

## The Vacuum in Political Thought

THE POLICIES of both the Conservative and Labour parties are making people throughout the country despair. There is really not much to choose between them - it is creeping socialisation of the country whatever party is backed, for the people have long ago seen through the euphemisms that describe the socialist policies of the Heath Government.

The Conservative party under its present Leader has stepped into the Labour party's old position and the Labour party turns even sharper left. How can people who value liberty and independence in social, industrial and commercial life vote at the next election?

Mr. Powell offers a grim choice for those Conservatives who see Britain's entry into the EEC as the disaster it undoubtedly is.

One ought to be able to turn to the Liberal Party, but what have they to offer? In general principle much the same as the other two if such policies can be rightly described as principles.

The Liberals proudly proclaim their consistency in supporting Britain's membership of the EEC, yet they are as much out of touch with the people as are the Conservatives on this matter, as a recent Gallup poll has indicated, for in spite of the votes of despair given to the Liberal Party at recent by-elections, 50 per cent of the British public think that entry into the EEC was wrong - only 32 per cent thought it right. According to this poll carried out for the *Daily Telegraph*, only 32 per cent of Liberal supporters thought we were right to join the EEC, while 58 per cent thought we were wrong. Further, 52 per cent of Liberal supporters would be pleased

if the Common Market were scrapped, only 21 per cent would be sorry.

While the Liberal Party may have been consistent in its support of the Common Market it has been at the cost of being inconsistent with its policy of free trade - indeed free trade is the only real answer that Britain has to the economic policies of Europe.

The Liberal Party has also been consistent in its support of a prices and incomes policy, their Leader said recently on television, and in spite of consistent failures of this particular policy to solve any of our economic problems.

The trouble is that Liberals think in pretty much the same way as Conservatives and Labourites and have failed to learn from their mistakes.

The Liberal support of site-value rating and indeed their consistency in advocating this much needed reform is a bright spot in their programme, although as T. O. Evans shows in this issue, there appears to be some doubt as to exactly what the Liberals have in mind regarding this reform.

Unless the electorate are offered real reform based upon principles instead of expediency, they will be more vulnerable to the appeals of demagogues who are always standing by ready for a crisis.

Liberals have a chance to turn much negative support to positive support and win very much more. Consistency is not a virtue if the policies are not right and Liberal leaders would do well to ponder the consistency of the British public in rejecting what is manifestly wrong.

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**T**RIBUNE of August 17 carries an article by John Silkin, Labour's planning spokesman, on his Party's proposals for land nationalisation.

Mr. Silkin believes that there are two basic elements in the land problem - unearned increment and the absolute necessity of planning controls.

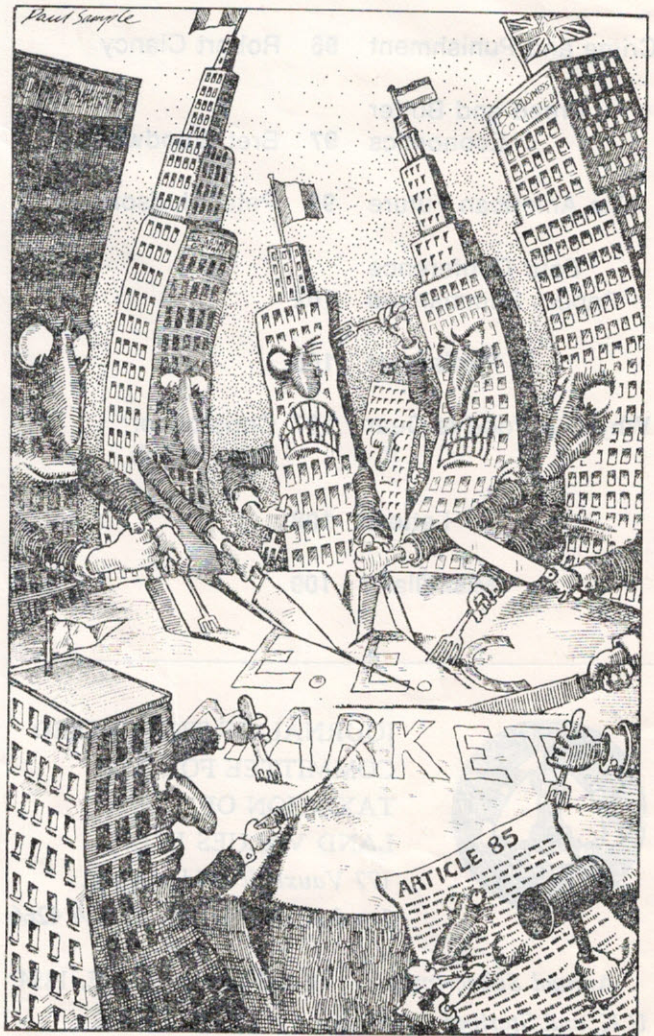
He admits that previous attempts by Labour to deal with the problem have been unsatisfactory. Their "sheer complexity made it difficult to arouse public interest and as a result succeeding Conservative Governments had no difficulty in repealing the legislation. The repeals passed without any public interest whatsoever and indeed even within the Labour Party, were at first hardly noticed."

All other solutions (including the implementation of a land-value tax by Labour in 1929, an interesting claim Mr. Silkin makes!) having been tried, the only one now left, he believes, is public ownership of land by local authorities. All land required for "development, redevelopment and improvement" would be bought at existing use value only over a ten-year period. "It will be necessary . . . to have ministerial watchdogs, to see that the more reactionary councils do not lag behind in acquisition."

Mr. Silkin believes that Labour's proposals would not only provide cheap council housing but would also, "where necessary", provide cheaper houses for people to buy. The general cost of land nationalisation would be a minimal strain on the national economy he says, because of the ten-year basis of the programme.

Apart from his (quite untrue) claim that Labour actually introduced a land-value tax in 1929; and did so "as a first step in the direction of land nationalisation," Mr. Silkin briefly introduces taxation as an alternative to land nationalisation only to dismiss it peremptorily. After admitting that speculation alone could be dealt with by special taxes, he repeats the old charge (in effect true of labour's land levy, but not true of a land-value tax) that such a tax would only further raise land prices.

The image conjured up in most people's minds by the words "council housing" - dullness, facelessness, oppressiveness and lack of imagination - seems to be faithfully mirrored in Labour's policy and in Mr. Silkin's exposition of it.



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