

AN I-YOU CHAT

The United Nations has been a disappointment to nearly everybody, I suppose. There is virtually no international conflict it has been able to mitigate or moderate. National interests dominate and each nation uses the UN as a soap-box for its propaganda. Yet it has endured for more than a quarter-century and still seems to serve a purpose as a world forum.

There is another aspect of the UN, less noticed and secondary, but deserving of more attention - and that is the research it does and the reports it issues on world problems, many of them economic. Two such reports were issued recently, one on rural and one on urban problems.

One was a report of a committee on agrarian reform of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization. This committee, headed by Dr. Lleras Estrepo, former president of Colombia, stated that the "green revolution" which has greatly increased farm productivity in many countries has not improved the lot of rural workers but "on the contrary, frequently makes it worse." This increase in productivity, the committee contended, "is not a substitute for agrarian reform." Distribution of the increased product remains a problem. Landlords have squeezed peasants and evicted them, "lured by the prospect of gaining higher net profits with the new patterns of production." The committee called for land reform as a necessary complement to the "green revolution."

The other report was issued by the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning of the UN Economic and Social Council. This committee launched a global study over several years on urban land-use problems. After reviewing urban problems that have arisen in recent years, the Committee offered its recommendations and conclusions. First among them was that "nations should treat urban land as a natural resource...as a trust whose enjoyment could be ceded to individuals or corporate groups on a conditional basis equivalent to a long-term lease... To society belonged the right to determine the use of land and enjoy the benefits which accrued from changes in kind and intensity of land use. The right of using land should be made available to all citizens... and that right should be fully negotiable and treated subject to the conditions of the trust."

It is interesting that these two reports point so clearly toward the Georgist philosophy. Although they stop short of the specific measures we propose, these could be added with no difficulty. Is it possible that we have come further than we realise and that we have friends and colleagues in high places? It is heartening to think so - and yet there are strong forces arrayed against us, too - and we have much further to go and much more to do.

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