

The
Land *the* **and** *People*

BRITISH
UNION
AGRICULTURAL
POLICY
by
JORIAN JENKS

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TWO PENCE

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The British Union Policy for Agriculture

JORIAN JENKS

FOR at least sixty years Britain's agriculture has been going downhill. Since 1870, when the flood of imports first assumed formidable dimensions, we have lost no less than 6 million acres of ploughland, including 4 million acres of cereals. By no means the whole of this land has been converted into useful pasture, nor can increments in live-stock be said to compensate for the loss. Our sheep are actually fewer by 3 millions, and increases in cattle, pigs and poultry are more than offset by heavy imports of feeding-stuffs.

This tragic decline is not due to natural causes. Our land and our climate are still among the best in the world ; our agriculturists of all classes rank equally high ; and we can yet show some excellent examples of intensive farming. The blight which hangs over the countryside is the blight of persistent and deliberate neglect on the part of those responsible for our economic policy. No nation has a greater need of a productive agriculture ; no nation has made less effort to achieve it.

The excuses advanced for this deplorable attitude are palpable distortions of fact. Thus there is the glib statement that "we cannot feed ourselves," though no serious effort has yet been made to develop the full productivity of our soil, which expert opinion puts at fully double its present output. Again, it is said that people "cannot afford" to pay a fair price for their food, as if the poverty of consumers were the responsibility of producers. Actually the "cheap food" talk comes from vote hunting politicians rather than from the general public. And finally there is the extraordinary assumption that we can live only by selling manufactured goods to the rest of the world in exchange for its surplus foodstuffs, a dangerous assumption indeed at a time when there is a world-wide trend towards self-sufficiency.

The plain truth underlying these specious excuses is that money invested in foreign-trade and international finance exercises a dominating influence over politics. Those who would benefit from a regeneration of our agriculture far outnumber those who derive profit from the international money-system. But because the latter have financial power, and therefore political influence, their interests are given priority. To such depths has " democracy " fallen. Agriculture has been sacrificed ; not because " farming doesn't pay," but because its activities might interfere with the flow of tribute to Mammon.

THE COST OF NEGLECT

Economic decay cannot be localised. The decline of agriculture has affected, not only agriculturists, but the whole community. A "cheap food" policy is in fact a delusion.

(1) For several generations there has been a steady migration of farmers and farm workers from the land to the towns. Since 1921 England and Wales alone have lost nearly a quarter of a million farm employees, and the rate of decline is tending to increase. Since these migrants are forced to compete with urban and industrial workers, the effect on wage-levels and unemployment is obvious.

(2) In the towns themselves malnutrition exists to a degree which amounts to a public scandal in an allegedly prosperous community. Politicians boast that none need starve, but ignore the fact that much of the stale, preserved imported food on which many of our people are forced to exist is little more than " fill-

belly." An urban population, living as it does in unnatural surroundings, needs above all else an abundance of fresh, wholesome food to enable it to resist disease and attain full physical development. This it is denied by neglect of agriculture. The divorce from the soil is complete.

(3) The foreign trade on which our economic system is supposed to be based is crumbling away, leaving us the grim legacy of the Distressed Areas. Despite desparate efforts on the part of politicians and bankers, it can never be adequately restored, for the good reason that most of our former customers are now making for themselves the goods which they formerly bought from us. Even in the few markets which remain, the British worker is coming increasingly into competition with cheap Asiatic labour, competition which has been made possible by the export of British machinery and capital. Meanwhile, we have an ever-growing bill for imports, a bill which will become more and more difficult to meet.

(4) Instead of replacing our lost export trade with genuine domestic trade, we have acquired the habit of depending upon a series of " booms." These are artificially engineered by the financial machine as a source of profit to itself and as an outlet for its accumulated funds. They are but temporary and demoralising stimulants, which cannot be an adequate substitute for natural trade between town and country.

(5) We have become the most vulnerable nation in the world, both in the economic and military senses. In periods of abundance our producers are ruined by dumped imports ; in periods of scarcity, our consumers are held to ransom by speculators. A short world harvest, or a financial collapse, can bring us to the brink of starvation ; war with a major Power would soon push us over the edge. No Navy or Air-force, no matter how efficient and well-armed, can guarantee our food-supply so long as two-thirds of it must run the hazards of the seven seas and subsequently enter by a few bottle-neck ports. A government which undertakes the task of national defence without expanding home food-production is guilty of criminal neglect.

Is this then to be the fate of Britain, the Britain of Elizabeth and Victoria, of Drake and Nelson ? To degenerate slowly into a community of town-bred, under-nourished weaklings, a parasite nation dependent for its very existence upon the charity of international financiers, upon the goodwill and forbearance of other and more virile countries ? Or shall we realise in time that there is a way, Mosley's way, in which we can recover national health, security and independence, in short our true nationhood ?

PARTY FIRST OR BRITAIN FIRST ?

It must surely be apparent by this time that a great national problem such as this will never be solved by " democratic " methods. Under "democracy" as practised to-day, national interests are invariably subordinated to vested interests, while the public is bemused with a cloud of talk. M.P.s, whatever their own views or those of their constituents, are no more than party servants and must obey party discipline. The parties in their turn are subservient to powerful interests which are in no sense representative of the people.

The Conservative Party, having been in the distant past closely identified with the land and agriculture, still considers that it has a hereditary right to the rural vote, though it now does nothing to earn it. On the contrary, its efforts to preserve the sanctity of the financial system and to salvage the wreckage of our former foreign trade have postponed for another decade the regeneration of agriculture.

Those who delude themselves that the Conservative party has an agricultural policy should remember that there is £3,800,000 of British capital invested abroad, and that the interest on this huge sum is paid very largely in agricultural commodities. A striking example is the case of Argentina where approximately £600,000,000 of British capital has been sunk, almost one-sixth of the total amount invested abroad. Payment is made almost entirely in agricultural products—grain and meat. Another £600,000,000 of British

capital is split up among the other Latin States of South America, from whom we are compelled, under the existing Financial-Democratic system to accept large quantities of agricultural products as interest on these loans.

The big financial institutions which are interested in these investments exercise a dominating influence over the Conservative party, and take very good care that it does nothing which might interfere with their profits, as represented by the inflow of agricultural imports. Very much the same is true of the Liberal party, which is still obsessed with the theories of international trade.

The Socialist party, once a reformist movement, is now too deep in the morass of internationalism to be capable of attacking domestic problems. It is almost wholly urban, and its more "advanced" members talk glibly of collectivising farming under a State bureaucracy, which is sufficient indication of the danger of looking to this quarter for an agricultural policy.

If there were no alternative to the Money Dictatorship of the Conservative Right, but the State Dictatorship of the Socialist Left, the outlook would indeed be dark. But there has now arisen, under the leadership of Sir Oswald Mosley, the new ideal of the British Union, a creed which rejects internationalism as a basis of social and economic policy, and asserts uncompromisingly that peace and prosperity can be attained only by minding our own business and working out our own salvation. It seeks to break the power of Finance, but will uphold the principle of individual enterprise so long as it conforms to the national interests. Its aim is to create a self-reliant Britain within the frame work of a self-sufficient Empire.

Such a policy cannot be applied so long as we depend upon foreign imports and foreign markets. Its fulfillment therefore necessitates a very considerable expansion of agriculture, both as a source of food and as a market for other industries. The aim of the British Union is to double the output from our soil and increase by at least half a million the number of people employed upon it.

The difference between this attitude and that of the old parties is fundamental. Neither Conservatives nor Socialists (much less the Liberals) really desire a revival of agriculture, because the resulting expansion of output would seriously embarrass influential supporters with foreign investments and conflict with the theory of international trade to which they subscribe. Their agricultural policies are therefore mere appendages, furbished up at election-time in order to attract the rural vote, and then conveniently forgotten. The British Union alone sees agriculture in its true significance as the corner-stone of a national edifice which shall stand four square to all the winds that blow.

WHAT A REGENERATED AGRICULTURE CAN DO FOR BRITAIN.

Sir Oswald Mosley's contention that we can double the output of our agriculture has never been seriously challenged by anyone with first-hand knowledge of farming. There is ample scientific evidence that the resources of the soil are almost endless if intensive methods can be applied under the stimulus of a progressive policy. But it is not always realised how far this expansion will go to solve our more pressing national problems.

- (1) It will increase enormously the proportion of fresh home-grown food in the national diet, and thus place the national health on an altogether sounder basis.
- (2) It will remove our present alarming dependence on imported food, thus easing greatly our financial position and lightening the problem of national defence.
- (3) It will expand internal trade by at least £600 millions a year, a sum which will amply compensate for

any resulting loss in foreign trade, and in fact go far to make good our past losses in this direction. This substitution of secure home trade for fickle foreign trade will give all industries greater stability and make possible a progressive rise in the standard of living.

(4) It will create a healthy, permanent employment on the land for at least half a million more breadwinners, which will automatically mean employment in industry and transport for another half million. A million families can be lifted from the dole and given economic security.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

The steps by which this policy will be brought into operation by a British Union Government are as follows :—

- (a) Increased consumer purchasing power : i.e. a larger market.
- (b) Drastic control of imports : i.e. a secure market. for
- (c) Stable prices and improved distribution: i.e. an orderly market.
- (d) Industrial self-government to ensure fair-play between employer and employee, producer and consumer.
- (e) Special banking facilities to provide cheap capital
- (f) Better housing, wages and opportunities for farm workers.
- (g) Adequate machinery for conserving the land and ensuring its full utilisation,
- (h) A systematic policy of increasing the number of small family farms.

BUILDING UP THE MARKET

Whatever theorists may say, every practical man knows that the prime cause of agricultural depression is low prices ; i.e. the producer cannot earn sufficient income to cover his legitimate outgoings and fixed charges. The grossly inadequate prices which have characterised the present depression are due partly to the excessive inflow of foreign produce, but also to the gravely insufficient purchasing power of huge masses of consumers. Wages which appear adequate on paper are whittled down by high rents and rates, by fares to and from employment, and by other charges, until the only food which can be bought is cheap and imported stuff. Sir John Orr has estimated that nearly half the population has less than 8/- per head a week to spend on food. The existence on a large scale of these low-standard incomes keeps down agricultural prices everywhere, even in areas where poverty is said to be non-existent.

Politicians who cannot see beyond the next election, and economists who are not themselves producers, always advocate forcing down prices to meet the lowest incomes, i.e. a " cheap food " policy, which is incidentally a " cheap labour " policy. Mosley advocates raising the lowest incomes to meet a fair level of prices, i.e. a " high wage " policy. Such a policy is not feasible under a system of price-cutting, international competition and restrictive finance, but will be perfectly possible when we break out of that vicious circle and concentrate on developing production and stimulating consumption within the Empire, beginning, of course, with Britain itself.

When the farmer is told that consumers cannot afford to pay him a fair price for his produce, he should reply that an economic system which denies honest people the right to enjoy the fruits of their own soil is fundamentally rotten. There is an ample market for all that our land can produce, as soon as the financial machine is diverted from selfish and speculative use to the all-important task of raising the national standard of living.

SAFEGUARDING THE MARKET

It is little use expanding the market if it is still at the mercy of importing interests. Producers will gain nothing if the additional purchasing power is dissipated abroad, nor, in the long run, will consumers either. Under a British Union government imports will be regulated to a purely secondary position, and will be regulated strictly in conformity with Home production. Farmers will thus be encouraged to produce all they can, and it should be possible, within four or five years, to replace foreign imports altogether.

The Empire countries will naturally receive preferential treatment, and effective steps will be taken to remove the causes of the present deplorable competition between Home and Empire producers. This competition arises from the fact that the Dominions labour under a heavy burden of debt to the financial system, and when that system, through its deflationary policy, drastically reduces the market value of their produce, they must enormously increase their shipments in order to meet their obligations. The Dominions have, in fact, been forced into a policy of dumping which is as harmful to them as it is to us.

The British Union is determined that Britons, wherever they live, must no longer be the slaves of usury. With the elimination of foreign imports, and a substantial increase in purchasing power, it will be our policy to offer the Dominions an assured market at prices which will enable them, not only to pay their way without hardship, but to purchase increased quantities of British goods. On the other hand, they will be required to regulate their shipments in conformity with Home production, and to spend in this country all that we pay them for their produce. There is no reason to suppose that this policy will not be entirely acceptable to our kinsmen overseas, who are, in fact much more loyal than our own politicians to the principle of " Home producer first, Empire second, and foreigner last."

ORGANISING THE MARKET

It is obvious that agriculture needs a marketing organisation in order to facilitate the flow of produce to the consumer and to ensure that the producer gets his full share of the consumer's price. But it is also obvious that to tie producers down to an elaborate marketing system without taking effective steps to ensure that the market is secured to them is like setting them to make bricks without straw. When the " National" government persuaded farmers to adopt the marketing schemes, it undertook to impose effective control on imports ; and its persistent refusal to carry out its own part of the bargain has done more than anything else to check the progress of co-operating marketing.

A British Union government, having restored to farmers the market which is theirs by right, will encourage them to organise it on sound lines for the benefit of consumers as well as themselves. Recognising the difficulties which farmers necessarily will experience in establishing such such machinery for themselves, it will take an active part in creating a system of depots for the grading, packing and processing of produce, these depots eventually to be handed over to organisations of producers, under the Agricultural Corporation. It will, moreover, be prepared, if necessary, to fix the price of staple commodities in accordance with ascertained costs of production in order to give the industry greater confidence and stability. This will be achieved by the accumulation of large Government stocks, which will not only be a means of stabilizing prices but will serve as a valuable safeguard against starvation in time of war or national emergency.

THE AGRICULTURAL CORPORATION

The Corporate State may be defined as industrial self-government within a framework of national planning. Agriculture, therefore, will be encouraged to create an Agricultural Corporation fully representative of farmers and farm-workers, together with qualified persons representing consumers and the State. Provided that it does not act contrary to national interests, the Corporation will have full powers to plan production,

regulate the flow of supplies, determine farm rents and farm wages, and advise the government on all matters connected with agriculture and food supplies.

"Democratic" politicians either assume or pretend that the farmer is an incompetent person who cannot be trusted to understand his own industry, which is therefore being handed over in installments to the dictatorial control of Whitehall officials and politically-appointed commissions of lawyers, accountants and company directors. The British Union, on the other hand, believes that agriculturists know their own business best, and that the Government's task should be to create conditions under which the industry can adequately fulfil its function as the main source of food for the people.

AGRICULTURAL CREDIT

Agriculture is perhaps fortunate in that it has never become the plaything of High Finance, but for this very reason it has been consistently starved of capital. The joint-stock banks are nowadays highly-centralised institutions interested almost exclusively in securities, and make little attempt to supply the rather special credit needs of agriculture. Merchant credit is not wholly satisfactory, and has in any case been carried to a point which is dangerous to merchants and farmers alike.

It will be the policy of a British Union government to create a State-guaranteed Agricultural Bank and thus divert to our own countryside some of the national savings which in the past flowed abroad to finance competitors. This Bank will relieve the present burden of agricultural debt and provide fresh capital for development at low rates of interest. It need hardly be added that the stabilisation of prices will greatly improve the farmer's credit position.

THE FARM WORKER

By reason of the skilled and arduous nature of his calling, the farmworker is fully entitled to better conditions, better prospects, and a higher status. Under the Corporative system he will elect his own representatives to the Agricultural Corporation, where they will take an active part in the councils of the industry. In the determination of prices for farm produce, full allowance will be made for the payment of wages more in keeping with those ruling in other industries for skilled work.

Rural housing is becoming an urgent problem, and will be treated as such by a British Union government, a good proportion of new houses in country districts being reserved for land workers. The Socialists make much talk about " tied cottages," but it is obvious that convenient accommodation for stockmen is an essential feature of farm-equipment and must be under the control of the farmer. The real remedy lies in better wages and a more liberal supply of cottages, both on the farms and in the villages.

CONSERVING THE LAND

The land of Britain bears silent witness to the decay of agriculture and the short-sightedness of our rulers. Huge areas lie wholly or partly derelict, evidence of neglected drainage is to be seen everywhere, and many priceless acres have been wantonly sacrificed to the speculative builder. It is significant that the townsman has ceased to regard the countryside as a source of national wealth and the workshop of a big industry, and now looks upon it rather as a large public park.

Under a British Union government, drastic steps will be taken to check speculation and the misuse of land, and to divert building operations as far as possible to soils of low natural fertility. Landowners will be

expected to fulfil their original functions as rural leaders, maintaining their estates in good order and actively encouraging good farming on the part of their tenants. To this end they will be relieved of tithe and other discriminatory forms of taxation, and will be given access to cheap capital for purposes of agricultural development. But the Government, as trustees for the nation, will not tolerate neglect or abuse, and will take powers to acquire land at valuation wherever such a procedure seems necessary.

Effective steps will also be taken to cope with the hosts of rabbits, pigeons, rooks and other vermin which now levy a heavy toil on our fields and which are often harboured by those who do not live by agriculture. The Agricultural Corporation will maintain a corps of expert vermin-destroyers, equipped with up-to-date apparatus, who will clear each district systematically.

THE LAND ARMY

Before agriculture can be restored to full productivity there is an immense amount of work to be done in clearing, draining and otherwise improving land which has fallen out of condition, thus restoring it to its proper status as a national asset. This task will not merely create employment ; it will provide an opportunity for urban and industrial workers to regain contact with the soil.

It is therefore proposed to create a Land Army recruited on a voluntary basis from those who wish to fit themselves for life on the land. Detachments of this Army will be stationed in standing camps wherever reclamation work is to be done. Contract work will be undertaken for farmers and landowners, but the main task will be the conditioning of land taken over by the State for settlement purposes. After a period of service, the men will be found permanent employment on the farms, or, if they have shown the necessary aptitude, will be assisted to acquire holdings of their own.

RE-PEOPLING THE LAND

The object of the British Union agricultural policy is not merely to improve the lot of existing agriculturists, though these naturally have first claim to consideration. It seeks to restore to the land at least a portion of the population which has been drawn from it by excessive urbanisation.

Brighter agricultural prospects, plus an improved status for the worker will soon lead to an increase in employment on the farms : and this process will be encouraged, if necessary, by a system of subsidised apprenticeship. But there must also be a special effort to increase and encourage that singularly valuable class of agriculturist, namely the yeoman, or small working farmer, tilling his own land with the aid of his family.

Land-settlement of recent years has had an unhappy record, owing partly to mismanagement, but mainly to lack of agricultural policy. When the old hands have to struggle for existence, new men cannot be expected to succeed. But with stable prices and an assured market, the task can be undertaken with much greater confidence. Areas of suitable land will be bought, conditioned, equipped and subdivided into family farms, priority being given to applicants who are farm-workers or have had Land Army experience. As far as possible, each holding will be self-contained, but each group will have a centre in charge of an experienced group-leader. From this centre settlers will be able to obtain the use of breeding stock, transport and the large cultivating implements, at cost. It will also serve for the distribution of materials purchased in bulk, and for the collection and packing of produce.

WHO WILL DO IT ?

National health, national prosperity, and national security alike demand an expanded and re-invigorated agriculture. Without it, our economic structure is hopelessly out of balance, and the longer we delay reconstruction the nearer we drift to bankruptcy and chaos. Foreign trade is a will 'o the wisp ; "boom" economics are a fool's paradise. Must we wait until another and worse crisis lays bare the hollow artificiality of our present position ?

Party politicians have one eye on the City of London and its foreign investments, the other on the next election and its catch phrases ; they cannot, and will not, face the situation. Only a movement which is pledged to break the power of international finance and restore to Britain her lost economic independence can tell the people the truth and re-awaken the spirit of national endeavour.

The Land is the heritage of the People, their only sure defence against privation and want. Financial Dictatorship has allowed it to decay, because bigger dividends could be found elsewhere. Conservatism is the servant of Finance ; Socialism has capitulated to it. Only the British Union challenges it in the name of the People, and only Mosley can restore the Land to the service of the People.