



SAO PAULO Gunfight

NEARLY 80% of farmland in Brazil is owned by 10% of the farmers, which explains why landless labourers are the target for the death squads hired by landlords. In the latest round of killing, 10 people — including a seven year old girl — died in a shoot out over land in the northern state of Rondonia.

The land was occupied by families who claimed that, under the law the government is entitled to take land that was not being used productively and allocate it to landless families. But a local court found against the squatters and sent in the police. That's when the shoot-out occurred, with two policemen also falling victim.

According to a spokesman for the church-backed CPT land commission: "The major culprit is the federal government which is not carrying out a and reform to solve Brazil's social problems."

President Cardoso was elected on the promise to carry out "profound change in the countryside." He pledged to settle 40,000 families in his first year in power, and 280,000 families during his four-year term.

• Over 950 labourers, their lawyers and union leaders have been killed in the last 10 years over land disputes, reports Angus Foster in *The Financial Times* (London: Aug. 12).

ROME Counter-revolution?

UMBERTO ECO, Italian philosopher and author of the global best-selling novel *The Name of the Rose*, analysed the roots of Mussolini's political movement in *The Guardian* (London: Aug 12), and notes: "The Fascist Party was born boasting that it brought a revolutionary new order but it was financed by the most conservative among the land-lords who expected from it a counter-revolution."

DAMASCUS Peace dividend

LAND PRICES are soaring in a village that lies below the Golan Heights. Although Syria has yet to sign a peace treaty with Israel, speculators confidently expect that the guns will be put away — and that the money can be used to buy land. So developers are already making fat profits by erecting houses, some of which are sold for £200,000 — twice the cost price! The property boom is the early signal that Syrians expect a big reduction in the 60% of GDP that is spent on the armed forces.

ALTON Marching armies

CROMWELL'S troops once marched over the hill at Greenfields in Hampshire to fight it out at the Battle of Alton. Today, another war is being waged over the fields. This time, the land — much of it owned by construction firms — want to build houses. Residents of the town object, because they want to retain the view of the surrounding hills from their homes. And besides, as a local Councillor says there are "plenty of smaller sites available in the town that could be used for this kind of development."

PARIS "Sick" society

FRENCH housing minister M. Pierre-Andre Perissol branded as "sick" a society in which the homeless and empty buildings co-existed side by side. M. Perissol caused a rumpus in the property industry when he declared on August 29 that his government would requisition vacant office buildings from banks and insurance companies to house the homeless.

The minister aims to take control of more than a dozen buildings to provide 500 dwellings under a 1945 edict,

but his actions were condemned by one Parisien newspaper as "more of a refuge for the politicians than the homeless".

France has a homeless problem estimated at 670,000. According to M. Jean-Baptiste Eyraud, president of a pressure group that represents the homeless: "It is necessary to break the situation where buildings remain empty and rents remain high."

• Germany's homeless problem is put at 875,000, compared with Italy (150,000), Belgium (24,000) and Spain (45,000).

HARARE Gay distraction

PRESIDENT Robert Mugabe has found a novel way of distracting the political discontent of people who are going hungry in the rural areas. Drought has exacerbated the consequences of the government's failure to introduce land reforms. But Mr Mugabe has found a new cause: attacking homosexuals, reports Andrew Meldrum in *The Guardian* (London: Aug. 14). According to the president, "It cannot be right for human rights groups to campaign to dehumanise us to the status of beasts". But the country's landless peasants think that the 60% rise in the cost of basic foods and fuel is a more pressing problem.

EDINBURGH Clearance sale

KNOYDART'S future is once again uncertain, as this Scottish peninsula estate overlooking the Isle of Skye goes up for sale for the sixth time in 25 years. Previous owners, claim the 50 residents of the estate, buy it for recreation rather than to invest in the livelihoods of the tenants. But the sale in 1985 was to a Surrey property firm which bought the estate for

£1.8m., sold parcels of the land for a total of £2.5m and then sold what was left of the estate, 17,200 acres on the north-west coast, to the present owners for £1.7m. Now the Knoydart residents' association have decided to create a charitable trust so that, sometime in the future when their land comes up for sale again, they can buy it for the community. Support for the trust comes from former Olympic athlete Chris Brasher, who says: "How on earth can a country allow a situation where someone from Timbuktu can come along, write a cheque for £2m and buy a great chunk of the UK? There must be some alternative."

PRETORIA Property rights

SOUTH AFRICAN land minister Derek Hanekom has come under criticism from within his own African National Congress for wanting to delete the statutory protection of property rights. Mr Hanekom wants the property clause dropped from the bill of rights, so that the Mandela coalition government can proceed with a land reform programme.

WASHINGTON Rights and wrongs

TELEVANGELIST preacher Pat Robertson, leader of the Christian Coalition, has upset civil rights activists by trying to persuade President Bill Clinton to roll out the red carpet for Zaire's head of state, Mobutu Sese Seko. Human rights organisations have condemned the Zairean president's record, but Mr Robertson says that it is time to forgive and forget. Mr Robertson has a major financial interest in diamond and gold mines and thousands of acres of rainforest in Zaire.