

# Land Monopoly Kills the Rain Forest In Latin America

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The destruction of the rain forest is a classic land issue which demonstrates not only the rules of Ricardo's law of rent and wages, but also the cost to the world community of land monopoly. More and more groups are recognizing this fact.

A recent Food First Alert, published by the San Francisco-based Institute for Food and Development Policy explains how the rain forest in Brazil is being destroyed as a result of the government's inability (or refusal) to discourage holding large tracts of underdeveloped land by a few wealthy families. The government encourages poor peasants to go to marginal lands in the rain forest instead.

World Watch, the Washington-based think tank says that the roots of Brazil's poverty and violence "lie in a pattern of land holding that excludes the majority of rural people from owning even a subsistence plot. In recent decades, land ownership has become even more concentrated, and landlessness has grown correspond-

ingly." According to World Watch, the government itself reported in 1985 that 2% of the people hold 60% of the land, while 70% of rural households have little or none. "Landlessness is forcing unemployed rural workers from the northeast and dispossessed small farmers from the south to trek to the Amazonian north and the shanty towns of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro."

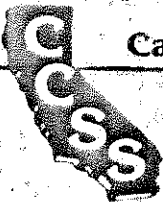
Norman Myers, author of The Primary Source, Rain Forests and Our Future, contends, "In principle there is hardly a need to cut down a single tree in a virgin forest. They are being cut down in large part due to monopolistic land tenure patterns, particularly in Latin America."

According to the U.S. News and World Report, "Encroachment on the forest is simply a response to social pressure in parts of Latin America, where 93% of arable land is controlled by 7% of the population."

"In Central America some 35 million people are reckoned to have no land, or not enough to provide subsistence. So officials look at land currently covered by forests as the answer to overcrowding and poverty." (March 31, 1986)

While we must look for short term solutions to the dilemma of saving the rain forests, in the long run the cause of saving the rain forest and social justice will be served by solving the land tenure problem in Latin America. ####

## NCSS Meeting in Anaheim in November



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