

A Word With You

"**C**HERCHEZ la femme," say the French, when it's a question of looking for the hidden motive in a crime. And the Georgist version of this in the arena of world affairs is, "cherchez la land question."

It works remarkably well. Your Georgist detective does as well as an Inspector Maigret. Point out some aggravated trouble spot in the world, and the *a priori* assertion that the land question there must be especially acute has a more than 50-50 chance of proving correct.

Number one trouble spot, Viet Nam: "land reform is a crying need," say observers, and the communists have gained their success on the basis of promising land to the peasants. It is, now widely recognized that only when a sound land reform is implemented in South Viet Nam will there be a fighting chance against communism.

There are many other places vying for number two trouble spot. Latin America has contributed quite a few candidates — Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and countries close to the boiling point, like Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil. The pattern is remarkably similar: land in the hands of a small oligarchy and widespread distress among the landless masses. Or if we take the India-Pakistan dispute, we find that it is a struggle over who shall control one of the choicest bits of Asian real estate.

"But," other detectives protest, "cherchez something else besides la land question." Indubitably. Ignorance, backwardness, corruption, inflation, governmental restrictions, trade barriers, burdensome taxation, racialism, monopolistic privileges. But it is vain to explain the misery of these places on the basis of any one or a combination of these maladies, without referring back to the land question. For if everybody had access to natural opportunities, the other ills would not wreak such havoc; in fact they would be ameliorated.

Rhodesia (surely a runner-up in the trouble spot competition) is considered to be the prime example of a racially torn country. But even there we find that it is at bottom a land question. As in so many other cases, the early white settlers made land deals which were not fully understood by the natives to mean monopolistic appropriation. The other problems are subsidiary — the illegality of independence, "one man, one vote", turning over the helm "when the natives are ready," etc.

A lot of publicity has been given to "la femme" via detective stories and movies. But in the world's trouble spots the subsidiary questions get the lion's share of attention. It's high time to bring to light "la land question."

—Robert Clancy

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The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021, supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community — known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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