10p

FOREWORD

Could Britain be self-sufficient in food production? "Of course we can feed ourselves:" Dr Kenneth Mellanby , former director of Monk's Wood Experimental Station. "Self-sufficiency is quite attainable " Professor Bernard Weitz, director of National Institute for Research in Dairying. "No doubt about it " Professor R. Riley, director of Cambridge University's Plant Breeding Institute. "We could produce, oh, double the amount of food without much trouble " Dr Norman Pirie, Rothampsted Experimental Station.

These experts and their fellow workers know that technical processes exist for abundant food production. Britain has the oldest capitalist economy in the world. Her agriculture has for centuries ceased to be based on subsistence. The movement to enclose the land enabled agriculture to be more productive. It also created an agricultural labour force dependent on the sale of its labour power on the market. No longer in Britain did men work their own land for their own food.

The expertise of centuries ought to mean that we have the ability to produce food in abundance. Yet under capitalism where profit is the guiding light, calling for self-sufficiency is like grasping for a straw in the wind. The government pays lip service (e.g. Government White Paper "Food From Our Own Resources") as a sop to the agricultural lobby but allows Britain's agriculture to be destroyed by the Common Market. The Working Class faces ever higher prices which have led to a decline in the nation's diet and the recurrence of the disease rickets.

How has this come about? Why do we want self-sufficiency? What is the present position?

THE POSITION NOW

British farming is the most efficient in Europe. It has undergone considerable changes since the Second World War. We produce more food than ever before. Even so, a few years ago we were the largest food importer in the world. Imports make up more than 50% of our total requirements.

We produce most of our meat, except bacon, and almost all our eggs, milk and poultry. We also produce practically all our potatoes, more than half our wheat flour and nearly half our cheese. We import two thirds of our sugar, while acreage of home-produced sugar beet is being cut, and import a high proportion of butter, oil, fats and margarine. Tea and coffee are imported. Our meat and poultry, though grown in Britain, is largely fed on imported feedstuffs. Imported fertilizers are used and energy is derived from imported oil. In 1975 our import bill was equal to the balance of payments deficit - £3500 million.

There has been great development since the war in agricultural engineering which had a £3 million turnover in 1938 but by 1972 it was £400 million, and it has a large export market. Over one billion pounds was spent on modern machinery and plant, compound feeds and fertilizers and sprays in 1972-3 alone. Farming net income rose in 1951-2 to a peak of £329 million, more than twice the pre-war level.

America plays a large part in our grain imports - used for animal feed and to produce the steam-sliced white bread that the British housewife is said to prefer. Also the Americans control 50% or more of the market in custards, potato crisps, cake mixes, pet foods and tinned milk.

The President of the National Farmers' Union in 1973 said: "If farmers were given their head (which in practice they never are) they could save another £750 million on imports annually within five years.

If this was done it would make us 80% self-sufficient in supplies of temperate foods."

Every week a thousand acres of farmland go out of production in Britain. While buildings and land stand empty in our cities, more and more good farming land is turned over to speculative building each year. In many cases the farmers are pleased to make easy profit by selling out to private builders, but this loss of productive land only weakens our ability to be self-sufficient in food. Ever since the enclosure of common land, the unit of agriculture has been increasing, the trend now being farms made up of several thousand acres owned by companies or individuals. Small units, however, especially dairy farms, are struggling for survival and many are selling out to big companies.

Comprehensive state control of agriculture began with the Agriculture Act of 1947. Government policy was to "promote a stable and efficient industry capable of producing such part of the nation's food as in the national interest it is desirable to produce in the UK and to produce it at minimum prices consistent with proper remuneration ...and an adequate return on capital invested". The last point is significant. The minimum price wasn't the lowest possible price but the price that ensured adequate return on capital, that which ensured a profit to producers and investors who were decreasing in number all the time.

The Act of 1947 may indeed have been a good thing since it encouraged production but it is still important to remember that it was the intervention of a capitalist state whose interests are opposed to ours.

The government's main ways of managing agriculture were to offer deficiency payments to producers and to set up Marketing Boards. Deficiency payments kept producers' profits high enough to ensure that food was grown and the Marketing Boards controlled the price, the amount produced and the method of distribution. The Milk Marketing Board was probably the best known of the Boards, though

they also existed for eggs, potatoes and hops. (The Milk and Egg Boards cannot exist within the EEC.)

Through these Boards food could be taken off the market and production curtailed. Potato planting for example was and still is closely supervised by the Board and farmers are fined if they plant more potatoes than the Board considers desirable.

No potatoes are grown specifically for animal feed in this country. We import a great deal of our animal feed but farmers are fined for planting "too many potatoes".

CONSEQUENCES OF JOINING THE EEC

The Common Market is a cartel for the benefit of monopoly capitalism which we voluntarily accepted by joining in 1973, with disastrous consequences for our agriculture.

In Europe the controls on agricultural production are the job of the Common Agricultural Policy, the food arm of the EEC. The CAP controls the distribution and production of food though one would be forgiven for thinking that it was interested in neither production nor distribution. It seems that it prefers to destroy production and to keep food in stores.

The CAP is the key to the Common Market and the member states have to agree on a common policy aimed mainly at controlling production and keeping profits high.

The EEC destroys productive capacity. It calls this "structural reform". There is a ban on investment for example in milk production in the nine member countries. This means encouraging the old-fashioned and inefficient milk farming methods. There are also grants available which encourage farmers to switch from dairy farming to something else. Grants are also given for slaughtering dairy cows. Egg production is also being curtailed by a decrease in the EEC laying flock. When any foodstuff appears to be in over-supply the Common

Market commissioners think of ways of limiting production. The criterion by which a commodity is judged to be in over-supply is of course profit - human need has nothing to do with it.

The intervention policy of CAP creates artifical shortages of meat, butter, milk, cheese, sugar beet, malt, cereals, wheat and fruit by amassing "mountains" of these foodstuffs from the consumer market to maintain the highest profit levels (see Table).

EEC "Food Mountains", December 1976

Product	1000 tonnes
Barley	210
Rye	160
Durum Wheat	370
Other Wheat	1400
Beef and Veal	360
Olive Oil	46
Butter	60
Milk Powder	1100

Cost of Storage	Million £
Cereals	95
Beef and Veal	210
Olive Oil	89
Wine	70
Dairy Products	570
Sugar	71

Fruit and Vegetables allowed to rot: £78 million

TOTAL COST 1976: £1736.8 million

Since entry into the EEC the British working class has suffered high food prices as a result of intervention buying, especially in beef and dairy produce.

The aim of the CAP is to maximise profits at the expense of British agriculture. In Scotland for example beef cow numbers are falling at the rate of 10% a year, breeding sow numbers by 3.5%, dairy cow numbers by 1.2%. Many farmers are planning further reductions. 40% of pig producers, 32% of beef producers and 20% of dairy farmers have declared their intention to reduce. The picture is similar in Wales. It is the small producer who has suffered and who plans to reduce capacity. Large concerns have done well out of the EEC. High prices suit them. Greater concentration and higher profits for the few is the order of the day. The people pay high prices as agriculture declines.

Since entry into the EEC the British government's method of controlling agriculture is considered illegal by the Common Market Commission. Any subsidies that are being paid to British producers will have to end. The Luxembourg Agreement between Britain and the rest of the community very kindly allows the government to phase out gradually the butter subsidy and thus cushion the effects of the EEC intervention prices which take complete effect in 1978. Further rises in prices will occur when the Green Pound is devalued. Intervention buying in beef and grain already takes place in Britain, keeping the price high.

The British pig industry is seriously affected by CAP. Monetary compensation, e.g. export payments on Danish pig products, has led to what appears to be dumping on the British market. "Dumping" usually means low prices and the destruction of an industry; in this case it means high prices and the destruction of an industry. Prices do not fall within the EEC. A government subsidy was introduced last year to assist producers. The subsidy is illegal according to the EEC. Producers probably slaughter as many pigs as possible to take advantage of the subsidy before it ends. Slaughterings are running at 41%, including sows. Since Britain joined the EEC the pig herd has decreased by 20% and the number of producers by 40%. Bacon has become a

luxury in Britain because of the high prices. Consumption has dropped by 25%. All this is taking place at a time when it can be shown that in terms of feed, labour and capital employed British farms are the most efficient in Europe.

The fishing industry in Britain is in decline. Over the last few years the number of distant-water fishing vessels has gone down, from 375 at the beginning of 1974 to 250 at the end of 1975. All the Labour Government's bluster over protecting "fishing rights" in Iceland's waters where we had no business being, was to cover up the breaches in the sovereignty of Britain's own territorial waters, which are part of our own EEC commitments. This is a "fishing pool" common to all nine countries, half of which consists of former British waters. Even an exclusive 12 mile zone around our shores will disappear in six years. This will lead to a further depletion of fishing stocks - particularly Scottish herring, already ten times less abundant than in 1960. In 1975 subsidies totalling around £9.5 million were handed out to maintain ships over 40 feet in length. Now this has been withdrawn adding to the disintegration of the fishing industry. There is an increasing influx of subsidised fish, imported mainly from Norway. Now Britain is trying to save the situation by imposing a 200 mile fishing limit of her own.

The trawler men have not been prepared to lie down in the face of this destruction. As we reported in the July 1977 issue of "The Worker" they held a successful and colourful demonstration bringing chaos to the Thames.

In all fields of British agriculture investment is being cut. A brand new multi-million pound butter making factory was closed in 1976 so that we can import EEC butter. Agricultural research has been curtailed. The National Institute of Agricultural Engineering which specialises in machinery and safety has lost 10% of its staff this year. Two horticultural experimental stations are to be closed.

This is the present position - agriculture and fisheries under attack, but as yet not destroyed. Now we will investigate whether self-sufficiency is possible.

Under capitalism the profit motive is the sole concern. Efficiency can be measured either by return on capital invested, i.e. profit, or output per acre. The latter method means greater investment which does not necessarily lead to profit. The fact that our farms are increasingly large concerns means that they are less intensively farmed than the smaller holdings on the Continent and in Eire. Gross product per acre is on average less. So though by one indicator British agriculture is very efficient, by another there is plenty of scope for improvement.

First, how did we manage during the last war? We had to depend to a very large extent on home production for food. The U-boats were very successful at inflicting heavy losses on convoys in the Atlantic. Even with the lack of machinery, skilled workers and time, by 1944, compared with pre-war production, there was a 90% increase in wheat, 87% in potatoes, 45% in vegetables, 19% in sugar beet; in addition, the output of barley and oats had doubled.

The Dig for Victory campaign increased the number of allotments from 800,000 to 1.5 million, making an area of 150,000 acres. The area of privately owned vegetable gardens is estimated to have reached 300,000 acres. And, due to rationing the overall health of the population increased, the poorer sections gaining most from the sharing out of food. The rations though limited had been carefully balanced nutritionally. The League of Nations handbook of 1944 said: "Such reductions in nutrition and standard of living as the war has necessitated have been balanced by a more equitable distribution of available resources and by a scientifically improved composition of diets." And all this at a time when hundreds of thousands were involved with wartime industrial production plus those at the war fronts.

At the present time, we import grain to feed our animals, which is an unnecessarily expensive way of feeding, and uses grain that could be used for human consumption. Why not exploit our natural resource - grass? Our temperate climate and high rainfall favour the growth of grass and in some parts it grows from March to November. Out of the

45 million acres of agricultural land there are 28 million acres classed as permanent pasture and rough grazing land. There is just not the investment for making these really productive. Two thirds of Britain's rough grazing is in Scotland. The potential there is fantastic. Even the 17 million acres of prime farmland are not safe from building programmes.

Efficient production and utilisation of grass is of great economic significance to British agriculture. Grass provides some two thirds of the total requirements in starch, and even more in protein, for all sheep, cattle and horses. It can be stored as hay and silage for winter feeding. Grass provides three quarters of the necessary nutrients at half the cost of concentrates. Britain is one of the most efficient producers of grass in the world, so let us use it fully.

There are many new methods of farming that are being investigated and some are being used to increase yields. As a task for some enterprising scientists there are about 80,000 known edible plant species - a mere 50 of them provide 90% of our food. Surely the others have myriad possibilities if human need rather than corporate interests redirected the experiments of the world's laboratories. An inordinate amount of research has been devoted to a) high carbohydrate high yielding varieties, b) climatic zones where they can be grown, c) fertiliser sensitive plants that can be protected from diseases only by chemicals. Proportionally there has been very little research on a) high protein crops like peas and beans, b) non-irrigated areas, c) biological, as opposed to chemical, increase of yeilds and blight prevention.

For example, alternate croppings with nitrogen-rich plants (like pulses) reduces dependency on chemical nutrients. Research at a British University has meant the production of an economically viable method of growing nutrient-rich algae on sewage for animal food. In the past tests have been unsuccessful due to incorrectly designed equipment and the high cost of building. Now the system is ready for mass production, but who will provide the financial backing? Not only is talent and technology wasted - natural products like manure could,

properly utilised, drastically cut our import bill for fertilizers used to enrich the land.

Fish farming has been with us for centuries, but only recently has it been developed from the egg stage to shop size on a large scale. Trout hatching is showing signs of being very successful. 3000 can be reared in one third of an acre. Fish are selected for breeding and the eggs stripped. A large quantity are exported as eggs. The fish are fed according to the numbers and weight and probable growth. After a few years the results are dramatic.

Before	After
½lb in 1 yr	1½lb in 1 yr
2½lb in 2 yr	7-8lb in 2 yr
7-8lb maximum	35-36lb in 4 yr

Other fish are now going to be tried on the same principle.

In the West of Scotland they are using the warm waters from nearby nuclear power stations to rear sea fish. Turbot has been the main species used and through selective breeding they have produced fish big enough for steaks in two years. Salmon has not yet been adapted for mass production due to its difficult life style, but Norway after ten years of research produces five hundred tons a year.

Another system being adopted for increasing yields is Hydroponics - growing plants without soil. These systems can produce plants of wide varieties and growing conditions. A cactus, usually associated with dry, hot climates can be grown alongside an ivy, usually preferring an opposite environment. Precise amounts of nutrients are added to running water contained in tanks. The glasshouses are beginning to adapt the system with tomatos as it leads to far greater uniformity of quality and a better flavour. It saves £1000 per acre as no annual sterilisation of the soil needs to be carried out. Self-contained systems are being developed which would produce a certain amount per week and can be adapted for home use. They need little attention - just adding the nutrients once a month. This would save a vast amount on import bills, but mass production seems very unlikely in the present climate.

Technology is useful, necessary and can indeed increase yields. But we must remember that our most important natural resource, indeed the source of all value , is a highly skilled, imaginative and enterprising working class. A skilled workforce is needed to maintain our agriculture but the skills of our farm workers are being undermined. In no other European country has farm labour productivity reached a point where the average annual output per worker is roughly equal with that of the average worker in industry as a whole. The National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers has helped to improve the very low wages. But the gap is still wide The number of full time workers is dropping much faster than that of casual and short time workers, i.e. an increasing process of casualisation of labour. Contract labour is increasing, leading to a general lessening of skills. Farmers deliberately refuse to recognise skill and experience by not accrediting farm workers as craftsmen. This saves on their wage bills.

Agriculture has been neglected because historically all the mechanical and chemical skill, and all the capital and energy were thrown into the struggle for trade profits and manufacturing pre-eminence. Once let the public interest and the public genius be concentrated upon the agriculture of Britain, and we shall soon silence the croakers who talk about the impossibility of the country feeding herself.

When a country is in the hands of the people after a successful revolution, socialism can produce abundance from land previously unproductive. China and Albania are excellent examples. They have terraced mountains, drained swamps, built impressive drainage and irrigation projects, so producing plenty for the populations to eat. Even tiny Albania is rapidly nearing self-sufficiency and only relies on a few imports, e.g. sugar. They have a thriving export trade. The people work out five year plans relevant to their particular areas, then an overall plan can be collected for the whole country. Both Albania and China are experimenting and implementing new techniques. Neither will tolerate being dependent on another country, as Russia wished

Albania to be, just a place to grow fruit for Russia's needs, deriving all her other needs from Russia.

Robert Blatchford (in "Merrie England", 1892) was very clear on the disaster of dependence for food on other countries and that the idea of one nation producing say certain industrial products and trading them for food was dangerous.

"Now, suppose we get at last to a state of things under which thirty six millions live on foreign grown wheat and none on wheat of home growth! Suppose our agriculture is dead; and we depend entirely upon foreigners for our daily bread! What will be our position then?

"Our position will be this. We shall be unable to produce our own food, and can only get it by selling to foreign countries our manufactured goods. We must buy wheat from America with cotton goods but first of all we must buy raw cotton with which to make those goods.

"We are therefore entirely dependent upon foreigners for our existence.

"Very well. Suppose we go to war with America! What happens? We should, in fact, be beaten without firing a shot. America need only close her ports to corn and cotton and we should be starved into surrender, and acceptance of her terms."

A concrete example of what Blatchford was warning against happened in 1973. The US had insisted in many an international meeting that it was prepared to supply greater and greater quantities of cheap soya, and foreign expansion was undertaken on this basis. The six original EEC countries, during 1961-72, increased their feed-mill capacities from 13 to 38 million tons - an impossible feat without soya beans.

Domestic stocks declined while the US exports increased, leading to prices on the Chicago futures market creeping up. US livestock raisers saw prices going up and did not take kindly to an increase in their own costs. Under pressure, the American government slapped an embargo on all soya bean exports in June 1973 "in order to examine its protein inventories". The result was pandemonium. Generalised speculative psychosis took hold and soya bean prices soared from $2 to $12 a bushel. British farmers slaughtered some of their

livestock simply because they could no longer afford to feed it. The embargo was removed 3 months later. At the end of the year it became clear that the fever was unwarranted. There was actually plenty of soya. It had never really been "scarce".

Dependence on foreign countries inevitably leads to a situation where we are at the mercy of those countries, who may curtail production or raise price at will. Food is used as a weapon to blackmail and dictate terms. No nation can be sound if its motive power is greed, no nation can be secure unless it is independent, no nation can be independent unless it is based on agriculture.

Historically, Britain has relied on exporting industrial goods to pay for the food it has to import. Yet the Common Market is also leading to the destruction of our industry. We will no longer be able to export industrial goods to pay for food. At the same time our agriculture is being destroyed. This is surely a lunatic policy which will lead to future starvation in Britain. The vote to stay in the EEC was a vote of shame. We must say 'No' to the EEC and 'Yes' to Britain.

THE STRUGGLE OF FARM WORKERS

By the latter part of the 14th Century serfdom had practically disappeared in England and the great majority of the population consisted of free peasant proprietors, who grew in numbers in the 15th Century. But the capitalist system presupposes a divorce between the workers and ownership of property through which alone their labour can become profitable; in this case the peasants from their land. The foundations for the Industrial Revolution were laid in the last third of the 15th Century and the first decades of the 16th Century, when large numbers of masterless proletarians began to come onto the labour market. This occurred due to the following main causes: (1) the break-up of the bands of feudal retainers; (2) the hunting of peasants off the land through enclosure and the usurpation of common lands (this mainly for sheep, leading to More's famous quote that sheep devour men); (3) the dissolution of the monasteries and the pillaging of ecclesiastical lands. After touring her kingdom Queen Elizabeth exclaimed:

"There are paupers everywhere!" Enclosures and the concomitant poverty reached their peak in the 18th Century and though manufacturing industry was developing rapidly, it only absorbed a proportion of the now dispossessed rural population. When the war with France ended in 1815 the artificial prosperity that war had endowed ended, and agriculture entered a period of decline.

In the 1830s mass agitation in the countryside came in the form of incendiarism. There was widespread burning of corn stacks, barns and even farm houses, but the secrecy of the workers led to few arrests. Many of these activities were attributed to a mythical character named "Swing", while in Wales some farmworkers dressed in women's clothing and destroyed toll gates on the roads, sending threatening letters from their folk hero "Rebecca". Though their actions throughout the country were multiform, the basic aims were singularly consistent: to attain a minimum living wage and end rural unemployment.

The primitive conditions of the countryside with its scattered settlements and largely illiterate population made organising trade unions a tough prospect. Many village unions were formed at this time, and the landowners fought back hard: six Dorset farmworkers, the "Tolpuddle Martyrs", were transported to Botany Bay in 1834 when they formed a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. But these unions remained in isolation until 1872 when the farmworkers of South Warwickshire found a leader from their own ranks. He was Joseph Arch, a skilled hedger and ditcher. Arch inspired great enthusiasm in his fellow workers, and under his leadership the movement grew in strength and organisation and in June 1872 the National Agricultural Labourers' union was founded, with Arch elected president.

As the Union grew in strength, there was widespread strike action and many local victories were won. But as the farmworkers grew more determined so did the landowners and in March 1874 a group of Newmarket farmers resolved that all union men should be locked out, and pledged to pay no more than 2 shillings for a 12 hour day. The lockout spread throughout the Eastern Counties and by July 1874 over

10,000 men were locked out. Thousands had been forced to emigrate. The Union came under severe financial strain. There was a lack of unity with some of the small local unions, and so defeat was conceded. Wages remained unchanged though many retained union membership.

The failure in the lockout and increasing inter-union quarrels further demoralised the farmworkers. From 1875 there was a succession of adverse seasons and agriculture entered a period of severe depression. At the same time large quantities of food were being imported from British colonies and from this time on successive governments adopted a policy of obtaining food from the cheapest source possible: this was always at the expense of British Agriculture and of course at no time has the working class seen cheap food in the shops.

Agriculture in Britain continued to decline until the outbreak of the First World War, many thousands migrated to the industrial towns and some emigrated. Membership of the national union sank so low that in 1896 it was disbanded. The only significant event in this period was that farmworkers secured the vote in 1884. In 1885 Joseph Arch was elected as a Liberal MP.

The spirit of farmworkers was by no means dead, and in 1906 the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers and Small Holders Union was founded, led by George Edwards. By 1910 this nucleus in staunch union country had grown to a National Union which continues to the present day under the name of the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers.

The age-old problem of organising the scattered workforce still exists; however, the principal problem facing the NUAAW is its involvement with social democracy. George Edwards followed Arch's example and became a Labour MP. Since the Second World War, when agricultural production steadily increased from the pre-war slump, farm workers appear to have relinquished their right of collective bargaining and withdrawal of labour in favour of the Labour Party. The folly of reliance on the Labour Party is reflected in the poor wages and conditions that farm workers still endure. Wages are still 15%

below the industrial average and agriculture remains one of the most dangerous occupations in the country. The only achievement that has been made since Joseph Arch's day has been the abolition of the feudal system of tied cottages - an act to give security of tenure to farm workers being passed by Parliament in 1976 after decades of broken promises by the Labour Party. But this law has had little effect in practice, there are just many more empty cottages in the countryside.

However, after the social contract which lowered their standard of living still further the NUAAW put in a claim in excess of the government's 10 per cent guideline and settled for 12-13 per cent. Farmworkers obviously have strength - they produce half of Britain's food. They should not only use this strength to fight for more wages, but also to save our agriculture for a self-reliant, socialist Britain.

CONCLUSION - SOCIALISM

The conclusion is that under capitalism and especially in this dying British capitalism there is no interest in being self-sufficient in food or in other industrial commodities. To save Britain from the destruction of its beautiful and fertile land, to preserve the skills and improve technology the only way is Revolution. Overthrow the bourgeois state and replace it with a socialist one, run by the working class for the working class. Only then will Britain be able to fulfil her potential in terms of food production, be able to flower in her full beauty.

Most people know the story of Robinson Crusoe. He was shipwrecked on an island and had to provide for himself. He raised corn, tamed goats, dried raisins, built himself a house, and made vessels of clay, clothing of skins, a boat and other useful things. If he had set to work making bead necklaces and feather fans before he had secured food and lodging you would say he was a fool. But what would you call him if he had starved and stinted himself in order to make bead necklaces and feather fans for some other person who was too lazy to work.

January 1978

BOOKS AND BOOKSHOPS

Bellman Bookshop, 155 Fortess Road, London NW5

Main Trend Books, 17, Midland Road, St.Philips, Bristol

Northern Star Bookshop, 18A, Leighton Street, Leeds

Brighton Workers Bookshop, 37 Gloucester Road, Brighton

Other CPB(M-L) pamphlets include:

Guerrilla Struggle and the Working Class, by REG BIRCH

The British Working Class and Its Party

Congress '76

London Murder

Ireland One Nation

The Definitive Statement on the Internal Polemic

For Education -- A Revolutionary Struggle

For an Industrial Revolution

White Collar -- A Myth Destroyed, a Class Made Stronger

For Health -- A Revolutionary Struggle

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