

## A World In Common - Editorial July 1991 Socialist Standard

We live in a world which has the potential to adequately feed, house and provide clean water and decent medical care for every single man, woman and child on Earth. The resources exist to banish material want as a problem for members of the human race. Yet millions throughout the world are malnourished, live in squalor or are actually dying of starvation or starvation-related diseases. The big question that faces the human race is what can be done about it?

For some years, pressure groups concerned with the plight of populations in the less developed countries have urged bankers and governments in the richer nations to cancel the Third World debt. They imagine that if the billions of dollars in loans and interest owed by governments in Africa, South America, and Asia were written off then the crushing burden of poverty suffered by the mass of people in those regions would begin to lift. A fresh way would be open for development, they argue. Food subsidies and health programmes would attack the deaths from malnutrition and disease. Education and housing would raise the quality of life for millions.

These things would not happen. The cancellation of the debt would leave the curse of world poverty intact. The beneficiaries would be amongst the ruling elites who own and control production and distribution in the debtor countries. They are the ones who through their governments owe the money but they are not poor. Amidst the poverty of the masses they live in luxury. Holding power often with brutally oppressive methods they care little for their populations. Their aim is their own self-enrichment. Why should we want to bail them out? Why should we want to ease the way for the rising capitalists of the underdeveloped countries to accumulate capital from the exploitation of workers?

There is of course a case for the populations of the advanced regions giving aid and assistance to the people in areas where infrastructures, services, means of production and distribution are poorly developed. This is the compelling case that those with advantages should put themselves out to help those in need. Most people will accept this but it cannot happen under world capitalism which keeps even our ability to help others in economic shackles-or reduces it to the pathetic levels of charity. The tragic illusion which is misleading those organising the Cancel the Debt campaign is their belief that the devastating problems of world capitalism can be tackled by re-arranging its finances.

The things that are desperately needed - food, clean water, housing, sanitation, transport, medical services and so on, can only be provided by useful labour, of which there is an abundance throughout the world. Finance is part of a system which operates as a barrier to useful labour producing what people need. Useful production must be freed from the constraints of profit and class interests. Only useful labour applied through world cooperation in a system of common ownership can solve the problems of world poverty. World socialism could stop the dying from hunger immediately, and provide the conditions for good health and material security for all people across the Earth within a short time. It would do this by producing goods and services directly for need.

World socialism will operate with one simple and ordinary human ability which is universal-the ability of every individual to cooperate with others in a world-wide community of interests. For too long has indignation at human suffering been dissipated by useless causes. How much longer must the price of failure be the misery of countless millions?