

C'sides of March

Countryside in question.
Common heritage or personal possession?

So, the Countryside comes to town,
to protest that uncaring city
is urbanising village pond and down
with no understanding or civility.
Town, meanwhile, bemused;
it's their land too, they fought and paid for it,
and are paying still, through tax-forfeit,
subsidy and spending on food,
while countryside and sensibilities
are trampled, drained and neglected
by uncaring, ungrateful feudal nobilities.

Two ancient urges here - a primeval feud:
to hunt, compete and survive from the land;
to enjoy and defend our common village green.
Primitive ancestors hunted over
communal territories for survival;
common interests in food security,
power with occupation of territory,
driving feudal farm and food policy.
Civilised contemporaries display
status and rank with private property,
defence of personal but privileged liberty,
obliging commoners to accept and bless
noblige and frock-coated vested interest.

City envious of landed property and rural mythology,
country jealous of urban wealth and political authority.
Neither one nor other monopoly of county or city.
The fundamental battleground - the land.
Propertied privilege, personal rights and paternal duty
fight common rights, social cares and responsibility,
with armouries of vested interest, envy, territorial protection,
social morals, the common good and ignorant coercion.

Freedom to march over Hyde Park and city streets
gives freedom to roam over private parks and hunting meets?
Will town now march and gather on countryside?
It already has - and made its unwelcome marks -
though bringing income and spending to ensure
continued immiseration of rural (and urban) poor.
Guarantees and fuel for the rural sparks,
lighting beacons to better future treaties,
or bonfires of antique and obsolete vanities?

Whose land? Private or Common heritage? Politics will decide.
Feudal paternalism, 'cause of ignorance of the crowd,
with mass consent to superior breeding, knowledge and possession?
Or social democracy, to respect civility and urbanity,
with rights to govern spread evenly over the whole nation?
Citizens or land (and money) lords to rule? - the eternal social riddle.
eroded to: who votes, or who owns, to settle.

Who best to decide? Local compromise or central dictat?
National legislation or voluntary contract?
Landed economic power versus abused social responsibility;
Common political might versus misused individual respectability.
State or market? Neither alone can suffice.
Convention and coercion tried and denied;
contract and consent left to decide.

Neither economic power nor political might
can hope to solve this fundamental fight.
Departments of state near obsolete
in finding local acceptable covenant,
what'ere their name and remit.
In fact and life, no single government
has adequate strong commitment
with sufficient unbiased tolerance
to manage or ordain reliable governance
'tween conflicting wants with diverse divergent means,
undersown with ancient and essential blend
of liberty, fraternity and equality.

Resolution needs imagination and invention
of new procedures and institutions
merging markets with states through transactions
based on consent as well as contract
while suppressing convention and coercion,
which too long have guided cultivation
and preservation of human need and aspiration
in conjunction with our national countryside.

Sustainable progress and development
needs enlightened and intelligent experiment,
informed communication and charitable argument.
Are mass or mob marches and demonstrations
precursors to or enemies of such ambitions?
Which side of the fence are you on?
And to whom does defence belong?
By whose consent is land a factory floor or natural moor?
And who the contractee and contractor?

David R. Harvey.

Percy Park, March, 1998