

## **Pollution and Growth**

China is declaring a small victory in the battle against pollution. Emissions of sulphur dioxide, which belches from smokestacks and causes acid rain, fell by 1.81 per cent in the first nine months of 2007 compared with the same period last year, the China Daily reported. COD, or chemical oxygen demand, a measure of water pollution, dropped by 0.28 per cent.

Many Chinese cities are struggling with choking smog, including 2008 Olympic host Beijing. The level of air pollution in the capital and its possible effects on athletes' health has been one of the biggest issues facing organizers of next year's Games. A recent report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) highlighted concerns about air quality in the city although Games organizers have said conditions will be improved by the time of the Olympics next August.

Sulphur dioxide and COD are primitive indicators of overall environmental health, and do not reflect the many other chemicals that have turned China's pollution problem into a domestic political headache and international embarrassment.

The government has been increasing regulations and sanctions on polluting firms. By the end of September, 250 small coal-fired power generation units were shut. China has promised to cut the two key pollution measures by 10 per cent between 2006 and 2010, but last year the country failed to meet the annual target.

If China does not fight pollution, then it will soon pass America as the world's biggest polluter. China's rulers recognize that they face serious consequences from local pollution and from changes to the global climate. However, there will be no caps on greenhouse emissions if that means slowing economic growth. China argues that other countries polluted their way to development; capping emissions now would unfairly punish those who come late to the game.

China rightly notes that, per person, it pollutes less than the Americans. But with such a large population, the Chinese cannot afford to let pollution go uncontrolled. Recently, weather reports have been amended by state-controlled forecasters to comment on haze rather than fog. The latter being a natural meteorological event, the former being

pollution. The government and the population of China at last appear to be recognizing the scale and nature of pollution.

### **Questions**

1. Why is it beneficial for China to grow its economy?
2. Is it reasonable for China to say that other major economies grew by polluting?
3. What other examples of economic growth damage the environment?