

THE LANDLESS peasants of Brazil have heard it all before. But once again, they are being showered with promises, this time from the incoming government led by Fernando Collor.

President Collor took office on March 15. His new agriculture minister, Joaquim Roriz, claims they will carry out "the greatest land reform in the world without violence."

That would be a truly remarkable achievement. But can Collor, whose presidency was energetically endorsed by the big landowners, deliver? If he does, his financial backers will lose heavily, because 75% of the "land tax" due from landowners remains unpaid every year. The largest landowners pay the least. Will they allow their president to hit their pockets?

As for the violence, Brazil has indeed suffered major social disturbances in recent years. Cavalry charges - sabres drawn, truncheons swung - have been employed against squatters.

•But even if the government managed to rein in the police, they cannot stop the private armies employed by the land barons. These mercenaries are used to control the peasants, whose desperation for land is an unceasing cause of rural conflict. The murder of landless farmers and their champions, from trade union leaders to Catholic priests, is now a routine occurrence. The assassins usually go unpunished.

The world has a vested interest in land

# Sting in the tale Amazonia nightmare

With the arrival of a new government, INSITE reports on to the prospects of peace and prosperity in Brazil.

reform in Brazil, because of the impact on global weather conditions arising from the deforestation of the Amazon.

Most people tend to forget the plight of the aboriginal tribes, however, whose plight is more immediate than the shift of temperatures by one or two degrees in the northern hemisphere.

The Yanomami are facing extinction because gold prospectors cannot be kept off their land. British pop singer Sting is one of the few high-profile people trying to rouse the public's anger against the genocide. Sting established the Rain Forest Foundation to try and protect native land, and in January he held a meeting with Raoni.

Raoni, the leader of the Xingu Indians, knows that the choices are stark. He says: "Are you going to kill all the Yanomami? God gave this land to us, the Indians. Sarney has cheated us."

Following his meeting with Raoni, Sting went on to a meeting with President Jose Sarney, to petition on behalf of the

Indians. Time, however, was running out for Sarney.

As the outgoing president, Sarney had little time left to accomplish anything. Earlier, he had claimed that he would confront the Amazon problem, but his record can be judged by his statement from the Catholic Indian Missionary Council, which accused him of reducing the size of the lands belonging to the Indians by 65%.

IT WOULD be easy to interpret the inactivity of Brazil's politicians as a wilful indifference to the aboriginal people's needs. It would probably be more accurate to interpret the political failure in terms of helplessness in the face of the economic despair of the miners who would not voluntarily abandon their families to scratch out a living from hillsides buried deep in the jungle.

Take, for example, the prospects of the 3,500 landless Brazilians who occupied a large ranch in Southern Brazil. They were evicted early in March after the threat of a massacre by the landowner's 800-strong private army. It was the last-minute arrival of 80 policemen - and the pleas for a peaceful solution from the wife of the landowner, Senor Rubens Banolas - which prevented a bloodbath.

Over 1,460 families quit, in what was a clear victory for the local branch of the right-wing Rural Democratic Movement, which is a powerful opponent of the government's agrarian reform programme. Its officials had succeeded in

starving the landless privately-owned land.

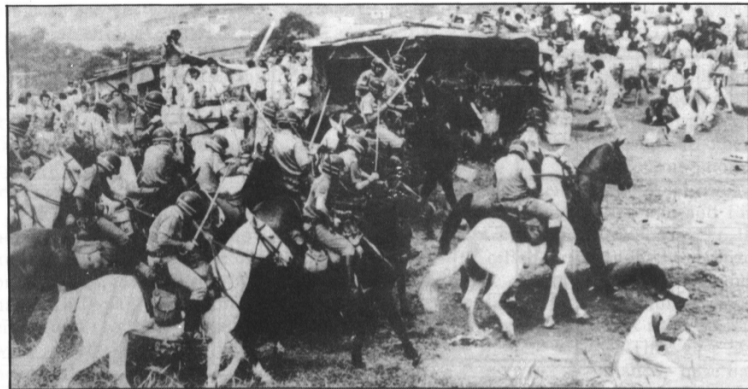
The families are now on a road 25 miles from town. They have nowhere to go. The 100 hectares (16 sq miles) of land is not available. Grande do Sul.

Understandably, they will exercise their option to head north, along a highway in the Amazon basin. Here they can carve out a tract and in five years, before the land is up and is abandoned.

Others will leave the shanty towns and head to the cities where their mercenary streams and poison the land. The plight of the proletariat - of hard toil for little reward - for their culture that is

That culture is the fabric of the Amazon basin. Here you take a piece of land, and you take a piece of culture, without the reference to the people. The malaria and mercury prospectors become a nightmare for finishing t

TO PITCH the annual difficulties in terms of agrarian reform, however, is to pitch it from the heart of the nightmare. There is enough



• Messy eviction: mounted police, swords drawn, uproot landless squatters in Sao Paulo, South America's largest city