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The Invasion of Waste

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Transcript of a talk scheduled to be given at Otros (Valencia), in
opposition to the planned construction of an animal waste
treatment facility at Pobla del Duc, May 6, 2015. Translated in
May 2015 from the Spanish translation of the original text, which
was written in Valencian, provided by the author.

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Nothing might seem less natural, but the fact is that, now that the rule of the economy is total and complete, what grows best in the countryside is not vegetation, but waste treatment facilities. Nowadays, the main purpose of the land is not to provide food to the nearby urban zones, for, with massive industrialization of agriculture and the relocation of agricultural production, the local farm has ceased to be a profitable proposition and, consequently, the small farmer's way of life has become unviable. Instead, in view of the fact that the urban agglomerations are incapable of entirely eliminating all their wastes, the countryside's potential to serve as a place to dump toxic substances has been noted and exploited. The profits became very tempting, which drove a horde of predatory businessmen and corrupt politicians to cash in on the transport, burial and maintenance of all kinds of industrial wastes and toxic by-products, stomping all over the territory like a bull in a china shop. Whereas traditional economies recycled their leftovers, the market economy endlessly accumulates wastes that have to be put somewhere. It does not transform them into raw materials, but converts them into immortal commodities.

In a super-urbanized society, rural space has lost all its autonomy. It is not a world apart, with its own customs, traditions and norms. It is an extension of the urban world, a reserve suitable for all kinds of operations—all, that is, except precisely for small-scale agriculture. Today, the uses of the countryside are dictated from the urban agglomerations of the great cities—which are now often called conurbations—places where investors, consultants, urban planners and politicians jointly draft development plans that respond to interests that are alien to the reality of the small-scale farmer. Danger always comes from the urban jungle. It is the oligarchy of the city that is planning the new function and the territory's new fate, which effectively has nothing to do with agriculture. The countryside is only a periphery, an undeveloped void or a quaint landscape that passively awaits its degrading exploitation. Thus, from the point of view of the globalized economy, it is not infrastructure projects, real estate speculation or the tourism or entertainment industries that are superfluous, all of which are destructive of nature and cropland; it is the cultivators themselves who are superfluous. This is not because agriculture is no longer productive enough: in this respect the territory is the same as it was before. It is just that its population, its municipalities, its public services, its rural ways of life, and even its vegetation, etc., are burdensome, and expensive to maintain. If the territory is deprived of these elements, its fate is sealed.

The economic needs that rule society not only increase the disequilibrium between the conurbation and the territory, lay waste to the land and artificialize life, but also bring about circumstances where this disequilibrium is the *conditio sine qua non* for meeting those needs. The crisis of the territory is more than just a reflection of the urban world, it is the other face of the urban crisis. In an unprecedented manner, the race for productivity gains and profits have entered into conflict with the territory, after having first ravaged the city. We can thank the separation between real social needs and the voracious hunger for profit for the acceleration

of the greenhouse effect, acid rain, forest fires, pollution, the destruction of flora and fauna... The typical aberrations of the urban lifestyle, such as pathological individualism, absurd dietary fads, novel diseases, the uncontrolled mechanization of life, etc., are now common in the rural areas. The flight forward on the part of the statist civilization of the market has entered into conflict with human health, imposing ever more insane consumerist lifestyles on the population. At this time, the capitalist solution for all problems passes through the transformation of the territory into a market, or more precisely, into a market of markets: a market that includes the market of the earth, the natural environment, vacation resorts, second homes, pollution, logistics, the “renewables” industry and ... waste treatment and disposal. The frenetic urban lifestyle constantly absorbs fuel, motor vehicles, plastics, chemical products, cement and industrial food, all of which pose serious problems with respect to the disposal of sewage and other waste. And at the same time a prosperous market opportunity arises, that of the market for waste treatment and disposal.

What they call “private initiative” is nothing but the battle tactic used by the forces of the economy against the society that they parasitize. In consideration of the havoc they have wreaked, we can verify that this trend reflects a veritable war in which the territory is getting the worst of it. If, by chance, the population does not willingly consent to the immediate enrichment of a handful of unscrupulous businessmen, the decision-makers accuse it of being against “development”, the official alibi for the progress of disaster. The fact that they are supported by finance, the communications media and the political parties makes it clear that the enemy of the territory and of its people is composed of not just a handful of savage entrepreneurs; it is a whole system of domination, whose mainstays are Capital and the State.

Faced with the most destructive consequences of the economics and politics of the market, world leaders have proposed, at various summit meetings, a pact between the economy and ecological

concerns, expressed in such formulas as “sustainable development” and a “new territorial culture”. In view of the limited resources of the planet and the unlimited requirements of economic growth—the two poles of an irresolvable contradiction—they concluded that business must be “green” or it will not exist, that is, business must deduct the environmental cost of its production process from its profits. The corporations affected by this development had to take this into account in their own plans. This was how the environmental crises of the capitalist regime were isolated, reducing the territorial question to an environmental, a conservationist and, in the final analysis, a political problem, and, at the same time, concealing its economic and social nature. What the defenders of sustainability are really defending is development, which they never question and, as a result, they also defend the political and economic regime that promotes this same kind of development. If they issue appeals to institutions, they do so not in order to abolish the dictatorship of the economy, but to impose some minimal conditions on its operations. Their realism does not aspire to liberate civil society from the yoke of capital, but to make it more bearable: they want to change some aspects of the system in order to save the system as a whole. From their perspective, institutions—which, when all is said and done, are nothing but the political-administrative form of the market—acquire a neutral character that they have never actually possessed. The decision-making power, that is, the general will, which cannot possibly be exercised outside of counter-institutions of self-government such as popular assemblies and neighborhood communities, ends up being usurped by self-appointed representatives of ambiguous platforms, which are neither fish nor fowl, or by politicians of one party or another, whose mission is to drown the defense of the territory in the legal and parliamentary swamp.

If we want a harmonious relation between the urban world and the territory, we have to reconcile the two realities by reestablishing their erstwhile complementary functions. In order to find the equilibrium between the city and the rural world, we need

to repopulate the countryside, recover communal goods, restore customary rights and, above all, dismantle the conurbations. The establishment of a communitarian way of life that is protected from the imperatives of industrialization must be born from the ruins of the stockyard-type population centers that are still called cities, although they are not real cities. The reign of freedom comes after a process of ruralization and de-industrialization capable of restoring its lost autonomy to a horizontally reorganized society. This means the end of the market and the return to the domestic and uncommodified economy of needs and desires. The libertarian utopia will not be built if its construction is not informed by an anti-developmental perspective.

While principles and final goals are necessary to prevent struggles from being recuperated by the dominant system and to prevent its defeats from being transformed into victories for the greenwashed economy, tactics will have to concretize the guidelines of everyday action in a practical manner, confronting particular local conflicts with the means at their disposal, which are often meager. While it is obvious that the defense of territory has an unequivocally anti-capitalist aspect, since it stands in the way, with greater or lesser effectiveness, of the atrocities of economic development, it is also obvious that the forces that are currently involved in this defense do not have a clear understanding of this factor. The question of social conflict will not be clearly perceived except at the end of a series of defensive battles. It is necessary to mobilize the largest possible number of people—many of whom are trapped in conurbations—against harmful or useless projects if any attempt is to be made to cultivate a collective subject with sufficient discernment and power, first, to bring a halt to destructive plans, and then, going on the offensive by way of the desertion of the urban centers, to occupy the rural zones and implement communitarian projects.