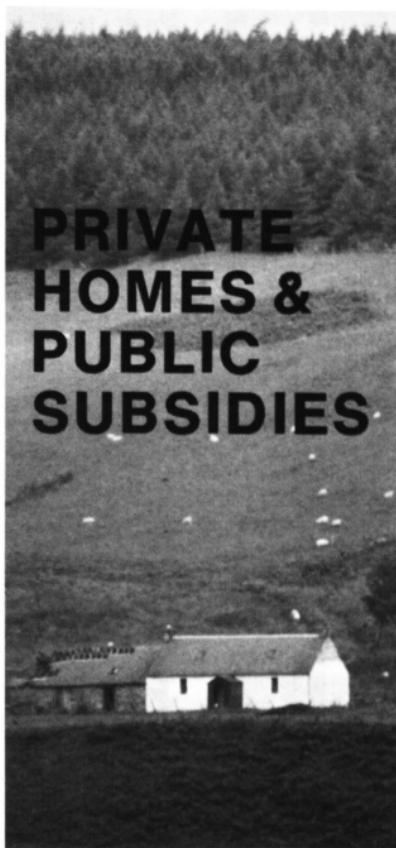


THE FRENCH call it a *residence secondaire*. We call it a second home or a holiday home. If you have one in rural Wales you run the risk of having it burnt down by arsonists. If you have one in some other part of the United Kingdom the risk from the firebrands may not be so great but the chances are that you will still be blamed by the younger members of the local community for their not being able to find a place to live in their own home village.

In *No Homes for Locals*, Mark Shucksmith concedes that the growing demand for second homes in rural areas is not the only factor that leads to young newly-weds being condemned to long years of living with mother-in-law or to even longer years on the waiting list for council homes. But he sees it as a major influence, and he concludes that more of the taxpayer's money ("a significantly greater commitment of public resources") is needed if the poorer inhabitants of attractive rural areas are to have a decent roof over their heads.

Mr. Shucksmith's approach to his problem is theoretical rather than practical. He gives no hard evidence of poverty in the shires. He paints no picture of squalid living conditions among the poor contrasting with the gracious opulence of the well-to-do. He merely "proves," with the clinical objectivity of the academic, that, in the sphere of housing, the free market produces results that are neither efficient nor equitable. As he sees it, the disparity between rural and urban incomes leaves the countryman at a distinct disadvantage when the affluent town-dweller moves into the



local housing market. The price of houses, driven up by the demand of the urban invaders, moves constantly beyond the reach of the locals. Add to this the inadequacy of local authority house-building programmes (there is never enough money to do what is needed), the decline in the number of houses for rent (blame the Rent Acts but we have to live with them) and the blighting effect of planning restrictions (to conserve the countryside) and you are led inexorably to the conclusion that government intervention is morally justified and economically sensible.

Of course, some local government authorities have already made efforts, within the powers that they have, to even-up the scales for the locals. In the Lake District, for example, the Special Planning Board uses its powers under Section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1971 to "restrict completely all new development to that which can be shown to satisfy a local need." Its intention is that there should be "no expansion of towns or villages outside their existing boundaries; infilling plots will be reserved for local use as they arise..." The effect of this policy has been to reserve all new housing for "people employed or about to be employed locally, or retired from local employment."

Unfortunately for its advocates, the policy has succeeded only in diverting the demand for second homes and holiday homes into the market for existing housing. This already handles about 80 per cent of all house sales in the area and prices, under the impetus of the increased demand, now threaten to reach a new high. All the signs are that the policy will fail to help local people. First-time local purchasers will still find new houses beyond their means, while existing houses will now be even more expensive than before.

Where, then, should we look for a solution? Depressingly, Mr. Shucksmith merely hands the problem to central government. The only answer he sees is a "re-allocation of resources in favour of rural council housing provision." Where, apparently, private enterprise has failed, the state must step in and provide.

Mr. Shucksmith's book is a useful glimpse of the problem — in the same way that an aerial photograph is a useful glimpse of a battlefield. But just as a photograph merely shows the dispositions on the surface, so the book confines itself to the facts immediately apparent to the onlooker. The author observes, for example, that "The essence of the housing problem in rural areas is that those who work there tend to receive low incomes..." But he does not concern himself with the reasons for the low incomes and whether the circumstances are just or unjust, susceptible to change or immutable. He does not reflect on the extent to which a change in the incidence of taxation relating to land might make agriculture more productive, with consequential benefits for those working in it. Nor does he consider the question of how, in any event, the level of those incomes might be expected to rise as the area concerned developed from a farming community into a holiday area with a rising demand for different types of labour. Surely experience in the development of holiday areas, both in Britain and overseas, could provide relevant data?

The book leaves the reader with a feeling that it is only Part I of a deeper study; that it focusses on effects with little concern with the causes, and that, before anyone rushes to the central government for more subsidies and handouts, further research is needed into the wage levels of agriculture and into the circumstances that depress them.

BERT BROOKES

Commonwealth Games at risk over native land rights

AUSTRALIAN aborigines are threatening to disrupt this October's Commonwealth games unless land rights are granted to them.

The government in Queensland, where the games will be staged, has one of the poorest records for recognising that the original inhabitants of the continent have rights to land.

And now Mr. Charles Perkins, head of the Aboriginal Development Commission, has warned that there would be no Commonwealth games unless justice was done to Queensland aborigines.

The state government has been reluctant to grant freehold land rights because of a conflict over the ownership of mineral deposits.