

Letters

LAND AND THE COMMUNITY

SIR, — Readers of LAND & LIBERTY will recognise that the idea of "stewardship" or "trust" with respect to land and natural resources is natural and fundamental. In fact this idea was expressed, one way or another, in early land-holding practices. With the passing of centuries, the idea of stewardship of land was all but lost. Private ownership of land is now considered an inviolable right by those people who can afford title to such property.

This comparatively modern system of land tenure has become a major source of social and economic inequity; land being increasingly translated into corporate ownership, has frequently lead to misuse and over-exploitation. The ecological and social problems that have arisen as a result of this tendency are amply documented.

Those of us who are concerned over the damage to natural systems which industrial man has caused, and are anxious to take practical steps to improve the situation by exemplary action, find that we are almost powerless to do so since individual ownership invariably demands the highest economic use which is not always the best social use. In so far as the introduction of land-value taxation would cheapen land and make it more widely available for use, we cannot but support it; but the ecological crisis is already with us. Legislative changes take time, and a do-it-yourself approach could complement political activity while increasing its chances of success.

The Community Land Trust represents an effort to fulfil this need by creating an alternative to existing practices of landholding, which creates a sense of stewardship of the land. A Community Land Trust is a legal entity which holds land for the benefit of all mankind, present and future. The aims of the Trust are to ensure that the land is used and cared for in ways which give the most benefit to present and future generations, and preserve and enhance its natural beauty and productivity; and to provide access to land for

those who will use it in accordance with these aims.

A great deal of work has been done in the last few months towards establishing a national Community Land Trust in this country. The legal form adopted is that of a non-profit limited company, which will seek charitable status. The organisation and administration will be carried out by a democratically elected Council, and there will also be a self-perpetuating body of Trustee Members, well-known individuals who will act as the guardians of land held in trust.

The Trust will act:

(a) as a "receptacle" for gifts and bequests of land from those who wish to ensure that their land continues to be used in accordance with the aims of the Trust.

(b) as a purchaser of land, using funds contributed by individuals and groups who wish to further the aims of the Trust.

(c) by granting long-term, secure leases to users of the land. The lessee would have security equivalent to ownership, only to be lost if he misuses the land within the terms of the aims of the Trust. The value of buildings and improvements on the land should accrue to the lessee in accordance with Henry George's philosophy.

There have been suggestions about the possibility of attracting investments from small savers, particularly those who at present have difficulty finding morally acceptable and socially useful organisations in which to invest.

There is much in common between the fundamental philosophies of the Community Land Trust and of land-value taxation.

The establishment of the Community Land Trust is the first major project of the New Villages Association, an organisation dedicated to decentralisation and localised production. Any reader who would like more information on the Community Land Trust, or is willing to give help in the form of professional aid (particularly in the fields of finance and land survey) is invited to write to me.

Yours faithfully,

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CLOBBERED

IT IS time for non-public companies to stand up to this Government who profess to wish to see a profitable private sector when in fact they are creating conditions which will destroy them.

This must be one of the reasons why we are suffering such a deplorable lack of investment in this country. If we are going to be clobbered by a wealth tax plus a gift transfer tax after we have paid our capital gains tax on top of surtax and income tax what the hell is the point in staying in business?

— Correspondent in the *Financial Times*.

EEC CORN LAWS

SIR, — To those of us who believe in Free Trade the shortage of sugar and increase in its price comes as no surprise.

Our concern is that economic conditions do not become as serious as they were in the "hungry forties" of the last century. Then it was the infamous "Corn Laws" — which by means of tariffs regulated the import of wheat as a method of maintaining prices — and the potato famine in Ireland which precipitated the crisis.

Today the same stupid concept prevails that trade can be regulated and protected by Government legislative measures. Through our membership of the Common Market sugar supplies have been manipulated so that producers and distributors of beet sugar, as opposed to cane sugar, are uniformly protected and the effect on consumers supposedly minimised by State subsidies.

The hungry seventies are inevitable unless we withdraw from the Common Market and open our ports to the free flow of food and goods from all countries.

Only by this means will supply and demand be equated, a realistic monetary exchange value achieved and the prosperity made possible by the accomplishments of science and research brought about.

Yours faithfully,

STEPHEN MARTIN
Fordingbridge, Hants.