

cosmetic changes. "Land is power and no one gives up power easily." Few people, say Oxfam, are actually against land reform but some are worried about the likely repercussions and for this reason advise against it... Some see it as the ultimate panacea. (No mention here of the Single Tax).

The chapter describes some instant land reform packages that could be introduced into any country but suggests that results would be disastrous for one reason or another. Oxfam is also aware that the existing land tenure systems breed violence. It is little wonder that peasants who are surely oppressed and hungry resort to stealing the landlord's crops at harvest time to sell on the black market.

Another well worn argument is that if only population could be reduced there would be more for those remaining. Landlessness and birthrates, poverty and malnutrition are all closely linked, but to concentrate on reducing population ignores the root cause of poverty – the unequal division of the resources of nature. The problem is not so much an overcrowding of land but the control of so much land by the few, leaving so little land – and often enough the worst land – for the many.

It is encouraging to learn that so many countries have introduced programmes they describe as 'land reform', some of them springing out of pressure by the

United States through President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, a programme of aid for Latin America in the 1960s. Most of these produced negligible results in the face of entrenched power structures. Oxfam describe some of them as disastrous.

Finally the booklet discusses the future effects of present international attitudes to poverty and hunger. The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, held in July 1979 under the auspices of the FAO, endorsed much of the work done by Oxfam. Here is a body who now believes strongly that "unless a society is organised to allow the benefits of growth to reach all its people, any technical improvement will always benefit the richer and stronger members of society more than the poor." They note with regret however, that "few governments are sincerely interested in social justice for the poor."

Although Oxfam offers no solution to the peoples of Third World countries they do open up the debate and give it a push towards the only real solution.

In doing so, they inspire hope that, some day, they will see the full light and realise that the solution they seek to the problem of the landless and the hungry in the Third World has been available to them – between the covers of *Progress and Poverty* – for the past 100 years.

*\*Land for People: Land tenure and the very poor*, edited by Claire Whittemore. Published by Oxfam Public Affairs Unit, Price £1.30. Available from : Oxfam, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ.

Commenting on the publication of *Land for People*, John Rowley in The Guardian has this to say:

"When an earlier version of this Oxfam Report made its appearance at the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Rome in 1979,

the conference organisers from the Food Agricultural Organisation attempted to prevent its distribution. That was a clumsy mistake, but it is not difficult to see why the attempt was made.

"From the FAO's point of view and that of other major aid donors, and many governments

who were anxious to protest their commitment to rural development, it is a thoroughly subversive document.

"Drawing on years of first-hand Oxfam experience in working with the very poor, the report concludes that the chief causes of persistent hunger and poverty in Third World villages

are not lack of investment in the countryside, rapid population growth, environmental deterioration, or the lopsided international economic order: the root cause is "the existence of unjust land tenure systems and the political, economic, and social policies which enable these systems to prevail."

**A**BOUT two hundred miles inland from the United States' Atlantic seaboard lies a vast region of mountain ridges, valleys and plateaux known as Appalachia. It is an area of great natural wealth – mainly coal, iron ore and timber – which stretches almost a thousand miles from Alabama in the south to Pennsylvania in the north, taking in large tracts of six intervening states – Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia and the two Carolinas.

By any standards of measuring natural resources, Appalachia is a rich country. Yet within its boundaries live some of the USA's poorest people. Indeed, it rivals the Deep South as one of the major depressed areas of the USA, with poverty-stricken hillbilly farmers eking out bare livings in a landscape scarred and disfigured by the activities of the big mining corporations. The whole area, according to a recent Washington Post report, is "deeply addicted to Government assistance."

## POVERTY IN APPALACHIA

A corner of the USA by-passed by the Affluent Society

..... Bert Brookes

The glaring paradox prompted one member of a 1978 seminar held by the Highlander Folk School of Tennessee to put the simple question: "Why is the land so rich and our people and schools so poor?"

To answer the question, a number of community groups and individuals in the region combined their resources to set up a study group which they called, perhaps a little colourfully, the Appalachian

Land Ownership Task Force. Their purpose was to determine to what extent land ownership patterns in the area were affecting social conditions in the rural communities.

The study involved some 60 investigators in surveying over 55,000 parcels of property and reviewing 20 million acres of land in 80 counties.

The study group found\* that there were three basic factors which could explain the persistence

of Appalachian poverty in the midst of 20th century American affluence.

First, they said, *the ownership of land and mineral rights in the area is highly concentrated in the hands of a relative few*. For example, the land surveyed was held by 30,000 owners; yet 43 per cent of it is in the hands of 50 owners and ten government agencies.

Second, *Appalachia's land and mineral resources are largely absentee-owned*. Of the surface area surveyed, nearly 75 per cent is owned by people or organisations based outside the area. In the case of mineral rights, the figure is 80 per cent. (This sort of pattern was expected in the coal areas but was found to apply generally.) Very little of the land is owned by local people.

Third, *large corporations dominate the ownership picture*. Some 40 per cent of the land surveyed and 70 per cent of the mineral rights are owned by big corporations. Of the top 50 private owners, 46 are corporations.

These factors are compounded by others relating to taxation. The property tax system, says the study group, fails to bring in anything like a reasonable revenue. Over 75 per cent of the mineral owners pay a mere 25 cents an acre. The average tax per ton of coal is only \$.0002 – or one fiftieth of a cent.

The group noted that the big, absentee owners tended to pay less property tax per acre than the small, local owners. They concluded that this was because local owners tend to make improvements to their land (which are taxable) whereas the absentees, usually holding the land for its mineral wealth potential or other speculative value, tend to leave the land in its virgin state.

One effect of these circumstances is that farming in the area has undergone a dramatic decline. In the 80 counties surveyed, well over a million acres of

farmland went out of agricultural production between 1969 and 1974. Over 17,000 farmers – about a quarter of the total – gave up during these years.

The housing situation, too, has reached a state of crisis. The tying up of large areas of land for speculation, especially in the coal areas, means that land for housing is scarce – and becoming scarcer. House prices are getting beyond the reach of all but the richest people.

To deal with these problems, the study group envisage a two-pronged strategy.

First, they want land reform. They want to see some mechanism that will reduce the loss of land for local use, counteract the effect of absentee ownership of large tracts of land and give local people more access and control.

Second, they want property taxes to be revised so as to yield bigger revenues and these to be used for the benefit of the whole community, for example, to promote economic development and provide adequate land for housing.

The study group's findings suggest strongly that the first essential step in any attempt to improve the plight of the people of Appalachia is to replace the present property tax – which apparently falls heavily on improvements – with a tax on land values only. Not only could this be geared to bring in more revenue without the deterrent to development which a similar tax on buildings would exert, it would dramatically reduce the present tendency for land to be held idle for speculation. The results could only be beneficial for employment, for the provision of land for housing and for the general well-being of the people of Appalachia.

**\*Who Owns the Land and Minerals? What Difference Does it Make? A Report by the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1981.**

## BOOK LIST

**ECONOMIC HARMONIES** by Frederic Bastiat. Translated from the French. The great truth that lies at the foundation of all human society, namely, that the interests of all men are fundamentally compatible, that there is and can be no antagonism between the welfare of one and the welfare of all provided there is a free market in which goods and services are voluntarily exchanged. The author refutes the contrary doctrine which is the basis of every variety of collectivism, namely that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the interests of different social classes, races, nations, industries, etc. Original French edition published in 1850. 596pp Paperback. £3.50

**LAND, PEOPLE AND POLITICS** by Roy Douglas. A history of the land question in the United Kingdom from 1878 to 1952. The author maintains that the "land problem" was far more central than most historians have hitherto allowed and that there is a continuous skein of thought and political activity related to land which links many apparently disparate events. Beginning with agrarian unrest in Ireland in the 1870s, through the agitation in the Highlands of Scotland and in Wales, he describes the relationship of the land question to the social problems of the time. 239pp Hard cover. £6.50

**PROGRESS AND POVERTY** by Henry George. The world's all-time economic best seller. An enquiry into the causes of industrial depression and of the persistence of poverty amid advancing wealth. 355pp Hard cover – full edition £4.50  
238pp Hard cover – condensed edition £3.00  
238pp Paperback – condensed 1979 centenary edition £1.95

**THE ROAD TO SERFDOM** by F. A. Hayek. Individualism and collectivism; democracy and planning, economic control and totalitarianism; security and freedom. A noted economist asserts that a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy. First published 1944; this edition 1976. 192pp Hard cover £3.50

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

**30 SQUARE MILES OF WASTE-LAND and EEC EMPLOYMENT PROPOSALS** two of an excellent series of booklets each at 50p from the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Limited, 45 Russell Square, London WC1.

**THE GALLUP REPORT** an interesting report on the fairly accurate Gallup record of a plus or minus error band of 3 per cent. Authors Norman Webb and Robert Wybrow. Sphere Books price £1.95.

**MANIFESTO** is published by Pan Books at £1.95: the collective authors are Francis Cripps, John Griffith, Frances Morrell, Jimmy Reid, Peter Townsend and Stuart Weir. A 'traditional' left wing indictment of the capitalist order.

**THE NATURE OF CURRENT UNEMPLOYMENT** by W. Daniel, British-North American Research Association, 1 Group Square, London EC4 and Washington D.C. This is one of a series of occasional

economic papers produced at £1.50.

to be reviewed in subsequent issues ... **THE POLITICS OF POVERTY** by Susanne MacGregor, price £2.95 published by Longman.

**RULE BRITANNIA** by James Bellini, price £6.95 published by Jonathan Cape.

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