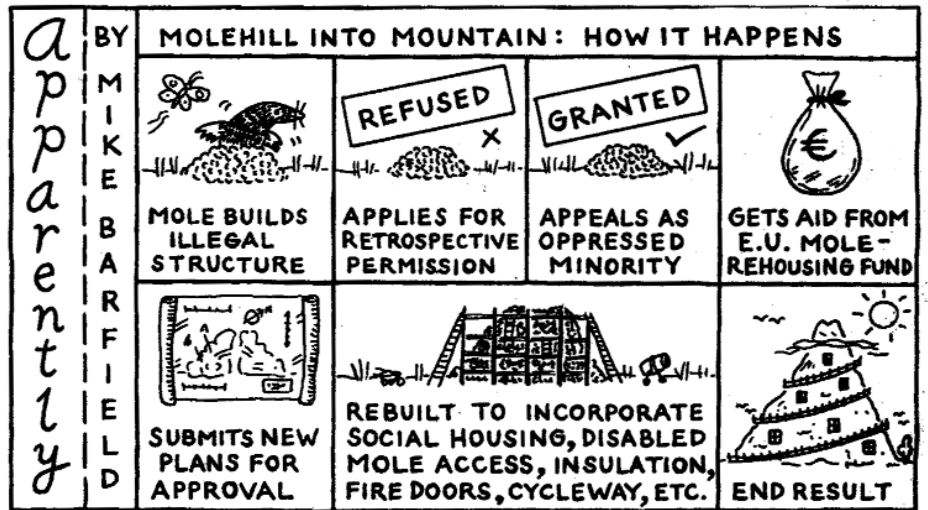
"There is evidence of a need for more Gypsy pitches as well as for Travellers who are not within the statutory definition. There are no realistic lawful alternatives for those currently residing on the site if the appeal is dismissed and the Council were successful in securing an injunction requiring the use to cease. In my view the closure of this site would inevitably lead to an increase in lawful camping elsewhere in the area. Compared to the consequences of such dispersed unauthorized camping, and both for the individuals concerned and for society generally, I consider that there are clear benefits in the continuation of the present use under the Appellant's management."

A sensible decision; what a pity it took 12 years for the planning system to reach it.

Cited in *TAT News*, journal of the Travellers Advice Team who ran the case.

WHEN IS A CARAVAN NOT A CARAVAN?

If you start to do up or extend a caravan, at some point it may cease to be a caravan, and become instead a structure requiring planning permission. At what point does this change in status occur?



Private Eye

Well that is a matter for the appeal Inspector's judgment.

- For example, Inspector David Harrison recently concluded that a mobile home was still a mobile home, and not a permanent structure, even though its wheels had been removed, an entirely new roof had been constructed, and some of its floor joists had been encased in concrete. Harrison argued that if the roof were dismantled the remaining structure could be moved, and therefore it should not be given a Certificate of Lawful Use as a building: **appeal dismissed.**

- On the other hand, Inspector Chris Jarvis decided that due to the passage of time a mobile home in the curtilage (enclosure) of a house could no longer be moved, and so it was a permanent structure which did not benefit from permitted development rights: **appeal dismissed.**

- And in a third appeal, Howard Russon ruled that a dwelling on a park home site, where the original chassis remained, but everything else had been replaced, was a new building requiring planning permission: **appeal dismissed.**

None of this is very helpful, and the only common thread that runs through all three decisions is the determination of the Inspectors to refuse the appeal.

But before you conclude from the above that Inspectors are unduly biased against caravans, you should take into account the recent decision of Ray Michael in respect of 28 static holiday caravans in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Dorset. The caravans were to be screened and strict rules imposed upon the use of washing lines. **Appeal allowed.**

Harrison: DCS 10036913 20 May 2005; Jarvis: DCS 53775873, 24 Sept 2004; Russon: DCS 52410478, 18 March 2005. Michael DCS 100037655 15 July.

AGRICULTURAL CARAVANS, YET AGAIN...

In *Chapter 7 News 16*, under the heading "How Many Times Do We Have to Tell You?", we noted that planning authorities were forever trying to claim that permission is required for non-residential caravans used for agriculture storage or rest-rooms, when the court case *Wealden v. Day 1987* makes it abundantly clear that it is not. We cited one appeal where an obstinate local authority was roundly defeated on this issue, and we have since learnt of another. In July, Inspector Clive Wilkinson (who was also responsible for the Fivepenny Farm decision above) concluded that a herd of 120 cows on a farm in Staffordshire needed supervision and that the caravan provided shelter and so did not require planning permission.

DCS 100037874, *Planning* 29 July 2005. *Wealden v Day* is also sometimes referred to as *Wealden v Secretary of State for the Environment (1987)*

...AND AGAIN

What is not quite so clear is the status of an agricultural caravan on a site where there is an enforcement notice on the residential use of a caravan. Mary H. in Gloucestershire, is due to appear in court on for not complying with an enforcement notice against residential use of a caravan, because, even though she has stopped living on site, a caravan still remains on her land for use as an agricultural store room. The result of this case could be important for other people in the same position, and we will report on it in the next issue.

LOW IMPACT LIVE/WORK UNITS

Chris Anscombe, the Inspector who allowed Caroline Barry's straw bale house in Somerset, (see *C7 News 16*) seems to be getting a lot of Chapter 7 type appeals.

In Spring he distinguished himself again at a Public Inquiry by allowing three “barn-style” live/work units to be constructed in a large garden in Dorset. The dwellings lay outside the settlement boundary, and involved development at only four houses to the hectare, instead of the recommended 26. But Anscombe considered that because the three new dwellings were not far from the development boundary, and involved low impact, energy efficient and renewable materials, the appeal should be allowed. This is potentially a useful decision for the considerable numbers of people who contact Chapter 7 with similar proposals in mind.

But a couple of months later Anscombe ruled against a mobile home on a 25 acre smallholding in Exmoor National Park, which had been given temporary permission in 1994. The husband had died unexpectedly and the wife apparently could not maintain a viable operation. Anscombe ruled that the impact of the home on the Park’s landscape was overriding and outweighed human rights considerations. Possibly, after a straw bale house, and low impact timber eco-homes, Anscombe was less than charmed by the ex-factory twin unit trailer-home? Or perhaps the appellant made a mistake by only lodging a written appeal? When personal circumstances might carry some weight, it is probably better to confront the Inspector face to face.

DCS 40557930 *Planning* 22 April; and DCS 100037389 *Planning* 24 June.

DON'T BUILD YOUR BUNGALOW INSIDE A BARN

A bungalow erected inside a barn on a farm in Surrey was refused a certificate of lawful use by an appeal Inspector, even though the bungalow had been fully constructed for more than four years. The Inspector ruled that the bungalow was not substantially completed until the barn walls were demolished only a year ago, because until then the windows and doors had not been able to fulfil their proper function.

DCS 100037359 *Planning* 17 June 2005

CERTIFICATE OF LAWFUL USE UPHELD, DESPITE LAPSE

A certificate of lawful use has been allowed for the occupation of a house covered by an agricultural occupancy condition, even though the property was vacant when the application was made. The inspector, Felix Bourne, citing *Nicholson v Secretary of State 1998*, noted that the condition had been breached for more than 10 years before the application was made and decided that the occupation was already immune from enforcement. This could be helpful for people who make the mistake of vacating a property not knowing that they might be eligible for a CLU, though we are not sure how it applies in cases where the breach of planning is something other than a breach of conditions.

DCS 100038326, *Planning*, 9 September

FIREWOOD NOT RURAL

Inspector Sean Slack has ruled that the processing of logs for firewood and the sale of Christmas trees did not require a rural location, and therefore should not be operated as a part-time activity on a smallholding in Berkshire. This decision conjures up the slightly absurd picture of tree trunks being trucked from the countryside onto urban industrial estates (and then back to wood-burners in country cottages) while IT workers commute to salubrious offices in diversified farmyards. Like so many unhelpful decisions, this was a written appeal.

DCS 100038324. *Planning* 2 September 2005

AGGREGATE MATTERS

Here are three appeal decisions which tell us quite a lot about the Government’s attitude towards stone quarrying.

Appeal No 1 A scheme in Scotland to extract 200,000 tonnes of dimension sandstone over 20 years was refused permission. This was building stone, not aggregate, used for restoration of old buildings, presumably mainly local, and in new-build projects. The recorder (Scottish Inspector) judged that the quarrying would have a detrimental affect upon local amenity, recreation and walkers.

Appeal No 2 The Welsh Assembly gave permission for the extraction of 14.8 million tonnes of crushed limestone aggregate - 74 times the quantity applied for in the previous appeal - from a 29 acre site in North Wales, because it would be more sustainable than importing it from elsewhere.

Appeal no 3 A farmer, using off-cuts from a stonemason’s yard and recycled aggregate from demolition sites was told that they came within the definition of “waste” and therefore required planning permission for disposal, even though the Inspector did not dispute that the material was put to various uses on the farm. If the farmer had bought un-recycled aggregate from the quarry in Appeal no 2, then he would not have needed planning permission, because it wouldn’t class as waste.

The message from these three appeals is that the less you re-use and recycle, and the more you extract and crush, the more likely you are to get permission. That these decisions were made in the name of sustainability by fairly sensible human beings only serves to confirm our suspicions that the UK planning system has a very warped idea of what



Herefordshire Advertiser

St Albans District Council remove a mobile home from Colney Heath Common. Peter Robb and Anthony Daniels had parked up there, and removed their trailer wheels, to protest at being evicted from their own land, Nuckies Farm, by the High Court.

sustainability means.

(1) DCS 100038047, Planning 12 August 2005 (2) DCS 55193284 Planning 25 February, 2005. (3) DCS 36155929 Planning 25 February 2005.

LLWYN PIOD: SUCCESS AT LAST

After about 35 years, the caravan and bender site at Llwyn Piod, in mid Wales, has been granted permanent planning permission at appeal. A considerable number of plot-holders who banded together to put in a joint application were given it, and so it is now unlikely that the remaining plots will be refused in future.

The Piod had been battling with the local authority for decades. On one occasion the council hired contractors and mounted a surprise early morning attack on the site in order to tow caravans away. However the residents were alerted in time and managed to capture one of the JCBs, holding it until lunch-time, when the contractors announced that they were knocking off because they'd only been hired for the morning.



The main question in the appeal revolves around the gypsy status of the various applicants. The inspector, T.J. Morgan, examines each of the applicants in turn - evidence was given on oath -

and finds that only one of them cannot benefit from gypsy status. Since many of these people carry out occupations which could equally well be interpreted as 'seasonal agricultural worker' or even 'commuter', the Inspector's conclusions are generous, and in this respect the decision letter will make very useful reading for anyone trying to establish their own gypsy status. It will be interesting to see how the Inspector's conclusions tally with the Government's revised planning policy for travellers which will probably have appeared by the time this magazine is published.

The appeal was also allowed because:

- whereas previous appeals had found harmful landscape impact, Morgan found that now there was none because trees had grown up around the site;
- the council's measurements concerning the highways access were inaccurate;
- eviction would have involved disproportionate interference with the occupants' human rights.

Congratulations to Clive Morton and the other residents of Llwyn Piod, and to the Travellers' Advice Team who, once again, conducted the appeal - Angus Murdoch (solicitor), Stephen Cottle (advocate), and Alison Heine (planning consultant). Planning Appeal APP/T6850/A/05/1179049, 24/11/05; copies of the decision letter available from Chapter 7.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Chapter 7 wishes to acknowledge the extremely useful planning appeal reports compiled on behalf of *Planning* magazine by DCS Ltd. The reference numbers at the end of many of the above appeals are DCS's and are there so that we can identify the appeal should a reader contact us requiring further information.

We are always keen to hear of any application, appeal or court results which may be of use to others.



Top right: from the outside it's an army tent; inside it's a wooden house (above). The dwelling belonging to Raine and Hug was given a certificate of lawfulness recently. Raine writes: "We bought a copy of Chapter 7's *DIY Planning Handbook* at the Big Green, and it turned out to be one of the luckiest breaks we ever had. Two months later we received a visit from our local enforcement officer. Without Chapter 7 and their publications, we would not have realized the rights we had. After years of living in vehicles and constant evictions, we might have just gone quietly thinking all was futile." The name of their holding is Bode's Well.

NIMBY SPIN

NOT IN OUR BACKYARD

by Anthony Jay, White Ladder Press, 2005

What would you think if The Masons' Arms banned stonemasons because they were dusty; or if the landlord of The Cricketers, lodged a complaint about ball games on the village green? Well, that hasn't happened so far; but a couple of years ago the newly installed landlord of the Lime Kiln Inn, near Somerton, Somerset, organized a campaign to stop the lime kiln in question reopening, and succeeded in getting the application turned down at appeal.

It now transpires that the landlord's success was due to an objectors' handbook written by a resident of the nearby village of Long Sutton, one Anthony Jay - co-writer of the TV Series *Yes Minister*. At least that is what Jay would like us to believe. Recently the book has been published, under the title *Not In Our Backyard*, and its sole case study - which runs through the book in 17 inset boxes - is none other than the campaign against the reopening of the same lime kiln and its blue lias limestone quarry.

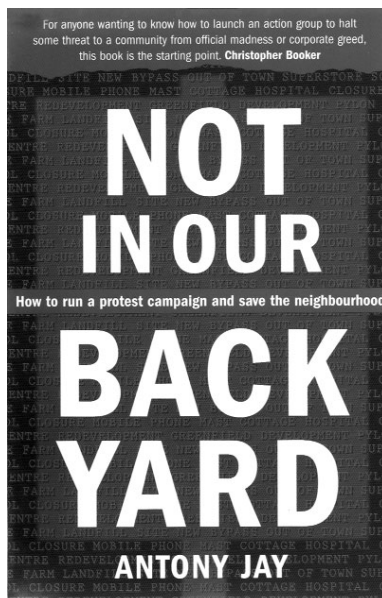
The book is sharp and witty and it contains plenty of clever advice for local groups fighting off developments. As one might expect, Jay understands the weak points of bureaucrats and dignitaries and knows how to take advantage of them through every kind of ingenious subterfuge. But after a while the book begins to impart a nasty taste to the mouth, derived from the fact that it is written for rather selfish people. This is how Jay defines them in his preface:

"A nimby is any citizen who tries to defend their home and their neighbourhood from plans which would destroy the view, pollute the environment, overload the transport network, upset the ecosystem and knock £50,000 off the value of their house. When it comes to our own backyard, we are all nimbies and every nimby deserves respect for standing up to corporate and government giants."

So who exactly were the corporate giants proposing a revival of the quarry and an up-to-date lime-kiln behind the eponymous pub? Lafarge Cement? Amey Roadstone? Not once in his book does Jay name the people behind the proposal, or take the trouble to outline their objectives. In fact, the scheme to revive the quarry, without extending it beyond its former size, was put forward by a partnership, formed for the purpose, called HL2, consisting of Stuart Black, a local developer turned green, and Mike Farey managing director. Black is also one of the directors of the Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development, a non-profitmaking organization which pioneered Bow Yard in Langport, a much applauded green housing project in the area

As a seasoned developer Black is phlegmatic about the collapse of the quarry project and the loss of the money he invested - you win some you lose some - but he says that it was a big blow for his partner: "Mike staked a lot in this project. He's up in Lincolnshire now working on a larger and more conventional quarry. The objectors crucified his business - and, frankly, his life."

Black procured the finance for the quarry and kiln project in order to provide a UK source of hydraulic lime, which, is stronger than normal building lime and provides a benign alternative to Portland cement - not least because its use entails 40 per cent fewer carbon emissions. Hydraulic lime was



used extensively in England for centuries, but became unobtainable in the UK after World War II when Portland cement took over. Today it is in great demand for conservation work and eco-building, but all supplies have to be trucked in from France.

"We thought we could win the appeal," says Stuart Black:

"Because the quarry would have made an important contribution towards the sustainability of the UK building industry. As well as using less energy to manufacture than Portland cement, hydraulic lime reabsorbs carbon as it cures. It allows houses to breathe, and you can reuse bricks and stones when the building is demolished, whereas if they are covered with Portland, they are only good for hardcore. And the reductions in transport from producing it in this

country would have been huge."

None of this is revealed by Jay in his book. He consistently refers to the product as "blue lias cement." This may be scientifically correct, but builders invariably call it "hydraulic lime", and Jay - who is as accomplished at spin as the civil servants he satirizes - does absolutely nothing to prevent the non-technical reader inferring that the stuff is just like Portland cement.

As for the transport benefits of producing lime in the UK, Jay doesn't give a toss. He trumpets that "the Action Committee's proof" - as if proof were needed - "that blue lias cement was readily available from France as a viable alternative supply was one of their killer arguments." One of the key tactics Jay advocates for his nimbies is to provide an "alternative plan" which will be "one of the pillars on which your case rests". In practice this means an alternative place, "a simpler site or route that they have missed" - somebody else's backyard.

In this case, that somebody else is people in France who will have to endure an extra quarry's worth of lime production because nimbies in Southern England are too effete to put up with it, even when the quarry is a mile from their home. On top of that, everybody en route between the French quarries and depots in England will have to live with extra juggernauts trundling the stuff past their door; and we all have to accept the additional toll on the global climate - all to preserve the bogus post-industrial tranquillity of an isolated pub on an A road, and the price of the objectors' houses in Long Sutton, built, more likely than not, out of stone and lime from the self same quarry.

Not In Our Backyard is a useful tool for anyone fighting a seriously harmful roadstone quarry or an airport extension - and good luck to them! But it will prove even more useful for ordinary people putting forward smaller, more sustainable ventures who need to understand the mentality and anticipate the tactics of small-minded neighbours intent upon preserving their own little bit of England at the expense of everyone else's - like the people whom this book is written by, about and for.

Simon Fairlie

Since this was written, we have been told of a pub called "The Traveller's Rest" which had a sign saying "No Gypsies", another called The Ploughmen, with a sign saying "No Muddy Boots", and a place called Boars Hill, where the residents complained about a small holder keeping pigs. Does anyone have any other examples?

LAND ADS

Land Ads is a place to post adverts and announcements which help to put people and places together. You can advertise here; • if you are looking for land for a sustainable or affordable project; • if you are looking for similar-minded people to acquire land with; • if you have land or a land-based project which needs people; • or if you are an organization or business which helps put people in touch with land-based opportunities. Offers of land for rent or for sale will be accepted if the land is offered below the market price in order to secure affordability or sustainable management. Inclusion of an advert is at the editors' discretion. Ads are free, but we certainly will not say no to a donation.

LAND ROOTS IN NOTTINGHAM

Land Roots is a group based in Nottingham looking to acquire land to be shared in common by people who don't necessarily want to move on permanently, but might want to spend some time there. They are planning to sell £250 shares which will entitle the owner to spend 28 days per year on a fairly large area of land, owned and managed in common.

We aim to organize and facilitate educational courses, and workshops on the land, that relate to all aspects of the aims and objectives. To offer people a home from home, a space to relax, to ground themselves, to explore, enjoy, and work on the land, knowing that they can return again and again and see the growth and progress of the land and community, inspiring a sense of belonging and longevity, without having the sole financial and practical responsibility of the land.

The group are in the process of establishing a community interest company, which will hopefully be launched by the end of the year, and are also planning to set up a web-site.

Contact Sharon:
coloursandcracks@hotmail.com

HOME SOUGHT FOR MOBILE HOME

We are a couple in our fifties running a small plants nursery in Bedfordshire and living in our mobile home on site. The local council have wanted us off for many years and we would like to move anyway, taking our home with us. Is there anyone out there who has two or three acres with permission for a caravan or mobile home? We have a little capital (I mean a little!) but are flexible over conditions. Our ideal area would be Dorset, but Somerset, East Devon, Herefordshire or Shropshire are all OK. We grow organically with a philosophy influenced by the late John Seymour. I can drive buses and coaches, and my wife Rosa is a qualified teacher

Please phone Roger and Rosa on 01462 814575 if you can help.

BUYING LAND TO SUB-DIVIDE INTO SMALLHOLDINGS

Couple with 2 children seek other individuals and families for acquisition of largish area of land and subdivision into independent, productive smallholdings. South west area. We ourselves need 15-20 acres of mainly grassland for animals and herbs. We're looking for families or individuals seeking plots of 3 to 30 acres who are into agriculture, livestock, horticulture, forestry etc, or else crafts that fit in well with a land-based set-up, e.g. mechanic, farrier/blacksmith, food processor, vet etc. We seek diggers, not dreamers: people who have a firm idea of what they want to do, but can't or won't pay pony paddock prices, so need to combine with others to buy and subdivide. We envisage independent smallholdings, but are open to co-operative projects, e.g. farm shop, heavy horse or tractor share, car pool etc.

Write to Box 1 at The Land.

ECO-VILLAGE IN BRISTOL GREEN BELT

Barrow mental hospital is a 200 acre wooded site in green belt land only 4 miles from the centre of Bristol. The NHS is selling it off, and outline permission has already been given for (yet another) Science Park. But an alternative Sustainable Initiative for Barrow is being put forward by a steering group of 8 local people, associated with forest of Avon Wood Products Co-operative. They are drawing up plans for an "Integrated Forest Community" comprising, among other things a low carbon eco-village, a permaculture approach to land management, and the retention of the Barrow Forest Farm Project for people recovering from mental illness, a charitable project currently operating on site which is threatened with closure.

Contact: www.sib.org.uk;
info@sib.org.uk

CONTACT POINT FOR SW SELF BUILDERS

Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development, based in Somerset are offering a service for prospective self-builders to get in touch with each other, possibly with a view to putting forward a cooperative self-build project in the future. STSD have already pioneered the successful development of the Bow Yard sustainable housing project at Langport, but are also interested in assisting more affordable self-build projects. They have access to development and planning expertise which may not be available to the average self-builder.

To register with STSD, please fill in their Self Build questionnaire, available from STSD, at the Old Town Hall, Bow Street, Langport, Somerset TA10 9PR, 01458 259400, www.sustainablehousing.org.uk

LOW IMPACT SETTLEMENT IN WEST WALES

Our intention is to demonstrate the viability of low impact development as a settlement model that has the potential to rejuvenate the Welsh rural landscape and economy. We envisage a new build low impact development of 30-40 innovative and earthy dwellings, centred around a village green. The dwellings will be sited on 1/2 acre plots that will allow residents to produce a proportion of their food/resource intake. There will be further agriculture/forestry plots enabling residents to explore the possibility of land based sustainable livelihoods. Beyond this small field network will be an area of wilderness. At the gateway to the site will be a visitor's centre, shop and hostel to welcome interested parties. Anyone choosing to live there will need to be committed to low impact living. However, beyond that there is no expectation for any "communal" input from residents. Like any other community there will be people from all walks of life at different points in their lives.

If you wish to support this project or see yourself as being one of the pioneers, check out our website www.lammas.org.uk

ECOLOGICAL LAND CO-OP

Upstart, a worker's co-op who specialize in getting other co-operatives off the ground, are in the early stages of setting up an Ecological Land Cooperative. The proposal is to attract up to £2 million initial investment through a share issue, which would be used to buy farmland to be subdivided and then rented or sold on to prospective smallholders, with some control over the land retained by the co-operative to ensure sustainability and affordability.

Investors would gain a modest return on their investment from the disposal of the land at something less than pony-paddock prices, and a better return if the co-op could secure planning permission for a cluster of smallholdings, prior to their rent or resale. The project is still in its infancy.

If you are interested, please contact Alex Laurie, 0845 458 1473.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY ASS

The Advisory Service for Squatters, currently celebrating its 30th birthday, has moved to new premises.

The contact details are now: ASS, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, tel: 0203 216 0099 0845 644 5814; fax 0203 216 0099; e-mail advice@squatter.org.uk

TRAVELLERS REST

The Robert Barton Trust, in Glastonbury, after a period of closure has opened its Silver Street Community Advice Centre and café for travellers and people who want to live in something other than bricks and mortar dwellings.

The centre will offer information and advice and courses on issues such as accommodation, homelessness, site provision, employment and benefit support on sites locally. It will also provide input to the local authority as, under the incoming legislation, it assumes responsibility for identifying suitable authorised sites.

We can be contacted on 01458 833797 or rbt@fish.co.uk

LONDON ACTIVISTS HEAD FOR THE STICKS

A discussion group has been formed for the many activists around London 'who at one time or another have expressed an interest in setting up a sustainable rural community.' Their first meeting was held on November 17.

You can join the group by sending a blank e-mail to communityforum-subscribe@yahoo.com, or check in at www.groups.yahoo.com/group/communityforum/



DIGGERS & DREAMERS 2006/07

• The ever-useful communitard's bible reappears once more in the handy small format. The centrepiece is an up-to-date directory of existing and embryonic communities in many parts of the UK - both urban and rural, secular and spiritual, wealthy and poverty-stricken! Other features include:

- A useful cross-index to help you find the community that matches your preferences
- Icons indicating how each community operates (on financial and sustainability levels)
- Listing of Networks and Support Organisations

Edited by Sarah Bunker, Chris Coates and Jonathan How. £6.50, 232pp paperback, b&w illustrations ISBN 0 9545757 1 7. Available from: www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk

LAND IN WEST COUNTRY

I am part-owner of a 9 acre site close to a village in the South West in a beautiful situation, overlooking a lake and bird sanctuary. Developers have offered to purchase an option on the site for market housing but if anything happens at all there, I would rather see something more ecological and affordable. Any proposals or ideas?

Contact The Land, Box 2.

MONKTON WYLD GREEN SCHOOL

A group of parents in Dorset would like to create a small school for 11 to 16 year olds with a curriculum centred around environmental awareness and social justice, with a strong emphasis on keeping youths in touch with the land.

The Green School hopes to prepare young adults for their GCSE's, but also aims to promote the practical, creative and spiritual development of the students. The curriculum will integrate basic studies in literacy, numeracy, social studies and science into projects which will also incorporate hands-on experience in practical skills and provide tangible benefits, such as organic food for the lunches and building projects for the school-toilets) and maintaining the facilities. The Green School will be based at Monkton Wyld Court community, in Dorset. We are looking for potential students, people to help with fundraising, etc.. and teachers.

Contact Jyoti Fernandes on 01297 560 755 or email: jyoti@tlio.org.uk if you are interested.

FORDHALL FARM

Fordhall Farm in Shropshire was one of the first registered organic farms in the UK, and is well known as the farm where Arthur Hollins developed his 'foggage' system of farming, involving wintering cattle outside and maintaining grass cover on fields throughout the winter. Arthur Hollins died in January 2005 and, as a result of various ill-advised financial deals, the farm is now facing a takeover by aggressive developers.

To save the farm, Hollins' children, Charlotte and Ben are attempting to raise a million pounds through a Community Farm Land Trust, in which individuals can buy non-profit making shares, the cheapest being £50, and so have a say in how the farm is run. The trust is run by the board of directors includes a seat for Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and one for those who work Fordhall, the rest being occupied by shareholders. It is, in essence, a model for creating a sustainable, community orientated mode of farming.

For more information contact: project@fordhallfarm.com; or see www.fordhallfarm.com or www.communitylandtrust.org.uk

THE VILLAGE FARMS NETWORK

The Village Farms Network has been set up to encourage the re-establishment of small scale village farms or smallholdings. By facilitating the re-invigoration of local, ecologically sound land based activities, the aim is to create employment and increase the supply of fresh seasonal products available to local people.

To do this the Village Farms Network is attempting to address difficulties with access to land and planning frameworks. The aim is to establish an acceptable planning mechanism through which Village Farms will be given permission using special development orders.

Currently the Village Farms Network is working with the Countryside Restoration Trust on a pioneer project at May Fields, in Norfolk which it is hoped will provide an innovative and durable model for more widespread adoption. The Countryside Restoration Trust hopes to be looking for tenants for this 40 acre organic smallholding in 2006.

For more information contact Simon Sagers by email - simon@livingcountryside.org.uk



THE COUNTRYSIDE RESTORATION TRUST
CREATING A LIVING AND WORKING COUNTRYSIDE

CAMPAIGNS

COME PIE WITH ME ...

Many readers will have played a part in the road protests of the early 1990s which forced the Tory government to scrap its grandiose multi-billion pound proposals to cover the country in yet more bypasses and dual carriageways. By the mid 1990s it was widely accepted by all political parties that road-building did nothing except create the need for everybody to drive further.

When Labour came to power in 1997 they pledged to reduce road construction to a minimum and to find ways to reduce car traffic. But as most people now realise, Labour are no more sensible than the Tories, just more duplicitous. After years of weaseling from a succession of Labour transport ministers, *Transport Times* reported on 9 September: "Alastair Darling bluntly made it clear this week that he has shifted government policy to accommodate traffic growth." Labour now anticipate a 40 per cent increase in traffic by 2025, and plan to spend £30 billion pounds on road construction in the next five years. There are currently about 200 proposed road schemes in the offing.

What a time for Darling to come clean! - right after hurricane Katrina, with Bush in disgrace, petrol pushing \$70 a barrel, and everyone worried about climate change. However the oil economy isn't going to collapse overnight, and it looks as though we are going to have to work a bit to put Darling in his place. Tiresome though it may be for those of us now entering into the dignity of middle age, we might have to fish out the D-locks from under the stairs to see off this silly resurgence of discredited policies with a bit of well-targeted direct action.

Co-ordinating the new wave of anti-road campaigns is an outfit called Road Block, not entirely unconnected with Road Alert!, which orchestrated much of the 1990s action. Keeping local community groups in touch and working together as a united front was crucial to the success of the 1990s battles. Road Block activists have already deftly custard-pied Alastair Darling and Jeremy Clarkson (see photo), and organized a lock-on of bulldozers at the Linslade bypass in Buckinghamshire. Road Block produce an e-bulletin every two weeks reporting developments at locations under threat around the country.

If you don't want to see the victories of the 1990s frittered away - or if you missed out on the action first time round - clock into Road Block.

www.roadblock.org.uk; office @roadblock.org.uk



Adrian Arbib

SCOTTISH ECOVILLAGES PETITION

An on-line petition has been mounted to persuade the Scottish parliament to introduce a planning policy allowing for ecovillages. The chances of this happening in Scotland (which already has national planning policies allowing for low impact development andcrofting) are rather higher than in England. To sign the petition go to:

http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/view_petition.asp?PetitionID=73, but if you are to late you can find out more about the initiative from Eurig Scandrett, Leuchie North Lodge, North Berwick, E Lothian EH39 5NT; eurigscandrett@rediffmail.com

TACKY KITCHENS FOR ALL

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in all good faith presumably, has set a target to ensure "that all social housing meets standards of decency by 2010" - as measured by the Decent Homes Standards. A home does not meet these standards if it has a number of deficiencies, for example it lacks "a reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less)" or "an appropriately located bathroom and WC".

These standards are all well and good, until they are used to remove people from their homes when they don't want to go. This is precisely what is happening to 30 tenants of Brent Community Housing co-op in Allington Road, South Kilburn, because their homes don't meet the standard. Brent Council is planning to evict them in November 2005.

To find out more or to give them your support contact www.allingtonroadsos.org The Decent Homes Standard can be found on www.odpm.gov.uk

SAVE CHRISTIANA

Christiana, Europe's oldest surviving autonomous zone, near Copenhagen, is once again under threat. The present right wing government in Denmark is trying to close it down for urban renewal. The inhabitants say that they do not want to

be “renewed” and that anyway, in the course of the last 35 years they have proved themselves perfectly capable of renewing the place themselves (The drive, some years ago, to get rid of the smack dealers who were running the place downhill, was considerably more successful than most mainstream inner city attempts to get rid of heroin). They want to preserve Christiana as an independent area which can be experienced by people from all over the world, and are asking people to sign their petition and forward it to friends.

www.Christiana.org/~befri/gl.php3

SMALLHOLDERS JAILED BY SHELL

Last year five smallholders in Rosspport, co Mayo, were sent to prison for 94 days for defying a court order taken out by Shell ordering they cease protesting against a controversial gas pipeline being built on their land.

The entire Corrib gas field, off the coast of Ireland, has been handed over by the Irish government to Shell who are piping the gas to the only land based gas refinery in the world, across unstable and environmentally sensitive bog, and within 70 metres of the nearest housing. Community protests and a direct action camp have managed to delay construction of the pipeline.

Campaign website: <http://www.corribsos.com/> **Camp contact:** rossportsolidaritycamp@gmail.com **Phone:** 097 20944 or 086 3201612; <http://www.struggle.ws/rsc/>

BIG GREEN GATHERING

The BGG for 2006 is scheduled for the first week in August at the same place as last year. However, the festival made a loss of around £60,000 last year, and need to find money to pay this off. This is the first time they have made a loss; every previous BGG was bigger than the last but 2005 saw a drop in tickets sold from 14,500 to around 13,500. Around 14,000 sales were required to break even.

The organisers say that if everybody who bought a ticket paid an extra £5, that would clear the debt. More to the point perhaps, if the 5,000 people who got free tickets as workers, contributors or hangers on paid £12 each, that would clear the debt as well.

The organisers welcome donations, which will be refunded if the financial situation is not resolved. They are also offering non-profit shares in the BGG for £20, which entitle you to a vote at the AGM. Again, these will not be processed unless the company continues.

Send cheques, made payable to the Big Green Gathering Co Ltd, to BGG, 10 St John's Square, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 9LJ; and don't forget to supply your address.

LAND SECURITY BILL

A group of people are examining the potential for a Land Security Bill with the ultimate aim of securing areas of land in the UK for settlement somewhat on the lines of the Crofting area in Scotland. An initial draft outline of the Bill proposes that it should authorize:

1. The setting up of regional land commissions, with the task of identifying suitable areas of land for resettlement and land-based activity.

2. The setting up of a land policy working-group, to research and assess land-resettlement schemes, and identify models of

best practice.

3. Surveying demand and listing and prioritizing individuals in various degrees of housing need to take part in the land resettlement programme and the setting up of co-operative structures empowered to own and manage land.

4. Transfer of freehold from the crown estates to the new co-operatives, adopting similar rules of succession and land management to those used in the Crofting Acts.

Anyone interested in taking this initiative further contact Mark Brown, 0208 3578 504, mark@tlio.org.uk

TESCOPOLY

A new alliance of organisations has launched a campaign to highlight Tesco's stranglehold on the economy. Tesco now controls over 30% of the grocery market in the UK, and is rapidly expanding into other sectors.

Its phenomenal success is partly based on trading practices that are having serious consequences for suppliers, farmers, overseas workers, local shops and the environment. Whilst all the big UK supermarkets have been criticised for such practices, Tesco is repeatedly identified by farmers, suppliers, local councillors and local campaigners as the worse offender, and this probably explains why it is the most successful.

Alliance members include a wide range of interest groups diverse groups embracing a range of issues from homeworkers' rights to the death of our high streets. eg Friends of the Earth, the GMB Union, the Small and Family Farms Alliance, Banana Link, New Economics Foundation, Women Working Worldwide, the National Group on Homeworking and War on Want.

Contact info@tescopoly.org; www.tescopoly.org

Corporate Watch
'the earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses'

INSIDE THE OCTOBER/NOVEMBER ISSUE

- **Corporate Technologies**
when progress meets profits
- **QinetiQ**
military research in a corporate world
- **Carbon Neutral**
when trees are not the solution
- **School Dinners**
feeding our children the corporate way

WRITE TO CORPORATE WATCH
CW is publishing 'letters to the editor' in upcoming issues!
Get writing today!

To subscribe contact:
01865 791 391
mail@corporatewatch.org
www.corporatewatch.org

THE LAND BOOKSHOP ~ The Potato Store, Flaxdrayton Farm, S. Petherton, Somerset, TA13 5LR

01460 249 204 ~ chapter7@tlio.org.uk (make cheques payable to "The Land".)

The following are available from The Land. Prices include p&p.

- **Cotters and Squatters**, by Colin Ward, Five Leaves published by Jon Carpenter, 2002. *A study of the 'one night house' and other squatter houses throughout British history.* £11.00
- **Arcadia for All**, by Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward, Five Leaves, 2004 *The only history of the plotlands. 'The best book ever written on the UK planning system, you will never look at Peacehaven or Basildon in the same light again.'* £15.00
- **Gerrard Winstanley and the Republic of Heaven**, by David Boulton, Dales Historical Monographs, 1999. *An account of Winstanley's life and the events surrounding the Diggers squat at St George's Hill* £10.00
- **Homework**, by Lloyd Kahn £17.50
By far the best collection of low impact buildings yet. 1100 mostly colour photos, 300 line drawings.
- **A Rough Guide to the Farming Crisis**, by Kathryn Tulip and Lucy Michael, Corporate Watch. £3.00
- **A Treatise on Hemp**, by M. Marcandier, facsimile 1764 edition edited and published by John Hanson, 1996. *How to grow and process hemp, and why its production is beneficial for rural economies. We have this by accident, rather than design, but it's a lovely little book.* £7.00

CHAPTER 7 PUBLICATIONS

Chapter 7 lobbies government for planning policies which provide for low income people seeking low impact opportunities in the countryside, and gives free planning advice to such people. Our name comes from Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 (the international agreement on sustainable development formulated at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit), which states that 'access to land resources is an essential component of low impact lifestyles.'

- **Sustainable Homes and Livelihoods in the Countryside** £3.00
Chapter 7's most recent report advocating changes to planning policy in the countryside. 52 pages
- **Planning for Sustainable Woodlands**, Lucy Nichol, Simon Fairlie, Ben Law and Russell Rowley, £2.50
- **Permaculture - A New Approach for Rural Planning**, Rob Hopkins, 1996 £8.50
A study of the success or failure of various different permaculture projects in acquiring planning permission.
- **How to get Planning Permission to Live on the Land** £7.50
Two page essay, by Mike Fisher, together with copies of his and Mandy Goddards' successful applications for planning permission on their horticultural holdings.

DIY PLANNING HANDBOOK

Chapter 7's 90 page guide to the planning system for smallholders, caravan dwellers and low impact folk is available at £11 to subscribers of The Land, or £15 to non-subscribers, including postage. It includes briefings on:

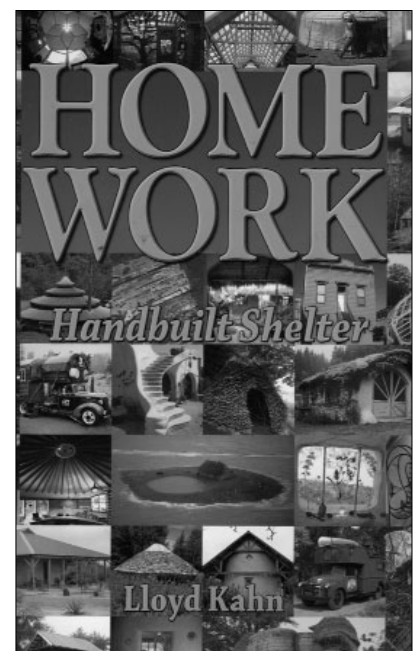
Introduction to the Mysteries of the Planning System - Should I Move on First or Apply First? - Putting in a Planning Application - Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Dwellings - Permitted Development Rights - Caravans - Certificates of Lawful Use: The Four and Ten Year Rules - Appeals - Helpful Appeal Decisions - The Human Rights Act - Enforcement - Consultancy and Advice - Index and Glossary

PLANNING ADVICE AND LIBRARY

Chapter 7 provides free planning advice on the telephone for smallholders, caravan dwellers and other low impact and low income people with planning problems. We have an extensive library of planning law and policy documents, appeal decisions and case law, which we can photocopy at around 12 to 20 pence per page. Please phone us, preferably on a Thursday, on 01460 249 204.

HOMEWORK by Lloyd Kahn.

The latest offering from the stable that produced *The Whole Earth Catalogue, the Domebooks, Shelter and How Buildings Learn* contains over 1100 mainly colour photos and 300 line drawings of inspired, earth friendly dwellings built either by hippies or by peasants. You can buy this feast of low impact architectural innovation from us for the price of an Indian meal.





Front and back cover illustrations by Woody Guthrie, from *Woody Guthrie Artworks* by Steven Brower and Nora Guthrie. Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 300 Park Avenue South, NY 10010, www.rizzoliusa.com
The front cover picture is from *Bound for Glory*, Woody Guthrie's autobiography; the illustration above shows a house demolished by a cyclone.