

*A New Deal for Rural Britain*, by Alan Butt Philip, Roger Pincham and Paul Tyler. (40p from Liberal Publications Department, 9 Poland Street, London W1).

THIS BOOKLET, written by three prominent Liberals, manages to survey the problems of rural Britain in a fairly comprehensive way despite its modest size and price. The authors are not claiming they have produced a blueprint, but rather a series of ideas on how our country society should develop. Their suggestions — more local self-help, a halt to the destructive centralisation of public services in the larger towns at the expense of the villages, parish buses, less rigid planning controls — are all echoed in the recently published **Rural Recovery: Strategy for Survival** (Association of District Councils, 25 Buckingham Gate SW1, £1.50).

Both papers suggest adjustments to the existing system which they hope will produce the desired results. Neither tackle the question of the fundamental economic reforms that would turn the revival of village life from methods which at best seem a kind of artificial respiration into a natural organic recovery. Indeed, it would not be possible in such brief papers, although **A New Deal for Rural Britain does** point a finger in the right direction when it suggests that site value taxation could cause derelict or under-used urban land to be more fully developed, and so spare valuable agricultural land from the concrete jungle. It also suggests that for the foreseeable future "agricultural land in productive use would be exempt from site value taxation, as this could only be applied to agriculture if the tax system were completely overhauled so as to relieve the farmer of the greater part of his

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## SEARCHING FOR A NEW DEAL FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE



*'The earth does not belong to man, but man to earth'*

present tax burdens." Of course, as far as tenant farmers are concerned, there would be no extra tax because SVT would be borne by the owners of the land. For owners (and these are increasingly pension funds and insurance companies) it would be a different matter. However, the booklet does prompt one into suggesting a thorough-going examination of the present tax system to find out which taxes could be cut, and in what sequence, in order that SVT can be brought in. A development of the proposals suggested in **The Chance to Change** (Economic Study Association,

12 Addison Avenue, London W11, 50p) might be in order.

Another book about rural life, but from the view of a farmer, has been published under the title **Just Where We Belong** (Michael Joseph, £4.95). Written by Humphrey Phelps, a Gloucestershire farmer and son and grandson of Gloucestershire farmers, he is an old-fashioned mixed farmer and proud of it. Indeed he says that our modern system of farming is mistaken, and one suspects he looks forward to the day when continuous corn-growing, the burning of straw and the ever-increasing doses of chemicals are abandoned for dung and the rotation of crops.

A quotation from Edward Thomas on the first page: "The earth does not belong to man, but man to earth," and shrewd observations throughout the book show an awareness of the problems of the land as acute as any theoretician. No solutions are offered but this gentle book, pleasingly illustrated with drawings by Brian Walker, particularly in the asides from stories of day to day life in a farming community, indicates that the threats to farming today are real, are appreciated and that men are actively looking for a solution."

## ORGANIC FARMING IN THE ORIENT

*Farmers of Forty Centuries*, by F. H. King (Rodale Press, £4.75), is a classic study of the organic farming methods used for generations in China, Korea and Japan. First published in 1911, this reprint, with nearly 250 pictures, is a massively detailed examination which merits our attention, although whether the methods used in an entirely different climate on lands the other side of the world can be related to our present-day needs is a matter for the specialist to decide.

Readers of *Land & Liberty* will be more interested in Dr. King's remarks on land tenure systems and taxation. These tend to be mostly passing references, but a few figures from Japan show the extent of the rent burden that tenant farmers bore. A peasant farmer who owned his own land

would receive from his paddy fields a crop income of \$55 an acre, out of which he would pay taxes of \$7.34 and labour and expenses of \$36.20, leaving him a net profit of \$11.46. A farmer who rented land would be hard put to make any profit at all. The statistics show rents for paddy fields averaging between \$24 and \$28 an acre, which leaves the tenant farmer no profit above his subsistence wages. In practice this meant that women and children had to do subsidiary work "to piece out the meagre income and to meet the relatively high taxes and rent."

Dr. King draws no conclusions on the subject, but merely makes this aside about family life: "If the burdens have been heavy, each has made the other's lighter, the satisfaction fuller, the joys keener, the sorrows less difficult

to bear."

That may have appeared to be so. But history tells us that one of the countries being discussed had a bloody revolution that wiped out the private landlord, another was partitioned by a civil war and Japan shook off the old system to adopt a more western-oriented economy. None of them really learnt the truth about land values, who creates them or how they should be divided—although the Chinese in some of their communal settlements seem to be stumbling towards some understanding of the matter. But Dr. King's book is more concerned with farming methods than it is with economic justice, and will be of more interest to the agricultural historian than it will be to the political scientist.

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