

has done little for those who remain landless labourers.

All of which is true. For in most countries, it would be impossible to provide everyone with land which was a viable economic unit. But even if it were possible, and some people chose not to work on the land, why should they give up their direct interest in their community's natural resources? Absent from Sinha's account is consideration of why it is wrong to own large tracts of land ("socially unjust", he calls it), but acceptable (in low-density continents like Africa) to own small tracts. Are there really no general moral and economic principles to guide us? If not, the jet-set academics will continue churning out discussion papers at their international conferences, but little action will be taken.

Sinha's preference for the collective farm is an unhappy one. He concedes that the Chinese found that such farms did not provide personal incentives; that yields are greater on family farms; and that communes effectively disguise unemployment by absorbing unneeded labour. "Even a casual visit to the countryside in China will suggest that there is over-manning on farms, in rural transport and in the retail trade. This virtually amounts to relieving the problem of unemployment by creating more disguised unemployment. Traditional social institutions, such as the family, or tribal and communal villages have always done this whenever the need has arisen. This

lesson from China should be taken seriously by other developing countries."

Should it? The social security provided by traditional institutions is only relevant if no alternatives are available. At least one does exist, which combines the virtues of the two systems referred to above, but excludes their defects. I have in mind the model of peasant farmers who possess their individual lands—so they have the incentives to work: the more they produce, the more they keep; but who do not own the land, as its rental value is annually taxed by the community. If land values rise, it is not the idle landlord who benefits: the community finds itself able to finance new irrigation and water conservation systems, better transportation and communication networks—things which boost output, living standards and employment. The Exchequer revenue ensures that the landless (be they urban labourers, teachers, architects, factory managers or housewives) retain their traditional share in the natural resources of their community, without having to actually work on the land.

Remember: it is not a question of a country or region having to produce more food to feed hungry citizens. For there is no world food shortage; we are dealing with a distributional problem, which could be solved to everyone's satisfaction through the ancient practice of exchange. But to achieve that happy state of global well-being, we need more careful consideration of all the options for change.

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THE sheer lunacy of the European intervention system has finally hit the UK in circumstances which would have done justice to a Monty Python scenario.

If anything could be said in justification of intervention, it would be that, at a time of real glut, supplies could be taken off the market to prevent a total collapse. However, what has happened here? Intervention buying has been made attractive to those able to profit from it, on a high market at a time of quadruple shortage. Not only is there the customary seasonal shortage but global home produced supplies are known to be down on last year. Additionally, UK exports of both livestock and carcase meat are substantially up on last year and the humorously-called "temporary" ban on beef imports from third countries, imposed in July '74, is still in force.

Had normal market forces prevailed, there could have been ade-

quate supplies for the trade to continue selling at a reasonable price, but there developed the iniquitous situation of supplies required by both butcher and customer being taken off the market for stock-piling and consequently ruination in cold stores. Some of our members at livestock markets had the mortification of being outbid by agents of companies buying solely for intervention. Thus prices were artificially forced up at a time when the retailer was already pulling out all the stops to maintain the trade at an acceptable level.

Adding to the irony of the situation, many wholesalers anxious to maintain traditional links with their regular butcher customers, were incensed to find that much of the beef destined to be spoiled in cold store was of top quality.

Undoubtedly much intervention beef will find its way to foreign countries in frozen form and at a cheap price but why should our customers be doubly hit by being

deprived of good quality beef in its natural form at a fair price while subsidising its depreciation for the benefit of foreign consumers?

—From *Meat Trader*, May

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WATER supplies might be low in drought-stricken Britain but the EEC has a massive and growing milk lake. Pierre Lardinois, the Farm Commissioner, proposed the levying of a tax upon milk deliveries in an attempt to reduce the surplus but, bowing to pressure from dairy farmers, decided to drop the idea.

Instead, the proposal is to levy a tax upon vegetable and marine oils so as to make margarine and other non-dairy products less competitive with butter. This, it is argued, will persuade people to consume more butter thus reducing the milk and butter surpluses.

Additional proposals from the EEC Commission include the following: payments to farmers *not* to send their milk to dairies or to feed their calves on milk, cheap milk for schools and hospitals and the compulsory use of dairy fats in some foods, including custard.