

A CLASSIC ANALYSIS OF POVERTY

Inside the Third World, 3rd Edition,
Paul Harrison,
Penguin, Harmondsworth.

In the thirteen years since the first edition of this book was published, it has been reprinted no fewer than fourteen times. This rise and rise to the status of a classic best-seller should occasion no surprise. It will probably be a long time before we see another guide to the Third World whose coverage is so comprehensive, which describes so graphically the dire conditions in which the mass of the people live, and in which the author shows such perception and understanding of the origins and causes of those conditions.

Between 1975 and 1980, Paul Harrison travelled through eleven countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, seeing for himself what he calls "the anatomy of poverty". His odyssey took him to, *inter alia*, Bangladesh, where landless labourers struggled to support wives and children on wages of 33 pence a day; to Sri Lanka, where tea plantation workers - typically families of five - lived in dark cells 10ft square; to Colombia where, in a nightmare world of disease and insanitation, he saw a family of nineteen living in a two-room shack, existing on maize soup and rice.

In Brazil, he saw a typical community where, because of a large labour surplus (ensured by keeping vast stretches of land under weeds and shrubs), the landlords were able to obtain workers for a level of wages that forced them, and their families, to exist on a diet of nothing but cassava flour. And all over the Third World he saw bright, shiny cities, their glittering skyscrapers, graceful flyovers and desirable residences contrasting starkly with the unsavoury shanty-towns on the outskirts where the poor camp in squalor, disease and neglect.

In Africa, he noted the decline in the traditional system of land tenure under which "a man cannot own the land because he did not make it", and the insidious growth of private ownership which brings in its train "social polarisation, increasing degrees of inequality and grinding poverty among those without adequate access to land." In Asia, he saw the same process at work with "Private property in land ..(leading) almost automatically to increasing inequalities and the emergence of landlessness, even with a static population." In Latin America he saw the legacy of the conquistadors who, long ago, "replaced an egalitarian communal system of landholding with large estates and landless labourers."

Seen through the eyes of Paul Harrison, the Third World to-day is an endless documentary of man's inhumanity to man. But there can be no doubt that the author "tells it like it is", making this book essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the "whys" and the "hows" of the shameful fact that one fifth of the world's population live in hunger and poverty; or, as Harrison puts it, "on the very edge of existence."

B. W. BROOKES

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they can invest in privatised enterprises. Many of them, desperate to overcome the impact of roaring inflation, have resold their vouchers for around R4,000.

The professor was obviously dismayed by the Yeltsin Government's policies. For example, he said, "enterprises will receive land in return for paper, because the vouchers don't mean anything: it is just paper given by the government to everybody, there's nothing behind the paper."

He wants a stop to Yeltsin's plan to privatise land until, for example, "we have a theory of how land rent should be determined under market conditions. The practical mechanism to determine the land rent doesn't exist here, because we have no land market."

The ominous future for Russia, if property rights to land led to the re-creation of a class system, was not lost on the professor. He warned:

"As soon as we come back to private ownership of land, taking into account the differences in the regions within Russia, the consequences will be very terrible. It is possible there will be the continuation of the Peasant Wars we had in the civil war 70 years ago."

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Kong for a continuous period of not less than 20 years." So Hong Kong will not again have to suffer a failed politician who, but for the loss of his parliamentary seat, would have had no thought of Hong Kong let alone a role in its fate.

The author refers many times to the Far Eastern Economic Review - a respected and well informed Hong Kong weekly - so it seems appropriate to conclude this review by a quotation from that journal. In January 1984, before the Anglo-Chinese Joint Declaration, it stated "if Hong Kong is still free and prosperous after 1997, it will not be because of any agreement signed by Britain and China in 1984. It will not be because the people ruling China at the end of the century have their own stake in the survival of an autonomous capitalist enclave on their country's south coast...there can be no such thing as a moneyback guarantee for Hong Kong." This is still the case.

* Richard Clarke was for many years Hong Kong's Director of Lands, Surveying and Town Planning.