

Five Acres & A Cow

(In Praise of the Peasant Economy)

by

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Introduction

I've never owned a cow...never milked a cow...but I know a few people who have
John Seymour...
Toni Pinschof...
Connie Lindqvist...mushrooms in the milk

For the next 30 minutes I will be telling you a little about John Seymour's experience...
...and some of the conclusions he came to.
From it I hope you will learn something about real economics...
...and the importance of 'thinking for yourself'

But first a few words about why you are here.

I am assuming these are some of the questions you are asking?

- How will renewable energy affect farming?
- What new income streams might there be for farmers?
- Can farms be a source for raw materials other than food...such as energy, clothes, building materials?
- Are farms and sustainable development compatible? If so how and what type of farming?
- Is long-distance trade and dealing in farm products a good or a bad thing?
- Do banks and farming mix? Where does the debt-economy fit into the countryside?

The bad news is that I expect you to answer these questions not me.

The good news is that I work on the principle that the side effects are the main effects and that Nature always works at right angles

So be patient with me and I think you will come away with some food for thought.

We are after all what we eat. What follows is mind food.

But just before we start a quick word about prices. Some rough numbers.

1957	plus	4% per year inflation	= x 6
		5%	= x 9
		6%	= x 14
		7%	= x 21
		8%	= x 32

So you don't get too depressed - multiply everything I say by TEN

Chapter 1- Cow Worship

Our story begins on the 30th of August 1957 when John Seymour was living in Dyfed and decided to buy a cow.

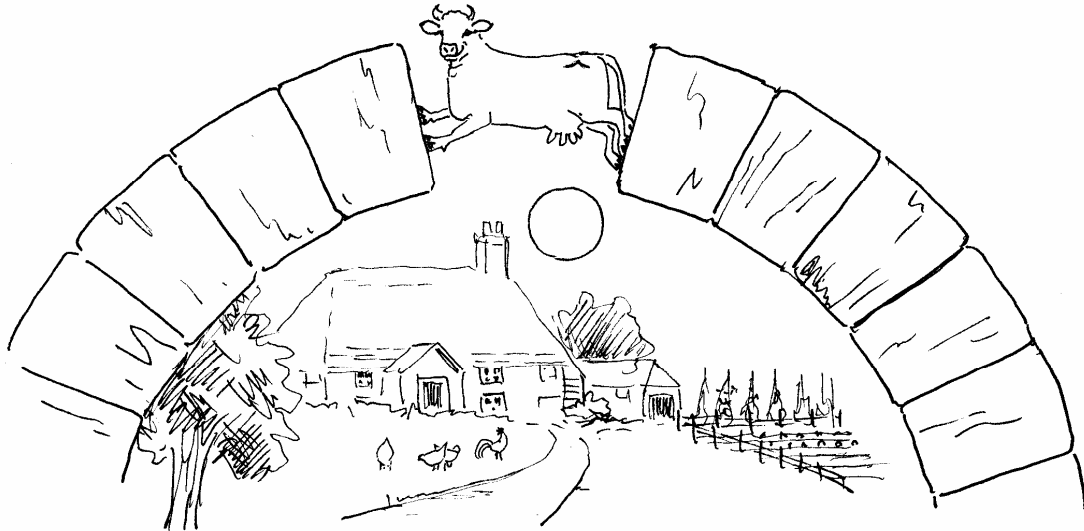
Immediately he found that he had a lot of other things to do.

This is the John's story as he told it in 'The Fat of The Land'.

John Seymour in 'We Get A Cow' from 'The Fat of The Land' (1961)

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*'Brownie is the keystone of the arch of our economy'
John Seymour*



Another digression. I see you have the motto 'Global Changes...Local Choices'

Approach such mantras with some caution...ask yourself always whether they are true?

Think about them.

Try turning them around...and see what they mean.

Take another one 'thinking globally acting locally'

What about 'thinking locally, acting globally'

Works just as well.

Another New Age favourite is 'not either...or but both...and'

What does this mean...and when is it to be applied

Always ask whether it applies to the particular case in hand.

Here are some others

- He who is not for me is against me
- Either big or small
- Either centralised or decentralised
- Either disempowering or empowering

What is really needed are sound principles.

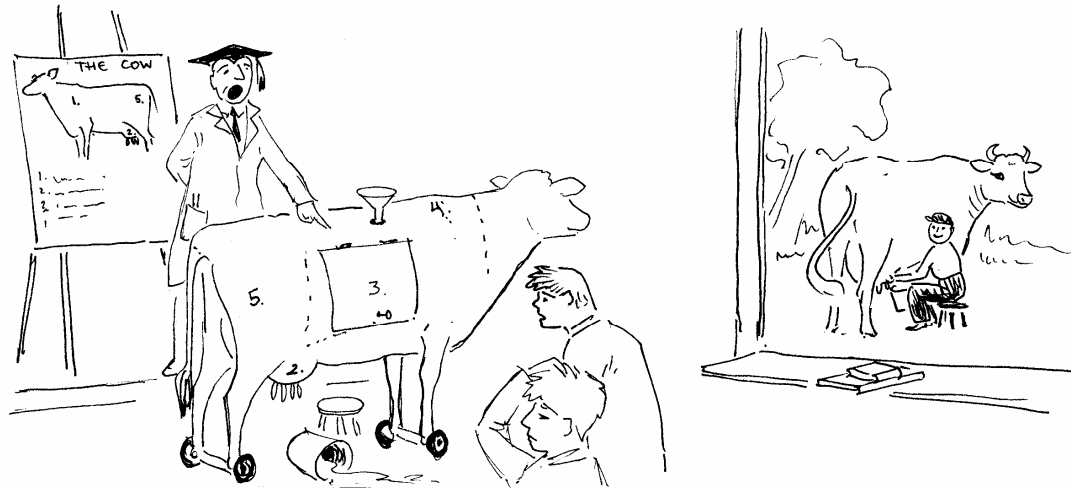
Here's one to be getting on with.

Power only flows one way at a time

Now back to cows. I will move quickly over the first few slides and pause when we get to the economics.

Chapter 2- Cow Ardly?

'The thing to do...when you want to get a cow...is just go and get a cow. Do not start taking the measure of your ignorance. The cow will dispel your ignorance...better than three years at an agricultural college. The cow is a better teacher than any book. Just get the cow.'



This is your first lesson for today. It was Aristotle who said 'To learn how to do something...do it'

You have all heard the joke about the Biology Teacher. 'Don't look out the window. Look at the blackboard'

Here is John Seymour

'It is something suddenly to be landed with a cow. Brownie had just calved, but the vendor was keeping the calf. So there she was with a bagful of milk. We had cleaned and whitewashed out the cowshed - the middle of the two compartments of the weatherboarding shed. We led her in there and I tried to milk her. I had milked cows as a child, but not since. It came back - slowly. But milking a cow - particularly one like Brownie who is hard to milk (Jerseys are apt to be a bit slow on the titty) is hard. It is a difficult job. I have taught several people to milk since and I have found that there is only one real teacher for difficult things - *necessity*. I milked Brownie because *I had to milk her*. I believe there is no other way to learn to milk a cow.'

But we rush ahead of ourselves.

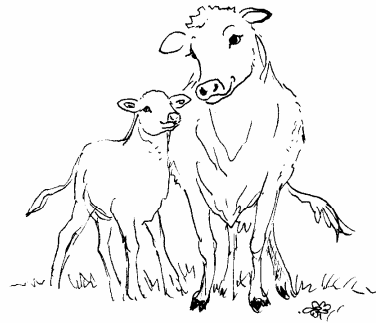
We're milking our cow before we've even bought her.

Chapter 3 - Cow Buying

It is difficult buying a cow, if you know nothing about it, and don't want to be robbed. We kept blundering about trying to buy a cow. We went and looked at a herd of pedigree Jerseys and were offered one - a cull - at just the hundred and twenty guineas. You can buy an awful lot of milk for a hundred and twenty guineas. And you can pay an awful lot out in veterinary bills on a pedigree Jersey or a pedigree any other breed. We did have enough sense - or instinct - to steer us away from over-bred stock.

Eventually we saw an ad in our local rag (a very good paper incidentally - far superior to most of the national press) for a Jersey house-cow. We went and saw her - she belonged to a smallholder, an oldish man, hard and tough and honest like so many small-holders, who had reared up a heifer calf from this cow and had decided to get rid of the old girl while the going was good.

Brownie was brown - darkish brown, too dark for a Jersey, skinny and bony and swag-bellied, a bit shy in the forequarters, not too heavily bagged, a sweet silly frightened old thing, and we bought her for thirty-five quid. She was delivered in a cattle float. And there we were.



Three points I want to make:

- Specialisation vs. Generalisation
- High tech vs. low tech
- Intermediate technology - Fritz Schumacher

Chapter 4 - Cow Lessons

So we have bought our cow...

...and we have learnt to milk her.

What does it feel like?

John Seymour again.

You have to sit there...

...until it is hard to keep the sweat of your brow from dripping into the pail...

...and the cow finishes the bit of grub you gave her long before to keep her quiet

...and gets restive

...and flicks you in the face (hard) with her hard old tail

...and jigs about

...and kicks the bucket

...and you fumble away

...and your wrists and forearms get paralytic

...and only one thing keeps you at it

the knowledge that the cow has got to be milked

...to the last drop in each quarter

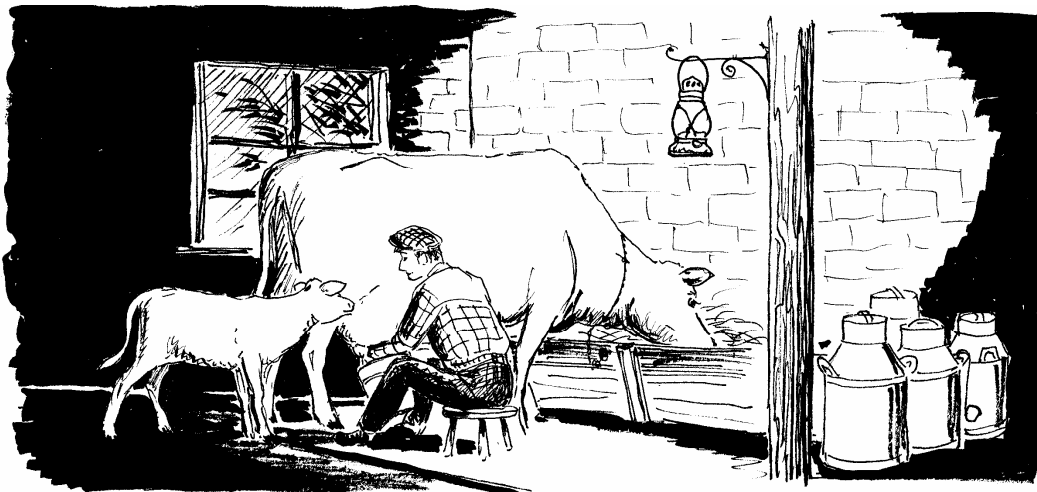
...and that she has got to be milked by you.

It's no use calling on the Lord God.

He won't come down and help you.

You are alone -

...with a cow.



But when you learn to milk comfortably

...which you do in about a week

...it becomes a pleasant job.

I look forward now to the morning and evening milking.

There seems to me to be a friendliness between the cow and me,

I put my head in her old flank and squirt away...

...and there is a nice smell...and a nice sound as the jets hiss into the frothing bucket

...and I can think, and sum things up, and wonder what I am going to have for supper.

In the winter it is dark and cold outside, but warm in the cow house...

...and the hurricane lantern throws fine shadows about the building.

The whole job takes perhaps ten minutes - night and morning.

Chapter 5 - Cow Work

Now for the economics. Don't groan. This is John Seymour economics. You'll find he's a man after your own heart. He starts by stating quite bluntly that:

'The economics of it are terribly obscure'

and continues...

'I would defy all the accountants in the world to work them out.' And here comes problem Number One.

'In the first place - an accountant would say that *labour* was the chief item. But how can you assess the cost of labour that you enjoy doing?'

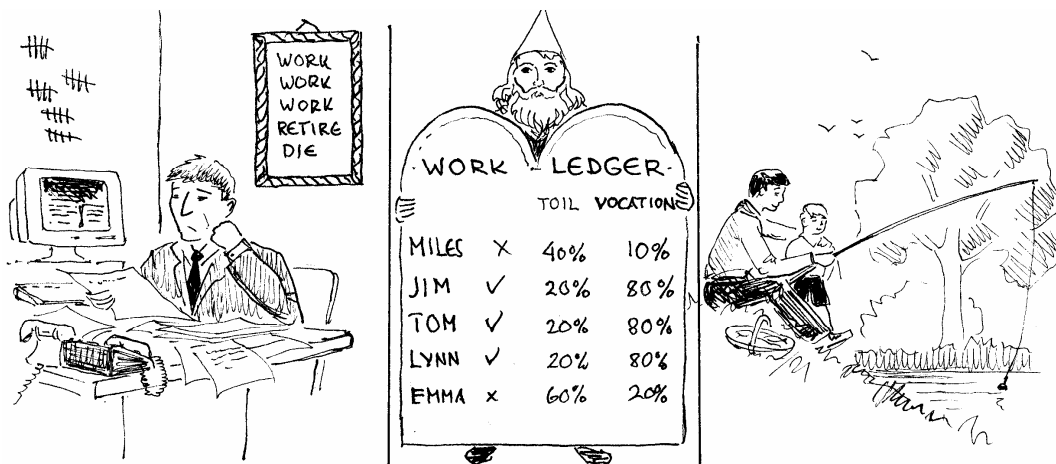
That is where I think all accountancy falls down - flat on its face.

An accountant will say that a man's labour costs - say - ten shillings an hour. Or five shillings an hour. Or what have you.

But supposing a man is *enjoying* what he is doing? Then he will do it for nothing.

If I were to work in an advertising agency I would want my labour to be assessed not at ten shillings or a pound an hour, but at a million pounds an hour...at least...for that is about the value that I would put on an hour of my life - knowing as I do that its hours are limited.

But when I am milking Brownie I am not *wasting* ten minutes of my life. I am *enjoying* them. And therefore I do not wish to charge my time up for anything.



- Economists talk about factors of production – ‘capital’, ‘land’ & ‘labour’
- Neo-Classicists have added ‘information’ as a fourth factor & expanded ‘land’ to ‘resources’

But what happens if you start instead with people

- Take people, add energy, stir together...give it time...and ‘poof’ - economic activity

Slide - But only a tiny part is exchanged for money

- Energy comes from human muscle and mind power
- Plus 150 energy slaves and X number of technology slaves

Slide - This is how an invoice of the future might look

- Work is assumed to be easy to explain...but is it?

Slide - Vocation & Toil

- Big business views ‘time’ as a factor of production & includes it under ‘labour’
- For the individual ‘time’ is a scarce resource...just so many heart beats
- There is not ‘work’ and ‘free time’ there is just ‘time’

Chapter 6 - Cow Costs

The other aspects of the cow economy are obscure. For example- what does a cow eat?

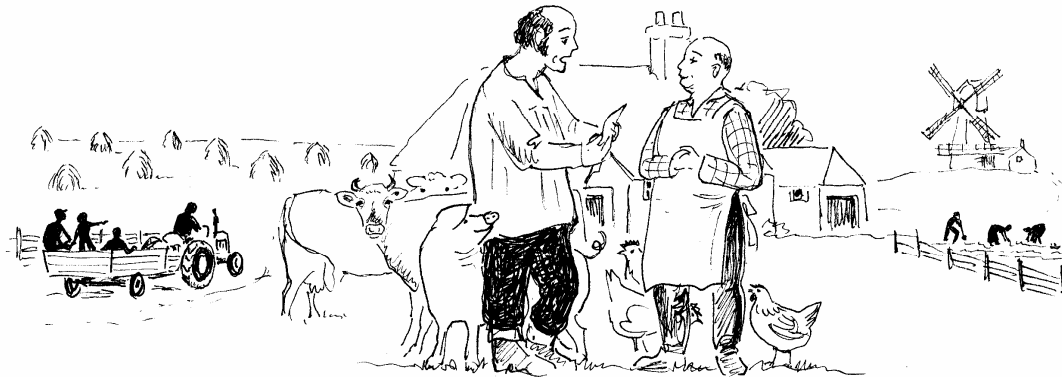
Grass all **summer**, and very little else; and that we may take as being free. For the use of our three-acre grass field naturally comes in with our twenty-five pounds a year rent...although actually it is not as simple as all that. In the **winter** she must have **hay**, **roots**, and **concentrates**.

Hay - I cut some rough hay with a scythe the first year in my field. That lasted me until Christmas and then I had to buy hay. The second year I cut half the field with Michael's tractor and that lasted me all that winter and half of next. This year I have had to buy all my hay - and I am feeding hay now even though it is high summer. This is because of the terrible drought *last* year (1959), the partial drought in the early part of this year (we have had floods of rain since - but too late), and the fact that I have ploughed half of my grass field up. I suppose that this year, for the cow and the pony, I shall have spent, by the time the winter is over, some forty pounds on hay. But it is most unlikely that such a thing will ever happen again. Nothing but a malign miracle can make us ever have to buy hay again.

Roots - we have always managed to grow nearly enough, either kale or fodder beet, to feed the cow. But up to this year - not quite. This year I think we will have enough, as we have a fine piece of fodder beet on The Hill.

Concentrates we have to buy and that is that. They consist mainly of oats and groundnut cake. And I have to admit, shamefacedly enough, that I have no idea what this costs me. I get a bill from Jack Hewitt the miller about twice a year, depending on how energetic he is feeling in the book-keeping way, it always shakes me to the foundations, but then I know that it includes not only the little bit of food I give to the cow but also pig food and poultry food. I made a rough, jumbled, stab at working out what the concentrates for brownie cost and came - after the most devious possible workings (one of the great electronic brains they have nowadays might have taken several years over it) that it averaged out through the year, winter and summer, at about a tanner a day.

So our milk has certainly not been free. I would put the cost of cow food, to date, at about twenty-five to thirty pounds a year. But this must be considered - it will get less year by year until we may get it down to very near nothing. There is no reason at all why one should not feed a cow - ay, and two cows - *and* a horse, off five acres of land, entirely, and keep up a good milk production. But first the land must be built up to a high state of fertility - and in doing that the cow plays the most important part.



Two points of interest

- Notice the tractor crew - John Seymour's first harvest in Wales
- Toni Pinschof - a village either lives or dies... 'my hamlet is dying...I need people'.

Let us think for a few moments too about free goods

- Difference between made things and grown things...nature is free-ish
- Free goods are...earth, air, fire & water...and spirit
- The moneygrubbers trick is to monopolise, pipe and meter (mpm)...& load with debt

Chapter 7 - Cow Products

Now what do we get *from* the cow?

When she first calves, and if it is summer and the grass is green, she gives nearly four gallons of milk a day. She goes down towards the end of her lactation to perhaps one and a half gallons a day. For most of the time she is giving us from two to three gallons a day. Now no family of our size can drink two and a half gallons of milk a day. After all - that is twenty pints. So there are various other things that we do with it.

We make all our own butter. We make most of our own cheese. By this I mean real cheese...not 'cottage cheese'...which we do make as well. Further, every living thing on the place with the exception of the horse benefits from Brownie's milk. Our pigs thrive in a manner remarkable to our scientific-farmer neighbours. Our young birds thrive and grow into healthy stock by virtue of their share of whatever butter-milk, cheese-whey, milk that has been left about too long and gone bad, cream that has been forgotten and gone mouldy. Our cat and our dog benefit. And the humans benefit by having unlimited, good, untampered with, unpasteurized, unprocessed and unbeg-gared-about-with *milk*.

Before we had a cow our milk bill alone came to two pounds a week, and butter and cheese cost say another ten shilling. This comes to £120 a year. So - whatever the calculating book-keepers and the costive cost-accountants say and they say a lot (the farming press nowadays runs an unending holy crusade to persuade people *against* being self-supporting - they want to turn every farmer into a money-grubber pure and simple), we *make a profit* of at least ninety pounds a year. The fact that we don't actually see the money makes no difference - we are spared having to spend it.



Let's pick up on some of these points...each one a book in its own right.

- Self-sufficiency is more dangerous than an anarchist bomb – but English Yeomanry a strength
- *'the farming press nowadays runs an unending holy crusade to persuade people against being self-supporting. They want to turn every farmer into a money grubber pure and simple'*
- Rythms of nature...fat years and lean years...tides...car people vs boat people.
- Landsman's point of view vs seaman's point of view - locality vs. interests
- Priestley - 'the masses' vs 'people' - McGregor Type A and Type B

Chapter 8 - Cow Trading

Then what else does Brownie give us? Well, for one thing, at least a calf a year. Now we know that non-pedigree Jersey calves are not very valuable. But here is our balance sheet. We have *paid out* £107 10s. for cattle. We have *been paid* £149 4s. for cattle that we have sold. Thus we have made a profit of £41 14s. on the buying and selling of cattle (and rearing of calves).

Added to this we still have Brownie cow, and she is at present giving us nearly four gallons a day. Her last calf, born a fortnight ago just before Sally's latest baby, proved, alas, a bad-doer and I knocked her on the head and her skin is drying for a floor mat and her meat is down in pickle in a large crock for feeding the pigs and fowls on. Waste not want not.

The size of the above sums is due to the fact that we bought another cow. One cow will not give you milk consistently all the year, year after year, and so you need two. We sold her again though, being in need at the time both of grass and cash. And once, when we didn't have any pigs, we bought a beef calf, reared him, and sold him at a negligible profit. A poor deal by any standard. Another lesson not to try to swim in the commercial sea.



Here perhaps we are coming to the crux of the matter..

...there are several points to make..

...do we have time?

- Production for use good vs production for the market bad - Ralph Borsodi
- Joy of surpluses & shortages...nature's way – Wimbledon strawberries - Rock Channel tides
- Distribute over time by canning, bottling, distilling
- Distribute over space by sharing with neighbours
- Swedish Green Party group - food miles labelling & taxing
- Contributing energy to the National Grid may be a Faustian bargain - proceed with caution
- Global Electricity Grid has benefits - but proceed with caution
- Anna Edey & Solviva - simple low-tech household responses
- The joy of doing without, abstaining and feasting - voluntary simplicity with parties

Chapter 9 - Cow Profits

But what else does Brownie give us?

Pleasure, for she is one of the family. It is surprising what an affection we feel for the old creature.

Fertility - for her dung is the basis of all husbandry. She is the cornerstone of the arch of our economy.

Everything we eat is enriched by either her dung or her milk.

Our crops flourish because of the priming-pump effect of her manure.

Our animals - and she herself - flourish because of the flourishing of the crops.

She is the prime mover of a beneficial circle of health and fertility.

I know this sounds like a lot of crankish claptrap and fiddle-faddle.

It is not though.

It is true and very easily verifiable.



So the reality is that

- Brownie gives pleasure - one of the family
- Brownie - gives manure
- The women in Bombay exploit cow dung in two ways - as a building material and as fuel
- The Hindu institution of the sacred cow is both ecologically and economically functional

'In the view of some cultural ecologists, the Hindu institution of the sacred cow is both ecologically and economically functional. This woman in Bombay is exploiting cow dung in at least two ways as a building material and as fuel. In addition cows provide milk and manure and give birth to bullocks.'

- Thomas Eriksen in 'Small Places, Large Issues'

A small digression. One of the things I am doing is studying Economic History.

But instead of empires what students should be doing is compiling real histories

...by artifacts, econofacts & politifacts

The History of Sheep,

....and fences

...of flowers

...and of trees

And what of water...ice factories, water mills, ship-building, trade etc.

And so to my last slide

Slide 10 - Cow (Im)pacts

John Seymour again

Having bought the cow, we found that we had a lot of other things to do.

In the first place - we couldn't possibly consume four gallons of milk a day and we hadn't learnt then about turning surplus milk into cheese.

We had to get some other animals to feed it to.

We could scarcely feed it back to the cow - for that would somehow be unseemly.

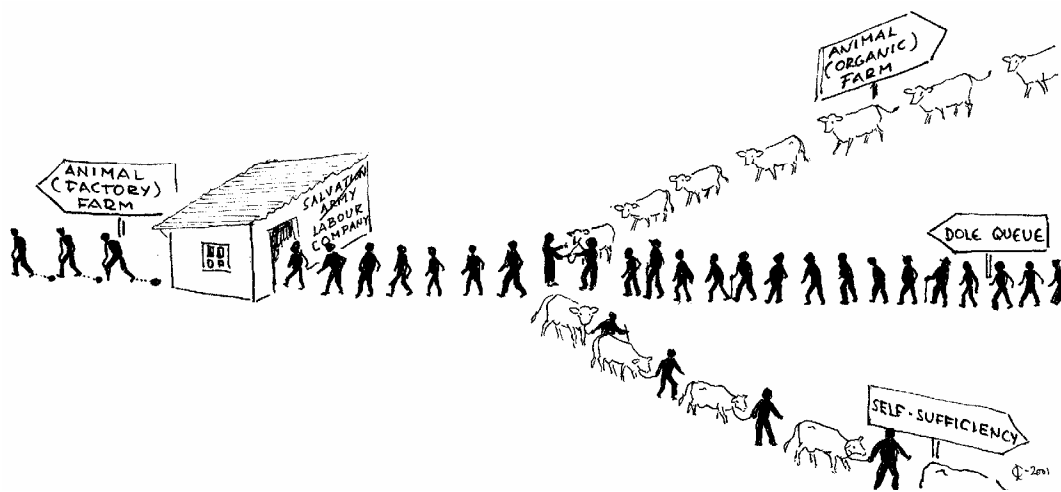
So we had to buy pigs.

In the second place - what were we going to do with all that dung?

We would have to extend our gardening and farming activities.

Brownie forced us, a long way, along the road that we had never planned to travel...

...the road to self-sufficiency and a peasant economy.



So what are the lesson from all this?...depending on time

- Distributists - two acres & a pig - Thatcherism + land & money reform
- John Seymour - five acres & a cow
- 'Road to Serfdom' or 'Road to Self-sufficiency'
- Two images of 'Animal Farm' - as an organic farm or a factory farm
- Aldous Huxley - 'Brave New World' or 'Island'
- Leopold Kohr - four radicalisms
 - ✓ christians - religious freedom
 - ✓ liberals - political freedom
 - ✓ socialists - economic freedom
 - ✓ ? - freedom to pursue happiness
- Society of the free - not a 'free society'
- John Seymour & Toni Pinschof are the new radicals