

Development: What Development?

Keith Buchanan

Ever since debate on the development process became popular it has been customary to frame the discussion largely in terms of the contrast between the underdeveloped societies (or, as they are now more tactfully described, the 'less developed countries') and the developed societies of the White North (capitalist and state capitalist). That these latter societies are industrially sophisticated and highly productive cannot be denied. Whether they are 'developed' in the sense many of the writers on global problems would use the word 'developed' is less certain.

Indeed if, as Pope Paul VI insisted, development 'cannot be limited to mere economic growth', if it 'has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man', we have to recognize that there are *no* developed societies. We have only the *underdeveloped* societies of the third world and the *maldeveloped* or *overdeveloped* societies of the White North. Or, perhaps, one global society in which the underdevelopment of the great majority of mankind is the price *they* have to pay for the overdevelopment of the affluent nations. Overdevelopment and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin.¹ When we read of Pope John Paul II beginning his recent American visit with an appeal to the American people to share their wealth with the rest of the world, this has to be borne in mind.

Moreover, as the World Council of Churches has noted, 'there is a direct relationship between the prosperity of one group and the poverty of the other. The position enjoyed by the first group is the result not only of its own efforts and of the stage achieved in its cultural process, but mainly of the subjugation and spoliation which it has inflicted on the peoples it has conquered and colonized.'² Keith Griffin, a British expert on development, put this same truth into historical perspective and in no less forthright terms: underdeveloped countries, says Griffin, 'are a relatively recent phenomenon. Europe did not "discover" the underdeveloped countries; on the contrary, she created them.'³

The Price of Wealth

The basis on which the affluence and overconsumption of the so-called 'developed' nations rests has been the appropriation of a high proportion of the world's non-renewable resources, especially metals and mineral

fuels. The USA alone, with less than 6% of the world's population, consumes almost one half of the world's coal, one-third of its petroleum and almost two-thirds of its natural gas. Other industrialized nations between them appropriate much of the remainder.

These nations—and it must be recalled that the statistics we cite are averages—are immensely wealthy. This wealth is relatively recent: the French economist Paul Bairoch estimated the difference in average income between large nations (such as Britain and India) in about 1700 at nearly two to one; today it is 40:1,⁴ though some estimates of the World Bank put the ratio as high as 120:1.⁵ The processes whereby the wealthy nations (or, rather, the wealthy classes within certain nations) attained such affluence have been destructive ecologically and destructive of other peoples. Ecologically they have resulted in large-scale destruction of our global environment; this is exemplified by the depletion of the forests of the third world, by the depletion and destruction of soils in both the third world and developed nations such as the USA, Australia or South Africa, and by massive pollution of the oceans by oil and, more locally, sewage and heavy metals. The industrialized countries themselves face a major environmental crisis. Britain, the pioneer of modern industry, faces the prospect of becoming an 'industrial wasteland' as the result of the ruthless subordination of all human, historical and ecological considerations to the achievement of what Goldsmith and Hildyard term that 'be-all and end-all of human endeavour'—the achievement of economic efficiency.⁶ And globally human society is, says the writer James Bellini, in the first stages of a technological holocaust.⁷

The Cost of 'Development' to the 'Underdeveloped'

One of the major impacts of development has been the depletion of resources throughout much of the third world. The industrialized societies of the White North represent less than one-third of humanity; they appropriate for their 'needs' the greater proportion of the world's output of minerals and fuels (the proportion varies from 60% to 95% according to commodity). In a world in which industrialization was confined to the nations of the White North this posed no immediate problem (though the continued plundering of the nations of the third world represented by the very low prices paid for these raw materials certainly raises moral issues) but in a world in which a growing number of third world nations are beginning to diversify their economics through industrialisation the situation is clearly different. Already many of the richest deposits have been worked out and in the future there will be a growing third world opposition to a global system based on the assumption that the industrialized nations must consume more and more, that the resources on which this consumption is based should be third world resources, and that the only role for third world societies is

that of producers of raw materials to meet the needs of the industrialized world.⁸

This casting of the third world's peoples into the role of 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' for the peoples of the industrialized North draws attention to a truth often overlooked—that, as sociologist Peter Worsley reminds us, 'to utilise or valorize resources, colonialism has to exploit men.'⁹ Or as Frantz Fanon (who was one of the third world's most articulate spokesmen) more bluntly put it: 'The well-being and the progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races.'¹⁰ That our wealth and opulence comes in large measure from the soil and subsoil, yes, and the slaves, of the underdeveloped world is something we forget. It is also—along with the human cost of all those generations who in Europe and North America were sacrificed in the course of the industrial revolution—overlooked by enthusiasts for conventional (i.e. Western) models of development.

Welfare—and Illfare

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation underlined this cost—and the limitations of orthodox development models—in its analysis of the crisis of development entitled *What Now: Another Development*. Said the Foundation: 'Although basic needs in the latter (i.e. the industrialized countries) have by and large been met and mass poverty abolished, the human cost of accumulation ... has been terribly heavy, even if this fact has sometimes disappeared from the minds and memories of the descendants of the sacrificed generations. The persistence of alienation leads one to think, moreover, that the road chosen by the industrialized centre was perhaps not the best.'¹¹

This alienation, this sense of not belonging, of purposelessness, is one of the most distinctive features of 'developed' societies today. It indicates clearly that high living standards (however measured) or the increasing accumulation of material goods do not alone ensure happiness or satisfaction.¹² Alienation can be seen in the assumption that material goods can make up for the lack of less tangible satisfactions. Isolated in one of the great population clusters which are typical of our age, engaged in a job devoid of meaning and little related to life, individuals commonly seek to express themselves by the accumulation of possessions; they become preoccupied with *having* rather than with *being*. Material goods are sought as a compensation for the emptiness of day-to-day life and the material wealth is seen as a means of obtaining all those non-material things—love, friendship, esteem—for which people crave.

This perversion of life in the societies we call 'developed' has been succinctly described by Douglas Dowd: 'Alienated workers ... make

better consumers, and better spectators, of politics as well as of sport. Life becomes a spectacle ... not something to participate in, to change, to control. As the meaning of life is drained away, the meaning of any particular obscenity within life is diminished: the obscenity of luxurious and idiot consumption and mountainous arms expenditure in a world where millions starve while nature dies.¹³

And all the time the pressure of advertising forces us to set our sights ever higher; the gap between what we are conditioned to feel we need and what we can actually have grows ever wider. We are caught up in what the American sociologist Philip Slater has called 'the pursuit of loneliness', for in our desperate scramble for material goods we isolate ourselves from our fellows and we dehumanize ourselves.

Symptoms of Chaos

When we begin to look more closely at some of these trends we may begin to see that the mechanisms of development, as presently practised, are quite simply destructive of many of the most basic human qualities. For us, as for the people of Rome in its last violence-racked stages, 'worse than the peril of death ... is the difficulty or (as it so often seems) the impossibility of being human'.¹⁴ And ultimately these trends are a threat to the very survival of humankind. We have, when we confront the present which prefigures our future, to recall the sombre vision of the American economist Robert Heilbroner: 'If then, by the question "Is there hope for man?" we ask whether it is possible to meet the challenges of the future without the payment of a fearful price, the answer must be: No, there is no such hope.'¹⁵ We have to recall, too, the even bleaker vision of the Swedish writer Jan Myrdal who comments: 'It is a strange thing to live in a dying culture in a doomed world.'¹⁶ But all politicians, East and West, persist in mouthing the same slogans: growth and development 'must', and will, continue, GNP will expand—and all are united in leaving out of account the less easily measured (and disturbing) intangibles such as health, security and the like.

Consideration of these intangibles gives a different picture. As early as the 1970s, the data for France clearly demonstrated the regression which was hidden beneath the facade of affluence of our industrialized societies.¹⁷

- Death had gained ground. Between 1960 and 1972 death rates for males between 40 and 45 years of age increased by 10%. For those between 15 and 25 by 45%. We had pushed back some diseases—but society had created new ones such as traffic accidents or, as a result of environmental deterioration, aggravated many old ones such as cancer or respiratory diseases.
- Between 1950 and 1970 death rates from respiratory diseases increased 50%, doubled for liver diseases, tripled for lung cancer.

- Deaths through road accidents tripled.
- Each year in France 14,000 people were killed on the roads and 350,000 injured and mutilated. From 1946 to 1976 the car killed more French than the Second World War.
 - Each year almost one and a quarter million were injured at work and the resulting loss of work-days was six times that due to strikes.
 - In Paris and the inner suburbs population increased by 30% from 1938 to 1974 but robberies with violence increased fifty-fold, burglaries ten-fold, murders and attempted murders doubled. Society, says the French novelist and diplomat Romain Gary, pushes people into crime by its constant provocation to possess—the motive is no longer misery but the pursuit of opulence.

As the industrialized societies continue on the same path, the trend emerging in these early data has persisted, as is amply demonstrated by recent data from, for example, the United States or Britain. Such data are the signs of a civilisation on the verge of collapse. It is a civilisation whose sickness is concealed by the slogan-mongering of politicians, by the ritual incantations of economists and other technocrats and by massive manipulation of the media.

Barbarism — and Beyond?

This, in truth, is a civilisation whose leaders are caught up in a fatal contradiction largely of their own making—for what we are told is 'progress' has destroyed community and replaced it by a shapeless and rootless mass of lonely and frightened individuals, and this mass is kept together merely by the pursuit of affluence which becomes the reward for conformity. But because we cannot have infinite growth in a finite world, because the resource base on which our so-called progress rests is so slender, and because our ecological destruction has been so massive, this affluence can be no more than a temporary phase. With an end to affluence, new means must be found to keep society together and these means will include an increasing use of compulsion and state force—in short, a shift towards a new and fearsome totalitarianism.

The beginnings of this shift are already with us—the rise of the corporate state, the multiplication of techniques of control and surveillance, law-and-order legislation which attacks the symptoms rather than the causes of social disintegration, the cultivation of an irrational chauvinism. For those of us who remember Europe of the 1930s the symptoms of a new barbarism are unmistakable. Said the American Jesuit, Father John Courtney Murray, some years ago:

Society becomes barbarian when men are huddled together under the rule of force and fear; when economic interests assume the primacy over higher values; when material

standards of mass and quantity crush out the values of quality and excellence; when technology assumes an autonomous existence and embarks on a course of unlimited self-exploitation without purposeful guidance from the higher disciplines of politics and morals; when the state reaches the paradoxical point of being everywhere intrusive and also impotent, possessed of immense power and powerless to achieve rational ends; when the ways of men come under the sway of the instinctual, the impulsive, the compulsive.¹⁸

Father Murray is describing our present—and a perfectly possible future. But if we believe that even at this late hour there may be a glimmer of hope, if we reject the prospect of a new barbarism, his diagnosis contains implicitly a plan of action, an indication of what must be done if civilization and humanity are to survive in the society which we inherit.

- 1 The *accelerated* pace of the transfer of wealth from the poor nations to the rich nations (i.e. this process of underdevelopment) is demonstrated by Clairmonte and Kavanagh in their paper on the 'Third World Debt Crisis' in *IFDA Dossier* 59 (Nyon) May/June 1987, pp. 43—50; they comment: 'The net transfer of capital from the Third World to the rich countries rose from US\$7 billion (1981) to US\$56 billion (1983) to US\$74 billion (1985). In 1985, new borrowing and rescheduling was US\$41 billion but debt servicing was far higher at US\$114 billion.' p.45.
- 2 World Council of Churches *To Break the Chains of Oppression* (Geneva, 1975).
- 3 Griffin, K. 'Underdevelopment in History' in C.K. Wilber ed. *The Economy of Development and Underdevelopment* (New York, 1973).
- 4 See, e.g., the Statistical Annex in Sivard, Ruth Leger, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1986* (Washington).
- 5 Dumont, René & Mottin, Marie-France *L'Afrique étranglée* (Paris, 1980).
- 6 Goldsmith, Edward & Hildyard, Nicholas, eds. *Green Britain or Industrial Wasteland?* (Cambridge, 1986).
- 7 Bellini, James *High-Tech Holocaust* (Newton Abbot, 1986).
- 8 World Council of Churches *op. cit.* Noam Chomsky comments ironically on the indignation of the wealthy industrial nations when the peoples of the third world, failing to understand this, 'attempt to steal *our* resources that happen to be in *their* countries'. *On Power and Ideology: the Managua Lectures* (Boston, 1987).
- 9 Worsley, P. *The Third World* (London, 1964).
- 10 Fanon, Frantz *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, 1967).
- 11 Dag Hammarskjöld *What Now: Another Development*: Report prepared on the occasion of the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (Uppsala, 1975).
- 12 For an account of the havoc wrought by the Society of Consumption see Pasolini, Pier Paolo *Lutheran Letters* trans. S. Hood (Manchester, 1983) e.g. pp. 35—37. Pasolini mounts an even more devastating attack in his *Ecrits corsaires* (the French trans. of *Scritti Corsari*) published in Paris in 1976; see pp. 83—100, 225—228.
- 13 Dowd, D. 'Stagflation' in *Monthly Review* October 1976 (New York).
- 14 Mumford, Lewis *The City in History* (New York & Harmondsworth, 1961).
- 15 Heilbroner, R. *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (London, 1975).
- 16 Myrdal, Jan *Confessions of a Disloyal European* (London, 1968).
- 17 Saint-Marc, P. *Progrès ou déclin de l'homme* (Paris 1978).
- 18 Murray, John C. 'Second Edition: The Case for Consensus' in *The Center Magazine*, Vol II, No 5, 1969 (Santa Barbara).