

Voice From The Back

The advance of poverty

Every day we can read about the expansion of capitalism and how new industrial and commercial giants are arising to challenge the supremacy of the USA. One of the leading candidates in this struggle is India. We are constantly hearing about the modernisation of that country and the supposed benefits of the expansion of capital. We don't hear so much about the plight of the working class there though. The following news item illustrates that the supposed benefits of capitalist modernisation are not so wonderful after all. "India has 100 million more people living in poverty, official figures show - 37.2 per cent of the population compared with 27.5 per cent in 2004 - with 410 million people below the UN poverty line of \$1.25 a day" (Times, 19 March). Surviving on a pound a day while the owning class of that country now boast of the richest men in the world. "Indian names now figure prominently on the league tables of the wealthiest people on the planet. The country now boasts 47 billionaires, up from 12 in 2005 and just nine at the turn of the millennium, compared with 10 in France and 35 in Britain" (Observer, 9 May). That's capitalism for you - surviving on £1 a day contrasted with the lives of billionaires.

The whip hand

"British Gas has received more than 65,000 applications for 600 gas fitter apprenticeships. The scheme pays £5,000 a year, plus expenses, to train staff to repair boilers and radiators. The 100-to-1 ratio of applicants to openings, twice the usual ratio, has been caused by surging youth unemployment, boosted by graduates and mid-career professionals searching for jobs. Most applicants are aged between 20 and 26, although British Gas said some were in their fifties" (Sunday Times, 18 April). Not only do we have workers madly competing for the right to be exploited but we have workers in employment working overtime for no extra pay. "One person in four is working longer than ever but few are paid extra for putting in overtime. A survey of 2,000 workers, carried out for Santander, found that the average employee in the UK is working a 41-hour week for an annual wage of £27,150. One in seven of those polled is doing at least 11 hours of overtime every week, but only two in five are paid extra" (Times, 4 May).

Fifty years of gradualism

One of the oppositions to world socialism is that rather than have a complete transformation of society we could have piece by piece gradual change. Well let us look at how that has worked out in relation to the environment. "Sir David Attenborough has warned that Britain's wildlife is being destroyed thanks to man's impact on the environment. The naturalist made his comments in the foreword to a new book, Silent Summer, in which 40 prominent British ecologists explain how humankind is wiping out many species. It comes fifty years after the publication of Silent Spring, Rachel Carson's acclaimed book on pollution of wildlife that helped the growth of the environmental movement worldwide and led to a ban of some pesticides in Britain" (Sunday Telegraph, 25 April). So fifty years after the alarm was sounded the position is even worse. That is gradualism for you. The drive for bigger and bigger profits means that the environment is of little importance.

A papal view of society

There are many ways to look at society. What are the most important aspects of present day society? Socialists might say the fact that a third of the world is starving, or that we live in a society that could be annihilated in a nuclear holocaust or even that in the drive for profits we risk the delicate balance of the global environment. None of these considerations entered into the reasoning of the Pope when he recently visited Portugal. "The Pope yesterday condemned gay marriage and abortion as 'among the most insidious and dangerous challenges' to society, as Portugal prepared to legalise same-sex partnerships next week. Benedict also criticised Catholics 'ashamed' of their faith and too willing to 'lend a hand to secularism'. Ninety per cent of Portuguese define themselves as Catholic, but Portugal's society is increasingly secular, with far fewer than a third saying they attend Mass regularly" (Times, 14 May). Starvation, worldwide slaughter or global warming? Not as

important as abortion or same-sex relationships according to His Holiness – no wonder the pews are emptying.

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