

## CANTERBURY Spiritual verdict

**OUTSPOKEN** Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. George Carey has pronounced on the scandal of the missing millions from the coffers of the Church Commissioners.

The Church of England lost millions of pounds during the land boom of the late 1980s. It happened when the investment advisors encouraged the church to pursue the windfall profits being made out of speculation in property.

Now the Archbishop has condemned the practice, which led to an £800 million fall in the value of assets and jeopardised the wages of the clergy. He said the Church Commissioners had been guilty of "no criminal behaviour whatsoever", but he added:

"What is inexcusable is the borrowing of so much money and the investment of hundreds of millions of pounds in property. Now you don't invest borrowed money, you just don't. That's highly dangerous, especially if the bottom falls out of the market, which it did."

Dr. Carey's comments were made during an interview; his views were to be published in a book. These comments, however, have since been cut from the version to be published later this year, but were leaked to the Daily Telegraph (April 6).

\*According to an investigation in *The Sunday Times* (March 27), some of Britain's insurance companies are refusing to meet legitimate claims by policyholders. The London newspaper quotes one loss assessor as stating: "They are behaving like crooks in bowler hats. They squandered millions of pounds on estate agencies and property; now they are

trying to claim back from the public in one year the losses of four or five years".

## BOGOTA Death squads

**LANDLESS** peasants in Latin America continue to be victims of official policies that ignore the role of land ownership in the cultural crisis.

• In Brazil, 1,000 children from landless families are murdered annually; but the number is twice as large in Colombia, according to the UN Children's Fund. Officially, the link is not made between landlessness and the teams of children in the streets of Bogota, who are the victims of shopkeepers and their security guards. Also among the victims of the land tenure system are the Arhuaco Indians, who live in the Sierra Nevada. Their attempts to protest at government policies have led to the murder of tribal leaders.

The Bogota government, while officially proclaiming a wish to eradicate the cultivation of narcotics, does not recognise an association between landlessness and the narcotics industry, which is centred around Medellin, Cali and Cartagena. The link is made by journalists, however. One of them, Lynne Wallis, writing in *The Observer* (London: 5.9.93) notes: "Now the land is being taken over by drug barons growing leaves for cocaine. The Arhuaco chew the leaves to suppress hunger and help them stay awake to tend crops."

• In El Salvador, leaders of the left-wing FMLN, who abandoned guerrilla warfare in favour of a peaceful settlement, now complain that the government has not kept its promise to provide land to former fighters. They also claim the government has tolerated the re-emergence of right-wing death squads.

**ROMANIA'S** parliament has approved a tax on land which opposition MPs are to contest in the constitutional court. They claim that the tax would be levied on estimates of production from land, which they argue is contrary to the law. The tax, they say, discriminates against private landowners, of which there are now over five million.

Agricultural companies, such as state farms, are exempt from the tax: they will continue to be liable to pay a profits-related tax.

The land tax is among measures that open the way for the IMF to approve a \$700m loan. But the Propact farmers' union predicts the tax will create social unrest.

## TOKYO Landless dead

**THE HIGH** price of land in Japan is so great that there is little room for the dead. Tokyo's metropolitan government has a solution: the dead are being offered multi-storey steel dormitories - but only for cremated bodies. A place in the 70-foot concrete dome, which holds 5,200 lockers, costs £1,400 to £2,400. The space crisis is a disaster for Buddhists, who believe the dead must be given a resting place before the 49th day after death. In Tokyo, the premium on space means that the city government has to sell 750 to 1,000 sites a year by lottery.

## LONDON Privatisation

**LAND at a discount, or even free, is being offered in 21 English towns. The offer is from the Commission for New Towns, which has been ordered to privatise public assets before it is wound up in 1998. The commission is asking councils to launch**

development competitions. Winners would receive land at less than its commercial value.

Since 1979, when Margaret Thatcher's privatisation programme came into action, the Commission has raised £2 bn for the Treasury. Assets still available for disposal include over 9m sq. ft. of commercial premises and 18,000 acres of land.

\* An underground toilet in London's West End, with a guide price of £70,000, has been sold at auction for £350,000. The toilet, in Charing Cross Road, has planning permission for conversion to retail use. A public toilet on Twickenham Green, in south-west London, has been converted to a bistro: the price has not been divulged by the borough council.

## LAGOS Redistribution

**NIGERIA'S** defence, justice and information ministers have been named in a court case in which they are said to have acquired prime building sites in Lagos at prices below market values. The 40 sites were compulsorily acquired from the owners. Now a development company is challenging the decree on which the coastal sites were acquired. The Lagos state high court has temporarily restrained the federal government from exercising ownership rights over the land.

In Harare, white farmers are complaining that Prime Minister Robert Mugabe is not playing fair with the programme of land redistribution. The Zimbabwe government has passed a law to compulsorily redistribute land to poor peasants. But the first farm to be compulsorily acquired has been leased to the cabinet minister who designed the land reform programme.

## News in Brief