

# LAND &

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NOVEMBER & DECEMBER, 1975



*Import Controls*  
*Failure of "Full Employment" Policies*  
*Capitalism the Scapegoat*  
*Land Legislation in France*  
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## Our Own Executioner

THE LATE Dr. Johnson described patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, which, if examined carefully, does not imply that all scoundrels are patriots, or that all patriots are scoundrels; our interpretation of the remark should be that many scoundrels do take refuge under the banner of patriotism. The late Horatio Bottomley is a classic case of an unscrupulous politician posing as a John Bull patriot.

An example of the misuse of patriotic sentiment is the current

demand that the Government impose selective import controls while haranguing the public with a "Buy British" campaign.

The fact that protectionist policies nearly always undermine the standard of living of the unprotected consumer, while, at best, giving only a temporary respite to the home producer, in no way deters protectionists from pursuing their selfish demands. Manufacturers and organised labour join in making vociferous demands on Parliament, lobbying the Govern-

ment for favours for their industry. It is their specious case that "our lads'" jobs are being sacrificed by the importation of goods made by the use of "cheap labour". Or "our industry" is being crucified by the "unfair" competition from "subsidised" foreign manufacturers "dumping" their "cheap goods" on to Britain's exposed shores. When subsequent investigation reveals that the imports are being sold at prices which cover their costs of production, and highly skilled overseas labour is being paid

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higher *real* wages than its U.K. counterpart and—as though to add insult to injury—the manufacturer, importer and retailer are all making handsome profits into the bargain, the attack is switched to the importer. He, it is said, only employs a fraction of the number of persons that are employed by the domestic manufacturer. No argument is too silly, too illogical or too incredible to be harnessed to their cause.

One of the main weaknesses in the protectionist case is that the importing house is only the agent in the transaction between willing buyers and willing sellers. The real importers are the millions of U.K. consumers; it is they who determine what is to be imported, not the foreign producer, who merely adds to the available choice.

Another weakness in the arguments of manufacturers and employees seeking protection is the assumption that it will provide them with higher prices for their goods and higher wages for their workforce without significantly reducing the value of other workers' pay packets. Consumers in general, and other employees in particular, will not be protected from paying higher prices for goods shielded from foreign competition.

Beggar my neighbour policies, pursued regardless of the consequences they have on the living standards of others, end, to quote Peter Jay of *The Times*, with British citizens exchanging with each other their increasingly shoddy goods. Taking in each other's washing is a poor and uneconomic way for the inhabitants of a trading nation like Britain to live.

Farmers, textile manufacturers and others who, together with their respective employees, are pressing for controls on imports, would do well to ponder the consequences of such measures. In seeking the right to live out of the pockets of their fellow nationals, the protectionists among us will soon discover that before very long all pockets will become threadbare and, for some, empty. If that dismal time comes to pass it will, as John Donne reminds us, be a case of "But I do nothing upon myself, and yet I am my own Executioner."

N.B.