

# That's capitalism (WS45)

## Workers Solidarity Movement

1995

358 billionaires in the world have a net worth of \$760 billion, equal to the wealth of 45% of the world's population. The 200 largest multinational corporations control over 25% of the planet's economic activity. Meanwhile, according to the international Labour Organisation, 30% of the planet's workforce — 820 million people — are either underemployed or unemployed.

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Bernie Cahill, executive chairperson of Aer Lingus, presided over job losses and wage freezes in the national airline. He hammered his message home; nobody should expect a steady job or a reasonable wage. Of course such rules don't apply to him. As well as his Aer Lingus job, he is the chairman of Larry Goodman's massive Irish Food Processors and has gone for the hattrick by also being chairman of Greencore, the state sugar company.

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Right in the centre of the "free world" state labour inspectors reported earlier this year that they had found over 2,000 sweatshops in New York City. Mostly exploiting non-English speaking and illegal immigrant workers, the average pay was £1.67 per hour for a 12 hour day. No overtime is paid, underage labour is common. Fire exits are often padlocked and sprinkler systems unmaintained. The authorities have no plans to add to the just 20 inspectors employed to investigate, nor to increase the maximum fines of £1,000 (first offence)/£2,000 (subsequent offences) for employing 'off-the-books' workers in these near slavery conditions.

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Children in Dublin's Inner City have to wait up to six years for some dental treatments, according to the Inner City Teachers Group. They revealed that one 12 year old found by the school dental service to need braces was told that there is a six year waiting list and that he would be 18 before he gets them. The teachers group complained that there are also six year waiting lists for children needing treatment for cleft palates.

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The School of the Americas (SOA) is the unlikely name given to a military training academy set up by the US government in 1946 to “promote democracy in the Americas”. Since that time ‘graduates’ from the academy have played brutal havoc with the human rights of people throughout south and central America. One example deserves mention. The UN sponsored Truth Commission, which looked into atrocities carried out in El Salvador during the civil war there, found:

- Romero assassination: two of the three officers cited as being ringleaders were graduates of SOA.
- El Mozote massacre of Salvadoran civilians: of twelve officers cited, ten were from the SOA.
- Massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter: of 27 officers cited, 19 were from the SOA.

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Allied Irish Bank gave its five executive directors a 35% pay increase. Each of them earned an average of £626,000 last year. These are the people who refused to pay bank staff their 6.5% claim three years ago and tried to break their union, the Irish Bank Officials Association.

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Raoul Cedras, formerly of Haiti, has moved to a beach home in Panama courtesy of the US government. The former dictator will have his rent paid by them for the next year. After that Cedras will have to fend for himself. But to make things easy, the US government is freeing the assets he stole and siphoned off to the USA during his period of power in Haiti. Who says crime doesn't pay?

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No recession for the directors of Cement Roadstone, which has recorded a pre-tax profit of £116 million (up 52%). Last year they were paid an average £532,664 each, an increase of almost 48%. Of course none of their staff got rises like that. The people who do the work were limited to the 3% PCW increase.

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Cholera is a disease caused by poverty and poor sanitation. Get rid of poverty and cholera usually disappears in turn. What is surprising, however, is that it is making a comeback in countries where it has been unknown for most of this century – like the Ukraine, Romania and Albania. Recent reports indicate that the disease is most widespread in Romania, but in the Ukraine last October it killed 20 people and put another 800 into hospital. Most commentators put the return of this deadly disease down to the collapse of the health services in those countries. With privatisation all the rage, nobody wants to take over the ‘unprofitable’ business of keeping people healthy through basic sanitation. So much for the ‘free market’.

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600 Northern Bank staff in the six counties are to have their pay cut by up to £5,000 a year. The IBOA has described the cuts as “outrageous at a time when the bank is showing such strong profitability”

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According to the Centre for Economic Investigation for the Caribbean, the minimum cost of living for a Dominican family of four in 1993 was \$276 per month. Westinghouse, one of the major US multinationals operating in the Dominican Republic’s Free Trade Zone, was paying its workers \$99 per month during this period. During the period 1980–92, real wages declined by 46% under austerity programmes applied to the Dominican Republic by the IMF and USAID (a branch of the US government).

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The World Bank’s ‘World Development Report’ for 1993, entitled Investing in Health, reports that life expectancy in at least eleven African countries has declined since 1986 when ‘Structural Adjustment Programmes’ of the World Bank were first applied. In Tanzania alone, female life expectancy has dropped six years over the period of reform.

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Last year the slaughter in Rwanda hit the headlines. But one aspect of the violence that received less attention than might have been expected was the involvement of the Catholic Church. The United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Kigali has indicated that there is “strong evidence” that at least a dozen priests were involved in murder. Two priests and two nuns are already in prison. Other are accused of “supervising” gangs of killers that marauded, killing Tutsis. One Tutsi priest has been quoted as saying that “the bishop and the archbishop could have stopped the killing, but they didn’t speak out”.

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