

# **Land Tenure: The Facts Cannot Be Hidden**

by *Alanna Hartzok*

The body of knowledge this movement has spawned has clearly identified the maldistribution of wealth problem – and the fundamental flaw in current market economies. The fact is, we have not founded our democratic system of governance on what should be a fundamental human right: the human right to the planet itself. Here are some land ownership facts:

– A United Nations study of 83 countries showed that less than 5% of rural landowners control three-quarters of the land.

– According to a government report, 2% of the landowners hold 60% of the arable land in Brazil while close to 70% of rural households have little or none. Just 342 farm properties in Brazil cover 183,397 square miles, an area larger than California (*Worldwatch*, Oct., 1988)

In order to show that there was no need for land reform in Central America because land ownership in the USA is even **more** concentrated, these facts were read into the Congressional Record by Jesse Helms in 1981:

– In Florida, 1% of the population owns 77% of the private land. Other states where the top 1% owns over two-thirds of the land are Maine, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon.

Throughout the world, we see numbers like these (compiled by a Quaker Land Research Committee):

– 86% of South Africa is still owned by the white minority population.

– 60% of El Salvador is owned by 2% of the population.

– 80% of Pakistan is owned by 3% of the population.

– 74% of Great Britain is owned by 2% of the population.

– 84% of Scotland is owned by 7% of the population.

Most of the nations in the world were founded on territorial conquest and domination, on the old Roman stance of *dominium* – the legalization of land acquired by conquest and plunder. And we continue to be ruled by might rather than by what is right. “Globalization” has become a code word for the challenges arising from the fact that so few control so much of the earth.

Another aspect of this land tenure problem is that the benefits of free trade are twisted by our current market mechanism. Profiteering and speculating in land and resources prevent markets from supplying shelter and other life necessities for all. After all: why should this be? All that we need for life’s security is created by labor applied to land. This is simply, obviously, a fact of nature. And yet, all over the world, land sits idle, and the woes of poverty are blamed on everything but this fundamental fact.

Our movement is heartened by the passage of the United Nations Habitat II Action Agenda, which states that “access to land and legal security of tenure are strategic prerequisites for the provision of adequate shelter for all, and for the development of sustainable human settlements....” Think about it: “access to land, and legal security of tenure.” We know how to implement that – and we can demonstrate our success.