

# LAND and LIBERTY

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Countryside bliss, but the farmworkers' personal harvest isn't so divine — see centre pages

# Mobile thoughts

THE Chernobyl disaster proves one thing: we truly live in one world.

They may call themselves the Marxist societies of the East; we the "free" world of the West. Technology, however, and ecology, do not recognise artificial political boundaries.

So when something goes wrong at a nuclear reactor, whether Britain's Windscale or Russia's Chernobyl or the United States' Three Mile Island, the winds and the rain wash the radioactive fallout across us all.

The fate of mankind rests with the individual decisions made in the Kremlin or the White House. It is too much to expect the creation of a world government to reach rational decisions on matters of global significance; that is why world statesmen must adopt the concept of freedom as the guiding principle.

The free exchange of ideas and information would improve the condition of mankind; advanced technologies, even those used for ostensibly peaceful purposes, are capable of destroying the life-giving properties of the planet. When something goes wrong, nothing less than the pooling of the accumulated knowledge of the experts of all nationalities is acceptable.

We cannot afford the scoring of cheap political points, when the food chain contaminates the baby's milk.

If we must generate power by using nuclear reactors, then the builders should have the best available information about efficiency and safety standards. That information must not be processed through the distorting prism of ideology.

THE APPEAL to freedom raises serious problems, which have to be recognised if we are not to be charged with glibness. Those problems come in many unexpected forms.

Patents, for example, are considered by many to be important, in that they ensure inventors receive a fair reward for their ingenuity. The result, however, is that others are forced to settle for inferior goods, based on obsolete knowledge, because they are

legally precluded from making use of the latest and best information. At what point does the interest of the majority override the rights of the individual?

And what of the much maligned bureaucracies? Every nation needs them as necessary mechanisms to turn the wheels of state. At the same time, it is true that individuals at all levels within a bureaucracy soon learn that their power can be enhanced by firmly controlling the information that is allowed to pass backwards and forwards between people and politicians. How do we tackle that abuse? Slogans like "open government" are not enough. Are we ready to tame the bureaucracies?

The destruction of the power of those who have a vested interest in blocking the dissemination of knowledge is no easy task.

But mobility of information has to be matched by an international mobility of goods. We take free trade for granted, yet there are still too many encumbrances — many of them cleverly concealed, but every bit as effective as the overt trade barriers — which restrain people from a free exchange of goods and services on an international scale.

There also has to be an improvement in the mobility of labour. Even within nations, the constraints on people moving from one region to another are considerable. Those restraints are sometimes visible, as in the racial laws of South Africa. In other cases, however — as with unemployed workers in the north of England, who find it exceedingly difficult to move to the areas of employment in the south — the barriers are not so evident, but just as effective.

Once we invoke the freedom principle, we begin to identify the shortcomings in ALL of the dominant social and economic systems. In doing so, we isolate the dangerous points of friction.

The means for solving ALL of the major problems of mankind — be they ecological or institutional — are now at our disposal. Goodwill is the key that would transform into reality what we all know in our hearts: that we are one people in one world.