

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

Decimated Britain

E. J. Mishan, London School of Economics. Letter in *Daily Telegraph*, December 15.

ONLY TWO MONTHS to go to D-Day (D for Disaster), and nobody in Parliament has raised his voice in protest.

The reasons for decimalisation—unproved and unconvincing—turn on efficiency. Could anything be more banal? Only in an age such as the present, in which people are conditioned to acquiesce in any policy which Governments can pass off as purely efficiency measures, would the idea be thinkable.

The incalculable resource costs to industry and trade, the high inconvenience and considerable efforts to be placed on us all for an indefinite period, the predictable confusion, the general annoyance, the fillip to inflation—all in the hope that it might somehow increase efficiency.

But, even if we were all so gullible as to believe that simply by changing to a decimal currency enduring material advantages would follow, there are the weighty considerations of sentiment, custom and pride. Pounds, shillings and pence are not merely currency, they are an essential component of John Bull's personality. They are



part of our history, part of our language, part of our literature. And in a world in which familiar landmarks are vanishing, in which (as result of modern communications and media) differences in accent and architecture, differences in character and custom as between peoples are rapidly being flattened out, there is everything to be said for hanging on to the appurtenances of our national identity.

The fatalism with which the British people wait for the disaster of D-day is itself a disquieting feature—the consequence of having its pride and confidence undermined by successive governments abasing themselves before the *ikons* of economic growth; monomaniac government that has judged the virtues and achievements of a nation by a single indicator, gross national product.

America is still the Mecca of our growthmen politicians, the country with the highest *per capita* real income—and by far the highest crime rate in the world. Japan is for them the model of unprecedented growth—though not only in “real” income but also in industrial disease, effluent, congestion and pollution. That Britain's contri-

butions to science and literature are second to none, that in the theatre and ballet our achievements are second to none, that our institutions are still studied as models by countries richer and poorer than we, that our courts of justice and our police are the envy of all countries—such facts count for nothing in the myopic eyes of the post-war Gradgrind style of government.

Apparently there is no custom, institution, civic virtue, or decent way of life such government would not today willingly place in jeopardy for the hope of some material advantage. Indeed the country is already up for sale—the monarchy, the common law, Parliamentary sovereignty, the lot—in the hope of some paltry pickings from the markets of the Six.

Since the death of Churchill no statesman is left to speak for Britain: naught but a sorry succession of little men tediously exhorting us to produce more GNP-stuff and eternally warning us about the balance of payments, little men that are responsible for the spread of economic opportunism that is corrupting the country.”

Economics of Slum Promotion

The Sunday Sun, Mass., U.S.A., November 29.

THE OWNER of blighted inner city property is encouraged by the improvement tax to let his property deteriorate, and encouraged by the low land tax to hold on to it. Meanwhile, with the growing demand for land by the growing population, with land's growing scarcity, its market value is skyrocketing ever upward. When the owner does get around to selling in some distant decade—after decades of depriving the community of taxes from himself, from industry, from its employees—he makes a rather large boodle in reward for his non efforts. And he may well reap this exorbitant reward from the community at large, directly. California taxpayers for instance, paid \$2.6 million for one site assessed at \$118,000... paid \$2 million for another assessed at \$32,000.

How did this anti-improvement tax syndrome ever manage to get started in the first place? According to Zwicker, it dates from feudal days in Europe—and, indeed, from the early days of America itself—when only landowners were permitted to vote. It wasn't the land that they voted to tax.

Where a reversal of this traditional system has been attempted, private enterprise has not only reversed the blight trend, but has made possible the erection of needed housing without subsidies, as well as bringing industry and its attendant prosperity into the area.