

That's capitalism (WS46)

Workers Solidarity Movement

1995

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'.

In Ireland the rich are having a ball. In 1965 wealth and property taxes represented 25% of the total tax take. By 1990 this had shrunk to just 5%. Although the European Union suggests 30% as a minimum figure for corporation tax, firms here get away with paying a maximum of 10%. And if the bosses don't want to pay these minimal sums, no bother. Nobody has ever served a jail sentence in Ireland for tax evasion.

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).

In the last tax year only 5,000 self-employed admitted to incomes over £25,000 a year. There must be an awful lot of poor shopkeepers, doctors, architects, dentists, auctioneers and consultants out there.

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.

Last year the 26 county economy grew by 7% (and the government expects it to grow by 5% in 1995). This level of growth is the highest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development. Exports grew by 13.9% last year, while imports only rose by 11.9%. A healthy picture? No, just for the rich. The government expects official unemployment figures to also rise, to 278,400 this year.

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".

Allied Irish Banks, who tried to break the IBOA bank workers union and get out of paying a 6.5% rise in 1992, have just declared yet another increase in profits. In the six months up to June 30th their profits jumped 10% to £161.7 million.

In Clinton's USA a white minor accused of drugs offences has a 1 in 70 chance of being transferred to an adult court (which can hand down a harsher sentence). A black minor has a 1 in 18 chance.

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