ALLOTMENTS and STATELY HOMES

WRITING in the Birmingham *Sunday Mercury* on October 17, Anthony Hancox draws attention to the seven-man committee that has been appointed by the Government to hold an enquiry into the use of allotment land. This, he reports, will be the first of a number of surveys launched by the new Ministry of Land and Natural Resources with the aim of building an up-to-date picture of how Britain's fifty-six million acres are being used and to discover whether (in the Government's view anyway) the land is being put to the best possible use.

In addition to the allotments enquiry, registration of Common Land is about to take place under a new law. A mineral survey is about to begin, as are also surveys of water resources, national parks, the countryside and the Forestry Commission's tree-covered acres. What is required, says the Ministry, is a complete land-use picture of Great Britain.

The Land Commission shortly to be set up with powers to buy land compulsorily, as well as manage and dispose of it, will be likely to ask the fact-finding Ministry of Land and Natural Resources for advice. Already some spadework on general policy for allotments has been done and some vital statistics have been dug out.

For instance, at the wartime peak period for allotment use in 1942 ("Dig for Victory" and "Grow More Food") about 1,452,000 plots covered about 143,000 acres. Figures slumped after the war and are now down to 729,000 plots on 78,000 acres, with 116,000 of them idle and many more in poor condition.

Professor Harry Thorpe, Professor of Geography at Birmingham University, and now head of the Government committee looking into allotment usage, said: "I don't think most allotment tenants realise how privileged they are when they have the sole use of land which might be worth between £15,000 and £30,000 an acre."

Allotments were once "parcels of land for the labouring poor." Today, what they contribute to the labourer's table, or to his pocket, is in question.

Mr. Hancox points out in his article that Birmingham Corporation now controls 10,931 plots on 161 sites covering 984 acres. Although the City Council has released large parcels of allotment land for other uses recently, 3,000 plots are today vacant.

All this concern about land use has not unnaturally made many of Birmingham's allotment holders apprehensive. What of the increasing numbers of flat-dwellers who do not relish "community gardens," they ask. And what of the vast numbers who, with a four-day working week ahead, will want land to cultivate? And what of the big land owners at the other end of the social scale?

A survey of the vast estates owned by the biggest land owners has not as yet been planned, but this would reveal some interesting facts to consider alongside the allotment holders enquiry.

It is known, for instance, that some six million acres are in public ownership. The biggest single land owner of all is the Forestry Commission, with 2,500,000 acres. The Army has 425,000 acres, the Air Force 156,000 and the Navy 70,000. The National Trust tots up 370,000 and the National Coal Board 214,000. No one is sure how much is owned by British Rail but the tracks alone account for about 180 square miles.

In a rather different category come the Crown Estates which the Queen owns "in right of the Crown," not as a private person. Their annual revenue is close on three million pounds but goes into the Treasury in exchange for the Civil List of Payments to the Royal Family. These estates total 285,000 acres.

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge total between them some 300,000 acres while the Church Commissioners hold about 200,000.

What about the fifty million acres in private hands? The true extent of most private ownership has always been shrouded in mystery. After William the Conqueror's Domesday Book the only other land survey ever made was in 1873 in an attempt by land owners to refute the claims of those condemning land monopoly. This listed the Duke of Sutherland at the top of Britain's land owners with 1,358,546 acres to his name. Next came the Duke of Buccleuch with 459,108 and the Duke of Richmond with 286,411.

The article continues: "Judged by the size of the rent-rolls, the Duke of Norfolk came top with an annual £269,698, with the Duke of Buccleuch second with £216,473 and the Duke of Northumberland third with £182,559.

"The list showed that twenty-eight dukes owned 158 estates totalling 4,073,676 acres, while nearly 14,615,000 acres — more than a quarter of the island — were owned by 527 members of the House of Lords, who gathered between them a gross annual rental of £13,030,988.

"A little adding up revealed that three-quarters of the

country was owned by a mere 38,229 persons . . .

"The name of the Duke of Buccleuch still figures prominently as in former times, but now with about 220,000 acres. The Countess of Seafield follows closely with 213,000 and Lord Lovat with 190,000.

"The Duke of Westminster's 138,000 include Mayfair and Belgravia. The Duke of Portland owns 17,000 in Nottinghamshire and 47,000 in Caithness; the Duke of

Northumberland has about 80,000 in his home county; the Duke of Beaufort has more than 50,000 in Gloucestershire; the Duke of Devonshire has 72,000 in Yorkshire and 40,000 in Derbyshire."

Mr. Hancox concludes with the comment that such vast estates may well make the allotmenteer wonder why all the fuss is being made about his little share. Indeed, he might, but millions of landless, particularly those who are unable to buy enough land simply to stand their home upon, might ask why they have been left out altogether. There is a method for bringing idle and much needed land into use which at the same times gives everybody a share in the value of land and that is to tax this value into the Treasury and reduce other taxation.

Invisible Barriers to Trade in Food

By Henry Clark, M.P., Rapporteur of the Committee of Agriculture of the Council of Europe. — EFTA *Bulletin*, September/October 1965.

THE FOOD TRADE is probably more harassed by non-tariff restrictions than any other section of the international market.

Some of the non-tariff restrictions are openly protectionist. Import quotas are common and minimum import prices are becoming more popular; similarly, a number of countries insist on a minimum percentage of home grown grain in bread. The most insidious barriers to trade are contained in the anomalies, contradictions and generally chaotic state of food laws ostensibly designed to protect the consumer.

Consumer protection is becoming an increasingly important and popular function of government and there are frequently local vested interests which support more restrictive regulations. In consequence, the non-tariff barriers to trade in food tend to grow; there is little reaction against them because they are invisible to the vast majority.

Frequently quoted restrictive food laws are those which prevent the sale of English and Irish sausages in many continental countries. Either because the meat content is too low or because sulphur dioxide is used as a preservative, they contravene regulations for sausages and are prohibited. The fact is, of course, that the English sausage must be cooked and is a basically different article of food from the continental creation with the same name.

There were wry smiles when a regular order for sausages reached Northern Ireland from the Vatican. Apparently the Irish Bishops could not face the Ecumenical Council without their traditional breakfast, and the Vatican City's regulations were waived.

There are dozens of other examples. The French may not make or import the soft ice cream which has become popular elsewhere because the use of glucose syrup in ice cream is forbidden and a sugar which does not crystallise out is essential. The British type of orange and lemon squash is prohibited in most continental countries because it does not fall into any of the accepted categories of fruit juice.

The regulations for jams in various countries in Europe would fill a large book. The permitted minimum percentage of fruit varies from 30 per cent to 65 per cent, and Englishmen are amazed to read of a type of German marmalade which can contain 50 per cent of mashed apples or pears. Each country divides jams and preserves into categories, and no two countries have the same definitions. The specifications of the top grades vary widely in accord with national tastes of fifty years ago. In many countries the sugar beet lobby has succeeded in retaining restrictions or complete prohibition on the use of non-sucrose sugars. A jam exporter in Europe needs a computer to prevent him inadvertently breaking one or other countries' regulations every day.

Many food regulations are restrictive because they are archaic, but even simple and logical regulations can prevent international trade. For example, certain countries insist that margarine must be packed in cube shapes so that the public can immediately recognise it from butter. This may seem sensible, but it prevents, just as surely as a 10 per cent tariff, imports from another country with a factory tooled up to produce rectangular packets.

When the protection of the public health is in question the regulations become even more diverse and contradictory. Of forty colouring agents permitted in Western European countries, only three are permitted in all EFTA countries and one of these is prohibited in some EEC countries. The United Kingdom, with its liberal tradition, permits twenty-eight different colours, but completely forbids two colours which appear on the German Federal Republic's restricted list of eight. Austria and Sweden permit only 100 p.p.m. of sulphur dioxide as a preservative in food but Portugal allows 1250 p.p.m. Insecticide residues are rigorously restricted in some countries, but not at all in others.

The diversity of the food laws, as well as restricting trade, brings the law into disrepute and so defeats its object. There can be few stronger cases for international co-operation than in this little-known field.