

# LAND and LIBERTY

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## COVER PICTURE

TWO Australian aboriginal land-rights campaigners bring their message to Westminster: they want the world to know that they have not given up their birthright. Television was on hand to interview them. But already, as Australia's bi-centennial celebrations recede into the background, the reaction against the original settlers has 'ret' in.

In New South Wales, aboriginal land rights are to be abolished if the new conservative coalition state government sticks to its election pledge. The Liberal-National parties achieved electoral victory in March with campaign promises to end land rights (the state's 59,000 aboriginals hold 0.03% of the land) and withdraw funds from the aboriginals' regional bodies, the land councils.

# Power and the people

FEW could deny the historical responsibilities of the imperial powers that dominate today's global economy.

The shapes of contemporary societies were determined by a few West European countries and, more recently, Red Russia.

They reached to the four corners of the world, visiting their ideologies on people who did not receive the intruders with open arms. Indeed, they were constrained to accept conquest because of their inferior arms.

But does that mean Third World countries are still under the economic domination of the Great Powers? The Pope thinks so, and the problem of economic development is worth examining in his terms.

POPE John Paul II's seventh encyclical is entitled *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, or Social Concern.

The largest bloc of people in the Third World are Catholics. This is not to lend credence to the theory that the Protestant ethic is better for wealth-accumulation than Catholicism, but rather to highlight the fact that the Pope's words carry considerable influence.

Superpower rivalry, he claims, is blocking development. "The present division of the world is a direct obstacle to the real transformation of the conditions of under-development in the developing and less advanced countries."

He takes side-swipes at both "liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism", which disarms both sides but does not enhance our understanding of the underlying problem of poverty, malnutrition, political instability, and the other features of so-called under-developed countries (have you noticed how many deprived people there are in the United States?).

IT IS TRUE that the super-powers still try to impose their concepts of the Good Society on their neighbours, not always with success: witness Washington versus Nicaragua, and Moscow versus

Afghanistan. But it is not true that change could not be engineered internally, peacefully, and to the advantage of the majority.

It is true that the super-powers can destroy the advance of economic development: witness Europe's infamous agricultural policy, which impoverishes farmers of the Third World.

But it is not true that clear-sighted and determined leaders are consequently prevented from reshaping their economies to the financial benefit of their citizens.

Taiwan demonstrated how a puny island economy could take on the giants and beat them at their own game! They did so by restructuring the land market in favour of the tillers of the soil - and redistributing rental income in favour of the wealth-creators.

SOCIAL justice requires more than finger-waving admonitions at East and West. In concrete terms, it entails more than the idea - floated by the Pope - that priests should sell their worldly goods to succour the poor.

What, then, can the religious leaders do to help economic development?

The priests of Latin America, all of whom come under the direct influence of Rome, have correctly identified the source of the problem of low or no incomes.

The peasants do not own land; and are excluded from a share of the rental income from the land which, they fervently believe, was given to their communities by God.

In the Philippines, for example, under a quarter of the farmers own the land they till. As tenants, they have to pay landlords crippling rents which often amount to 60% of their total harvest.

Which is why many priests adopt a political approach to the needs of their parishioners. Inevitably, that leads them into conflict: not with the super-powers, but with the elites within their societies.

And they have been admonished by the Pope for doing so. Strange, isn't it?