

New investments led to a loose money supply that created inflation (up to 30 percent in 1989); also, under "capitalism," state bureaucrats who controlled limited supplies enjoyed unprecedented opportunities for corruption. Corruption and inflation together spawned the massive unrest that eventually led to Tiananmen Square. Vogel barely deals with these vexing issues. (He does mention that in one year there were a thousand executions in Guangdong alone for economic crimes.) An optimist himself, Vogel skirts basic structural problems, such as Beijing's growing inability to exercise control over Guangdong. Yet despite this limitation, Vogel is—and will likely remain—the authoritative guide to that first decade of reforms not only in Guangdong but in the People's Republic as a whole.

LOSING GROUND: Agricultural Policy and the Decline of the American Farm. *By Hugh Ulrich. Chicago Review Press. 278 pp. \$18.95*

This informal history of U.S. farm policy begins in the early 20th century, when one out of three Americans were employed on farms. It concludes in the present, when less than two percent of U.S. citizens still work the soil. As it unfolds, one learns about massive soil erosion as well as bureaucratic inertia and the farm lobby's shortsightedness.

"The story of how we got into the current farm mess," writes Ulrich, a grains analyst and former member of the Chicago Board of Trade, "is a sort of 'How the West Was Won' in reverse." By 1910, American farmers ranked as the most productive in the world, even though

their numbers were already beginning to decline. Through the 1960s, American farming remained at the pinnacle of world agriculture. "The United States was number one in productivity, in the size of its food surplus, in its export market share, available farm capital, applied technology, transportation, processing and refining, storage capacity," says Ulrich.

What happened? The shift from smaller to bigger farms brought in larger equipment and practices which, though profitable in the short run, eroded topsoil faster than it could be naturally replaced. U.S. government policies were also, at best, contradictory: Pork-barrel irrigation projects, for example, increased corn production at the same time the Department of Agriculture was jumping through hoops to reduce it. And mounting competition abroad—millions of acres of soybeans planted in Brazil, the "green revolution" in India—reduced demand for U.S. crop surpluses.

Things have only gotten worse in recent years, Ulrich shows. During the 1980s, world demand for U.S. farm exports dropped from a 1981 high of nearly \$44 billion down to \$26 billion five years later. Plunging sales abroad meant increased commodity surpluses and lower crop prices at home. Farmers who had gone deeply into debt during the 1970s to expand their operations now found themselves in serious trouble.

Not everyone was sympathetic. "For the life of me," David A. Stockman, then director of the Office of Management and Budget, said in 1985, "I cannot figure out why the taxpayers of this country have the responsibility to go in and refinance bad debt that was willingly incurred by consenting adults." Ulrich thinks that Stockman "made sense"—to a point. But Stockman came to "the more dubious conclusion that there were too many American farmers in 1985." On the contrary, Ulrich contends.

Unlike Stockman, Ulrich would not leave agriculture to the free market's invisible hand. Although he believes present, "ruinous" government programs favoring large farms should be abandoned, he argues that they should be replaced by support for small, owner-operated farms that "have a far more desirable impact environmentally and socially." Ulrich outlines a detailed program for encouraging soil stabilization, reforestation, and farm employment



Iowa farmers protest foreclosure in 1985.

maintained at five percent of the total population, all of which could help revitalize small towns and local industries. "No area of national policy," he argues, "has the same kind of power for good or ill as does farm policy."

THE USES OF ADVERSITY: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe. By Timothy Garton Ash. Random House. 335 pp. \$19.95

It would seem foolhardy to publish a book about Central Europe at a time when daily newspaper articles about the region often prove outdated by the time they hit the streets. These 16 essays by the London *Spectator's* foreign editor originally appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *Granta*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the author's own publication; they date from the winter of 1983 to the summer of 1989. Yet there is little that is stale about them. They are saved, in almost every case, by Garton Ash's historical intelligence, his acute readings of cultural politics, and his deft portraits of key political players, many of whom (particularly those on the Polish scene) he knows first hand. The *New York Review* essays even entered directly into the political dialogue that helped shape the new Poland and the new Hungary: Hastily translated, they enabled reformers there to see events in their own country within the larger context of a collapsing Soviet Empire. The tempo of "refolution"—Garton Ash's neologism for the revolutionary reforms we are witnessing in Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and East Berlin—has accelerated dramatically since last summer. But this collection will endure because it depicts so exactly, and often presciently, the region on the brink of its most dramatic political transformation since the early years of the Cold War. While clearly enthusiastic about the prospect of a reinvigorated, democratized Central Europe, Garton Ash remains soberly realistic about the dangers that lie ahead for an area with so troubled a past: "Can Central Europe be put together again . . . at the very point where it has most often, most horribly, and (from the point of view of neighboring empires) most successfully been divided—at the point where different nations, races, cultures, religions try (or fail) to coexist?"

Arts & Letters

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Speeches and Writings. Edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher. Two volumes. Library of America. 898 pp.; 787 pp. \$35 each

Abraham Lincoln is only the second American president—after Thomas Jefferson—to be "canonized" by inclusion in the Library of America's collection of "America's greatest writers." Does this mean that Lincoln, in addition to being a great president, should be reckoned among our great literary stylists?

Here are close to 1,700 pages of speeches, letters, messages, and even a few poems by which to arrive at a judgement. Certainly Lincoln's status as a stylist and writer was harder earned than Jefferson's. In his 1860 campaign autobiography, Lincoln reports that he never entered a college or "accademy" [sic] until he became a lawyer. "What he has in the way of education," Lincoln (a genius of understatement) writes of himself, "he has picked up." Yet, for all his homespun, unassuming airs, he made himself into a person of genuine culture: He attended the theater and the opera regularly, and he read widely. "Some of Shakespeare's plays," he said, "I have gone over perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader"—a literary training that few politicians, or non-politicians, can better.

At his best, Lincoln enters the company of Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson; like them, he is a biblical prophet who has learned to use the American vernacular. The Civil War made Lincoln a stylist, because his biblical cadences were inspired by what was to him a *holy* war: "He [God] gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence [slavery] came." Lincoln's most remembered passages—"Four score and seven years ago" (from the Gettysburg Address) and "With malice toward none, with charity for all" (from the Second Inaugural)—are religious, not political, rhetoric.

