

# LAND & LIBERTY

LAND TENURE &  
WORLD ECO-CRISES

## OPIUM and the MASSES



Two Afghan heroin addicts in the streets of Kabul: victims of the landlords' poppies . . .

MARX said that religion was the opium of the masses. In Afghanistan, opium is the religion of the few – the rich landlords – and the peasants are its victims. Long before Moscow sent in troops, the landowners were making fortunes out of the narcotics trade. The peasants were shackled to the land in feudal serfdom, their only relief from exploitation being a helping of the product from the poppy fields which they were compelled to grow. The world is now shedding crocodile tears for Afghanistan. Détente is dead. Wall Street went frenzy with excitement as President Carter announced a \$16bn. increase in military hardware. But few people spoke up for the landless peasants when Afghanistan was ruled by a King. Few cared when Marxists took power in Kabul in the pre-invasion period and set about wrecking any hope of constructive land tenure reform. Statesmen now talk about the inviolability of national sovereignty. Few of them have anything constructive to say about the conditions which would create real freedom for the individual. Afghanistan is just a convenient excuse for the leadership tussles in Moscow and Washington. *Land & Liberty* probes the source of the real hardships confronting the Afghan peasants in their daily lives. And in our next issue, we report how landowners are operating a \$1.5bn. p.a. narcotics trade in Colombia, where guerrillas took over a dozen ambassadors hostage in Bogota in their bid to publicize their cause: land reform.

Many of the international community's widely shared goals – the elimination of malnutrition, the provision of jobs for all, the slowing of runaway rural-urban migration, the protection of productive soils and ecologically vital forests – are not likely to be achieved without radical changes in the ownership and control of land. It is a delusion to think that the basic needs of the world's poorest people will be met without renewed attention to politically sensitive land-tenure questions. It is an even greater delusion to think that the dispossessed of the earth will watch their numbers grow and their plights worsen without protesting. The issue of land reform will not go away.

—Ecologist Erik Eckholm: P.20

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