



THE LAND IS OURS

SUMMER 2005

NEWSLETTER 23

DIARY:
♦ 3-10 July 2005: Ecovillage Network: European Gathering – Galagafarm, Hungary. www.gen-europe.org for more info: kazimir@gen-europe.org
♦ 3rd - 7th August: Big Green Gathering: - Cheddar, Somerset. TLIO's recommended festie of the year; www.big-green-gathering.com 01458 834 629
♦ 23rd October: Right To Protest Conference: London: www.freedomtoprotest.org.uk

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www.ramblers.org.uk 0207 339 8500
Sustainable Economics
www.sustecweb.co.uk
magazine available £10 annual sub; contact Brian Leslie 01892 522776
Travellers Advice Team
TAT News magazine, 0845 120 2980
www.communitylawpartnership.co.uk
Travellers Times Magazine
www.travellerstimes.org.uk 01432 344 039
Green Party
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TLIO CAMPAIGNS PEACEFULLY FOR ACCESS TO THE LAND, ITS RESOURCES & THE DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AFFECTING THEM, FOR EVERYONE, IRRESPECTIVE OF CLASS, RACE, AGE, OR GENDER.

NEWS IN BRIEF

RIGHT TO ROAM

Hooray! Due to lots of hard work, particularly by the Ramblers Association, we now have a right to roam over an extra four million acres in England and Wales. New maps are being published by the Ordnance Survey, showing where to walk over areas of privately-owned moor, mountain and heath land. Magistrates now have greater powers to clear blocked paths and there are tougher penalties for wildlife offences. Central Southern England is the third of eight regions to have new 'access land' maps published by the OS. [See www.countryside.gov.uk/access](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/access)

MOD DIRTY TRICKS DISRUPT 'GHOST VILLAGE' ACCESS

Fearless plans for a permanent peace centre in the middle of Salisbury Plain, Britain's biggest military danger area, have come a step closer this year. St. Giles' Church in Imber, a ghost village 'temporarily' requisitioned by the army to train US troops in 1943, is to get a £200k face-lift. The army and the Churches Conservation Trust are sharing the bill to restore the besieged church which has been damaged by wayward shells and shots. Recent events at St. Giles' have included Peace Direct, Bruce Kent's Movement for the Abolition of War, Wessex Archeology and Wiltshire Racial Equality-Council.

However, whilst giving with one hand, the army are taking with the other. They have launched a dirty tricks campaign, changing publicly announced access dates at short notice and disrupting events. Plans for a 2005 Easter service had to be cancelled at the last minute because the army 'had to' use Imber to train for the Iraq occupation on Easter Saturday.

For up-to-date Imber access dates contact Ruth Underwood, author of book 'Forever Imber', on 0207 272 8500. Ruth's father, Austin, started the campaign for the army to honour their pledge to evicted villagers. 'Friends of Imber Church' in Warminster also campaign for access. Contact them via John Syme on: 01985 846538. You can contact the army's land liaison officer Lt. Col. Nigel De Foubert at Westdown Camp on 01980 674679.

PLANNING SYSTEM: ALL CHANGE

The entire structure of the UK planning system is changing. Responsibility is gradually moving towards the EU-led Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies. To keep pace with this change get hold of the Friends of the Earth Planning Briefing which has been produced by their Leeds office - 0113 389 9954. The draft document is available on the TLIO Yahoo groups, contact Tony tony@tlio.org.uk on 0117 944 6219 FFI

WHO OWNS BRITAIN?

Look out for the new BBC series based on Kevin Cahill's land ownership book "Who Owns Britain" meanwhile the book itself got cheaper. This 450 page county-by-county catalogue and historical critique is

available in hardback edition from P.S. Books for only £11 inc. postage. Phone 020 8 767 7421, email: orders@psbooks.co.uk

DIY SQUATTING MANUAL: NEW EDITION

According to the Empty Homes Agency there are 864,000 empties in Britain. Nevertheless waiting lists continue to grow making social housing more and more difficult to get.

To the rescue comes the 12th edition of the Squatters' Handbook, available for £1.50 (bulk discounts available) from Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS). Tel. 08456 445814. E-mail: advice@squatter.org.uk ASS also have a groovy new website at www.squatter.org.uk

TLIO DIRECT ACTION INITIATIVE



The Diggers' Phone Tree

Diggers, Ecohome Defenders, Fencebusters, whatever you want to call the TLIO direct action band; the need for us to be there to help defend self-build affordable eco-homes and support land rights activities everywhere is not going away. Tony Wrench and Jane Faith are now threatened with an injunction - and so are Emma and John, who occupy a couple of smaller straw bale roundhouses at Brithdir Mawr. If the injunction is imposed, they could all be jailed for continuing to live in their own homes.

Their struggle has become a symbol for all the pioneers of what seems to be increasing numbers of people to be the only way out of plummeting quality of life and social/environmental degradation in de-industrialised cities. Low-impact livers, tucked away in the fields and forests of the UK, are fighting for the fundamental human right to live on the land. They're fighting for a sane future for their children which our authorities have made unlawful.

All of us who want to see responsible repopulation of a sustainable countryside need to get on the phone tree. To sign up phone the Chapter 7 office on 01460 249204 leaving your address, telephone number and transport capacity/need. Call on Thursdays to speak to a human.

LAND IS OURS STILL LANDLESS!

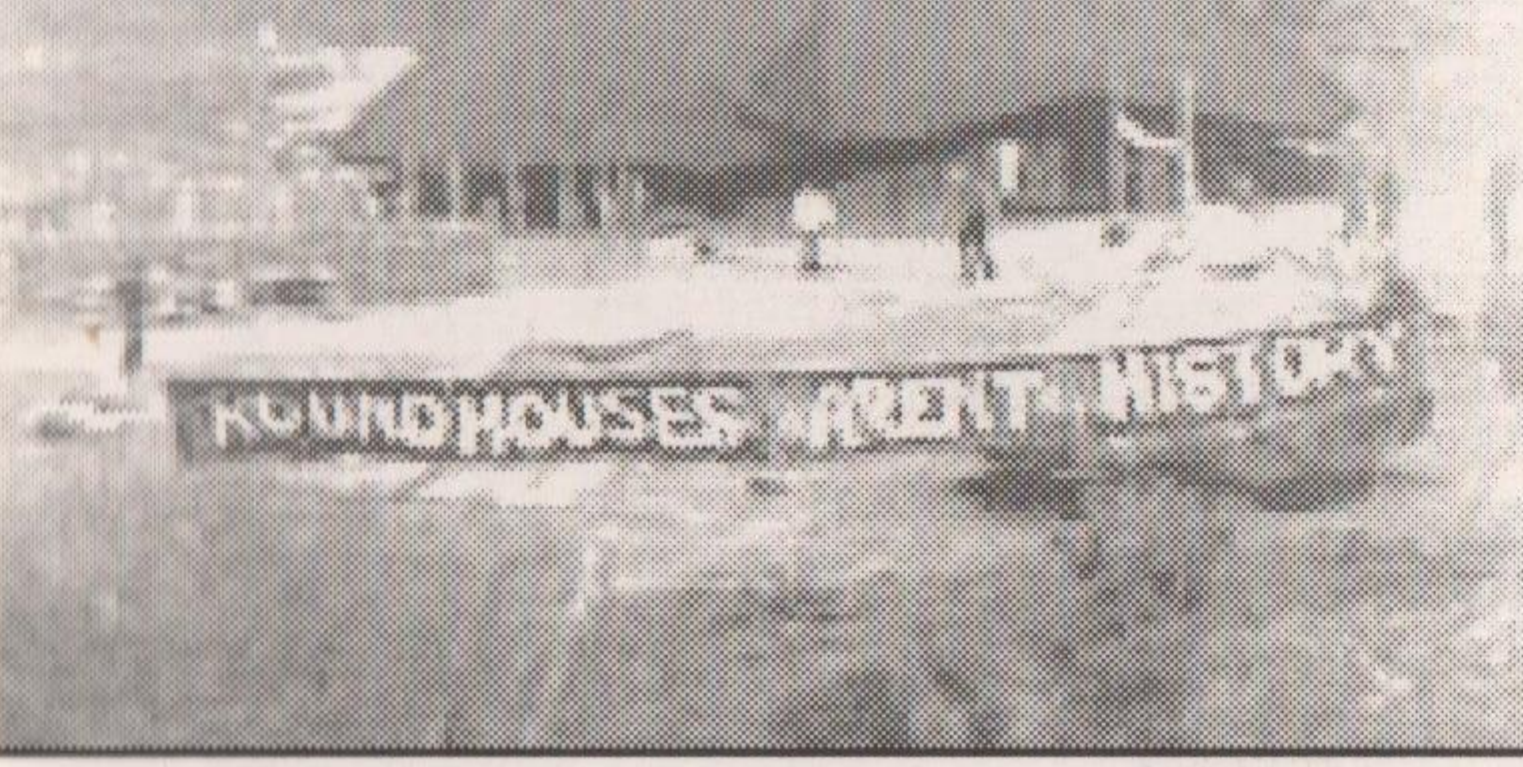
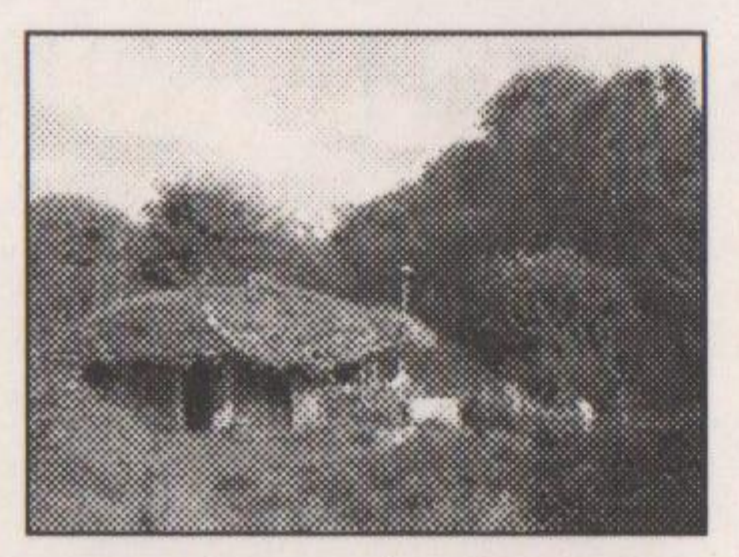
TLIO has brought together people all across the UK – and in other parts of the world – who believe that land ownership and social justice issues cannot be dealt with in isolation. But we have never had a permanent base, various temporary offices and ever changing addresses have made organising difficult at times and we have had to give equipment and records away for lack of space. If anyone living in or near the Somerset, Gloucestershire, Avon, Oxfordshire area has a spare room, outhouse or building or even a space to build that might be converted into a permanent TLIO storeroom and bunkhouse we'd very much appreciate it :-)) We also welcome suggested sites for one-off gatherings.

ROUNDHOUSES AREN'T HISTORY

Simon Fairlie

It's been over three years since the last issue of the TLIO Newsletter. We can only apologize for our absence, and in particular for failing to cover the action to save Tony Wrench's roundhouse at Brithdir Mawr, in Easter 2004. Subscribers to the TLIO mailing list must have wondered why they weren't invited to join the fun. The answer was that there wasn't the time, the entire protest was organised in less than three weeks. For those who missed it, here is a belated account of the event.

Eight years ago, Tony Wrench and Jane Faith built themselves a 30ft turf-roofed roundhouse with a 'one planet' ecological footprint at Brithdir



Mawr in Pembrokeshire National Park. The house didn't 'conform with planning policy' and now, after Tony and Jane have lost two planning appeals, National Park authorities are trying to force them to demolish their home.

Over Easter weekend, 2004, the couple had organised a posse to demolish their house - so Chapter 7 and The Land is Ours helped organise direct action to stop them, and give them the moral support they deserved! Protesters from all over the country descended on Pembrokeshire, first occupying an Iron Age Roundhouse village, which the Park authorities had given themselves permission for some years ago. We flew a huge banner declaring that 'Roundhouses aren't History' and set up an impromptu 'ideal low-impact home exhibition' in a nearby lay-by.

Then we marched to Brithdir Mawr to persuade Tony and Jane not to destroy a house that has become a symbol of the struggle for sustainability to so many people. Squatters occupied the roundhouse to prevent them from demolishing it, as supporters sang songs and gave public pledges of support. The emotional couple finally declared that the roundhouse would remain standing! On the Tuesday an even larger group of protesters marched on the Haverfordwest planning offices of the local authority, squatting the car park with a yurt and tents, until the authorities agreed to meet with them.

The event was emotional and empowering, as well as humorous, highlighting the absurdity of

CROFTERS TURN THE TIDE OF HISTORY

Tony Gosling

In one of the remotest parts of Britain a quiet revolution is taking place. On the 9th February 2005, three hundred crofters and residents of Paicr, in the Outer Hebrides, became the first to vote for a right to buy under the Scottish Land Reform Act. This follows on from previous amicable buyouts at Eig, Assynt and elsewhere and is the latest milestone in an historic shift in ownership from the Lairds to Crofters, beginning to redress the injustices of the Highland clearances.

Paicr's 55,000 acre Galson Estate is in the isolated Ness area of Lewis. It is part-owned by Barry Lomas, a Leamington Spa accountant who has repeatedly refused to sell to local residents. Plans for a wind-farm on the estate, with the future revenue this will create, have been cited as a motivating factor behind the bid for local control.

An Expanding Role for Crofters

South East of Uist, Crofters have called on the Cairngorms National Park to renovate their empty Crofts to satisfy local demand for affordable homes. Crofters in Badenoch in the Cairngorms are being offered high prices for scarce grazing land by housing developers bewitched by planning gain: the rise in land value that comes



Overjoyed Paicr Residents celebrate Land Reform Act success

with planning permission. Despite the temptation, many Crofters are refusing to sell, pointing out that farmers and landowners have hundreds of empty but structurally sound cottages in need of restoration.

The Cairngorms National Park has a significant area of land under Crofting tenure, and like the rest of rural Scotland it suffers from high house prices. Under proposed legislation, urban Scots will be able to buy cheap new Crofts rather like lowland smallholdings. There are high hopes for the new Crofting Reform Bill, in which new areas of land could become Crofts and large existing Crofts subdivided, giving an increasing number of Scots the chance to build or buy an affordable home.

What is Crofting?

Crofting is a way of life and system of land management, governed by the Crofting Acts of the late nineteenth century. It is the traditional collective way of farming in the Highlands where all local people have private plots but collectively manage shared land and the surrounding mountain grazing.

The victims of the Highland Clearances were mostly Crofters who followed the fate of the English and Welsh peasants in being evicted to make way for sheep. Crofters fought back valiantly in the 1880's, after which a Royal Commission established their security of tenure in law. Crofters now pay what is usually a peppercorn rent to the local Laird, from whom they 'hold' the Croft.

More recently many Lairds have sold off their estates to investors. Crofts cannot be bought, sold or mortgaged and must be passed down in the family or given to newcomers agreed by the local community.

For more info see: Andy Wightman's guide www.landreformact.com
Caledonia Centre for Social Development (CCSD) www.caledonia.org.uk

The Land Is Ours ~ A Landrights Campaign for Britain



OUR ADDRESS: THE LAND IS OURS, The Potato Store, Flaxdrayton Farm, South Petherton, Somerset, TA13 5LR 01460 249204 www.tlio.org.uk

photo courtesy of Stormovay Gazette

September 2004 - Tony Gosling and Mark Brown

Rather than grumbling about landlessness & the injustices of corporate land ownership, we decided to discuss, then draft, a programme to be embodied in a simple parliamentary bill. Like Diggers of yore, we believe the simple principle that everyone has a human right to space to live, without paying tax or rent to anyone; & that this, not draconian laws, CCTV, ID cards & guns brings real and lasting national security.

The immediate advantage of this approach to land distribution would be for wage-earners. They would be able to choose the work they do rather than be coerced into wage-slavery. It would also secure British people against a precarious economic system that could topple at any time. So we had a go at plotting out a course by which our country might be peacefully and fairly redistributed.

One irritating factor mitigates against this bill: Economics; homelessness is good for business. If society's demand for homes was satisfied; that would cause a drop in the price of a roof over your head (Hooray!). According to *The Economist* this would cause a recession & shift Britain's finances into reverse. With interesting results?

Outline stages of the Land Security Bill can be found on The Manor website at www.public-interest.co.uk/manor or phone: 0117 373 0346

COMMUNITY LAND OWNERSHIP

A Community Land Trust is a Charitable Trust or Industrial and Provident Society which acquires land/premises through gift or very low purchase price, then leases to a community group for: affordable housing; growing land; social enterprises and/or live/work units. The key difference from other schemes is that the land value, quite considerable in many cases, is taken out of the equation by ring-fencing it in perpetuity for the community. With the land value out, any transaction deals solely with the cost/value of the buildings on it. With affordable housing, purchasers can sell on but will leave a proportion of the building value behind (perhaps 25 - 30% - it varies), so it's affordable for the next person.

www.oxfordshirecommunitylandtrusts.org.uk

Go, MOVE, SHIFT

Mark Brown

A shocking new wave of traveller evictions has swept the country over recent years. Seeds of this latest displacement were sown a decade ago when the 1968 Caravan Sites Act was abolished and victims of the new Criminal Justice Act were encouraged to buy their own land by the Tories.

On 6th January 2005 at Ridge in Hertfordshire, Twin Oaks Caravan Park was bulldozed. Five people, including a critically ill woman of 72, were assaulted and two men arrested. Four mobile homes with content were wrecked including two wheel chairs. The eviction, carried out by Constant & Co, cost £150k. Damage to property was almost £75k. Cases under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act are now being prepared against Hertsmere District Council and Constant.

Most disturbing of all was the recent suspected arson attack at a site of largely Irish travellers near Basildon, Essex, which killed John and Kathleen McCarthy. John and Kathleen



BRITAIN'S LOCAL HOUSING MONOPOLIES

James Armstrong and Mark Brown

Last year's Barker Commission, set up by John Prescott, investigated the UK crisis in housing supply. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published Kate Barker's report in March 2004. Ms. Barker is a friend of the Treasury; who are concerned to align the UK economy with the Eurozone. The EU wants the annual growth of UK house-prices to amend to continental levels of 1.1% a year. Barker recommended a substantial increase in new house-build to achieve this.

In her report Ms. Barker states, "The underlying constraint on housing is the supply of land". (Interim Report, Executive Summary - paragraph 19, p-10). Housing developers, she explains, drip feed houses onto the market rather than producing them as fast as they are able, in order to maintain prices. Self-build is not mentioned in the report. The section with the promising title "Alternative Housebuilders" turns out to be about office developers who dabble in house-building. With this major omission, questions remain about a conflict-of-interest in Kate Barker's appointment to lead this investigation. In her position as a professional banker on the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, her opinion is likely to be prejudiced, since a rising housing market is central to banks' income. So her review - in her own words - was "limited to the scope of the existing policy framework" (Interim report page 5, para 5).



artwork by Peter Poole: PO Box 321, Hove, BN3 6HY

A Housebuilding Cartel

The UK's top ten housebuilders, who currently construct about half of all the country's new homes, own land and options with permission sufficient for six and a half years of house build. They are Wimpey, Persimmon, Barratt, Taylor-Woodrow, Bellway, Wilson-Connolly, Westbury, Berkeley, Wilson-Bowden and Redrow. Seven of these companies effectively contract-out building plans, "oven ready land," to the other three, Barrett, Bellway and Berkeley. Meanwhile, almost all of the smaller firms which constitute the other half of the industry dominate a market locally, or regionally, undertaking 50 or even 100% of all new build housing in 'their' county or city (Interim Report, table 5.4).

As an economist, Kate Barker was only critical of housebuilding monopolies insofar as they may lead to "inefficiencies in delivery" or "market failure". As a result, the final report recommends that local authorities should allocate 'multi-developer sites'. Eg. instead of Barrett's, we get Barrett/Belway/Berkley Homes. Parcelling sites out to a number of developers in this way meets Barker's demand for "competition", but it fails to acknowledge that there is as much cosiness between developers as there is between developers and local authorities. Officially then, despite virtual local and national monopolies on new building land, everything is hunky-dory says Kate. In rip-off Britain, housing can now join banking, supermarkets and oil in the twilight world of the officially sanctioned cartel.

For more info see TLIO website: www.tlio.org.uk

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

Dave Bangs

In East Brighton a number of us have campaigned hard for a boundary to the proposed new National Park that included all urban fringe downland. This is the Downs that our large & mostly working class population uses & loves. By a paradox of history it is also an area of much higher quality than the more remote areas. Abandonment by farmers unwilling to play a public role, past public acquisition, & the quirks of geography have all played their part in making the Brighton & Newhaven urban fringe cliffs & Downs exceptionally rich in wildlife & archaeology.

The campaign included walks, talks & lobbies, culminating in the appearance of 22 local folk as our witnesses at the Public Inquiry. We will know by the end of the 2005 whether our arguments have scored. The wider campaign for a National Park has been dominated by conservative middle class folk whose interest has lain with 'remote' areas & whose approach has been timid & deferential.

Phantom Conservation Volunteers

We set up the PCV at the end of 2003 to work on sites which landowners were neglecting. Since humans were excluded by the owners, we turned up as ghosts. Our first task was at Toad's Hole Valley, Hove, from which local people had been excluded for 10 years. About 30 local people hacked down scrub & cleared up rubbish on this derelict Downland site, nicely timed for our appearance at the Public Inquiry, to argue the inclusion of the site in the new National Park.

In May 2004 we discovered that a notorious local farmer had ploughed up an old chalk grassland site at Scabby Brow. The wretched local Council did nothing & DEFRA were reluctant to act against him despite their new powers under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. We organised a mass trespass & door-stepped the farmer. Finally we held a trespass scrub-bashing task on a part of Ditchling Beacon long damaged by modern farming, and we supported a mass trespass at Black Rock cliffs against ASDA's closure and enclosure of the well-known Undercliff Walk.

LIE OF THE LAND

Tony Gosling

The hunting battle leaves me cold. Isn't it just a spectacle? a side show in a wider attack by the City's globalising control freaks on those who still stand in their way, the Aristocracy, Monarchy and House of Lords? Let's not presume this ruling class infighting will result in vast lordly estates being sold off to you and I. As the aristocracy are divested of land and traditions, bad and good, so individuals and investment funds, hedging their bets against the crash, will rush to snap them up for industrial agriculture.

I am a trustee of land, which I don't allow bloodsports on, but this issue is tiny compared to the diabolical cruelty of war and globalisation. Hunting will test our ability to contemplate the diversity we preach, and the aristocracy's ability to compromise, reflect, and form alliances against the global capitalists who have now turned on them.

Meanwhile, might some wound up aristo., in a moment of clarity, consider collectivising and repopulating the estate as a defence against the speculators? It's a long shot idea but worth entertaining, because that's where the global city slickers, the war profiteers and the cartel of cartels are most vulnerable.

INTERNATIONAL

Follow International Land Rights issues on the 'Legacy Of Colonialism' email list; contact Marki Brown: mark@tlio.org.uk

KENYA New Land Ownership Ceiling

On January 11th, Kenyan Lands and Settlements Minister Amos Kimunya issued a twelve-month ultimatum to individuals who own over 1,000 acres of land that lies fallow to either develop or lose it to the state. *The Times, Kenya - 12th January 2005*

ARGENTINA Stateless Indians Make a Stand

In Argentine Patagonia a Mapuche family is standing up to the might of Italian clothing giant Benetton over a tiny plot of land called Santa Rosa on a huge sheep-rearing estate, near Leleque, Chubut province. After occupying and farming the plot, in 2002 Atilio Curiñanco and Rosa Rúa Nahuelquir were evicted by the local police at Benetton's request. Benetton came to "own" the estate by buying it in 1991 from the Argentine Southern Land Company, who in turn acquired it as reward for financing the army's so-called Campaign of the Desert, in which thousands of Mapuches were killed or imprisoned to free up the territory for European exploitation. Keen to protect the company's cuddly anti-racist image, Luciano Benetton has recently offered to "donate" some other land to the family. No deal.

Find out more about the Mapuche's struggle on their website. www.mapuche-nation.org

VENEZUELA Liberation of Land Gathers Pace

Land Occupations drive Venezuelan Revolution
A movement of land occupations by farmers is behind the land reform process in Venezuela. One such occupation, on the El Charcote ranch in Cojedes state, has received international attention because its owner, Sam Vesty, is a wealthy British businessman.

On January 10th, the federal government issued a decree aimed at accelerating land distribution to small farmers. The law calls for unproductive land to be confiscated by the state and turned over to landless farmers to help meet the country's food needs. It also provides for the review of private land titles by the government to assess if they are legal. If current owners can't produce adequate documentation, their land can be nationalised.

According to numbers from the 1998 census, about 1,000 big farmers - 5% of all farmers and ranchers - owned 75% of the country's arable land, leaving most of the peasantry landless and poor and Venezuela importing most of its food.

Other policies of president Hugo Chavez's government have included laws to protect small fishermen, legislation strengthening state control of oil, and programs to expand literacy and access to medical care funded in large part by revenues from oil. According to Jesus "Chucho" Garcia, director of the Afro-Venezuelan Organizations Network "80% of the profits were going to 5% of the population. Now profits go to the majority for education and health care," said Garcia. A key part of what Garcia called the "revolutionary process" has been the political awakening of the country's Black population. "80% of the vote in

the Afro-Venezuelan communities was for Chavez. Of the 3,000 hectares of land already distributed to the peasants, 20% has gone to Blacks," said Garcia. He explained that before the election of Chavez, Black people were absent from the political discussion in the country." Meanwhile, U.S. covert operations are being launched into Venezuela from Columbia to destabilise the Chavez regime.

BRAZIL Landless under Fire

Landless Campaigner Missionary Assassinated
After years of conflict between rich landowners and logging companies and landless peasants the Brazilian government has been forced to act. The catalyst was the assassination of a US-born missionary who had campaigned for the forest's peasant farmers for many years.

The Brazilian government is sending troops to maintain order in the Amazon state of Para following a wave of land-related violence. US missionary Dorothy Stang, 74, was shot dead by hired gunmen near the town of Anapu on 12th February. A leading figure in the rural trade union movement was killed in another part of the state.

Following an emergency cabinet meeting, 2,000 soldiers were sent to three towns in the region, including Anapu. Land reform campaigners are upset that it took the death of a foreigner to force the government into action. Para has seen more than 500 land-related killings over the past 20 years.

THAILAND Muslim Land Rights Activists Killed in Custody

Around 80 Muslim land rights campaigners were killed in October 2004 after being rounded up by the Thai army. Witnesses say a riot started when police fired live rounds into a crowd of 2000 demonstrators outside a police station in Takbai, southern Thailand. The dead were crushed and suffocated after being packed tightly into trucks and driven to Pattani province following 1300 arrests.

Campaigners in Narathiwat province say they have legitimate frustrations due to economic deprivation, denial of land rights, freedom of religion and language, as well as the right to run their own schools.

Human Rights Watch and other rights groups have been consistently reporting cases of torture, kidnapping and disproportionate force by Thai security forces.

AUSTRALIA Aboriginal Land Rights to be Privatised?

In February 2005 Australia's Indigenous Affairs Minister Amanda Vanstone announced a bill to privatise Aboriginal Land Rights. She has the backing of mining companies, investment trusts and others who want access to natural resources. The bill overrides key clauses in the Northern Territory Land Rights Act 1976, held up as one of the most effective land rights acts in modern history. This follows similar new laws in Papua New Guinea, where communities have been given cash and new cars to register & mortgage land which they can now lose to banks.

Green Left Weekly: www.greenleft.org.au

