Genocide in the countryside

The current foot & mouth crisis has shown how the government, MAFF and the National Farmers Union are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths (through mass slaughtering of animals) to protect the reputation of the UK intensively-farmed livestock export industry. Mass slaughter of animals has occurred to prevent any indication of this industry whose intensive farming methods deserve a long-overdue examination. Whole of the source of infection was identified as an Asian strain from imported meat, while the spread of this disease has been described in terms of centralisation of bovine distribution. The fact is that the underlying cause is over-consumption of meat which encourages the monstrous scale of this ‘industry’ worldwide.

The agricultural jack-boot of MAFF/Defra acting like a major police state, has been killing animals with the force of Stalinist iron-rule, combined with the subsequent destruction of information (figures for the numbers of animals killed have mysteriously stopped being reported by this Orwellian ministry). One case in point is Woolley, Gloucestershire illustrates this when, after the vat on the ground diagnosed symptoms ‘indicating FMD’ on one single animal on 09.04, while it specifically would not condemn the herd, MAFF ordered the kill of all animals on the farm (and neighbouring farms – total 3,000) over the telephone. The next day, the blood test results of the herd including the supposed infected animal were shown to be negative.

This agricultural crisis has been going on for 50 years!

The fact is that the crisis occurring in British agriculture has been going on for 50 years, certainly since the early 1970’s when intensive CAP-supported chemically dependent industrial agriculture first started to kick in. Post-war intensive agriculture has been responsible for the loss of 97% of British meadows, as well as the destruction of soil fertility and survival of watercourses. The subsidised collapse of agricultural prices in accordance of land activity has meant that farmers are ensnared in a death-pact of relying on support payments, and getting into greater levels of debt to afford mechanisation, as those farmers who cannot keep up are thinned out of the system. The need for high rates of returns on investments means intensive monocluster and larger farms earned into huge production units. However, the sector as a whole is being stretched by falling world commodity prices as transnationals dominate commodity trading and liberalisation means imports from intensive-production in low-income countries are cheaper (apart from the current high product). For the majority within UK agriculture, the reality is bankruptcy.

Yet, the larger agribusinesses of the home counties are sure to survive and even prosper, able to spread costs in a restructuring industry as large-scale intensive production enables them to continue to guarantee market share, while also being the ‘hinge-pin’ domestic supply-castes for supermarkets. We could even see larger farmers typically diversely and gear sections of their land to exploit new markets towards organic production, while they continue to practice intensive monoculture and chemical saturation of soil on the remainder of their estates. It’s why the NFU has traditionally been seen to not engage links with the organic movement, because the vested interests it represents wanted to keep smaller farmers to the dark about it and hence the market tends to this new market all to themselves! The government’s rural white paper was also quite contradictory of the future direction of agriculture. In it, they referred to a ‘major restructuring in the industry’. There is no mention of how, if at all, small and family farms are to be treated; the so-called ‘MGY’ or ‘Negative Income Supplement’.

Beyond Foot and MAFF Disease

As the foot and mouth saga has progressed the public have gradually become aware that it is not FMD which is fatal to livestock but the Ministry of Agriculture, MAFF is annihilating healthy British animals because they are in danger of contracting a non-fatal disease which causes nasty gastritis and footrot and which is successfully treated with salt and Stockholm tar, and which many sensible societies have learnt to accept and accommodate (at the expense of the agents of export trade to the “clean” countries). Culling every animal within sight of the disease is the best way not to build natural resistance in the national herd. The epidemic is not simply “a disaster waiting to happen”; it is a disaster elicted by MAFF’s arrogant disregard for the way diseases, immune systems and the whole of Nature works.

What does this bureaucratically engineered eco-apocalypse mean in terms of future land ownership patterns? One thing is certain: MAFF has so disgraced itself that the calls to have it abolished, which were loud enough last year, will be repeated with greater and probably overwhelming force after this.

What will replace MAFF? Probably a rural ministry headed by a diligent, well-meaning but not very far-sighted minister like Michael Meacher, possibly backed up by Eliot Morley who also seems somewhat unfortunately in MAFF.

The brief of this ministry will be to manage England’s rural land for the benefit of the environment and the rural economy, rather than just farmers.

And what will this ministry decide? It will be subject to all the usual influence from pressure groups. Which pressure groups in particular? The ones that own the countryside, namely the Country Land and Business Association (until recently the Country Landowners Association), the National Farmers Union, the NFU Scotland, the NFU Wales, the NFU England, and the NFU Ireland.

The Protection of Rural England etc.

And what will these pressure groups be saying? That agriculture is up the creek; that we have to import most of our food, fibre and timber because the World Trade Organisation says it is uneconomic to do otherwise; and that for “agriculture” to survive it has to diversify. Into what? Well, anything that makes money, which at this point in time means tourism, conference centres, telecations and industrial use of farm buildings.

A vision of this future was provided by the recent amendment to Planning Policy Guidance 7 on the Countryside, which deleted specifications tying farm diversification to land-based use, and which now allows farms to move into any industrial activity they like, as long as it is “consistent in scale with a rural location” on the scale of a 2000 cow pig unit for example?

This means that people looking to buy land and buildings for a box scheme, or an organic holding, or a free range egg unit will have to compete with FT firms or industrialists looking for a nice leafy site for expansion.

When we asked the DETR how this amendment was introduced so suddenly, they said that it was the outcome of a seminar held on 26 May attended by the CLA, the NFU, the British Horse Industry Confederation, the Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, the National Trust, the CPRE and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. The Land Is Ours was not consulted, nor were the Soil Association, the Small and Family Farms Alliance, the Womens Institute, RSPB or Friends of the Earth.

We suspect is likely to be the dominant pattern of land allocation over the next few years.

Agriculture is hi-jacked, so let landowners diversify into whatever frivolity is profitable; meanwhile we’ll buy all our food, clothing and timber from the international market, where we don’t have to think about the environmental consequences.

The Land Is Ours, in common with a number of other organisations, supports something different. Access to land for people who want to produce food and clothing sustainably; and who, when their animals get some ‘poxy disease’, nurse them through it, and build up resistance, regardless of the economic consequences, like they would their own children. (The author of the above knows cows and pigs.)

‘Join the Real Rural debate’ Do we want Britain to remain a seriously capable food producing nation? What do think? Have your say at Rural Futures: a new coalition of nine stakeholder organisations (including TLO) who have agreed a 3point agenda. Rural Futures aims to generate debate around some of the deeper questions affecting the countryside. In the reports section you will find some interesting new thinking such as Chris Rose’s call for a ‘Campaign Against Rural England’ and other papers and articles.

Visit our website: www.ruralfutures.org

Simon Fairlie is the TLO spokesperson for Rural Futures. To contact him: ring: 01460 249 204
Scotland and the draft Land Reform Bill

Peter Gibb
Director Land Reform Scotland

On 22nd February 2001, the devolved Scottish government published Consultation Paper 18, "Scotland's Land: A Draft Land Reform Bill". In the pages that follow, this draft Land Reform Bill is discussed. The Bill, which sets out a framework for new public access and rural ownership laws in Scotland, would give the public access to the land and rights to buy. The Bill is written within a broad consultation process, which has involved the various sectors of the rural community, and accompanied by a forty-page draft access code (A DACC) and a separate Code of Practice (COP). Public access to the land and rights of responsibilities and ownership is a political agenda that is within the remit of the Labour government. A year ago, when land reform was first announced, it was widely welcomed across Scotland. In a variety of press articles and letters, people's reactions were mixed. It is likely that the Bill will be even more controversial in the forthcoming General Election (Scotland) Bill - building Scotland's Land. The Bill's primary aim is to address a range of issues that are currently affecting land use and land management in Scotland and it is intended to be the most radical Scottish Land Reform Bill, providing for access to all land on a local basis. The Bill is also designed to give the public access to rural areas and to enable communities to participate in the management of land. The Bill is intended to build on the successes of the previous Land Reform measures and to provide a framework for future land reform initiatives. There is a need to ensure that land is used in a way that is sustainable, that meets the needs of local communities, and that respects the environment. The Bill is a major step forward in this direction and it will be important to ensure that it is implemented effectively and fairly. Scottish Land Reform Bill & Access

A Land reform Bill represents the most significant change in law of land use for generations. It is a radical move that will have an impact on the economy, society, and the environment. The Bill is a comprehensive package of measures that aims to achieve a fair and equitable land reform in Scotland. The Bill is designed to provide a framework for a new, sustainable approach to land use and land management. The Bill is intended to empower communities to participate in the management of land and to enable them to make decisions about the future of their land. The Bill is also designed to provide a framework for the development of new economic opportunities in rural areas.

Several provisions of the Bill are intended to address specific problems and issues. For example, the Bill includes provisions to allow communities to purchase land and to provide for the development of community-owned land. The Bill also includes provisions to allow communities to make decisions about the future of their land and to participate in the management of land. The Bill is designed to be flexible and to allow communities to adapt it to their particular circumstances.

The Bill is a significant step forward in the process of land reform in Scotland. It is a major step forward in the process of modernising land laws and giving communities a greater say in the management of land. The Bill is designed to provide a framework for a new, sustainable approach to land use and land management. The Bill is intended to empower communities to participate in the management of land and to enable them to make decisions about the future of their land. The Bill is also designed to provide a framework for the development of new economic opportunities in rural areas.

Investing in People and Land

New Report from the Countryside Agency

Commissions for William Cobbett, through Oliver Goldthwait, to J. Missingham, have long lamented the decline of the English countryside. The Agency of England's rural economy and self-sufficiency, Cobbett wrote, "is now in a state of decay, and the greatest part of the labour is committed to the poor. The best companies are in want of land, and the best lands, of tenants."

Investing in People and Land is a new report from the Countryside Agency. It is a major study of the countryside, and it is an important contribution to the debate about the future of the countryside. The report is a valuable resource for those who are interested in the countryside, and it is an important contribution to the debate about the future of the countryside. The report is a valuable resource for those who are interested in the countryside, and it is an important contribution to the debate about the future of the countryside. The report is a valuable resource for those who are interested in the countryside, and it is an important contribution to the debate about the future of the countryside.
The Land Is Ours, 16B Cherwell St, Oxford, OX4 1BG
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www.oneworld.org/tlio/

Tlio News:
The Big May Hot Squat (due to have been between the 15th-31st May) - to transform a derelict site in a 2-week occupation has been cancelled, but for positive reasons! The site has suddenly been bought by a new party, launching the help of the local area's Regional Development Agency, to involve the local community to draw up plans to develop the site. We still will not reveal the location of this site so as not to draw attention to it or we is undergoing this change of ownership with apparent local collaboration working for the positive.

Chapter 7 News
Chapter 7 have prepared their first DIY planning brief, for low/impact dwellers and those out there attempting to live on the land. The latest issue of Chapter 7 News (Spring 2001 - issue no.5) is out now as well, featuring articles about the latest controversial revision to PPG-7, and other interesting tit-bits from land-based communities around the British Isles.

The Community: 2001
To get an annual subscription to Chapter 7 News, send a cheque or postal order for £5 (£3 unwaged) with address & contact details to: Chapter 7, The Potato Store, Flandronay Farm, South Petherton, Somerset TA13.

Country Strike
Activists in Tlio are preparing a new publication which intends to firmly take issue with some of the underlying vested interests at the heart of the agenda of some self-appointed standard-bearers for the voice of the countryside such as the CLA. NFU and particularly the Countrywide Alliance. The editorial team taking this on have already put together some material to go into his magazine (the name is the one on the magazine Country-Life), but they require more stuff to complete it. If you have any snippets, articles, jokes, funny illustrations, photographs, short observations or rants, please share them with us as soon as possible! Contributions are most welcome! Please contact Jaffa or 07909 973300

Left of Centre: Perspective on the Rural Debate
This month's article of the above working title will shortly be available in the form of a pamphlet. It has arisen out of the above mentioned ongoing project, and as a response to Chris Rose's article in the latest issue of ECOS, entitled "Time to campaign against 'rural England'" Contact Simon on 01935-881975 for more details.

Call for Another Land Essays
The editors of this newsletter is also collecting articles for a future 'Land Essays'. Some of the articles in the above mentioned compilations may also feature, as well a synopsis of the main contributions to the Rural Futures website. The interrelationship between globalization of agriculture and trade and destruction of rural land-based livelihoods, as is the ensuing focus within Rural Futures, will be a key theme for this issue. However, we are intending that this particular compendium to become a compilation of articles about land-issues from around the world - a more in-depth version of this newsletter in fact.

If you think you could contribute an article to this issue, please contact Mark on: 020 8357-8504, or throw caution to the wind and send in your contributions to Tlio's postal address.

Diggers Memorial Stone
The Diggers Memorial Stone, now has a permanent home. On Sunday 18th December 2000, Andrew Whittle (who sculpted the stone) erected this historic monument to the Diggers and Gerrard Winstanley on a small bit of heath near to the Monopoly railway station. 'Diggers Trail' is well under way and is due to open in late summer when we promise a big celebration - see the next issue or visit the website closer to the time for further updates.

Easter Garden - Bristol
It’s a long time since Tlio was active in Bristol, but it's legacy lives on. The garden created by Tlio activists over 4 years ago goes from strength to strength. The developer who had been claiming ownership of the site has been dealt with and the truth over the garden's lack of owner firmly established. Locals now have formed a limited company to ensure the garden remains a public free space in perpetuity.

Tlio Diary:
Sat 28th - Sun 29th April: Radical Routes Gathering, Venue: Warwick Leamington Spa. To receive more details, ring Keveral Farm on 01508 2557-258

Tuesday 1st May - May Day Monopoly/DisOwn it all. Celebrate May Day by playing Monopoly. Get involved by organising your own May Day celebrations, choose a Monopoly theme: housing, debts, railways, privatised utilities, prisons, etc. Followed by a Carnival/Gathering at the day's events in a mass action at Oxford Street at 4pm. Bring White overall, padding, helmets, inflatable toys and a sense of fun, adventure and humour. For more info phone the action line on: 07960-973-847 or get the game guide to Monday Monopoly send an SAE to BM Mayday, London. WC1N 3XX.

There will also be a Critical Mass bike ride on the day. Meet outside Marylebone Station for West End Tour, or Liverpool St for a city tour. Both start 7:30 am, and will meet up for a game of Disown It All Monopoly Birmingham: Party and Protest against Capitalism, Mayday direct action. Meet 12:30 pm outside Virgin Megastore, Corporation Street, Info: 07800 413577.

Glasgow Mayday 2001, meet 12.30pm Buchanan St Underground, bring music, costumes, good vibes.

The Land Is Ours land rights campaign for all recognising land rights around the world