

Fresh country air

WHEN people learn that Sir Richard Body is a farmer who has sat as Conservative M.P. for the mainly rural constituency of Holland-with-Boston since 1966, they tend to visualise him as a typical NFU-type protectionist, with a pretty hard-nosed attitude to environmental matters. All this is completely wrong.

He is as good a free trader as anyone in the House of Commons, and vastly better than most; while his sensitivity to "green" matters is acute. Not only is his heart in the right place, but his mind is there as well, and the intellectual content of all his writing is impressive.

Red or Green for Farmers is the third and latest book to come from this remarkable man. It covers a wide field of agricultural economics, but its most original feature is a stirring presentation of what might be called the environmentalist case for free trade.

Agriculture has shown astonishing, and sometimes paradoxical,

• ROY DOUGLAS reviews
**RED OR GREEN FOR FARMERS. Richard Body. (Broad
Leys Publishing, 164pp; £3.95)**

features since the Second World War. The man-in-the-street has little doubt that farmers have prospered exceedingly since 1945, and anyone who visits a country town on market day can easily locate the leading farmers in the best hotel, where their presence is marked by large, expensive cars.

And yet in the same period the number of farmers has dropped from 500,000 to 185,200. If agriculture is such a good thing to be in on, why have so many people abandoned it? In this connection the author develops what posterity may choose to call "Body's Treadmill". Roughly, the "Treadmill" works like this.

For various reasons, some patriotic, some based on a curious kind of economic thinking and politically cynical in the extreme,

vast sums of taxpayers' money have been thrown into agriculture. This process began during the 1940s as government policy, and has been extended with a vengeance in the last decade and a half under the EEC. Some of this money has been paid in subsidies, while much of it has been pumped into research. Trade barriers imposed by the EEC have greatly restricted non-European competition.

Grain output has increased enormously. "On land that grew seventeen hundredweight before the war . . . today three tons are likely to be harvested." Furthermore, land which once could only be used for grazing now supports arable crops, largely because of the fertilizers and pesticides applied to them. The production of wheat has gone up sevenfold and barley fivefold.

If people produce more of something then (surprise, surprise!) down goes the price. The large farmer can increase production by using the various highly expensive devices and substances which agricultural technology set at his elbow.

The small farmer, with limited land and limited capital, cannot do this, and eventually goes out of business. His holding is added to the many acres of the big farm.

The big farmer, with easy access to the ear of government, is also able to get various kinds of financial support from public funds, or at the expense of the consumer.

All this sets up pressure for more research into ways of increasing agricultural productivity, and so the treadmill began to turn again, and ever faster.

SOME OF the agricultural re-
LAND & LIBERTY

'Empty' action

A CAMPAIGN to force empty housing back into use has been launched in Britain.

A Bill is being presented to Parliament to endorse the idea of a register of all empty properties.

Local authorities would be given powers, called Empty Property Use Orders, to bring the houses back into occupation.

Said Lord Scarman, President of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless: "The existence of empty property on a massive scale is an insult to all homeless and badly housed people — a virtual smack in the eye."

• Owners of houses in Britain do not automatically pay tax on property that is unoccupied.

Meanwhile, London's

"dossers" — homeless people who sleep rough in the streets — have discovered that their favourite night-spots are being rented out.

They now pay rent for a guaranteed "skip" — sleeping space — in one of the most sought-after areas, the concrete cavern beneath the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, on the South Bank.

Racketeers are receiving between £3 and £10 for five to seven days' stay. One Irish dossier said: "It was only a matter of time before someone started to do this sort of thing. The site is very clean and dry."

Frank Forino, operations director of the South Bank Board, which administers the entertainments complex, said: "We are well aware that there is extortion by some of the tramps."

"Needless to say, we find it quite appalling that the housing problem in London has come to this."

Michael Carroll, the manager of a London hostel for vagrants, lamented: "Even for a dossier, the streets of London have been set at a premium for those who can afford a little peace and quiet. Isn't it absurd that this kind of extortion should hit even the destitute?"

search has produced beneficial results. New strains of crops with better yields per acre are from most points of view a boon.

Other results are vastly less beneficial. The World Health Organisation estimates that 50,000 people a year die of acute pesticide poisoning. Nobody knows, or can know, the long-term effects of pesticides.

Tests on laboratory animals whose life span may be a couple of years or so tell us nothing about the effects of chemicals on people who ingest them over half a century and more.

Even substances which once seemed completely harmless are constantly being shown to produce appalling results when consumed over a long time.

The essentially artificial pressure for greater productivity at all costs has extended to livestock farming, with scant regard to the welfare either of the stock or of the customer. So it becomes common to have five or six battery hens living in a cage 20 x 18 inches, or for sows to be "prevented . . . from turning round or even doing anything except standing up and lying down again for four months at a time". Enjoy your eggs and bacon!

At various times and in various countries, veal calves and chickens have been supplied with diethylstilboestrol which can



• Richard Body

advance the age of puberty in girls to six or even five, and feminise boys. Hormones and related substances, and also antibiotics, continue to be injected or fed to the animals which people eventually eat.

At the same time, "Body's Treadmill" produces fearful consequences for our environment. The loss of wetlands, downlands, heathlands, woodlands, hedges, moorlands and ponds which have been destroyed over the last 40 years in the interests of agricultural productivity – and ultimately at the taxpayer's expense – has been catastrophic for the plants and animals which live there, and for every human being who seeks pleasure and relaxation in the countryside.

Agricultural chemicals seep into our water supplies. Not so many years ago, people thought that nitrates from fertilizers were harmless in all but gigantic doses;

now we appreciate that they can all too easily be converted into nitrates, which readily produce carcinogenic substances.

It is vital to remember that all this has not come from the workings of the "free market" at all. It is the result not of too little government action but of too much. The incentive for farmers to increase their productivity has been there since the Neolithic Revolution; but it is only in quite recent years, when vast sums of taxpayers' money began to be thrown at agriculture, that the sort of trouble which this book describes so lucidly began to appear.

IS THE analysis complete? No, I fear not. The land problem has not been properly discussed. The ruin of the small farmer and the desecration of our countryside is certainly in part the fault of iniquitous agricultural policies stemming from British governments and from the EEC; but it is also to a very large extent the effect of our land system.

Until we introduce land value taxation we shall not solve the problems which that process has brought in its train.

One day, I hope, Dick Body will apply Georgist economics in their totality to the problems of agriculture. The result would be a masterpiece of the first order.

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an experiment will be conducted in the near future – for example, in Estonia – where a new system of taking into account all the factors of production will be adopted with payments for all the resources utilised in production."

So Karl Marx's central principle – the workers must collectively own the means of production (in other words, the State must continue to direct its use, which is the source of Russia's major economic problems) – must continue to apply. This reveals a contradiction in the *perestroika* programme which must be confronted, if the reforms are to have any long term benefits for the people of Russia.

If the Politburo fails to deal with this contradiction, Western exporters can breathe easily. But if Mikhael Gorbachev can put the Marxist philosophy behind him, our manufacturers had better watch out in the bazaars of the world, for the Russians will be coming . . .

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ANNUAL NORTH AMERICAN GEORGIST CONFERENCE

The Council of Georgist Organizations holds its 8th Annual Conference from Tuesday July 26 to Sunday July 31 at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia.

The host organization is the Atlanta Chapter of Common Ground, headed by Mary R. Davis as President.

The program includes speakers on Georgist philosophy, reports on Georgist action, annual banquet, and extracurricular activities including a Shakespeare festival and a tour of Atlanta. For additional information, contact Council Chairman Robert Clancy or Secretary Mark Sullivan at 121 East 30th Street, New York, NY 10016.