

# Overcoming Ignorance - The need for Political Will

by P. Anderson

The world stands at a cross road. As to which direction it might take, the signposts appear to be hidden. We have no shortage of problems confronting us. As to how we can deal with the problems, that seems a little harder to define.

On Sunday 14th November, President Clinton delivered an address to a gathered group of black clergymen, from the very same pulpit where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his last sermon. The president seemed at a loss to explain the fact that despite black Americans having won a larger role in American society, the rate of crime and violence had continued to soar. Quoting from parts of the speech, as reported in the Age, 15/11, "How could we explain", Mr Clinton asked, "that we gave people the freedom to succeed and we created the conditions in which millions abuse that freedom to destroy the things that make life worth living and life itself?"..... "I tell you that unless we do something about crime and drugs and violence that is ravaging our country, it will destroy us!"

And there are further problems. Take, for example, the billions of dollars the West pumps into developing countries as aid. All of this development aid, financed by the World Bank and others, has one thing in common. It increases the value of land! Eventually the poorer citizens are priced out of the development that was intended to help them.

The world's resources are being fast depleted. In the case of our rivers and seas, they are not only being polluted, but over-fished. New Internationalist magazine, August 1992 quotes Daniel Pauly, of the International Centre for Aquatic Resource Management, in Manila, as suggesting "the basic problem is that there are too many people trying to make a living from the sea." He goes on to say "half the farmers in South East Asia are landless. When their luck goes bad they drift to the coast."

New Internationalist reports further from researcher Wolfgang Harris. He studied two villages in Java and found that as prawn and fish farming expanded so did the land holdings of the wealthy. The losers were villagers who, for generations, had been cultivating fish in small ponds for local consumption. **The problem always comes back to the land question.**

Boris Yeltsin sees this too. His 21st September presidential decree disbanding the parliament was in response to a parliament "proposing a wildly irresponsible budget, blocking presidential legislation, including that which sought to allow the buying and selling of land." Under enormous pressure from the IMF, world bank and others, the Russians have now signed away their economic freedom to western land lords.

Very soon, the Russian people will be able to witness first hand, land grab activities like that which recently occurred here in Australia. As reported last month in the Financial Review, the elders of the Kuuku Ya'o tribe, of Cape York Peninsula, have been negotiating to buy the nearby Line Hill block (containing sacred sites) from Lloyds Bank for \$750,000. Line Hill, originally, had been sold

to a company called Iron Range Developments in 1987 for \$1,630. This land was then sold the next year to a shelf company, the Howe Corporation for \$4.5 million. That same afternoon, the land was sold to another company, Farndale, for \$14 million. Farndale is now in liquidation, with Lloyds Bank as the principal creditor and mortgagee.

Yes the problems are many. The way forward is clear to those who will acknowledge the simple principle:

**The land owner should pay the full rent to the community.**

