

THE DC 10 skimmed effortlessly over the clouds, 33,000 feet above the Amazon jungle. Dawn on the horizon, and the first red rays pierced the white mountains to expose the green mat of foliage which are no longer the final refuge of primitive men. Down there, in the jungle, human beings are being crushed by the bulldozers and guns of an economic system hungry for the resources of nature and disrespectful of the needs of the peoples who adapted themselves to the Amazon basin in the earliest stages of cultural evolution.

My lofty vantage point lent itself to perceiving problems on their global scale. It occurred to me that two loosely-knit, worldwide organisations concerned with the allocation of land were too isolated from each other. Each was primarily interested in men at different stages of cultural evolution, and this exclusive interest resulted in missed opportunities. Should resources and knowledge be pooled in order to redirect cultural developments in the right direction?

The key elements held in common are (a) respect for the uniqueness of individual beings and their cultures, and (b) the need for men to share natural resources in order to survive.

In *urban-industrial society*, these twin aims are represented by the philosophy of Henry George. He proposed that the industrial economy should operate within an institutional framework in which men enjoyed equal access to natural resources. In a technologically-advanced system this can only be accomplished through the exaction of a tax on land values.

In *rural-traditional society*, a pre-condition of survival for so-called primitive men is the preservation of traditional rights to land. Anthropologists are beginning to mobilise their efforts in a belated effort to halt the genocide which has decimated so many tribal societies since the beginning of colonial expansion.

Should these two areas of concern relate more closely to each other? Can lessons be learnt in the pursuit of common goals? After all, the main thrust of action in both cases is opposition to the

FRED HARRISON visits BRAZIL and says:

# Amazon Indians' fight for land is everyone's cause

♦*SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL'S picture shows two aboriginal men deep in the jungle of the Amazon basin. Their existence is threatened by an economic system which is grabbing their land without recognising their customary rights to the resources of nature. . . .*

exploitation of people—whether proletariat, peasant or primitive—arising directly from the loss of land rights.

THE JET landed smoothly at Sao Paulo, a sprawling city of skyscrapers at the centre of Brazil's industrial complex. Here, not so long ago, Indian slaves were traded. Today, Brazil has one of the fastest growing economies, and a GNP built on the bodies of indigenous Indians who numbered one million in 1900 and only 200,000 in 1957. During this brief period over 80 tribes suffered deculturation and destruction. Hired killers have been and still are—used to clear Indians from their land, to make way for a programme of economic growth which has no respect for ethics or customary rights.

The fight to protect traditional societies is seriously hampered by the absence of a coherent strategy and philosophy. Many issues are still controversial. For example, should tribes be preserved in "national parks" (which can be seen as human zoos)? Or should they be integrated into the wider social systems which seek to embrace their land, if not their bodies? Integration at too fast a rate would expose them to the diseases of "civilisation" which in the past have proved lethal. Yet

there are those who favour integration on the ground that Third World countries must develop in order to free the majority of their people from inadequate diets and disease. According to this argument, they cannot afford to abstain from exploiting natural resources located in areas where aboriginal peoples live simply to preserve the apparently incongruent social behaviour patterns of the past.

The problem with this is that the poverty of politically independent Third World countries can in large measure be traced to the exploitation of resources by monopolists. The misallocation of land and income (arising directly from the adoption of the European model of property rights) creates an impression of scarce resources; this, then, suggests the need to expand the process of land exploitation. There need be no such problem. Existing resources—properly used and allocated—could provide for all needs without having to trample on the lands of neighbouring aboriginal peoples. Those who advocate the expropriation of other people's land have to prove their case, and a shallow humanitarianism which justifies damage to ancient cultural systems on the grounds of necessity and economic growth must be rejected.

So the anthropologist should show an interest in the way land



is used in industrial systems, whether advanced or developing. For the pressures to transgress the land rights of others originate in these urban centres. If the anthropologist looks, he will find surplus land which stands idle for anti-social reasons. He need not, therefore, lend his authority to spurious arguments about the need to develop by robbing others of their ancient rights to resources.

The solution to the alleged problem, a tax on land values, should commend itself to him for two reasons. First, it reduces the temptation to steal other people's land. Secondly, its socially integrative qualities, and its recognition of equal rights to land, closely parallels the customary practises of traditional societies.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, we have a developmental model for aboriginal societies interested in aligning themselves with larger social systems.

But lessons can be transmitted in the opposite direction. The demand for land taxation in industrial society emphasises the materialistic-utilitarian virtues of such a reform; too often we ignore the psychological and biological importance of territorial identification. This realm is, admittedly, a difficult one. It confronts us with the problem of identifying the characteristics of a "healthy" society.<sup>2</sup> The psycho-social instability of whole

groups of peoples in so-called advanced societies reveal an acute state of suffering which cannot be cured by the placebos of the welfare state and/or the penal system.

**SURVIVAL** International is a London-based organisation fighting to protect the rights of aboriginal peoples. It recognises that "probably the greatest problem for most non-literate communities is to retain their land." SI has raised funds with which to buy land confiscated from tribes, in order to hand it back to its traditional possessors. The work of SI will be described in greater detail in a future article. Here, we consider one critical problem.

In a study of territorial rights which SI is funding, it defines the second phase of the project in these terms: "If all members of the community hold land rights now, it is important that all should retain their land rights until the community is effectively literate and able to interact on more equal terms with other citizens."<sup>3</sup>

But what happens once the aborigines are literate? Should rights be adapted to permit the alienation of land? If not, and given that there is the assumption that the aborigine has been integrated into a modern economy based on advanced technology, how should the erstwhile equal

rights to land enjoyed by all members of the community be preserved? Do those who move off the tribal lands into factories to earn their living lose their share? If customary rights are to be maintained in a modern context, how can this be by any means other than land value taxation?

The transitional problem of integrating people of different cultures into a single economic system is a delicate one. Private property in land encourages deleterious attitudes which must hinder integration. The losers are just as likely to be the aboriginal groups who have reaffirmed their rights to land according to criteria of modern jurisprudence. For example, the last Labour Government in Australia recognised the legal rights of aborigines to the land on which they lived. That appears an enlightened decision, offering protection from European land-grabbers. But there is a catch. If they "own" their land, they have no rights to the lands which the Europeans "own". So any future proposals for a reciprocal share-out of nature's resources on a nation-wide scale between the two races can be blocked by politicians on spurious ideological grounds.

There is a further complication. If foreign capital is admitted onto the land for the purpose of development, what part of the ensuing output belongs to the indigenous population? To say that firms should be obliged to plough back some proportion of the wealth constitutes no guide as to (i) how much this should be, and (ii) whether it should be derived from the returns to land, labour or capital. If an answer to this problem can be secured on ethical grounds, it would constitute a sounder basis for taxation than one based on arbitrary a-moral judgments.

So we can see how vital it is to begin work on a developmental model which satisfies both the traditional and modern economy in a dynamic way; which provides both economic efficiency and social harmony; and which preserves the dignity and freedom of people at all stages of cultural evolution. Only then can anthropologists and politicians help aboriginal peoples to integrate into the larger systems



on a voluntary basis and at a pace which does not threaten them with biological or cultural extinction.

SAO PAULO is the living indictment of a system which refused to recognise the justice of equal rights to land. During the 19th century, while the southern states of Brazil at least carved out many smallholdings for immigrants, in Sao Paulo the land was held by a few owners of large estates growing coffee.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants were needed—as labourers on the plantations! Today, the giant multi-national firms as well as Brazilian entrepreneurs exploit natural resources and the people. The latter have no land rights to fall back on. Fifty years ago there was an incredible re-emigration rate to Europe: this route is closed now, and the people are trapped in the concrete canyons.

Nor are we, in Europe and North America, disinterested observers of what is going on in the Amazon basin. As my DC 10 soared northwards back to New York, I read *Victims of the Miracle*,<sup>5</sup> a study of the relationship between economic development and the plight of Brazil's Indians. The author, Shelton Davis, reminds us that 11.4m. hectares of the Amazon were officially deforested between 1966 and 1975. The basin produces about 50% of the oxygen added to the earth's atmosphere annually, and consumes about 10% of the gaseous carbon. The process of deforestation, then, as well as stripping the ecological environment away from the tribes, also seriously threatens the biosphere with environmental suicide. We all have a direct interest in the photosynthetic processes of the Amazon basin. If we aligned this with a concern for the plight of the people who are trying to live there, our common interests would be well served.

# Pension off the Speculators!

SIR ANTHONY Royle, the Tory MP for Richmond upon Thames, failed to force the Government to scrutinise the Post Office Pension Fund's speculative property dealings.

He was angry that a nationalized corporation should invest \$18.9m. in a development in Philadelphia, USA, instead of British industry.

In the House of Commons he asked what account was being taken of the speculation. But he received short shrift from Les Huckfield, the Secretary of State for Industry, who replied: "None. Such transactions are the responsibility of the trustees of the fund."<sup>1</sup>

The conservative Party endorses the present system which finds land speculation acceptable. It therefore ill-behoves one of its leading representatives to raise objections to a particular case.

There is undoubtedly a need to examine the speculative activities of institutions like pension funds. Sir Harold Wilson, the former Prime Minister who is currently chairing a committee of enquiry into the financial activities of the City, has remarked on the astonishing power wielded by such institutions.

They contributed significantly to the boom in property dealings around 1972-74, which caused the ensuing collapse in the economy.

Involvement in Property Funds £m. <sup>2</sup>					by Pension
1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	
138	172	220	437	516	

Insurance companies also joined in the frenzy of buying and selling which priced land beyond realistic levels.

The slump in the UK property market, however, encouraged the pension funds to seek elsewhere for their speculative investments. North American land proved very attractive.

Although there was a slump in the US property sector in 1974, a quick recovery attracted foreign money—including the cash accumulated by British pension funds, many of which represent the interests of employees in the public sector.

FOR example, in March the British Airways' Pension Fund paid about £13m. for a 13-acre shopping centre in Houston, Texas. The fund has an estimated total of about £100m. in real estate generally.

It is estimated that over the past three years about £200m. has been invested by pension funds and other UK investors in US real estate.<sup>3</sup> Among these investors are the pension funds of the Electricity Supply Industry, the Post Office, London Transport, British Rail and British Steel Corporation.

If—as Royle suggests—it is wrong for the pension funds to channel money into land speculation rather than job and wealth-creating investment in UK firms, his argument can only be right if it applies to **all** such investments by **anyone**. Only a thorough change in attitudes to property ownership will yield a general solution to the problem: why single out one speculator for condemnation?

The left-wing plan—worker control of the pension funds<sup>4</sup>—is no guarantee that the cash would be used for "socially beneficial purposes" by the new trustees, unless the prospect of profits from speculation were removed altogether.

The only answer is a tax on the value of land. This would remove all incentive to channel money into the speculative buying and hoarding of land.

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2. G. N. Appell, 'The Plight of indigenous peoples: issues and dilemmas,' in *Survival International Review*, Summer 1977.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. P. P. Lopes, 'Land Settlement in Brazil,' *International Labour Review*, Vol. 33, 1936.
5. S. H. Davis, *Victims of the Miracle*, Cambridge U.P., 1977.

1. *Hansard*, March 9, 1978.
2. *Money into Property*, Debenham, Tewson & Chinnocks, Information Service (July 1975).
3. Bruce Kinloch, *Daily Telegraph*, March 29, 1978.
4. *Your Money and Your Life*. CIS Anti-Report No. 7.