

THE RAPE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

EVERY SUNDAY AFTERNOON in spring and summer sees something of a minor exodus of people travelling by car into the countryside in an attempt to escape from the impersonal and ugly environment of the town and city. But every season the trip takes a little longer as more cars compete for road space and suburbia expands farther into the country; and when one gets there one expects the countryside to be countryside, and not a semi-rural landscape dotted with garages, power stations, hoardings, hill-top rubbish dumps, pylons, junk-yard farms, disused army camps and badly-designed houses. Deprived of beauty in one's immediate environment at home and work, one makes the weekend pilgrimage only to be confronted with an eyesore.

Where good landscapes still remain, they tend to be part of large estates, whether owned by private individuals or the state. Even so, private landlords are often willing, when they need the money, to sell land for development which mars the landscape. Most of the eighteenth-century parks, remnants of an age when landscape mattered, are generally in the last stages of decay with no new tree-planting. Individual smallholders tend to be even less concerned, piling up junk such as old cars and tractors in their yards; while the successful modern farmer-businessman in his factory farm knows that farms don't sell on appearance and, backed by a Government policy that consciously encourages larger agricultural units and 'rationalisation' of layouts within farm boundaries, merrily sends his bulldozers through the hedges; hedges that are being removed at a minimum rate of 7,000 miles each year. Provided this rate remains the same, the last hedge in England will be torn up by the roots in the winter of AD 2049, all of which totally ignores the value of hedgerows for the protection of wild life, soil conservation and the beauty of the landscape.

NO CONCERN FOR LANDSCAPE

Also, little or no concern is shown for the landscape in the development of expanding villages. Abandoned allotments and decayed orchards are left in the centre of compact villages, while clutches of council houses are tacked onto the end. Although they may be well-designed individually, and in isolation from the environment, different coloured bricks and tiles and the planting of trees and hawthorn hedges should be considered instead of the usual concrete posts and chain-link fencing, so that they fit into the existing village.

But the results of private housing are even worse, especially bungalows, which are alien to the village scene and waste a lot of land. The kind of private housing that is being built is an attempt to solve the problems of the society we live in, within that society, and the result is the creation of greater problems. The detached and semi-detached house express the desire for isolation in an overcrowded society; the desire for one-upmanship in a competitive society (the poor man's version of the mansion); the desire for the rural (the garden) in an urban society; all done on an individual basis in a society that is lacking in community. The result is neither splendid isolation nor community, neither town nor country, but something that has the disadvantages of both and the advantages of neither—suburbia. 'Ten million private dreams become a public nightmare.' Essentially there is no difference between a town and a village (apart from size); they are both urban. The need is for the building of urban (terrace-type) houses in-filling vil-

lages and for the creation of new villages and genuine new towns, for community planning rather than private speculation.

The needs of an increasing population provide other threats to the landscape; primarily the need for water supply and an improved road system.

The Government has recently approved the building of a 54-acre reservoir (part of the land to be flooded is common land) at Meldon, in the Dartmoor National Park. An alternative site suggested by the planning assessor and the Dartmoor Preservation Association was only pretended to be considered by the authorities. According to John Barr in *New Society* (28.11.68), the recommendations of public enquiry inspectors were overridden; there was an outright resistance by the Government to consider alternative sites, and a notable reluctance in official quarters to let all interested parties have their say. Considerations of capitalist economies ruled the day and the value of the environment was not considered. Barr concludes: 'There is a real risk that in time Dartmoor will be transformed into a kind of sterile Lake District, the lakes ringed by barbed wire, and the public restricted to peering over the barriers.'

In Westmorland is one of the loveliest deer parks in England. It is 600 years old; has the only herd of Norwegian black fallow deer in Britain, the finest avenue of oaks in Britain (250 years old); it is one of the earliest examples of British landscaping art predating Capability Brown by 50 years; and as well as all this it has the remains of the tenth-century monastery of Hefresham which was abandoned during Viking raids. Its name is Levens Park and it is threatened by the advance of the M6 motorway.

An alternative route would involve cutting through a smallholding, building the road next to houses and cutting the grounds of a convent in half. This alternative route is estimated to cost £170,000 less, but the figure is disputed by the Ministry of Transport. Objections can only be considered by the authorities when the final plans are published and a compulsory purchase order has been made. Not the waste of effort, time and money you might think, for the authorities seem to consider the hearing of objections as a mere formality. The Chief Inspector of Monuments has said, 'We are prepared to schedule the whole park as an ancient monument after the motorway has gone through.'

LIP SERVICE

The Government pays lip service to a programme of National Parks, green belts, etc., and a new countryside act reiterates the importance of 'the enhancement of natural beauty', yet it, and the speculators it allows to run wild, are the main culprits engaging in the destruction of the countryside. Where it is not bent on creating desolation itself, it seems content, in the realm of planning, to put a fence round a village, with little concern about how far and at what rate the fence expands and what goes on inside it.

Without considering the multiple use of rural areas for caravan sites, power stations, etc., there is so little that is really rural in our environment that it needs preserving. The state is supposed to be an efficient planner, but in this sphere it has shown itself incapable of planning for the needs of the people, considering both material needs and the value of the environment.

And yet the gap between capacity in architecture and planning and the usual practice is enormous. The failure is a result of false communications, communi-

Nationalism and Freedom

One of the most interesting phases of the great revolt is the agitation of the Keltic populations, if not for a free land, at least for land less heavily burdened for the maintenance of their Teutonic masters. Foreign competition has reduced the value of agricultural produce by something like half. But the non-producing classes, i.e. proprietors and clergy, and farmers in localities where these have been bitten by the idea of degrading themselves from workers into gentlemen—are struggling to wring the same unearned benefit from the toil of the labourers as before. Amongst the Keltic peoples this attempt to extort the uttermost farthing is aggravated by antagonism of race, by the tradition of conqueror and conquered, by the imposition of an alien law. The tithe war in Wales is a current example. These tithes are an arbitrary charge upon the rent of the land, varying from 6d. to 10s. 4d. an acre. They are reckoned by the average price of corn, whereas Welsh land is mostly pasture, and stock has been depreciated 30% during the last two years. Grievance number one. They are paid to support the Welsh clergy of the alien Church of England, to which religious body only 300,000 out of a population of 1,500,000 belong. Grievance number two. In view of the bad times the landlords have accepted a reduction of rent, but the majority of the clergy have refused to follow suit. Grievance number three. The farmers, 400 or 500 of them, have resolved to be sold up rather than pay, and on the 7th September at Ruthin fair they formed a North Wales Anti-Tithe League. They have the people with them, miners and farm labourers alike. Indignant crowds have attended the forced cattle sales, and only been prevented beating and ducking the bailiffs and auctioneer by bodies of 80 or 90 policemen. One obnoxious parson has to be guarded to church by a policeman on each side, and many others have been frightened into offering a reduction. The agitation, partial and narrow as are its present objects, is a valuable practical lesson to the Welsh people in the art of ridding themselves of land leeches.

—From *The Coming Revolution*.

FREEDOM, Vol. 1, No. 1, October, 1886.

THE COMING INVESTITURE

of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales has led to a revival of interest in Welsh nationalism, and to the arrest of members of the Free Wales Army, no doubt to discourage nationalist demonstrations. Because it has happened so long ago it is easy to forget that Wales is in fact a conquered country. Although English and Welsh have become so much assimilated to each other, resentment still exists. The position of individual Welshmen is not really comparable to that of, say, the American Negroes or the Catholics in Ulster. They do, either in Wales or in England (the latter country they can enter freely without passports or permits), have complete social equality (for what it's worth) with Englishmen. No one is persecuted for being small and dark and speaking with a sing-song accent! Nevertheless a sort of colonialism does exist. The piece quoted above shows how the Welsh farming community was exploited to the profit of the Church of England.

Plans having taken place between planners and bureaucrats, instead of planners and people. The need is for a new structure—the village assembly or commune. The commune, in co-operation with planners, architects and representatives of building workers' associations, could decide how the village should grow, how its buildings, trees and the spaces between should be related; what materials should be used; what its detailed and general form should be. The area could be planned as a whole by the representatives of the workers' organisations, the village assemblies, and the towns that have surplus population.

The bureaucracy is incapable of planning our environment; we must do it ourselves. The immediate need is for organised resistance to bureaucratic vandalism based on direct action by village communities. There have already been isolated instances of housewives tying themselves to trees that enhance the landscape, preventing workers from cutting them down, destroying decades of growth in a matter of minutes. This, however, would only be a stop-gap. Village communities must make their own plans (there must be some planners and architects who care, and are willing to render their services voluntarily) to counter those of the bureaucracy. Every day bulldozers in fields and pens in offices are turning our countryside into a desolation. Time is short.

B.B.

tion, begin to put up candidates for elections or even to form armies. (Anarchists are not necessarily pacifists, but an anarchist army is difficult to visualise, although I believe something of the kind was tried in Spain.) Or become, as they sometimes do, racist. To make a religion out of the Welsh or Irish languages, or of having a black skin, is no more sense than making a religion out of the tongue of Shakespeare, or out of Norman or Saxon blood. Anarchists have many bitter experiences of the results of supporting, temporarily of course, the less evil government against the more evil (or what they at the time imagined to be the less or more). A Welsh republic would in all probability jail strikers and squatters, or those who demonstrated on their behalf, just as the English monarchy does.

Even the People's Democracy movement, which is closest to us in its attitudes, participated in the recent election in Ulster. All we can do is to point out the dangers of this kind of proceeding, while at the same time supporting all forms of non-governmental, spontaneous and libertarian popular action.

The original programme of Plaid Cymru, the Welsh independence party, put out after the Second World War, was near-anarchist. It advocated workers' control of industry. The demand for a Welsh parliament was, as it were, tacked on at the end, as a sort of afterthought. Welsh nationalists were also often ardent pacifists. But, as so often happens, the movement becomes more power-conscious as time goes on. The 'practical' men take over. 'Idealistic' or 'utopian' demands are put off to some indefinite future.

Perhaps this tendency is inherent in the very nature of all organisations. At all events it usually makes its appearance. We have to be on our guard against it always.

ARTHUR W. ULOTH.

SQUATTERS' HOTEL

MEMBERS of the Arts Lab, in Drury Lane have been attempting to obtain the use of an hotel which has stood empty for two years. Various attempts to get the premises on a monthly licence have failed; so ten days ago a working party entered the building and began to clear the debris of two years' neglect. Then on Friday, March 7, the police noticed and investigated and left. The situation at this stage was that an immediate occupation was necessary. About 50 people entered the hundred-roomed building and began to clear it. During the day the media man came and looked, the GLC sent its officials to ask if we knew that we were trespassing. 'Yes, we did.' 'Who is your leader?' 'Our who?' was the reply, 'we haven't one.' The spontaneity was beautiful. During Saturday the following notice was displayed on the street door.

HUMAN RIGHTS SQUATTERS
178 Drury Lane,
London, W.C.2.

This building has stood empty for two years. It is owned by the GLC but has now been taken over by those who need somewhere to live. There are still some unclaimed rooms—so if you've nowhere to live, come and take one—it's yours. The smell is due to milk which has been there for two years, but we are at present cleaning, disinfecting and painting the building.

IF YOU AGREE WITH OUR ACTION PLEASE SIGN BELOW
(17 signatures)

There are still some rooms to spare, so, if you haven't anywhere to live just go to 178 Drury Lane and claim one. It's yours provided that you clean it out. Since the Occupation it has become clear that the squatters need desperately a hard core of militants who are prepared to hold the place and fight if necessary. Also they need bedding, heating and various household goods. Help them to help themselves.

PETE POLISH.

