ILL FARES THE LAND?

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL FOOD SELF SUFFICIENCY IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

1880 – 1939

David William HARGREAVES

M.Phil

SCHOOL OF LIFE SCIENCES,

Department of Archaeological and Environmental Science

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David William Hargreaves

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Abstract

After the repeal of the Corn Laws ended the policy of protectionism which had enabled Britain to feed herself from within her own resources, free trade resulted in domestic food production constituting only 30% of the British diet. This study looks at the political discourse from 1880 to 1939 when the ‘empty countryside’ became a symbol of agricultural decline. Emerging radical and socialist narratives put forward approaches for rural regeneration and increased food production. Other narratives suggested that agricultural decline was one manifestation of national decline whereby a self sufficient and proud nation was being betrayed by Capitalism. Both Left and Right offered up the prospect of different solutions predicated upon shared perceptions of ‘Englishness.’ The experience of Irish famine failed to inform political action or policy making.

The study notes the importance of War upon the development of food policy. Increasingly, the State joined forces with the NFU in a corporate endeavour which sought to manage, rather than increase, food

production and created structures which became increasingly important in the context of rearmament. Increased food production was rejected upon defence grounds in that free trade and a navy were seen as appropriate safeguards. Those countries which sought to follow self sufficiency – or autarky – are portrayed as warlike in their intentions; by 1939 all mainstream political parties rejected the notion of artificially increased food production.

Those who continued to press for increased food production concentrated either upon earlier pre Capitalist societies or were attracted by Fascism and strong leadership. After such searches became increasingly problematic there was emphasis upon the soil, with the adoption of an approach which was both practical and mystical.

Acknowledgement

This work would not have been possible without the resources and the staff of the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, an institution which has a collection ‘capturing the stories and struggles of ordinary people’s efforts to improve their world.’ The Library was founded by Ruth and Eddie Frow; both lifelong Socialists who took more interest in food policy than many on the Left, possibly on account of Eddie having been born in 1906 as a child of tenant farmers in Lincolnshire. The collection in Salford was enhanced by the acquisition of some of the libraries of Michael Barratt Brown and Eric Heffer, both people who appreciated the value of lifelong learning and self improvement.

My studies would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of George Sheeran and Paul Jennings of the University of Bradford and formerly members of staff in SLED (School of Lifelong Education and Development) which sadly closed in 2012. Universities may feel that they no longer need enthusiastic adult learners, but we’ll be back.

And, above all, thank you Janet.

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Introduction

This work examines sixty years of food self sufficiency in political discourse. The main focus of this work is to allow those who have advocated food self sufficiency to speak and to foreground the books, pamphlets and speeches written between 1880 and 1939 and place them in the wider political discourse. Many of the voices presented in this work have been forgotten or, critically, put forward reasoned arguments for growing more food in this country at times when the supply of food from the rest of the world was taken for granted. Clearly, the Second World War is most often associated with the notion of self sufficiency through ‘Dig for Victory.’ However, that notion is problematic given that it does not take into account the extent to which the country had become dependent upon imported food or the fact that such dependency might have been seen as being in the national interest. For sixty years a number of people and organisations argued that dependency upon imported food either imperilled the nation or was symptomatic of national, imperial or moral decline.

The first chapter moves outside of the chosen time frame of 1880 – 1939 in order to ascertain the extent to which successive Irish famines, but especially the major one from 1845 onwards influenced the political discourse. Whilst the brief treatment of the *politics* of the famine does

not do justice to the scale of the tragedy, any work which seeks to examine food self sufficiency must identify the extent to which such a famine was important in having influenced the view of food provision.

In order to locate those voices, the principal focus of the work has been to carry out extensive archival research. This task has been made easier by the comprehensive collection housed at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford at http://www.wcml. The material in Salford is complemented by the nearby Manchester resources, the Co-operative archive at www.archive.coop/ and the People's History Museum at www.phm.org.uk.

Locally, the West Yorkshire Archive Service branches in Halifax and Huddersfield (http://www.archives.wyjs.org.uk/) have yielded important background information.

The works for non violent social change collected by the Commonweal Collection at the University of Bradford, http://www.bradford.ac.uk/library/libraries-and-collections/commonweal-collection/ show the breadth of thinking that has taken place on food and society.

More generally, the study presents the voices of those engaged in Parliamentary Debate as recorded in Hansard at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/ or through local and national newspapers at http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/19th-century-british-library-newspapers.aspx or

through significant material on organic gardening and health gathered together at http://www.soilandhealth.org/index.html.

There are some excellent agricultural histories of this period notably that of *English Farming Past and Present* by Lord Ernle (1936), a respected historian, agricultural expert, politician and administrator whose work has the mark of authority. Similarly, the many works of C.S. Orwin and E.H. Whetham cover the technical and scientific changes in agriculture in some detail, and explain how successive Governments have endeavoured to influence agricultural policy and practice. Two particular works by Whetham, the *Agrarian History of England and Wales 1914* – 1939 (1978) and *The Economic Background to Agricultural Policy* (1960) have been essential to an understanding of the period. Works such as *History of British Agriculture* by Orwin and Whetham (1964) also sought to challenge the underlying assumptions contained in such an authority as Lord Ernle. The 'official' histories of the Second World War – *Agriculture* by K.A.H. Murray (1975) and *Food: the Growth of Policy* by R.J. Hammond (1951) – contain important summaries of the events which shaped food policy and production in wartime. Both make explicit the close links between the brief period of food control in the last year of the First World War and the comprehensive approach of the Second World War. The politics of agriculture are well covered in *The State and the Farmer* by Self and Storing (1962) but the authors concentrate more upon the 1947 Agriculture Act and beyond rather than the formative period covered here. *British Agriculture 1875 – 1914* by Perry (1973) offers a different

interpretation of the Great Depression in that he describes not decline, but a period of re-adjustment from which a leaner domestic agriculture emerges.

The extent to which that adjustment has enabled Britain to feed herself in wartime is well recorded by Barnett in *British Food Policy during the First World War* (1985) and much of the output of Dewey, especially *British Agriculture in the First World War.* (1989)This emphasis upon wartime has benefited from the recent international perspective offered by Collingham in the 2011 work *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food.* The work of Martin, *The Development of Modern Agriculture: British Farming since 1931* (1967) is authoritative in exploring the relationships between agriculture and the political discourse and is detailed and perceptive about the 1930's.

Harris' biography of William Beveridge (1977) and *Food* by Fielding (1923)both express the degree to which administrators felt that the return to market conditions after 1919 could only be seen as a missed opportunity to both enhance diet and work towards a fairer society. Middleton offers a more detached perspective in *Food Production in War* an officially endorsed work appearing in 1923.

These works place food production and distribution in the broader political context and the 2012 work of Edgerton –*Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources and Experts in the* Second *World War* builds upon that by emphasising the degree to which food policy was integral to rearmament and war preparation from 1935 onwards. Equally, the

2001 work of Wilt – *Food for War: Agriculture and rearmament in Britain before the Second World War* – casts a different light on the growth of State intervention in agriculture in the 1930's. In a complementary approach, *The First World War: an agrarian interpretation* by Offer (1989) emphasises the extent to which the 'scramble for Africa' and other colonial adventures were important contributory factors in the lead up to the conflict. Chapter 3 of this study, along with a more detailed appendix, looks at the 1905 *Royal Commission on Food and Raw Materials in Time of War*. This Commission was set up on the back of the perceived humiliation of the Boer War and the rise of German naval power and dismissed any possibility of increased domestic food production as being essentially unpatriotic, given that it would cast doubt upon the ability of the British Navy to defend the country. The campaign for this Commission to be set up and the critique of the outcome was well covered by publications as diverse as *The North American Review*, *Transactions of the Royal History Society* and, above all, *the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Journal.* Indeed, articles in the *Journal of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural History Review, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* and *Rural History* have all offered up detailed work of relevance to this study.

The degree to which the experience of famine in Ireland has shaped political perceptions of food security has been assisted by the impressive works of *Famine, Land and Politics* (1999) by Gray and *Black '47 and Beyond* (1999) by O'Grada in addition to the detailed work of *The Great Hunger* (1962) by Woodham Smith. It is worth noting

that whilst historians marked the 150th. anniversary of the famine in 1999 it received rather less attention in political circles.

However, if the question of domestic food self sufficiency had already been covered by the many books and journal articles produced then, arguably, there would have been no need for a study such as this. The truth is that many of the proponents of food self sufficiency were considered to be on the margins in both political and agricultural circles. In 1939 the NFU expressed the view that no 'sensible' person had ever advocated such an approach.

In his work *English History 1914 – 1945* A.J.P. Taylor wrote that 'agriculture provided a strange story, in which emotion played as much part as economics' (1965:341) before concluding that the interwar years did see moves towards food self sufficiency. In general histories of the period, agriculture is often little more than a footnote, although the work of Hobsbawm, particularly *The Age of Extremes 1914 – 1991*(1994) and *Industry and Empire* (1990) ensures that agriculture is placed in the context of a developing market economy.

If agriculture itself is marginalised then it is hardly surprising that the voices of those advocating food self sufficiency are seldom heard. *The Origins of the Organic Movement* by Conford (2001) and *Early Green Politics. Back to the Land and Socialism in Britain 1880 – 1900* by Gould (1988) both provide excellent introductions to those who put forward visions of England based either on the merits of past societies or the creation of future societies based upon self sufficiency.

The inspirational work of William Morris, Edward Carpenter and Peter Kropotkin sits alongside a whole range of pamphlets and election material in which working people have argued for a future where human fulfilment might be best achieved not just by Socialism but by alternative forms of society which have food production at the core. Whilst the Fabian Society and the Labour Party sought to marginalise such characters in favour of dour Managerialism and the joys of managed Capitalism, the Independent Labour Party, *The Clarion* and other groups saw the possibilities of more local and democratic forms of society with enhanced appreciations of human dignity. Increasingly, the vision of a self sufficient Britain came to be associated with the Radical Right, particularly the works of Christopher Turnor, who moved from being a mainstream Conservative in works such as *Land Problems and National Welfare* in 1911 to an advocate of the use of force to defend the countryside in 1923 in W*here are We Going? A manifesto to all who live on or by the land of England.* He also went on to write appreciations of Fascist agriculture, especially in Italy, and to call for an end to 'usury' and the return of the peasantry in his 1939 work *Yeoman Calling.*

The study will also explore the complex links between the development of the Organic movement, the Radical Right and Fascism in the 1930's. The work of Eve Balfour has considerable contemporary resonance in her appreciation of the centrality of food, as illustrated by two extracts from *The Living Soil* first published in 1943.

‘Agriculture must be looked upon as one of the health services, in fact the primary health service’ and, ‘If fresh food is necessary to health in man and beast, then that food must be provided not only from our own soil but as near as possible to the sources of consumption.’ (1943:147)

These tenets are very much at the heart of much contemporary thinking on issues of Local Food and at the heart of the Transition Town movement, well articulated in works such as *Local Food: How to Make it Happen in Your Community (*Pinkerton and Hopkins 2009) and *The Transition Handbook.* (Hopkins 2008) However, the supposedly ‘non political’ stances of such voices in the 1930’s seemed drawn to the attractions of Fascism or the assumption of the need for the leadership by ‘strong men.’ Conford (2001) touches upon such links but Copsey and Renton in *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (2005) Griffiths (1983) in *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany* and Webber in *The Ideology of the British Right 1918 – 1939* (1986) cast considerable doubts upon the political ‘naivety’ of many of the advocates of food self sufficiency. Stephen Dorril’s comprehensive work on Oswald Mosley – *Blackshirt* **–** (2007) identifies the contradictions in the bringing together of the need for a ‘modernised’ agriculture with ‘traditional’ English values. It is the career of Jorian Jenks which epitomised many of the contradictions in the proponents of food self sufficiency. The author of an important work on health and organics in 1959 – *The Stuff Man’s made Of. The Positive Approach to Health Through Nutrition* – founder member of the Soil Association and Journal Editor for many years but also the author

of the British Union of Fascists agricultural policy – *The Land and the People* – in 1937. One might say that for most of the Right, the founders of the Organic Movement and for food policy generally, what a difference the war makes.

In the interwar years both the main political parties adopted pragmatic approaches, with the development of the Conservative Party being well recorded in Andrew Cooper's *British Agricultural Policy 1912 – 1936: a study in conservative politics* (1989). For Labour, it is necessary to look at both the succession of political pamphlets setting out their aspirations and the continuing adoption of Land Nationalisation as the primary policy for agriculture. However, this needs to be compared to the establishment of Producer Cartels and the more 'businesslike' approach adopted by the party when in office. Such changes are well chronicled by Tom Williams, who became the Agriculture Minister in 1945, and Christopher Addison in the works *The Autobiography of Lord Williams of Barnburgh: Digging for Victory* (1965) and *A Policy for British Agriculture* (1939). Whilst not all on the Right were attracted to continental Fascism it is worth noting the preferences for strong or 'natural' leadership contained in the works of Viscount Lymington[1] such as *Horn, Hoof and Corn the Future of British Agriculture* in 1932 or Lord Northbourne in *Look to the Land* in 1940.

Although Kropotkin was denounced by those who argued for 'State Socialism' his detailed knowledge of agricultural production and his

[1] Earlier Gerald Wallop & then Earl of Portsmouth

insistence upon the maximisation of output through the application of scientific knowledge meant that virtually all the adherents of food self sufficiency acknowledged a debt to him. Works such as t*he Conquest of Bread, Fields, Factories and Workshops* and *Agriculture* (1913, 1968 and 1896) constituted a body of knowledge which left little doubt that this country could, easily, feed itself to a high standard if it possessed the will to do so. However, Kropotkin's solution of a local, democratically controlled society based upon meeting human needs above all, gained little following on the Left. The consequence of that is the Left remained, in the words of G.D.H. Cole, like 'a fish out of water' (1980:60) when it came to agricultural matters. In addition, self sufficiency predominantly became a narrative about 'traditional' values rather than feeding people. This is reflected by the choice of the title of *Ill Fares the Land?* This poem by Oliver Goldsmith contained imagery of an 'empty' countryside and a dispossessed peasantry which, as this work shows, remained part of the political discourse until 1939.

The conception of food policy today owes much to works such as *Food Policy Old and New*[2]*, Food Policy. Integrating Health, Environment and Society* (Lang T. Barling D. and Caraher M. 2009) and *Plenty and Want* written by John Burnett in 1989.

Lang *et al.* point out the extent to which food policy emerged, 'in a serious and consistent way'[3] from the 1970's and is now a considered

[2] Maxwell S. & Slater R. *Development Policy Review* Vol. 21 Issue 5 -6 September 2003. pp. 531 - 553
[3] Above p.27

discourse. Recent works such as *Eat Your Heart Out* by Felicity Lawrence (2008) and *Hungry City*[4] by Carolyn Steel (2009) have examined the centrality of food to modern society. This built upon the earlier works such as *Ill Fares the Land* by Susan George which examined food hegemony in 1990.

For this country, much of the current discourse is based upon the experiences of the Second World War, the 1947 Agriculture Act, and membership of the European Union and questions of food security and energy and water supplies.

This work examines the work of those who argued for greater food self sufficiency from the 'Great Depression' through to 1939, their relationship to mainstream political and agricultural discourses and the tentative beginnings of food policy from 1935 onwards. There are five specific aims of the work;

To ensure that all voices are represented and their relationship to mainstream political discourse fully explored and analysed.

To explore the detailed arguments offered by the advocates of food self sufficiency.

To evaluate the extent to which the Irish famine influenced the political discourse in the period under study.

[4] Both works 2008.

To critically analyse the strategies of the main Political parties in the interwar period in respect to agricultural policy and managed Capitalism.

To determine the degree to which War has been an important factor of food policy.

This work rests upon considerable archival and other research in order to uncover the voices of those who advocated food self sufficiency in the period 1880 – 1939.

It is crucial to ensure that the books, speeches, pamphlets and news reports which this work presents are analysed in the specific social political and cultural conditions which prevailed at the time.

Many of those who argued for food self sufficiency took up positions in which they argued for fundamental changes in the organisation and priorities of the society in which they lived. They were individuals and organisations that saw the question of the country producing either all or most of the food required for the population as being of such fundamental importance that they produced detailed plans for how that might be achieved. Most of those perspectives saw the realisation of food self sufficiency as only being possible through the creation of radically different forms of society.

This made most of them marginal both at the time and in subsequent historical and political analyses. However, as E.P. Thompson noted, it is often the case that ‘the blind alleys, the lost causes and the losers

themselves are forgotten' (1991:12.)The overall methodology of this work, therefore, is to foreground those voices but also to ensure that sufficient detailed work has been undertaken in order to place them into their political, social and cultural contexts.

Chapter One

‘Everyone Forgets Ireland.’[5]

The purpose of this Chapter is to identify the extent to which the experience of famine in Ireland, and particularly that of 1846 onwards, influenced political discourse on food self sufficiency.

By virtue of the Act of Union of 1801 Ireland became the ‘responsibility’ of the Westminster Parliament and was in a free trade relationship with England. Woodham Smith (1962:16) commented that the primary object of Union was ‘not to assist and improve Ireland but to bring her more completely into subjection.’ The possible use of Ireland by Napoleon as a ‘back door’ into England and the supposed constant threat of rebellion served as the reasons why ‘Union’ was necessary. More opportunistically, given that there was ‘internal free trade and monetary integration between Ireland and Britain by 1826’ (Gray 1999:16) the Irish economy was open for development, with the assumption being that the Irish population would benefit. Between the Union and 1845 ‘no fewer than 114 Commissions and 61 Special Committees were instructed to report on the state of Ireland.’ (Woodham Smith 1962:36) Before the 1846 Famine the Poor Inquiry Committee had ‘stated that 2,385,000 persons in Ireland were in a state of semi – starvation every year.’ (1962:62-63)

[5] Pat Barker

Ireland in 1845 was both a Parliamentary responsibility and a country which had been much studied and discussed. The predominant position in Parliament was that England had managed to feed itself under the Corn Laws through enterprise and that Ireland was 'empty' and available for capitalist development.

Discussions about possible and then actual famine took place in that context, and increasingly the 'Irish question' and the 'Anti Corn Law' debates became entwined. Before the famine, the state of Irish agriculture and, especially, the perceived need to reform land ownership were subject to highly politicised debates. As Prime Minister, Peel took the view that 'peace and security for private investment were vital prerequisites of any real improvement' (Gray 1999:55) but acknowledged that Irish landlords were largely either not up to the job, not interested or simply greedy. The establishment of the Devon Commission (1843 – 1845) was intended to enquire into the existing state of the law, property rights, and taxation and how to improve agricultural practice. It concluded[6] that landlords should be 'responsible' and expressed the wish that 'a 'yeoman' farmer – proprietor class would emerge.' (Gray 1999:70) This view was at variance with the more radical proponents of change in England, who envisaged a more full scale capitalist agriculture imposed upon an 'empty' Ireland. *The*

[6] The conclusions of the Devon Commission need to be seen alongside that of the Drummond Commission which produced a Report in 1840. It had been set up to inquire into '*The Condition of the Agricultural Classes of Great Britain and Ireland.* Volume 1 – *The State of Ireland* – appeared in 1842 published by John Murray in London and with a preface by Henry Drummond.

Economist[7] 'condemned landlord 'monopolists', but pointed to free trade in food rather than any state interference in tenurial relations as the sole panacea for the ills of the Irish and British masses.'

Whereas the Corn Law debate in England was conducted along the lines of 'liberating' manufacturing in order to bring about prosperity, for Ireland the possibilities of free trade were more concentrated upon agriculture, given the proximity of the English market.

However, the barriers to a more Capitalist agriculture were perceived to be both the Aristocracy and the Irish people generally. Thus, emerged a division between those seeking to remove the landowners and impose 'English' farming practice in the use of mixed farming and extensive pasture and those who saw change resulting from making existing landowners live up to their moral responsibilities to bring about improvement. What was common to both of those visions was that the State should not interfere with Irish agriculture. For Peel, 'the role of the State was confined to removing obstacles to investment and educating the rural classes to recognize their own best interests.' (Gray 1999:81-82) *The Times* commented[8] at a time when news of the famine was reaching England that the Irish were too dependent on their own soil but that 'England, on the contrary, the laws of commerce operating fairly ... will preserve us from this horrible affliction.' In what is an extremely important statement, *The Times* says of the Irish that they are

[7] Issue of August 9th 1845. Referenced on p.75 of Gray 1999.
[8] November 3rd. 1845

‘Breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature and consequently the laws of God.’

This is perhaps the first, and certainly not the last, exposition of Providentialism about the famine and one which appropriated God’s approval on specific trading arrangements. ‘Ireland’ and the ‘Corn Laws’ became examples of the workings of providence in that both constituted artificial restrictions of commerce.

Gray (1999:102) quoted an anonymous ‘dignitary of the English Church’ as warning that ‘the Corn Laws were impeding the providential destiny of the Empire’ and the famine attracted many such explanations. *The Times*[9]expanded upon the notion of providence by publishing an editorial which states that ‘For our part, we regard the potato blight as a blessing’ in that it will ‘assist’ the Irish to adopt a more varied diet and other ‘good’ habits. Gray (1999:331) saw English politicians as ‘grasping the heaven – sent ‘opportunity’ of famine to deconstruct Irish society and rebuild it anew’ in the context of seeking to ‘impose a capitalist cultural revolution on the Irish.’[10]

The effect of the mixing of Corn Law and Ireland in political discourse was to ensure that warnings and reports of famine were discredited as the manoeuvrings of political opponents. Peel sought to persuade his own Party of the gravity of the famine, but *most* of his own MP’s ‘chose

[9] September 22nd. 1846

[10] There is a very interesting parallel between the uses of the phrase ‘cultural revolution’ in this context (one which seeks to overthrow the aristocracy in favour of the bourgeoisie) with the launching of the Cultural Revolution in China through the Declaration of August 8th. 1966 which sought to purge the countryside of ‘bourgeois’ elements.

to believe the continuing claims of the Irish Tory Press that the crop failure had been exaggerated for political purposes and that Ireland faced no real danger.' (Gray 1999:109) This line of argument was then carried over to discussions about the need to provide famine relief. Not only was the famine not as grave as portrayed, it was also the case that intervention was inappropriate, given that 'help would shift resources from the more to the less deserving' predicated on the belief that 'famine was nature's response to Irish demographic irresponsibility.' (Ó Gráda 1999:6) Although *The Times* is credited with having first informed the nation of the famine, it campaigned throughout against the rebelliousness, dishonesty and subterfuge of the Irish people. *The Economist*[11] provided a summary,

'To convert a period of distress, arising from natural causes, into one of unusual comfort and ease, by the interference of government money, or of private charity, is to paralyze the efforts of the people themselves.'[12]

Against a backdrop of hostility towards expenditure on Irish relief it is necessary to understand the operation of the Poor Law which is predicated upon the principle of *local* intervention. In Ireland, the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act replicated the provisions of the 1834 Act in England, thus throwing the responsibility back upon the very landowners denounced for not accepting their responsibilities as landlords in the first place. There is also a broader point, which is that the State on a national level did not have the responsibility for the health and welfare

[11] January 16th. 1847
[12] Ó Gráda 1999:77

of its citizens. It is interesting to note that this is a point which is re-iterated by the 1905 Commission on Food Supplies in Time of War[13] and by the actions of the British Government from 1914 – 1916. It is only as a result of the mounting evidence of poor working class health and the re-armament strategy in the mid 1930's that such a responsibility is deemed to be appropriate.

In order that the Tory and Whig administrations of the famine period did not fall into the position of 'last resort' provider of relief, successive Prime Ministers argued that they did not have the requisite powers to intervene. This line is reinforced by the constant output of English newspapers which 'conveyed an impression of the Irish poor as devious, violent, and ungrateful' and of famine relief 'as a bottomless black hole.' (Ó Gráda 1999:83) Indeed, for much of the period England has the 'excuse' of a substantial financial crisis based upon the end of the Railway Boom, irresponsible lending and large scale bank failures.[14]

The other obstacle to radical reform of agriculture was an assessment of the degree to which the populace might resist such changes. Parliament gave as much time to debates about imposing control on Ireland as it did to famine relief. Indeed, there were a number of debates which identified that capital would not be invested in Ireland owing to the climate of 'uncertainty'. The resistance of Irish people to clearances and their concomitant demands for land reform resulted in

[13] Chapter 3 and Appendix 1
[14] Accompanied by Bank of England inactivity, ended by the 1840's version of quantitative easing – the printing of bank notes in a secret and not strictly legal manner in order to reflate the economy.

the passing of Coercion legislation[15] and the continuing campaign of *The Times* to demand armed protection for landowners.

However, the position of landowners was ambiguous in that whilst the 'reforming' examples were praised in Parliament it was not clear whether compulsion should be employed for those who were either not interested or too heavily indebted to invest. The deployment of the moral argument that they should reform raised the question of what should happen if they did not.

It is not until the Second World War that the State has confidence that it was appropriate to intervene in private property rights on a large scale. In 1845 – 1850, the newly emergent Free Traders and traditional Landowners are both clear (although for different reasons) that the State should not either remove land from rightful owners or undertake work on that land from the public purse.[16] The contradiction lies in the fact that in order to attract capital investment then a trade in land must take place in order to produce a new generation of farmers. Gray (1999:197) noted that reformers 'saw a connection between free trade in food and the liberation of the land market.' In opposition to that, the Earl of Glengall in the Parliamentary Debate on Encumbered Estates[17] spoke of 'confiscation of property' and 'a principle of communism and socialism of the deepest degree.'(c.1351)

[15] Under different guises and titles, one of a series of such Acts.
[16] At the same time, noting the important contribution of the Public Works schemes.
[17] HC Deb June 11th. 1849 Vol. 105 cc 1336 - 1367

Critically, this debate impinged upon detailed questions of famine relief in that 'it was held that the reason why dealers and import merchants had so signally failed to replace the potato last season had been the Government's purchases.' (Woodham Smith 1962:106) If traders were to be *undermined* by the Government, then they would not become involved in importing food supplies into Ireland[18]. In the critical Debate on Famine Relief[19] the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Wood had defended the Government on the grounds that **then** there had been Protection but now that Trade was free then **now** it would not be replicated. Mr. Browne MP commented that 'it would be dangerous to make the people of any country dependent upon anything other than their own exertions.' (c.780) and that it was necessary to avoid any action which would 'depress them from a condition of *honourable freedom*[20] and self reliance.'(c.780)

The Debate also considered arguments that people starving would be disadvantaged by Government intervention in that market prices would increase and supply decline 'because legitimate speculation was checked by the interposition of Government.' (c.780) In the same Debate, Mr. Labouchere MP commented that now free trade has arrived then 'nothing can be more fatal to the interests of the country than that the Government should undertake the business of the

[18] The Government had, through the services of Baring Brothers, secretly purchased 'Indian Corn' for famine relief the previous year. It had chosen that product and that method in order to cause the least disruption in the market.

[19] 'Distress in Ireland – Measures of Relief' HC Deb August 17th.1846 Vol. 88 cc 766 – 799.

[20] My emphasis. I cannot think of any appropriate comment other than to highlight the words.

merchant' (c.782) and emphasised his point by referring to 'the evil consequences by Government either with the import trade or with the markets of the country.' (c.783.)

In a later Debate[21] the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke of his conviction that 'the free trade principle had contributed very largely to the preservation of life in that country by cheapening the food that was imported' (c.983)

Some MP's continued to argue against free trade and to assert that both England and Ireland would benefit from protection: Charles Villiers[22] pictured that 'Ireland has been laid – a – side of England, for the purpose of feeding her – the finest agricultural country in Europe, united to the largest manufacturing and wealthiest commercial community in the World' (c.104) but such a portrayal was distinctly out of favour.

The relevance of the Irish Famine to this work is firstly to note that whilst a million or more people died in a country ruled by the English Parliament the majority of the political debate focussed upon the providential nature of that famine and the requirement that Government expenditure and intervention be strictly limited. Gray (1999:332) noted that, as the Famine got worse, 'identifying and eradicating 'abuse'

[21] 'Famine in Ireland' HC Deb May 25th.1849 Vol.105 cc 978 - 990
[22] HC Deb January 31st. 1850 Vol.108 c. 82 – 161.

acquired a higher priority than saving lives.' This was reinforced by a concerted campaign by the then influential *Times* newspaper.

The Free Trade ambition for Irish agricultural reform greatly exceeded that of England because Ireland could be regarded as 'empty' given the evident neglect of owners of Irish land, and their lack of moral and political force. There was also a sense of confidence that reforms could be imposed through the deployment of physical force allied to assisted emigration. Large scale evictions and comprehensive land clearance took place on a large scale from 1847 onwards.

Until the changes in land ownership after the First World War, landowners in England had sufficient political power to defeat or water down significant land reform, therefore the Irish famine afforded an 'opportunity' for wholesale reform of agriculture under free trade. The political discourse in England from 1880 onwards took place in the context of how to avert agricultural decline, not the amelioration of starvation. The debate was therefore less concentrated, less urgent and more open to discussions about Free Trade, Protectionism, Empire and land reform. Many of those in Parliament or associated with the *Times* and the *Economist* saw the Famine as an opportunity to both argue for Corn Law reform and provide an immediate example of the benefits. J.S. Mill offered a more nuanced approach in that whilst he accepted that 'property in the soil has a sort of magic power of engendering industry, perseverance and forethought' (Gray 1999:157) he opposed wholesale clearances and concentration of land ownership in favour of

the development of a class of yeomen[23] who would have a measure of security unknown in Irish agriculture.[24]

The essential point to grasp is that within the political discourse in England there was little sense of the humanity of the Irish people and the extent of the suffering. Where it was accepted that people were suffering, contributions from both Government and Private sources were discouraged on the grounds that it would undermine *local* responsibilities. The Duke of Argyll in a Parliamentary Debate on the later Orissa Famine[25] spoke of the necessity of Government not to 'supersede local efforts and local charity' (c.1068) but also added that 'the value of human life is a thing comparatively unknown in the East – it is the product of Christian civilization.' (c.1069.) It is interesting to evaluate that remark in the context of English political discourse at the time of the Famine.

[23] Morning Chronicle October 14th. 1846.
[24] Woodham Smith 1962:24 *'In Ireland alone, the whole agricultural population can be evicted by the mere will of the landlord.'*
[25] HL Deb April 24th. 1874 Vol. 218 c. 1063 – 1094. One lesson of the Bengal Famine of 1943 is the degree to which the dominant narrative is the primacy of the food needs of the 'Mother Country' despite the contribution of Indian volunteers to the British Army.

Chapter Two

Radical and Socialist Perspectives on Agriculture 1880-1900

'Since we left the land in the hope that the factories would feed us better, why not go back to the land if the factories fail to feed us at all?'[26]

This chapter seeks to identify and evaluate a number of Radical and Socialist perspectives in the 1880's and 1890's which although arising out of the specific conditions of the time continued to be a significant part of political discourse on the Left and were heavily borrowed by many on the Right.

In his *Report on Guild Socialism* in 1920 G.D.H Cole commented that 'socialists applying themselves to rural problems have usually breathed in the manner of fish out of water.' (Cole 1980:60)

Whilst he acknowledged the contribution of a number of thinkers to the development of Socialist perspectives, specifically O'Connor, Owen, Blatchford and Kropotkin, he concluded that such influences have still left Socialist or Labour Parties generally 'without a clear, practical and constructive policy capable of being applied to agricultural production.' (Cole 1980:60)

[26] Robert Blatchford

The Land Question

The consideration of agricultural matters in the late 1870's was shaped by the understanding that British farming could not withstand foreign competition. Even if later agricultural historians cast doubt upon whether the period leading up to the Boer War constituted a 'depression' it seemed at the time as if agriculture was in such decline that it might just disappear in favour of imports. In many European countries tariffs were the only answer to afford protection to agriculture, the hope being that 'they would render the nation self sufficing, and to that extent invulnerable to foreign attack.' (Hayes n/d: 205)

A number of possible explanations for agricultural decline were explored and on the basis of such analyses, solutions put forward. Martin Crick, charting the rise of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), noted the diversity of land related reformers developing out of the Radical tradition. The Land Question was primarily considered from the perspective that the decline in agricultural output arose from the neglect and / or greed of landlords. Crick (1994:19) noted 'a long standing Radical tradition (which) held that the land was capable of supporting all and that the masses of urban unemployed were, in effect, labourers turned off the land by grasping landlords.' Even amongst Radical thinkers there was no consensus as what the main failings of landlords might be; certainly neglectful, but also irresponsible or grasping or being content to settle for the status of being a landowner

without accepting attendant responsibilities. Certainly, Britain did differ significantly from the rest of Europe in that 'only 12 per cent of the land was owned by its farmers and 88 per cent of the holdings were farmed by tenants.' (Offer 1989:107) The landowners in turn took a significant percentage (44%) of the output produced by their tenants.[27]

A later (1907) Fabian pamphlet placed the blame on landlords who 'escaped public burdens.' (Carpenter et al. 1907:67) and failed to exercise leadership expected by their status.

The figure of Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty* in 1881, emerged as one who attempted to move away from locating the precise nature of the blame to the adoption of a workable policy proposal. The 'single tax'[28] was presented as a solution which would fit all the possible manifestations of neglect, and result in increased farming output. Crick (1994:19) characterised the approach of George as being built on 'ideas of natural rights, Ricardo's and Mill's theories of rent, and the schemes of Thomas Spence[29].' The single tax proposal came largely from Spence who advocated common ownership of land not by the State but by self contained parishes run on a democratic basis. He envisaged such a tax as constituting virtually the *only* tax

[27] Offer 1989:107 cites a number of sources – notably E.M. Ojala *Agriculture and Economic Progress.*1952 and C.H. Feinstein *National Income, Expenditure and Output of the United Kingdom 1855 – 1965.* 1972 in order to arrive at this figure.
[28] Henry George based the proposal on Thomas Spence (below) but also Adam Smith. In brief, the value that land had was due to the work carried out on it by the community, therefore the community should benefit and the tax distributed widely.
[29] Thomas Spence (1750-1814) Radical and land reformer who was an advocate not of the nationalisation of land but of self governing self contained parishes. Initiator of the 'single tax' proposal, he was imprisoned for both treason and sedition. His work was publicised in the 1880's by Hyndman, who changed the emphasis of his work to suit 'modern' conditions.

levied in a future in which 'free trade and manufacture, a flourishing agriculture, and completed democracy would unite the nation to a high moral level.' (Beer 1920:2)

The predicted impact of the single tax proposal was to open up a way forward in which every landlord had a clear incentive to actively promote the growing of food on their land[30]. In a series of articles in 1877 Annie Besant had put forward the proposition that land owners did not have the right to not cultivate and the State must intervene 'as the trustee of the nation.' (Besant 1970:5) Having so intervened, the State must then act in order to feed British people adequately from within our own resources whenever possible.

The notion of a 'self sufficient' Britain emerged in the light of both a substantial increase in imports and the linked evidence of uncultivated land. This notion was coupled with the asserted existence of a 'golden age' of landownership and social responsibility. The exact time period of the golden age would vary according to the prejudices of the argument but what was clear was that it contained those elements which had made Britain a uniquely great country. For Annie Besant the features were 'a large number of peasant proprietors (who) are the safeguard of a State' coupled with 'a steadiness, a dignity, an independence, about the men who cultivate their own little farms that no other employment seems to give.' (Besant 1970:8) It must follow that if one re-created this class of peasant proprietors they would fulfil their role of working

[30] Note a contemporary debate on the question of a 'Land Tax' which would incentivize landlords to ensure that houses were occupied.

tirelessly for the public good accepting little in return except a pleasant but restricted life. Whilst the main benefit would be enhanced cultivation such a move would also 'offer a reliable guarantee of steady progression without hasty revolution.' (Besant1877:8)

For both Besant and George, and many other Radical thinkers and advocates of Land Reform, what is being asserted is that the land is in some way different from or / outside of the rest of society. To produce as much food as possible can be achieved by the simple starting point of exempting agriculture from the general commercial functioning of society. In any consideration of food self sufficiency in Britain this argument is always present, but there is little development of how this could be achieved. For Radical and early Socialist thinkers of the 1870's and 1880's this thinking hinged on understanding that land was either natural, so that people being on the land were asserting a 'natural right', or the view that 'no man made the earth' commonly attributing such a statement to J.S. Mill[31].

But those very advocates for maximum use of the land would assert the right of people to be on the land without then paying any attention to the practicalities of what should be grown and for what reasons. It seemed sufficient for people to 'be on the land' but not to consider whether their produce should be equally exempt from commercial considerations. Generally, common ownership was seen as a solution in its own right. Once it had been obtained, then the failures of landlords and of a

[31] J.S. Mill *Principles of Political Economy.* Reference generally made to Chapter 12 on how land differs from the other elements of production, labour and capital.

Government wedded to free trade would be exposed. Higher production *would* follow and, having escaped the burden of the landlords, it would be at a competitive price. This being an obvious outcome, little detailed *agricultural* work was carried out by most reformers. Henry George succeeded in presenting his arguments to the public; *Progress and Poverty* sold incredibly well, and even those who did not share his analysis acknowledged his important contribution. E. P. Thompson noted the books' 'mixture of libertarian and Christian rhetoric with chapters of closely argued political economy.' (Thompson 1996:291) Marx read the work and wrote that it 'is significant because it is a first, if unsuccessful, attempt at emancipation from the orthodox political economy.'(Thompson 1996:291[32])

George tried to argue that his proposal of a single tax would not just be additional taxation but enable reductions in other taxes with the proceeds from the land shared amongst the population, rather than just going to the landlord. This was designed to appeal to Governments which feared that any intervention in agriculture would entail either higher taxes or dearer food. Annie Besant incorporated another approach into her essays and lectures, which was that the decline in agricultural output produced not just 'rural issues' but the emigration of rural labourers deprived the country of its' best stock and resulted in burdening 'the State with weaker and more helpless citizens.' (Besant 1877:3)

[32] Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence. Letter to G.Sorel

Industrial productivity would decline as a result of this physical deterioration and the social consequences might become as serious as to lead to the eventual decline of Britain itself. The physical act of farming, of being in contact with the earth in a 'natural' way was, it was argued, the way of life of many other nations who were healthier as a result. Asserting that neglect of agriculture is a precursor of the decline of the race, as George and Besant did, is also linked in with the responsibility of the British to the rest of the Empire. If the 'mother country' is unhealthy then imperial decline will follow. This argument was not fully developed until the 1930's when the superior physical attributes of the people of Germany and the Nordic countries were contrasted with the lack of care taken with 'white' stock both in Britain and in the Empire. *Land Nationalisation* written by A.R.Wallace in 1882 linked the questions of physical and moral decline in Britain and asserted that land monopoly and increasing competitive behaviour would result in both, unless Capitalism was tackled in order to change current priorities.

John Galsworthy in his pamphlet '*The Land*' argued that the profound weakness in Britain was failing to produce our own food, to the degree that 'we have become more parasitic than any other nation' and 'the blood in our veins is sucked from foreign bodies.'[33] He also complained of the decline in English stock; having drawn upon a sample of 1650 town dwellers to ascertain how 'ugly he adjudged people to be'

[33] John Galsworthy '*The Land. A Plea by John Galsworthy.'* London: George Allen & Unwin 1918. Written towards the end of the First World War but these are comments looking back on recent history.

compared with either Australian soldiers or country people. He commented upon the 'squashed in, stunted, disproportionate, commonized look of the bulk of our people.'[34] His proposal for national security through home food production emphasised this 'decline in the stock' argument.

To sum up the main non – Socialist arguments before 1883 it was clear that the State was urged to intervene on a number of grounds – it was in the self interest of the State itself, maintenance of the Empire, it produced a healthier population, less revolutionary tendencies and was 'morally' appropriate. At the heart of all Land Question positions, and there were a wide variety of them, agriculture had to be considered 'different.' If not, in the words of Annie Besant, Britain would consist of 'Barren lands; Scanty food supply; Idle arms.' (Besant 1880:6)

Agriculture as a Success?

The proponents of reform considered that such arguments were just too fundamental to be ignored, too illustrative and too accurate a summation of Britain to be brushed aside. The weakness was that they failed to show any appreciation of just how successful British agriculture had been up to that point. For the first thirty years after the Repeal of the Corn Laws, British agriculture had adjusted to the new

[34] *The Land* p.9

circumstances and had fed a rapidly expanding population in the towns and cities.

‘The limitless expansion of the urban and industrial sectors’ demand for food’ (Hobsbawm 1990: 196) had been met by the same landlords now deemed to be idle. Agricultural productivity had increased and a greater variety of food stuffs had been introduced into the British diet. Despite that, wheat imports increased substantially after the abolition of the Corn Laws[35]

Some explanations rejected the increase in imports as problematic either for Britain as a whole or for British farming. They started from the position that whilst Britain was undercut on price, the imported wheat tended to be from countries whose agricultural productivity was quite low and whose use of land was based on poor long term practice. British farmers claimed higher quality, higher yields and better farming practices.

Even the amount taken from the tenant’s output by the ‘grasping’ landlord was seen to be generally beneficial in that the farmer did not have to worry about the purchase of land and was able to concentrate fully on farming. ‘High cash rents induced good practice and gave rise to the best agriculture in the world, or at least the highest yields.’ (Offer 1989:107) and this contributed to British agriculture, under free trade, being dynamic and innovative at least until the end of the *de facto* monopoly. In the period since the Abolition of the Corn Laws, capital

[35] See Appendix 2 table 1

investment had increased substantially, the railways offered an effective but pricy means of distribution and Victorian ingenuity brought about higher yields per acre. Although true that labourers had left the land, those remaining on it saw modest increases in wages because landowners had to take note of what might be earned in the towns and cities, as well as the distinct possibility of skilled workers emigrating. All the above factors contributed to a feeling in the farming community that whilst imports were clearly rising and they were losing market share, *they* were doing little wrong.

For proponents of Free Trade, those positive predictions for British agriculture argued for in the debates about the Corn Laws in the 1840's had come about. In the work of the National Anti Corn Law League[36] it is important to look back upon the advantages that were foreseen for free trade when British agriculture was protected by tariffs. One particular work published by the Anti Corn Law League in 1842 captured well the expectations that many had for the reform.

In his prize winning essay, George Hope wrote that the role of farming was to promote 'the welfare of the largest possible number of consumers' but that it would not be achieved by foreign imports because there is no other country in the world 'where labourers bring the same spirit, activity, and intelligence to their work such as they do in Britain.' This is an acknowledgement that competition *might* damage the

[36] Three Prize Essays on Agriculture and the Corn Law published by the League in Manchester in1842. Essays by George Hope (Tenant Farmer) A. Morse, W.R. Grey. No detailed information on the second two authors. Referred to in the text as author / year.

ability for Britain to remain self sufficient but such a potential problem will be overcome by virtue of the exceptional British character. Hope then added an interesting rider which is that if manufacturing and commerce is ruined by protectionism, then farming will not escape anyway. The prosperity of British farming should be considered secondary to other commercial interests and 'free and unrestricted commerce is the only means that can give Britain a chance to continue to progress; without it we must even go back.' Even in the words of a tenant farmer in 1842 we have the summary of the argument which is that "competition is good for Britain, it *might* result in decline for British agriculture, but working people have to be fed as cheaply as possible and, anyway, it will bring about peace."

Whereas the above statement appeared a clear and unequivocal appeal for free trade from the vantage point of a tenant farmer in 1842 it also served to explain much of the drift of Labour party policy throughout most of the twentieth century, recalling the 'fish out of water' remark of G.D.H. Cole. The Labour Party did little to move away from an insistence of the 'right' of working people to benefit from 'cheap food' under the efficiencies of Capitalism. Indeed, it is worth noting how the essayist linked 'trade' and 'peace' in an association not generally challenged until the 1930's.

The other important element which was in the literature of the Anti Corn Law League was that of 'the selfish landlord' under protectionism. W.R. Grey argued that since the end of the French Wars every factor had

been in the favour of the farmer and the landowner – more customers with more money, less taxes, more legal protection – but with all those advantages the result has still been agricultural depression. This voice from one of eras which might constitute the ‘golden age’ of British food self sufficiency identified the self interest of the producer as the cause of British ills, on the grounds that they failed to deliver either price stability or lower costs. Instead, as Morse emphasised in the third of the essays, the landlords had made large profits and passed as much of the burden as they could on to the tenant farmer.

Grey concluded that ‘like all consumers the agricultural labourer has a paramount interest in cheap food’ in an interesting assertion of the primacy of consumer rights over any other interest.

These three prize winning essays concentrated on the importance of the consumer and the need to secure all goods as cheaply as possible.

The large scale farmers in the South East of England may have felt they had little reason to change from traditional outputs, but others were adjusting to new conditions in the 1880’s as they ‘profited from growing domestic demand and better prices,’ (Pugh: 1994:7) by growing fresh produce which was not undercut by competition from the United States, Canada and Argentina. This was led by the small farmers who, although often derided for their conservatism, had to rely on farming for their living and were more responsive to market needs.

However, the tide of imports after 1870 reached the point that even knowing the market or switching from arable to pasture was not sufficient to continue working the land for many landowners. The development of refrigeration and canning left Britain only specialising in 'high end' meat and whilst sugar consumption – to give but one example - was 80lbs per head per annum by 1900, little of it was home grown. The market which might have been one for domestic agriculture –the urban poor – remained undeveloped owing to continuing poverty. Working people did not benefit greatly from the availability of local fresh food and tended to have to purchase cheaper cuts or canned meat from abroad. Those foods which were imported were those which constituted a significant percentage of the working class diet.[37]

When Radical and Land Reform arguments did not seek to question the primacy of the consumer (i.e. the market) they ran the risk of the criticism that any proposed intervention would raise prices or would be unsustainable in the long term because the market would not permit 'artificial' manipulation. In fact, and it was never fully articulated, they were arguing for growing more food or striving towards self sufficiency for *other reasons;* predominantly non – economic ones. What is critical, therefore, is the degree to which the emerging Socialist organisations utilised radical arguments or found new approaches to the question of food production.

[37] Table Appendix 2 Table 2

Socialist Perspectives?

Many Radical proponents of land reform subscribed to views which incorporated the moral superiority of working on the land as opposed to the privations of working in factories and living in cities. This assumption was shared, either in their personal lives or in policy formulation, by a number of influential individuals in the early Socialist movement. Those who saw Socialism as an expression of compassion, of whom William Morris might be the best example, brought with them clear perspectives on city living. The rather dogmatic of view of Morris espoused by Engels - 'a very rich artist-enthusiast but untalented politician' (Lindsay 1985:273[38]) came to be shared by many in the Socialist movement.[39] Until he became irritated with the Anarchist manoeuvrings in the Socialist League which he had been instrumental in setting up in 1884, Morris was prepared to encourage perspectives with which he did not fully agree. His overall philosophy focussed upon the question of balance in society and his vision of the future was that of 'a society which has reached a position of equilibrium' (Lindsay 1985:35) in contrast to the current state of insecurity. Equilibrium *might* be achieved in a number of ways but above all depended on building a society from the bottom, from the smallest possible unit of production; one based on the production and distribution of food. Anything that was produced to meet 'artificial' needs led to a society which was out of control, with the

[38] In a letter to Kautsky June 22 1883
[39] In spite of the fact that many of them were dependent upon his funds.

resultant ‘horrible burden of unnecessary production.’(Redmond 1992:79) Morris was able to amalgamate such a vision with the Marxist interpretation of the ‘final’ classless society after a transitional Socialist phase, by arguing that this vision has the ‘most exact precedent in the myth of the golden age.’ (Morris 1992: xxv)[40]

The focus on what was ‘missing’ in contemporary Britain was an influential strand in demands for Land Reform; it was not just the lack of access to land which had to be addressed but the re-population of the countryside. Land Reform was a transitional demand, once it had started then more people would want to follow. The very proliferation of so many groups demanding land reform, communal ownership or nationalisation showed the degree to which the ‘empty space’ was open to different interpretations. These hopes took little account of why working people had left the countryside in the first place, but it was asserted that this time they would be there as owners or yeomen. For some, the magic of private property would be transformative and would not just attract farmers but artisans, small workshops, new industries. In the Socialist perspective, people would be productive because they were growing food on behalf of the people, which alone would lead to greater satisfaction. In return, the State would offer better housing, schools etc. to further improve the quality of their lives and the attractiveness of rural life.

[40] Introduction by Redmond J. Editor of the 1992 edition.

Such examples of successful country life might even offer a challenge to the factory system itself. Robert Blatchford, who offered a very broad interpretation of Socialism, framed this debate in works such as *Merrie England (1893)* and *Britain for the British* (1902) by advocating the abandonment of the current basis of commerce by imposing an upper limit on industrial production. Both works sold incredibly well [some reports suggest that *Merrie England* sold over a million copies] and along with *The Clarion* popularised the view that both being in the countryside and earning a living from it were both the most positive expressions of Englishness.

As a result, a new balance would come into play in which given that we (Britain) did not need to **sell** manufactured goods overseas then neither did we need to **import** food. Therefore, Britain became self – sufficient in all important aspects by virtue of <u>only serving the home market.</u>

It was the work of Peter Kropotkin, particularly *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, which influenced Blatchford to be confident that not only was self sufficiency possible, it was workable. Kropotkin convinced him that 'there is no natural obstacle to our production in this country of all the food our people need.' (Blatchford 1902:114)

Kropotkin stressed this point in a pamphlet published in 1896 entitled '*Agriculture*'[41] in which he argued that that there was sufficient knowledge within the agricultural community to produce far more food. The principal factor which stopped that happening was the ownership of

[41] Published by Liberty Press: Chiswick

the soil by a combination of landowners and financial interests. The latter, because of their attachment to profit, did not understand agriculture and thus promoted large scale and intensive farming 'which takes the soil from nature without seeking to improve it.' (1896:7.) What might have been profitable in the *short term* offered no *long term* future for agriculture.

Market gardeners and smallholders showed how it could be done, as they understood how soil can be 'made' using natural processes and how extensive use of greenhouses can increase production utilising surplus energy from industry. The ILP endorsed the 'small scale' approach, being active in demanding smallholding and allotment reform as well as seeking to promote market gardening both as a way of increasing domestic food production and to improve the working class diet. The ILP pamphlet *'Socialism for the North'*[42] argued for public ownership in order to make more fresh food available to the urban poor and '*Municipal Socialism'*[43] declared that 'no nation has flourished that has allowed its agriculture to decay.' The proposed solution – farming by municipal socialism – was based on utilising sewage waste as a resource and challenged the capitalist neglect of farming generally. The author optimistically declared that so efficient would this method be that 'the competition of the Municipality would speedily extinguish all its rivals.' (p.10.) This belief in the power of the State, either nationally or

[42] Published by ILP Gateshead Branch. Not dated, but probably 1898.
[43] Written by H. Russell Smart [ILP Candidate for Huddersfield] published by Labour Press: Manchester. *Probably* 1902.

locally, was challenged by others. J.L. Green[44], writing in 1896, accepted the initial analysis of capitalist farming *and* was convinced by small scale solutions, but felt that municipal or any other State intervention would bring in unskilled operatives who would fail. He advocated an extension of the provisions of the 1892 Smallholdings Act in order to promote farming in *rural* areas utilising *urban* waste. To make a living from farming a high level of *individual* skill was required, enhanced by *collective* organisation. He concluded that 'by all means let us help men on the land, but let the men be men who understand the land.' (Green 1896:115)

These approaches did not rely upon rural nostalgia; they were positions (despite disagreements on the role of the State) which utilised the application of modern farming methods. The additional tool of scientific farming, the bringing together of idle land and idle workers would produce a level of productivity which could match American or French levels[45]. Land reform, in this context, sought to build upon the notion of the idle, non – investing landlord to show how wealth can be created to benefit the whole population. The unemployed will become wealth producers 'and no longer starvelings or paupers.'

Rural Socialism and love of the countryside were presented as being equals and as Gould (1988:37) noted 'it was a Socialism ... in which

[44] Allotments & Smallholdings Swan Sonnenschein & Co. 1896
[45] In general, farm outputs in these countries were quite low. The reference to French efficiency referred to extensive market gardening around Paris. This was the model which Kropotkin proposed – but it was often the case that all agriculture 'abroad' was taken to be more efficient than Britain, which it wasn't.

material betterment of the working class had a subordinate place, ultimately, to the quality of life available.'

The limiting of industrial output to what was needed for use in this country would be a way to end the ruin of Britain both environmentally and morally. It would also be an attack on what a *Clarion* pamphlet of 1898 [46] called 'monopolist obstruction' which led to people not being fed properly. It was not *agriculture* which was the real victim, but the diets and health of working people. Landowners demonstrated their power by taking action 'to prevent the workers from *producing ten times more food*' and by encouraging the development of useless occupations when we need more 'producers of necessaries – more and better market-gardeners, fruit-growers, foresters, general farmers, wool-workers, builders, and useful workers generally.' (Both p.3)

The Clarion was clear that higher British food production would follow if there was common ownership. The restrictions were not from nature, but from the inefficiencies of commercial production. The pamphlet concluded that

'by laying waste to our own land, and throwing ourselves upon the mercy of the foreign food producers for our supply of eatables, paying them for food with artificial manufactures, we have been truly *buying in the dearest* market and *selling in the cheapest.'* (p.11)

[46] Hall L. *Land, Labour and Liberty; or the A B C of Reform.* Clarion: London 1898

The Clarion consistently argued that Britain could produce more food simply by looking after the soil better and favoured 'organic' production. A pamphlet of 1896 by W. Sowerby[47] argued for intensive work on soil and subsoil improvement using human and other waste from the towns and cities. In the same year W. Jameson[48] argued that the myth of needing food from abroad had been spread by The Manchester School[49] to the degree that most British people 'believed that even the present population could not be fed without foreign supplies.' (p.2) For both of these writers, public ownership would ensure both higher production and better stewardship of the land.

Resources currently deployed in industry could be moved to agriculture in order to improve communal health and wellbeing. The title '*Britain for the British'* ascribed to Blatchford's collection of *Clarion* articles published in 1902 summed up his patriotic perspective. Not a pride in Britain as the 'workshop of the world, but the building of a country which is wholly independent and secure.' British agriculture, if left alone in its current state will perpetuate 'the evil of our dependence upon foreign countries for our food.' (Blatchford 1902:98) Without drastic intervention to save British agriculture Blatchford argued that the 'commercial system' will only intensify the factory system to the degree that future conflict for the resources of the world will result. It is the pursuit of the

[47] *Clarion* pamphlet Number 12. 'The Agricultural Deadlock and how to overcome it by rational means.' 1896.
[48] *Clarion* pamphlet 'the coming fight with famine: Can Britain feed herself?'
[49] The Manchester School was a phrase attributed to Disraeli to those committed to free trade from the mid 1830's. Generally taken to include Cobden and Bright amongst others and suggesting a higher moral purpose than mere accumulation of wealth. Used in Marxist writing generally as a term of abuse.

goals of 'commercialism'[50] which is the reason why 'we have sacrificed our agriculture and endangered the safety of our empire.' (Blatchford 1902:102)

Blatchford identified the broader justification for his approach; 'since we left the land in the hope that the factories would feed us better, why not go back to the land if the factories fail to feed us at all?' (Blatchford: 1902:104) This key element of *The Clarion* manifesto brought together moral and environmental bases and the ending of working class poverty and national vulnerability.

Blatchford gave full backing to the campaign of S.L. Murray for a Royal Commission to examine 'Our Food Supply in Time of War' because, he argued, it must inevitably reach the same conclusion on all grounds he had identified. This rather ignored the fact that Murray was largely motivated by fear of how the working class might react and the degree to which 'they would use hunger as a weapon.'(Offer 1985:213)[51]

Blatchford expressed great faith that the interests of the nation and the empire were so obviously best met by looking after agriculture that, were there to be an inquiry, such an interest would override <u>any</u> other consideration.

[50] See later for Marxist reactions to Blatchford, Morris, Carpenter and other 'Utopian' perspectives. The general non Marxist term for Capitalism in progressive circles was 'commercialism'

[51] *Past & Present* May 1985 No. 107. Pp.204-226. 'The Working Classes, British Naval Plans and the Coming of the Great War' Offer A.

In opposition to this sensible move he identified a 'few landlords, coal owners, and money-lenders (who) wax fat upon the vitals of the nation.'(Blatchford 1902:118.) The article '*Can Britain Feed Herself?'* concluded that the opponents of self sufficiency offered only a false, self-interested patriotism to set against the *real* interests of the nation.

The arguments put forward by Blatchford rested upon the bringing together of the needs of the people for a simple productive life with a demand that 'the State' assert the national interest. This type of nationalism rested upon the assumption that the people of the country are let down by the pursuit of selfish aims by industrialists and financiers.

Three main difficulties arose with this emphasis upon the plea for state intervention, the principal one being that it assumed the existence of such a body which either had the will or the means to act in such a way. Secondly, and of equal importance, was the fact that Blatchford, although armed with the informed scientific work of Kropotkin, took little account of other analyses. Specifically, with his assumption that a Royal Commission would *inevitably* conclude that British agriculture needed saving, he ignored the findings of Commissions held to consider successive agricultural depressions in 1879 and 1893[52]. Both had concluded that little could be done to improve matters - with poor seasons being partly to blame.

[52] 1879 – 1882 Royal Commission on Agricultural Interests and 1893 – 1897 Royal Commission to Inquire into Agricultural Depression. Both marked by a high level of dissension and lack of agreement.

Blatchford had also, along with many other thinkers, been taken with the ‘empty space’ imagery of the countryside and had seen his proposal as being a logical way of filling it. *The Clarion* and others sought to increase access for health and recreational purposes and to revive rural crafts and countryside skills, whilst at the same time envisaging the land being intensively farmed. How could these two visions of the ‘empty space’ be reconciled?

Thirdly, Blatchford exhibited no critique of Capitalism beyond its impact in bringing about environmental damage and moral decline. Engels looked from a distance at many of these assumptions of ‘England being different’ with a wary eye and growing frustration.

Back to Nature Analyses and Plans

Whilst it is acknowledged that Blatchford and *The Clarion* greatly contributed to the development of Socialism, most of the content actually celebrated a potential world of spiritual improvement, the natural world and outdoor healthiness. That anyone should promote such possibilities in the context of industrial processes, domestic poverty and an unhealthy living space is entirely understandable but this was often ‘mingled with patriotic sentiment and a romanticised view of the past.’ (Gould 1988:38) Although Kropotkin and his evidence was often deployed to show that such schemes were practical, Blatchford overlooked the *intensive* nature of the agriculture he proposed and the

degree to which it should be concentrated very close to town and city centres. Kropotkin was no sentimentalist in this matter and his work showed that self sufficiency required single minded endeavour; farming being effectively an industrial operation which substituted the soil for a factory.

Whether this scale of farming equated to creative work carried out in beautiful surroundings and with the full dignity of manual labour which Blatchford and William Morris envisaged is not clear. But, many individuals felt that they had at least to try, given their analyses of a morally bankrupt, despoiling country quite possibly in terminal decline.

However, it was not necessarily the case that individuals looking to settle on the land were proposing alternative forms of societal organisation. What many required from the countryside was 'sincere and simple living, direct contact with nature' leading to the 'necessary condition of honesty, directness, simplicity, and trustfulness, transparency of life and cleanliness of thought found among fishermen of coast, toilers in field, labourers in quarries.' (Gould 1988:20)[53] Whilst an undoubtedly impressive list, it contained nothing about working together in communities or what 'outputs' might emanate from the honest work.

Edward Carpenter, in works such as *Towards Democracy,* shared many of the above sentiments and concentrated not just on the physical labour, but also emphasised the importance of the act of growing and

[53] Gould reference: H.Rix *Seed Time* (October 1889)

selling food. It was the experience of growing food in the local community that led directly to the visions of a future more local, closer to nature and based on collective work. From 1883 Carpenter offered a future based on co-operative work stressing the importance of 'personal actions and ideals' (Tsuzuki 1980:55) rather than schemes which 'had been proposed mainly for the institutional regeneration of society.' As the disputes continued in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), the reaction of Carpenter was to emphasise even more the importance of the personal in political settings.

Whilst he subscribed to the need to overthrow capitalism his preferred solution was based on individual moral change - 'the new ideal of dignity of man and labour was something that would transcend and even surpass even Socialist laws and institutions ' -(Tsuzuki 1980:59) rather than spending time on theoretical positions. In many respects this wish represented a kind of rugged individualism more associated with conservative perspectives; the 'co-operative aspect' being rather underdeveloped. It looked forward to a society which has been transformed through small scale individual and collective example.

This had some links with the movements in the 1880's and 1890's to increase smallholdings and allotments because there was an emphasis upon self sufficiency, contact with nature and allowing working people a creative outlet.

Those who visited Carpenter on his smallholding outside Sheffield were expected to consider the value of manual work and the moral

superiority of a simple life, but to reflect more broadly that this small scale model might serve as a blueprint for society as a whole. This demand for higher moral behaviour in response to the disease of civilization was notably rejected by the Fabians in 1889. The hostile response to Carpenter at a Fabian Society meeting in that year [with a theme of Communism + nature] from a number of influential thinkers indicated the extent to which Socialism was starting to move on from an attachment to a model of moral improvement. George Bernard Shaw commented that such a lecture, if given to outsiders, 'could only bring contempt on the Socialist cause.'[54] Sidney Webb in his 1894 lecture *Socialism True and False*[55] spelled out the extent of the rejection of moral improvement and other approaches in a very broad denunciation

'If our aim is the transformation of England into a Social Democracy, we must frankly accept the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, the factory system, the massing of population in great cities, the elaborate differentiation and complication of modern civilisation, the subordination of the worker to the citizen, and of the individual to the community. We must rid ourselves resolutely of those schemes and projects of byegone Socialisms which have now passed out of date, as well as from the specious devices of Individualism in a new dress. All these I class together as Spurious Collectivism making, in my view, not for social progress, but for reaction.' (Fabian Tracts Nos. 1 to 202. 1923: Tract 51:10.)

[54] Quoted in Tsuzuki C. *Edward Carpenter: prophet of human fellowship.* P.80.
[55] Fabian Society Lecture: January 21st. 1894.

Carpenter hoped for the unity of all 'socialists' and expressed the view that there were common factors such as increasing human happiness shared by all such political positions. But the vehemence of Fabian denunciation indicated that Carpenter posed a threat to their highly centralised and controlled view of change. Carpenter 'wanted not just a change in the way power was held and wealth distributed, but a transformation in men's and women's ways of feeling, in the ways in which they related to other individuals and in the natural world.'(Brown 1990:7)

The act of working collectively on the land would enable human beings to value each other and make provision for their own food and survival. Whilst this characteristic of Carpenter has been interpreted as one seeking salvation[56] or part of a deeply held Christianity not really abandoned, what is clear is the central role which Carpenter assigned to food production. He took the view that not being involved in food production or healthy outdoor work led to proliferation of diseases of affluence, because the wealthy would demonstrate their riches by opting out of physical labour. The compartmentalism of Capitalism would result in some being paid to undertake healthy physical work and others being trapped in unhealthy factories for all their working lives. *Towards Democracy* expressed the sentiment;

[56] Brown (1990) uses quotations from 'Towards Democracy' to illustrate this point. See also Shaw C. & Chase M. 1989.

‘To feel downwards and downwards through this wretched maze of shams for the solid ground – to come close to the Earth itself and those that live in direct contact with it.’(Brown 1990:5)[57]

Carpenter, despite believing in individual change, still argued for ending the monopoly of land and for the people to take it over for the common good. He subscribed to the need for either State or municipal land ownership and, to that degree, should have been welcomed by the Fabian Society.

Where Carpenter had to be presented as a marginal or crank figure was in his insistence upon both the centrality of food and the retention of personal autonomy.[58] Whilst the State might be in close control for a transitional period, this should pass.

Carpenter ‘is convinced that the danger of collectivism is almost as great as that of capitalism, if it does not give people responsibility.’ (Cachin 1990:63) The Fabian Society sought to marginalise the figures of William Morris and Edward Carpenter and to castigate Kropotkin on the grounds that notions of personal freedom and of ‘non – governmental society’ challenged the concept of the ‘good state.’

In the 1894 lecture Webb also went on to attack the ‘amiable enthusiasts’ working on ideal communities and identified the aim of

[57] From *Towards Democracy* p.28
[58] Cachin used close textual analysis to show how later, edited; versions of some of the earlier works strengthened the warnings about the dangers of bureaucracy.

Socialism as ‘not to enable this or that comparatively free person to lead an ideal life, but to loosen the fetters of millions who toil in our factories and who cannot possibly be moved to Freeland or Topolo-bampo.’ (Fabian Society Tract 51:10)

Webb argued that the approach of isolated communities serving as examples to others had failed as well as all the approaches which envisaged ‘opening up the land’ to the unemployed or city dwellers generally. Such colonies would not be self supporting, would pay low wages and would rely on the belief that ‘a heterogeneous collection of waifs and strays, without a common acquaintanceship, a common faith, or a common tradition, could be safely trusted for a single day to manage the nation’s land or capital.’ (Fabian Society Tract 51:12)

For the Fabians the fact that agriculture is afforded a lesser role in Britain as a result of the market system and the international division of labour is a ‘given.’

Later in the same lecture Webb said ‘the steam engine, the factory and the mine have come to stay; and our only choice is between their management by individual owners or their management by the community,’ (Fabian Society Tract 51:17)

To conclude the lecture Webb identified those who wished to settle more people on the land, or even enhance the role of the peasant proprietor, as being proponents of ‘economic individualism’ whose real aim was to bolster the forces of reaction against the march of progress.

In adopting this position, the Fabian Society followed the analysis of Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848

'The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared to the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.' [59] and the subsequent point made which relates not just to the 'idiocy' of rural life but the backward nature of rural workers;[60]

'Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.'[61]

There is a considerable distance between the Fabian Society in the 1890's and the Marxist position of 1848, but if one examines the points made by Webb in the Fabian Lecture there is a clear acceptance of the 'feudal phase' in the development of society. From that it must follow that Socialists must do nothing to assist in returning to 'pre Capitalist'

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[59] Communist Manifesto. Chapter 1: introduction. Online access: www.**marxist**s.org/archive/**marx**/works/1848/communist.../ch01.htm accessed 23/11/2011

[60] In the Collected Works of Marx and Engels: [4:309] Marx made the point about rural life without using the 'idiocy' phrase. There is some dispute about the translation of this phrase from the Communist Manifesto. He did describe the rural dweller as living in ' isolation and stupor in which (he) has vegetated almost unchanged for thousands of years' (*Housing Question*, Pt. III, Chapter 3).

[61] From Communist Manifesto. (7) above.

modes of production. As rural workers are not chosen to be the transformative force in society, then the formation of agricultural unions or attempts to improve conditions and wages is to be welcomed by any Socialist but are not be seen to be critically important. The needs of rural workers must in every aspect be subordinate to those of the industrial vanguard.

Food production, in turn, must be primarily for industrial workers and no logical barrier to imported food acceptable, given the 'elaborate differentiation' or the international division of labour which Fabians argued that socialists 'must accept'. Quality of life, when considered by Fabians, will improve because what is now run for individual profit will henceforth be for the benefit of the community.

Both the SDF and the Fabian Society wanted to distance themselves from any association with utopianism or the natural life. Increasingly, the Socialist League, which had broken away from the SDF in 1884, came under Anarchist control and critics were able to utilise 'Anarchist' as a wide term of abuse. G.B. Shaw in the 1893 Fabian Tract '*the Impossibilities of Anarchism'* attacked the philosophy for excessive individualism and undue emphasis on land and soil issues. Shaw stood instead for the efficiencies of the cities, the rationality of commerce and above all the transformative potential of the State against vague notions of personal freedom and expression.

Colonies and Communities

The most common accusation levelled at co-operative colonies and other forms of ‘utopianism’ was that those involved had opted out of the ‘hard work’ needed to bring about political change. To a degree, they were ‘the result of frustration at the Socialists’ failure to effect a moral and social revolution.’ (Gould 1988:49) and a growing distrust of perceived Socialist disdain for the individual.

The ‘spurious collectivism’ of the participants was dismissed as being self – indulgent and often such groups were damned by their alleged association with a wide range of sexual and behavioural practices which was seen to be their ‘real’ purpose[62].

Horticulture was at the heart of many of these endeavours, owing to the influential position of Kropotkin, the example of successful intensive horticulture in the Channel Islands and the assumption that to achieve a simple life required no particular level of skill. Kropotkin especially promoted the use of horticulture using the by-products of industrial processes, the availability of urban human waste and proximity to markets. This led to a number of colonies close to towns and cities where working people would be able to visit and see the attractive nature of the lifestyle.

[62] Note the vehemence of the denunciation of Carpenter by Engels.

Clousden Hill, close to the centre of Newcastle-on-Tyne,[63] was one which endured long enough for some lessons to be learned on methods of operation. The English Land Colonisation Society (ELCS) envisaged a co-operative chain of small-holdings 'as the possible beginning of an entire alteration in our economic system.' (Todd 1986:14) With the scientific work done by Kropotkin there was confidence that such colonies would prosper both agriculturally and as examples of the advantages of co-operation over wasteful competition. The colony would not be run as a retreat but in such a way as to integrate horticulture and industry. The advantages of new technology would be applied to both sectors. Clousden Hill started in 1895 on 20 acres of reasonable land and was given a tentative welcome by Kropotkin although he did warn of the need to understand how hard the work would be, and the need for effective control over incomers. The outlined approach for Clousden was based upon intensive agriculture using 'advanced principles of scientific research and instruction.' (Todd 1986:23) and was eagerly promoted in a number of Anarchist publications as well as in the more mainstream press such as *Horticultural Review*. Whilst the Fabians might have seen the experiment as a failure, it did for a while prosper, led to other (non – co-operative) smallholdings and built links with more mainstream Co-operative Societies. The major difficulty was the amount of attention received, which led to an influx of International Anarchists and Tolstoyans some of whom rejected the concepts of 'work,' which rather

[63] Full title 'Clousden Hill Free Communist and Co-operative Colony'

clashed with the needs of both horticulture and animal husbandry. As the Anarchist movement declined after 1896, new members did not come forward and, although some early participants went on to other smallholdings, the Colony was generally considered to have failed. The SDF, through the publication *Justice,* was alleged to have printed rumours about the Colony and few Socialists mourned the passing of the colony around 1899. However, many of those involved used the experience of co-operation to become involved in political and trades union action.

It also exposed the fact that '**the Co-op**' in its retail and wholesale manifestations had 'begun to accept more of the ideology of Capitalism and saw the enlargement of their own organisations *within* the market economy as a criterion of 'progress'' (Todd 1986:36) Local criticism sparked off the purchase of farms by Co-operative Societies in the North East of England on the basis of bringing together producer / consumer[64].

Other colonies and smallholdings were directly influenced by Clousden Hill, especially that of Daisy Hill near Blackpool set up by Allan Clarke and the *Northern Weekly* based in Bolton. Clarke was a prominent critic of the factory system who acknowledged a debt to Robert Owen and the Chartists. He held strong views on food and diet – he opened a vegetarian restaurant in Bolton in 1904 - and set up the 'Daisy Colony Scheme' to promote a healthier diet and to 'form a communistic colony

[64] Having a significant influence upon starting the process whereby the Co-operative is now the largest farmer in Britain in 2012.

and natural holiday resort .... to start market gardening.' (*Northern Weekly May 21st. 1904*[65]) The local branches [31 in 6 months] undertook political discussion, held classes on horticulture and raised funds for the purchase or rent of land. Clarke published a pamphlet '*Can we get Back To the Land?'* in 1905 and acquired two acres of land in Bispham, with prospective settlers having spent time previously working on allotments. As with Clousden Hill, and the later Girlington Klondike in Bradford, many visitors and onlookers had to be accommodated, making practical horticulture difficult. Unlike Clousden and the many other Anarchist or Tolstoyan colonies of the period, the Daisy Colony spent little time on group interaction as Clarke envisaged full time food production taking up most of the time and energy. The failure of the Colony came in 1907 and the *Northern Weekly* shortly after. Clarke had proposed 'a co-operative allotments scheme ... as an alternative' (Salveson 1984:35) but attracted little support. Whilst Clarke (who went on to have a long history in various movements) wanted to return to 'former times' in one sense, the Daisy Colony above all represented his conviction that *practical* ways forward could be found for working people to live healthier lives both as producers and consumers.

[65] Quoted in Salveson P. '*Getting Back to the Land: The Daisy Colony Experiment'* in 'Labour's Turning Point in the North West 1880-1914. North West Labour History Society 1984.

Conclusions

Britain, after the Repeal of the Corn Laws, had become a country in which commerce was celebrated as 'the grand panacea, which, like a beneficent medical discovery, will serve to inoculate with the healthy and saving taste for civilization all the nations of the world.'[66] The benefits of Capitalism were evident in the factories and mines and manifested in impressive machinery and the application of technology. Before 1880 there were notable thinkers and movements which questioned this form of progress and when they invoked the countryside they did so as the expression of some essential English character, now lost or struggling. Wiener coined the term 'the Southern Metaphor' which explained the success of Capitalist Britain 'not so much to continuing effort as to their unique cultural inheritance.' (Wiener 1981:42) In this reading, Britain is a uniquely great country not because of the outputs of the factories but owing to the links with the soil and the village.

Britain had a distinct landowning class which had adapted to the needs of the economy and the rising population by expanding agriculture, whilst cutting labour, in order to feed the towns and cities. Imports of food tended to be confined to specialist items not generally consumed by most of the population. From the 1870's food imports were rapidly

[66] Richard Cobden quoted in Wiener M.J. 'English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit.' 1981 p.28

increasing as a result of opening up new lands, refrigeration, shipping improvements and, above all, price advantage. This was despite the fact that many countries which opened up 'new lands' did so in a way which resulted in much lower productivity levels than Britain and substantial environmental damage. Therefore, British agriculture was undermined by less efficient production because such imports were the only way to pay for manufactured goods from Britain. What *really* mattered for the economy was 'industry, trade and finance' (Hobsbawm 1990:199) and farming could be sacrificed to that end. By the period 1880-1890 'the countryside was 'empty' and available for use as an integrating cultural symbol.' (Wiener 1981:49) Those who might have suffered from the empty countryside – the landowners – 'were not prepared to do more than make a nominal protest, for if their income was not already diversified into urban real-estate, mining, industry and finance, it could easily be so salvaged.' (Hobsbawm 1990:199)

Instead of adopting measures of protection, which most of Europe did intermittently in this period, British agriculture went into areas of production where foreign competition seemed impossible; horticulture and pasture. This led to lower rents, shedding of labour and reductions in acreages, as agriculture tried to obey the same laws as other Capitalist enterprises. The large landowners were able to get through this period owing to the lack of substantial unrest in England[67] and the fact that they had diversified their investments. Unlike in Denmark,

[67] Though not in Ireland – where land reform was accelerated in response to substantial unrest and where the model of co-operation was adopted much more than in England.

farmers did not co-operate their way out of a crisis, rather more they sat tight given that 'no alternative existed between the individual farm and the intervention and planning of the state.' (Hobsbawm 1990:201)

Most Radicals and early Socialists therefore targeted state intervention, through nationalisation or other form of common ownership, as the **only** possibility for change. The Labour Party maintained land nationalisation as policy until 1945 but then decided not to pursue the matter after the 'successes' of State controlled wartime agriculture. Whilst much of the output of the Fabian Society, and later Labour Party material, offered self congratulatory words on the displacement of 'cranks' such as Kropotkin, Morris and Carpenter, the more serious long term consequence was that the Left generally[68] had isolated itself from those seeking self sufficiency or local and autonomous ways of working.

Emerging Socialism had failed to build links with those *within* farming or who had agricultural expertise, so they acquired no compensatory knowledge. Many smallholders and small farmers were assumed to be similar in outlook to the cranks, rather than producers who were able to operate flexibly and supply local markets. The particular expertise that would have assisted the Labour Party in the following century was an understanding of the extent to which agriculture had to be <u>sustainable</u>, with there being an enduring policy assumption that agriculture could be run on industrial lines for the benefit of working people. This 'industrial scale' agriculture demanded large farm sizes, and Labour Party policy

[68] Note Communist Party of Great Britain material 1930 – 1945 and ILP material, especially in the 1920's

in the twentieth century relentlessly pursued such aims at the expense of smaller producers. Indeed, little support was given to the extension of smallholdings as a consequence of the assumption that it would only encourage a reactionary formation.

This failure to engage with smallholders and small farmers, and to understand rural concerns, left the notions of ‘Englishness and the countryside’ much more in the hands of the Right in the twentieth century, particularly during times of economic and political hardship. With the Left having portrayed the possibilities of ‘back to the land’ as a reactionary or crank demand, the Right was able to establish the concept of ‘peasant proprietors’ or ‘yeomen’ as being the backbone of England and a bulwark against Socialism or the threat from the Communism of the Soviet Union. More immediately a concentration upon land *ownership* served to allow little thinking about food policy.

Chapter Three

The Royal Commission of 1905[69]

'A foodless people cannot go to war; a foodless people cannot support a war." [70]

The Royal Commission on Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War reported its findings in 1905. It had been established two years earlier with terms of reference which invited wide ranging consideration.

'To inquire into the conditions affecting the importation of food and raw materials into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in time of war, and into the amount of such supplies existing in the Country at any given period; and to advise whether it is desirable to adopt any measures, in addition to the maintenance of a strong Fleet, by which such supplies can be better secured and violent fluctuations avoided.'

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[69] Details of the evidence and the conclusions of the Commission are to be found in Appendix 1along with accompanying Parliamentary Debates.

Appointed on 27 Apr 1903. Report presented on 31 July 1905.
Cd.2643, xxxix. Other papers: Cd.2644-5, xxxix-xl.

Members:

Lord Balfour of Burleigh; Prince of Wales; Duke of Sutherland; Lord Burghclere;H. Chaplin; J.L. Wharton; Sir G.H.U. Noel; Sir J.C.R. Colomb; Sir A.E.Bateman; Sir H. Seton-Karr; H.H.S. Cunynghame; E. Robertson; T.E. Holland; A. Emmott; A.S. Harvey (d. 13 March 1905); R. Montgomery; J.E. Street; J.Wilson.

From: 'List of commissions and officials: 1900-1909 (nos. 103-145)', Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Volume 10: Officials of Royal Commissions of Inquiry 1870-1939 (1995), pp. 42-57.
http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=16607 Date accessed: 21 November 2012.

[70] Captain Osborne, Royal Navy in Owen 1909:1570

The work of the Commission is important to this study in that it was the only opportunity, until wartime preparations started in the 1930's, to carry out a systematic appraisal of the extent of suffering that might occur in the event of dislocation of food supplies. (The evidence presented to the Commission, and the attendant Parliamentary and public debates are to be found in Appendix One.) It was also an opportunity for a number of those who felt that the high level of imports and lower domestic agricultural output were two factors which, taken together, created a level of national vulnerability. This was not just thought to be the case in the event of any *future* war, but also an expression of anxiety regarding the conduct of the Second Boer War (1899 – 1902) and the dislocation of trade brought about by the Spanish American War of 1898.

With active consideration of Free Trade, Protectionism and Imperial Preference also happening, this meant that the deliberations of the Committee took place at a vibrant political time. In addition, the Royal Commission would permit an assessment of the extent to which two decades of Radical and Socialist interpretation of food policy had entered mainstream political discourse as well as the more generalised anxieties about the future of British agriculture.

The Commission spent little time in consideration of 'any measures' in the terms of reference which might have increased domestic food production, but did note the extent of the exposure to imports. It

managed to identify that strategic weakness without suggesting an effective remedy.

Where it did exceed the terms of reference was in spending time in assessing the likely reactions, especially of working people, to restrictions in supplies or fluctuations in price in the event of War. In the earlier Commons Debate which was called to urge the establishment of a Commission, particular emphasis was placed upon the apparent suffering of working people. Significantly, most of the contributors to the debate[71] represented large towns or cities. Howard Vincent (Sheffield Central c. 1125) noted this fact 'showed (it) was in no sense an agricultural question, and that it had nothing to do with bringing arable land into re-cultivation, but it was a question which vitally affected the welfare and interests of the masses of the people.' What this intervention showed was that, even before the Commission had begun its work, informed opinion was anxious to separate availability of food from any concern about sources of supply.

In order to assess the operation and conclusions of the Committee, there are important areas which require further examination. The 1905 Report might well have very largely avoided consideration of increasing domestic food production, the uncertainties brought on by the Boer War (which might have induced a more reflective position on British military might) and Tariff Reform, but the recommendations were influential because they formed the basis of Government Policy until late into

[71] Commons debate on National Food Supply. HC Deb 28 January 1902. Vol. 101 cc. 1119 – 1163. References in the text identify speaker, constituency and column.

1916. That over two years of hardship in the Great War had to elapse before the twin pillars of free trade and *laissez faire* were seriously challenged indicated the importance of the 1905 Report. Regularly, any M.P. wishing to question naval power and the 'food question' would be referred back to the 1905 Report and its apparent settled conclusions, including the idea that increased domestic food production was not in the best interests of the country.

The proceedings of this Commission seemed to lack any focus upon the state of agriculture in Britain, even though it could have done so as part of the brief it was given. To some extent the agricultural industry had moved on from the worst of the sustained depression of the 1870s to the 1890's and had reached a level below which it could not realistically fall. The concentration upon products which could not easily be imported, such as fresh fruit, vegetables and fresh, better quality, meat had taken the place of wheat once it was clear that it was not possible to compete with cheap food from abroad. Although the twenty year period was a depression it was also a period of change based on increasing the use of pasture and the growth of market gardening. In addition, two Royal Commissions specifically established to look agricultural depression had offered little in terms of a way forward.[72]

Running parallel to the sessions of the Royal Commission in 1903 – 1905, the proceedings of the unofficial Tariff Commission on Agriculture had also failed to concentrate on the state of the industry, preferring to

[72] Commissions on 'Agricultural Interests,' final report in January 1881 and 'Agricultural Depression,' final report in June 1897.

find ‘the best ways of harmonizing any conflict of interest between agriculture and manufacturing.’(Marrison 1986:174) The Tariff Reform Campaign might have appeared to assist the British farmer by the erection of tariff walls to provide some shelter, but agricultural opinion was not generally in favour. Many farmers were aware that any form of Imperial Preference would bring them into competition with the largely untapped resources of the Empire. Any encouragement to Canadian agriculture, for example, would have led to rapid opening up of new lands and the recruitment of additional labour – especially farmers and farm labourers from Britain.[73]

The 1905 Royal Commission took the view that bounties or other forms of inducements to farmers should be discouraged. Therefore, if home production could not be *incentivised* and it was not clear whether farming would gain from protection at all, no viable alternative agriculture change was envisaged. The working class and trades union delegates, attracted to the Commission by the efforts of S.L. Murray, were disappointed that poverty alone did not seem sufficient to the Commissioners as to require action. The Commission concentrated upon wheat, deciding that this was the decisive product and could not be effectively stored. The spread of supplies from around the world once again ensured that Britain had the resilience to avoid any hardship in wartime. The free trade argument also prevailed, with the dominant

[73] Lord Onslow, President of the Board of Agriculture in a letter to the *Morning Post* November 26th 1903 wrote of ‘millions of acres of colonial soil, yet untilled.’ Marrison 1986:173

view being that Protection would lead to higher prices and less certainty of supply.

Those working for Tariff Reform were also aware that they were vulnerable to the line of argument that Protectionism would make future war more likely. Germany had introduced some protective measures in 1879 which had increased prices and led to demands for higher wages for the industrial working class and the stopping of the flow from the countryside.[74] Strategically, without the benefit of a large empire, Germany risked bringing about retaliation through protection and this was recognised by the actions of Chancellor Caprivi who upon election in 1890 re-introduced free trade. Substantial rural pressure brought about a reversion to protectionism in Germany from 1894 onwards. The justification for protectionism, which was tightened by von Bulow in 1900, was that 'without large domestic grain production the country would be unable to survive a blockade; without a strong agricultural population the man power of the German army would be sapped.' (Gerschenkron 1966:54)

Protectionism in Germany embedded the Junkers and thus gave more power to the same kind of people who had proved so ineffective in maintaining domestic agriculture in Britain. The debates in Germany, *at the same time as the Royal Commission upheld free trade,* centred upon the degree to which Free Trade would result in war. The British

[74] See Gerschenkron 1966 for some excellent background detail.

rearmed to ensure the continuation of free trade and the Germans did so because free trade with Britain – with all her colonial advantages – would inevitably lead to war. The promotion of food self sufficiency in Germany was utilised to help the population adjust to the distinct possibility of war as part of *'Wehrwirtschaft'* [war preparedness]

Later Interpretations

The Royal United Services Institution (RUSI) considered the impact of the Commission in 1909[75] and largely accepted that dependency on imported food was inevitable and that the possibility of war was increased as a result. One exception to that was the contribution from Harry Quelch[76] who re-iterated many of the demands of Socialists in the 1880's and 1890's. His line of argument was that 'all countries become more and more dependent upon foreign sources for their food.' (Owen 1909:1565) and what must follow is that all markets for manufactured goods must diminish. Every industrial nation will *have* to re-discover ways of producing more food.

The lack of agricultural focus to be found in both the findings and the detailed evidence of the Royal Commission is hardly surprising, given

[75] Owen D. *Our Food Supplies* RUSI Journal 53 (part2) (1909 July-December) pp. 1551 -1578. Opening lecture by Douglas Owen and then contributions from Institute members and authorities.

[76] Harry Quelch (1858-1913) was an important member of the SDF who stayed in the Party after the split with the Socialist League and went on to become the editor of *Justice.* He was involved in discussions about the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) but remained with the SDF and was associated with International Marxism. Lenin wrote a memorial article, praising his contribution to the cause of Social Democracy.

that the Commission had little room to manoeuvre and little pressure exerted to consider domestic food production more seriously. The Commissioners concluded that 'they accepted the decline in food production as an incontrovertible fact' (Hurwitz 1968:206) As the evidence showed, agriculturalists either declined to give evidence of how production might be increased or were poorly represented, most reasonable people having accepted that their position was politically unsupportable. The lasting legacy was the concentration upon the assessment of working class reactions to interruptions in food supplies. In 1909 RUSI commented that the question of panic had not been fully addressed, with *fear* of interruptions in supply being the main issue which they should have tried to understand. One contributor to the discussion – Lord Ellenbrough of the Royal Navy – offered the following;

'If our food supply is interrupted it is not the poor alone who will suffer, it is the weakest who will starve first. Law and Order will disappear. Bank balances, investments, jewels, furniture, and motor cars are not edible, and force and violence will be made us of to obtain food for the strongest.' (Owen 1909:1563)[77]

Harry Quelch countered that by pointing out that currently only the poor starve and in the event of war 'the rich would be fairly well able to take care of themselves, as they are now; that is to say, unless the anger of

[7777] This was partly in response to the lecturer – Douglas Owen – having asserted that the Rich would make sure they had all the best foodstuffs. Caborne went on to say that 'The rich and poor will both starve.'

the populace in consequence of the mismanagement of the affairs of the State, and the starvation in which they found themselves, came to be such that the rich had to suffer at their hands.' (Owen 1909:1565)

To ensure that the spirit of the Radicals and Socialists of the earlier period had not entirely disappeared Quelch offered the members of the Institution the following ways forward – National granaries, a survey of public land with a view to public ownership of farms and the promotion of widespread co-operation. From the perspective of 1909 a number of speakers commented on those issues which the 1905 Commission had neglected to consider. Referring to a newspaper campaign in 1909 Captain Osborne of the Royal Navy pointed out that recently the Prime Minister had turned down a request for another Commission owing to the 'long and thorough investigation so recently as 1905' (Owen 1909:1571) Osborne concluded that another inquiry was required because 'a foodless people cannot go to war; a foodless people cannot support a war.' (Owen 1909:1570)

This emphasis could have been increased further had the 1905 Commission, or any of the witnesses, made the link with interruptions to the export trade. Given that free trade depended upon the exchange of goods then the failure of the Navy to protect shipping would have also have affected exports and led to a substantial rise in unemployment. This might be have been seen as exceeding the brief of the Commission but was a major component of the campaign conducted by S.L. Murray and was one of the reasons why it was possible to put

together a coalition of interests. The concentration upon working class and their propensity to riot or stage an organised revolt did however confirm one point; ‘that poverty had become a key issue of strategy and of national survival.’ (Offer 1989:222)

Many of those who joined the campaign of S. L. Murray thought that the argument for increased domestic food production was so strong that the Commission was bound to conclude that it was an urgent necessity. Instead, the question was largely re-cast as being about questioning the power of the Navy, the loyalty of the Empire and impracticalities of growing or storing more food.

Chapter Four

Conservatism, Agriculture and the First World War.

Introduction

In 1923 the former Conservative, substantial landowner and agricultural writer Christopher Turnor wrote off the Conservative Party as having 'one time represented these (rural) people, but it has abandoned them.' (Turnor 1923:86)

This chapter examines the development of a Conservative position on agriculture in the light of the failure of the 1905 Royal Commission to offer any prospect of increased domestic production either on strategic or cost grounds. Given that the emerging Labour Party had effectively cut itself off from Radical and Socialist perspectives on agriculture in favour of land nationalisation and the Liberal Party remained preoccupied with the 'Land Question', the Conservatives shifted their policy towards a more pragmatic appreciation of how agriculture might be managed.

The default political position of the Conservative Party was to support the landowner and to be seen as best representing the rural voice. Liberal attempts at land reform, including settling more people on the land, were not opposed in principle, but on the grounds of cost to the public purse or in defence of the principle of private property.

The paradox is that it was the Conservative Government of Peel which took on the vested agricultural interests in order to repeal the Corn Laws in 1846. The Anti Corn Law League mounted a successful campaign but one which so strongly attacked the selfishness of the farming and landowning interests that most Conservative MP's felt compelled to defend them. In February 1846 'two thirds of the Conservative Party in the Commons voted against their leader' (Gash1974:54) and Peel had to rely upon Liberal support to repeal the Corn Laws. Until the beginning of the twentieth century the Conservative Party felt itself to be so divided on the issues of agricultural protection and free trade that little policy formulation took place. The only 'policy' was to support the landowner. Conservative historian Norman Gash referred to 1846 as being 'the most spectacular party disruption in British political history'[78] and although some effort was made to restore Protectionist policies in 1852, the Conservative Party broadly favoured free trade until the end of the century.

For most of the intervening period the Conservatives, along with the Chambers of Agriculture, campaigned on issues of local taxation and other rural 'burdens' upon landowners such as the Poor Laws. Whilst the Liberal moves towards the extension of small holdings were not actively opposed there was resistance to the charge to be made on the local rates and opposition to the *compulsory* nature of land acquisition. Increasing the number of *owners* of agricultural land was generally

[78] Norman Gash *Wellington and Peel* 1832 – *1846* in Southgate D. Ed. 1974 *The Conservative Leadership 1832 – 1932.*

considered to be of benefit to the maintenance of stability, but there was no linking of such a development with a concomitant increase in food production. That arable farming was declining, land under populated and under cultivated was taken to be as a result of the greater needs of manufacturing. 'Cheap food' through imports was beneficial to the efficient functioning of society and might also assist in keeping industrial wages low. Writing in 1901 J.W. Martin[79] portrayed the neglect of the countryside by the main Political parties as ending in rural depopulation, moral and physical degradation and substantial loss of rural wealth. Governments, in pursuing free trade, were not being patriotic and needed 'to make the country far more self supporting than it is today.' (Martin 1901:248)

Martin urged the Conservatives to become more assertive and dictate to foreign countries (*they* are dependent upon *us*) and financial interests. It is the latter who have exposed us to the grave danger of dependency upon foreign food, the result of which could be that 'our Empire would be broken at one blow.' (1901:258.) Martin then identified that Britain and her Empire might be brought down despite (quoting Lord Roseberry) the existence of 'the hand of God in our history.' Moving the hyperbole up further Martin warned that God works in such ways, we might lose our leadership as 'at one period of the world's history it was Israel, now it is England' which could be laid low.' (1901:266)

[79] *The Ruin of Rural England. A Warning.* Simpkin, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd: London 1901

Martin in 1901 offered what might be seen as an extreme analysis of the state of the nation, but what he did do is question whether the supposed benefits of free trade were accruing to Britain. His analysis suggested that the wealth of Britain was built on the back of agriculture and it was that wealth which built up industry home and abroad. Now (1901) imports far exceed exports, Britain lives upon banking, finance and shipping, but Martin posed the question where does that money go? Whilst this theme was not expanded upon until later in the 1920's, and then linked with conspiracy theories about Jewish interests, it portrays landowners as having been uniquely threatened. This threat came from 'the rise of speculators, financiers and industrialists' (Cooper 1989:11) and, later, from death duties and taxation. This assertion rather ignored the fact that it was large landowners who financed much of this speculation[80], but it is worth noting that the *feeling* of being victimised.

The deliberate under cultivation of large estates during the Great Depression, particularly in the Eastern Counties is largely portrayed as being the responsibility of Government by many Conservative thinkers. Martin (1901) presented the 1870's as a time of sturdy folk, self supporting communities and robust populations contrasted with money leaving the villages, old men left behind and a residue of poor labourers. The existence of a golden age, this time only a few years

[80] In *English landed Society in the Nineteenth Century.* Thompson F.M.L. 1963 the author provides many examples; The Marquess of Salisbury, Earl of Durham & Earl Fitzwilliam on p.307 alone. In reverse, Thompson details business people who moved into land ownership such as W.H. Smith, W.G. Armstrong, Samuel Cunliffe – Lister (p.297) *neither* party would be especially concerned with agricultural production.

before the agricultural depression, is contrasted with the current state of the nation; 'truly the English are an imperial race of the soft, generous-hearted type: they have bossed the world so long that in commerce as in politics they gave all the advantage away.' (Martin 1901:105) The strength of feeling is compounded by the conduct of the Boer War – 'our military incompetence in the South African War'- (1901:267) but Martin conveyed a sense of conspiracy, although its nature is not specific.

Martin saw the decline of agriculture as being related to decline generally, but at various levels of analysis – Imperial, moral, military, even spiritual. This would seem to offer fertile ground for political expression on behalf of those seeking to defend and promote the national interest. In addition, one would have expected some of that feeling to have emerged during the Royal Commission of Food in Wartime (chapter 3) given that such an inquiry had a remit to look at national *security.* Close examination of the evidence shows surprisingly little organised political input into the process, although the efforts of S.L. Murray in setting up the Inquiry were widely supported.

For the Conservative Party an acceptance of the principles of Free Trade, despite two distinct periods of flirting with Tariff Reform, gave them little room to manoeuvre. Bowley's statement that 'our foreign trade is to a great extent an elaborate machinery for supplying us with food,' (Bowley 1905:133) helps to understand why this might be. In importing £470 million pounds of goods (nearly three quarters food or raw materials) this represented interest on capital invested abroad, thus

identifying a *financial* imperative for imports. Secondly, if we did not import, then nobody would buy our exports and damage our *economic* interests. Thirdly, the decline in the price of imported foodstuffs lowered costs for a considerable percentage of the agriculture industry, giving a *farming* benefit. Finally, Bowley argued that the whole 'elaborate' process did not end up with funds leaving the country but is a shift in which money 'goes to the artisan or the factory hand instead of to the agricultural labourer' (Bowley 1905:137) thus offering (on balance) a *political* benefit.

For the Conservative Party, unless serious questions were raised regarding national security, the maintenance of free trade was not to be challenged. Protection in order to allow farming some space to adapt to new markets or take advantage of some of the scientific progress *might* have been feasible. Amongst many in the farming community[81] it was thought that protection would only benefit the large farmers in the Eastern Counties. The campaign of Joseph Chamberlain for Tariff Reform also did not seem to offer any possibility of vastly increased production, given the enthusiasm with which the colonial benefits were pursued. The prospect, therefore, was of a 'policy which benefited only industrial and colonial interests' (Marrison 1986:173) and coupled with an increase in food prices which many would blame on farmers.

[81] See Marrison A.J. *The Tariff Commission, Agricultural Protection and Food Taxes 1903 – 1913. Agricultural History Review* 1986. Vol.34 No.2

The Tariff Commission[82], which met at the same time as the Royal Commission on Food in Wartime, struggled to put together a coherent policy for agriculture. Above all, the Conservative Party had suffered a number of crises during the Tariff Reform struggle and this was followed by the heavy electoral defeat of 1906, one which was largely attributed to a divided party. Despite a strong attachment to Free Trade the Conservatives arrived at a compromise after 1906 in which they maintained a token commitment to small amount of duty on foreign corn. Some elements in the Conservative Party did remain committed to some assistance for agriculture[83] before a formal abandonment after the 1910 General Election.

Austen Chamberlain noted that 'we grow so little wheat in these days that even the farmer in most parts of the country is to be reckoned a consumer rather than a producer of wheat.' (in Marrison 1986:183) The

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[82] The Tariff Commission was an unofficial body set up in 1903 under the auspices of the Tariff Reform League. W A S Hewins (at that time Director of the London School of Economics) was Secretary and Sir Robert Herbert was Chairman, by invitation of Joseph Chamberlain. The aims of the Commission were to examine and report on Chamberlain's proposals for tariff reform and their probable effects on British trade and industries; to suggest the best ways to harmonise the various conflicting interests involved and to work out what import duties should be recommended. The Commission collected extensive data from British business through interviews and questionnaires. It was the intention of the Commission to publish reports on every industry that they investigated and bring these together into a final report that would lay out a full tariff scheme. Seven volumes were published, but lack of funds caused the eventual abandonment of publishing. The archives are maintained at the London School of Economics. Further details at http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cgi-bin/vcdf/detail?coll_id=5929&inst_id=1 from which the above description was obtained.

[83] Marrison identifies Austen Chamberlain, Bonar Law, Viscount Ridley and Alfred (later Lord) Milner.

embedding of the 'defeat' of agriculture into Conservative thinking did cause a backlash[84] and created a group of thinkers who were of some influence before the War and of prime importance once food policy changed at the beginning of 1917. It would be wrong to infer that the Conservatives did not have a food policy; Joseph Chamberlain expressed the central question clearly – 'why should the British working men pay more for their food?' [85](Gollin 1965: 121) To reinforce that, in 1903 the influential *Daily Mail* campaigned against 'stomach taxes' although it later modified its position to both oppose food taxes and be broadly in favour of protectionism. Again, Joseph Chamberlain posed the essential question in respect of possible Imperial Preference; 'why should they ['the working men] sacrifice their own precarious standard of living for the sake of agriculturalists living in the great Colonies thousands of miles from Britain's shores?' (Gollin 1965:121)

Chamberlain thought that such reform would repair the damage done to agriculture and reconnect many people in Britain with the soil. Being self sufficient in agriculture would help people understand what constituted a proud nation or empire.

It was the persistence of the Liberal Party in continuing to address the 'Land Question' that caused the Conservative Party to re-assess their position on agriculture. Whilst the Tariff Reform debates were meant to produce an advantage for agriculture, they were no substitute for

[84] The 1911 work of Christopher Turnor being just one example.
[85] It is worth noting that after the Boer War a 'temporary' Corn Duty was introduced in the 'Hicks – Beach' budget. This was purely to redress the fiscal deficit brought about by the War.

actually focussing on a role for the industry. The Land Enquiry Committee of 1912[86] produced an overview of rural life which moved beyond some of the crude anti landlordism of Lloyd George. Above all, it invited the Conservative Party to move away from an instinctive pro landlord position in favour of a national perspective. In doing this, 'it drew upon the older tradition of Liberal – Unionist land reform associated with Joseph Chamberlain and his lifelong follower Jesse Collings, the cardinal features of which were an emphasis on the creed of self – help, social justice and rural utopianism.' (Cooper 1989:7)

For the Conservatives the emphasis was upon encouraging land *ownership* in the shape of yeomen. These were not the urban unemployed or the ex – servicemen favoured after 1918, but those in and of the countryside already who would assist in promoting rural stability through the benefits of owning a stake in the land. This was to be brought about 'by instilling a spirit of self reliance, enterprise and pride of personal possession' (Cooper 1989:8) into people who would contribute to social stability. This approach was in line with the manifesto contained in *'Land Problems and National Welfare'* written by Christopher Turnor in 1911. The introduction to this work was provided by Lord Milner[87] who wrote that 'we have to get back to the old conception of the paramount importance of production and of a healthy, vigorous and moral race.' (1911 vi-vii) This conception of 'back to the

[86] A formally constituted body which produced two volumes of work available at http://archive.org/stream/landreportofland01landuoft#page/n3/mode/2up

[87] Lord Milner was a colonial administrator, business person, Liberal and then Conservative politician, member of the Lloyd George Cabinet from 1917 and agricultural 'expert' who chaired a Committee on Food Supplies set up in 1915. Reputed to be the author of the 'Balfour Declaration.'

land' differed significantly from most of the Radical proponents in that it was envisaged to be greater in scope; nothing less than the primacy of agriculture above all other considerations. Lord Milner concluded that the underlying issue is that of obtaining and sustaining greater production of food in Britain.

In pursuance of the 'non political' tone of the work Turnor cited the figures of Horace Plunkett and Peter Kropotkin as showing how co-operation and intensive husbandry could transform Britain. Cooper (1989) noted the influence of a group of agriculturalists around Turnor and Lord Milner who developed from around 1910 and who possessed substantial farming knowledge.[88]

In 1911, Turnor was already calling for a National Party which would move away from the pettiness of Party politics. Whilst the proponents wished to deploy their expertise to improve agricultural output generally, they above all saw a role for themselves as offering leadership as enlightened landlords. What they could demonstrate is how the Country could benefit from the application of modern farming methods under the direction of themselves who were self evidently *special* people with a historical role to perform.

Turnor cited a series of articles in the *Morning Post* by the German agriculturalist Von Zelter in which he identified a pressing need for Britain to increase the number of farmers who own – rather than rent –

[88] Cooper cites AHH Matthews, Lord Ernle, Christopher Turnor, Lord Milner and Charles Bathurst. The significance of this group lies in the degree to which they formed a large part of the expert knowledge drawn upon during the First World War.

their land as part of ‘an endeavour .... to create afresh a peasantry, and a new class of landowners occupying an intermediate position between them and the great landlords.’ (1911:50)

Whilst criticism of free trade is that which most engages Turnor in his analysis in 1911, it is accompanied by an attribution of the problems of farming to the actions of ‘middlemen’ or ‘financiers’ who make money out of food producers without delivering any real value to the consumer. Wealth had become too centralised, too dependent on financiers who took advantage of the ‘tenets of that derelict school of political economy which emanated from Manchester.’ (1911:211)

The main focus of any National Party should not be to take part in the Free Trade / Tariff Reform debate but to assert that the Mother country should produce as much food as she can, and then import the rest required from her dominions over the seas.’ (1911:211) The notion that the Empire could be the ‘self supporting unit’ was one which the Conservative Party had advanced in the past, most notably through Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform movement.

Whilst the Turnor / Milner group wished to present themselves as acting in the national interest and offering practical and moral leadership, much of their approach was based on the countryside as being ‘different’ from the towns and cities. Whilst such a view rested upon their own role in becoming leaders of the countryside it also incorporated a sense of a corporate rural policy. Although the primary

requirement was for the introduction of efficiency into farming it should not be done by the copying of industrial methods. To move away from the rural equivalent of the industrial working class could be avoided by a substantial increase in land ownership allied to extensive co-operation between small producers. Alongside that co-operation would be a comprehensive recreation of English village life; the bringing together of improved housing, better farming practice and modest sized industry in rural settings. In contrast to the discussions on Tariff Reform, which had never fully engaged agriculture, the Conservative Party had by 1912 what was close to a comprehensive Rural Policy. The only requirement for any protection might be that for produce which would be the specialism of the smallholder: fruit and vegetables and dairy produce.

The encroachment upon traditional Liberal territory which this policy encouraged did not win complete support in Conservative ranks. After all, the Liberal policy 'caused concern in Conservative circles because its proposals incorporated most of the goals for which Radical land reformers had been campaigning since the 1840's' (Green 1996:289)

The success of the Liberal Policy[89] led to Conservative concern that they would lose votes in the countryside and Lord Malmesbury wrote to the Conservative leader Bonar Law that 'the working classes are growing more and more concerned that the Unionist Party is not sincere in its attempt to deal with the Land Question.' (in Green 1996:291) To draw up the response – *A Unionist Agricultural Policy* - the

[89] Particularly, by the success of the Liberals in the North West Norfolk by election in May 1912.

Conservative Party turned to Christopher Turnor and others who had previously been seen as 'land cranks'[90] (Green 1996:291)

The Conservative Party as a whole did not embrace many of the notions advanced by Turnor, Lord Milner and others even though there was general acceptance that they might lose out to the Liberals in the countryside. The opposition was based on the fact that all of the reform options were predicated upon the intervention of the state. Given that England had prospered by *laissez faire* policies and free trade, why should the State now intervene with powers to compulsorily take away land from landowners on the grounds of either social policy or non cultivation? Such a possibility was at odds with Conservative thinking in that it interfered with property rights and treated agriculture as being something *different* or *special* for no clearly thought out reason. By 1914 the compromise position adopted by the Conservative Party was to do nothing but Cooper noted that the balance had shifted in that 'the hegemony of the landed interest in defining the limits of agricultural policy had, for the first time, been seriously challenged within the Conservative Party.' (Cooper 1986:19) On the other hand, the question of *possible* Government intervention in agriculture and rural life generally had been fully aired as part of an examination of how the Party might best win rural votes. However, the fact that the Conservatives pursued tariff reform at all in the period leading up to the War was based not on support for agriculture but to 'pay for social

[90] And, would again be seen as such after 1921.

services and reduce unemployment' (Grainger 1974:174)[91] The Party pursued the possibility of politically unpopular food taxes without any benefit for agriculture. The Conservatives attempted to appeal to the farming interest on the grounds 'that agriculture traditionally fared better under the Unionists than the Liberals' (Marrison 1986:184) without any substantial evidence to support that statement.

The importance of identifying in detail the position of the Conservative Party in the period before the War lies in the fact that it helps to understand how agriculture in general, and increased home food production in particular, could be abandoned so soon after a clear political consensus by the end of the War that vulnerability to imported food should never be repeated. Many of the agriculturalists who tried to shape Conservative agriculture policy played a leading role in Food Production in 1917 – 1918 and anticipated a continuation of wartime priorities. The consequence of the subsequent 'betrayal' was that from 1921 onwards there emerged a disparate group of knowledgeable agriculturalists who not only felt that the Conservatives had no rural policy but that democracy was incapable of protecting the country as a whole. Rural revival and the plea for national (or imperial) self sufficiency were advanced as *the* key indicators of the future of Britain.

[91] In Southgate ed. 1974 *The Conservative Leadership 1832 – 1932.* Chapter: *Between Balfour and Baldwin 1911 – 1923.* Grainger J.H.

The conduct of the War

'*Food Production in War'* by T.H. Middleton[92] is one of the series of works entitled 'Economic and Social History of the World War' which is part of a 'scientific and objective study of war economics' (1923: vi) The opening chapter '*The 'Waygoing''* serves as an assessment of the state of agriculture upon the advent of War and the tone is established from the beginning;

'*When on the 4th.of August 1914 this long lease of peace terminated abruptly, the 'waygoing' found the farmer quite unprepared. The conceptions of his calling, so familiar to his forefathers, were wholly novel to him. The conditions tacitly read into all the farming covenants of 1815 had been forgotten. The rules of good husbandry took no account of the one canon supreme a century before; in 1914 the farmer was no longer the warden of the nation's food, and agriculture, far from occupying the 'lordly' position among our industries accorded to the 'loaf provider' when the nineteenth century opened, had become a minor contributor to the food supply, and to the country's wealth.'* (1923:1)

That the role of agriculture was indeed 'minor' was emphasised by Middleton who produced the calculation that it fed the British people 'for one hundred and twenty five days out of three hundred and sixty five'

[92] Thomas Hudson Middleton was Deputy Director-General, Food Production Department.

or, as he also expressed it 'from Friday night until Monday morning.' (1923:1-2) At the same time, Lord Ernle, the Agricultural historian and Conservative politician had identified that 'in the first place we must recognise that the industry is at present sound and prosperous.' (Ernle: 1936:392)

Middleton's account rested heavily upon the role of the Navy in maintaining imports of food and identified that as being the principal reason why intervention in the first two years of the War was limited. The author, along with the 'official' interpreters of agricultural administration in War such as Fielding, Rew and Beveridge, sought to convey the impression of a thought out, orderly and balanced set of moves. That agriculture was now prosperous after the Great Depression meant that it must be doing something right and any change unnecessary. Henry Rew[93] used the argument that 'a larger quantity of food was being produced at the outbreak of war than at any previous period. The food was not the same in kind as it was forty or fifty years ago, but it was greater in quantity.' (Middleton 1923:7)[94] This rather strange assertion, perhaps only justifiable in the sense of better quality and variety of output, is used to assert that agriculture was best left untouched because farmers would try and increase production through patriotism.

[93] President of the Royal Statistical Society and civil servant at Board of Agriculture, later Ministry of Food. Author of *Food Supplies in Peace and War.* 1920: London.
[94] Address to the Royal Statistical Society. 15th. November 1921.

That they were unable to increase production[95] was as a result of forces beyond their control – loss of fertilisers, much of which came from Germany, large price increases on foodstuffs and the indiscriminate loss of skilled labour to the Army. In addition, it was generally assumed that the War would soon be over and to plough up grassland on the basis of speculation might leave farmers nursing heavy losses as prices fell. For Rew (1920:49) 'the simple fact that the State assumes the power of settling the market value of any commodity must inevitably tend to check the enterprise of the producers of that commodity' meant that the market must be permitted to operate in *any* circumstance. If the State did not intervene when the large increases in imports happened and home production declined, why should it in wartime?

Harking back to the 1905 Royal Commission Rew noted that it did not recommend any action on the grounds that there was no evidence that State action would be achievable. He concluded that 'success or failure under the artificial economic conditions of war furnishes no final evidence that similar results would follow under normal conditions.' (1920:62) This clear statement served to show that whilst the administrators were keen to assert that wartime food production and distribution benefitted from civil service administration, there was limited support for further State intervention elsewhere. Further evidence of this emerged in the reactions to the Milner Committee in 1915 which had been set up in order to 'consider ways to maintain and if possible increase food production in England and Wales.'

[95] There is no evidence they did.

Despite all Party and agricultural representation Milner noted that 'a set of men more absolutely divided, not only on first principles, but in their appreciation of the facts with which they had to deal' (Barnett 1985:51) he had ever met[96] The Milner Report's difficulty lay in that fact the proposal of a guaranteed price for wheat *seemed* to imply that the Navy might be unable to continue to protect imports and also that to plan in such a way implied that the War *might* continue longer than the public anticipated. The complacency which lay at the heart of the 1905 Report (and repeated at a time of actual conflict) allied to the upholding of *laissez faire* principles and no backing for State intervention meant that 1914 – 1916 saw little progress in food production. The rather stark illustration of this is in the table below,

Table: Home Production of Basic Commodities 1914 and 1917, 1918.[97]

[Expressed in thousands of quarters]

	1914	**1917**	**1918**
Wheat	**7804**	**8040**	**11643**
Barley	**8066**	**7185**	**7760**
Oats	**20664**	**26021**	**31196**
Potatoes[98]	**7476**	**8604**	**9223**

[96] Barnett 1985:5 quoting a letter from Milner to Viscount Selborne Agriculture Minister.
[97] Adapted from table in Rew 1920:52

In terms of such basic commodities, very little operational change came about until the concerted intervention of 1917 following the Submarine campaign. (Oats is a slightly different case in that it has a wide range of uses in livestock farming and was used for feeding horses, which played a significant role in the conflict itself.) Some of the explanations for the policy of non intervention were rooted in the fact of good harvests in the early part of the War and a continuation of a substantial amount of imports.

The 'administrator' view is one in which there was a period of taking stock, controlling the very limited amount of food which was exported and weighing up the possibilities of further action. Early intervention was confined to sugar where the State intervened to take over the trade and this was done on the basis that sugar was important to the British diet.[99] It was believed that sugar offered the highest return in calories and that it was essential for the working classes. Barnett (1985:30) noted that 'it was commonly believed by the working classes that children would die unless they ate a pound of sugar a week' and recorded that members of the Royal Society in 1918 'railed against the government's 'stupidity' in shipping in cereals when they should have been concentrating on sugar.' (1985:31)[100]

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[98] Potatoes: Tons

[99] Britain was the highest *per capita* consumer of sugar in the world. All of it was imported and refined in this country. Sugar became the one commodity after the War where the Government acted to bring about self – sufficiency. See Chapter 8.

[100] Despite this T.H. Middleton devoted one chapter of 'Food Production in War' to the developing science of nutrition. The Second World War was an example of how far this had moved on, although sugar seems to have still been valued, perhaps as much for 'morale.'

Aside from sugar, and the need to make proper provision for securing military food supplies, the first two years of the War was marked by 'business as usual'[101] and the conviction that 'food imports would be best ensured by leaving merchants and traders free to obtain supplies in the normal competitive way.' (Burnett 1983:244) When voluntary measures for restraint were urged, they tended to be based on a lack of understanding of what constituted the working class diet (beyond bread and sugar) or the effect that large price increases were having. In the case of the latter, 1914 – 1916 was marked by substantial amounts of industrial unrest and rent strikes. Some sections of industry were affected by short time working[102] and the loss of the breadwinner brought about substantial hardship, exacerbated by profiteering.[103]

Problems with distribution also caused difficulties in many parts of the country from late 1916 onwards and the Government became aware of the extent to which working people felt that they were missing out.

Barnett (1985:142) recorded how the *Herald* newspaper had exposed the nature of 'voluntary' rationing by purchasing a six course meal in the Ritz and the widespread phenomena of queuing was said to undermine the war effort. Three million working days were lost in the second half of 1917 and a general strike appeared a distinct possibility (Barnett 1985:142-145.)[104] Whilst this might seem to constitute a 'reasonable'

[101] A phrase employed by W. Runciman President of the Board of Trade.
[102] In Lancashire & Yorkshire particularly.
[103] The comprehensive account in *The Home Front* by Sylvia Pankhurst is particularly useful in identifying the depth and the nature of wartime poverty.
[104] 56,000 miners struck on 26th. July 1917. Engineers and other Unions threatened a general strike unless the Ministry of Food intervened. (Barnett 1985: 142-145)

level of industrial unrest (it was less than that for 1910 – 1914) in the context of War and the Russian Revolution it took on the character of something more sinister. *The Times* claimed that it amounted to 'the conscious revolutionary movement aimed at the complete overthrow of the existing economic and social order'[105] and claims were made of foreign money seeking to undermine the war effort in order to bring about a negotiated peace. Soldiers were said to be unhappy at the degree to which their families were not being properly looked after.

Whether by virtue of pressure from the working classes, because the administrative machine finally moved into action or through high profile sackings carried out by the Lloyd George Government, by the Spring of 1918 there had been substantial improvements in food supply and distribution.

The intervention of the State in the detail of farming practice and in food production and distribution became the subject of analysis after the War had ended. For William Beveridge and many Fabians the intervention of the State and of a professional bureaucracy constituted a model for the future. Beveridge criticised the way in which private industry had attempted to continue with business as usual when the national interest clearly demanded otherwise. Beveridge wrote in 1917 after the accession of the Lloyd George Government that 'not only the last Government, but the whole Civil Service and much of the subordinate

[105] Barnett (1985:144) does not give a date for this article.

government of the country is in the hands of amateurs.' (Harris 1977:235)[106]

The role of the *professional* administrator was to ensure that policy was carried out in a fair manner, rather than let market forces perpetuate inequalities. The introduction of rationing and State control of nearly 90% of food supplies led to what Beveridge called 'a ruthless equalitarianism'[107] and the statement from his biographer that 'he wanted to subject the whole of social and economic life to bureaucratic control.' (Harris 1977:243)[108] For many others, including colleagues of Beveridge, the wartime experience led to different conclusions. The intervention of the State in wartime was appropriate to those such as Rew and Middleton; the latter having summed up the equation well – 'agriculturalists took up the wholly reasonable attitude that if their farming was to be dictated by the nation's needs, and not by their ordinary business considerations, the nation should share the risk.' (Middleton 1923:271-272)

In return for making an investment on behalf of the taxpayer it was proportionate for the State to exercise some oversight on the principle that 'without some form of public control, public money must not be expended.' (Middleton 1923:272) Middleton concluded that wartime Food Production expenditure was a form of insurance and at 'only' £9 million for the whole of the War a good deal. But the Corn Production

[106] Letter written 14th.January 1917.
[107] *British Food Control* p.241.
[108] Chapter 4 on Fabian Society emphasises just how much this was an ambition.

Act 1917 represented an attempt to extend that insurance from intervention in wartime *only* to improving security against *future* wars. The Selbourne Committee on Agricultural Reconstruction recommended in 1917 that the price guarantees in the Corn Production Act should continue long after the War in an attempt to substantially boost production in staple foods and enhance security. Above all, the farmers required such a guarantee in return for their willingness to make changes during the war; they needed to be shown that they could trust State intervention. The Act also recognised the contribution of the farm worker by introducing a minimum wage to go alongside the minimum price for the farmer and afforded further protection against rent increases for tenants. Such a balanced approach was, however, upset by the subsequent Corn Production (Amendment) Act 1918 which broke significant promises made only the previous year and embodied intervention only previously made under D.O.R.A.[109] It now appeared that the farmers would be 'subjected permanently to a form of control which, however designed to improve efficiency, might involve the loss of their land, their homes, and their livelihoods, a form of control which was not to be imposed on any other industry.' (Marrison 1986:41)

The Fabian vision of a state controlled, nationalised and, above all, planned agriculture might have been what Beveridge thought had emerged from wartime, but the reality was very different. Middleton made the assessment that England could produce significantly more food based on wartime experience. It required a greater business sense

[109] Defence of the Realm Act.

from farmers, much more deployment of advanced scientific methods and the removal of what he termed ‘unwise’ politicians. Self sufficiency could be achieved without great difficulty ‘if the people of this country were content to place themselves under the direction of some all-powerful Food Controller, who would feed them with what was necessary, as a farmer feeds his cattle.’ (Middleton 1923:323) This vision of permanent rationing he declared to be both impractical and expensive, but he offered some scope for change in that ‘between 34% of food requirements supplied by our land in 1909-1913 and 100% there is a wide margin.’ (Middleton 1923:324)

Even to achieve 40-50% would require State control in order to change consumer habits and it was preferable to allow the market to provide cheap and abundant food rather than such interference. Henry Rew reached the same broad conclusion and added the fact that increased demand from working class people for an improved diet would have to be met after the War and only increased *industrial* production could guarantee that. He concluded that ‘the millionaire as a rule eats less than the miner’ (1920:122) to emphasise his point.[110]

From the vantage point of after the conflict, it was possible for Rew to conclude that it was ‘the difficulty of distribution, and not the non-existence of supplies, that was the real trouble.’ (1920:127) Rew backed up the conclusions of the 1905 Royal Commission that little

[110] Although I am baffled as to what point he is making.

could have been done in advance of the war and that the submarine threat could not have been foreseen.[111]

Christopher Turnor wrote two significant works during the War which argued that Britain must learn from the conflict and ensure that 'never again' will the security of the country be imperilled by low domestic production. His emphasis, however, was upon building up the countryside by the spread of independent ownership and linking this with expansion of colonial agriculture. By way of evidence he suggested that the 'white agricultural population' of the UK, Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand was only 13.4 million compared with the 20 million Germans so engaged. It was the case that 'unpeopled and undeveloped land in our Overseas Dominions is a source of great weakness from the point of view of defence.' (Turnor 1917:76) The war had exposed the neglect of agriculture which should have been the primary source of wealth, moral probity and good health. After the war there must be a strengthening of Empire and the re-direction of capital from the rest of the world. The Government should step in to 'prevent any British citizen from settling outside the British Empire.' (1917:126)

The different conclusions reached about wartime and food production are manifested in perceptions about the role of the State, both in relation to the responsibility to the citizen and to the need to intervene in the market. It is generally not clear how the State is able to carry out the

[111] Chapter 2 emphasises that it was increasingly foreseen from 1909 in many naval and political debates. To admit to the *possibility* was to denigrate the ability of the navy to deal with the threat.

competing responsibilities. The position was complicated by the fact that wartime intervention had brought about improvements in nutrition and substantial reductions in infant mortality. This might be attributed to rationing but was largely a product of full employment and women in relatively well paid employment. However, the poor state of health of potential recruits[112] emphasised that the fact that the State needed to take some responsibility for future generations.

Turnor argued for drastic intervention in some affairs whilst warning off the state in interfering in farming matters. Rew wanted the re-assertion of the market after the war but then put forward a comprehensive scheme to get more people on the land as a national priority. This was on the grounds that it was better 'for the physical, moral and mental health of the community' (Rew 1920:168) and sustained the soul of the nation for 'without roots in the soil the country will become soulless and effete.' (1920:168.) The manifesto also incorporated one of the main elements of earlier radical interpretations, which was that the land had been stolen from English people.

[112] '41% of men, supposedly in the prime of life, were graded C3 and unfit for service' Burnett 1983:254

The Aftermath.

The varied and contradictory interpretations of food production in the War were reflected in the legislative confusion around the Agriculture Act. Lloyd George had set out the ambition of the Government in a speech in November 1918 that identified the £300 million food imports 'that could have been produced here' and he anticipated that controls – if not rationing proper – could be in place for some years. Barnett wrote that 'it would seem to have been settled that the food control apparatus, both domestic and international, would be maintained virtually intact for some time, possibly years.' (Barnett 1985:210) Indeed, it appeared possible that, with some reservations, all mainstream Political Parties shared that view. This moment passed both as a consequence of international pressure and financial hardship as the cost of the War began to be met.

The United States led the way in dismantling these controls and domestically, decontrol measures were ready to be deployed after the armistice. The only way forward was assumed to be the restoration of the free market with industry being permitted to move on without Government interference. For the agricultural industry, the lesson was that 'the war had revealed the extent to which a policy designed to secure the maximum production of food in the national interest was

incompatible with their own ability to operate in the market place as they wished.' (Cooper 1989:42)

Overseas trade needed to resume in order to encourage growth and to counter what was feared to be a resurgent Germany. Despite enthusiasm from those who had seen the benefits of increased domestic food production, the legislative emphasis was placed on getting people, especially ex-servicemen, back on the land through the Land Settlement Facilities and Acquisition of Land Acts. Once again, it became more important to bring life back to villages by increasing land ownership (rather than necessarily increasing food production.) The continuation of guaranteed prices to farmers were promised at the time of the 'coupon election' in November 1918 and consolidated in the Agriculture Act 1920. Following the re-establishment of international trading in 1921, however, world prices in staple products fell considerably and would have left the British government with a substantial bill for compensation, hence the immediate repeal of the 1920 Act provisions[113].

With the winding down of the Ministry of Food in 1921 the official end of substantial State intervention in farming had been reached. Barnett (1985:214) recorded *The Times* editorial which acknowledged that in *wartime* the Ministry of Food had been necessary but that 'the net result of its history was to furnish an overwhelming argument against state

[113] Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Act 1921.

trading in normal times.'[114] The 'great betrayal' amounted to a breach of trust between farmer[115] and the state, and left the feeling that for their 'sacrifices' in wartime they received little.

But the legacy of the wartime experience for food production went beyond the concerns of farmers. Middleton, in his official account, finished the work with a plea for unity of *all* interests and Charles Fielding in his work noted that we could

'produce practically the whole of our food requirements. We have the area; We have the good land; We have the suitable climate; We have ample population and ... we can produce as cheaply as other countries' (in Burnett 1983:255)

but a strong sense of purpose and central direction was required. Engendered by 'a strong suspicion (which) grew that the government never intended the Act to operate at all,' (Cooper 1989:55) Many of the Conservatives and agriculturalists who had attempted to change Policy before the war now considered their options alongside those who questioned both Party politics and democracy itself. They were closely allied to those who wanted to re-cast England as a country which 'based the national economy on agriculture, not industry' (Conford 2001:23) and sought inspiration from ideas of Social Credit and Guild

[114] October 14th. 1924.
[115] Even more so for the farm worker, because the repeal removed the mechanism of the Wages Board. Wages fell substantially.

Socialism. The latter[116] described as 'not an alternative to Socialism, not some new doctrine ... but a new interpretation of Socialism, an attempt to make it a more complete and balanced doctrine, more completely expressive of democracy.' This became linked with a revival of the 'Social Imperialism' of the Tariff Reform period in what has been called the 'Fabian – Liberal imperialist strategy of national efficiency.' (Dorril 2007:37)

For many in the Conservative Party, state intervention had been discredited by the wartime experience, if only on the grounds of cost and the need to leave the market to operate on its own terms. The Conservative Party position on the role of agriculture had, after the War, become intertwined with rural revivalists, re-definers of Socialism, anti - Bolshevism and the beginnings of a reverence for the 'soils of England' based on the primacy of agriculture and self sufficiency.[117] For a brief period there existed the *possibility* of the Party being influenced by agriculturalists such as Turnor, but by 1923 much of that had been discarded. Ironically, the pragmatic way forward for the Party between the Wars was influenced by Labour legislation and the adoption of Protectionism where the State might play a limited role in promoting agriculture.

[116] Fabian Tract No. 192 *Guild Socialism* Cole G.D.H A lecture given in London in November 1919. p.4
[117] See Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

1919 – 1923 A New Age?

'The present order is doomed'[118]

This chapter looks specifically at the analyses of the War which opened up the possibility of different forms of society with self sufficiency at the core. This came about as a result of a current of thought which saw the atrocities of War as leading to the need to re-think the essence of society and how one might live.

Guild Socialism

The re-emergence of Guild Socialism had much to do with the moral lessons to be drawn from the conduct of the War. The revival owed much to *New Age* magazine under the editorship of A.R. Orage and the work of A.J. Penty, both of whom used earlier works from the mid 1900's. The position of Guild Socialism was based on the perceived need to challenge the emerging Labour Party on the grounds that it was necessary to look at how a 'Socialist' society might look after any political transformation. The argument pursued was that if a simply crude mechanistic solution was sought – the State taking over industry on behalf of the working class – then little substantive progress would have been made. Instead, it was argued that it was necessary to pursue

[118] A. J. Penty

different co-operative solutions where the State would underpin, and be subordinate to, comprehensively organised groups of trades or Guilds.[119]

The specific aim of Guild Socialism was 'an attempt to apply the organic conception of society to modern conditions' (Martin 1967:200) and based on limiting capitalism on the one hand and the power of the State on the other. Other political perspectives failed to understand the 'organic' nature of society as they are predicated upon taking 'our industrial system for granted as a thing of permanence and stability.' (Penty 1921:14) The indictment of Labour Party aspirations came in the assessment that if they achieved power then they 'would be subject to the same economic laws to which employers are subject today' (Penty 1921:20) and would be running the same system with the addition of considerable State power.

Penty examined alternative forms of societal organisation in the light of his analysis of the causes of World War 1, which he saw as an extension of an inevitable trade war with competition for raw materials, Capitalist economic expansion and colonial conquest. Further, the cost of the War itself resulted in Britain selling investments abroad and entering into a cycle in which it would be unable to sell into foreign markets and therefore be unable to afford food and other raw materials. This was illustrative of the short future life of the industrial system as the War had exposed the contradictions of arrangements 'whereby goods

[119] The term 'Gild' was also used, perhaps to convey the sense of a 'collegiate' form of governance.

are produced at one end of the earth and food at the other (which) does not possess within itself the elements of permanence.' (Penty 1921:21)

In arguing for a more 'organic' society which would move away from the inherent conflicts within capitalism, the Guild Socialists asserted the primacy of agriculture above all other endeavours. Penty wrote that 'agriculture is fundamental, since the price of food determines the cost of everything else.' (Penty 1921:23) In addition, *New Age* put forward the need for a reformed society to avoid the 'Marxist dictatorship' which had already afflicted the Soviet Union. This built upon the earlier work of Penty himself in 1906 but also incorporated the notion of the 'Servile State' which Belloc[120] had deployed to 'describe a beneficent despotism whereby the working classes sacrificed their freedom in exchange for social welfare measures.' (Martin 1967:193)

British vulnerability to the cyclical nature of Capitalist production was enhanced by its dependency upon overseas food supplies, which constituted a fundamental weakness in itself but Penty used food policy to illustrate that Capitalism was short sighted and unable to plan for a sustainable future. From within Socialism itself those elements of mutual aid and co-operation could be harnessed to run a society based upon the primacy of the Producer expressed through Guilds. The State would underpin the Guilds, would *assist* them but generally allow them to organise their own production, welfare and levels of output. A society

[120] Hilaire Belloc (1870 – 1953) wrote the Servile State in 1912 after having served as the MP for Salford South from 1906 – 1910. An associate of G.K Chesterton he argued for a return to a Pre Capitalist 'Catholic' system of Economics known as Distributivism. In the Interwar period was 'associated' with Anti Semitism and Fascism, although the extent of that is disputed.

run on morally appropriate lines such as this would be the expression of a moral economic theory in turn based on a self sufficient society in which agriculture is paramount. The role of industry would be to supply the domestic market and work alongside agriculture. Penty summed up this approach as 'the corollary of the substitution for international competition of international co-operation is the revival of agriculture, for it implies a return to the idea of communities that are as self contained as circumstances will allow; and such communities inevitably rest upon agriculture.' (Penty 1921:74)

This general analysis of society was shared by the Social Credit[121] movement which was equally promoted by the *New Age.* The chief proponent was Major Douglas who argued that the increase in productive capacity during the War indicated that the needs of manufacturing industry exceeded the capacity of the planet to provide raw materials. 'The factory system of the world is prepared, to a degree transcending anything dreamt of in the past, to flood the market with any article on which a profit can apparently be made.' (Douglas 1918: 429-430)[122] it followed that even the provision of food had to be subordinated to the need to make profits in industries or spheres of activity unrelated to agriculture.

Douglas argued that Britain was capable of producing its own food from within its own resources but was prevented from doing so by

[121] Very largely the creation of Major Douglas (1879 – 1952) and incorporated the notions of the National Dividend (a surplus distributed to citizens every year) and the Just Price.
[122] Quoted from *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism.* Hutchinson F & Burkitt B. p.63.

international trade and the needs of financiers. *Any* farmer, but especially the small producer, has to contend with the work of the speculator in their everyday operations. As Hutchinson and Burkitt pointed out, Douglas also anticipated the growth of a highly centralized, processed and transport dependent food network based on maximising profit.[123] Instead of long term instability and inevitable war, it was necessary to adopt a system whereby 'each country meets its own subsistence needs (and) international trade can be conducted in mutual co-operation.' (Hutchinson and Burkitt 1997:72)

The practical organisation of self sufficient agriculture would be left to the Agricultural Guilds, who would assume complete responsibility for production, breeding, quality control and all aspects of the trade as a whole and who would receive a 'Just Price' in return. This not only encouraged production necessary for the requirements of the nation, it also meant that work was carried out with dignity and inbuilt craftsmanship. This approach had been put forward by an earlier work of A.J. Penty[124] but also referred back to the output of William Morris and John Ruskin which it seemed the Fabian Society had discarded as 'outmoded'. In fact even the Fabian Society seemed to find the mood of the after War conducive to re-considering its pragmatic world view, with the re-issuing of Tracts on Robert Owen, William Morris, Charles Kingsley and John Ruskin. The reprinted Tract No. 182 of 1922 by

[123] above p.71.
[124] *The Restoration of the Guild System* 1906.

C.E.M Joad[125] emphasised Owens words of 1834 that 'as long as master contends with master, no improvement either for man or master will be possible. There is no alternative, therefore, but national companies for each trade. All trades shall first form associations or parochial lodges, to consist of a convenient number for carrying on the business.' (1922:26) in the same year, G.D.H. Cole produced the definitive Fabian Society tract[126] on Guild Socialism as a redefinition of Socialism incorporating an extension of democracy to incorporate industrial control. Instead of nationalisation of the land, Cole advanced the view that 'we believe the right way of running an industry is to hand it over to be worked by the people who know the best possible way of working it efficiently.' (1922:12-13)

Capitalism stood in opposition to 'a gradual reversion to localism, to smaller-scale production, to meet the gradual demands of the consumer for goods of a higher quality.' (1922:16)

Localism also stood as the only sustainable way forward for Britain, with Capitalism only a temporary phase. Penty commented that the revival of small scale agriculture would also assist in dealing with sustained high levels of unemployment, meet the pressing need for a better diet and increase the health of the population. The lesson of the War is that 'we had a larger percentage of physical inefficient than any other country at war.' (Penty 1921:74) The notion of the decline in the health,

[125] *Robert Owen, Idealist.* First Published 1917, reprinted 1922 Joad became well known as member of *The Brains Trust* from 1941, but was a member of the Fabian Society until expelled for sexual misbehaviour. Well known as a pacifist (until the advent of Fascism) philosopher and philanderer.
[126] *Guild Socialism*. G.D.H. Cole. 1920, reprinted 1922.

or vitality, of the stock of the nation is also used by Penty as one of the defining reasons for the rebalancing of the economy with agriculture at the core. The role of the 'new peasantry' will be to act 'as a reservoir from which the towns replenish their stock.' (Penty 1921:75) Whilst Capitalism might be highly efficient in the production of *goods* in doing so it undermines the nation state. Thus, people need to act and return the land 'to the principles of justice, honesty and a fair dealing.' (Penty 1921:75) The notion of 'Agriculture first' in Guild Socialism has to be understood as the creation of a society from the foundations, the idea of being based upon a 'real' set of needs and not the illusions of Capitalism.

This sense of not being vulnerable to forces of Capitalism is found across political discourse in the early 1920's. The search is for some way of living which is beyond economic forces or which cannot be subservient to them. Given the many changes in the British and World economies by 1923 this sense of vulnerability was heightened by a widespread conception that Britain, although the victor, had emerged from the War dependent upon the United States and in debt to that nation for the foreseeable future. Penty and Cole conveyed that substantial questions needed to be addressed about 'progress' if it is only expressed through continuing industrial development. If material prosperity is elevated as the main driver for Society, then it is seen that *only* selfishness underpins economics.

For Cole, economic arguments are in reality *moral* arguments as to what sort of society is desirable. Penty (1921:99) argued that there is a decline in both 'collective morality' and 'simultaneously with it personal morality has suffered a decline.' We might reach the point of starvation because our thought processes are impinged by a dependency upon machinery. To quote Penty in his introduction to his 1921 work, 'a general consensus is growing up that the present order is doomed.' Once again, there is the evocation of former times from which to seek some sense of how to return to the fundamentals of life. At the heart was an 'updated' interpretation of a Mediaeval Society with a simple religious understanding based on the motto of 'they shall maintain the fabric of the world and in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer.'[127]

Anti Capitalism?

This amalgam of anti – Capitalism with the need to find some earlier configuration of Society in which men were afforded more dignity was something which interested both Left and Right political discourses.

In a work published in 1923 the landowner and agriculturalist Christopher Turnor[128] concluded that in the last one hundred years all the political parties had failed to support rural Britain and had fallen prey

[127] Ecclesiasties xxxviii, 31 in Marshall 1967:209.
[128] Christopher Turnor (1873 – 1940) was an architect and landowner who wrote critical works on food & agriculture from 1911 to 1939. His works concentrated on preparation for war (1911) food policy during the war (1916) land settlement after the War (1921) the agricultural 'successes' of Italy and Germany in the 1930's and, once again, preparation for War in 1939.

to a town based view of the world which had ‘made Agriculture its cat’s-paw (and) traded mercilessly on its ignorance.’ (1923:9)

He attributed the primary responsibility for the failure to develop home food production to the Conservative Party which, he alleged, had since 1840 only courted urban support and had treated its own loyal rural supporters ‘with a neglect amounting to contempt’ (1923:19) In similar vein, his dismissal of the Liberal Party –‘no first hand acquaintance of rural affairs’ (1923:19) was coupled with what he perceived as their opportunistic approaches to rural voters by mounting successive Land campaigns. Of the Labour Party, Turnor identified that Socialism generally had a real problem with the ‘peasantry’ in that they formed part of the ‘great bulwark of private property against revolution.’ (1923:22)

That one might find an authority on rural affairs to be so critical of *all* political parties for ignoring domestic food production is not unduly surprising but it is important to note that Turnor was part of a group of agriculturalists and politicians who were influential both before and during the 1914 – 1918 War. The sense of frustration and betrayal that Turnor showed in 1923 was one which was widespread amongst that group and was an amalgam of a number of fears for the future of Britain (or, more commonly, *England)*

Turnor was a member of a loose alliance of those in the early 1920’s who felt a deep sense of betrayal by both the Conservative Party and

government generally allied to fear of Bolshevism. They doubted that democracy would be strong enough, or even the right system, to withstand socialism.

Turnor had advocated the formation of a new 'National Party' in an earlier work published in 1911[129] and had been part of significant political movements during the 1914-1918 War. He had been a member of the British Worker's League which had developed out of an attempt by many 'socialists' to show that patriotism was more important than ideology. An important figure in the formation of the movement was Blatchford, assisted by *some* Fabians and H.G. Wells. Blatchford advocated a Socialism in wartime 'which was characterized by economic nationalism, imperialism and patriotism' (Dorril 2007:39) in ways which had changed little from his earlier work (Chapter 2) but which formed a bridge with British fascism (Chapter 9)

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the British Worker's League grew on the back of a nationalistic, non – socialist and uniquely English approach to post war reconstruction. In the 'Coupon Election' [130] the League put forward candidates with the new title of the National Democratic and Labour Party. In 1911 the earlier move for a 'National Party' had been on the basis of asserting agricultural primacy, arguing that such neglect was responsible for many of the current ills. The

[129] *Land Problems and National Welfare.* London: The Bodley Head.
[130] The 'Coupon Election' of 1918 was held in the aftermath of the War and some Liberal Party candidates were issued with a letter of support [A 'Coupon'] from both Bonar Law for the Conservatives and Lloyd George for the Liberals. The authority of the official leader of the Liberal Party – Asquith – was therefore undermined and most of the official Liberals, including Asquith, lost their seats. It seems unlikely that such an example of coalition politics would happen again.

former Conservative Prime Minister Bonar Law had stated that 'the granaries of the Dominions should supply the working man with breadstuffs' (Cooper 1989:7) meaning that he had little interest in domestic agriculture. For Turnor and others that approach typified the Conservative contempt for agriculture.

The frustration expressed by Turnor in 1923 is an indication of the extent to which the Conservative Party had struggled to adopt a consistent approach to agriculture since the advent of the 'Great Depression.' Agriculturalists had failed to be convinced by what *might* be beneficial when it came to Tariff Reform and when such a policy had been adapted to favour colonial agriculture, had become fearful of the competition from countries with an abundance of cheap land. Turnor in 1923 was also expressing widespread rural frustration in that when the Government had belatedly become involved in food production in 1917 there were promises made to farmers that agriculture would never again be neglected.[131]As the Act was repealed after only six months, in what has become known as the 'Great Betrayal', the anger of Turnor and other agriculturalists is understandable.[132] Turnor wrote that 'the city hangs around the countryman's neck when famine or revolution threaten, and forgets its most solemn protestations or governmental pledges in five minutes – as soon as the danger has passed.' (1923:35)

[131] Strictly speaking, such guarantees were confined to wheat production.
[132] Arguably, the biggest losers from the Repeal were farm workers who saw substantial falls in their wages when they lost the protection of the Wages Boards as a result of the 'Betrayal', but Turnor expressed little regret at this situation.

Whilst many self congratulatory works had been penned on how successful Government food administration had been from 1916 to 1918, there had been only a comparatively small increase in the amount of arable land cultivated during the War. Much of the ploughed up land had been on poor soil and whilst the harvest was boosted for 1918, such land would have needed considerable investment for longer term fertility. The financial incentives for farmers had been implemented in such a way as 'to encourage farmers to grow oats, a cattle food, instead of human food as intended.' (Cooper 1989:54) The notion that agriculture was to be rewarded for its 'war effort' did not seem convincing to farmers, when many had expended much effort in resisting Government 'meddling' during the War.

The dilemma for agriculturalists such as Turnor was that State intervention would never be in the interests of landowners. Whilst Turnor had been part of the Conservative re-think of agriculture before the War, he was now regarded as being the main proponent of a nostalgic back to the land approach. He was seen as embodying 'a nostalgic quest for national stability and national safety.' (Cooper 1989:56) and expressing a view of society not in accord with practical politics. In short, as Cooper wrote, he was now 'a crank.' (1989:56)

Turnor put much effort into the proposed Rural Party in order to advance the rural interest and to act on behalf of the wider society by

countering the imminent threat of revolution. Socialists were now 'seeking a revolution, a bureaucracy and a dictatorship' (Turnor 1923:42) on the grounds that industrial democracy and Capitalism are incompatible. Turnor's argument was that democracy cannot work in the cities, but only in the countryside because it is where people know each other and there is no party politics. Instead, there can be the consensual emergence of 'good people' and 'leaders'. Landowners, farmers and farm workers can build unity on the back of common rural identity. The main aim of the Rural Party would be to act against the interests of the City and create a society of balance, albeit one which based on the primacy of agriculture as 'national welfare demands that our land shall be as productive as possible.' (Turnor 1923:61)

What is critical, however, in the 1923 work of Turnor[133] is outlined in the Chapter entitled 'The Only Hope'. The view is expressed that existing Political Parties and the NFU have betrayed agriculture and the task of the Rural Party is therefore pressing and vital. It is stated that 'in the realm of politics reason has no sway. Only force counts. Remember that. It is everlastingly true. ONLY FORCE COUNTS. Free Trade has sheltered and fostered the foreign trade of our cities at our expense. It is going to be our turn now.' (Turnor and Gilbert 1923:56-57)

The phrase 'our turn now' in 1923 seems prescient in terms of the many organisations from the Right which attempted to incorporate motifs of the 'rural' or 'soil' or 'Englishness' into their calls for action in the 1930's.

[133] *Where are We Going?* C.Turnor & B. Gilbert. London 1923 London.

The work offered up a vision of a society on the brink of a much more substantial collapse. The rise of the Rural Party will be to promote ‘a return towards the conditions of the beginning of the last century.’ (1923:77) This back to the land movement is at one level practical – to avert starvation – but of greater importance is the need to go back to our grandfathers because ‘they believed in something real; and that is essential; for unless a people have faith they must surely perish.’ (1923:83)

The work concluded that ‘A people must have one King, one Church and one Law before they can live together as a community with comfort or happiness or safety. To believe anything else is to suffer from the illusion of progress that has poisoned our idealists for so long a time.’ (1923:84)

The State as the Real Enemy?

The ties between Guild Socialism and Turnor can be clearly seen in respect of the restorative role of religion and a respect for pre Capitalist formations. There is also an important additional point which starts to emerge from both these perspectives and that is the notion of deployment of natural resources. Penty advocated that the use of machinery should be limited to the extent that labour should be utilised instead, but appended an even more important point in that such a limitation acknowledged ‘the exhaustion of natural resources which

follows its unregulated use.' (Penty 1921:89) Penty highlighted oil supplies using the topical example where 'we are engaged in a war in Mesopotamia to secure another source of supply.' He concluded that 'it is sheer folly, to say the least, to commit ourselves to methods of production and transport that depend upon supplies that are limited.' (1921:89) The consequences of moving away from a 'natural' approach to living would be higher rates of diseases and a diminution in fertility as a consequence of trying to maintain production levels through the use of artificial fertilizers.

These particular perspectives arising from both Left and Right positions share anti – Capitalist stances but also offered critiques of the modern world predicated on the belief that it was necessary to look at the assumptions which underpin liberal notions of 'progress'. Included in that are attacks on democracy: for the Guild Socialists with a view to broadening its scope to avoid centralised state control and for Turnor to avoid being ruled by town based politicians under the control of Finance Capital. Both use earlier forms of *Englishness* to underpin their vision and both place food growing and self sufficiency at the centre of societal priorities. Whilst the image of the 'golden age' had been important to the Radical and Socialist perspectives before 1900, it seemed as if a more determined effort was now being made to appropriate native and natural role models. Particularly, there was a move towards an appreciation of how a powerful moral force might be

able to counter capitalism. Linehan[134] noted how the Tudor State was deployed by forerunners of the Fascist movement with 'its objective of national integration through authoritarian centralised government' (2000:14) and incorporating restrictions on money and a planned economy. The decline of the Tudor State had ushered in 'individualism, 'class-egotism' and free-trade *laissez faire* internationalism' (2000:15) and the primacy of the market over the national interest. The most obvious manifestation of that lay in the decline in agriculture, with the British Union of Fascists evocation of the 1815 Corn Laws 'ideal of a self supporting agriculture and its goal of stimulating domestic production.' (Linehan 2000:16)[135]

The idea of a central force had been a component part of the thinking of many of those associated agriculturalists who asserted the primacy of the landowner and of the aristocracy. Lord Lymington[136] saw such people as having a responsibility to govern which originated from the 'natural order' of things. The State was in a sense a competitor to such interests, a jealous rival who attempted to undermine them with burdens of legislation and taxation. The feudal system understood the nature of life through an understanding of the rights and obligations of private property, and the imposition of death duties constituted no less than a form of confiscation. Lymington summed up this by referring to 'the

[134] *British Fascism 1918-1939*. T.Linehan 2000
[135] Linehan refers to E.D Hart in *Fascist Quarterly* April 1936.
[136] Gerald Wallop, later Lord Lymington, later the Earl of Portsmouth (1898 – 1984) Had been a Conservative M.P. from 1929 – 1934 when he resigned on the grounds that he considered Parliament ineffective. Writer on agriculture and back to the land who founded both *English Mistery* and *English Array.* During the Second World War became a member of the British People's Party. See Chapter N

political evils (which) have been caused by over-indulgence of talk about the rights of man.' (Lymington 1932:55)

In order that 'duty' may carried out and the 'competitor state' be overcome then the concept of the strong man appeared attractive as a possible solution. Linehan noted the early fascist preoccupation with Thomas Carlyle as an opponent of materialism and who, it is suggested, supported a 'Hero-King' who 'would revive the old aristocratic virtues of duty, responsibility and service and thus provide an alternative to the contemporary parliamentary 'age of government by mediocrities.'' (Linehan 2000:16)[137]

In terms of much of the political analysis of the early 1920's the evidence for the 'mediocrities' can be found in the conduct of the war itself, the failure to deal with the Irish question effectively, labour unrest and imperial decline.

In 'Culture and Society'[138] Williams noted the point made by Carlyle that 'with the completest winning of democracy there is , nothing yet won – except emptiness and the free chance to win.' (1967:73.)[139] The population, which has become unduly mechanical, *requires* the imposition of a sense of order in which those who *should* govern will 'make themselves an active and responsible governing class.' (Williams 1967:81) In essence, the Fabian position of the scientific and

[137] In R.Griffiths' *Fellow travellers of the Right 1933 – 1939* the author draws attention to the large numbers of works in the 1920's and early 1930's that seriously considered the future of democracy, citing works by H.G. Wells, H. Laski and J.R.B. Muir. (1983:28)
[138] *Culture & Society.* Raymond Williams 1967.
[139] The quotation is from 'Works Vol. IV p.145'

managerial leadership of society – 'the sphere of the brain working professional will be a great one' (Webb 1920:15)[140] shared much of the vision of Carlyle, in that order is prized above all. Before the War this vision had been challenged by Hilaire Belloc in *The Servile State* who had noted that the prospect of the State running things 'appeals to the tidy minded bureaucrat who is one main type of social reformer.' (Williams 1967:187)

Belloc identified another 'golden age,' before the Reformation, when the Guild system was working towards a comprehensive scheme for a fairer society. Goods were produced to meet the needs of the populace; balance was brought about through responsibility. His prescription for the future was based on 'small self governing communities of individual property owners' (Coker 1921:199) who would co-operate with other such bodies to create a pluralistic democracy. This was advocated in order to challenge collectivism through 'Distributivism' and to move away from a state of 'mere Capitalist anarchy.' (Belloc 1912:198)

In *The Country and the City* Raymond Williams noted the many attempts to evoke the sense of Old England by moving back to particular eras. In identifying the prevalence of such imagery Williams wrote of the 'successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede.' (1973:12.) Looking back at different times and different values fits well with the period immediately after the War given the scale and the nature of wartime

[140] Fabian Tract No. 196 *The Root of Labour Unrest: An address to Employers and Managers.* November 1920 edition of a talk given by Sidney Webb in 1919.

destruction. As Williams wrote it is always a ‘traditional’ society which emerges in these imaginings, one which possesses qualities which might be seen as natural. It is not the precise nature of that imagined society which is important but to be aware that it is a ‘particular kind of reaction to the fact of change, and thus has more real and more interesting social causes.’ (1973:35.) The key component is always the ‘idealisation of feudal and immediately post – feudal values.’ (1973:35.) The simplicity of these apparent societies is expressed both in a natural sense of order and hierarchy but also the centrality of land ownership.

Industry is confined to that which agriculture needs to function and transport and distribution systems are limited and local. However, there is no accompanying appraisal of <u>what</u> was produced, <u>how</u> it was distributed and what constituted the diet of the citizen. Indeed, there is very little in the analysis which shows an understanding of how such a society worked. It is a critique primarily about capitalism and its tendency to be unstable, divisive and favouring finance over production.

Conclusion

It is possible for anti-Capitalist analyses to be part of Left and Right political discourses. In many respects, this is much easier from the Right as although the Fabian Society had an interest in re-issuing works on figures such as William Morris in the immediate post war period, it still resolutely ploughed on with schemes for a managed Capitalism.

Indeed, it was the clear vision of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in proposing that the State take over the centralized purchase of food and raw materials, as had happened in 1917, that was one of the reasons why Oswald Mosley joined the party in 1924. The ILP advocated a Central Committee on production which would seek ways of ensuring the most rational approach to agricultural and industrial output.

Many on the Right appreciated the imagery of the Feudal Society but had a heightened fear of Bolshevism and a distrust of democracy. Whilst accepting that the old feudal values could not be realistically brought back under Capitalism they were attracted to the possibilities offered by a strong man, who *might* be able to overcome economic forces.

Williams (1973:36) termed this 'the offensive against democracy in the name of blood and soil' which was the product of the 'persistent rural – intellectual radicalism' in Britain. It is worth recollecting the demand of Christopher Turnor that force is required in order to assert the rural interest, but there was no real sense of who that should be directed against.

However, it is clear that in the four years after the War that the figure of Mussolini became important to *some* people.. The formation of *fasci* in Italy from 1919 'was a campaign by landowners and commercial lease holding farmers to put a definitive end to working class agitation and organisations by force' (Morgan 1995:36) and this was based on a

desire to counter any socialized agriculture. By 1921 this had been incorporated into Fascist Land Policy which asserted a type of local agrarian democracy outlined in Turnor's work of 1923. Indeed, the local organisations were predicated on a system of agrarian syndicalism which created a 'national community of all producers through corporations of workers and employers' (Morgan 1995:45) thus encompassing the aspirations of both Guild Socialism and the Rural Party.

The inter war period was characterised by the somewhat hesitant rise of the Labour Party and the decline of the Liberal Party but was essentially a *Conservative* period in British life. The period up to 1924 was one of profound crisis and various attempts to think about the country in ways which 'required the inculcation of 'integrating myths' that would contribute something positive to social solidarity.' (Webber 1986:57) Whilst there was general level of confidence on the Left that Capitalism could be 'managed,' many of those participating in the political discourse saw the War as an indication of moral bankruptcy, saw Capitalism as being inimical to the national interest and therefore sought to advocate a return to earlier, self sufficient models. The Conservative Party sought to incorporate such views but at the same time developed an essentially pragmatic non ideological approach to government.

On the Right, therefore, there was a tendency for those who saw themselves as being outside that emerging consensual approach to

start new Political Parties, to be attracted to Fascism or to see themselves (and agriculture) as being somehow ‘above’ politics.

Chapter Six

Food and Agriculture 1923 – 1939: The Conservative Party

'I see barns falling, fences broken;

Pasture not ploughland, weeds not wheat.'[141]

Introduction

Both this and the following chapter concentrate upon changes in the mainstream political discourse in the interwar period. By the mid 1930's these changes had resulted in an important shift in the perception of food and agriculture and had created an apparent consensus on the role of agriculture within a managed Capitalism. However, such a consensus further marginalised ideas about food self sufficiency, resulting in many advocates of the need to increase domestic food production or back to the land becoming increasingly attracted by utilising non democratic methods.

The Changing Party

The Conservative Party in the interwar period went through a number of changes in the composition of the Party in the country and in Parliament

[141] W H Auden

involving a reduction in the influence of the landowning interest. This did not result in the wholesale acceptance of the merits of Capitalism but the gradual development of an understanding of how Capitalist and National interests might be brought together.

Nevertheless, as far as the Labour Party was concerned, the Conservatives were the friends of the farmer if not the landowner. Philip Snowden made the point in the House of Commons that 'agriculture has always been the pampered darling of the party opposite (in Moore 1991:344) and even after the Second World War Tom Williams wrote of farmers that they 'helped keep the Tories in power and the Tories did little to relieve the depression of the industry.' (1965:115)

The assumed link between landowners and the Conservatives was not, in fact, as great as Labour asserted. Even as early as 1923, Parliament was dominated by factory owners, business interests and lawyers[142] The House of Lords was more influenced by the landowning interest but most of the major debates on agriculture took place in that House, rather than the Commons, and there landowners and farmers were treated as being 'experts.' The NFU had the aim in the early part of the interwar period of trying to exempt agriculture from political discourse, pursuing a principle which was established at the time of their foundation in 1908. This was an approach designed to 'lift politics out of

[142] Food (1923) Fielding C quoted in Moore 1991 lists 322 factory and business, 86 lawyers and 25 journalists.

agriculture, and uplift agriculture above politics.' (Self and Storing 1962:42)[143]

Anthony Eden in 1947 looked back at the interwar period recalling that 'we are not a Party of unbridled, brutal capitalism, and never have been. Although we believe in personal responsibility and personal initiative in business, we are not the political children of the laissez faire school. We opposed them decade after decade.' (Glickman 1961:136)[144]

Reasons for Intervention

In respect of agriculture, it was those Conservatives in the *National* government who intervened in the sector more than the short lived Labour Administration by introducing measures of protection on the one hand and strengthening the producer cartels on the other. From 1924 onwards the Conservative Party developed a view of agriculture in which 'economic progress replaced social stability as the watchword of the party' (Cooper 1989:72) but in doing so adopted often contradictory positions on the role of the State. Above all, at the beginning of the period, the wish was to operate at arm's length from agriculture, and move away from the wartime model of co-operation. Moore (1991:359) identified the ambiguity of the Conservative position at the time: 'although they detested direct control, they wanted the Ministry of Agriculture to intervene decisively in farming affairs.' It was also the

[143] Quoting A.W. Palmer, General Secretary NFU 1910.
[144] Taken from the Conservative Party Annual Report from 1947.

case that there appeared to be no feasible way of intervening in one sector of the farming industry without ignoring the claims of another.

In the 1925 House of Lords debate on the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation[145] Lord Bledisloe[146] made the point that the NFU had never asked for either special treatment or a subsidy and that other industries such as coal, steel and shipbuilding would have equally valid claims for State assistance. Whilst the Labour Party saw the possibilities of an industrialised agriculture as offering greater outputs from larger farms, the Conservative Party concentrated upon the sector as offering a market for the products of British industry. In the search for 'expert' opinion the Conservatives were prepared to utilise the expertise of many of the new producers who were becoming household names – ICI, Ford, Massey Harris, David Brown and International Harvester.[147] The 'experts' offered up the possibility of an expansion of domestic food production through larger farm sizes using large scale agricultural machinery, specialisation of output and the application of artificial fertilisers to increase yields. It would be fair to say that both of the major parties bought into this narrative; though for the Labour Party there was an initial unwillingness to acknowledge the big business interests involved in the promotion of this approach[148]. In order for these changes

[145] HL Deb 27 July 1925 Vol. 62 cc 407-446.
[146] Previously known as Charles Bathurst, became Viscount Bledisloe in 1917 when at the Ministry of Food. Worked in the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries from 1924 – 1928, later Governor General of New Zealand. He initiated the Bledisloe Trophy for allotments in 1917, which is still awarded to Allotment Societies to reward improvements in sites & organisation.
[147] See Cooper 1989 pages 82 & 98. Ford opened its new factory in Dagenham in 1930.
[148] Until the 'nutrition' and 'efficiency' narrative firmed up in the 1930's.

to take place it eventually became the Conservative view that it was necessary to shelter under some form of Protection with *some* exemption for the Empire. But at the time of the 1925 Debate neither protectionism nor a policy of industrial intervention were politically feasible. Whilst it was acknowledged that the previous Labour administration had intervened in respect of sugar beet, Lord Bledisloe claimed it was only acceptable for a new crop and would be the only setting 'under which there will be any guarantee of securing increased production as the result.' (c.413)

The grounds for State intervention must be applied with great care in that 'any subsidy on a general scale by which public money is paid to men for doing no more than they would do without it, is difficult to defend.' (c.413) The Government *may* assist in the restructuring of the industry, but this had to be at a respectable distance given that the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation had, as with the Royal Commission of 1905, rejected the need to intervene on grounds of national security. The broader role of the Government as seen by the Conservatives in 1925 was to assist agriculture by ensuring the continuation of free trade and, in what might seem to be something of a paradox, to encourage overseas settlement of farmers in the Colonies to ensure maximum productive output for this country.

Influential Conservative thinkers, along with the NFU and the Central Landowners Association (CLA), questioned what particular expertise *any* Government could bring in assisting agriculture. In the House of

Lords Debate the Duke of Buccleuch argued that the State had only ever contrived to place burdens upon farming and land ownership in the guise of taxation, death duties and educational and social costs. He argued that 'in the old days the agricultural stock and everything else in Britain was miles ahead of that in any other country in the world. That was in the days before Parliament began to interfere with agriculture.' (c.433) The State should pull back from anything other than general oversight, with the Ministry of Agriculture returned to the staffing levels of 1905. This statement certainly needs to be recalled when considering the conversion to active management of capitalism, and equally of farming as a *capitalist* enterprise by the National Government only six years later.

Whilst this might seem to be an isolated voice arguing for an old style Toryism (not one recognised by Eden) it is worth noting the conclusion of the agriculturalist and historian Lord Ernle in 1925 is that

'**nothing seems more certain in politics that British agriculture will be neither subsidised nor protected.'** (Ernle 1925:222)[149]

The NFU had also shown their resistance to state interference when they had boycotted the National Council of Agriculture in 1924. In doing this, the Union had tried to forestall any rival to their own authority but also had signalled that they wanted no return to wartime interference. For the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin the NFU was 'selfish, unconstructive, greedy and ungrateful.' (Cooper 1989:69)

[149] See Self & Storing 1962:18

What was prized above even NFU involvement in the interwar period was the amenable agricultural expert. Whilst Christopher Turnor was initially welcomed but then ostracized as the *political* implications of his agricultural advice became clear there were a small group of 'experts' who were courted by both the Conservative and Labour parties. In the 1925 House of Lords debate Lord Ernle, the most prized of experts (and, above all respected as *the* historian of farming as well as an administrator in World War 1), framed the debate in very precise terms in arguing that there needs to be 'a very clear distinction between an agricultural policy framed in the interests of the industry and a national policy towards agriculture framed in the interests of the nation.' (c.441)

This distinction occupied the attentions of all parties in the interwar period, but in 1925 Lord Ernle concluded that no intervention was required on purely *agricultural* grounds. The industry could simply move out of cereal production and move into grassland production and sell fresh meat and milk into the domestic market. To do this, it simply had to follow sound agricultural practice without external assistance. In considering the alternative approach advocated by the ILP and the Labour Party – Land Nationalisation – Lord Ernle saw that Government control of agriculture in the national interest would have to be replicated in all the other main industries of the country and was consequently undesirable, unfeasible and costly.

Earl De La Warr, speaking for the Labour Party in the Debate, saw any talk of subsidy as 'representing the failure of private enterprise' (c.438)

and thus providing the grounds for Government intervention. He proposed a return to World War 1 structures with the County Agricultural Committees assuming local interventionist roles to implement national policy objectives. Lord Harris, in summing up the debate for the Government, rejected any assertion that private enterprise had failed and accused the Labour Party of really saying that it is farmers who have failed, thus implying that any intervention was 'anti-farmer'.

In this one substantial House of Lords Debate in 1925 are to be found the establishment of a number of clearly stated but obviously contradictory positions. Lord Bledisloe, previously courted by both the Liberal and Labour Parties, believed in farmers being businesslike in order to increase their productivity. In addition the Conservative Party had a wish to see more people settled on the land in units which most people would have seen either as uneconomic or constituting state sponsored unfair competition to farmers. The Conservatives, no more than Lloyd George, still maintained an appreciation of the virtues of land settlement in maintaining 'old' England. Perceptions of what constituted 'businesslike' farming were difficult to define, let alone how Government might assist.

For the Conservative Party what stands is the principle put forward by Bonar Law in 1923 that 'agriculture must lie on an economic basis' (Brassley et al. 2006:190) This position was further strengthened by the 1926 White Paper on Agriculture which re-iterated the positions of no

protection and no subsidy. However, the White Paper stated that 'agricultural policy should aim to maximise food output and provide a reasonable livelihood for the greatest number of people.'[150]

The Conservative policy of non intervention could only be sustained if agriculture were somehow to transform itself or for there to be some possibility of a transformative outside element to be introduced. The latter appeared to be possible given the extent to which the suppliers to the agricultural industry offered apparently risk free and scientific increases in yields and the utilisation of currently marginal lands by the application of artificial fertilisers. Mechanisation offered both reduced labour costs, whilst offering higher wages to those who remained, and higher productivity per worker. Farm sizes would have to be increased and inefficient smaller operators absorbed into larger units. Thus farming might be saved by these new and transformative developments.

In other words, although political discourse had rarely felt confident with agricultural matters, it was now being assisted with an argument that there was nothing special or different about agriculture after all, it was simply an industry like any other. As an 'industry' it suffered from a lack of capital investment which meant that expensive new equipment could not be afforded. Cooper (1989:97) noted that the effect of agricultural policy developed by the Conservatives from 1926 'was to give a disguised subsidy to manufacturing industry.'

[150] 1926: Cmd. 2581.

This is a critical change in that State involvement (i.e. public money) could be justified largely on the grounds that it brought together the new sector of science and technology and the old industry of agriculture. Given the prospect of unlimited increases in productivity offered by industrial farming this contributed to 'a profound transformation of the central assumption on which the Conservative party's agricultural policy was predicated.' (Cooper 1989:76) The Labour Party Conference in 1926 had reached very similar conclusions by adopting 'a vigorous constructive policy [to] achieve the threefold ideal of better farming, better business, better living.' (Williams 1965:73) Tom Williams, later Minister of Agriculture in 1945 commented in his autobiography it was an attempt on the part of the Labour Party 'to find a halfway house between the Tory extreme of protection and the Liberal one of free trade.' (1965:73) Williams does not explain why it was necessary to occupy this halfway house, but it is worth noting that both the major parties adopted the mantra of 'business' around the same time.

Given that the possibilities of science and technology were 'without limit' then intervention by the State did not have to be overly concerned with artificial targets for increased output – the discourse was influenced by the *assumption* that food output would be maximised because only the profitable crops would be planted. The role of the State was 'to encourage and materially assist the industry to organise itself more effectively.' (Brassley 2006:155) and confined to interventions in drainage, science and education, marketing and the provision of credit. In return farming had to be more businesslike in ways which were

largely specified by the new breed of experts who were no longer academics or researchers but much more likely to be employed by supply companies. For the Conservative Party nobody in the farming industry had in any way ‘failed’ but needed reorganising in such a way that the State operated with discretion and, at the same time, opened up a market for suppliers. By the time of the National Government the Conservatives had also appreciated the advantages of the 1931 Marketing Legislation and tapped into the sentiment that consumers were losing out by virtue of the operation of middlemen who artificially increased prices.

A Consensus?

Both the main political parties were starting to agree on a core set of policies by the mid 1930’s, despite the Labour Party maintaining the policy of land nationalisation. Both parties justified state intervention based on elements from their own philosophies and pasts. However, that they did so meant that some of the profound contradictions of farming policy were not brought out in mainstream political discourse. The measure of consensus did, however, attract particular opprobrium from both those inspired by Fascism, especially the ‘successes’ of Mussolini and the possibilities of autarky, by the emerging Organic movement and by those arguing for rural revival through a return to ‘old’ values.

The mainstream discourse could agree on the aims of ‘promoting economic growth and profitable investment for industry, a goal pursued uncompromisingly at the expense of social dislocation.’ (Cooper 1989:98) For many critics such a focus on economic growth was also based on not understanding the natural qualities of the soil and on the importance of maintaining balance in the countryside. (see chapter 9) Secondly, the pursuit of economic growth and industrial farming would have profound implications for rural life, certainly involving considerably more depopulation. Although Labour did endeavour to mitigate the latter through the Land Utilisation Act the powers granted by that legislation effectively offered little by way of increased land settlement and it consequently largely failed in the aim of rural re-settlement.

The most profound contradiction that both parties had to work through was that of the operation of Capitalism itself. The call was for agriculture to operate with stability and certainty at a time when capitalism itself was in considerable turmoil and unable to offer either of those virtues. In addition, agriculture was required to be businesslike when it was generally agreed that it needed sheltering from the operation of the market system. British agriculture was unable to operate in an international market except in respect of horticultural and perishable crops; consequently, it needed sheltering from other countries, even those Colonies who were part of the ‘family’.

In an important House of Lords debate in 1928[151] The Labour spokesman Earl De La Warr put forward what was in effect the taking over of the import trade from commercial interests on the grounds that Capitalism had failed and had placed the National interest at risk. Whilst he criticised the Conservatives for their policy of protection, De La Warr argued that there was another way to safeguard the national economy. The example he used was the meat import business and the dominance of particular suppliers – 'three quarters is controlled by the American Meat Trust and by the Vestey interests.' (c.282) He posed the question: 'are we prepared to let her [United States] financiers have control from the very source of one of the staple foodstuffs of this country?' (c.282)

In reply Lord Bledisloe, although not supporting the motion, acknowledged that agriculture was in crisis and vulnerable to foreign control. It was *finance* that dictated matters, not agriculture and he used the example that this country had just had the best harvest for some thirty years 'yet there is not a single crop that we have raised this year in England that will show an appreciable profit ..... except sugar beet, which is artificially supported by Government money.' (c.296)

The solution for Bledisloe is to somehow remove agriculture from the political debate altogether, to treat farming as outside of political discourse. In the Debate Lord Harris states that although the Debate is

[151] HL Deb 22 Nov. 1928 vol. 72 cc 279 - 312

about agriculture it is in reality much broader: ‘it is an economic question, a trading question, and possibly a political question.’ (c.300)

Once the National Government has gone beyond the Imperial Economic Conference of July – August 1932 [the Ottawa Conference] it is also aware that the Empire no longer wishes to operate as some offshore food supplier to Britain, and repository of surplus agricultural labour, and that imperial rationalisation dictated by the mother country is not possible. From that point on the policy of Protection becomes a ‘vital element in this emergent economic nationalism’ (Cooper 1989:160) of the Conservative Party.

As a manifestation of that spirit of Nationalism Walter Elliot is appointed as the Minister of Agriculture in September 1932. Elliot had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Guild movement after the war (chapter 5) and had been attracted to the possibility of starting a new party. Elliot took as his starting point the ‘total breakdown of the market and the world economy’ (Cooper 1989:162) and concluded that it was not possible to protect the National interest without there being some intelligent direction present.

He regretted that in the period after the War the opportunity had been missed to create ‘a permanent Coalition Party’ (Dorril 2007:46) He had also worked with the ILP in 1926 along with Mosley, Keynes and other ‘experts’ and been involved in some attempts to form a ‘Young Party’ under the auspices of Beaverbrook in 1929. Further, Elliot had been involved in the creation of the United Empire Party in 1930 but had, like

many others, drawn back in the face of Conservative hostility.[152] Throughout 1930 there were profound discussions in both the Labour and Conservative parties about the future of Capitalism and Democracy, given the real possibility of economic collapse. Dorril (2007:142-143) recorded that Harold Macmillan warned that such a collapse would 'lead to a breakdown of the whole party system. No other single party will form a Government and there will be a cabinet of young men.' In such an atmosphere Oswald Mosley advanced the possibilities of either national, European or imperial self sufficiency in agriculture (chapter 9) but attracted little support despite working closely with many possible defectors from the main parties. Elliot remained in the Conservative Party and advocated that

'some conscious direction and intelligent anticipation of the economy was essential to national welfare and survival.' (Cooper 1989:163)

Capitalism had not just failed in respect of agriculture, but more generally and was about to be replaced not by 'a cabinet of young men' but by intelligent management of national resources in a corporatist and business led State.

Having inherited the Agricultural Marketing Act, Elliot saw that the system of producer cartels had enough of the flavour of independent Guilds to become a workable future for agriculture. Once protection measures had been introduced this created the possibility of a business led (and, therefore, businesslike?) system of cartels where production

[152] Dorril 2007: pp 103, 128, 132.

levels were controlled in a ‘closed’ loop. Cooper pointed out that the consequence was that agricultural policy ‘moved away from parliamentary accountability’ (1989:169) altogether.[153] *The Times*[154] referred to this as not farming from Whitehall but a ‘new experiment in local self government.’ In a corporate system, the NFU became the agency which both administered and arbitrated the process. Tom Williams noted one weakness of such a form of organisation, that it lacked any consumer focus and checks and balances. In his autobiography Williams portrayed the work of Elliot as offering no coherent plan for the long term, an ironic comment given that the Conservative Party ultimately removed Elliot for being a too coherent advocate of the corporate state. Williams characterised the Conservative policy as consisting of ‘a stubborn unwillingness to value the industry properly as part of our national economy (1965:115) and criticised Conservative adherence to the doctrinaire at the expense of practical politics.

Elliot ultimately took the logic of domestic production to one of preferring autarky and this proved a step too far given that it put at risk relationships with friendly countries. Elliot was then removed from his post in 1936 when he was replaced by the much more amenable William Morrison who remained until early in 1939. The legacy of the Marketing Acts of 1931 (Addison) and 1933 (Elliot) remained in that the producer cartels and the NFU took over effective control of the most

[153] Arguably this is still the position, albeit in different circumstances not envisaged in the 1930’s.
[154] March 20th 1933.

significant sectors of agriculture, working closely with the Government but allowed considerable autonomy.

What protection and tariffs achieved from 1932 onwards was only a slight reduction in the volume of food imports, principally in respect of vegetables and fruit. However, the major change, and an outcome not wished for by Elliot, was that of a rebalancing between foreign and empire imports. In overall terms, foreign imports in 1937 were at 70% of the level they were in 1929-30[155] and there had been significant reductions in food imports from foreign countries in respect of wheat and meat. The main changes in British agriculture were increases in protective foods, chickens and milk production but despite the advantages conferred by protection Britain was still largely dependent on imported foodstuffs and animal feed. What had happened was the consolidation of the industry into larger conglomerates both in the production and distribution sectors. Burnett (1989:260) noted that by 1939 the Co-operative Society, Lipton's, Home and Colonial and Maypole Dairy 'controlled almost half of the nation's grocery business.' There were similar developments in respect of other sectors including Tate and Lyle, Lever Brothers and Spillers, all companies which benefited from growing subsidies during and after World War 1.

The growing awareness of nutrition and the poor state of health revealed by a number of surveys[156] also affected the Conservative Party and encouraged those elements of the Party who saw State

[155] Burnett Plenty & Want 1989:257 Table 29
[156] Chapter 7. P.137

intervention as an appropriate way to bring about social change. The remarks of Harold Macmillan in 1936 are important to note

'Toryism has always been a form of paternal Socialism.... The Conservative Party has always been dominated by money and the City.... a party dominated by second class brewers and company promoters – a Casino Capitalism – is not likely to represent anybody but itself.'[157]

For all the political discussions in Labour and Conservative circles, and the apparent sharing of collectivist sentiments, the overall outcome of Government action in the interwar period was to bring about little change in British agriculture. It only constituted around 4% to 6% of the Gross National Product in this period and employed around the same percentage of the workforce. The total agricultural area in 1931 was 29.9 million acres, only a slight reduction on the 1870 -*before* the Depression - figure of 30.41 million acres.[158] After all the intervention of the interwar period, wartime changes and the politically committed 1945 Labour Government the total agricultural area in 1948 was slightly below that of 1931 at 28.79 million acres. The efforts of Labour and National Governments in the early 1930's in respect of agricultural policy were in the end the <u>same efforts and the same policies</u> which were deployed in respect of all the main industries of Britain. McCrone (1962:39) identified that the quotas and the tariffs 'were not of great

[157] Interview in the London Star June 1936. Quoted in Glickman 1961:137. I can find no contemporary resonance here.
[158] McCrone 1962:33 Table 3. The balance of arable (18.3) to permanent pasture (12.1) had changed considerably to 12.6 and 17.2 respectively by 1931.

importance to British agriculture.' On the other hand, the Marketing Boards were critical in encouraging the industry to rationalise which was 'a rather polite term for what was really the establishing of a monopoly' (1962:39.) Whilst it *might* be the case that increases in production follow from the setting up of such boards, it is necessary to understand that in the interests of maintaining or increasing farm incomes and agricultural wages, which were other Government objectives, it was possible that supplies could be deliberately limited. The NFU took on the role with some enthusiasm, knowing that they were not tied into artificial targets for outputs, but adjustments made in order to keep supply and/or prices at 'acceptable' levels. The NFU took on a role which had a 'direct link with regulation, whereby representative interest groups ensure some responsibility for the self –regulation and disciplining of their own constituency in return for privileges offered.' (Cox, Lane and Winter 1986:475-6)

The Conservatives introduced further legislation in respect of sugar in 1936 and extended the wheat subsidies to oats and barley in 1937 which added to around a dozen marketing boards which had taken advantage of the legislation to control their sectors. In addition, Commodity Commissions were set up to organise the payment of subsidises and deficiency payments. The 1937 Agriculture Act also introduced a new set of measures designed to improve the soil through the application of lime and other improvers.

Conclusion

The overall achievement of the Conservative Party by 1938 was to have rid itself of the dangerous tendencies of Elliot and have consolidated the Acts of 1931 and 1933. For Tom Williams such a policy 'consisted of a stubborn unwillingness to value the industry properly as part of our national economy' (1965:115) owing to being too doctrinaire. However, the Nuffield Foundation Report published after the Second World War[159] concluded that 'by 1938 the State was assisting all the principal branches of agriculture, but the absence of any basic principles by which the assistance was determined led to the feeling that the policy was one of expediency and that the assistance was probably of only a temporary character. This tended to lower confidence rather than raise it.' (1960:19-20)

For Williams, the Conservatives were 'too doctrinaire', for the Nuffield Foundation, it was 'the absence of any basic principles' that was the important factor. What constituted the outlook of both parties was that they over emphasised their own legislative or policy influence. Mechanization was not as established as some of the efforts put into place by Elliot might suggest, farm incomes continued to be low and capital investment incapable of being deployed to increase efficiency. Farm prices reached a low of 77 in 1933 (1927-9 = 100) and had only

[159] Williams H.T ed. (1960) Principles for British Agricultural Policy: A Study Sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation. The study commenced in 1945 and the first draft was available in 1951 but for a number of reasons publication was delayed until Williams completed the work in 1960.

risen to 90.5 in 1937 (Nuffield Foundation 1960:18) Above all, what was not happening was any move towards self sufficiency. Despite subsidises farms remained in poor condition and this constituted one of the main elements in the critique of both rural revivalists and the Organic movement which was that underlying soil fertility was declining owing to either neglect or artificial fertilisers. Of paramount importance was that by 1938, for the entire public subsidy and the industry self regulation, very little increase in production had been secured and a series of measures had been adopted whose sole purpose was to regulate supply and demand rather than increase production. Indeed, by the end of the interwar period, the Conservative Party had decisively rejected any possibility of food self sufficiency[160] in a speech given by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain which asserted the primacy of manufacturing.

[160] See Chapter 8 & Conclusion

Chapter Seven

Food and Agriculture 1923 – 1939: The Labour Party.

'A large percentage of working class children are growing up under – nourished, ill – clad and ill – shod'[161]

Introduction

The inter war period saw the emergence in agricultural politics of a whole new range of contributors to the political discourse, most of whom were concerned with the promotion of *farming* as a business. Indeed, it was the first time that one could speak of the farmer, a *food producer,* as a particular entity and that had important political repercussions in the relationship between farming and the State. Hobsbawm (1990:201) wrote that after World War One 'the old landed aristocracy and gentry abdicated.' The consequence of that was the transfer of around one third of farming land to owner occupiers[162] in a change so substantial as to amount to a transfer not seen since the Norman Conquest.[163] Hobsbawm identified that 'the curious thing about this virtual revolution in landownership is that hardly anyone noticed it at

[161] Fenner Brockway
[162] See Thompson F.M.L *English Landed Society* 1963 for some examples of long established families selling up after 1918.
[163] Hobsbawm 1990:201, relating to Thompson conclusions above.

the time, except the tiny percentage of the population professionally concerned with agriculture and the real – estate market.' (1990:201)

This transfer came about because of the repercussions of the 'lost generation' of those who died in the War and the selling up which took place in the immediate post War boom. In addition, the fear of Socialism was so great that selling to ones tenants was regarded as preferable to having the land nationalised. What was *not* the case was that the change had happened as a result of political pressure of the type envisaged by the Radicals (chapter 2) or the efforts of Lloyd George. The political implications were that concerns were now focussed on the issues of practical farming, rather than landownership, with an attendant emphasis upon levels of productivity and marketing. Secondly, a whole range of new influences were brought to bear whose interest in farming was primarily commercial – selling feedstuffs, chemicals, fertilisers, farm machinery and tractors – but who sought political control as well. Thirdly, the rise of the farmer was accompanied by the rise of the voice of the farmer as a distinct entity in the shape of the National Farmers Union. (NFU)

These changes were reflected in the political discourse to the extent that the Conservative Party had to ensure that it moved away from a defensive posture and consider a range of practical questions about farming and rural policy. Whilst the interwar period is often portrayed as one in which a consensus emerged, it is rather more the case that both of the main parties were adjusting to becoming managers of an

increasingly Capitalist endeavour, albeit one which constituted only a small part of the national Economy.

However, it should not be assumed that the rise of farming as a business meant the decline of those arguing for food self sufficiency or 'back to the land'. The opposite was the case; with a reaction from those who resented the spread of Capitalism into the affairs of the countryside. In turn the application of business methods to farming led to concerns that the soil itself was threatened.

Emerging Labour Party

Despite Conservative dominance, much of the political discourse of the inter war period emerged from the Labour Party which discovered ways in which it could match the 'business like' mentality of farmers and the NFU by introducing new factors which provided justifications for active State intervention in farming policy and practice. It managed to bring that about whilst still maintaining a policy of land nationalisation and being treated with considerable contempt by the NFU and representatives of landowners. In the two brief periods of Labour Administration[164] measures were introduced which were significant for establishing the practicalities of intervention.

The discourse which Labour maintained was not based on the active pursuance of land nationalisation as a *political* act but one which was to

[164] 1924 and 1929 – 1931.

be pursued in the national interest. From the early 1930's the Labour Party used the growing evidence of the poor 'state of the nation' to justify intervention in agriculture to achieve social objectives. The British Medical Association (BMA) work of 1933[165] and the joint BMA / Ministry of Health Conference of 1934[166] built upon earlier works which showed that British people, especially the working class and the elderly, were generally unhealthy and poorly fed[167]. The work of Fenner Brockway[168] highlighted the human stories behind poor nutrition, but combined such stories with detailed analysis of the realities of the diets of the poor. Brockway noted that 'the low quality of the food which is being eaten undermines the health of entire families.' (1932:17) and paid particular attention to the plight of rural workers. The work illustrated the bringing together of two facts which showed the pressing need for Government intervention; firstly that rural workers, who were not eligible for unemployment benefit, were being laid off on account of technical progress in agriculture, and secondly, that they, like most of the working class, were desperately in need of the protective foods which they *should* be growing. The representative of the National Union of Agricultural Workers that Brockway interviewed argued that agriculture was not in decline, just not meeting the people's needs. The Union representative made the point that 'farming cannot be expected to act as the sink of the industrial unemployed' (1932:80) and that agriculture

[165] Report of Committee on Nutrition.
[166] BMA and Ministry of Health Advisory Committee on Nutrition. Report on Conference 1934.
[167] Notably the First York Study of 1899 (repeated in 1935) The 1899 Study had had little impact on national food policy, as had successive Irish famines (see Chapters 1 - 3 & Appendix 1)
[168] *Hungry England.* Victor Gollancz /LBC 1932.

can only go through revival through the production of an output that people can afford. The interviews conducted by Fenner Brockway were supported by detailed budgetary breakdowns which showed the dependence upon bread and sugar in the working class diet. By the mid 1930's such a limited work was eclipsed by the large scale investigations of the International Labour Office, (ILO)[169] John Boyd Orr,[170] McKillop and Mottram[171] and McCarrison.[172] All of these works focussed upon two principal factors; that certain foods had more nutritive value, so that 'calories' alone did not convey what the body needed to protect and help safeguard health. The second was that it was possible in an objective manner to specify exactly what the food needs of the body were, depending upon age and occupation. To an extent Boyd Orr built upon the BMA work but also used the American 'Stiebeling Standard' which had been developed by the U.S. Bureau of Home Economics after the First World War. Such works also emphasised that both the percentage of income spent on food, and the healthiness of the diet obtained, varied greatly by social class. Boyd Orr worked out in great detail the extent to which consumption levels of specific foods had to be increased to reach an acceptable standard. The deficit in the working class diet was still most pronounced in respect of fruit, vegetables and eggs and these were all products which British Agriculture was well capable of producing. The national drive towards the understanding of the importance of nutrition was also

[169] ILO *Workers Nutrition and Social Policy* 1936.
[170] Orr J.B. *Food, Health and Income* 1936.
[171] McKillop N & Mottram E.C *Food Values.*1936.
[172] McCarrison R. *Nutrition and National Health.* 1936.

reinforced by the efforts of the League of Nations from 1935 onwards. The work of the League culminated in the Hot Springs Conference of 1943 which declared that ‘the goal of freedom from want of food, suitable and adequate for the health and strength of all peoples’ was achievable. (Potiphar 1945:85)

In the Left Book Club edition *The Condition of Britain,* the authors, as the title implies, attempted an overall ‘health of the nation’ summary. In respect of the implications for agriculture they concluded that ‘no one in his senses can doubt that, as far as the technique of production is concerned, these increases in supply are easily procurable’ and the problem is therefore ‘one of demand, and not of an inability to produce enough.’ (Cole and Cole 1937:132) Whilst the authors acknowledged that diets had improved since 1918, they noted the clear evidence that such an improvement is not evenly distributed and that for many it is still the case that ‘existing supply falls short of what ought to be regarded as a tolerable minimum of nutrition.’ (1937:139)

By 1937 the Labour Party had arrived at a justification for a national *agricultural* policy to improve infant mortality, lower rates of death through heart disease and improve child health. However, that conception of agriculture, which was accompanied by a confidence that the State could successfully administer such a policy, took some time to emerge.

Such an appreciation was close to one in which agriculture was part of the health service, producing healthy and affordable food for the

population. Given the Fabian tradition of the Party the presentation of an approach whereby the Government could intervene to administer such a policy and could measure outcomes was perhaps a more telling reason for State intervention in agriculture than the mere *ideological* pretext of land nationalisation.

However, the Party had also been trying since 1918 to find a way in which to intervene in the detail of farming, given that it had maintained a free trade stance on the grounds that it ensured that food was priced as cheaply as possible. There was also an acknowledgement that the working class diet had improved since the 1920's because the 'cheapening of food enabled the British people as a whole to improve its standards of consumption despite the world slump, and helped even many of the worse off sections of the working class, above the level of the unemployed on relief, to prevent their standards of living sinking even when their earnings were reduced.' (Cole and Cole 1937:267)

The Labour Party in the interwar period kept to a policy of land nationalisation knowing that it was seen by most farmers (and certainly the NFU) as an attempt to bring about State control or 'farming from Whitehall.' For those who had opposed limited State intervention in the First World War it served as a constant reminder of the dangers of State interference and for the Conservative Party it meant that it did not have to try too hard to appear to be the friend of the farmer. For most of the period, it was generally assumed that the NFU and the Conservative Party had common interests. In reality, the NFU was treated with some

contempt by most of those involved with agricultural matters, at least until 1933 when the Marketing Acts started to give the union a clear administrative and policy purpose.[173] Viscount Linlithgow, whose report had initiated the marketing process, spoke of his dealings with the NFU as a 'long and sanguine struggle.' (Cooper 1989:78)

The wish of the Labour Party to avoid association with 'cranks,' meant that they lacked agricultural expertise. Whilst a figure such as Kropotkin was widely respected for the detail of his work and had shown how British agriculture might be organised, the overriding quest for respectability meant that he was sidelined. Indeed, anyone who appeared to have detailed knowledge of agriculture was suspected of not pursuing the interests of the industrial working class and this was compounded by the virtual absence of the Labour Party or *effective* Trade Union organisation in the countryside. Griffiths (2007:217) wrote that 'Labour was strongly influenced by the belief that only agriculturalists could speak with authority about agriculture.'

Until the mid 1930's the result was a preoccupation with the interests of the working class consumer[174] and a wish to oppose *any* proposed intervention to assist agriculture on the grounds that it would increase food prices. Hence the appropriation of the earlier slogans about 'stomach taxes' and a collection of ideas which concentrated on the farmer and / or the landowner requiring pampering whilst working people would be made to pay.

[173] And, guaranteed prices.
[174] Despite the fact that the consumer might be poorly fed, s/he was cheaply fed.

The Labour Party covered up for its lack of agricultural policy by largely importing one from the Liberals, with the three dominant agricultural policy figures in the interwar period all being recent Liberals – Lord Addison, Noel Buxton and Josiah Wedgwood.[175] On a practical level, it meant that the Party could concentrate on some of the implications of the Land Question whilst largely ignoring the rhetoric of land nationalisation. The possibilities offered by the rise in interest in Guilds or alternative forms of rural enterprise (Chapter 5) were soon cast aside once Labour had assumed office for the first time.

The emphasis shifted from questions of how might nationalisation be carried out to how might the State invest in agriculture, either to bring about change or to meet social objectives such as land settlement. The difficulty to reconcile was to try and make agriculture more efficient (less labour required) but bring about more smallholdings (more labour on the land.) This contradiction was exposed in the 1934 pamphlet *How Labour Will Save Agriculture* which proposed that another 0.5 million people could be settled on the land in order to bring about a prosperous countryside.

The Labour Party in government in 1924 ensured that it made good on the promise to agricultural workers by the restoration of the Wages Board but placated farmers by ensuring that no minimum wage was specified. Their intervention in agricultural matters was confined to the

[175] Wedgwood and Buxton had both been Liberal MP's and both joined the Labour Party in 1919. Addison had been a leading Liberal since 1907 and joined Labour in 1922.

sugar beet industry where it introduced measures to develop a national sugar industry on the grounds that it was a product of national *strategic* importance.[176] It was also an attempt by the Labour Government to show that it had some understanding of agriculture and could intervene strategically.[177] But it was a 'one off' in that it was State finance being used to create a virtually new industry rather than sort out an existing and declining sector. What it was supposed to illustrate was how Labour could intervene responsibly when required but in no way was it offered as a national model. The ILP commented at the time that 'the idea of a self contained Britain was 'absurd'' (Griffiths 2007:236) Sugar beet was not the first in a line of products which would constitute a move towards national self sufficiency, the real intention was to gain credibility with farmers, who reacted with indifference. The justification for the 'strategic' nature of sugar was that it comprised a high percentage of working class consumption, but it did not address the far more pressing issue of deficiencies in protective foods.

The 1929 – 1931 Labour Administration introduced two significant measures which combined a continuation of the 'Land Question' and a new approach involving active Government intervention and, more importantly, public money. Griffiths described much of the Labour programme of this period as being concerned with the question of how

[176] See Chapter 8
[177] The legacy is interesting, given that the British sugar beet industry has continued to supply a very high percentage of refined sugar used in this country. As high as 77% in 2003 and averaging around 65% over the past decade.

to make ‘capitalist agriculture work more effectively, rather than reconstruction it on socialist principles.’ (2007:232)

The Labour Government delayed any announcement on food policy until it had been in office for over a year, with such a move being made on August 1st 1930, the final day before Parliament went into recess for nearly four months. The future agriculture minister Tom Williams excused the delay on the grounds that the mission of the administration was one of taking responsibility for the complete breakdown of Capitalism. The Parliamentary statement was made by Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who outlined the chosen Labour approach in the opening paragraph; ‘the urgent need for reform in methods of marketing and production in order to take advantage of our valuable home market’ in order to bring about ‘prosperity in the industry.’[178]

This was to be done by offering ‘certain powers to large scale commodity organisations initiated by producers themselves for the marketing of home produced agricultural products, and protects such organisations form the disruptive action of minorities.’

The cereal industry was not dealt with, ostensibly because of the forthcoming Imperial Conference but also because the Labour Government was beginning to take the view that it was a part of the

[178] HC Deb 01 August vol. 242 cc 890-896.

industry that could be allowed to decline even further. When the Chancellor was challenged in the House of Commons by Basil Peto M.P. that there was no mention of the dumping of overseas produce on the British market, he replied that improving marketing and presentation of goods would go some way towards enabling the home producer to compete. In the subsequent Parliamentary debate on agriculture, led by Chris Addison the Minister of Agriculture,[179] it was emphasised that much of the difficulty facing British agriculture came down to 'one of organisation – of processing, marketing and so on.' Addison outlined the extent to which he considered that farming was 'the only industry in the land where you have not had the collective application of capital' or, further 'it is the only case of any great industry where you have not had a collective assembly of science, skill and organisation to develop the industry.' The speech is dotted with notions of 'machinery' 'science' 'management' 'marketing' and, above all 'large scale.' In an interchange which identified the essence of agricultural policy not just in 1930 but until the end of period in study, Hansard recorded the following interjection and Ministerial reply;

[An HON. MEMBER: "Who has got to pay?] The nation.

Alongside notions of State sponsored reorganisation and efficiency embodied in the large scale farm Addison offered a Liberal notion of self supporting smallholders who, he argued, had been more successful than had previously been recognised. The Conservative agricultural

[179] HC Deb 13 November 1930 vol. 244 cc1891-2006

spokesman Walter Guinness interpreted such proposals as being designed to bring about an influx of smallholders on farms torn apart to meet their needs whilst at the same time introducing the 'experiment of factory farming.' Guinness identified the 'political' nature of the proposals by asserting that 'Large scale management, except for such a political purpose, can surely only be justified if farmers are inefficient at their job,' followed by the recorded interjection of "So they are." Guinness echoed the position of the NFU by concentrating not on the detail of the proposals but on the slur on the reputation of farmers, based upon the assumption that the State could enable better production through an industry restructuring which, according to the Opposition, would result in nationalisation.

The Labour Party had not emphasised land nationalisation, indeed it had outlined an approach which was to become the alternative – public money into farming in return for specified national outcomes. At no time did the proposals suggest that the end result might be greater national self sufficiency or even more production at all, the emphasis was upon restructuring and efficiency.

In the debate on the Wheat Bill introduced by the subsequent National Government in 1932[180] the Labour agricultural spokesman, Dr. Salter was critical of the proposed measure on the grounds that it 'was wasteful and uneconomic' and stated that 'you cannot possibly stop the progress of social and economic evolution by Government edicts or

[180] HC Deb 01 Mar 1932 vol. 262 cc. 959-1078

Bills.' (c. 983) He spoke approvingly of large Soviet farms (300,000 acres) and the large numbers of tractors in Canada, the United States and the Soviet Union and was clear in identifying that Britain should not concern itself with wheat production because it could not possibly compete.

The Labour narrative only developed when the mid 1930's provided updated and overwhelming evidence of poor nutrition and lack of national effectiveness and health. The structure outlined by Addison then changed in a crucial way in that certain items (which conveniently could be produced equally by small or large scale enterprises) deemed to be 'protective' foods could be supported through public expenditure. The questions of free trade and protective measures for domestic production were therefore avoided and the emphasis placed upon the fact that British farmers may be good at growing produce, but knew little about marketing, grading and attractive packaging. This narrative allowed another 'party' – the middleman – to be scapegoated as the cause of the preference for foreign produce.

This represented a bold attempt to appeal to both producers and consumers and offered the possibility of interventions which would protect British agriculture without higher consumer prices. With the 1931 Agricultural Marketing Act incorporating 'the formation of producers' organisations to guarantee quality and control prices' (Griffiths 2007:242) the interests of consumers could only be protected

through substantial amounts of public money. The model for this form of intervention had been established by the Linlithgow Committee of 1923[181] which had investigated the operation of the retail and distributive trades in order to ascertain the reasons why retail prices were so much higher than those which the farmers obtained. Collective marketing was proposed in order that British farmers might have greater marketing power and that more attention paid to the presentation and grading of produce.

That Labour took to this enforced Capitalist intervention represented the failure of attempts to bring about co-operation in farming as had been done in the cases of Denmark and Ireland. The 1931 Act was followed by another in 1933 brought in by the National Government which strengthened the earlier Labour measures. It was the second Act which added powers of compulsion in order to ensure that a minority of producers did not subvert the system and also imposed import quotas in an attempt to boost the home industry. Self and Storing (1962:88) described the result of the two Acts as 'statutory producer controlled marketing monopolies' in the context of the beginning of 'the modern period of state intervention, assistance and control.' (1962:18)

In 1931 the NFU had pointed out that improvements in marketing were of limited value unless accompanied by import quotas, a factor which was acknowledged by Clement Attlee who worked on the detail of the proposals on behalf of the Labour Party. He was opposed by the

[181] Linlithgow Committee on Distribution and Prices of Agricultural Products.

Chancellor, Philip Snowden, on the grounds that the Party remained committed to free trade and that import quotas would lead to increases in public expenditure at a time of Labour enforced austerity. Golant (1973:329) made the very telling point that 'there is very little socialism here.'

Indeed, whilst it might have been appropriate to try and convince members of the Labour Party that it involved state control that was far from the truth. Some branches of the agricultural industry would be left to reform themselves, impose minimum and maximum prices and *possibly* increase production but in no sense did the Labour Government indicate any commitment to increasing national self sufficiency. Golant (1973:327) wrote of 'feelings of helplessness and timidity' in the face of depression as an expression of the major failings of Capitalism.

In introducing the bills on marketing and land utilisation the Labour Government relied upon its imported Liberal values in preference to any that it might drawn up from its own theoretical possibilities. In 1922 J.H. Thomas had pointedly left off the land from the nationalisation possibilities choosing instead to re-affirm the centrality of free trade to 'Socialist' thinking about agriculture – 'free competition, the law of supply and demand, with a just wage and a fair profit.' (1922:55.)

It was asserted that produce was always going to be cheaper under free trade, with Thomas claiming that any form of protection brought about higher profits at the expense of the consumer. He also firmly

ruled against trusts or producer cartels on the grounds that they would 'exploit the public in order to maintain high prices and big dividends.' (1922:178) Earlier, Ramsay Macdonald[182] had emphasised his commitment to land reform rather than nationalisation and to promote the idea that greater working class affluence would 'give [an] opportunity for maintaining many of these small "peasant" and hand industries which alone can surround people with individuality and distinction.' (1920:163)

In examining the Labour Party in the interwar period it is important to note that land nationalisation is maintained as a policy throughout, but that in terms of practical politics there is a general adherence to Liberal principles, superseded by reliance upon managed State intervention

The land question dominated thinking, as illustrated by the proposal introduced by Philip Snowden in 1931 to introduce land valuation as a means of taxing all land, a proposal not pursued by the National Government that followed. In addition to the ideological emphasis upon nationalisation there was another approach, which was that landlords were failing to maintain the land in productive order, and the State had, therefore, to assume direct control of land.[183] Manton noted that 'this economic critique, which showed that landlordism, either actively or simply by default, retarded the efficiency of farming, was central to Labour thinking.' (2006:256.) A concentration upon 'lack of productivity'

[182] *A Policy for the Labour Party.* Leonard Parsons: London 1920
[183] Note Manton K. *The Labour Party and the Land Question, 1919 – 1951.* Historical Research, vol. 79 No. 204 (May 2006) who explores this in detail, and Conwell- Evans T.P. *The Land for the People.* Labour Party 1927.

or ‘inefficiency’ meant that ‘any method that could be guaranteed to boost productivity could be advocated without recourse to nationalisation.’ (2006:256.) Some ‘farming' experts’, notably C.S. Orwin[184], maintained that land nationalisation was still necessary in order for a national and rational policy to be pursued. The line of argument being that agriculture, alone of all industries, ‘has not developed along the large scale lines of other industries, which can thereby attract capital awaiting investment, offer opportunities to labour and reduce the cost of commodities and services to the public.’ (Orwin 1942:25)

Protection and Planning.

The developing Labour narrative of offering the prospect of large scale intensive production brought about by state expenditure aroused the interest of the NFU and many of the commercial interests in mechanisation, fertilisers etc. who would otherwise have stood in opposition. Here is the prospect of the Labour Party tentatively working towards a central view of agriculture which is a *corporate* endeavour, a partnership based upon enhancing efficiency. That is not tied in with any perception of greatly increased *output*, but more one of emulating other (Capitalist) enterprises, that is to increase profitability. Hugh Dalton (1935:157) noted that ‘a Labour Government must be prepared

[184] *The Tenure of Agricultural Land.* Orwin C.S & Peel W.R. Cambridge: University Press 1925 and restated in *Speed the Plough.* Orwin C.S. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1942

to spend money freely on reorganising agriculture' but added that to spend *too much* on acquiring land rather than improving land would be a folly. In this regard, Dalton would have been aware of earlier attempts by the Fabian Society to ascertain just how much nationalisation would have cost, given there being no national land register from which to provide an estimate.[185] Thus, he argued to maintain an emphasis upon nationalisation 'will create in the countryside a sense of unconvincing irrelevance.' (1935:159)

When the National Government moved to impose duties on food imports in 1932 and strengthened agricultural marketing the year after, the Labour Party also reconsidered the matter of Protection for domestic agriculture. Clement Attlee in 1932 welcomed protection provided that it was 'temporary' in nature and was only 'acceptable where it was clear that an industry would be run efficiently, in the interests of consumers and producers, with control "by the community in the interests of the community"' (Griffiths 2007:249)

The Labour Party then developed another strand of thinking in respect of agriculture, which was the role of planning. Stafford Cripps emphasised this aspect in a Labour Party pamphlet of 1934[186] in which he identified the key issue as being rampant individualism of farmers, a factor which inhibited both planning and co-operation. Whilst such an appreciation of the merits of planning might be considered an appropriate 'Fabian' policy, the need for the Labour Party to develop

[185] New Fabian Research Bureau 1933. (see Manton 2006: 264)
[186] Cripps S. *The Economic Planning of Agriculture.* London: Labour Party 1934.

such a policy was arguably more influenced by the enthusiasms of Walter Elliot, the Agriculture Minister in the National Government. In what Cripps no doubt thought was a compliment to the farmer he noted that he 'has subjugated to his will the great forces of Nature' and with State assistance that can be built upon and so 'the prospect of wealth and plenty is almost unbounded.' (1934:3.) All that the farmer needed to give up was the need to chase profit, once that was out of the way then his skills would flourish. Cripps looked back on Labour Marketing legislation as a good piece of work which had subsequently been distorted by Capitalist values.

In another pamphlet that year[187] George Dallas appealed to the farming interest by indicating that they were being fleeced by big business, wholesalers and other vested interests – 'in the face of large scale distribution he was absolutely helpless.' (1934:8.) Stafford Cripps again appealed to the public to ensure that food production could be increased in writing that 'today the people realise that science has so far won its conquest over nature that there is no need for scarcity.' (1936:77) Scarcity which was, in the view of Cripps, brought about by the wish of Capitalists (aided and abetted by the National Government) to 'bring about scarcity creation and an unlimited desire to exploit consumers in all countries.' (1936:72)

[187] *What Labour Has Done for Agriculture.* Dallas G. London: Labour Party. 1934.

The former Agriculture Minister, Christopher Addison published a pamphlet in 1937[188] which again emphasised that farmers needed planning to help them alongside practical schemes such as improved drainage, water supplies and the availability of cheaper credit in order to mechanise farms. He summed up Labours' 'practical' policy as offering 'an assured place in the home market with a just price guaranteed to him, for good produce that the land is suited to produce.' (1937:7.) The mechanisms were a National Agricultural Commission, national ownership, fair rents, guaranteed prices and control of imports. The conclusion of the pamphlet was that 'it is abundance that we want, not scarcity.' (1937:10.) The key to abundance was to assist farmers to understand how they had been farming to the best of their ability but had not had the benefits of scientific advances that could accrue through co-operation with the State. In 1924 the then Agriculture Minister Noel Buxton had offered up the prospect to farmers that 'with the help of science he need scarcely set any limits to the yield of the land. Better business will dispose efficiently of the better yield.'[189]

There is a clear change of tone, and the development of a much more confident approach, in the Labour Party around the mid 1930's. It is clear that from being unable to voice any practical suggestions for farming (for fear that ignorance would be revealed) the Party had now shifted the ground significantly by emphasising the narratives of

[188] *Labour's Policy for Our Countryside.* Addison C. London: Labour Party 1937. Note the subtle change in wording to 'our' countryside.
[189] *Labour Looking After Agriculture: Better Farming: Better Business: Better Living.* London: Labour Publications Dept. 1924. Introduction by Noel Buxton)

planning, food and nutrition and the consideration of farming as an economical and functional activity[190]. Above all, there was a 'discovery' of the benefits of science and technology. Instead of castigating landlords for being idlers[191] there was now an emphasis upon how productive farmers *could* be if so enabled.

The 1937 Labour Party pamphlet[192] 'HOUSEWIVES! LOOK AT THIS! claimed throughout (and in capitals) that food prices were increasing owing to Government incompetence and that it was official policy to make the poor pay more for food. It was claimed that' ONLY THROUGH SOCIALIST PRODUCTION CAN THERE BE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY' and that Labour would make sure that 'agriculture ... be re-organised and re-equipped and set on its feet.'

Once the doctrine of free trade had been shelved, the Party also emphasised the nationalism of encouraging home production for as long as it could not be accused of preferring dearer food as a result. The chosen methods of avoiding that eventuality were to deploy public resources either in direct subsidises or in tariffs, grants and scientific and technical education. In return, farmers could be assured of a good income if producing in the national interest.

Planning would not mean 'Farming from Whitehall' but the establishment of national objectives, the implementation of which would

[190] Such a narrative was assisted by re-armament.
[191] See *Britain Must Produce More Food!* London: Labour Party 1926 contained the slogan that the land is 'NOT FOR DEER FORESTS OR FOR FOX HUNTING'
[192] *Housewives! Look at This! Government Bungling Increases Food Prices* London: Labour Party (no author) 1937.

be determined locally and with representation from both the NFU and farm workers unions. The end of free trade was a time when 'the startling realization of Britain's economic weakness at the onset of the great depression forced an uneasy recognition of the general weakening of its imperial power and the need to build up economic defences.' (Woodcock 1974: 168) The Labour recognition of the limitations of free trade in the context of imperial decline meant an emphasis upon a *national* agricultural policy for the first time.

The pamphlet 'Why Not Develop Britain?'[193] claimed that of the £650 million spent on food each year, only £250 million made its way to food producers. With a sound national plan 'home food production can be increased by £200 million a year within 10 years' and this would create considerable rises in rural employment. The pamphlet stated that '**we don't supply more ourselves because we have never tried.'**

In attempting to analyse *why* this was the case the Communist Party[194] identified the vested interests in land, finance and marketing as having impeded agricultural development but criticised both Labour and Conservatives for having created further sectors such as the fertiliser and chemical industries and Marketing Boards which in turn were becoming barriers to increasing domestic production at affordable prices. Whilst the Labour Party may not be too concerned at criticism

[193] *Why Not Develop Britain?* London: Labour Party 1933 (no author)
[194] *Plan for Britain's Agriculture.* Cornforth M. London: Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) 1938

from the CPGB it is worth noting this general line of argument was developed extensively both on the Left and the Right. In the run up to the Second World War, and also during the conflict, any concerns that Labour might simply have used public money to create another generation of entrenched capitalist interests were not to be actively considered. Indeed, the farming industry was given *carte blanche* to make the transition to a 'public good' or being 'part of the social services' not through the acquisition of 'higher motives' but by public money.[195] That public money was required arose out of the realisation that once the sources of 'cheap food' garnered by British expansion had started to cost more, or even become unavailable at any price, then the 'real' cost of feeding the British people would have to be faced.

[195] The phrases come from Ramsay Macdonald. *A Prosperous Countryside.* London; Labour Party 1927: p.8 and quoted in Griffiths 2007 p.275.

Chapter Eight

Administrative Triumph.

'It is within the wit of man to find an alternative to competitive private enterprise with market prices as a means of obtaining and distributing food, to replace economic by human laws, to substitute managed for automatic provisioning of the people.'[196]

Introduction

R.J. Hammond began his three part history of the 'Food' volume of the History of the Second World War with the above quotation from William Beveridge which expressed the sense that 'rational' administration could find a better way of not just running society in wartime but of ensuring a fairer society (1951:337-338). There was little actual shortage of foodstuffs in 1917 when it became imperative for the State to intervene; it was rather the case that working people felt the system as it stood was not working and this was expressed in a sense of militancy which threatened morale.

Beveridge wrote those words from the viewpoint of 1928 and afforded considerable importance to the somewhat brief period of 'rational' food administration from 1917 but also extended such an experience to assert that it would be possible to 'replace economic by human laws.'

[196] William Beveridge.

This chapter examines the interplay between the market and the 'rational' administrator in the context of rearmament and the growth of civil service administration of both the food and agricultural industries. Above all, it is this interplay which explains the specific development of agricultural policy and the further marginalisation of food self sufficiency.

The language of Beveridge accorded with many of those who had advocated food self sufficiency in that it asserted the need to move away from the operation of a market society, and had common ground with many of those who portrayed agriculture as being 'different' or apart from a capitalist economy. But the notion of 'managed provisioning' showed a quite formidable sense of self confidence in that it moved away from *asserting* that agriculture is different to indicating *how and by whom* it could be run more appropriately. Hammond (1951:4) contrasted the period of 'business as usual' for most of World War 1 when 'interference by Government in an existing system of private trade, or resort to exhortation and sumptuary prohibition ....were alike ineffective, not to say disastrous' with the assumption of control over production and distribution of food from 1917. It is clear also for Beveridge that the dismantling of state controls and the return to the market after the 'Great Betrayal' of 1921 meant the doing away with of a rational and principled approach to food which might have benefited both the British farmer and the British consumer. Hammond also noted that control was easier to impose when there was already a degree of organisation in place so that the dependence upon imported food 'not

only made its effectiveness greater, since ships and ports provided a ready –made bottleneck at which the Government could lay hands on commodities.' (1951:4)

Even at the level of the individual consumer it was possible to ensure that through the State , nationally and locally, it was possible to ensure that rationed goods were provided to retailers on a guaranteed basis when national rationing began in July 1918. It is important to appreciate the significance of what was a brief experience of food control, given that it not only brought about an allegedly rational distribution of food but it also incorporated an attempt to ensure that consumers were treated fairly, with price controls and taxes on profiteering. Exhortations to private businesses having been perceived to have failed to deliver a reasonable supply of foodstuffs, State intervention was seen as a force for good. But, it is necessary also to point out that State intervention was costly and that as soon as world prices started to rise in early1921 it was necessary to move away from the commitment that had been made to domestic agriculture through the promises embodied in the 1920 Agriculture Act. Cuts in government spending also became necessary in order to pay for the War, and Parliamentary debates at the time showed a level of anger at the breaking of promises to farmers but balanced with an appreciation of the fact that Government should not interfere in the market in peacetime. It should therefore be possible to close that episode of State control with the epitaph that it brought about 'a brief hour of administrative triumph in an unaccustomed field'

(Hammond 1951:7) and gave confidence to the nation that it could be reproduced in a future conflict if necessary.

For many on the Right, and for many farmers, the retreat of the State was appropriate despite the fact that they expected it to provide cheap long term credit, protection from retailers and, above all, to restrict imports. If it was not possible to obtain such benefits without the State insisting upon accountability in return, then it seemed as if most farmers and landowners would prefer self management to the possibility of prosperity and increased production. Farmers also observed that whilst the State could indulge in policy U turns, they required more stable conditions than political expediency could deliver. As for the lesson which might have been learned about food supplies – undue dependency upon imported food – it is worth noting that Germany was considered by many agricultural experts to have lost the War through its undue dependence upon home production. Although the agricultural sector was larger than that of Britain, farm sizes were smaller and detachment from world trade resulted in a lack of foreign currency. Collingwood (2011:27) noted the work of Friedrich Aereboe in concluding that Germany would have been better off participating in world trade and that 'agriculture should have been scaled down, freeing up workers for industry to produce manufactured goods for export which would then, in turn, have paid for increasing imports of food and consumer goods.' In other words, the British model of free trade could carry the structural weakness of being dependent upon imported food

and having a declining agricultural sector because it was more efficient than protection.

The Conservative Party and many on the Right moved in the 1920's to challenge the orthodoxy of free trade and saw a role for a limited amount of protection as a *temporary* measure for *certain* industries, including agriculture[197]. However, as has been seen in Chapter 6 Stanley Baldwin resisted a wholesale change of policy. J.M. Keynes in his Yale Review article in 1933[198] commented that free trade was an 'economic doctrine which a rational and instructed person could not doubt.' (1933:755.)

For Keynes, what followed from that was that 'policies which sought to interfere with the ideal international division of labour were always the offspring of ignorance out of self interest.' (1933:755.) The Government White Paper of 1926 also confirmed the position that no compulsory controls over production, no subsidises or intervention on the grounds of national security were justified, thus restating the conclusions of the 1905 Commission. This refusal was embodied in the statement that no case had been made which 'would justify the expenditure necessary to induce farmers in time of peace to produce more than economic conditions dictate.' (Williams 1965:112) However, one exception had already been made, that of sugar which was subject to 'temporary' intervention from 1925.

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[197] Joined by the Labour Party from 1931. (see Chapter 7)
[198] *National Self Sufficiency.* Yale Review Vol.22 1932-1933. Pp. 755-769.

The Example of Sugar

What is important to evaluate is the fact that in respect of one food product, sugar beet, successive Governments from 1917 onwards attempted to intervene in the production, organisation and distribution of a ‘new’ product based upon an assessment of strategic dietary requirements of the population in wartime, vulnerability to imported foods and a perceived need to revive agriculture in a specific geographical location. A detailed consideration of the sugar industry between the Wars also highlights the methodologies employed by the Civil Service and how this impacted upon the markets and also served as a study for the ways in which the British Government might have pursued a policy of food self sufficiency.

Even before the outbreak of War in 1914, sugar had been identified as the key strategic foodstuff, given its prominent place in the working class diet. A Commission was appointed in August 1914 with the ‘power to purchase, sell and regulate sugar supplies on behalf of the Government.’ (Hammond 1962:3)

Despite the ability to intervene in the market, the Sugar Commission was unable to replace European sugar with supplies from Java and Mauritius. Problems with distribution meant that in 1916 supplies were running at around 60% of pre war levels and this brought about the first approaches to establish a rationing scheme. The way in which Civil Servants approached this matter is significant given that throughout

1916[199] the official line was that rationing was not an option. The Ministry of Food had certain clear administrative preferences, but needed to resolve the question of whether an individual or a household should be registered with a particular retailer or be given the opportunity to spend the ration with any retailer. The critical difference lay in how sugar supplies should be distributed, with there being a difference between provisioning a retailer with a regular clientele and responding to customer purchasing patterns. The War Cabinet in May 1917 were presented with a comprehensive approach or a simple initial model with the clear expectation that they would choose the latter. As Hammond (1956:431) made clear the substantive matter was that the Ministry really wanted to establish Local Food Offices as their first priority, a component which was common to both schemes.

Rationing was due to commence on December 31st. 1917 but was thought to be unable to deal with any matters such as households moving and displaced persons. It was therefore concluded that what was required was a Central scheme which could accommodate change and this new arrangement was approved in October 1917. As Hammond wrote 'the task was begun of covertly transforming the plan already announced, in such a way that every consumer would be brought on to the central register.' (1956:432)

This interaction between the civil service and politicians could simply be dismissed as an attempt to put together workable solutions in a difficult

[199] Until the advent of the Coalition Government of December 1916

wartime setting, but the significance is twofold. Firstly, the introduction of rationing required measures both for the consumer and the producer and was dependent upon Government establishing and working through the Sugar Commission and purchasing both openly and covertly sugar on the world market. The losses which were incurred by state trading after the War then contributed to a perceived need to introduce a sugar beet industry into England. Secondly, it is clear that, notwithstanding the exigencies of wartime, political decision making in what is considered to be a technical area (such as agriculture) is heavily dependent upon the Civil Service. Sugar provided an example of both administrative dependency and the 'sub letting' of an issue into a technical arena hidden from much political accountability.[200]

As an illustration of that fact despite the Cabinet having initially approved a *simple* scheme, then a *national* scheme, what was finally implemented was a *local* scheme owing to the failure to resolve the detail of national operation. Consequently, a month after the Cabinet approved the national guidelines; local schemes were 'officially sanctioned and encouraged.' (Hammond 1956:434) William Beveridge wrote that 'the Ministry of Food made it's .... reputation by putting accidentally into practice one system of rationing while it was formally engaged in devising a different system.' Hammond (1956:434) noted whilst being 'publicly committed to a third.' From the introduction of rationing it followed that the British Government intervened in the market to such an extent that major shifts in the production of sugar,

[200] Which might well provide an accurate appraisal of agriculture in the E.U.?

especially from the West Indies, took place. In turn, this meant detailed negotiations with the International Sugar Committee. The other implication was that the expertise of the private sector was incorporated into the Government process through the operation of the Sugar Commission, to the extent that Civil Service relied upon the statistics provided and the reaction of industry experts to the practicality of certain solutions, with the assumption that decisions made would not commercially benefit the companies concerned.

The boom which followed the end of the War led to substantial increases in world sugar cane prices and as a consequence of the slump that followed, the British Government was left with a large supply which had to be sold off at lower prices. The lesson, it seemed, was not that Governments should refrain from playing the market; instead it brought about a sense of resentment at the undue 'rigging' of the market which was largely attributed to American and Cuban subterfuge and the unreliability of International trade regulation.

The promise made to attempt an increase in home production of sugar beet was therefore predicated on the assumption of an unfair market, abuse by larger suppliers and a need to provide some assistance to the arable farmers of Eastern England. When in 1924 the import duty on Non Empire sugar was reduced, the very small Sugar beet Industry requested Government assistance for a *temporary* period of time. How small the industry was can be seen in the Written Answer provided by

the Minister of Agriculture in 1925[201] that showed only 7,011 tons of production in 1922, 13,281 in 1923 and 23,761 in 1924[202].

In Parliament the question of sugar imports became the subject of a number of debates and even played a major role in consideration of the Finance Bill. Sir W. Mitchell - Thomson[203] asserted the need for domestic support on the grounds that 'submitting to the unrestricted market manipulations of the producers was not Free Trade, but madness.' (c.317.)

What is largely ignored in the debates is that tariffs which were raised during the War had already been in operation for some while and were set at a level 'that permitted of substantial discrimination in favour of home – grown or colonial supplies.' (Hammond 1962:5) That is, conditions had already been altered in favour of sugar beet growers.

Thus is illustrated one of the defining sequences of Government intervention designed to bring about agricultural change; the intervention fails – the market is at fault – further intervention – unintended market consequences – further intervention. In terms of the British Sugar (Subsidy) Act 1925 the intervention was time limited to seven years with a reducing subsidy level during that period. The other consequences of the legislation are well illustrated by the contributions of MP's Maclean,

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[201] HC Deb 27th March 1925 vol. 182 c820w Mr. E. Wood Minister of Agriculture.
[202] The figure for imported sugar cane was 1,568,000 tons in 1923, out of a total world output of 18,004,000 tons.
[203] HC Deb 6th. May 1925 vol.173 cc. 270 - 396

‘I do not see why the 45,000,000 people in this country should be taxed to provide the problematical 100,000 people with £30,000,000 in wages (c.393.)

and, Lyle,[204]

‘There can be no logical justification for protecting a special industry in this country against an already established industry’ (c.396.) with the additional point that it is one which is ‘employing thousands of men directly and indirectly. (c.395.)[205]

Maclean further remarked that each job will cost the State more than double the average wage and as this is supposed to be an entrepreneurial country, why is *any* intervention required? In the months after the passing of the Act there were many questions in Parliament about foreign labour employed in the sugar beet factories, use of foreign equipment, involvement of foreign capitalists and the granting of a building contract to an American company. All these amounted to a ‘British jobs for British workers’ paradigm which has some contemporary resonance.

In addition, there was claimed to be specific agricultural benefit to the efforts to promote sugar beet growing which is it that increased agricultural employment and that beet had a special cleansing effect which was good for arable rotation systems. The time limited subsidy was eventually accompanied by a reduction after negotiations with

[204] Leonard Lyle MP declared his interest as Director of Tate & Lyle.
[205] All these points from HC Deb 6th. May 1924 vol. 173 cc 270 – 396.

sugar refining interests and ultimately a quota agreement was imposed on both industries in1933. By that time, it had become clear that the industry was not performing in accordance with the somewhat unrealistic expectations and another Sugar Committee was set up by Parliament to consider the future of the subsidy.

The three person body split with the Majority Report arguing that there was no justification for any continuation.[206] The Majority framed the argument in a clear manner; 'the sum of several millions per annum on an industry which has no reasonable prospects of ever becoming self – supporting, and on the production of a crop which, without that assistance, would at present sugar prices, be practically valueless.' (Hammond 1962:7)[207]

Even in terms of the provision of a secure supply in wartime, the sugar subsidy was adjudged to have failed completely attracting the label 'haphazard and inequitable' (Hammond 1962:7) from the Majority Report.

Not only would the maintenance of imports offer greater security in the long run, the recommendation was that the State should not support the industry as the farmers concerned would be better growing other crops. The Minority Report identified clear agricultural benefits and emphasised that other industries which the refining process required benefited from the building of sugar beet refining, notably limestone,

[206] The seven year 'limited' life of the scheme already having been extended to ten years.
[207] Sugar Committee March 1935 Command Paper 4871.

coke and coal, although it noted that these products had to be conveyed around the country to where the factories had been sited. Hammond noted drily that 'the very economic inefficiency of the whole process of obtaining sugar from beets was turned into an argument in its favour.' (1962:8)

In the Parliamentary Debate which followed the Report[208] Christopher Addison, who had launched The Marketing Act when Agriculture Minister, referred to the sugar beet subsidy as 'a conspicuous example of what should not be done when public money is provided in abundance (c.1301.)

This was not a statement of principle, but an indictment of how it had been administered. British farmers had in ten years approached the productivity of European farmers with decades of experience, but were let down by the administration of the industry. The subsidy was high owing to the quotas which had been agreed with large sugar refining interests, meaning that factories were not fully productive. The country had only been able to provide a small percentage of domestic sugar supplies, wages were poor, many jobs were seasonal, gains to shareholders were high but – in a clear statement of the Labour Party position – Addison then stated that 'we regard the sudden cessation of this growing as a thing which would not be politically or industrially wise or practicable.' (c.1307.) Therefore, the country cannot stop, we

[208] HC Deb June 27th.1935 Vol. 303 cc 1299 -1392.

appreciate the benefits but 'we object exceedingly to the continuance of this payment of public money' (c.1307.)

Mr Amery (Conservative) characterised the difficulty facing Parliament as being that the question of sugar 'has been complicated and be-devilled in a whole jungle of mystifying make – believe ever since the day we started protecting the production of sugar in this country and decided that we must pretend that we were not protecting it.' Further, 'if the sugar subsidy is not working in the sense that the crop is 'practically valueless' then does this bring into question why we persist in spending £20 million a year on steel, or £200 million to develop a motor car industry?' (c.1313.)

Amery also posed the question which must arise from the Majority Report, which is that if sugar can **never** be made self supporting[209], can any agricultural crops?

Amery concluded, like Addison, that the country must continue to protect sugar, despite the difficulties, because only 5% of sugar crops worldwide are produced under free trade conditions. It was not a free trade product and that should be recognised by using public money to increase efficiency. The bulk of the contributors to the Parliamentary Debate represented constituencies in Yorkshire or Lincolnshire who grew or refined sugar beet and who commended the wisdom of the scheme, the efficiency of the farmers, the importance of the crop to

[209] The argument being that in a rigged market Britain cannot make sugar beet pay under *any* circumstances.

arable rotation and the fact that, *soon*, no further subsidy would be required. Mr. Lennox Boyd (Conservative) used the security argument in noting that Germany produces 95% of their crop as against 30 – 35% in Britain and it is for that reason that the subsidy should continue. H. Samuel blamed the Labour Party – 'they would turn this uneconomic and costly industry into a quasi – national institution' and, 'they would make it into a public corporation and tie this millstone round our necks in perpetuity' (c.1357.)

In reply, Tom Williams for Labour stated that 'I am satisfied the whole scheme from beginning to end has been one long ramp'[210] (c.1383.) and then voted to continue the £3 million pounds a year subsidy.

The final two contributions showed the degree to which this one crop, which is illustrative of how much of the agricultural discourse was conducted between the Wars, produced strange political contradictions. Samuel proposed that one should vote for the measure but noted that Labour would behave in an even worse fashion and a future Labour Agriculture Minister declared it a 'ramp' and voted for it as well.

Indeed the subsequent Government White Paper[211] rejected the Majority Report on 'sound' agricultural grounds and proposed a further reorganisation, which brought about the setting up of the British Sugar Corporation, an independent oversight body, more quotas and additional duties.[212] A ceiling on production was also imposed in line

[210] Not a word in contemporary usage, but perhaps best 'translated' as a racket.
[211] July 1935. Command Paper 4964.
[212] These measures were contained in the Sugar Industry (Reorganisation) Act 1936.

with international agreements which started in 1931. Prior to the full implementation of the new measures, there were further modifications made in the light of the International Sugar Conference of 1937, which made producer countries pledge to make every effort to ensure efficient production methods.

The Broader Lessons

The close analysis of sugar has been undertaken in order to examine the situation when successive Governments undertook to intervene in an agricultural industry on strategic grounds. The initial concern was that of security, underpinned by recognition of the importance of sugar to the working class diet. The intervention was intended to be temporary and, importantly, to cover so many contingencies that few understood the detail of the scheme. Once started it had a certain logic which meant that other interests had to be bought off (Tate and Lyle for example) and at one point *increased* subsidises were being paid in order to *reduce* production. It also seemed impossible to withdraw funding for a crop that the Majority Report assessed as 'practically valueless.'

There is also the position that the Government claimed to be undertaking all of this intervention on behalf of the consumer, either in ensuring continuity of supply or lower prices. Only in the late 1930's, when the public started to perceive that virtually all the agricultural industries were run by Cartels with complicated and opaque funding

arrangements, does there appear any prospect for independent consumer representation.

Sugar beet showed the way in which any Government that had wished to move towards a policy of food self sufficiency would have been constrained by a market economy. That is not to say that the methodologies chosen were the *only* possible ways of doing things, but is to make it clear that once the State felt that it had a role, then market intervention was necessary.

The Labour Party, despite a long term commitment to nationalisation had seen that as a 'land' issue, rather than considering what mechanisms would be required to decide what crops, what quantities and at what prices goods would be sold. One of the reasons why the Co-operative Wholesale Society kept its distance between itself and the Labour Party on food and agriculture matters was a wish to protect how it ran its' operations and to guard against increased prices. The main reason why detailed consideration was not given to the level of output that might have resulted from nationalisation was that the Party had at the core a belief in rational administration, largely arising from Fabian self confidence. Secondly, it was assumed that domestic food production was so low under present market conditions that Government intervention <u>must</u> improve matters. The Agricultural Marketing Acts also rested upon the assumption that if agriculture was being unduly dominated by retailers then intervention on behalf of

farmers would act as a corrective. The State had a duty to intervene simply because farmers were being disadvantaged by slick retailers.

The Further Development of State Intervention

It may seem unlikely, given the narrative of the sugar beet industry, but within political discourse the depression of 1929 – 1932 is seen as firm proof of the need to intervene in both agriculture and industry generally. It seemed possible to retain a belief in free trade (as the Labour Party did) but also acknowledge the need for ‘temporary’ protection or to ensure that the Empire is treated more favourably. Intervention by Government is then justified in order to bring about organisational change through Marketing Acts either voluntarily (Labour) or through compulsion (National Administration.) Land reform was introduced in order to encourage larger farms whilst, at the same time, using public funds to encourage smallholdings. Subsidises were provided to bring about improvements through increased use of fertilizers, exemption from taxation introduced in order to boost production and grants given to improve land drainage or infrastructure. Whilst there are some elements in common with protecting other aspects of British industry, many of these moves reflected that agriculture being different. It was not simple intervention that was needed, but complicated and subtle movements which could not be understood outside of a specialist few ‘experts’ or administrators. Winters wrote that ‘agricultural policies in nearly all industrial countries raise prices, redistribute income

regressively and towards a small section of society, and impose economic costs both at home and abroad.'[213] This is certainly true of the period from 1931 through to the outbreak of War in 1939 and Winters is correct is portraying agricultural policy as being an 'endless and uncertain game' (1993:11.)

As evidence of that, by 1939 there are seventeen Agricultural Boards in operation, all operating according to the specific requirements of their trade and all requiring the specialist knowledge of the NFU, leading farmers and administrators. Not one has the specific brief to *increase* food production.

Murray (1975:28) wrote that by 1939 'public opinion was becoming a little restive about the granting of restrictive powers to groups of producers' coupled with awareness that 2.7 million acres of agricultural land had gone out of production since 1918. Was sugar beet a success given that it had since 1925 cost £42 million Pounds in subsidy and a further £21 million in rebates? Output had increased[214] but constituted 'some 16% per cent of the country's pre – war annual requirements' (Murray 1975:32)[215] The sugar beet subsidy for the last year before the War (1938 -39) was eclipsed by that of wheat deficiency payments (£9.3 million Pounds) and fat cattle payments (£4.3 million Pounds)[216]

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[213] Winters L.A. *The Political Economy of Industrial Countries' Agricultural Policies* in Rayner A.J. & Colman D.eds. (1993) *Current Issues in Agricultural Economics.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
[214] From 24,000 tons in 1925 to 325,000 tons in 1936-8. (Murray 1975:32)
[215] Other estimates are in the order of 30 – 35% but the author is quoted given that he is writing in the Civil History series
[216] Murray 1975:372 Appendix table III *Subsidy and Price Insurance Payments 1924-5 to 1938-9.*

Overall, for the period 1936 -9, 'British farming supplied some 30 per cent., by wholesale value, of the country's annual peacetime food requirements.' (Murray 1975:39) For Tom Williams this figure was low because *not enough* public money had been invested owing to 'a stubborn unwillingness to value the industry properly as part of our national economy' (1965:115) by an overly doctrinaire succession of Conservative led Governments.

Williams may have perceived the 'doctrinaire' minds of his opponents but the whole edifice can also be analysed on the basis of undue interference in the market. Robbins' account of the Great Depression[217] portrayed agricultural support as being the effort of the Government under political pressure to support an industry which should have been left to adjust to market conditions. The Government wish to bring 'order' into agriculture did little other than raise prices, reduce competition and delay moves into more profitable areas. Robbins argued that 'an association of producers with statutory powers to exclude competition is not necessarily the best judge of the interest of consumers.' (1934:139.) Supporters of intervention were characterised by Robbins as pursuing 'the *rationale* of the mysterious adjustment of supply to demand' (1934:141) at the expense of the consumer. He wrote that, 'it is all very well for the dilettante economists of wealthy universities, their tables groaning beneath a sufficiency of the good

[217] This particular work has been chosen not as the definitive account of the Depression but because of the fact that it was written in 1934 and sees agricultural state support as part of the problem. Robbins pays particular attention to agriculture, where others do not. It is also useful to look at the Robbins – Keynes dialogue.

things of this world ... to say ..“Food is cheap enough, Charabancs are vulgar. The railways are admirable. We have enough of plenty. Let us safeguard security”’ (1934:142)[218]

When Governments did intervene in agriculture, Robbins argued that there was no reasonable limit, given that the State ‘will be driven to adopt closer and closer control if the schemes are not to break down from evasion of their rules’ (1934:144.) The ultimate expression of intervention was that of planning, of being rational and maximising control over the productive apparatus. Robbins wrote that ‘we may not all be socialists now, but we are certainly (nearly) all planners.’ (1934:145)

For him, a Right Wing Government might still plan but at the same time acknowledge the rights of private property, but this would not last – which led him to the conclusion that Socialism and Planning are, in the end, the same. In respect of agriculture, Robbins pointed out that giving each industry the right to govern itself is not even planning because it will result in a much more chaotic situation, not stability.

Robbins alluded to the enthusiasm for planning and managing capitalism in response to the recent publication of works such as *Land and Life: The Economic national Policy for Agriculture*[219] in which the authors acknowledged that some control of imports was required and it was necessary to increase home production through State intervention.

[218] Presumably, a reference to Keynes and the L.S.E.
[219] Astor & Murray 1932

J.M. Keynes wrote in the *Yale Review* of ‘the penetration of a country’s economic structure by the resources and influence of foreign capitalists’ which required a ‘greater measure of national self sufficiency and economic isolation.’ (1933:2)

This line of argument saw that free trade was either outdated, not working properly or inherently flawed. Keynes wished to present a balanced argument in which he was persuaded of the merits of further intervention, having moved on from adherence to free trade.

‘I have become doubtful whether the economic loss of national self – sufficiency is great enough to outweigh the other advantages of gradually bringing the product and the consumer within the ambit of the same national, economic and financial organization’ based on the belief that ‘decadent international but individualistic capitalism .. is not a success.’ (1933:3)

Clearly, Robbins did not accept that line of argument describing a (national) plan as ‘being the centralised disposal of the factors of production’ (1934:153) which did not permit the functioning of a free market.

The importance of this debate for agriculture was critical but in many respects by 1933 the process of State intervention was difficult to bring to a halt, as evidenced by the sugar beet industry and by the fact that virtually all agricultural sectors were run by industry bodies by 1939. With growing evidence of the nutritional deficiencies in the working

class diet, Astor and Rowntree[220] shifted the basis of the interventionism by identifying that although the country was no longer in recession, British agriculture should still be subsidized 'but only for nutritional reasons and in the name of efficiency.' (Wilt 2001:49) This linked State intervention in agriculture with the need to grow 'protective' or 'nutritional' crops for people not currently benefiting from them.

They argued that there should be clear limits to the amount of help in order that foreign trade can increase and the country continue to import food and raw materials, especially from the Empire. In their later publication[221] Astor and Rowntree shifted the ground by portraying security as the dominant issue and although still wishing to limit intervention nevertheless wanted to see the State assume the responsibilities of the various Marketing Boards in order to operate in the interests of the consumer. Despite these shifts in the *raison d'être* for intervention, Robbins' would undoubtedly have still asserted that capitalism constituted 'a much more flexible mechanism than the collectivist alternatives.' (1934:155)

The official consideration of the problems of food supply in wartime began as early as 1933 and there was a clear linkage between food policy and re-armament.[222] The Interim Report on Food in 1933 went over the old ground of the procedures developed in World War 1 but did not suggest any immediate change in policy. There was no requirement

[220] *The Agricultural Dilemma.* 1935.
[221] *British Agriculture: The Principles of Future Policy.* 1938
[222] Wilt A.F. (2001) pays particular attention to how the issues were linked strategically through Cabinet Committees etc.

for food stockpiling or increased domestic production and little consideration was given to the suggestions of those such as Viscount Lymington that food self sufficiency would improve security. The move to Empire, rather than foreign, imports appeared to ensure that there would be continuity of supply during wartime[223] and there was a sense of confidence that the administrative procedures could be re-activated, if necessary. Neville Chamberlain occupied the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 – 1937 and acquired a reputation for financial prudence whilst at the same time carrying out a programme of re-armament through increased borrowing[224].

One central principle was maintained all the way through the development of strategy, which was that there should be 'no major change in the existing peace – time agricultural policy in advance of war solely for defence purposes.' (Murray 1975:46)

Whilst it was acknowledged that more food could be produced there was a broad consensus that the cost of that would be too high and would result in a loss of export markets. More importantly, there would be a loss of Political Capital in that it was assumed that any reduction in food imports would alienate allies. The detail of what would become the wartime policy of ploughing up and the switch to foods for human consumption was accepted by 1936[225] and William Beveridge was brought back to oversee aspects of food policy and rationing.[226] Despite

[223] From 1927-9 to 1938 food imports from the Empire increased by 41%
[224] Defence spending rose from £119 million in 1934 to £473 million in 1938.
[225] Committee for Imperial Defence Food Supply Sub Committee. May 1936.
[226] From being Director of the L.S.E. (see Robbins & Keynes earlier)

the increase in the number of subsidies and marketing arrangements the growth in the expenditure of the Ministry of Agriculture was modest in the run up to wartime. It would therefore be incorrect to assert that Government intervention was only predicated upon defence considerations. But the unintended consequence of State sponsored control over most agricultural sectors was that it had created composite bodies capable of assuming a more interventionist role in the event of War.

From 1938, the Food and Agriculture ministry's developed the working assumption that even after any War there might be a need for permanent agricultural programmes to ensure a certain national level of production. From 1936 the Cabinet and the attendant Committees received regular and (as it turned out) accurate estimates of how production might be increased in the event of war. In 1937, it was estimated that 1.285 million acres of grassland could be ploughed up, wheat output increased by 26% and potatoes by 38%. (Murray 1975:53) The realisable gains were comparatively easy given that livestock production was a very inefficient way of producing food for humans as well as consuming a high percentage of imported foodstuffs. In February 1937 the urgency of enhanced planning and control was emphasised by virtue of the Cabinet requesting a move away from 'palliatives aimed at maintaining farmers' returns (which) were no longer adequate in the face of growing dangers.' (Murray 1975:38) From 1937, and especially in respect of the Agriculture Act 1937 and the Agricultural Development Act 1939, wartime planning was explicit in the

legislation. However, Murray noted that it was considered important not to alarm the public. In year one of any war it was thought that imports would remain at the same level with the 'growth of the belief that there would be no serious shortage of shipping.' (Murray 1975:55) Whilst the scientific verity of moving away from animal proteins was generally accepted, the Cabinet anticipated public pressure for animal protein.

In respect of planning for any anticipated war, the prevalence of agricultural marketing bodies and other fora for joint working between civil servants, farmers, landowners and the NFU provided the illusion of action. A significant number of scientists felt that they were being excluded from such planning, especially in relation to their advice on vitamins where they considered that the deployment of 'vitamin science' could be introduced much faster than increased production[227]. Agricultural output had, in fact, increased little since 1918 and increasingly, farming in Britain had become a process for turning imported feeding stuffs into livestock products. There had been little by way of capital investment and State encouragement in drainage and fertiliser application had been patchy. Encouragement had been given to the developing Organic movement throughout the 1930's by the reality of poor soil fertility in Britain and dust bowl events in the United States. For all the State intervention in agriculture, once wartime planning had commenced it became clear that what had occurred was 'the re-balancing of the state and the private sector;' in which 'controls

[227] Early in 1940 Penguin issued a Special which was written by 25 scientists and which outlined the specific ways in which science could assist the war effort. It was issued anonymously.

replaced ‘free’ markets.’ (Barling *et al.*2002:28)

In what might seem to be an affirmation of Robbins’ work, what had not happened was increased capital investment; change into more profitable areas of farming and more efficient farm units. The State was now in a position to control food production and to supply narratives as to why it might do so in the shape of nutrition and security in time of war, but had achieved little to bring about real change. This was revealed in two significant events in 1938 and 1939; the Kettering Speech of Neville Chamberlain and the East Norfolk by election in January 1939. Chamberlain in the Kettering Speech[228] made it clear that to produce more food would endanger the farmer and lead to possible starvation. Although the Agriculture Minister, Morrison claimed in Parliament that the Prime Minister had been ‘misunderstood’ the remarks were widely seen as a put down for farmers and somewhat contradicted assurances being given elsewhere. Morrison claimed that Chamberlain had only highlighted the’ more extreme’ version of self sufficiency and what he really mean to say was that ‘there was no prospect of this country being starved out because we had lost control of the sea.’ (Wilt 2001:102)The NFU repudiated the assertion that it sought self sufficiency and considered that Chamberlain had cast doubt upon their loyalty. A chain of events was set in place whereby the Government withdrew support from its own candidate in the East Norfolk by election of February 1939. On the eve of the poll, the Agriculture Minister was replaced by Reginald Dorman Smith who, in

[228] July 2nd. 1938

almost perfect summation of the interwar period, had just finished as the President of the NFU and was a former member of the English Mistery[229].

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[229] One might also add that he was a leading member of the Anglo Irish gentry, which refers back to Chapter 1 as well.

Chapter Nine

On the Edge

'The Past is a strange land, most strange.'[230]

The notions of the restoration of the Guilds and rural revival in Chapter 5 represented part of the reaction to the First World War. This chapter examines the responses of many on the Radical Right[231] to both the War itself and the perceived decline of Britain. Whilst those who advocated a return to the land or a simpler, more moral life, can be dismissed as 'anti-modernists' there were more important underlying aspects to their position, which has not been sufficiently appreciated. The First World War was conducted using much of the latest science and technology in order to produce mass slaughter enabled by the accelerated deployment of mechanisation. The Fascist J.F.C Fuller called it 'the military apotheosis of the Industrial Revolution.' (Linehan 2000:261)[232]Whilst the trenches represent an almost simple human level of conflict, that combat was enabled by the development of a range of efficient new technologies. One argument from the Radical Right was that the availability of that technology was indicative of a society where agriculture had already gone too far away from a 'natural' state of affairs, in line with the remark of Viscount Lymington [later the

[230] Edward Thomas
[231] Not a satisfactory term in many respects, but a useful starting point. By the end of the chapter it should have become clear that there are substantial political, religious and ethical differences between those so labelled.
[232] Linehan refers to Fuller J.F.C *The Dragons Teeth.* 1932:22.

Earl of Portsmouth] that 'modern farm machinery is permissive of evil.'[233] R.G. Stapledon, an Agricultural writer, academic and researcher wrote that towns appealed only to one part of the human character and have 'accentuated the tendency to act and think, not as a free and independent entity, but merely as part of the herd.' (1944:6)[234]

In the interwar period, many previous societies were evoked (The Tudors being a particular favourite) in a manner similar to that previously encountered in Chapter 2.The question of being *too* mechanized, and lacking in human values, became an important element in the development of both the Radical Right political position and Organic agriculture. The notion of an organic society found favour in the revival of the concept of the Guild, which carried with it the idea of a balanced and self governing society. However, it is important to note that 'balanced' in this context means the maintenance of a 'natural' English hierarchy and does not incorporate democracy.

The second component of the post War analysis on the Radical Right was that whilst the many that have died for "King and Country" were rightly mourned, those who survived the conflict became a force to be feared. This originated not just from the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the various 'near misses' from all over Europe, but also the perception of the growing industrial and political power of the newly enfranchised working class. There was to be no sense of reassurance generated by

[233] Massingham H J ed. (1945) *The Natural Order: Essays in the Return to Husbandry.* Chapter 8 p.143. The contrast is with the small farmer who is trustworthy because he has reached a position of harmony with nature and is not burdened by machinery.
[234] The work was originally published in 1925.

the Government which introduced substantial tax increases and cuts in public spending from 1919 in order to pay for the War. When threatened by possible widespread industrial action in the autumn of 1920, the Government introduced an Emergency Powers Act and assumed wartime levels of control. Instead of comforting the Right this raised the prospect of a more intrusive State prepared to extend 'emergency' powers. The Radical Right also appreciated, some years before the Labour Party, the implications of the changing relationships with the Colonies and why the colonies might not always be coming to the aid of the mother country. AJP Taylor (1965:150) noted that 'it had been assumed that for years after the war Great Britain would gain from monopolizing the raw materials of her colonies.' More importantly, the Colonies were determined to introduce a much greater measure of self government in order to pursue their own self interests. Other 'British' interests such as Ireland and India went through changes in the 1920's and 1930's respectively which illustrated the decline of the British Empire.

In the context of all these anxieties, the Radical Right asserted the existence of traditionally British or, more appropriately, 'English' traditions. The logic of this was to emphasise native traditions, with a view to heading off allegations of copying an 'alien' philosophy from Europe. Linehan (2000:14) wrote that the search for such a lineage would 'become a highly subjective exercise in invention and take the fascists on an imaginative journey deep into the British past.' At the heart of that journey was the concept of self sufficiency, both in the

narrow agricultural sense and as the symbol of a proud, independent, nation. The Tudor State had given way to the ‘’bourgeois’ financial – capitalist class and ....ushered in the hated era of individualism, class egotism and free trade *laissez faire* internationalism.’ (Linehan 2000:15) Clearly, a world view based upon such assumptions had little scope to participate in mainstream political discourse.

The resumption of free trade after the War was seen by all the main Parties as being essential to the maintenance of economic growth but the Radical Right reached back not just to the Tudors but to the more recent advocates of Protectionism and national or imperial self sufficiency. Being excluded from the orthodoxy of the free trade consensus meant that opportunities to set up a new party were explored, as happened with both the Rural and National Parties in 1917/1918. The presumption was that such a Party was needed to introduce a sense of order into ‘the chaotic world of individual business run for unchecked private profit.’ (Dorril 2007:30) The inspiration from agriculture lay in the demands from agricultural experts, most notably Lord Milner, who was engaged in an ‘elitist quest for a coalition of the best political minds.’ (Thurlow 2000:45)

The role of the ‘best minds’ was to provide the intellect that Capitalism lacked. Given also that Democracy was assumed either to have already failed or be incapable of providing real leadership, then the ‘best minds’ had to be above politics. This approach was best summed up by the

programme of the English Mistery[235] which sought to create 'a sound ethical basis for national politics' based upon 'principles derived from the instincts and traditions of British breeds.' (2003:339) This equated to the elevation of the Aristocracy in place of the elected Parliament 203:339) although many other agriculturalists, notably Massingham and Lord Lymington,[236] felt that landowning had become so diversified that there were very few remaining landowning leaders who could contribute specialist knowledge. This knowledge *had* to be there in order that the leadership could then contribute to 'a society wherein agriculture took priority over manufacturing within self supporting, self governing organic communities.' (Moore – Colyer 2004:359)

Viscount Lymington argued that it was the essence of being English that land had to be held privately and control had to be local. Public ownership could not be considered as a viable option owing to the fact that 'neither by soil nor character are we fitted to be socialized farmers.' (Massingham ed. 1945:165)[237]

Archibald Hurd (1925:48) saw the 'war against Capitalism' being waged by the Labour Party as being part of an attempt to impose public ownership on landowners when if it had not been for their 'high sense of public duty' things would have been even worse in the countryside. Stapledon (1944:189) noted that landowners had diversified their

[235] The English Mistery was founded in 1930 and included William Sanderson, Viscount Lymington and Rolf Gardiner as members. Campaigned against 'alien' influences on England and for an Anglo Saxon revival.
[236] H J Massingham was a prolific writer on rural affairs and was one of the founder members of the Soil Association. Member of the Kinship in Husbandry and one time associate of Rolf Gardiner and Henry Williamson.
[237] Chapter 8 *The Future of Estate Management.* By Lord Portsmouth.

interests but this arose ‘out of public spiritedness and a desire to take an active part in big business.’ The implication was that if the national interest demanded it, then these people would return to agriculture, particularly if not burdened by the actions of financiers or, to use the more widespread term, usurers.

If land was held in common, this would not only have agricultural consequences, but would represent the most serious restriction on personal liberty yet seen in Britain. Farming by ‘*diktat* ‘would be a step backwards, leading to a reduction of the food production of our native soil and a further increase in our dependence on supplies of food from overseas.’ (Hurd 1925:53)

By 1924 the perspectives of the Radical Right had indentified that private ownership was essential, the State should only intervene if the consequence is to increase personal or local responsibility and production would increase substantially if agriculture were left to landowning leaders. In addition to those principles, one also had the formulation of sets of ideas about the condition of the soil and/or humanity, incorporating notions of a fundamental cultural and national decline. Webber (1986:56) wrote of the perception on the Right of ‘an internal ‘malaise’ – a lack of national vigour and purpose.’ This was also expressed as a sense of spiritual confusion arising from the alienation of people from their native soil and village. Rudolf Steiner[238] wrote that Capitalism brings economic analyses to the fore and denies the

[238] Work first published in April 1919, re-issued in 1920 and again in 1943.

essential humanity of all people, but especially the working class who are ‘convinced of the ideological character of spiritual life; but the conviction renders them more and more unhappy.’ (1943:25)

In respect of *agricultural* implications, experts such as Stapledon appeared to remain ‘above’ politics. Shaw and Chase wrote that ‘agriculturalists, largely political innocents, were drawn to the prospect of authoritarian government because it alone seemed likely to deliver the kind of reforms to farming practice they desired without the anathema of collectivisation.’ (1989:136)

That perspective was illustrated by Stapledon (1935:304) who saw himself ‘as a man who has not studied public affairs, and who has a distinct antipathy towards everything that savours of politics, and who scarcely ever reads a political speech.’ None the less, Stapledon can still assert that ‘as a matter of fact I believe that there is a great deal to be said for ‘narrow’ nationalism’ (1935:251) or ‘I cannot begin to understand either the international position or high finance, but least of all can I understand why either should be permitted to dominate this country’s attitude towards the land.’ (1935:252)

Stapledon was no marginal figure; as an advocate of Ley Farming he provided a very practical way forward in terms of storing and releasing fertility and played a leading role in influencing policy in the Second World War. Shaw and Chase suggested that this apparent innocence is far from the case and the bringing together of the rural and the technical was based on a use of the past ‘in reactionary, right wing ways.’

(1989:129) It is the *context* for the technical which is important to note, in that the use of any improved or scientific method of farming is deemed to be acceptable only in an imagined rural setting. Once it is to be utilised in a capitalist or collectivist setting then it cannot meet real *national* objectives.

In any consideration of the nature of the Radical Right it is necessary to note the appropriation of many perspectives from the Left. Linehan (2000:30-34) noted the importance of the work on eugenics of HG Wells and Sidney Webb and the involvement of the latter 'in the creation of a new supra- class party of 'national efficiency', whose aim would be to acquaint every sphere of British life with the principles of efficiency.' (2000:31) The later work of Robert Blatchford, particularly his denunciation of the Left in the First World War, made an important contribution to a sense of hyper nationalism.

From 1919, however, what became important was that, whatever the *British* traditions, Mussolini was bringing about an apparent transformation of Italy by incorporating many of those values and offering firm leadership.

This practical example of agrarian change in Italy took place in a specific political context[239] arising out of the ending of the First World War and the first application of a democratic franchise. Owing to the system of proportional representation it was difficult to identify a clear

[239] Morgan P (1995) *Italian Fascism 1919 – 1945.* Chapter 1 is particularly useful.

winner of the 1919 elections[240] but substantial advances were made on the Left by the PSI,[241] a party which then refused to participate in any moves towards coalition. The party did, however, exert a measure of control in some parts of Italy and utilised that in order to follow the process of building the Local State as an instrument for socialist transformation. Morgan wrote that it 'used its local government powers to 'expropriate' the propertied classes through high taxation and support of consumer and producer co-operatives' (1995:32.) In the light of the severe financial crisis of 1920, the Fascist reaction was largely predicated upon local and rural reaction to the threat of 'imminent revolution.' Harold Goad wrote of Italy having to stave off 'alien ideas imported from Germany via Russia.' (1926:310)[242]

The development of agrarian fascism was in opposition to 'the socialist goal of a collectivised agriculture' (Morgan 1995:37) and managed to bring together both landowners and small producers in some of the Italian provinces. As the agricultural policy of Mussolini developed in the 1920's it incorporated increased land ownership,[243] land reclamation, control of production levels and the replacement of Independent agricultural Trades Unions with Syndicates, which had the 'beneficial' effect of lowering wages.[244] In all areas of social, economic and political life the Fascists in Italy were 'working to erode the bases of pluralist society' (Morgan 1995:68) and to build up the Corporatist State. In July

[240] As would be the case today in Italy.
[241] *Partito Socialista Italiano.*
[242] Review by Harold Goad of *The Fascist Experiment* by Luigi Villari 1926 in *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.* Vol.5 No.6 (Nov. 1926) pp.310-312.
[243] Though, without threatening the large landowners.
[244] Cohen 1979 & Morgan 1995.

1925, after severe difficulties affecting the *Lira,* Mussolini launched the *Battaglia Del Grano* (Battle for the Wheat) which involved the imposition of import duties on wheat, scientific and technological programmes and equipment grants. The aim 'was to increase Italy's production of wheat and cereals to the point of self – sufficiency' (Morgan 1995:98) with one substantial exception, which was the acknowledgement by Mussolini that 'self - sufficiency' had to be enhanced by Colonial acquisitions. Until Italy was in a position to colonise productive neighbours, then it could only be a proud independent nation if it could satisfactorily feed itself. To a very large extent this goal was achieved, in respect of wheat, by 1930 but such was the power of the producer syndicates that consumers had to pay high prices. More importantly, such was the distorting influence of the incentives and duties that production of other significant crops declined over the same period.

From 1928 Mussolini 'encouraged' rural settlement on the grounds of the enhanced moral and physical attributes of country living and looked to increase domestic food production through the scheme of *bonifica integrale*; land reclamation. Whilst more recent writers have seen the drive towards 'ruralism' as part of a move to divert attention away from increased industrialisation in Italy, at the time such a policy was greeted with enthusiasm in Britain by many on the Radical Right. Not all MP's were as enthusiastic as the Conservative member, Viscount Lymington in the House of Commons debate on Agriculture[245]

[245] HC Deb 26 May 1930 Vol. 239 cc 949 - 964

‘Yes, it would be better to have a Mussolini organising the agriculture of this country than to see it go to ruin, as it is doing to-day. It wants leadership, a clear balancing of the differences between arable and pastoral agriculture, getting them in a sane light, and going through with it with bravery, courage and singleness of will and purpose.’ (c.953)

In a number of debates in both the Lords and the Commons, the term ‘Mussolini’ became shorthand for decisive action or showing leadership, especially in the 1920’s. In the same debate in 1930, R.A. Butler backed up Lymington and said that

‘Agriculture has waited some 84 years since the repeal of the Corn Laws to get equitable treatment from the towns and from the House of Commons. Entirely brushing aside all the arguments about one party or another, it is time that we had active administration at the Ministry and some remedying of the price to the farmer in the extremely difficult circumstances in which he finds himself at the present time.’ (c.958)

In the Unemployment debate in 1931[246] Lloyd George said of Mussolini that ‘He is reclaiming 5,000,000 acres of land,’ followed by the interjection recorded by Hansard - [An HON. MEMBER: "So could we!"]

Indeed, the principal topic of the debate was finding ways of creating work, through land reclamation and rural reconstruction, both acknowledged as Mussolini precedents. Lloyd George again spoke in another Unemployment Debate in 1932,

[246] HC Deb 12th Feb 1931 Vol.248 cc631 - 741

‘The "Times" has already been advertising what Signor Mussolini is doing in the way of reclamation. He was opening yesterday a town built upon a waste swamp which has been reclaimed. Italy is a poor land. It is a poorer land than ours. That is what he is doing. He has shown courage. He is facing his difficulties. He has reclaimed hundreds and thousands—and, I am not certain that there are not millions—of acres. He has put, at any rate, hundreds and thousands of people upon the land. In Germany they are going to take 1,300,000 acres in East Prussia alone in order to settle the population upon the land where 30 per cent of the population is already on the soil.’ (c.1309)

The contributions recorded here are from mainstream political discourse, although Viscount Lymington did subsequently resign his seat on the grounds that Parliament was ineffective. Many on the Left saw Italy as offering little by way of example, being substantially less industrial than Britain. In reply, the Radical Right would indeed point to the fact that rural reconstruction through the primacy of agriculture is the desired end; therefore Italy *does* provide an example.

The implications of the Italian ‘experiment’ were more broadly applied than simply to agriculture. Harold Goad, who gave an influential lecture on the Corporate State to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1933, had written in1926 that such a State fitted the bill in Italy in that it

did not have a democratic tradition and, before Mussolini, had fallen into 'the hands of a political class, consisting mainly of profiteers, agents, journalists and briefless barristers.' (1926:311)

Goad offered a definition of Fascism as 'government by the aristocracy of patriotic devotion; the rule of the country by those who care most and think most and work most for the country.' (1926:311) This rather useful definition is noteworthy in two important respects; that it corresponded closely to the working definition of good government which had been encountered in the writings of the Right and the 'agricultural experts' and, secondly, it suggested a way forward out of Capitalist crisis.

The favourable treatment of Mussolini by many agriculturalists declined after the accession to power of Hitler, despite the apparent commitment of the National Socialists to food self sufficiency. Collingham (2011:28) wrote that it was not self sufficiency which was being pursued but the creation of a 'food economy which would provide the basis for military action.' Many agriculturalists of the Radical Right had contact with the German Agriculture Minister Walther Darre[247] and expressed an interest in German agricultural revival through the setting up of the Reich Food Corporation[248] and the accompanying policies of autarky. There was also an appreciation of the merits of German policies on racial purity, with Viscount Lymington wishing to see an alliance of white peoples in order to take part in the German experiment of 'constructive racial

[247] Minister for Food & Agriculture from 1933.
[248] *Reichsnahrstand*

regeneration.' (Griffiths 1983:321)[249] Rolf Gardiner[250] wrote of 'how hope can be given to a defeated and degenerate nation by sacrifice and singleness of mind working outside of the normal bureaucratic standards; how the regeneration of Hitler's Germany was made possible beforehand by a few pioneers.' (Griffiths 1983:321)[251]

Christopher Turnor toured Germany and wrote appreciations of German (and Italian) agriculture[252] and Viscount Lymington lectured in Berlin in 1939 praising the moves made towards food self sufficiency. There were, however, a number of contradictions in the appreciations of Italian and German agriculture. Firstly, for all the talk of 'blood and soil,' Germany was utilising a degree of mechanisation that many on the Radical Right opposed in Britain. Secondly, there was an appreciation that 'self sufficiency' for both Germany and Italy actually meant that there was an inbuilt need for expansion into Eastern Europe or North Africa, a precedent set by Japan invading Manchuria in 1931. In the case of Italy, the leadership role attributed widely to Mussolini was replaced by one of an appreciation of his warlike propensities. By 1935 (after the invasion of Abyssinia) the tone had changed to

'I hear that this is what Signor Mussolini told the Chamber of Deputies last year: War is to man as maternity is to woman.… I do not believe in

[249] From Quarterly Gazette of the English Array July 1938.
[250] Associated with many of the groups mentioned in this study – Guild Socialism, Social Credit, English Mistery, English Array, Kinship and Husbandry and the Soil Association. Undoubtedly pro German and pro Nazi, although attempts were made to portray him as 'misunderstood' in respect of Anti Semitism.
[251] From Quarterly Gazette of the English Array October 1938.
[252] *Land Reclamation & Drainage in Italy* in 1935 and *Land Settlement in Germany* in 1935. Both published by P.S. King & Co. In London.

perpetual peace; not only that, I consider that it depresses and negatives the fundamental virtues of man, which only in bloody effort reveal themselves in the full light of the sun.' (c.2714)[253]

In addition, it was clear that Italian agriculture was struggling despite, or because of, the State encouragement and subsidy, resulting in shortages and high prices for consumers.

Thirdly, whilst national regeneration was to be welcomed and authoritarian government seen to be the best way of restoring the traditional order, the examples of the Fascist states contradicted the carefully constructed narratives about the natural order and Englishness and the discovery of the ancient virtues of village life. The vision of authoritarianism was founded on the emergence of natural leaders, not the imposition of State control. Massingham analysed the National Socialists[254] as having 'played upon a certain hysteria and distortion to which the German character is prone' and quoted Hayek in asserting that the absolute State 'was the creation not of the Prussians but of the Socialists' (1945:2.) In his view, Socialism had entered Germany and laid the foundations for State control because as a race they did not possess the individuality of the English. Massingham saw *everything*; concentration camps, mass executions, as the 'consequence of the loss of the person in the mass and the State, of free will and individual rights in the collective consciousness, of the timeless rural values in industrialism.' (1945:3)

[253] Mr George Lambert M.P. debate: HC Deb 31 July 1935 Vol. 304 cc. 2689 – 2781.
[254] *After* the War.

Writing shortly after the 1945 Elections, Massingham observed that the 'Hitler situation' was already present in Britain, as shown by the present mass psychology. The Socialist foundations of Britain were laid long ago with the result that 'our people are not thinking in terms of self help and personal responsibility, but of social services and security which can only mean the authoritarian state' (1945:5.) The situation in Britain was unchanged from the 1930's in that agriculture was still not the paramount industry, the country was still too urbanized and too motivated by commercial considerations: 'We betrayed and deserted our agriculture by the Enclosures and the 'workshop of the world' fetish, and it at once took the egoistic form of *laissez – faire* individualism' (1945 5-6.)

Finally, many on the Radical Right simply ignored that they had previously been sympathetic to or had even supported Fascism before the War. Whilst it had been widespread to appreciate the leadership skills of Mussolini and see some hope in the shape of the National Socialists in Germany, many on the Right seemed to forget just how enthusiastic they had been. In respect of the 'home grown' variety of Fascism, many had an ambiguity towards English fascism and, in particular, to Oswald Mosley and his circle.

Oswald Mosley had absorbed much of the Guild Socialism of G.D.H. Cole from his time with the ILP and had left the Labour Party once it had rejected his ideas for National Regeneration and Planning. At times he seemed to share the Radical Right position on agriculture. However,

the analysis of the CPGB[255] is worth remembering - that the Blackshirts 'emerged from the heart of the Labour Party and the ILP' (Dorril 2007:205) and many on the Right shared that view and were suspicious of Mosley. Mosley might best be described as being too eclectic in his beliefs for many on the Right.

Stephen Dorril wrote of Mosley's 'romantic nostalgia for a rural past (which) found favour with Nietzschean Tories of the organic movement, who feared modernity and cosmopolitanism, and dreamed of a pure and spiritual national revival' (2007:250.) The difficulty for many on the Right was that he also favoured the rapid modernisation of Britain, having argued for the industrialisation of agriculture when he was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Mosley claimed that his plans resolved any town – country conflict through the idea of national harmony, sacrifices made by all in the national interest.[256] Henry Williamson[257] saw that 'the British Union [of Fascists] had the most supportive agricultural policy, with increasing stress placed upon the 'moral' advantages of rural life.' (Dorril 2007:417) and Mosley constantly stressed the need to stay in touch with the soil for the benefit of the health of the English race. But his equal attachment to the modernisation of British industry, including the creation of large industrial farms, made him somewhat untrustworthy to many

[255] Communist Party of Great Britain. General Secretary Rajani Palme Dutt.
[256] Sihvonen (2008) *Modern and Anti – Modern Elements in the Discourse of the British Union of Fascists.* PhD Tampere, Finland.
[257] Henry Williamson (1895 – 1977) was best known for *Tarka the Otter* written in1927. He wrote extensively of his experiences in the First World War and visited Germany in the 1930's, praising the Hitler Youth. Was involved in the BUF and worked with Jorian Jenks on agricultural policy. Briefly interned in the Second World War.

agriculturalists. By the time that the British Union of Fascists produced its first comprehensive agricultural policy (1938) the BUF was somewhat in decline and the attention of many agriculturalists had turned to wartime preparation. Jorian Jenks, the BUF agriculture spokesman who wrote the policy, started from the position that 'no serious effort has yet been made to develop the full productivity of our soil,' and that Britain continues to indulge in 'manufactured goods for food' which is 'a dangerous assumption indeed at a time when there is a world -wide trend towards self –sufficiency.' (Jenks 1938:3)[258]

The explanation for such British neglect was to be found in the influence of those involved in trade and finance using their power over politicians to bring about a situation in which 'agriculture has been sacrificed, not because farming doesn't pay, but because its activities might interfere with the flow of tribute to Mammon.' (1938:4.) The human cost of agricultural neglect was identified as an empty countryside, malnutrition in the towns, and a lack of security. Are we 'to degenerate slowly into a community of town bred, undernourished weaklings, a parasite nation dependent for its very existence upon the charity of international financiers, upon the goodwill and forbearance of other and more virile countries?' Jenks asked (1938:5)

Jenks dismissed the ability of the main parties to restore agriculture, given that they were prey to either finance capital or false internationalism. Only the BUF had the strength to put Britain first by

[258] Page references throughout relate to the second edition of 2003 published by Steven Books.

taking on the forces of International finance with the aim of creating 'a self reliant Britain within the framework of a self sufficient Empire.' (1938:7.)[259] The BUF also captured the essence of the Radical Right position by promising an 'agriculture first' policy, doubling home production and employing half a million more people on the land. Jenks, however, showed commitment to 'intensive agriculture' in pursuit of those aims by asserting that 'the resources of the soil are almost endless if intensive methods can be applied under the stimulus of a progressive policy' (1938:7.)

This policy would be overseen, not through democratic accountability, but by the Corporate State which would offer agriculture self governing status if it operated in the national interest. Unlike the current half hearted Marketing Boards, the self governing authorities would comprise farmers, farm workers, consumers and the State itself. The key item in the BUF policy was cheap agricultural credit, a demand which had been present on both the Left and the Right since the great depression of the 1880's. The BUF envisaged that it would be brought about by breaking the powers of International finance, which other parties had failed to do. The policy document ended with the proclamation that 'Conservatism is the servant of Finance; Socialism has capitulated to it.' (1938:15) However, it is worth noting that many on the Left analysed the same 'vested interests' in international finance as

[259] After the War, Mosley and the Union Movement increasingly substituted 'Europe' for 'Empire'.

also being the principal reason why agriculture failed to prosper.[260] In wartime the CPGB also reflected that it was big business which had allowed agriculture to decline, because it was in its interests.[261] Christopher Addison in a Labour Party pamphlet of 1926 entitled *Why Food is Dear* pointed to the actions of financiers and speculators. Jenks and the BUF rarely explicitly referred to Capitalism and did not analyse it as a system, but instead concentrated on financiers as if their actions were different from how 'honest' people operated. In an earlier work[262] Jenks (and co-author Taylor Peddie) had written that 'agriculture is the natural foundation on which the whole national economy should be based' and that 'agricultural produce is the truest from of wealth that exists.' (1935:13) The soil is from God and represents 'the agency through which He provides man with his daily food.' (1935:42.)

Taylor and Peddie had earlier written a work entitled *The Economic Mechanism of Scripture*[263] which looked to the scriptures in order to inform economic theory and practice and which attempted to build a specifically Christian approach to trade.[264] Taylor and Peddie wrote that the adoption of a Central Reserve Standard would enable 'real wealth' to be deduced and then be distributed equitably in order to generate better consumer purchasing. This would make sure that 'the farmer

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[260] See *Plan for Britain's Agriculture* from the CPGB 1938 authored by Maurice Cornforth it identified middlemen, financiers & landed interests.
[261] *Food and Farming for Victory* from the CPGB 1942, also authored by Maurice Cornforth.
[262] Jenks J.E.F & Taylor Peddie J. *Farming & Money* 1935.
[263] Published in 1934 by Williams & Norgate
[264] Both the Old and New Testament, but also a fair amount of emphasis upon the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Solon. It was the latter who concentrated upon the need for the restriction of trade, especially the export of food as part of his work to reform the declining economy of Ancient Greece.

would be assured not only of sufficient currency to finance his operations, but also of a market for his produce when offered for sale.' (1935:20-21.) Agriculture would prosper because it is the principal component of real wealth, thus it would follow that it would make 'agriculture the agency for the restoration of national prosperity, and thus re-establish it in its rightful place as the most important industry in the country.' (1935:24.) The authors then presented a fairly orthodox set of measures (marketing, housing, smallholdings, agricultural authorities etc.) for rural revival which can *only* work if economic reform is implemented. The perspective on the position of the Colonies is of interest in that the authors recognised that economic nationalism was a growing force across the world and that 'even our Dominions, whose loyalty to the Mother Country is unquestioned, made it clear ... that they were not prepared to sacrifice their own manufactures in order to provide markets for ours. In other words, they preferred THEIR conception of national self sufficiency to OUR conception of international trade.' (1935:37.) The 'answer' was home trade; agriculture as the primary industry, increased purchasing power for consumers and minimal international trade through barter.

The references to international finance or to usury are coded, and often not so coded, statements about so called Jewish influence or conspiracy. Rolf Gardiner in 1933 contrasted Britain and Germany in the following terms; 'one [is] championing the values of earth and bread,

the other cleaving to the advantages of commerce and usury.' (Griffiths 1983:146) Britain could ensure a useful future if it 'returned to our own English religion which was nurtured in the soil of our land until supplanted by alien, neo – Phoenician ways.' (1983:146)[265] Taylor and Peddie had earlier quoted the Bible to show the 'financial dodges of the Israelites.'[266]

There was also a coding involved in the soil itself where a contrast is implied between those who have a sense of identity and rootedness and those who 'wander.' Viscount Lymington in *Famine in England* in 1938 wrote that back to the land was the only way of dealing with 'scum' and 'aliens' in the cities, who lacked roots. The casual anti-Semitism of many on the Right[267] meant that it was not left to Fascists alone to single out the alleged ills of Jewish financiers and contrast that with the degree to which Christianity[268] was rooted in the native soil. The linkage between God and the soil was of particular importance in the setting up of the Soil Association by people (many of whom were unapologetic or slightly apologetic fascists) whose 'belief in a God – given natural order ensures that they mistrusted any agricultural system which ignored the Rule of Return.' (Conford 2001:96) Massingham wrote in 1941 that 'the development of "scientific" land-forcing based on finance is a phenomenon even more terrifying than the savagery of the

[265] From English Array: Quarterly Gazette. April 1938. I have decided that the sins of the Neo Phoenicians are beyond the scope of this study.
[266] The reference is from a review of his 1934 Work contained in the 1935 Jenks & Taylor Peddie volume *Farming & Money.* The review is from the *Times Literary Supplement.*(1934:110)
[267] Even those who have not been thought of as Right Wing?
[268] With an acknowledgement to a fair degree of influence from the Pagan tradition.

present war, which is the logical outcome of living for wealth rather than for health of mind, body and estate.' (Massingham ed. 1941: introduction: 3)

Later in the introduction, Massingham wrote of the spiritual return which contact with the land brings and concluded that 'the machine – made life will not work; it ends as we are seeing it end – in chaos, massacre and a lunacy of domination by evil men.' (1941:6) For Massingham, Germany alone is not responsible for the War ('all Europe is guilty') because all nations have chased progress which has placed the Continent 'back in the moral world of the Assyrians.' (1941:9.) In an essay in the same work Viscount Lymington made reference to the 'ancient wisdom' of man and nature and called for a system of interest free farming because 'usury destroys wholeness because it demands something for almost nothing.' (1941: Lymington: 28)

Both during and after the War, the Radical Right developed an enhanced sense of spiritual and moral Englishness and elevated 'the soil' to a dominant position. For Lord Northbourne the key concept was that of 'biological self sufficiency' which could replace crude economic nationalism by unleashing the true creativity of the English nation. This analysis followed from the position that 'trade as the foundation of living is nonsense; the net result is nil.' (1940:62.) Instead, what is required is a genuine sense of place, not a 'recreational and sentimental' (1940:64) one based on leisure. The revival of agriculture also became linked with the ability of Britain to defend itself in the event of war. After Viscount

Lymington had resigned from the Commons in 1934 he linked the essential nature of food self sufficiency with the need to rearm and 'to re-establish English character and tradition.'[269]

The interwar period saw the development of an amalgam of views which brought together, in varying combinations, Englishness, race, breeding, religion, paganism, contempt for democracy, fears of Capitalism failing, Bolshevism winning and guarded admiration for Italy and Germany. Hobsbawm (1994:124) wrote that the 'natural alliance of the Right between the wars went from traditional conservatives *via* old-style reactionaries to the outer fringes of fascist pathology.' Writings on agriculture, especially from the experts,[270] often seemed to occupy positions on that spectrum whilst claiming to be 'non – political.'

This apparent detachment was enhanced because it was widely assumed that agriculture was simply too difficult to fit in with political discourse. Whilst there were converts in the 1930's, and many who subsequently went on to assist in the formulation of the 1947 Agriculture Act for the Labour Government, the 'Socialist' conception of agriculture was confined to state ownership and a market economy. Anyone who knew too much about agriculture on the Left, as with Kropotkin, had long since been discarded in favour of recycled Liberals.

[269] Taken from the *Saturday Review* March 24th 1934 and quoted in Griffiths1983:319
[270] Griffiths 1983:317 uses the phrase 'agricultural philosophers.'

Taking note of the spectrum described by Hobsbawm, many of those who advocated ‘back to the land’ or food self sufficiency are hard to categorise. For example, the Labour Party exhibited a touching belief in large scale industrialised farming which could only be unleashed by nationalisation. The fact that the Agricultural Marketing Acts introduced by the Labour Government in 1931 acted a spur to the development of large ‘agri-businesses,’ the intensive use of chemicals and artificial fertilisers and increased mechanisation seemed not to have been appreciated, given that ‘State control’ would soon arrive. In the meantime, the *practical* effect of Labour policy was to strengthen the position of a number of key companies in a way which signalled the development of a capitalist agriculture. *How* output was increased seemed less important than the impact that it *might* have on the land, a position which meant that Labour characterised all those in opposition as being sentimental or reactionary. The purpose of agriculture was to feed the workers – cheaply.

Questions about ‘self sufficiency’ did not need to be addressed given a future in which fewer farmers working on larger farms would feed substantially more people from within our own resources. Whether they fed *all* of them did not really matter, as long as they fed substantially more than present. George Woodcock criticised this aspect of Labour policy, writing that there had been little work done on ‘a truly socialist

agricultural policy that aims at making full use of the productive capacity of British soil.' (Woodcock 1942:15)[271]

The large scale soil erosion encountered in Australia and the 'dust bowl' in the United States both served to concentrate attention on to the soil itself; 'irresponsible farming had created deserts and caused untold human misery through the resulting social dislocation.'
(Conford2001:98)

Conford quoted extensively from the United States Department of Agriculture Yearbook for 1938; two significant points being that 'stable civilizations are associated with long familiarity with a given soil; they grow out of it and are rooted in it' and 'a stable, healthy and vigorous civilization demands a proper adjustment of men to the soil, and opportunities for them to make this adjustment.' (Conford 2001:98)[272] Just how serious was the nature of soil erosion was emphasised by the publication in 1939 of '*The Rape of the Earth: a world survey of soil erosion*'[273] which referred to erosion as 'one of the most vicious and destructive forces that have been released by man.' The authors took the view that the threat was greater than that from dictatorships and emphasised the USDA point about the decline of civilisations being a result of neglect of the soil.

It is important to understand the significance of how 'the soil' and the associated questions of fertility entered in to the political discourse.

[271] *New Life to the Land* George Woodcock, published in 1942 by Freedom Press.
[272] American agriculturalists trying to understand the causes of the dust bowl sought advice from R.G Stapledon. (Conford 2001:120)
[273] By Jacks G.V & Whyte R.O. published in London in 1939 by Faber & Faber

Whilst it is easy to emphasise the links between many agriculturalists and their appreciations of Fascism and / or ancient societies[274] it is necessary to also understand the sense of urgency and danger many felt about soil quality and fertility, which is exemplified by the American experience. Mainstream political discourse appeared to exclude them, given that the Conservative Party vaguely supported back to the land, but not with any great conviction.[275] In any event, supporting back to the land as a *social* policy showed little understanding of the state of the soil itself. The USDA Yearbook statements seemed, even from this distance, to posses something of a mystical quality in the way they linked the notions of 'civilisation' with 'soil' and 'rootedness.' A.J. Penty (see chapter 4) moved from being a member of the Fabian Society and an advocate of Guild Socialism to being a Fascist supporter and 'writing, as a Catholic, in praise of Mussolini for having created a corporate state which was in essence 'the Regulative Guild State' and demonstrated that 'Mediaeval ideas still have practical validity.' (Conford 2001:154)[276] Whilst not exclusively drawing upon the 'mediaeval,' a number of magazines, notably *New English Weekly,*[277]placed agriculture in a spiritual context.[278] The *NEW* attracted support from those such as Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton who looked back 'to an imaginary time when the Church had been central to life, when all had been stable, ordered, hierarchical and traditional, and

[274] It is easy simply by quoting what many of them said in praise of Italy, or more tellingly, Germany.
[275] Notably with how they opposed and then diluted the Labour Land Utilisation Bill.
[276] Conford also records similar journeys made by a number who advocated Guilds / Social credit in the immediate post war period, including A.R. Orage [see page xx]
[277] Conford 2001: chapter 10 & Dorril 2007: chapter 11.
[278] Contributors included A.R. Orage, T.S Eliot, A.J. Penty, & Ezra Pound.

when every man had known his duties as well as his rights.' (Griffiths 1983:59) In addition, one might add, Britain was self sufficient and had not been subject to the control of 'international finance.' The line being articulated by the Radical Right was that international finance, and the associated elements of free trade and 'usury' not only brought ruin to British agriculture [deliberately] but robbed Britain of her soil and, therefore, her very essence. The supporting evidence for this was said to be the policy of cheap food to go along with low wages and to bring about higher profits for the exploiters. This resulted in the exploitation of soils all over the world to such a degree only *artificial* fertilisers could maintain *artificial* fertility, but only in the short term.

International forces, almost always described as Jewish, were conspiring to rob Britain of her fertility both in the sense of the condition of the soil, but also of her 'manhood'. The country could starve either by the workings of international trade, through another war or by having lost her capacity to use her own soil. When war did actually break out, the resulting mechanisation of British agriculture merely served to intensify those feelings. The Right 'viewed the land as a fundamental resource, not only for the production of food, but as a locus of values and ways of seeing and thinking worthy of preservation.' (Moore – Colyer 2004:369) and increasingly came to consider that post war agriculture would intensify production methods and produce poorer food as a result. Many of those fears were to be found in the *New Pioneer* magazine which was launched in 1938 and included many of the figures

already encountered in the interwar period[279] and which was closely allied with the British People's Party.[280] The *New Pioneer* contained what Linehan referred to as a 'curious ideological mix of the absurd and the sinister' (1983:141) but also published a considerable of material on practical organic husbandry. Nevertheless, it was dominated by anti – Jewish and anti – war sentiment and tended to place the practical material (much of which influenced the founding of the Soil Association) in the context of mediaeval imagery.

Exploiting 'our' own soil appeared to make sense from the mid 1930's as the threat of war became apparent. Active Government planning commenced in 1935 (see chapter 8) and the Marketing Boards served as a template for future intervention. The actions of Walter Elliot as the Minister of Agriculture had encouraged corporatist approaches to agriculture and he argued in 1934 that such arrangements had 'already developed further in England than is generally recognised.' (Ritschel 1991:58)[281] That such an approach was not completely acceptable to the Conservative Party was shown by the removal of Elliot form Agriculture soon after and the wry remark of Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade that 'what is now called planning, ten years ago would have been called Socialism.' (Ritschel 1991:59)[282] One

[279] The founders were Viscount Lymington & John Beckett with contributions from A.K. Chesterton, Ludovici, Rolf Gardiner & Arthur Bryant. [Griffiths 1983: chapter 10.Dorril 2007: chapter 21. Linehan 1983: chapter 5. Conford 2001: chapter 8.]
[280] Co-founded by Beckett & the Marquis of Tavistock who Linehan described as a man 'who took a keen interest in the welfare of parrots and homing budgerigars.' (1983:139) Beckett was a former Labour MP and member of the ILP (as were many of the BPP) Viscount Lymington, unsurprisingly, also joined.
[281] From *The Times* of June 25th 1934.
[282] From *The Times* of May 10th 1934.

would have thought that the Radical Right would have welcomed this 'conversion' to developing domestic food production, but most of those encountered in this chapter were involved in pro – German and/or anti – war movements. The notion of self sufficiency also came under interrogation, with the emergence of an approach which noted that British self sufficiency always incorporated the Empire. For Germany, Italy and especially Japan (the most self sufficient and agricultural nation of all) attempted self sufficiency changed into territorial expansion. The Royal Institute of International Affairs pamphlet *Raw Material and Colonies* contrasted the strategic self sufficiency of the British Empire with the vulnerability of Germany and Japan. If open trade were the norm, then each country could make up that deficit by means of commerce, but the countries which sought domestic food self sufficiency were consciously opting out of 'normal' trade by protecting agriculture by tariffs and other measures. In a work in 1938, H.N Brailsford[283] saw the attempt by Germany to create national self sufficiency as an aggressive act and one typical of a Fascist State 'which arises as the old system of international interdependence breaks down, in countries whose industrial development surpasses their natural resources and their assured market.' (1938:66)

Given that most of the Radical Right ascribed the decline of British agriculture to its 'abandonment to world market forces' (Moore- Colyer 2001:189) or Capitalism or an alien conspiracy, then here is the countervailing view, which is that trade, properly conducted, is a greater

[283] *Why Capitalism Means War* Brailsford H.N Left Book Club / Victor Gollancz. 1938.

guarantor of peace. Self sufficiency for *any* national economy is an aggressive act – 'an element of military strength which no Power can afford to neglect.' (Brailsford 1938:67) Thus, the assertion of imperial self sufficiency, with trade with 'foreigners' being the lowest priority is also an aggressive act, given that it encourages war and colonial expansion of the part of those nations who lack access to raw materials and foodstuffs. Rolf Gardiner, but also later Oswald Mosley, understood and sympathised with Germany to the extent that Britain should move away from Empire and move towards Europe.[284] Gardiner hoped that across Europe, but especially in Germany, it would be possible to bring about a rural and organic revival given that 'the radical agrarian wing of National Socialism sought national salvation in land settlement and the recreation of a strong peasant economy.' (Moore- Colyer 2001:197)

Conclusion

The Radical Right in the interwar period pursued different arguments in support of rural revival and domestic food self sufficiency. The success of the Conservative Party is that it managed to be very close to a lot of the rhetoric of the Radical Right but developed sufficient political acumen to distance itself from Fascism. The Radical Right showed little sense of balance in their views on agriculture, wishing to recreate a vaguely realised former England. At the same time, many of the arguments used by the BUF were from the Left; the Fascist John

[284] Specifically, Northern Europe or 'Nordic' peoples.

Beckett said that 'my speeches were practically the same as those I had made in the ILP, because my change of organisation had no effect on my Socialist convictions and policy.' (Coupland 2005:97)[285] The Radical Right *thought* that totalitarian States offered an example to be followed as they appeared to represent ways in which Leadership and Rural Revival could be realised. As it became apparent that they did not (a process which took longer for some than others) there developed a greater sense of mysticism intermingled with patriotism. Preoccupation with the soil represented an attempt by many on the Right to establish themselves in an area where there were 'truths' to be discovered which transcended the mere superficialities of being 'political.'

Eve Balfour wrote in 1943 that 'if our experience of the last twenty years has not taught us sufficient humility to realize that we are incapable of ordering our lives successfully in a Godless society, then one is tempted to wonder whether as a species we are worth preserving.' (2006:196) In the midst of wartime, Balfour wrote of the imperative of Human ecology which 'demands that we should think less of our 'rights' and more of our duties to all living things, including each other.' (206:196.)

Whilst such a work as *The Living Soil* pointed the way forward to the development of organic agriculture, perhaps exemplified by the founding of the Soil Association in 1946, it was also clearly a child of the

[285] In Copsey N. & Renton D. *British Fascism, the labour Movement and the State.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2005. Chapter 5 *'Left Wing Fascism' in Theory and Practice.* Coupland P.M.

interwar Radical Right. Whilst the Soil Association website notes that it was founded in 1946 'by a group of far sighted individuals in who were concerned about the health implications of increasingly intensive agricultural systems'[286] it declines to note who those individuals were.[287] The First Council of the Soil Association included H.J. Massingham, Viscount Lymington [by then the Earl of Portsmouth] Rolf Gardiner and, finally, the Editorial Secretary was Jorian Jenks.[288] 'Survivors' of the Radical Right arguing not for a narrow *national* self sufficiency but having sought refuge in a more seemingly profound mystical pursuit of natural laws and the future of mankind.

[286] http://www.soilassociation.org/aboutus/ourhistory accessed June 14th 2012
[287] http://www.psa.ac.uk/cps/2002/reed.pdf accessed June 14th 2012 M.Reed University of Plymouth Thesis: *Servants of the Soil: The Lonely Furrow of the Soil Association 1946 – 2000.*
[288] I think, as a member of the Soil Association, I need to declare an interest here.

Conclusion

‘Ill Fares the Land?’

In choosing the above for the title of this work, one is aware of the use of the first line of the Goldsmith poem by a number of authors over the years. It was the 1984 work of Susan George which initially offered a possible title for this work, but one also notes the more recent polemical work of Tony Judt[289] which has kept the phrase in the public consciousness. As this study has developed, however, it has become apparent that it is necessary to return to Goldsmith, given that his work encapsulated much of the political discourse presented here. For all the apparent benefits of the involvement of many agricultural ‘experts’ it is arguable whether most of the advocates of food self sufficiency have developed their positions much beyond the contents of this work of 1770.

It is worth reproducing the opening stanza from Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* in full because it articulated the dominant narrative in the sixty years covered by this study

‘Ill fares the land, to hast’ning ills a prey,

Where wealth accumulates, and men decay:

[289] Penguin Books: 2010

Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;

A breath can make them, as a breath has made;

But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,

When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.[290]'

Whilst much of the poem, written in 1770, is personal to Goldsmith it is nevertheless the political articulation of the impact of change imposed upon the countryside. Whilst wealth might be a transitory blessing, it is contrasted with the value of having a dependable population who are the guardians of more enduring values. Although often portrayed as a lament for a sentimentalised countryside, Goldsmith made some specific points in which he identified the nature of the exchange which is taking place,

'The man of wealth and pride

Takes up a space that many poor supplied.'

In addition, Goldsmith presented a view of the lifestyle which is being lost through the presentation of the deserted village

'A time there was, ere England's griefs began,

When every rood of ground maintain'd its man;

For him light labour spread her wholesome store,

[290] From the Poetical Works of Goldsmith. Oxford University Press 1906 edition: pp 23-47

Just gave what life requir'd, but gave no more:

His best companions, innocence and health;

And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.'

In considering that stanza, one has to be aware of the prevalence within the political discourse of the image of the self sufficient individual within a self sufficient nation. For some, this represented *all* that England needed to be, but for others even a partial recreation of the peasantry would be better than nothing.

Whilst Goldsmith is often seen as having written this work as the consequence of specific examples of the building of grandiose houses[291], the following line concentrated upon a more generalised view of where the blame lies for the transformation,

'trade's unfeeling train.'

The word 'unfeeling' contrasts the personal nature of the countryside and the benefits of contact with the soil with the importation of a system which has the power to create wealth on a scale previously unknown in human history but will bring that about by appealing to less desirable aspects of human character

'Unwieldy wealth, and cumbrous pomp repose;

And every want to opulence allied,

[291] Both in England and in Ireland, being important to remember that Goldsmith was, above all, an Irish writer. That the examples are said to be drawn from both Oxfordshire and Athlone strengthens the universality of the poem.

And every pang that folly pays to pride.'

Within the political discourse, it is that sense of 'unfeeling' which is prevalent in that it expressed the fears of a wide range of political positions that society is, or will shortly be, unrecognisable as England. The material presented here shows just how widespread is the view that England had a better and a more moral past and, above all, a past predicated upon human or natural values.

This line is articulated by a whole range of conservative thinkers who are convinced of a profound national decline in every aspect of public and private life. Goldsmith may present a vision in which once the peasantry has gone – it *'can never be supplied'* – it cannot return, but this study indicates just how often such a demand was part of the political discourse. That England was once 'great' is a discourse which the Left articulated with as much enthusiasm, despite the different rhetoric. Annie Besant's call for a new peasantry and recognition of the moral and physical superiority of working on the land accorded with the pursuit of higher moral ambition followed by Carpenter and Morris. Blatchford called for a ceiling on production and a deliberate rundown of international trade in order to avoid dependence on other countries. Morris wrote that the demands of the economy produced purely artificial constructs which removed men from their natural ways of life.

Right and Left even agreed most of the time that financiers and speculators were the principal architects of this national decline, using

the cover of free trade to undermine the national economy. It is they who embody the ‘unfeeling’ aspect of trade.

Role model societies which predated Goldsmith were then evoked to portray eras of fair dealing, notably the Tudor State which is praised by Christopher Turnor and many others for safeguarding the national interest above that of financiers. A J Penty and Hilaire Belloc ‘updated’ much of this material with evocations of ‘organic’ societies, self contained communities and self regulated industries. The ‘Just Price’ and economic systems inspired by biblical teachings offered alternative perspectives on Capitalist crises. In this discourse, it is necessary to start again and construct new societies based on traditional values which ‘we’ have been alienated from by the forces of Mammon, trade and financial speculation. G.D.H Cole wrote that ‘economic arguments are in reality *moral* arguments’ not just at a time of economic crisis but after a War on a scale that stood as an illustration of industrial and technological might. Turnor warned that future wars would be fought on the basis of competition for raw materials, using Mesopotamia and Oil as his prime example, and called for a future where the use of machinery is curtailed and food produced deploying older and wiser technologies. This line of argument is substantially reinforced in the 1930’s by an enthusiastic mining of the past by Fascists anxious to avoid any imported ‘alien’ philosophies, however attractive they might appear to them and however widespread is the admiration for Mussolini.

Slightly less discerning is the appearance of a mystical grounded view of the world which drew upon the metaphor of the 'land' to elevate consideration of the soil and its characteristics above (or below) all other considerations. Jorian Jenks, author of the British Union of Fascists agricultural policy and co - founder of the Soil Association wrote that

'Material acquisition tends to be regarded, not only as an end in itself, but as conclusive evidence of human powers and the inevitability of human progress,'[292]

in a remark which in 1959 recalled the Goldsmith lines of nearly 200 years earlier.

'*Just gave what life requir'd, but gave no more:*

His best companions, innocence and health;'

The emerging Labour Party sought to distance itself from the seemingly romantic view of a proud peasantry by seeing itself as a transformative, modernist force. In reality, that meant condemning those who wished to utilise the soil more effectively as 'dreamers' who represented economic individualism and whose real aim was to return to 'rural idiocy.' Sidney Webb was clear that the industrial revolution could not and should not be undone and that the fight was to ensure that working people got their cut (eventually.) The practical impact of this focus was for the Labour

[292] Jenks J. (1959) *The Stuff man's made Of.* Faber & Faber: London

Party to remove contact with anyone with a working knowledge of agriculture and to largely welcome the possibilities of technology, large farm sizes and the application of as many fertilisers as the 'experts' saw fit.

Behind the smokescreen of land nationalisation, the Labour Party gradually constructed a policy of a state administered farming and partnership with the NFU and agricultural companies – a policy which appealed equally to an increasingly pragmatic Conservative Party.

Labour maintained a clear preference for the advantages of free trade, reiterating that position largely on the back of the perceived advantages of securing cheap food for the working class and maintaining a position which had moved on little from the statement of Joseph Chamberlain at the time of the Tariff Reform campaign – 'why should the British working man pay more for their food?' This has to be seen in conjunction with the fact that many on the Left were comfortable with the notion of Empire, having moved on little from the view of Blatchford in 1901 that 'England is universally admitted to be the best colonising power the world has known, and the gentlest and wisest ruler over subject races.'[293]

A 'socialist' agricultural policy escaped the Labour Party (despite the repeated insistence upon Land nationalisation) but recalling that 'fish out of water' remark, such a position was not so much as a result of a lack of political conviction but a wish not to be identified with any cause

[293] *Clarion* July 13th. 1901 quoted in Ward (1998:62)

which did not accord with ‘progress.’ Given the unquestioned ability of the Colonies and commercial trade from around the world to feed working people as cheaply as possible, why spend time on consideration of a costly expedition into agricultural matters which seemed too complex to understand? Yet, the Labour Party never quite detached itself from the moral superiority of escaping from inner city life and shared the Liberal preoccupation with land settlement, but this was never extended to an appreciation that such people would then produce *food.* Imaginings of smallholders never extended to a detailed consideration of what they might produce and how their subsidised state might interact with the production from *real* farmers. The vision was confined to *any* form of life outside of the main towns and cities being more acceptable than membership of the unemployed masses.

The 1905 Royal Commission represented an opportunity to take stock of the possible impact of the dependency upon foreign food. The confidence that was expressed in the benefits of trade, particularly the dependence of many nations upon Britain, was backed up by the supposed continuation of naval supremacy. This was no passing expression of military might, it was repeated up to and during the First World War and formed part of the narrative from 1935 onwards. Put simply, if increased domestic food production was proposed at any time during the course of this study, then it was tantamount to doubting the ability of the country to defend itself.

After the First World War this study presents the evidence that images of a rural, self sufficient and moral England abounded after the carnage of war. The wish to move away from a world which seemed inevitably to be committed to the continuation of trade disputes ending in technological conflict allowed a brief opening where even the Fabian Society unlocked its shackled imagination. Again, Goldsmith characterised the challenge which arose from an urban society.

'Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey

The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,

'Tis yours to judge, how wide the limits stand

Between a splendid and a happy land.'

In the mainstream political discourse in the 1920's the question of '*how wide the limits stand'* is given additional force by successive Capitalist crises, General Strikes and fear of Bolshevism. From 1924, based on the brief experience of food administration in 1917 – 1918, developed not so much a consensus, but rather more the adoption of pragmatic, interventionist policies which concentrated on food and nutrition. The principal impact of the First World War in respect of food policy turned out not to be the moral re evaluation of Society's values which seemed briefly possible, but the understanding that administration could be a force for efficiency and income redistribution. Every manifestation of crisis in Capitalism resulted in greater administrative self confidence that economic forces could be overcome.

For all the consideration of self sufficiency as an ideal, it is hard to find any evidence that those who argued persuasively for such a state of affairs had any detailed understanding of what the lauded peasant actually consumed. '*When every rood of ground maintain'd its man'* is largely unquestioned, should such evidence undermine the nature of the myth which is at work here. The empty countryside received more attention than the empty belly.

The experience of Ireland in *successive* famines confirms that truth, in that what is notable is the absence of the Irish famine in English political discourse in the period 1880 – 1939. This study was predicated upon the assumption that the Irish Famine must have influenced thinking on food provision, if only within radical and socialist thought. However, there seems to be no memory which became embedded in radical or socialist sensibility which led to demands for people to be fed adequately or to avoid the slightest possibility of such an event happening in England. It seems as if it occupied a 'providential' position where the Irish people are victims of fate rather than politics. In respect of this study, it seems that the famine of the 1840's served more as an argument for, and endorsement of, free trade than as a memorial to mass slaughter.

Once the pragmatic coalition of interests develops from 1924 onwards, the possibilities of food self sufficiency are marginalised even further. Market intervention is enabled by the rise of a confident professional administration and justified by both main parties as being 'temporary' or

in order to bring about a ‘restructuring’. The reorientation of trade after the ‘limited’ introduction of protectionist policies and the Ottawa Conference did not serve to increase domestic food production. Instead, it created a publicly funded set of Marketing Boards who had as their main purpose not increased food production but the attempted regulation of supply and demand. The example of sugar beet shows just how complex, costly and politically ambiguous market intervention can be. Nevertheless, there was a sense of confidence that the uncertain episodes of Capitalism could be smoothed over by the deployment of wise and dispassionate administrators, able to improve upon the workings of the market. It was that spirit which brought together both main Political Parties not so much in a consensus but more in an understanding that they could deliver some examples of active government.

In the end, public money led to a coalition of self interest incorporating the NFU, civil servants and successive Governments confident that they were ‘doing something’ for agriculture. Given the rearmament effort from 1934 such examples of State intervention also served to act as War Planning, although the main focus up to 1939 was not on production, but distribution and continuity of supply.

Where nations were pursuing food self sufficiency, such as Germany and Italy, then such moves towards autarky were denounced as being warlike in intention. In 1939 the Labour Party agriculture expert Lord

Addison clearly spelt out why *any* move towards self sufficiency was an identifiably Fascist move.

The work of Jorian Jenks showed how the British Union of Fascists would ensure self sufficiency for this country and, indeed, even raised the (then unlikely) prospect of English food production being tied in with a European future rather than the perpetuation of colonial ties. From 1939, and even more so in the wartime years, the proponents of self sufficiency made a significant shift away from their previous discourse by identifying that the previous notion of the 'land' had been superficial. The *real* question to be faced was one of soil fertility – a preoccupation that was both intensely practical and mythical at the same time. But, at least after years of flirting with Fascism it seemed to offer a safe ground from which to comment upon the follies of the world. The final four lines of Goldsmith offer a summary,

'That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,

As ocean sweeps the labour'd mole away;

While self – dependent power can time defy,

As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

There is something profound which is missing from the political discourse around food self sufficiency, which was the question posed by Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread.*

‘But upon what basis must society be organised in order that all may have their due share of food produce?’ (1976:40)

In successive works Kropotkin approached the question of food self sufficiency from that premise and, in some detail, identified how the latest technology might be deployed to achieve that end. But, the important context is the assertion that the provision of food is the *primary* responsibility of society and that such a responsibility is best exercised through local, democratic and co-operative solutions. Such a position exposes the essential shallowness of much of the political discourse on food self sufficiency which for all the deployment of agricultural experts rarely goes beyond the recollection of a time

‘*When every rood of ground maintain’d its man’*

Within mainstream political discourse, Chamberlain in his Kettering speech in 1939 rejected the ‘artificial’ aim of producing sufficient food and asserted that trade was more important to the long term development of the country. For Labour, Lord Addison accepted the term ‘artificial’ and described himself as ‘an apostle of the managed market’[294] and the NFU denounced self sufficiency as a ‘view which has never been advocated in responsible agricultural circles.’(Wilt 2001:111)[295]

[294] HL Deb July 12th. 1938 Vol. 110 ccs 762 – 768 Lord Addison: c771.
[295] Quoted from the *NFU Record* August 1938:263

That the country was able to respond to the interruptions to food supply brought about by the Second World War owed much to the experience of administration gained at the end of the First World War, especially in respect of rationing. Despite the many discussions in Cabinet as to how this might be introduced, there was never any doubt that the market led chaos of 1914 – 1917 would be replicated. In addition, the introduction of Marketing Boards had resulted in the establishment of detailed understandings of the state of each particular crop, which was invaluable to the administration of the War Agricultural Committees – another model adopted from the First World War. Although the interwar period had seen no significant increases in either acreage or output it was clearly understood in terms of war planning that rapid increase in the output of key crops could be obtained within a reasonable period. Similarly, the ability of relatively new suppliers such as Argentina and the United States to fill the gaps in supply brought about by the curtailment of provisions from the Empire and Europe. The key to both increased domestic production and changes in overseas trade was that the Government adopted the central role in the operation of the market. Farming as an industry was given the reassurance that, unlike after the First World War, it now had a place within the economy in which increased domestic production followed from the supply of public money. Further, the industry was offered a partnership arrangement in which the NFU played a critical role.

If there were shortfalls, particularly in respect of fresh vegetables, then responsibility could be passed back to the individual or the local council, hence the critical nature of the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign.

Increased domestic food production was based on the deployment of ‘marginal’ land and the utilisation of more large scale and chemical farming methods. Ironically, therefore, the biggest critics of such approaches were many of those who had advocated food self sufficiency for many years previously. Thus, the Second World War saw the coming together of the organic movement who directed their concerns at the effect of wartime farming upon long term soil fertility.

However, the ‘Kropotkin Question’ remained unanswered both nationally and internationally both in the context of food security and the depletion of natural resources.

Appendix One.

Royal Commission of 1905

This appendix contains some of the detailed pertinent evidence considered by the Commission and some detailed later consideration.

The Importance of Wheat

Emerging out of the Committee's consideration of the sources of food and raw materials was the central role of wheat and flour. The Report [para.34] noted that they are '*by far the most important articles of consumption in these islands'* but it is not consumption alone which is important but that '*we find for those supplies we are more dependent on importation from over-sea than in the case of any other foodstuffs we have had to deal, inasmuch as we import annually four-fifths of our total requirements.'*

To illustrate the extent of that dominance the Committee looked at evidence from the Royal Statistical Society that consumption of wheat per head was currently 342 lbs per annum, nearly three times that of all meats. In the detailed appendices of the Report there is *some* consideration of increasing domestic supplies but the conclusion in

Paragraph 37 clearly indicated that such a move was not given serious weight.

‘*We note that there has been a great decline in the quantity of wheat grown in this country during the later decades of the last century, and this tendency has gone so far that the acreage under wheat in the United Kingdom has decreased by more than one-half in the last thirty years. This diminution has been brought about by a variety of causes, chief among them being probably the large decline in price.’*

In addition to the decline in home production it was also noted that consumption of bread had increased by 300% since 1870 and the conclusion was drawn from this that imports would have increased even if British wheat had been more available. Other than a passing reference to decline in price, strangely qualified by ‘probably,’ the Committee took this matter no further despite contemporary debates about the state of agriculture. As the evidence unfolded it became clear that not only was the continuation of free trade assumed but at the same time the ability of the Royal Navy to guarantee that was not seriously challenged. The widespread distribution of wheat imports was presented as the strength of British policy.

Table 1

"SOURCES OF SUPPLY TO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF WHEAT AND FLOUR. PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN."

	1871-5	1898-1902	1904
British Colonies and Possessions			
	10.9	**19.0**	**39.1**
Europe	**41.4**	**8.8**	**25.4**
USA	**39.9**	**62.2**	**15.9**
South America			
	2.9	**9.7**	**19.2**
Others	**4.9**	**0.3**	**0.4**
	100	**100**	**100**

(Adapted from the table in Paragraph 40, p.7of the Report.)

Such a geographical spread showed that in the event of a bad harvest or a War (the immediate example being the Spanish – American conflict) that a rapid switch of suppliers could take place. Such a confident assertion on the flexibility of supplies was backed up by an analysis of Britain written for the United States Navy that 'her wants, we can see clearly, can be complied with in a fortnight from a cabled order

at any time of the year. We are, in a phrase, no longer dependent upon a fickle climate.' (Bellairs 1907:79) It was assumed that, such was the power of Britain, as the largest consumer of wheat and the dominant naval power, that there would be no interruption in supplies.

In addition the example of Argentina was given as an illustration of the importance of emerging suppliers who were able to build up their trade with greater speed than British farming had shown for over thirty years. Where one might perceive a weakness in this arrangement, that is that supplies could be cut off either by obtaining a higher price elsewhere or by other disruption in trade, the Committee was anxious to emphasise just how important Great Britain was to suppliers.

Table 2

"PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPORTS OF WHEAT AND FLOUR SENT TO GREAT BRITAIN. QUINQUENNIAL 1897 – 1901."

USA	**58.5**
RUSSIA	**13.9**
ARGENTINA	**23.9**
BRITISH INDIA	**47.4**
CANADA	**73.8**
AUSTRALASIA	**46.8**

(Adapted from table in paragraph 41, p.8 of the Report)

That the United States, an acknowledged world trader, sent 58% of all its wheat exports to this country provided a reassurance to the Commission that our market was too important to be neglected. The fact that an established trading nation or a rising country such as Argentina, rather than the 'family' members of the Empire, required this country showed the adaptability of the supply chain. What the evidence did not concentrate upon was the growing competition for supplies amongst both nations and new highly technological industries. The latter, such as the rapidly expanding biscuit industry, represented also the way the demand was growing for particular *types* of wheat and

guaranteed supply windows for continuous production processes. These factors combined t to bring about rises in food and commodity prices, even in peacetime.

The system was therefore determined to be flexible and there was a measure of confidence that in the event of difficulties affecting the 'mother country' then supplies would be diverted from other customers. It was also assumed that production would be increased further either to meet that obligation or as a result of increased prices. The higher dependency of British India on the British market, as opposed to Russia, was also seen as acting in the British interest given that the former would be 'expected' to make up any shortfall – a policy which was to have serious consequences for India in the Second World War.

The Commission also observed that one important consequence of the wide geographical spread of suppliers was the provision of wheat in an uninterrupted chain of supply throughout the year. This factor was also utilised in the Report to emphasise the even spread of trade routes and the constant level of carriage which resulted in efficient use of British merchant shipping. A particularly advantageous factor for Great Britain was that supplier nations would often delay, and therefore incur their own storage costs, export until particular orders for immediate consumption were received. This enabled the level of storage in Great Britain to be minimised, leaving what might have been seen as a high level of dependency on imports. Given that nearly all British wheat was harvested in August or September, the only period of guaranteed

availability found in domestic supplies was for up to nine weeks after that, considering the limited capacity for long term storage. Some comfort was gained by the Commission in the estimation of the future for British wheat in the view that

'It seems probable that the demand for straw for various purposes must always operate to impede the decline in the production of wheat in this country.' [para.66]

A statement which set out that domestic wheat production will continue not in order to meet the needs of the population for an essential product, but for the utilisation of a by product clearly illustrated, rather more than any other, how the free trade view of the world saw British agriculture. *The North American Review* compared the state of Britain to the maritime empires of the past such as the Phoenicians and the Greeks and concluded that 'no nation has ever drawn its food supplies from transmarine territories to anything like the same extent.'(Bellairs 1907: 77) The biggest danger that the Commission examined was that of a 'corner' in wheat supplies where panic may be introduced by an apparent or actual interruption of supplies.[296]

In the House of Commons Debate earlier[297] Seton – Karr M.P. (St. Helens c.1119) had foreseen that disruption would not be as a result of a 'political movement at all, but purely a business movement for the

[1] A recent example having taken place in the United States, where a 'corner' organised by Leiter in Chicago had brought about an increase from 32s. Per quarter in August 1897 to 56s in May 1898. By June the price had gone back to 31s per quarter. *Royal Commission para.72.*

[297] January 28th 1902

purpose of making money.' In such a situation the power of the Navy would not be the most important factor. Seton – Karr (c.1122) pointed out that British vulnerability arose because the 'whole globe was ransacked to supply the breakfast table of the working man.'

In respect of any other cereals and foodstuffs, the Commission took little interest in either how they were used to feed people or whether they might be substituted for wheat in times of hardship. That the products concerned were overwhelmingly home produced[298] seemed of little importance, with the conclusion reached that it was difficult to ascertain just how much of each article was used for human consumption. Where the vulnerability of other materials was considered it was done so in a way which opposed *any* action on foodstuffs. George Whiteley M.P *(*Yorkshire West Riding, Pudsey) pointed out that the loss of cotton would be as great as that of wheat, so why should we subsidise agriculture? Why was it a special case?[299]

Really, a question of the Navy

In exploring the possible antagonists in Wartime and the likely interference in trade that might result, the Commission never seriously challenged the view that the British Navy would afford protection to all

[298] Barley 60% Oats 77% Potatoes 95% based on Royal Statistical Society for quinquennial 1898 – 1902. *Royal Commission para.78.*
[299] January 28th 1902 c. 1158.

trade routes for as long as a ‘strong fleet’ was maintained. The Report relied on an acceptance of an ‘unquestioned superiority of British sea power which would, beyond doubt, prevent any interference with the British sea trade.’ (Hurwitz 1968:205) Any possibility that such hegemony *might* be threatened could only be realised if naval expenditure failed to be increased in line with maintaining a ‘strong fleet.’ Two possibilities therefore remained; either another nation would aggressively expand its conventional forces or technological progress would result in the formulation of a weapon not easily countered. As a North American naval perspective commented, in respect of torpedo craft, they ‘have never proved of the slightest utility for attacks on trade routes, and have never been able singly to achieve anything against moving vessels.’ (Bellairs 1907:74)

In the House of Commons *any* speaker who suggested that the Navy might not be able to deal with all possibilities was the subject of rebuke. The contribution of Colonel Kenyon – Slaney M.P. (Shropshire, Newport) illustrated that well in the National Food Supply debate in 1902 with his statement that the mere suggestion of a blockade or other effective action ‘should never come from the lips of Ministers or lovers of their Country.’ (c. 1137)

Running parallel to the assumption about the strength of the Navy was an appreciation of just how cheap sea transport had become, assisted by technological improvements and the logistical efficiencies of the trade of Empire. Even modest storage proposals put to the Commission

were disparaged on the grounds of cost, let alone the wholesale revival of British agriculture.

The tone of self satisfaction with which the Commission case aside agricultural concerns and supported the 'free trade and the navy' line was not shared by all who gave evidence. Parliamentary concerns were voiced before the Boer War and increased in the light of the experience of a mighty Empire failing to deal effectively with low key opposition. Indeed, one of the driving forces behind the setting up of the Royal Commission was the humiliation of the Boer War. Even those not sharing the 'humiliation' tag were 'no longer confident that it [Great Britain] could depend on its safety solely on the strength of its own far flung economic and naval resources.' (Barnett 1985:5)

Part of the reason for that was that although the British navy was substantially strengthened from 1890 onwards, this only brought about a similar increase in all the other major powers. The actions of Germany in building a substantial number of warships from 1900 led to more active consideration of war planning (Offer 1989) and the exploration of the available options which included a blockade of Germany and action against the German fleet.[300]

Thus, whilst the Royal Commission on Food ruled out the possibility of an effective German blockade of Britain on the grounds of practicality, ethics and International Law, elsewhere in Government the possibility of doing that in reverse was being considered. 'The navy's planners

[300] Offer 1989:227 cites the Naval Intelligence Dept. Memorandum ADM 116/1043B

gradually came to realise that Britain's adversaries might not have sufficient naval power to safeguard their own economies from disaster in wartime.'(Offer 1989:229) The Admiralty Paper [ADM 137/2749] referred to by Offer looked in detail at current and projected bread prices based upon the relative importance of bread in the working class diet. However, in terms of the British risk of blockade the Navy itself, in evidence to the Royal Commission, stated that

'Blockades are now finished with .... It would not be possible to conduct an effective blockade of these islands.'(para. 121) Any historical precedents, the action of Confederate cruisers during the American Civil War being one, were rejected. The clear statement of the Admiralty was that

'T*here would be no material diminution in the supplies of wheat and flour reaching the United Kingdom.'* (para. 127) In many respects, this was **the** statement that the Royal Commission had been set up to elicit and it was one which was maintained as public policy even after two years of war and up to 1939.

Whilst such self confidence might have been reassuring it is the case that Parliamentary concern continued to be expressed after the publication of the Report. For some members, the possible vulnerability of food supplies owing to unconsidered alliances or technological advances is an issue which they would return to in the next few years. They remained a minority in that such certainty, along with any countervailing evidence from within the agricultural community that

domestic production could increase, meant that any question of food supplies was questioning the word of the Navy. In broader terms, questioning the strength of the Navy was also to question the conduct of 'free trade' by Britain in that it was the Navy which guaranteed that trade in what amounted to a form of insurance. If there were supply problems in wartime then one impact would be large increases in insurance payments and subsequent rises in prices. It might be that even the *fear* of scarcity would trigger a large amount of hoarding and shortages.

Would the Working Class Riot?

Notwithstanding the confidence exhibited above, the enquiry conducted by the Royal Commission of 1905 still spent time considering the possible effect of war upon the British working class. In part this was as a result of pressure from the person who had done the most to bring about the enquiry – S.L. Murray.[301] His principal analysis was that the major strategic weakness of Britain lay not in the military field but as a result of dependency upon imports which would lead to widespread social unrest. Britain, it was argued, could be defeated by the actions of its own working class not having access to sufficient food supplies. To

[301] Major Murray retired from the Army in 1902 to devote himself to the campaign for an examination of the food supply problem.

that end, he established the ‘Association to promote an Official Enquiry into our Food Supply in Time of War’ and, from the beginning ensured that ‘representatives’ of the working class were included in the body. This became the strongpoint of the campaign, given that the presence of trades unionists and financiers in the same organisation helped to persuade an initially reluctant Government to meet the demand for a Commission.

The question of the working class diet was narrowed down to a consideration of the supply of wheat.

‘W*e find that wheat as a foodstuff has an immense preponderance in the dietary of the nation as a whole and that this preponderance is even more marked in the case of the poorer classes of the population.’* (para.165)

In order to look further into this matter the Commission sought statistical confirmation from the Board of Trade and ‘*Mr Booth, than whom no one has a better right to speak on questions affecting the social life of the working classes.’* (para.167)

Charles Booth gave evidence to the Commission as one who knows about ‘*the condition of the working classes and their method of living’* but also ‘*as one interested in ships and shipping.* (6179) Indeed, the bulk of the evidence given by Booth related to his position as the Owner of his own Shipping Company. Clearly, the Commission members did not consider there to be an actual or perceived conflict of interest in

respect of the importation of foodstuffs. In the questions directed at Booth the main concern was to establish whether there would be riots in the event of severe dislocation of food supplies. Booth was unequivocal that '*poor people would adjust.'* (6249) citing as an example the Siege of Paris. Booth saw the strength and adaptability of the working classes as arising from the ability of women to suffer in order to benefit both their husbands and family members. He observed that women suffer more because they '*would wish to do so.'* (6235)

Had Booth been confronted with accounts of the serious bread riots in Italy in 1898, which he was not, then he would have no doubt added that this was also a *national* characteristic.

When challenged to consider if he knew of a single country which had so great a dependence upon imports, Booth stated that '*I believe we are absolutely alone in that respect.'* (6261)

Although the Commission noted his observation that war with the United States might create difficulties for the continuation of food imports, Booth reassured them that ways and means would exist to trade through third parties, as in would not be in the commercial interests of the U.S to stop selling into its largest market.[302]

Such an ' expert' confirmed not only the preponderance of wheat, but also that working class people would not consume cheaper alternatives such as oatmeal. Although it might not have been his intention in

[302] Table 2 in this Chapter.

stating that, it once again persuaded the Commission that domestic production would not meet dietary requirements, even if such a change were possible. Critically, the statements from Booth and the trade unionists giving evidence[303] allowed the following to be inferred

'*The working classes would be able to adapt themselves to the new conditions and would reduce their standard of living to the point necessitated by the circumstances'* (para.169)

The Commission devoted one session from around 50 to hearing evidence from S.L. Murray and the working class representatives seen as important to the success of the campaign. Having assured them of his respectability and wide ranging experience G. D. Kelley from Salford outlined three types of working person (skilled, unskilled and casual) and explained that each grouping would cope with privation in different ways. He introduced an issue previously not considered by the Commission; that of the immense burden placed upon Poor Law Relief. Thus, he argued that working people would not react strongly to a lack of food but would have '*a very great prejudice indeed'* (8770) at having to seek State assistance. Their strong feelings would be inflamed by the '*large alien population.'* (8773) who would take 'their' jobs by undercutting wage rates. Kelley thought that people would eventually adjust to the new conditions as long as the Government had stored sufficient flour and arranged for fair distribution. Beyond this point, Kelley became ensnared in questions of patriotism.

[303] Evidence References Booth 6199 Llewellyn Smith 6985, Kelley 8822, Booth 6201.

It was clear that the Commission preferred the earlier evidence of Charles Booth that working people *would* adjust - Kelley had limited that to the skilled working class –and pressed Kelley to state that working people would be patriotic above all. Why, he was asked, did people not riot in the Crimean War? His assertion that people were better organised and more confident now led him not to say that they would be better able to resist the declaration of war, but that the working classes remained patriotic throughout everything. It would be fair to say that Kelley failed to convey many of his concerns as a consequence of his perceived need to show 'loyalty.'[304]

His evidence petered out amongst musings by Commission members as to just how much working people spent on alcohol and the more recent vice of football matches. Kelley offered no alternative vision of increasing domestic food production and when asked *'Your general idea of a remedy is to store grain?'* replied *'I know of no better remedy.'* (8850) Offer (1989: 225) noted that 'as moderate and patriotic trade's unionists their warnings of turmoil did not carry conviction.'

In the Final Report, the Commission was comforted by an assurance that even if the price of wheat rose sharply, it would only do so for a limited time and would produce a lower concomitant percentage increase in the price of bread itself. The question of working class

[304] It is worth noting that the Prince of Wales was an active member of the Commission. Although speaking little generally his interventions tended to concentrate upon loyalty to the Crown and the detection of any lack of loyalty to the Crown.

resilience continued to be of concern even though the Commissioners did not fully understand the evidence given by Mr. Kelley in respect of the differences in the ability to cope between skilled and unskilled operatives. Under 'modern conditions' there was a confidence that working people would cope, citing the lack of riot and sedition in the 1850's and an apparent lack of connection between rises in the price of bread and increased pauperism. The resilience of working people in strike conditions was also used as an illustration of their likely behaviour in wartime. Nevertheless, the trade unionists persisted in their suggestions of serious unrest brought about by food shortages to the extent that

'*A rise in the price of bread would be so great as to cause serious riots or, at least, to cause pressure to be brought to bear on the Government to make peace at any price.'* (para. 187)

In addition, the working class was portrayed by Kelley as being more assertive, more organised and more able to affect policy than the historical precedents used by the Commission – The Napoleonic and Crimean Wars. This brought about a brusque rebuttal in the Final Report of there being no factual basis to this - being merely assumptions based on an inaccurate understanding of the past. Paragraph 188 of the Report was clear that

'*The teaching of history is against their accuracy, for we can recall to mind no instance in which scarcity of work or dearness of food has made any one class more than another display a yielding spirit. We*

believe in their patriotism and in their loyalty to the Constitution and we desire to place on record our conviction that the working classes of today are no more likely than their predecessors to urge the Government, on account of any privations affecting themselves, to make an inglorious peace. We believe they are ready to bear with fortitude, for the sake of their country, hardships as great as were ever borne by their forefathers.'

The Commission wanted reassurance and ignored much of the evidence put forward by the working class witnesses, none more so than B.T. Hall of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU) from Manchester. The line taken by Hall in evidence was not referred to directly in the Final Report but was one which became a major issue in the run up to the outbreak of war in 1914. Hall assured the Commissioners of the patriotism of the working classes but said that a future war would most likely arise as a consequence of '*some failure of diplomacy'* and not out of a direct threat as was faced in the Napoleonic Wars. Any possible conflict '*would be so involved and would be so unintelligible and so remote that it would not be possible to put it in any way so clearly.'* (9009) this prompted a rare intervention from the Prince of Wales

'*You say working classes 'can stop the war.' Will you please explain what you mean by saying 'they can stop the war?'* Hall explained that rather than threatening to riot to stop the war, the working classes can

now '*bring the influence of vote and opinion to bear through constitutional channels.'*(9029)

It was some while later in the questioning that Hall was challenged about this, with the assertion that working class people might be able to exercise such a level of political power such a startling one as to invite no serious consideration, except this final summation by the Chairman who wanted to clarify if Hall had actually said that

'T*he great bulk of workmen would demand the removal of the cause* [of War] *at any cost – even the extinction of Britain as a dominant power in the world?'* (9058) a question to which Hall replied with a simple 'yes.'

The gravity of such a statement being undermined by Hall's only remedy for avoiding starvation being a reform of the Poor Law system, not having considered increased domestic food production at all.

This section of the evidence is quoted from at length because it stated with great clarity the nature of the calculations being made by the Commission. It is on the grounds of social unrest that the coalition of interests emerges to request the enquiry, it is the addition of working class representatives which is supposed to emphasise that point and yet the Commission is clear that the risk is not significant. However, it is the *next* paragraph which put such an unequivocal position in a different light and which served either as a warning to the Government or an encouragement to others urging greater rearmament

‘*In all that has been said above we have assumed that the command of the sea has not been lost, that is to say, that affairs had reached a point at which our Navy was no longer able to prevent an organised attack upon our commerce, for if that occurred, it would no longer be true that we should obtain our supplies without material diminution, or that there was no fear of actual starvation.’*

On the contrary, the suffering caused would be substantial to the degree that

‘T*here might be produced such serious suffering that the country could hold out no longer.’*

The two final paragraphs presented here form the crux of the analysis of food security, which is that there is an unbreakable link between free trade and naval power. With an acknowledgement to discussions taking place outside of the Commission on Protectionism and to the fact that most of those arguing for the setting up of the Enquiry were Protectionists, the Commission arrived at the conclusion that no viable alternative existed

In reaching that conclusion it was able to bear in mind the rather poor presentations made to encourage greater domestic food production, especially of wheat. The most authoritative witness, R.H. Rew from the Board of Agriculture confined himself to a statistical presentation, inviting comments from the Commissioners that eradication of waste

might go some way to being a solution. When asked whether the Board had a view on returning to growing wheat, Rew answered that

'*No, I am afraid it has not been specially considered from that point of view.'* (332)

When, as an expert witness, Rew is asked if other (home grown) products currently used as fodder could be used instead of wheat for human consumption he replied

'*I do not know what the horses would do; but I suppose we should be eating horses too at the same time,' (366)*

The prospect of no barley for the brewing of beer or for the feeding of animals served to close down the line of questioning, an occurrence repeated when the Commission learned later that such substitution would not be acceptable to the working classes in any event. A large North Yorkshire farmer later giving evidence[305] reinforced the point about not increasing domestic wheat production by stating that

'*I do not see the slightest possibility or likelihood of any greatly increased quantity being grown at home.'* (8097)

Bearing in mind the number of influential people who called for this enquiry who did so as a way of either challenging free trade policy or simply arguing for British self sufficiency as a good thing in its own right, it is clear that precious little encouragement is being given to them by

[305] Christopher Middleton. Secretary of the Cleveland (Yorkshire) Chamber of Agriculture.

witnesses. Other farming witnesses such as B. St. John Ackers explicitly rejected the idea of financial incentives or bounties in order to increase wheat production. Farming, he argued, had moved on into more profitable areas. The perception that farming was in crisis is one that need to be briefly examined, given that the view of Ackers was more widespread than one might expect. Firstly, there was no consensus that there had been an agricultural depression, although the foremost agrarian authority, Lord Ernle, had both defined it and given clear parameters to it. (1873 – 1896) Whilst it was clear that new land overseas was being opened up to a significant extent in the 1870's and that imports were assisted by transport improvements that did not by itself amount to a crisis for the British farmer. Fletcher (1973:53) argued that such a change 'inflicted suffering on a particular section of farmers, the large corn growers.'

Many agriculturalists at the time urged British farmers to adjust their outputs to meet the new markets which were opening up, citing successful examples in Lancashire and Yorkshire. It was the large landowners in the South and East of England who were generally resistant to such innovation, but they valued their right to manage their own land above profit maximisation and, in any event, were sustained by investments elsewhere. Certainly, their absence from the witnesses examined by the Royal Commission is explained by that need to preserve ownership rights, with the expectation that any state money would be accompanied by state interference. Given that British farming had previously been successful (and Britain self sufficient in food as a

result) through concentration of land ownership, it was necessary for those landowners to resist any calls for greater efficiency. Hobsbawm (1990:201) saw the British commercial farmer as being too small to increase output significantly but too large 'to subordinate himself to a co-operative organization capable of operating on a large scale.' There was no 'middle way' such as the co=operative enterprises which had been successful in Denmark and which were emerging in Ireland through the work of Horace Plunkett[306]. The second reason why the depression did not figure large in 1905 is that there was an improvement in profitability through reaping the fruits of market adjustment and new farming technology. (chapter 4)

The effect of any Government action might be to increase wheat production but only at the expense of other food stuffs. But St. John Ackers put forward an interesting proposition, which was to build up two years stock of wheat in order that Home production could be built up over two growing seasons to replace imports. In an argument which broadened the debate, he stated that

'*A reserve of food is equally essential to secure peace and to prosecute war successfully.'* (8261)

[306] Horace Plunkett (1854 – 1932) had a long and varied career in Anglo – Irish Politics. In the context of this work he was most associated with agricultural co-operation in his efforts to improve the position of Irish farmers. Mainly associated with the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) and with the cause of co-operation generally. The Plunkett Foundation remains a very large funder of co-operative small scale agriculture.

A position which is taken up much more widely in the 1930's in the sense of that being self sufficient in food removed one of the causes of war – food insecurity.

J. Voelcker, the Chemist from the Royal Agricultural Society, did offer the prospect of increased wheat yields but undermined his case somewhat by his conclusion that the public preferred foreign wheat anyway. The only enthusiastic supporter of food self sufficiency[307] on the grounds of greater rural employment and maintenance of the national physique, rather undermined his case (despite an impressive collection of statistics) by declaring that he had left farming and was now practising as a Dentist. A more considered presentation by the practising farmer Alfred Mansell made the case for a strategic policy in which the decline in wheat acreage is reversed. Using the available figures for wheat imports he stated

'*We are gradually getting to the point when we shall grow no wheat.'* (8639)

Mansell made the only recorded supportive remark for self sufficiency in either the Report itself or in any of the transcripts of evidence when he argued that the best policy is '*putting the home grown first. Even at great cost? Yes.'* (8652)

[307] T.G. Read. Vice President of the Tendring Hundred Farmers Club

Report Conclusions

The Commission did not spend time on the question of what might constitute a ‘strong fleet’ but it nevertheless pointed out the stark alternative which might result from a lack of one. It assumed that the Navy would recommend the appropriate level and the Government would fund it, but if it did not, then it fired a rather timid warning. The Commission came up with little of practical use beyond establishing the need for more statistics, an exploration of whether additional storage might be needed and the *possibility* of some additional insurance cover for merchant shipping in times of conflict. Any questioning of a possible role for British farming is confined to the Reservations and Memoranda appended by various Commission members. The Statement of Reservations by Henry Seton-Karr [pp.95-103] pointed out that the brief of the Commission contained the sentiment that ways should be found to ‘better secure’ bread supplies. He concluded that

‘I much regret that more support could not be given to recommendations for the encouragement of British farming, and for increasing the wheat-acreage of the United Kingdom.’

Appendix 2

Table 1 “United Kingdom: Wheat Imports. “Thousands of Cwts.”

Five Year Periods beginning,

1845	49,400
1850	82,200
1855	79,800
1860	144,100
1865	148,100
1870	197,800
1875	260,200
1880	288,000
1885	280,600

(Adapted from Hobsbawm 1990:198)

On page 20.

Table 2

“Approximate % of Food in Working Class Diet which is imported”

By Calories	%
Wheat	80
Sugar	100
Lard	80
Cheese	75
Bacon	66

(Adapted from Barnett 1985:3)

On page 24.

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