

# Letters to the Editor

## THE GREATEST HOAX OF ALL TIME

SIR,—Will someone please explain! Much of the greater part of our imports of raw materials and manufactured goods carry a heavy customs duty, and quotas and licensing control their quantity. All this was introduced after 1918 to protect "our" economy. Why, then, is the size of our imports greater than our exports? *Why has the control of imports failed?*

If it is true that this is the cause of the present economic crisis; that we are on the verge of national insolvency; that personal spending must be rigidly curtailed; then it is conclusive evidence of the failure of protection. Or is it that we must increase these controls to the point where we have no imports?

Bearing in mind the fact that international trade operates solely on the exchange of goods and food, and not on cash transactions, and that imports of goods have to be accepted as payment for exports, is it logical to conclude that the smaller the amount of imports the more profitable it is to take part in international trade?

Contrary to general conception, gold reserves are not reserves of currency; gold is a raw material, as is copper, lead or pig iron. The same applies to dollar reserves; they are goods, and the holding of these reserves simply means that at some time or other we have got to increase our import of American goods.

To me, this trade payments bogey is the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on society.

Yours faithfully,

STEPHEN MARTIN

Fordingbridge, Hants.

## A MATTER OF LIBERTY

SIR,—The Minister of Health, having failed, after five and a half years of persistent propaganda, at the expense of the taxpayer and ratepayer, to persuade the local health authorities and water authorities to put fluoridation into force, is now offering extended indemnity as an inducement to them to toe the official line.

The offer of an indemnity is an admission that claims may be made. In any case, if, as I submit, fluoridation is wrong in principle, no one should

be influenced by the offer of an indemnity. Similarly, no one *in a matter of principle*, should be influenced by such an offer as has been made by the Minister to at least one local health authority (and most probably to others) that he would, out of taxes, give a grant towards the initial cost of a fluoridation scheme.

Today, no one can be *compelled*, against his will or without choice of alternative, to consume any drug, food or drink. Fluoridation would be the first breach of this basic personal freedom, and no amount of hair-splitting can disguise the fact. Water is essential to life and no one can do without it.

All the chemicals at present added to water supplies are used solely to treat the water itself, to kill disease germs or otherwise make it more suitable for domestic or industrial use. Fluoride is not, and never has been, needed for these purposes and would be added solely and avowedly to affect compulsorily the development of the body (i.e., the teeth of children).

Fluoridation is medication without the consent of the patient and is repugnant to the principles of any society which calls itself "free."

Yours faithfully,

WINIFRED M. SYKES

Huddersfield, Yorks.

## LAND RIGHTS AND THE ODEL SYSTEM

SIR,—In connection with Mr. D. J. Latham Brown's interesting article, "A Legal Look at Land Tenure" in your June, 1968 number, it may be of interest to look more closely at the very old system of "odel" (old Norse "odal," allodium) still surviving in Norway, and possibly also in the previously Norwegian Shetland and Orkney Islands.

"Odel" is a right of re-purchase or redemption. If landed property outside the cities, and subject to this right, is sold out of the family, a member of this may, within three years, claim to redeem it for his or her own benefit for a sum to be fixed by legal valuation.

The right of "odel" is gained for the family when the property has been in the unbroken possession of the acquirer and his descendants for

twenty years. It may be claimed as a personal right by linear descendants of the owner at the time when it was gained. As between brothers and sisters, the former rank first, and between claimants of the same sex, the elder. As long as the property is owned by a member of one line of descendants it does not revert to one more remote. Thus a daughter of the eldest son takes precedence of the second son. The right may be renounced for oneself, but not for one's descendants.

A pretender to the right of "odel" may claim to redeem the property not only from buyers outside the family but also from those of the family whose right ranks after his or her own.

This right lapses when the property has been held by some one outside the family for three years, and all potential claimants lose it after another of lower rank has held the property for three years.

As will be seen, the "odel" is a right akin to that of succession to thrones, and it was invoked by pretenders to the throne of Norway during the Middle Ages, some of them proving their descent by ordeal.

"Odel" does not now carry with it any special rights beyond that mentioned of buying the property back, but even so it has been of great importance in preventing the amassing of great landed property by persons outside the peasantry. It has been said that this saved the Norwegian peasants from becoming serfs, as happened in many other countries.

However, the "odelmen" themselves were a privileged class, on whom the landless were dependent for a living. The number of these "husmenn" (cotters) increased enormously; their condition as regards servitude to the landowner and otherwise was little better than that of serfs, and deteriorated to such a degree that protective measures had to be enacted. From the first half of the nineteenth century their condition was also improved by the possibility of emigrating, mostly to the U.S.A., in whose middle west hundreds of thousands of people of Norwegian descent now till their own land, while they, in their turn, see looming on the horizon terrible problems also connected with the land question, although in new forms.

The system of "husmenn" (cotters) is now practically extinct in Norway.

The question of amendments to the Law of Odel is under discussion. Perhaps it could be combined with that of making a new register for taxing land *in rem*. The existing register is

so old and obsolete as to be of no practical value.

As regards *personal* taxation, the value of land subject to "odel" is treated like that of other land.

The Norwegian Constitution pro-

vides that the right of "odel" shall not be abolished.

Yours faithfully,

OLE WANG

Tonsberg, Norway.

## Miscellany

### Sleight of Hand

**A** DUPLICATED advertising letter from a firm of estate agents in central London tells us that "due to the current economic situation, landlords are anxious to effect early lettings of empty premises."

Could the "current economic situation" have anything to do with the rating of empty buildings, recently introduced?

But the agents are optimistic; they know the value of government restriction: "There is no doubt that when the economic scene begins to brighten, office rents will spiral as before—particularly in view of the present ban on further building."

So our government, while waiting for an "economic miracle" indulges in sleight of hand legislation which brings down the rents of office buildings by taxing empty ones while at the same time it sends them up by forbidding the erection of new ones.

In private housing the government practises similar sleight of hand. It gives conversion grants to owners to modernise old houses and when the conversions are completed it jacks up the rates because, well, they're worth more now aren't they?

### Road to Peaceful Solution?

**T**HERE can be no negotiations with Israel, no armistice with Israel and no bargaining of any sort. These are the principles we will follow for a peaceful solution of the crisis."

—President Nasser in a speech on the sixteenth anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, July 24.

### Trawlers To Get Higher Subsidy

**S**UBSIDIES for the trawling industry are to be increased from this year's total of £1½ million to a maximum of £4 million in a government scheme designed to help efficient ships and penalise those working at a loss, reports *The Daily Telegraph*, July 9.

The basic subsidy will be £2 mil-

lion, and this will be increased or decreased according to whether the industry as a whole earns more or less than £4 million profit. A firm doing well in a bad year will qualify for the highest benefit from the new scheme.

The new subsidy started on August 1, and is to last for three years. Mr. Cledwyn Hughes, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, promised that the industry would get some form of subsidy for at least five years.

The ostensible aim is to drive out inefficient ships and produce a profitable industry. What in fact it will do is to strengthen the fish monopoly.

### Red Tape in the Bronte Country

**T**HE Keighley and Worth Valley Light Railway Company is confident that it will make a profit when it starts operating its five-mile system through the Bronte country. As all staff are volunteers it can count on being free from union troubles, and its wages bill will be nil.

For the privilege of running its own railway, this company pays British Rail £3,500 a year, which includes the lease of part of Keighley Station. As this station is still nationalised, the company has had a red-tape tussle for five years to obtain the necessary Parliamentary authority.

It has also had something of a battle with the West Yorkshire Roadcar Company, part of the state-owned British Transport Holdings. It has had to agree to charge its railway passengers more than the bus fare!

### Sharp Points from Two Speeches

**G**REAT BRITAIN is a country of merchant converters. We live by buying raw materials from abroad, converting them into finished goods and selling these goods overseas. Once we start controlling manufactured goods coming in from other countries then those countries can well do exactly the same to us. This could trigger off an avalanche of

### CENTRALISATION WEAKENS FREEDOM

He (the lawyer) above all men, knows that liberty depends upon the survival of local self-government, and that as government becomes more centralised freedom weakens; that nothing undermines local government more than the acceptance of financial aid and gifts from the central government; and all this concentration of power is closely related to deeper schemes to shift the burden of taxation.

Judge J. R. Fuchs

trade restrictions from which we would suffer most and would probably lead to a major trade recession.

Import controls are a negative way of looking at our problems. This Government and our country must take positive action to increase exports and particularly invisible exports.

There is no solution in withdrawing into our own frontiers and damning the world. We must be outward bound.

—Kenneth Baker, M.P., July 10.

**S**INCE Labour came to power, prices have risen by more than 3s. in the pound. This means that it costs the average family £3 a week more to buy the same goods as it did in 1964.

Taxation is now £2,000 million more than it was in 1964. Interest rates have been at 7 per cent. or higher for longer than ever before in our history.

—Anthony Barber, M.P., July 11.

### Liquid Liabilities

**A** LANDLORD, says a Midland newspaper, has put the following notice in a village pub.

"I bid you welcome, all customers. You have just contributed to, or are about to contribute to, the payment of the following: corporation tax, customs and excise tax, income tax, graduated pension contributions, licence duty, import duty, National Health contributions, purchase tax, rates, selective employment tax, surtax surcharge, temporary import charge, water rates, wine and spirit tax.

"From what is left, I hope to be able to pay the brewery."