

Why half the world's children go to bed hungry

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It's hard to know how any one can consider capitalism a viable system when looking at the situation of the less developed countries. After the millions raised by Live Aid, it seems unreal that people are going hungry. A recent UN report estimates that 30 million people face starvation. Yet EC beef, butter and wine mountains rot in European warehouses, farmers are ploughing crops back into the land, in US corn belt fields of wheat are burnt.

There's a bit of a modern myth that the problems of Africa are either their own fault (over population, wars) or beyond anyone's control (drought, desertification). Though it's true these are contributory factors, many other countries cope with these same problems without the huge loss of life suffered by Africa (for example China, even England has been through war and drought).

The reasons cited by the UN for the deaths of these people are as follows; lack of resources from the international community, poor planning and falling prices on the commodity markets (especially for cocoa and coffee). Companies selling to Africa have tightened up credit terms while external debt levels continued to increase.

COCOA AND COFFEE

When Africa was first colonised, land was switched from production of food to feed the local population to the production of 'cash crops' such as cocoa, tea, coffee and sugar. These crops were exported to colonising countries at low prices. In a similar way corn was grown in Ireland during the 1845 famine. Today coffee and cocoa is still a major export of 15 African countries as they need the cash provided to keep up with debt repayments. Cocoa prices have fallen to their lowest level in 15 years while coffee is at a similar low level.

DEBT

In the early 1970's many African governments borrowed heavily. About 40% of debt is owed directly to other governments. In almost all cases this money was lent on the condition that it be used to purchase arms from the donor country or that subsidies be granted to multinationals based in the donor country. In this way the third world country is made to pay twice over. 25% of the debt is owed to the IMF and the World Bank. Today Africa's debt is estimated at 270 billion dollars. Repayments consume 30 per cent of export earnings.

UNITED NATIONS

It's obvious that the governments of the U.S., China and Europe aren't really interested in combating the crisis and these are the governments that run the UN. The last program of aid implemented by the United Nations (according to their own report) in 1986 met with little success. This was the plan the UN promised would revive Africa's economies. Instead, in their own words "By the end of 1990, it had become evident that the African crisis had indeed deepened...the average African continued to get poorer and suffer a persistent fall in an already meagre living standard". Now, five years later, they add that even if their latest plan was fully implemented (they call it ambitious) the average income per head in sub-Saharan Africa would only reach US\$700 per

annum in 25 years time. Rather than offering the solution the governments that make up the UN itself that are the problem.

THE FUTURE

So it doesn't look as if the situation will fundamentally change. But then, why should the Western governments want things any different? Africa provides the bosses with markets for the surplus goods we produce as well as cheap labour and raw materials. Live Aid showed that workers of the West are not willing to let Africa starve (as some Greens would argue), however it also showed that while the means of production and all the resulting profits are in the hands of the bosses, individual attempts at resolving the problems will do little more than make a dent in the problem. The type of massive development that Africa requires will only come about when the resources of this world are distributed according to need and not according to profit.

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