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The terrible mess we are in today is not the result of a technical flaw in the implementation of today's policies, but in the policies themselves. This we fail to realise because they are rationalized and hence legitimised by the world-view – one might say the secular religion - with which we, in the modern world, have all been imbued. It is this world-view that I wish to consider here, because for me its total rejection and replacement by a more realistic one is a prerequisite of any realistic solution to the growing problems we face today.

To begin with, the basic assumption of this world-view is that, in creating the world, God (or if we prefer, the evolutionary process) did a bad job, and it is incumbent on man with his much touted intelligence and ingenuity, together with his science, technology, industry, and nowadays, free trade, to redesign it in accordance with his far superior plan. In this way he will be able to create a material and technological paradise on earth, from which all the problems that have beset us from the beginning of our tenancy of this planet will have been eliminated once and for all.

What lends credibility to this infantile world-view is that it actually underlies modern science. Science is very much part of our secular religion. If a proposition is seen to be scientific it is unquestionable, while if on the other hand it is branded as unscientific, then it can only be the work of an ignoramus or a charlatan. In fact, the declarations of our scientists are imbued with an aura of sanctity previously reserved for the holy texts of the established religions which has provided the scientific priesthood with the powers to prevent any undesirable deviation from scientific orthodoxy.

The idea of progress was firmly built into the Utopia of Roger Bacon, regarded as one of the founders of modern science, along with René Descartes and Galileo Galilei. None of them really saw science as an objective study, but as an imperialistic enterprise, whose goal it is to subjugate, dominate, and control the natural world. The Scientific Academy of the New Atlantis – Bacon's Utopia – he called "Solomon's House". Its goal was the

“enlarging (of) the bounds of human empire to the effecting of all things possible”, suggesting that every scientific intrusion into the workings of nature was necessarily beneficial and that no limits could be imposed on their nature and extent.

For Bacon this enterprise would create “a second nature”, in other words, a man-made, science-and-technology-inspired surrogate world, which was clearly seen as a vast improvement on the natural world that it would supplant. The scientists of Solomon’s House would then be in a position to ensure “the prolongation of life” and “the restitution of youth”, as well as “the retardation of age” and “the curing of diseases counted as incurable”. They would even be capable of “regulating climate” and “making new species”. There was indeed no limit to what they could achieve, or to the extent to which they could transform the natural world. Nor was there the slightest concern for what might be the social, ecological, climatic, or moral implications of implementing this puerile and megalomaniac dream, which modern science, with its elaborate installations and ingenious technologies, has only achieved imperfectly and in the very short term – and at considerable cost – that of creating the terrible mess we are in today.

Our economists are also imbued with the Religion of Progress. Economics, as taught in our universities, is above all designed to rationalize and hence legitimise, economic growth, or development as it is called when imposed on Third World countries. If scientists are the priests of our technological society, in some ways, economists are its high priests. Indeed, for an economist to brand a project as uneconomic is possibly even more damning than for a scientist to condemn it as unscientific.

One of the main problems with modern economics is that it is based on a minute, totally atypical, highly aberrant, and necessarily short-lived sample of the total human experience on this planet – that of the industrial age. Economists thereby assume, as do our sociologists and political scientists, that 99% of the human experience on this planet is totally irrelevant to the study of and the solution to the problems we face today. This is among other things an act of supreme arrogance. The societies we have lived in up to now were above all based on the extended family and the community – and this cannot be a coincidence. Their members, what is particularly important, were bound by a strong set of reciprocal obligations towards each other, and this provided the very basis of what we

could refer to as their economic system: the production and distribution within these social units of the food and artefacts that they required, and, what is critical, without any money changing hands. Nor, for that matter, was money required to motivate the members of these traditional families and communities to fulfil all the other functions required to assure the welfare of their members: the bringing up and education of their children, the looking after of the old and the sick, the organization and performance of their religious rituals, and the maintenance of law and justice.

This is particularly important because the principal argument for economic growth or development is that money is a requisite for assuring people's welfare and solving whatever problems they suffer from. Thus the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) insists that if people are hungry it is that they are poor and cannot afford to buy the food they need, while the World Health Organization (WHO) assures us that it is because people do not have the money to pay for the medicines that would make them healthy that they are disease-ridden and die young. Hunger and disease are thereby classified as but two of the many forms which poverty – also identified with “underdevelopment” must take, for which there is only one solution – economic growth or development, which is alone capable of generating the money we think is required. This is, of course, what they want to make us believe at Johannesburg.

No one seems to have pointed out to the promoters of this lethal process that, until recently, people could feed themselves very satisfactorily without money, and usually also maintain themselves in excellent health – as has been documented in the pages of *The Ecologist* and associated publications in great detail over the last thirty-two years.

One could go further than this and point out that poverty itself is not a term that made much sense in the context of a pre-development community. What seems certain is that their members did not regard themselves as poor. In fact, if we are to believe the French sociologist Serge Latouche, the West African societies, in which he lived and worked, do not even have a word for poverty. Helena Norberg Hodge, who spent much of her time in Ladakh, a Tibetan society in the Himalayas in the last thirty years, also tells us that the Ladakhi had no word for poverty. Marshall Sahlins, the well-known anthropologist, regards poverty as “an invention of civilization. For Latouche the word that is the closest

to poverty in the vocabulary of West African people is that which denotes an orphan, i.e. someone who is deprived of social support. This is not surprising as in a pre-development society a person's family and community, with their land, of which development necessarily deprives them, are his or her two principal sources of wealth and security. Significantly, the late Julius Nyerere, when Prime Minister of Tanzania, told us that "in an African society nobody starved, either of food or human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member."

Another of the serious problems with modern economics is that it is studied in total isolation from society and the natural world, about which most of its practitioners know almost nothing. As the late Professor Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, a dissident economist at Vanderbilt University, pointed out "the economic process is depicted by modern economists as "a circular diagram, a pendulum movement between production and consumption within a completely closed system". As a result "the fact that there is a continuous influence between the economic process and the physical environment carries no weight with a standard economist". In other words, economic development is seen as a purely economic process, whereas by its very nature it must necessarily give rise to the most dramatic social, ecological, and cognitive transformations, which, if our knowledge were not so fragmented, would be regarded as the integral and indissociable components of this lethal process.

The reason economic development is so socially destructive is that it is above all a process whereby the functions that were previously fulfilled very effectively and entirely for free by the normal functioning of traditional families and communities, are taken over by the state and commercial enterprises, that then commodify and monetize them, so that they must now be paid for. Of course this enables them to contribute to Gross National Product (GNP), or more realistically Gross National Cost (GNC). As this occurs, these key social units, now divested of their natural functions, must inevitably atrophy, like muscles that are no longer in use, leaving behind an atomised mass of socially deprived and alienated individuals – the main cause of the current epidemic of delinquency and drug addiction. At the same time a very large number of people, not only in the Third World but also in the industrialized countries of the West, no longer have access to these now-monetized

benefits – and, if the current trends towards the further privatisation world-wide of key goods and services proceeds as planned, their numbers can only escalate.

Economic growth or development does very much the same thing to the ecosystems that make up the ecosphere or the natural world, on whose normal and totally sustainable functioning, human life and well-being, as well as that of all other living things, has always depended. As development proceeds, however, these critical functions, that of course are provided entirely for free, are also usurped by the State and the corporations and hence also monetized. Thus the nitrogen used to fertilise our land is increasingly produced at great cost in factories rather than fixed by nitrogen-fixing bacteria on the roots of leguminous plants, and the water we use, instead of being stored for free in the aquifers beneath the forest floor, is increasingly stored in large incredibly expensive man-made reservoirs that, in tropical areas, silt up in a matter of a few decades, often more quickly.

Development also involves a transformation of the world-view or cultural information pattern or the effective religion (secular or transcendental) with which pre-development people were imbued. Thus, instead of seeing our welfare, indeed our survival, as dependent on the preservation of the critical structure of the cosmos, which was seen by pre-development people as encompassing society, the natural world and the world of the Gods, (see my book “The Way: an Ecological World-View) we now see it instead as dependent on its systemic disruption and annihilation, and its replacement with a crude, and totally unsustainable man-made substitute.

As development proceeds, so do we become ever more hooked on this fatal process, hence on the continued cancer-like expansion of the surrogate world, Bacon’s “new nature”. This is not because it is really designed to satisfy human needs, but because we are correspondingly deprived of the real world on which we previously depended.

Unfortunately just about every serious problem that confronts us today is interpreted, by those who govern us, in terms of this aberrant world-view, or more precisely of its highly flawed paradigms of reductionist science and modern economics in such a way as to make it appear amenable to the solution we have decided to apply in advance – the only one that modern society is organized and motivated to apply: – a developmental solution involving

more science, technology, and capital investment. This will, of course, further contribute to the sales and profits of the vast corporations that, with the globalization of the economy, now largely control our governments and international agencies. In this way the problems caused by economic development are simply transformed into business opportunities.

But such pseudo-solutions can only mask the symptoms of our problems, thereby making them, for some of us at least, correspondingly less painful. However, the problems themselves can only really be solved by putting development, which has caused them, into reverse, but this is not remotely acceptable. Hence the problems can only worsen – and the money required for providing ever more pseudo solutions to mask their symptoms constitutes an ever-growing proportion of our Gross National Product (GNP) which is the main reason why I prefer to refer to the latter as “Gross National Cost” (GNC).

To give a typical example, the agricultural economist Philip Raup tells us that “there can be no permanent shortage of agricultural land. To suppose the opposite is an error that stems from wrongly considering the availability of resources in physical rather than economic terms. Indeed, if some land is unsuitable for agriculture, this is only a reflection of current market conditions. If the land were really needed, then the necessary science, technology and capital, would make it productive.” Of course, if this were true we would not have to abandon some seven or eight million hectares of agricultural land that has been compacted, eroded, desertified, or salinized, by industrial agriculture every year. If the land has been destroyed it is because industrial agriculture is so incredibly destructive. It is also because modern society is incapable of controlling its population, any more than it can its natural resources, as primal people were well capable of doing – the strategies for doing so being built into their cultural patterns. If there is a land shortage, it is also because, for development to occur, we must accommodate the vast, sprawling, infrastructure of the industrial society that it gives rise to. Significantly, the three countries of South-East Asia that are regarded as the most successful, those that have succeeded in achieving the most economic growth – as Lester Brown tells in his book “Who Will Feed China?” - have lost between forty and fifty two percent of their cereal growing land in the space of no more than forty years. It is not clear how these countries will feed themselves if this and other associated trends are allowed to persist – especially as they are occurring in just about all the other countries from which they might import the food they can no

longer produce themselves. The only way to solve the problem of land shortages is clearly to put these trends – all of which are the inevitable consequences of economic growth - into reverse, and this again we cannot do - at least at present - though the highly unstable global economy must one day inevitably collapse on its own accord

I've mentioned that the present epidemic of crime, delinquency and drug addiction is caused by the breakdown of the family and the community and the cultural patterns that held them together, which is again the inevitable consequence of economic development. This means that the real cause can also only really be addressed by putting this process into reverse. Building ever more prisons, as we are doing today, is once more but a means of masking some of the symptoms of our sick society, and, by the same token, of providing the now privatised “prison-industrial complex” with a superb business opportunity – but it does nothing to address its cause.

An effective campaign against poverty, if this concept is not seen in the purely material sense of the term, as I have also intimated, requires demonetising the real necessities of life and hence putting development into reverse. This is above all essential, of course, for slowing down climate change, the most daunting problem mankind has ever faced. Significantly, the day we learned how to mobilize the energy contained in fossil fuels, within the context of a market economy, we were condemned to climate change – which is a sufficient indictment of the industrial society which this discovery made possible and which today the whole world misguidedly seeks to emulate.

Indeed, if we are to survive for much longer on this planet, we have no alternative but to emulate instead some of the main features of the traditional pre-development society. This will mean that most of us will live in largely, but not entirely, self-sufficient villages, geared to the small-scale low-tech production of food and artefacts. It also means that our social and cultural life will, as it once did, play a much more important part in our lives.

Finally, it also means that we must be imbued with a very different world view, in the light of which we see human welfare and human survival once more as dependent upon the preservation of human communities and the natural world of which they are part, rather than on the surrogate world that economic development brings into being.