

A DEVELOPMENT TOO FAR?

Stuart Millson looks at the many threats to our greenbelt and countryside.

NEW TOWNS, mass-development, urban sprawl, the erosion of the greenbelt, farmland sold off to housebuilders – this is Tony Blair's legacy to the environment.

Since New Labour came to power in 1997, we have witnessed a massive shift away from planning controls and countryside preservation in favour of Barratt-type housing, major road schemes and a “blank cheque” for the suburban superstores. Yet it might be worth remembering that this merciless and unthinking process of development actually began a year earlier – under the supposedly pro-greenbelt, “middle England” Tories.

A Major mistake John Major fired the starting gun in the race to pour concrete over the greenbelt and countryside when he announced that 4 million new houses would have to be built between 1996 and 2014. The developers were already well ensconced within Whitehall and various local authorities, yet there seemed to be plenty of opportunity for local conservation groups and individuals to challenge the housebuilding juggernaut. For example, back in the 1990s there was a perfectly serious plan under consideration to link the city of Gloucester and the town of Cheltenham in one huge conurbation. Since the 1960s and 70s, Gloucester had already been gradually expanded by the building of large estates. The idea was to maintain the momentum in the direction of Regency Cheltenham.

The much-respected Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) was involved in the battle to prevent the hybrid “new city”, and the plan was eventually abandoned. Thanks to the ideals of local planning, local involve-

ment and local councils listening to serious objections, the greenbelt did at least have some chance of survival. But today, the Government is intent upon diluting these vital channels and procedures. The impending creation of regional assemblies for England (areas which, incidentally, bear a curious resemblance to an EU scheme to break us down into little local statelets) will dissolve the existing consultation procedures at a stroke. Instead, the regional bodies (so far *completely* unelected) will respond to a Whitehall “strategic plan” for housing, and will implement it accordingly. We can only wonder how the anti-conurbation protest groups in Gloucestershire would fare today.

Unthinking development In its West Midlands heartland, the Freedom Party has been active in opposing unthinking development. Naturally, most people accept the need for *some* new housing, but how much of this is a response to real, organic change and actual need? In the Wormbourne district, the social engineers have been at work, trying to push the overspill from Wolverhampton into a suburban and village environment – often with disastrous consequences.

The provision of “social housing”, once a noble ideal, has now become associated with the importation of social *problems* – with policy being fuelled by the objectives of the Social Services departments, rather than the needs and feelings of local people. And few can continue to ignore what must now be the biggest cause of the housebuilding/urbanisation process: unrestricted and unmanaged large-scale immigration into the United

Kingdom – in particular into the cities of England.

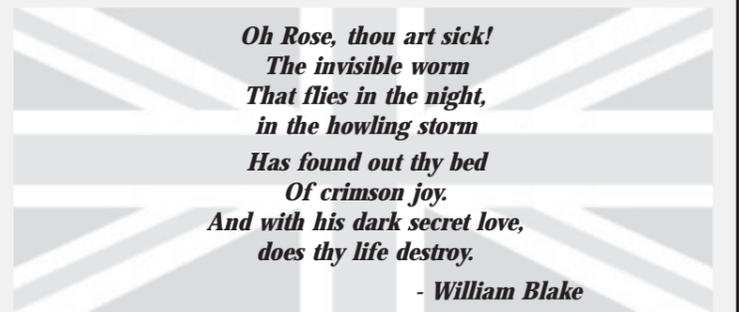
‘Punished and anonymous landscapes’ As cities become more crowded, less cohesive and more prone to social problems, so the flight from urban areas grows. People – quite understandably – want to move away from drifting gangs of youths, decaying public transport and the seemingly unstoppable crime rate, and so they make for the hard-pressed greenbelt. The cities, meanwhile, gradually become grim, run-down and totally denatured, and quite unable to regenerate themselves – the very impulse needed to attract people back. The writer and conservationist David Lovibond had the measure of it a decade or so ago when he described “the punished, anonymous landscapes of our inner cities”, and the grave threat which major demographic change posed to our remaining countryside and greenbelt.

Today, New Labour's policy on population change, “in-migration” (i.e. the movement of people from one part of the country, or area, to another) and immigration is exposed for all to see. Mr. Blunkett seems to operate on the principle that nine people can be easily and happily squeezed into a Mini! As we all know, this does not – and can never – work. The time has come for a radical rethink of our whole approach to these issues.

Unless we can halt the process of mass-development, make our cities habitable for civilised people once again, and achieve “zero immigration” within five years, we may have to say “farewell” to the old image of England's green and pleasant land.

Party of the nation?

As the Tory top brass expresses its embarrassment at being British, Peter Gibbs offers a glimpse into the heart of a party which has cast aside its national inheritance.



ON SATURDAY 25th October, right-wing Tory MP Andrew Rosindell was speaking to Conservative Party members in Beckenham, Kent. Mr. Rosindell expressed his concern that the Union Jack was no longer displayed at Tory Party conferences, and that the patriotic songs, such as the evergreen *Land of Hope and Glory* which once concluded this event, were banned. The MP also informed his audience that the Tories' selection process for candidates has substantially changed. Amazingly, a PPC is no longer asked for his or her opinions. Instead, they are submitted to a range of psychological tests. This probably explains a lot.

At the time of the IDS confidence vote, it seemed that the top brass were falling over themselves to appeal to *Guardian*-thinking. Not content with alienating their grassroots supporters under Duncan Smith, Michael Howard turned up the pressure in the Tory war to purge the party of its Britishness. Howard proclaimed: “I am the son of immigrants, and my Euroscepticism does not mean that we will be harking back to some bygone golden age.” Meanwhile, Euro-federalist Kenneth Clarke (known to many as “Fed Ken”) warned Michael Howard on the 30th October that the language of “Little England” (i.e. basic, honest, everyday patriotism) should be avoided at all costs in any Eurosceptic pronouncements.

Rose of England withers

All this seems so far removed from the days even of Margaret Thatcher. This newspaper has little time for the Tory Party hierarchy as it is, but we ought to remember how the party once felt. At one Conservative conference, Margaret Thatcher appeared with a red rose in her buttonhole. This was at the time when Neil Kinnock's Labour Opposition used the rose as their campaign emblem. Before starting on the main part of her speech, the Iron Lady stated: “Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to make it clear that the red rose I am wearing is the *rose of England!*” The cheers were deafening – and many Union Jacks were waved at the end of the address. Today, the roses have all withered and died, and the flags are in the black binliners at the back of Central Office.

Even as recently as the 1980s, Tory Central Office proudly sported British flags in its grand reception area. A Union Jack was surrounded by English, Welsh, Scottish and Ulster flags – the Tories keen to stress that they were still unionist in thinking, despite having signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement! Up until the 1950s, the party had a badge which consisted of the symbolic flowers of the countries of the United Kingdom, and the title: “Conservative and Unionist Party”. Even in the days of the liberal Edward Heath, the party had a large flag on its conference platform, with Ted himself allowing more than 20 of his MPs to belong to the anti-immigration Monday Club. Just where has the spirit of patriotism gone, and what has become of the “broad church” which was once the Tory Party?

Off his trolley!

After their two catastrophic election defeats, the party embarked on a period of desperate soul-searching. Suddenly, Michael Portillo – a man who had become the high priest of Euroscepticism, invoking all sorts of SAS-related patriotic rhetoric – reappeared as a mild, socially-concerned apostle of the social services! Michael never seemed to miss out on an opportunity to push a hospital trolley, or appear as a helper to single mothers – a living embodiment you may say of the Tories' conversion to the politics of being nice, rather than “nasty”.

Then, Duncan Smith (do you remember the “Quiet Man”?) confounded everyone by announcing on the BBC Radio 2 Jimmy Young show that he disliked the name “Tory Party” because it was too old-fashioned – possibly not fitting in with the new, vibrant party of the hospital trolley and the single mum. It was even reported that one former party Chief Executive (the Tories seem to get through one Chief Exec every six months) wanted to rebrand his forces as “The Enterprise Party”. Quite a good title, perhaps, but a bit difficult to square with the tens of thousands of small businesses which John Major wiped out in the run-up to Black Wednesday!

So where does this leave the ordinary British people, bewildered as they are by Blair's Euro-federalism and the Tories' embarrassment at being British? Can't help thinking that the Freedom Party – with its proud Britannia logo, its regional English pride, real Euroscepticism, and popular British nationalism – might have an answer to that one! □

Tory MP places 'market' above countryside

Buckinghamshire Tory MP, John Bercow, caused eyebrows to be raised at last year's Tory conference. The frontbench spokesman claimed that in the current debate on greenfield development and housing, market forces must prevail over the interests of the countryside. However, the fact is that the so-called “demand” for housing is often artificially stimulated by developers who are keen to buy up land at any cost. The Freedom Party believes that local planning is essential and that developers must be accountable for ensuring that their housing blends in with a district's existing character. Sadly, Mr Bercow's “market forces” pay little attention to quality and environmental considerations. No wonder the Tory Party is now dwindling in Middle England!

And they wonder why Britain is ravaged by crime...

Whilst British people labour on in their daily lives, with the threat and fear of crime looming almost constantly, how reassuring it is to know that the police “force” is putting its back into fighting criminals. Or is it? According to one retired policeman (D.F. Hayward of Northampton) writing in *The Times* on the 27th October:

“We should encourage the use of the term ‘police service’ rather than ‘police force’... there is also a need to remove the last vestiges of militarism from police training. Drill sessions, saluting and ceremonial parades only encourage a lack of independence of thought, and waste time that could more usefully be used in the classroom.”

Aren't our policemen wonderful?

News Digest

The Freedom Party's regular round-up of national news items.

If it's English, it must be “racist”

London cabbies have been ordered by their licensing authority to remove St. George's flags and even Royal British Legion poppies. The reason? Such symbols might “offend” ethnic minorities. Recently, Romford Council in Essex ordered stallholders to take down Union Jacks in the popular local market. After an outcry from local people and some strong condemnation of the council from patriotic Tory MP Andrew Rosindell, the market was awash with red, white and blue – forcing the council to squirm. What also upset the sour-faced local commissars was the fact that Asian stallholders joined in with the defiant flying of the flag! Clearly our national symbols do not offend ethnic minorities – just middle-class white liberals who claim to speak on their behalf.

Brussels Broadcasting Corporation

The Euro-federalists and left-wing programme makers at the BBC must be laughing behind our backs. Here we are, the ordinary Eurosceptic people of Britain, paying a compulsory tax to finance their propaganda. Recently, the prestigious BBC Richard Dimbleby Lecture was hijacked by the Euro side. A prominent French Euro-federalist informed the audience that “we are building a political union”; that federalism and the Euro-constitution were the only way for Europe. So far, no moves have been made to invite any anti-EU spokesmen or writers to give the lecture. The BBC Charter expressly commits the Corporation to political neutrality. We may well ask why this impartiality is not being observed.

‘Get your hands off my house Gordon’

Not content with scores of stealth taxes, rumours are now flying that Gordon Brown is to tax us further on the profits we make from the sale of our houses. Raising capital gains tax to something like 40 per cent seems to be the latest scheme to deprive the nation's earners and savers of their modest wealth – to be accompanied, no doubt, by more benefits and welfare for those who haven't contributed a penny in their lives. As London's *Evening Standard* columnist Allison Pearson put it on the 22nd October:

“Apart from the super-rich or senior civil servants and politicians, who seem, mysteriously, to be paid more after retirement than when they're in work, most Britons will rely on cashing in their bricks and mortar to subsidise their kids' college fees...and still have a bit left over for the third cheapest casket at their funeral. If Gordon takes our nest-egg away, what will become of us? If Gordon Brown thinks he can take all this away – our cushion, our running-away money, our hope of a comfortable old age – he will make the fuel protest look like a mere sparkler. The middle classes will take to their over-priced streets...”

The Freedom Party is the only party which would halt and reverse this Government's disastrous tax and spend policy. Our belief in a genuine property-owning democracy, coupled with lower council tax rates, makes us the party of the hardworking British majority. Our policy of disengaging from the corrupt EU would automatically give Britain a spending dividend of £1 billion – a substantial saving of taxpayers' money.