

LAND AT THE CENTRE attempts to relate some of the major issues now on Britain's political agenda through a discussion centred on the use and control of our land. This is done in the context of a review of global and European developments.

We live in a world of accelerating change, whether of population, communications, urbanisation or consumption of resources and energy. In the dangerous situation of nuclear and ecological threat, nature is the basis for life survival.

The use and control of land and its resources are crucial for the wellbeing of nations, both in the developing world and the advanced industrial countries.

Yet the latter debates on the economy or social problems largely ignore the role of land for its place has never been rigorously examined in modern economic theory, which is based on presumptions of unlimited supply and the primacy of the market.

The work of Henry George and his followers is fundamental, but in spite of its once potent force, it has not succeeded in altering the broad historical movement. In his time nations were then transforming from rural to urban societies, and land ownership, control, and taxation were central political issues. But since then the thrust has turned towards the

Crucial choices

● John C. Holliday, a consultant in urban management, planning and landscape design, discusses the thinking behind his recent book, *Land At The Centre*

town planning movement, which, while succeeding in certain respects, has become increasingly removed from central political affairs.

Today, as the west moves from an industrial urban era into what has been called a post-industrial — or as I prefer to call it, a post-urban era — transformation is again under way. The threats to life survival, the profligacy of old productive systems, (including agriculture) and the waste of human resources all demand a new assessment of the role of land, whether for city or town, agriculture or wildlife.

IN PERIODS of rapid change, rapid adaptivity is required. The process is one of public awareness, assessment, resolution of conflict, the wide acceptance of new values and their translation into political action.

This was true of Britain in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it is true today. Current issues include human rights, freedom of information, social polarisation (whether inner city or small farm as compared with prosperous Britain), taxation and subsidy (rates, mortgage tax relief, agricultural support), wildlife, the green question and of course the bomb.

The attempt to relate these issues requires a new perception of patterns of life. The approach in *Land at the Centre* is made initially through the way we perceive our land, which is unveiled through an examination of historical circumstances. I analyse the era of town and country planning, seen alongside the economic and social changes of this century. The policies now followed, those of urban containment and countryside protection formulated in the 1930s and 40s, are outmoded. They damage the

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What this demonstrates is that competition does its job — selects the most suitable means for the end. The secret of "appropriateness" is to diversify into those niches that competition has not reached; to breathe new life into those parts of the economy from which the growth-men are excluded.

The paper on the Green Belt Movement among Kenya's women provides a telling example: wasted labour and wasted land are being rescued through tree-planting to rescue the country's basic raw material; rescue its nu-

trition through rescuing its fuel for cooking; and raise the status of women. Were Kenya's land rents to be rescued from its private landowners how much further could public goods provision and public employment go!

THE LAND reform chapter, in fact, forms the pivot of *The Living Economy*, commencing the practical half of the book. This is chronologically significant, as James Robertson notes: "The conventional path of development creates dependency... Historically, it starts by excluding people from access to land, and thus makes people dependent on paid labour or cash handouts for

the money to meet needs formerly met by ownwork."

Shann Turnbull discusses co-operative land banks, which are a Trojan horse for land rent recapture and local democracy within the present system. Her business model provides a clear picture of the economic principles underlying the land stewardship versus ownership issue, which apply equally at the local, national, and international scales.

Fred Harrison succinctly summarises the social, economic and ecological implications of "land value taxation" (LVT), and assesses its practicability.

One wishes, however, that he

economy, lock poverty into the inner city and are inequitable. A case is made for the repopulation of our countryside as well as improving the cities.

Over the post war period, three attempts to deal with the problems of compensation and betterment have failed. But the better linkage of private profit and public gain becomes ever more important as the public need for sharing our inheritance of land, air and water grows stronger.

Old style town and country planning is outmoded, but new forms of management (containing good planning) are developing. New strategic and practical skills are as essential for land as they are for government or industry and policies over the whole system of government and taxation need urgent review.

The land is a resource for the life of the nation and should be treated equitably across its surface. *The old class landed interests and presently confused public and private interests now prevent clear perceptions and fair deals.*

The means by which we move forward are necessarily complex, but the principles are not. The case for reform rests on six arguments:

- the mismatch between economic structures and land policies;
- tight planning controls



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leading to high land prices;

- agricultural subsidies and misdirected investment;
- social unfairness;
- a failure to perceive land as a resource for all life, and
- lack of design vision.

Opposition there will be, but it is indisputable that the country is undergoing structural changes in every walk of life, and some clear vision is required.

WHAT WE are seeing in politics today is the result of the stress inherent in changing social and economic systems. To leave land out of the discussion will only perpetuate unfairness.

We have got to learn to think less in specialised boxes (an in-

heritance of science) and more in connected ways; nowhere more so than in Whitehall. We shall also have to be less selfish in the protection of private territories in the name of public interest, especially in the countryside.

There are now new opportunities everywhere, but also the burden of vested interests. This is not the place to write of Henry George and site value taxation, (SVT), for my book does not discuss them at any length. It does, however, recognise the force of the argument relative to our prosperity and wellbeing.

I would contend that it is not enough to consider SVT separately from other major reforms. Concepts of the market must be complemented by concepts of the inherent values and uses of land. It is no good encouraging overinvestment in cities if thereby they suffer heavy public costs of congestion.

My own view is that the opening out of the land debate is essential if social progress is to be made and justice done. The relative poverty of a third of the population of the UK could be turned to a more fulfilling life on a land re-populated, better managed and more productive in landscapes of different but new beauty.

• *Land At The Centre* is published by Shephard Walwyn at £7.95

had been further consulted regarding the links between LVT and the rest of the economy. It is only subsequently mentioned in order to encourage the informal economy.

The "blinkerred, binary language of 'jobs' and 'unemployment'" is scorned by the New Economists. The informal economy — small scale, flexible, socially aware — is glorified as the "true safety net" underpinning the formal economy, and the present social security system is seen as an obstacle in its way. Much is therefore made of an unconditional basic income guarantee — "minimum econo-

mic rights" — for all individuals in order to abolish the present disincentives to low paid work.

It is admitted that this would require a "substantial" additional tax burden, however, which is where LVT comes in. Steven Cord's calculation of the land and resource rent of the USA has been noted, suggesting that the public haul would be "enough to replace all taxes on labour and capital, apart from user charges... [with] no disincentive effect on production, rather tending to bring land into use..."

Given such potential, one is entitled to ask why the formal economy is virtually written off in

the first place? It is said to be straining against increasing resource scarcities, capital scarcities, and environmental and social costs.

The savings required to finance the new technologies are unlikely to be sufficient "to generate growth fast enough to absorb shed labour." Jobs will become increasingly the monopoly of a "technocratic elite", and more taxes into fewer jobs to support the "drones" will not go.

This scenario can certainly be challenged. Rofie Hueting, a leading environmental statistician in Holland, notes in his paper that

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