

resurgence

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WORKERS' ECOLOGY

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Dear Resurgence, Your open letter to Tony Benn in the last issue of *Resurgence* was like a red rag to a bull to someone wishing to bring together the Socialist and Ecology movements. You accuse Benn of going along with the existing capitalist power structure. But surely what Benn wants above all is to *change* this power structure; to transfer power from capital to labour. Until this transformation takes place it is unfair and unrealistic to expect Benn to adopt a no-growth policy as one of his political platforms. Until workers have control over their own destinies and through a system of radically democratised socialism can make such policy decisions for themselves any decision to end growth and consumerism would inevitably hit the ordinary working people the hardest of all. It is, after all easier to contemplate an end to economic growth from a comfortable middle class position or from the vantage point of a self-sufficient land-

holding, admittedly less comfortable but in its own way no less privileged.

It is worth remembering that Benn's Bristol constituency contains pockets of real poverty and deprivation. On one particular estate where 40,000 people live in council houses and high rise flats there is only one shopping centre, a street where the shops are so frequently vandalised that residents are afraid to use them. The alternative is a 70p return bus ride to the city centre. On this estate the comprehensive school has just suffered swingeing cuts imposed by the Conservative controlled Education Authority, cuts which particularly harm the academically least able children. If you were Tony Benn would you feel able to enter the homes of your constituents in this area to talk about an end to growth and consumerism and ask them to accept a fall in their living standards?

Certainly these issues must be debated, the nettle grasped,

STATE STAY OUT

Dear Resurgence, John Seymour's piece 'Farming as if People Matter' (May 1979) is an excellent, concise, and humane statement about the kind of agriculture that is consonant with human and community values.

At one point, however, Mr. Seymour seizes a 'supremely simple' idea which has exceedingly dark implications. That is his idea of state expropriation of farms from absentee owners.

Now the minute we concede to the State the power to come crashing in and take peoples' property, we have

conceded tyranny. If the power is conceded to the State to take from landlords and give to tenants, that same power may be used to take from some tenants and give to other tenants; to force tenants into collectives against their will; or to take from smallholders and give to corporations.

Land reform is admittedly necessary, but it can be achieved without the use of State expropriation. One simple device is a tax on agricultural marketings in excess of that produced from an efficient farm. In the States,

many studies have shown that for practically all products in practically all parts of the country, a family farm with no more than one hired man is an efficient productive unit. Tax, on a graduated scale, the production from farms significantly larger than this size, and those farms will gradually be divided into efficient family-sized farm units for purely economic reasons.

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