

Letters to the Editor

28 April 1985

Dear Sir,

It is apparent from the content and style of his paper on British Agricultural Policy since the Second World War (Vol 33, Part 1, pp 66-76) that Mr J K Bowers is an enthusiastic subscriber to the conspiracy theory of history. Indeed at one point he declares that criticism of the policy was reduced because 'everybody with the knowledge of the details was likely, one way or another to be part of the system'. The implication of his paper is that successive Ministers of Agriculture and Chancellors of the Exchequer of successive Governments of differing political ideologies, together with their supporters, senior civil servants and agricultural economists were all part of a gigantic and continuing plot to featherbed the farmer (to use a famous phrase from the era) at the expense of the taxpayer. The further implication is that this policy was not only misguided but that those involved deliberately set out to deceive the taxpayer. Mr Bowers refers to new arguments being 'introduced' or 'found' to justify the continuation of price support policies; thus implying that the Government had other reasons for their actions. His paper would then have been more balanced if he had considered the possibility that the policies were indeed right and thus fully justified at the time. As a result of this failure, I fear that his paper does not meet the high standard of objectivity which members of our Society expect in their journal.

This unbalanced interpretation of recent history would perhaps not matter too much if it were not for the open attack on present day farming contained in the closing paragraphs of the paper. Not only is this attack misplaced in a historical study of this kind, it is, in a number of respects, misleading or worse, inaccurate. The misleading statements can be identified by phrases such as 'There has clearly been . . . but this still awaits documentation' or 'It could indeed be said . . .'. The inaccuracy is to be found in his statement that 'Existing plans by Water Authorities will, if carried through, eliminate virtually all the wetland grazing marsh in England and Wales'. I can claim to have considerable knowledge

of the land drainage activities and plans of Water Authorities and I know of no plans of the kind described by Mr Bowers. Indeed the recent cuts in drainage expenditure imposed by the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food will result in a significant reduction in the already modest plans of Water Authorities. I hope therefore that your readers will not be misled into accepting Mr Bowers' assessment of the relationship between agriculture and the countryside. In this context, it would perhaps have been helpful if the 'Notes on Contributors' had contained a reference to Mr Bowers' close links with the conservation movement.

Yours faithfully,
A F Longworth
CBE, BSc

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12 June 1985

Dear Editor,

I do not subscribe to a conspiracy theory of agricultural policy formation nor am I a conspirator in something called the Conservation Movement. The sources for the information and views in the latter part of my paper are to be found in the footnoted references. The question of standards is, of course, a matter for you and your referees.

Yours sincerely,
J K Bowers

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*Members will note the Society does not accept responsibility for the opinions expressed by contributors, and that this is indicated on the rear cover of the **Review**.*

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