

Voice From the Back

BRAZILIAN GENOCIDE

Brazil had an estimated six million indigenous people when the Portuguese arrived in 1500. Today there are 700,000 out of a population of 183 million. Indian tribes have been frequent victims of massacres and agents from Brazil's National Indian Foundation fear that more tribal groups are in danger of genocide. They base this on a local court ruling lifting the protection order on tribal lands that allows loggers and ranchers new access. "A boom in prices for South American beef, soy and timber has sparked a surge in land grabs directed against indigenous groups by ranchers and loggers in other parts of the continent as well." (Times, 18 May) More profits equal more deaths, it was ever so.

THE CRAZY SOCIETY

Only capitalism with its rapacious drive to make money could produce the following crazy situation. "White wristbands sold by the Make Poverty History coalition were made in Chinese factories accused of using forced labour, it has been disclosed. The fashionable white wristbands, worn by celebrities and politicians, including Tony Blair, were made for a coalition of charities as a symbol of its 2005 campaign to end extreme poverty." (Independent, 30 May) As long as there is a couple of bucks to be made, there is nothing the owning class won't stoop to!

THE NEW ELITE

"South Africa's mining magnates and millionaires have been meeting in the imposing Rand Club in downtown Johannesburg for more than a century. ... Built on the wealth of the largest goldmine in the world and the sweat of black labour, the club's membership was, until a few years ago, closed to South Africa's blacks. But these days, there's a new breed of tycoon walking the club's wood-panelled corridors and sipping whiskey in its stuffed leather chairs. A black elite has crossed over from politics and the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Rand Club members over the past few years have included Cyril Ramaphosa, 52, one of South Africa's richest men, who was once touted as a possible successor to Nelson Mandela, and Tokyo Sexwale, also 52, another politician turned capitalist." (Time, 6 June) The result of all those years of sacrifice and effort by workers to get rid of apartheid has come to this!

RICH PICKINGS

The gap between the rich and the rest of society is widening all the time as the research in the USA by The New York Times indicates. "A new breed of fabulously rich American is leaving the rest of the country far behind, in part because of President Bush's tax cuts. The "hyper-rich", 145,000 taxpayers earning an average \$3 million (£1.65 million) a year, have seen their earnings soar while their tax burden has decreased significantly in recent years. Their share of the national income has doubled in the past 20 years while 90 per cent of taxpayers have seen their share fall." (Times, 6 June) The report goes on to give some examples of the wealth of these capitalists - Bill Gates, Microsoft owner \$48 billion, Warren Buffett, investment magnate \$41 billion, Paul Allen, Microsoft co-founder \$20 billion and five members of the Walton family (Wal-Mart owners) \$18 billion each. Land of the free?

HOW THE OTHER 5 PERCENT LIVE

As you worry about paying the rent, the mortgage or your payments on the credit card think about the owning class and their problems. "Mrs Wildenstien told her lawyers; during a cruise in the West Indies, the family's yacht was caught up in a storm. The crew tried to enter ports in Haiti and San Domingo but these were too small for the vessel. Finally, they struggled into a bay in one of the Virgin Islands. To mark their lucky survival, Daniel bought the island." (Observer, 12 June) See how lucky you are, fellow workers. You don't own a yacht too big to get in to Haiti or San Domingo, do you?

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