



INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF SURVIVAL & SABOTAGE

When new laws were passed, or new fences put up, a characteristic response of the English people was to simply carry on as normal, reasserting their right to harvest freely from the commons. It is due to this quiet persistence that we still have traditions of foraging blackberry picking & mushroom collecting.

1993 LA VIA CAMPESINA
Established to coordinate the diverse struggles waged by peasant producers, La Via Campesina now has a membership numbering 200 million.

1936 SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Thousands of people from across Europe signed up to the international brigade to fight alongside the Spanish anarchist movement.

ROAD PROTESTS
1980-1995
A campaign of direct action forces the Conservative government to scrap over 300 road building projects.

1934 LAND SETTLEMENT ASSOCIATION
A government response to the deep recession: tracts of land were compulsorily purchased, divided into smaller units and offered, at a low rent, to the unemployed.

1932 KINDER SCOUT TRESPASS

The British Workers' Sports Federation organised a mass trespass for the right to walk on land stolen in earlier times.

1880 THE ALLOTMENTS ACT
1920's

Land in the form of allotments became a key political issue. Seven acts resulted in the statutory rights to allotments.

1834 TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS

Six agricultural workers were deported for resisting wage drops. Despite their punishments by 1872 the agricultural labourers' union had over 86,000 members.

1880's CROFTERS' LAND WAR

Scottish crofters rose up against landowners in the Highlands & Islands. A new Crofters' Act did not redistribute land, but gave them a greater sense of tenure.

1830 THE SWING RIOTS

Agricultural workers rose up & destroyed threshing machines in East Kent.

1811 LUDDITES

Textile workers in Nottingham protested against machinery introduced to replace their labour by destroying mills & machines. The movement spread rapidly across England.

1791 HAITIAN REVOLUTION

Haiti was a French colony where slave labour produced 60% of the world's coffee & 10% of its sugar. In 1789 Haitian slaves rose up & fought off the colonisers to establish an independent republic.

1640 THE LEVELLERS
~50

Named for their belief in 'levelling the land', the Levellers were the radical wing of the New Model Army.

1649 THE DIGGERS

Remembered for their occupation of St. George's Hill & Gerrard Winstanley's proclamation that 'the earth was made a common treasury for all'. Some 400 Digger settlements were established over the period.

1549 KETT'S REBELLION

Angered by the enclosure of common land, a peasant army of 20,000 took control of Norwich, then England's second city, & forced the army to truce.

1381 PEASANTS' REVOLT

Triggered by an attempt to levy a poll tax on the population, peasants rose in insurrection across the country. Rebel groups from Kent & Essex stormed the Tower of London, spurred on by the dissident preacher John Ball's poignant question: 'When Adam delved & Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'

Conservative-Liberal coalition government criminalises squatting of residential buildings in the UK

CRIMINALISATION OF SQUATTING
2012

The food crisis triggered a corporate-led land grab on a scale never seen before. Recent research estimates the area of land bought by corporations at over 80 million hectares since 2006.

LAND GRABS

Between 2006 & 2008 food prices rocketed. Food speculation by large corporations exacerbated the price rises causing millions to go hungry.

FOOD CRISIS
2006 ~ 2008

The WTO removed trade barriers, forcing small farmers into direct competition with huge corporations.

WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION
1993

Four supermarkets control 75% of UK food retailing.

SUPERMARKET MONOPOLIES
2005

Between 1945 & 2005 the percentage of the population working in agriculture had dropped from 15% to less than 1% whilst more woodland was destroyed than in the previous 900 years.

AGRICULTURAL INTENSIFICATION

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Unjust subsidies pay landowners for owning land, driving up prices & encouraging more large-scale acquisitions.

AGRIBUSINESS

Following World War Two many companies involved in producing chemical weapons turned their attention to the lucrative pesticide market. Today 5 multi national companies control 60% of the pesticide market & a quarter of the global seed market.

COLONIAL AGRICULTURE

Food imports produced by exploited slave labour in Britain's colonies were used to undermine agriculture in Britain.

HIGHLAND CLEARANCES
1800-1850

The enclosures of the Scottish Highlands were even faster & more brutal than the enclosures in the rest of Britain.

THE BLACK ACT
1723

Vicious laws were introduced to deal with the resistance of those who opposed the enclosures.

In 1723 the Black Act was introduced, authorising & implementing the death penalty for more than 50 offences connected to poaching.

The enclosure of land was backed up by increasingly vicious legislation. Between 1760 & 1870, 4000 acts of parliament changed a 6th of the area of Britain from common to private land.

PARLIAMENTARY ENCLOSURES
1700-1850

Led by wealthy landowners the enclosures attacked the open field system & common lands to privatise their use.

ENCLOSURES
1300 ~1700

The Norman Monarchy claimed ultimate ownership of all land in the country ending the Saxon notion of free ownership of soil by working farmers.

NORMAN CONQUEST
1066

Telling the history of land & food rights is always a two-stranded narrative. On the one

side we have the historical themes & processes in the history of enclosure, privatisation & the dispossession of land based communities.

On the other we have the vibrant histories of struggle & resistance that emerged when people rose up & confronted the enclosures of their lands, cultures & ways of life not as passive victims but as land activists. The people of Britain have been land activists throughout this history in many places & with many forms. In doing so they have left us with a rich history of resistance, as well as many rights & traditions we take for granted.

OUR ROOTS