

Is Bill Gates really worth 14,000,000 people?



BETWEEN 1986 AND 1999 Bill Gates, the richest man on earth, earned over 14 million dollars a day from the increasing value of his Microsoft shares alone. Yet over one billion people on this planet live on less than one dollar a day. Some put Gates' wealth down to hard work, but the reality is that some of these low earners are working far longer hours.

Women workers in the garment industries in Bangladesh earn as little as 63p a day¹. The UN reports that they "spend 56 hours a week in paid employment on top of 31 hours in unpaid work - a total of 87 hours". The reality of this new millennium is that inequality is now greater than ever, and according to the UN it is getting worse.

Their 1999 development report reads "by the late 1990s the fifth of the world's people living in the

highest-income countries had 86% of world GDP - the bottom fifth just 1%." This is not the full story; in many of these 'high income' countries the gap between the rich and poor is also widening. "OECD countries also registered big increases in inequality after the 1980s - especially Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States."

Depending on whether you compare his wealth or his earnings, this economic system judges the life of Bill Gates to be worth that of between 14 million and 500 million of the world's poorest people. And life is the correct measure here as millions of poor people die every year because they are unable to buy basic medicines for themselves or their children. We need a revolution to change this.

¹ The Asian garment industry and globalisation, Written by Duncan Green, Edited by Linda Jones, November 1998, http://www.cafod.org.uk/garment_industry.htm

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