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Anti-developmentalism

What It Is and What It Wants

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In one respect, anti-developmentalism emerged from the critical re-evaluation of the period that ended with the failure of the old autonomous workers movement and with the global restructuring of capitalism; it was thus born during the seventies and eighties of the last century. In another respect, it arose amidst the incipient attempts at ruralization that had taken place during that same period and in the popular mobilizations against the presence of factories emitting pollutants in the core urban areas and against urbanization projects and the construction of nuclear power plants, highways and dams. It is simultaneously a theoretical analysis of the new social conditions that takes the contributions of ecology into account, and a struggle against the consequences of capitalist development, although those two aspects do not always proceed in tandem. We may define it as a form of critical thinking and an antagonistic practice born from the conflicts provoked by development during the last stage of the capitalist regime, which corresponds to the merger of the economy and politics, Capital and the State, industry and life. Due to its novelty, and also as a result of the spread of submission and resignation among the de-classed

masses, reflection and combativity do not always proceed hand in hand; one postulates goals that the other does not always want to fight for: anti-developmental thought envisions a global strategy of confrontation, while the struggle is often reduced to tactical considerations, which only benefit domination and its supporters. The forces mobilized are almost never conscious of their historical task, while the lucidity of critique is likewise not always capable of contributing to the development of consciousness in these campaigns.

The world market is continuously transforming society in accordance with its needs and its desires. The formal domination of the economy in the old class society is being transformed into real and total domination in modern mass technological society. The workers who were transformed into masses are now, above all else, consumers. The principal economic activity is not industrial, but administrative and logistical (tertiary). The principal productive force is not labor, but technology. The waged workers are now the principal force of consumption. Technology, bureaucracy and consumption are the three pillars upholding the current form of development. The world of the commodity is no longer susceptible to self-management. It is impossible to humanize it: it must first be dismantled.

Absolutely all the relations experienced by humans among themselves or with nature are not direct, but are mediated by things, or, more accurately, by images associated with things. A separate structure, the State, controls and regulates this reified mediation. Thus, social space and the life that it hosts are modeled on the laws of these same things (commodities, technology), on those of circulation and those of security, all of which give rise to a set of social divisions: between urbanites and those who live in rural areas, leaders and led, rich and poor, included and excluded, fast and slow, connected and unconnected, etc. The territory, once it has been cleared of farmers, is transformed into a new source of resources (a new source for capital), a backdrop and base for macroinfrastructures (a strategic element of circulation). Today, this spa-

collectives and rebel communities, the seeds of a different kind of civilization, liberated from patriarchy, industry, capital and the State.

tial fragmentation and social disaggregation take the form of a crisis on several fronts, all of which are interrelated: demographic, political, economic, cultural, ecological, territorial, social.... Capitalism has exceeded its structural limits, or, to put it another way, it has hit the ceiling.

The variegated crisis of the new capitalism is the product of two kinds of contradictions: internal contradictions, which are the cause of major social inequalities, and external contradictions, which are responsible for pollution, climate change, resource depletion and the destruction of territory. The former do not extend beyond the capitalist domain where they are dissimulated as labor problems, financial issues or parliamentary shortcomings. Trade union and political struggles are never posed in such a way as to exceed the framework that demarcates the boundaries of the established order; and they are even less likely to oppose its logic. The principal contradictions are therefore either produced by the clash between the finite nature of planetary resources and the infinite demand required by development, or by the clash between the limitations imposed by the unlimited devastation and destruction that necessarily accompany continuous growth. These contradictions reveal the terrorist nature of the market economy and the State with respect to the habitat and the lives of the people. Self-defense against the terrorism of the commodity and the State assumes the form of both an urban struggle that rejects the industrialization of life—that is, anti-developmentalism—as well of a defense of territory that rejects the industrialization of space. The representatives of domination, if they cannot integrate these manifestations of self-defense under the aegis of a “green” opposition, one that respects the rules of the game, will depict them as a problem of public order posed by a minority, in order to thus repress and crush them.

At a time when the social question tends to take the form of a territorial question, only the anti-developmental perspective is capable of serving as an accurate vehicle for its expression. In

fact, the critique of developmentalism is the form assumed by contemporary social critique; no other critique is really anti-capitalist, since none of them questions growth or progress, the old dogmas that the bourgeoisie foisted on the proletariat. On the other hand, struggles in defense of and for the preservation of territory, by sabotaging development, cause the order of the ruling class to shake and tremble: to the extent that they succeed in shaping a collective anti-capitalist subject these struggles are nothing but the modern class struggle.

Anti-capitalist social consciousness arises from the unity of critique and struggle, that is, from theory and practice. Critique that is separated from the struggle gives birth to ideology (false consciousness); struggle that is separated from critique leads to nihilism or reformism (false opposition). Ideology often proposes an impossible return to the past, which provides an excellent excuse for inactivity (or virtual activity, which is the same thing), although the most common forms it assumes are, in the economic domain, cooperativism, and in the political domain, the civil society movement (“citizenism”). The real function of ideological praxis is disaster management. Both ideology and reformism separate the economy from politics in order to propose solutions within the dominant system, whether in the economic or the political domain. And since in this case changes must derive from the application of economic, juridical or political formulas, both ideology and reformism reject action, for which they substitute theatrical or symbolic replacements. They flee from real confrontation, since they want to render their practice compatible with domination at any price, or at least to take advantage of the latter’s gaps and interstices in order to subsist within and coexist with it. They want to manage isolated spaces and administer the catastrophe, rather than put an end to it.

The above-mentioned unity between critique and struggle provides anti-developmentalism with an advantage that no ideology possesses: it knows just what it wants and it knows the instrument necessary to pursue its goals. It can present, in a realistic and cred-

ible way, the main outlines of an alternative model of society, a society that will become palpable as soon as the tactical level of platforms, associations and assemblies is superseded and the strategic level of combatant communities is attained. That is, as soon as the social conflict can be expressed in every sense of the words as “us” against “them”. Those at the bottom against those at the top.

The crisis provoked by the repeated instances of capitalism’s flight forward only confirms *a contrario* the pertinence of the anti-developmental message. The products of human activity—commodities, science, technology, the State, conurbations—have become more and more complex, they have become independent of society and have turned against it. Humanity has been enslaved by its own out-of-control creations. In particular, the destruction of territory as a result of cancerous urbanization is today revealed as the destruction of society itself and of the individuals who compose it. Development, like Janus, has two faces: at the present time, the initial consequences of the energy crisis and climate change, by illustrating the extreme dependence and ignorance of urban residents, are showing us the face that was once concealed. The stagnation of gas and oil production announces a future where the price of energy will rise continuously, which will increase the cost of transportation, causing food crises (exacerbated even more by global warming) and the collapse of entire productive sectors. In the medium term the metropolis will be totally unviable and its inhabitants will find themselves in the position of having to choose between creating a new world or disappearing.

Anti-developmentalism wants the inevitable decomposition of capitalist civilization to lead to a period of dismantling industries and infrastructures, ruralization and decentralization, or, to put it another way, it looks forward to a period when a transitional stage towards a just, egalitarian, balanced and free society will begin, rather than a social chaos of dictatorships and wars. With such a noble goal, anti-developmentalism seeks to ensure that sufficient theoretical and practical arms are available for the use of the new