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THE STRUGGLE AGAINST MALDEVELOPMENT IN HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES

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1. Introduction

When historians, equipped with more insight, because of more hindsight than we have, write up the history of the phenomena described in this paper, they might well decide that it all started with the "hippie movement" of the late 1960s in North America in Western Europe. And the important point about the hippies was that they in a sense were criminals in reverse: criminals have the same goals as those adhering to the dominant way of life of the society (eg to get rich quickly, to have power) but they use means unacceptable to the rest of society. The hippies, however, rejected the very goals of society: money, power, career, participation in the "great society": they preferred life in smaller groups, communes, centered on conviviality and rich inter-human and inner experiences. They were searching for deep non-material gratification and saw material consumption not only as irrelevant but as a hindrance. At the same time they were acting out a combination of protest and despair; protesting the policies of their government domestically, relative to the Third world, relative to nature, despairing at the inadequacy of political institutions to correct the course or even to articulate the issues.

The way the problematique is formulated above contains the nucleus of the perspective underlying this ^{study} ~~article~~. Any social formation - a family, a village, a primitive/traditional/modern society - produces goods and services of a very complex variety ~~of kinds~~ for consumption among its members. Some get access to more, some to less of these goods and services. There is usually a structure behind this: those who get more can be identified as a social class, and so can those who get less; one background factor being how close one is to those who control the means of production of the goods and services. The result is class struggle, for a more equitable, even equal access to the goods and services - whether through better distribution, new patterns of control of means of production, or other methods. No doubt this struggle is a major driving force in history.

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When we mention this obvious point it is in order better to understand the alternative ways of life phenomena. They have their class character, but ^{are a} challenge ^{of} an other aspect of society. It is not only the (often blatantly unjust) ^{consumption of} distribution of goods and services in society that is questioned, as the profile of consumption of goods and services. The claim is that much too much is consumed of one kind, and much too little of another kind, thereby making the society maldeveloped, lopsided, unbalanced. And here the simplest, but also quite effective ⁱⁿ comprehending these phenomena, formula seems to be the following: the thesis is that our high income countries are overemphasizing material goods and services, and underemphasizing the non-material ones. Even the language used here reflects this: food, housing, clothes, schooling and medical care, means of transportation and communication, leisure time gadgets are clearly identifiable as "goods and services"; close-ness to self (inner life), to others (conviviality), to nature (partnership), to some social group (society, community) and feelings of freedom, of having options, consciously made choices are not identified as such, but seen as "values", and as "private". [What this indicates is, of course, that the leading paradigm for the governance of most societies in the world today, economics, is itself a part of the problem by giving so much attention to material and so little to the non-material aspects of the total social production of goods and services. To this economists might object that the non-material "intangibles" referred to above belong to the "informal sector". And the conclusion might then be, in one sentence: the alternative ways of life movement is above all an effort to preserve, protect and expand the informal sector, the sector of direct interaction, non-monetized, non-codified where production (in the broad sense) is for consumption by the producers and ^{only marginally} ~~not~~ for market exchange.

It should now be emphasized that the claim is not that there is over-production of material goods and services in high

income countries today. With a better distribution of the products
the society might already become ^{more balanced} ~~(and potentially over development)~~ The claim is that there
is over-consumption[^] of some goods and services in some parts of society,
and for some of them even in almost all parts of society - as pointed
out in the latest Surgeon-General's Report in the US ^{and serious under-consumption (and potentially underdevelopment) of} For that reason ^{others}
it is rather obvious where the AWL movement would emerge: not among
those who ^{materially} have too little, but among those who have ^{- or might get -} too much. It would
tend to be a phenomenon of the higher strata of society, and of course
particularly pronounced among the educated (because they are more con-
scious, and have more knowledge and intellectual resources in general in
devising alternatives), and particularly among the young (because they
are more free to change ways of life, less settled because of job/ca-
reer, family and house). Thus, it has its class character, and may even
^{apparent} be in conflict with movements to improve the conditions of lower clas-
ses. But this does not detract from its significance as an indicator
of a deeply rooted problem in contemporary rich society, and as a point-
er to alternatives.

CONCLUSION : Some Notes on the Politics of Alternative Ways of Life

As it has been presented here, the AWL movements have been seen as a reaction to the dominant way of life in affluent, rich, industrialized countries. More particularly, AWL has been seen as a reaction to an institutionalized pattern of maldevelopment in consumption, a combination of material overconsumption with non-material underconsumption. As a critique of society it differs from the classical socialist critique of maldistribution and could be seen as complementary rather than contradictory to that critique.

The obvious corrective in most of Alternative Ways of Life movements has been a lifestyle with a more modest, more restrained pattern of material consumption and efforts to obtain a much richer pattern of conviviality and inner life. But in addition to that two other aspects have been mentioned : a deeply felt ecological concern, and an equally deeply felt concern for the Third world.

A lower level of material consumption is intrinsically related to a higher level of ecological awareness, and as such unproblematic. This, of course, does not imply that an active AWL movement in a society will lead to a softer approach to nature in general in that society. It could also lead to encapsulation : the adherents of the dominant way of life could leave the AWL people to their eco-farming and their partnership with nature, and calculate how much extra that would mean for the rest of the society in terms of resources that can be extracted from nature. The pattern of "ghettofication" of an AWL movement so as to quarantine the phenomenon, setting it aside, would be an obvious political device. The AWL people on their side might be surprised to find how well they are treated, how willing the Government would be to set aside some remote territory for their experiments, and out of political naiveté not fully realize the implications.

As to the second point, the relation to the Third world, the politics of AWL is more complicated. Some of the material overconsumption in First world countries can be traced to a resource base in the Third world - this might, for instance, be particularly true for meat. The harmful consequences of overconsumption in the First world may be related to even more harmful consequences of underconsumption in the Third world. AWL reasoning might be that a partial or even complete closing of the import market in First world countries for such goods would serve as a boycott, and would have the effect of liberating resource in the Third world exporting countries (not only soil, but also capital, labour

and other resources) for internal consumption.

This type of reasoning is political, but dubious. There is little convincing evidence in recent history to the effect that external pressure leads to internal changes. The target country in the Third world would be more likely to try to find an other export market, and if not in the First world, possibly in the Second or Third worlds. The message is also likely to be misunderstood or at least to be misinterpreted and misrepresented. What might also happen would be that the Third world country would continue the same internal mode of production, and simply be left with neither any internal change for the possible benefit of the people in general, nor with an export market - but simply with non-exportable overproduction. In no sense is this an argument against an internal change in that country so that underconsumption even down to the point of abject misery and starvation can be eliminated - it is only dubious that this particular method will bring about that change.

As a matter of fact, the idea that a reduced level of material consumption in First world countries should lead to internal change in Third world countries is probably a latter-day-version of the old thinking in First world countries to the effect that anything good in the Third world necessarily must have a cause in the First world. A politically much more likely chain of events would reverse this causal linkage and look at it from the opposite angle : is it not likely that Third world countries increasingly will produce for themselves and for other Third world countries, and for that reason make less raw materials and semi-processed goods (such as meat products) rather than more of it available to First world countries ? And does that not mean, essentially, that a reduced level of material consumption may not come about primarily as an outcome of dissatisfaction with the internal state of affairs in high consumption countries, but rather as a deed of necessity, caused by external events in a changing world economy ? The answer to this, of course, is seen much more clearly if instead of meat we talk in terms of oil : what happened was certainly not that the First world started consuming less oil and thereby started bringing about changes in the Third world - it was Third world oil exporting countries that intervened actively in the oil market, and thereby started, however slowly, causing some changes in the consumption pattern in the First world countries. Most of these changes are still to come, but if the result in any kind of Alternative Ways of Life it is certainly as a consequence of what happens outside the First world countries rather than as something caused by internal changes in the First world itself.

However, this may be AWL is now already a part of the political life of high income countries; there will be strategies in dealing with them and the movement will develop its counter-strategies. But the direction of this dialectic will probably depend more on international than national factors.