

The Geodata Project

Alanna Hartzok, the IU's NGO representative to the United Nations, is creating a clearinghouse for crucially needed data on land and wealth distribution. The following facts are displayed on her web site at:

www.envirolink.org/orgs/earthrights/

Answers to questions such as "Who owns the earth?" and "How much is it worth?" are frequently difficult to find. This section will focus on facts about land tenure and maldistribution of wealth. We invite your participation. Please send us data you come upon in these areas. Ask and discover for yourself "Who owns the earth?" in your city, county, or region. Email your findings to earthrts@pa.net — or send them to Alanna Hartzok, P.O. Box 728, Scotland, PA 17254.



Alanna Hartzok

Here are a few wealth distribution facts:

- ↳ "The richest 1% of Americans possess greater wealth than the bottom 90%." (David Kotz, "How Many Billionaires Are Enough?" *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1986)
- ↳ The 1996 annual ranking of the 400 wealthiest Americans by *Forbes* magazine (10/14/96) includes a record 135 billionaires, 41 more than last year. This news came just as the Census Bureau reported that the average earning power in the US increased in 1997, for the first time in six years. But while regular folks' salaries have inched up, the coffers of the rich have ballooned. For the first time, the average net worth of "Forbes 400" members exceeds \$1 billion. Longtime multimillionaires in businesses like finance, retail, oil and real estate remain on the list.... (from Associated Press)
- ↳ In the US the share of net worth held by the top one-half of one per cent rose from 25.9% in 1962 to 31.4% in 1989; the share of income received by the top 0.5% rose from 5.7% in 1962 to 13.4% in 1989. (Edward Wolff, 1994)
- ↳ A just-released OECD report states that income distribution is more unequal in the United States than in other developed countries.
- ↳ The growth in the federal government has brought a growth in federal benefits. Contrary to popular impression, the bulk of these benefits go to the well-to-do. Peter Peterson estimated an annual flow of \$570.7 billion to the non-poor vs. \$109.8 billion to the poor. The average benefit to households with incomes over \$100,000 exceeds that to households with incomes under \$10,000. (Peterson, 1994)

↵ The income of the richest 20% of the world's people are approximately 140 times that of the poorest 20%.

↵ The world now has more than 350 billionaires whose combined net worth equals the annual income of the poorest 45% of the world's population. (*The Nation*, July 15/22, 1996, "The Limits of the Earth" by David Korten.)

↵ "The most pressing cause of the abject poverty which millions of people in the world endure is that a mere 2.5% of landowners with more than 100 hectares control nearly three-quarters of all the land in the world, with the top 0.23% controlling over half. (Susan George, *How the Other Half Dies*, Penguin Books, 1976)

What is the primary source of this concentration of wealth? Let's look at some bottom line figures on land ownership:

↵ "At best, a generous interpretation would suggest that about 3% of the population owns 95% of the privately held land in the USA (Peter Meyer, "Land Rush — A Survey of America's Land — Who Owns It, Who Controls It, How much is Left" in *Harpers Magazine*, Jan. 1979).

↵ In the US, 568 companies control 22% of our private land, a land mass the size of Spain. Those same companies land interests worldwide comprise a total area larger than that of Europe — almost two billion acres. (from above)

↵ A United Nations study of 83 countries showed that less than 5% of rural landowners control three-quarters of the land.

↵ According to a 1985 government report, 2% of landowners hold 60% of the arable land in Brazil while close to 70% of rural households have little or none. Just 342 farm properties in Brazil cover 183,397 square miles — an area larger than California (*Worldwatch*, Oct. 1988)

↵ In order to show that there was no need for land reform in Central America — because our land in the USA is even more concentrated in ownership — Senator Jesse Helms read these facts into the Congressional Record in 1981: "In Florida, 1% owns 77% of the land. Other states where the top 1% own over two-thirds of the land are Maine, Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Oregon."

↵ Throughout the world, we see these numbers:

86% of South Africa is still owned by the white minority population.

60% of El Salvador is owned by the richest 2% of the population.

80% of Pakistan is owned by the richest 3%.

74% of Great Britain is owned by the richest 2%.

84% of Scotland is owned by the richest 7%.

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