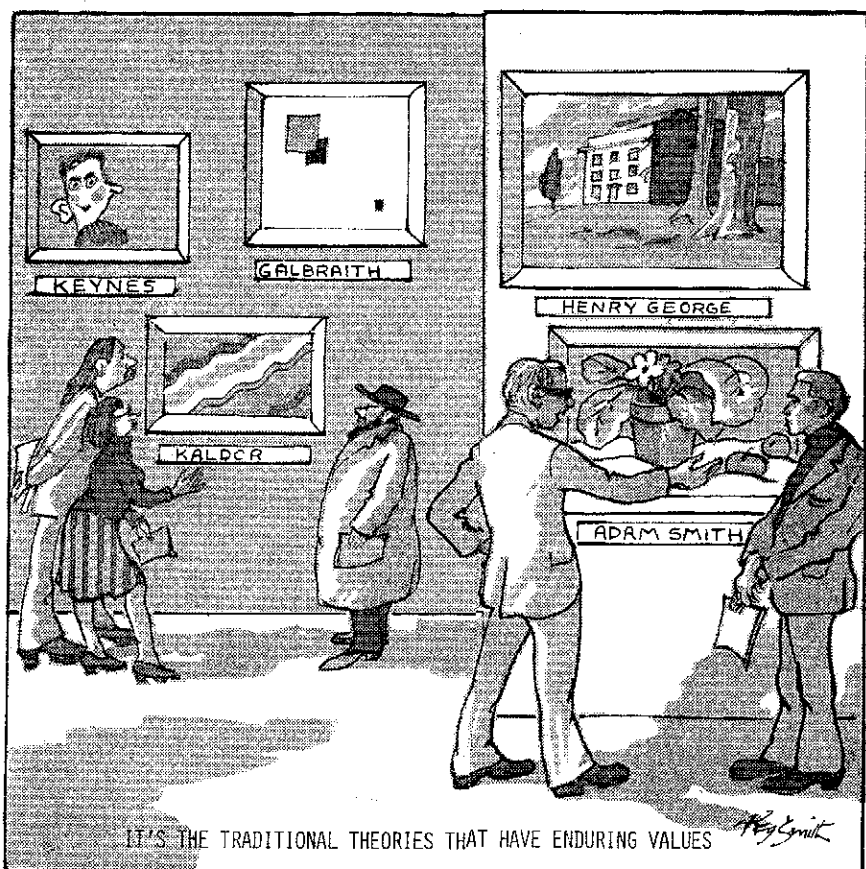


# LAND &

# LIBERTY

MARCH & APRIL, 1976



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## It Can't Wait for Repeal

**T**HE progress of the Community Land Act is now following the pattern laid down by its predecessors, the Town and Country Planning Act (1947) and the Land Commission Act (1967)—all Labour-enacted legislation. Conferences to explain, interpret and guess how it will work in practice, have proliferated. Speakers, each dealing with a different section of the Act have had to plough through it clause by clause, section by section, to unravel the intentions or assumed intentions of those who drafted and amended it.

These conferences, organised by professional institutions, though non-political in character, have been highly critical of the legislative rubble strewn in their path by the Act.

At a conference convened by the Land Institute on January 28, much was made clear and much left unclear as to the intentions of the legislators. What was clear, was frightening in its bureaucratic implications and what was left in doubt, frustrating to the point of despair.

It was inevitable that the Act

came under heavy fire both from the speakers and from the audience and in spite of the resolve to keep politics out, it surfaced on more than one occasion from the floor.

At these conferences one is sadly aware that we "have been up this road before" and is confirmed in the opinion that the end of the road will see the repeal of the Act—as before.

The Labour Party will always claim that the repeal of their recent so-called land reform has been "political", that their tortuous Acts would have worked if

only they had been left on the statute book long enough. The latest legislation, while claiming to be an improvement on its predecessors, is essentially the same in principle—or lack of it—being paradoxically both timid and ruthless: timid in its complete neglect of all *existing* land values throughout the country and ruthless in its treatment of land ripe for development or redevelopment.

The Development Land Taxes levied on betterment, rising to 100 per cent, will do little except aggravate the mischief of the Land Act which threatens to bring private development to a grinding halt. Landowners have nothing to lose and everything to gain by not "bringing their land forward." They hope that the next Tory Government will replace these land Acts with something more acceptable to them and consider it wiser to lie low and hold on to their land until this time comes.

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Land reforms elsewhere, though drastically different in their nature, suffer from the same lack of fundamental thinking. In Portugal last year the Communists seized 2,500,000 acres and turned them into about 400 collective farms. Swapping one set of landowners for another set has never been a successful way of achieving justice. Now the Minister of Agriculture in Portugal is preparing to hand back three quarters of the occupied lands to their original owners, thousands of whom had only small holdings and farmed them themselves. Those who have so far escaped collectivisation are not content with government reassurances and are threatening to defend their interests by cutting off food supplies.

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Attempts at land reform in the Philippines were consistently thwarted in the '50s and '60s by landlord dominated legislatures, but in 1972, upon his proclamation of martial law, President Marcos announced an ambitious programme of land reform.

The idea was that ownership of land would be transferred to tenants, the state compensating the former land owner. The government would organise rural co-operatives, provide credit, and

build roads and irrigation systems. Some 200,000 out of 900,000 eligible tenant farmers have so far received land transfer certificates, but the pace of reform seems to be slowing and the problems mounting.

The redistribution applies only to rice and corn growing land, excluding sugar and coconut land. One result is a high rate of eviction of tenants by owners of sugar and coconut land, fearing that their lands may be dealt with next.

One major failing of the reform is that it grants land only to existing tenants; thus landless wage labourers—who constitute up to one third of the workforce—are not immediately benefited. And of those who will benefit, one expert predicted to the correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor*, "this generation's land beneficiaries will probably become the next generation's landlords." And of course the possibilities of real land reform will be farther away than ever.

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