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EDITORIAL

THUG POLICIES WON'T SOLVE THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

THE WORLD is now afflicted by a single system of exploitation, but the human tragedies of the developed nations are overshadowed by the tragedy in the "developing" societies.

As many as 200 million children under 15 years of age spend most of their waking hours at work, "sometimes at risk of survival, very often at the expense of their physical and mental development, and the numbers are growing" according to UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund. Next time we wear our sylph-like blouses and fashionable shirts bought in stylish boutiques, remember the children of Bangladesh. There, the landless families have little option but to commit their children to what is *de facto* slavery. Estimates of the number of 10- to 14-year-olds employed range from 5.7 million (the government's figure) to almost three times that number.

According to the Asian-American Free Labour Institute, garment factories in 1994 adopted measures that were not unlike slavery techniques: children and adult workers were frequently locked in the factories, working 10 to 14 hours a day with a half day off on Friday.

About 13 million children died in 1994 for "lack of immunization, oral rehydration and other eminently affordable interventions," according to the head of UNICEF. He says that "their fate [is] often sealed by the budgetary priorities of government".

What kind of a society have we created, that we should allow the "budgetary priorities" of the state to assume greater importance than the lives of millions of children?

The problem does not exist with the willingness of people to work. Nor is there a shortage of capital. The source of the problem is to be found in the land market.

The solution, however, has nothing to do with the strategy recently advocated by Zimbabwe's vice-president, Joshua Nkomo. He urged black people to grab land from white farmers. "The whites didn't buy it, they took it by force, so do the same," he urged.

Bad advice. It provokes civil strife. It would cut the output of food. And it would not solve the structural problems that prevent sustainable growth. Statesmen should avoid the politics of the thug.

There is a better policy waiting in the wings. One that would unite people of all races behind a programme of social and economic renewal. Governments should introduce a charge on the rental value of land. That would stimulate a fresh supply of affordable land, as the hoarders released the vacant tracts that they are not using. It would enable governments to cut the job-killing taxes on work and wealth. And families could afford to send their children to school.