

**WASTING THE WORLD:  
ENCLOSURE, ACCUMULATION AND LOCAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES  
ON A GLOBAL SCALE**

**EDDIE GIRDNER**

I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

Lawrence Summers (World Bank, US Treasury Secretary)

The name toxic imperialism has been used for struggles against the export of toxic waste. Such struggles could easily link up with the Environmental Justice Movement in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Juan Martinez-Alier

**1. Environmental Degradation on a Global Scale**

Capitalist accumulation, commodification, and environmental degradation are global in scale. Environmental struggles must be carried out on a global scale against cultural imperialism and the invasion of local communities by corporations for resources and profits. Capitalist accumulation encourages the creation of waste in the preference for exchange values over use values. The use value of local communities and living cultural traditions are giving way to the capitalist corporate assault all across the globe. As Stephen Horton points out, 'local communities are the biggest losers when

---

<sup>1</sup>J. Martinez-Alier, 'Environmental Justice (Local and Global),' *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Vol. 8 (1), March 1997, p. 104.

use-value has to give way to exchange value.<sup>2</sup> This ongoing historical process that can be traced to the Enclosure Movement, the 'creative destruction' of capitalism, has been characterized as 'taking a meat-axe to living communities.'<sup>3</sup> This happens when communities in New York are carved up for shopping malls, as noted by David Harvey. Such cultural imperialism, whether against tribal peoples in India, Native Americans or small white communities in the Midwest of the United States, provokes local responses and struggles. In Mercer County, a small community in Missouri, it provoked the response 'Amoco, just keep your ash out of my river.' Those who had taken the local people for granted for so many years were also served notice in a highly visible highway billboard: 'Fight Waste-Tech and the politicians who don't.'<sup>4</sup> The people did fight Waste-Tech, a hazardous waste company, and subsidiary of Amoco, throwing the company out of the county. The politicians and local officials the company had bought, were voted out of office. There are similar struggles against such corporate assaults all around the globe.

## 2. The Mushroom Syndrome: Waste Flows Down Hill

The global corporate-State agenda, to be sure, is a sort of mushroom syndrome on a global scale. Pile horse manure on the people and keep them in the dark. With the exception that Lawrence Summers would replace the former with hazardous waste.

A well-known World Bank report from Lawrence Summers, World Bank Economist, who became US Treasury Secretary, argued in 1991, that it is perfectly logical to dump hazardous waste in the lowest wage country. The report saw Africa as 'underpolluted.'<sup>5</sup> This view of economic rationality, which is a form

---

<sup>2</sup>S. Horton, 'Value, Waste and the Built Environment: A Marxian Analysis,' *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Vol. 8 (1), March 1997, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>E. J. Girdner and R. Furgeson, 'Amoco Planning to Dump Hazardous Waste in Mercer County,' *Compost Dispatch*, Vol. 4 (3), March 1993, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>R. Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, Boston: South End Press, 1993, pp. 19-20.

of toxic imperialism by transnational corporations, is being sharply challenged by people in many Third World countries.<sup>6</sup>

Part of Summer's memo to some of his colleagues has been published:<sup>7</sup>

Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging **more** migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

(1) The measurement of the costs of health-impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health-impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

(2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution will probably have very low cost. I've always thought that **under**-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low [sic] compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high prevent world-welfare-enhancing trade in air pollution and waste.

(3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income-elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one-in-a million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under-five mortality is 200 per thousand. Also, much of the concern over industrial atmospheric discharge is about visibility-impairing particulates. These discharges may have very little direct health impact. Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable.

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral rights,

---

<sup>6</sup>M. Mpanya, 'The Dumping of Toxic Waste in African Countries: A Case of Poverty and Racism,' in B. B. and P. Mohai, (eds.), *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1992, pp. 204-214.

<sup>7</sup>J. B. Foster, 'Let Them Eat Pollution: Capitalism and the World Environment,' *Monthly Review*, Vol. 44 (8) January 1993, pp. 10-11.

social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) [is that they] could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every Bank proposal for liberalization.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. The World Trade Organization and the Global Market in Toxic Waste: The Commerce Clause on a Global Scale

The Commerce Clause, Article I, Section 8, of the US Constitution is one of the most powerful instruments of US corporations in consolidating the monopoly waste industry and increasing capitalist accumulation. In allowing giant integrated economies of scale, and the monopoly of a scarce commodity, namely landfill space, waste corporations are becoming more and more powerful. The corporate agenda of Waste Management Incorporated, Allied Industries, and other monopoly waste corporations is to extend the unimpeded trade in waste, whether classified as hazardous or not, on a global scale. The Commerce Clause serves to strip states and local communities of local control and democratic rights to control their communities and their future. The World Trade Organization is intended to serve as a Commerce Clause on a global scale, allowing waste companies to move waste at will anywhere in the world again stripping countries of the global south and local communities of local control. This is what global waste corporations need in order to maximize profits on a global scale. The US government has traditionally supported this agenda by playing the role of a blocking nation in the attempt to establish conventions that would restrict the trade in toxic waste globally. Just as solid and hazardous waste in the US is considered a commodity in interstate commerce, by the same token, the US supports the treatment of toxic waste as merely a commodity to be traded globally. When corporations are global in their operation, the complete freedom to move waste can contribute significantly to global profits and capitalist accumulation. While the US has the 'right to block the importation of goods that fail to comply with its health or environmental standards,'<sup>9</sup> EPA Administrator Carol Browner approved the import of toxic PCB wastes from Mexico

---

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 10-11; and Bullard, *Confronting Environmental Racism*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup>W. Lash III, 'Environment and Global Trade,' *Society*, Vol. 31(4), May/June 1994, p. 54.

and Canada for incineration and disposal in toxic waste landfills in the US in March 1996.<sup>10</sup>

Under the 'Final Rule,' the Toxic Substances Control Act would be amended to allow the import of PCB waste for disposal as long as certain conditions were met. According to the EPA, 'an economic benefit in the range of 50-100 million US dollars annually for the U.S. disposal industry will result.' Another benefit could be to 'stabilize disposal prices for U.S. PCB waste generators in the future, by ensuring the U.S. PCB disposal facilities continue to have an economically viable market, and continue to remain in the PCB waste disposal business.' In asserting that these imports would not 'increase the risk of injury to human health or the environment,' it was pointed out that the 173,000 metric tons of PCB materials in Canada and 60,000 tons in Mexico could be compared to the '842,000 tons of domestic PCB waste' disposed of at US commercial facilities in 1993.<sup>11</sup> This decision was later blocked by a court order, but it illustrates US policy on the international trade in hazardous waste. The case illustrates the activity of the key agency of the federal government charged with the protection of the environment as launching a campaign to assist hazard waste companies in importing one of the most hazardous wastes known into the US on the basis that the industry needs more profits. What needs to be understood is that this is not a fluke but business as usual.

The international trade in toxic waste is closely linked to foreign debt and a developing country's need for foreign exchange. Eastern Europe is becoming a target in addition to the third world countries. As noted above, the US is one of six states, including the UK, Germany, Australia, Japan and Canada, that have helped play a blocking role in banning the trade in hazardous wastes. Hazardous waste has been shipped to developing countries in many forms. It has been shipped under the rubric of 'humanitarian assistance' in the cases of radioactive milk and illegal pesticides. It has gone as fertilizer, landfill material, fuel, recyclables, dry cleaning solvents, road construction materials, battery recycling, fuel for cement kilns (in Turkey) and an almost endless list of other ways. Nongovernmental organizations

---

<sup>10</sup>*Waste Not*, No. 360, March 1996.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

(NGOs), such as Greenpeace, have played a major role in working to ban the trade. When they are not being sent abroad, these materials are increasingly being used for the same purposes at home as well. Realizing the cost of Superfund cleanups, hazardous waste has become increasingly more 'green' and more uses are being found for it. Sham recycling, using it as fuel, road construction, and building materials are suggestive of the future.

The Basel Convention, which was brought into force in 1992, does not provide adequate protection for nations from the trade in toxic wastes, and some environmental NGOs have called it 'legalization of toxic terror.' Some 95 countries are a party to the treaty. It was not ratified by the largest waste-producing states nor the largest importing states among developing countries. Among its weaknesses, the treaty seeks to regulate waste, rather than ban it; has no provisions for actually stopping shipments; contains vague definitions of the terms 'hazardous waste' and 'environmentally sound'; and it excludes radioactive waste.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of the waste and recycling industries, the Basel Convention 'damages recycling,' and the industry complains that no one can be very sure about what materials are banned from international trade. This is an argument made by the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR). This organization legally challenges the Basel Convention definitions, saying it hampers the international trade in plastic, paper, textiles and so on. With recycling operating under low profit margins, the waste companies are likely to be able to mount increasing political clout to treat hazardous waste as any other commodity in global trade, as is done in terms of hazardous waste in the United States. The monitoring and control of cross-border transportation of hazardous waste and recyclables is problematical, not only because parties claim they do not know what is banned,<sup>13</sup> but because the various definitions and classifications of hazardous waste are themselves political. As

---

<sup>12</sup>J. Clapp, 'The Toxic Waste Trade With less-industrial countries: economic linkages and political alliances,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 15 (3), 1994, pp. 510-512; Mpanya, *The Dumping of Toxic Waste*, pp. 204-214.

<sup>13</sup>J. T. Aquino, 'ENTSORGA Speaks: Confusing Definitions from Basel Convention Hurt Recycling,' *Recycling Times*, No date, <[www.wasteage.com](http://www.wasteage.com)>

global corporations gain more power internationally control becomes more problematical under neoliberal agendas.

The 1991 Lome IV Convention between the European Community (EC) and 69 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states is a stronger commitment to control international control of toxic wastes. The EC states agreed not to export wastes to the ACP states and the ACP countries agreed not to import such wastes from any non-EC states. The African Bamako Convention, negotiated in 1991, attempts to ban the import of toxic waste, including radioactive waste, into Africa. Regional bans have been also adopted in some other areas.<sup>14</sup>

With the US taking the lead to establish global systems for the tracking of toxic chemicals, similar to the cradle to grave system in place under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) in the United States, environmentalists and environmental NGOs clearly have a difficult road ahead of them. We have seen how the chemical industry and other powerful corporate sectors have been able to protect their most profitable emissions under the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) system of reporting in the United States. Now several countries are in the process of developing TRI-like systems. These go under the name of 'Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers' (PRTRs). Supporting these efforts is the Commission on Environmental Cooperation, which was created by the environmental side-agreements of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has developed a guidance document for governments published in 1996. At least eight countries have set up PRTR systems: Australia, Canada, France, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, U.K., and U.S.<sup>15</sup>

For the global south, The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) has set out procedures on how to implement a toxics reporting and tracking system. A pilot program has been set up including Mexico, the Czech Republic, and Egypt under the PRTR Coordination Group, chaired by the

---

<sup>14</sup>Clapp, *Toxic Waste Trade*, pp. 509-513.

<sup>15</sup>1996 *Toxics Release Inventory*, US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics (7048), Washington, D.C., 1997, pp. 16-17.

U.S. and in cooperation with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which serves as the secretariat.<sup>16</sup> Such a system may have the potential to increase knowledge about toxic emissions globally. Politicized, it could serve as a vehicle by which the most polluting global corporations might prevent radical and more effective regulations, thereby protecting their most egregious and profitable emissions wherever they operate globally. Some countries in the global south have higher standards than the US in particular areas. 'In some cases, Mexican standards are higher than environmental regulations in the United States.'<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the US recognizes that some regulation is an advantage to US corporations. US Congressman, Richard Gephardt, argues that '...the failure of other states to enforce their environmental laws places foreign manufacturers at a competitive advantage over American producers...I refuse to accept the notion that we should lower our standards environmentally so that our companies can compete more effectively.'<sup>18</sup> The statement, itself, suggests the utopian nature of the notion of effective 'environmental protection' under global competition. Clearly US corporations have polluted to compete globally, as we saw in the post-WW II US economy. But it is clear that even moderately higher standards in many countries of the global south and former Communist states, could contribute to the ability of US multinationals to meet the higher capital requirements of new regulations and increase their monopoly power. We have seen how higher standards for waste disposal in the United States have contributed to the power of monopoly waste corporations.

#### **4. Fighting Invasions: Challenging the Corporate Assault on the Global South**

There is an ongoing scramble for global resources, of commodification and environmental degradation whose roots we have traced to the historical Enclosure Movement. We need to take a global perspective and link local case struggles to what is happening on the dialectically opposite face of the globe. We have

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Lash, *Environment and Global Trade*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



concentrated to some extent on India. But this is merely illustrative of a similar dynamics that can be seen at work all across the global south.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>R. Hofrichter (ed.), *Toxic Struggles: The Theory and Practice of Environmental Justice*, Philadelphia, P.A.: New Society Publishers, 1993, p. 3. Parallel movements are emerging in many Third World countries based on a proliferation of new, usually locally based, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There is a burgeoning literature on these movements. See T. Princen and M. Finger, *Environmental NGOs in World Politics: Linking the local and the Global*, New York: Routledge, 1994; P. Ekins, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change*, New York: Routledge, 1992; W. Pereira and J. Seabrook, *Asking the Earth: Farms, Forests and Survival in India*, London: 1990; N. P. Peritore, 'Environmental Attitudes of Indian Elites: Challenging Western Postmodernist Models,' *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33 (8), August 1993, pp. 804-818; B. K. Pattnaik and A. Brahmachari, 'Community-Based Forest Management Practices: Field Observations from Orissa,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (Hereafter EPW), Vol. 31 (15), 13 April 1996, pp. 968-975; S. Sinha and R. Herring, 'Common Property, Collective Action and Ecology,' *EPW*, Vol. 28, 3-10 July 1993, pp. 1425-1432; S. Rego, 'Destructive Development and People's Struggles in Bastar,' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (7), 12 February 1994, pp. 351-353; Makal, 'Villages of Chipko Movement,' *EPW*, Vol. 28 (15), 10 April 1993, pp. 617-621; A. Baviskar, 'Fate of the Forest: Conservation and Tribal Rights,' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (38), 17 September 1994, pp. 2493-2501; R. Bakshi, 'Development, Not Destruction: Alternative Politics in the Making,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (5), 3 February 1996, pp. 255-257; V. K. Bawa, 'Gandhi in the 21st Century: Search for an Alternative Development Model,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (47), 23 November 1996, pp. 3048-49; K. Kumar, 'State and the People: Styles of Suppression and Resistance,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (39), 28 September 1996, pp. 2666-67; D. Sarangi, 'People's Resistance to TISCO Project,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (13), 30 March 1996, pp. 809-810. Martinez-Alier speaks of the 'environmentalism of the poor' in such countries as Peru when villagers fight against global mining companies poisoning their water supply. He notes similar cases in Ecuador, Zambia and Chile (pp. 97-99) An ongoing struggle against Cyprus Amax Mining Corporation, a Colorado based US multinational, which owns an abandoned copper mine in Cyprus is ongoing. A long struggle has been carried out by the local people in Bergama on the Aegean coast of Turkey against plans of Eurogold to mine gold. The dynamics of such struggles fall into patterns very similar to those taking place in places like Mercer County Missouri. The people feel the same in both places when they confront the bulldozers. When they are steamrollered by company men in coats and ties and a pocket full of credit cards and airline tickets. Somehow they find the same strength, the same sense of justice to struggle on, against the outrage of invaders coming in and forcibly taking what they know rightly belongs to them. And sometimes they win.

The difficulties of effectively addressing these fundamental questions, especially in the 1990s when structural adjustment programs (SAPS), economic liberalization, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations promise almost unlimited global 'plunder' by transnational corporations, are enormous.<sup>20</sup> Under IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs, countries would seem to have little choice. E.F. Schumacher aptly characterized the problematical nature of fundamentally questioning the orthodox economic paradigm in the 1970s. 'Anything that is found to be an impediment to economic growth is a shameful thing, and if people cling to it, they are thought of as either saboteurs or fools.'<sup>21</sup> As we see, for Michael Fumento, environmentalists are saboteurs 'squandering money.'<sup>22</sup> These issues are difficult to address in the face of the prevailing strength of the global ideological hegemony of 'markets' and so-called market rationality. 'The market is the institutionalization of individualism and non-responsibility.'<sup>23</sup>

In the 1990s, however, grass roots movements emerged across many countries where people reasserted traditional collective and communitarian values over those of individualism.<sup>24</sup> This was, in part, a reaction to the cultural imperialism of capitalist development, that we see in small communities in the United States and in the global south. It is also a way of controlling local land and use-values. It suggests the optimum way to cut waste. Not just at the nominal root, but at the real root that requires real structural

---

<sup>20</sup>R. Weissman, 'Corporate Plundering of Third-World Resources,' in Hofrichter, *Toxic Struggles*, pp. 186-196. Another case is seen in Cyprus, victim of both the American mining company, Cyprus Amax Mining Corporation and the state. E. J. Girdner, 'Aphrodite's Nightmare: Cyprus Mining Company and Environmental Disaster in Northern Cyprus,' *Scandinavian Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, June-September, 1999.

<sup>21</sup>E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, London: Sphere, 1976, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup>'What they [environmentalists]...do not seem to realize is...[m]oney is a resource...and nobody more actively squanders those resources than those who do so in the name of environment.' 'Squandering money' by environmentalists today is compared to the historical destruction of American Bison herds and passenger pigeon flocks. M. Fumento, *Science Under Siege: Balancing Technology and the Environment*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993, p. 368.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>24</sup>Sinha/Herring, *Common Property, Collective Action*, pp. 1425-1432.

change in society. We see it also in the case of Native Hawaiians below. We see how stripping people of cultural traditions and use value is also linked to stripping them of land. Horton shows how this strips the people of their ability to control use value. That is why people were swept off the land in the first place in the Enclosure Movement and into the city so their labor would be available for the production of surplus value. Their land and labor was commodified. Only by controlling the land can people control use value and their resources, but capitalist neoenclosure goes on around the world, kicking people off their land. Capitalism is still in the business of kicking people off their land. Emerging grassroots movements and community organizations tend to address the real needs of the community. They can allow people to define their basic needs and develop the resources to meet their needs with minimal outside assistance.<sup>25</sup> These factors are closely linked to preserving and improving the environment in communities where people live. We will briefly survey a number of such movements in this section.

Native Americans are attempting to recover their cultural values. Tribals in the global south are trying to cling to them in the face of the corporate assault. White Americans in small communities in the Midwest are trying to preserve some semblance of their communities and way of life that has been annihilated in the mass waste-cornucopia-utopia-suburbia of McDonaldlands from coast to coast of the United States. The loss of community and cultural traditions and the shopping malling of America from coast to coast creates consumers, producers of waste, 'voters,' individuals sometimes with opinions, but not people empowered to control their future. Older established urban communities are being carved up, as David Harvey observed, in cities like New York. Like Native Americans, Hawaiians were also subjected to cultural imperialism.<sup>26</sup> The spiritual opiate of the masses is found more nearly in the shopping malling than in religion, in the fetishism of commodities as traditional communities are drained of the capital they need to survive. Living communities militate against the market and the ongoing global centralization of capital.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ekins, *A New World Order*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>26</sup>C. V. Zevern, 'Land, Ecology, and Women: Implications For Hawaiian Sovereignty,' in J. Turpin and L. A. Lorentzen, *The Gendered New World Order*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 83-94.

Claire Van Zevern points to the strong ethic to care for the land among Native Hawaiians, similar to the land ethic of Aldo Leopold.<sup>27</sup> They too were subjected to cultural imperialism as 'blatant force' was used to compel the king to sign the 'Bayonet Constitution' and hand over power to The House of Nobles dominated by American missionaries in 1875. With the annexation in 1898, Hawaiians began to be denied the traditional rights to the land. As Zevern points out, '[t]he most fundamental aspect of cultural, social, economic, political, and human survival is land, without which these rights cannot be sustained.'<sup>28</sup> As is going on around the world today, and as with Native Americans, in Hawaii, the 'communal land base system' was destroyed. This was also the loss of culture as 'cultural survival is based upon the human right to develop self-sufficient economies which require a land base.'<sup>29</sup> The loss of the land was the loss of social power. This, in a nutshell, is what is happening to living communities around the globe and it is what must continue to happen when commodification and environmental devastation is the next item on the agenda of the global corporation. And it is, today. It is ongoing enclosure and commodification of the entire globe.

It is significant that the insights into the nature of production from thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi and E.F. Schumacher, emerged in grass roots movements in the 1990s in resistance to industrialization and 'development' that destroys traditional communities. These thinkers, along with John Ruskin in England, essentially approached the problem from an anti capitalist, point of view but arrive at similar conclusions about the capacity of capitalism to destroy living communities. Put simply, 'the substance of man cannot be measured by gross national product.'<sup>30</sup>

Schumacher argued that the mainstream view of economists that the 'problem of production' had been solved was misguided,

---

<sup>27</sup>'A land ethic...reflects the existence of an ecological conscience...' A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1970, p. 238.

<sup>28</sup>Van Zevern, *Land, Ecology and Women*, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>30</sup>Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*, p. 20.

because 'the earth's capital is being used up.'<sup>31</sup> Developmentalism sends the message to the poor and marginalized peoples of the world that in due time, if they are only patient, the good life will trickle down to them also.<sup>32</sup> In the 1990s, however, the 'carrot of consumerism' seems increasingly a 'cruel deception' for hundreds of millions.<sup>33</sup> It is little wonder that people of the global south are beginning to pursue alternative paths to the 'good life' that work for them. However, the corporate drive to commodify the resources of the entire globe today militate against such efforts regardless of how fervent.

In most cases, developmentalism has come to people in the form of 'big-projectism.' The most typical situation is that the people and their way of life, and all they own, is merely an impediment to 'progress' that must be bulldozed out of the way to make way for the future. In the global south, these projects tend to be big dams, steel mills, timber industry, mining and so on. In recent years, resistance to such projects has increased dramatically.

In eastern India, for example, in 1996, 500 people demonstrated against the effort of TISCO, a large steel firm, to locate a mill which would displace some 22,000 people in 27 villages. The factory would destroy forever the traditional crops such as rice, cashew, jackfruit and kewda plant. In this case, the area targeted produces some 90 percent of the kewda plant in India, which is used as an aromatic flavor and provides a livelihood to the local inhabitants. Kewda cultivation is a significant example of a livelihood in harmony with nature and the local economy. As the plant needs little investment, peasants need not borrow money; it grows on marginal land on the edge of fields, and the bushes need no watering. In addition to the valuable aromatic flavor extracted, the fibers provide a livelihood to families who make ropes, bags and other products from the plant. Local peasants organized a local group, the **Gana Sangram Samati**, to prevent government and TISCO vehicles from entering the area. Educational seminars were conducted to inform the people about the devastating impact of the proposed project.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>33</sup>Ekins, *A New World Order*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>34</sup>Sarangi, *People's Resistance to TISCO Project*, pp. 809-810.

In another case, the Indian Army planned to take over tribal land in eastern India for artillery practice. In such cases, much of the land eventually ends up in the hands of non-tribals, which demonstrates a form of land alienation through state-sponsored projects.<sup>35</sup> In fact this type of appropriation has a long history whereby the forest and mineral wealth is taken from tribal peoples, as seen also in many other parts of the world, including the US. This alienation of tribals from their ancestral land has intensified under globalization and liberalization.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic example is the well-known project to construct a series of huge dams in the Narmada Valley in Western India, on which much has been written.<sup>37</sup> The project includes two large dams, the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP), as well as 28 other large dams. The project will displace at least 200,000 individuals. The SSP and the NSP will submerge over 100,000 hectares of land, including 50,000 hectares of forest. The Department of Environment and Forests of the Indian Government estimated in 1987 that the environmental losses due to constructing the dams would be three times the cost of the SSP.<sup>38</sup> It is generally acknowledged that the state governments involved do not have the resources to resettle the displaced population, even if the consequences of disrupting functioning communities is disregarded. The social costs of breaking up communities and attempting to resettle families on scattered plots cannot be taken into account.<sup>39</sup> Scholars and observers point out that there is no comprehensive rehabilitation scheme for thousands that will lose their livelihood as artisans and fisherfolk and be forced into a life of toil as agricultural and manual laborers.<sup>40</sup> It is also argued by critics that the primary

---

<sup>35</sup>'Natarhat Project: Biggest Ever Tribal Displacement,' *EPW*, 29 (18), 30 April 1994, pp. 1055-56.

<sup>36</sup>S. Rego, 'Destructive Development and People's Struggles in Bastar,' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (7), 12 February 1994, pp. 352-353.

<sup>37</sup>Ekins, *A New World Order*, pp. 88-94.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup>'Sardar Sarovar Project: Review of Resettlement and Rehabilitation in Maharashtra,' *EPW*, Vol. 28 (34), 21 August 1993, pp. 1705-14.

<sup>40</sup>P. D'Souza, et. al., 'Bargi Dam: Oustees Pay Price of Development,' *EPW*, 9-16 November, pp. 2984-85.

beneficiaries of the project will be in the relatively prosperous and industrialized areas of Gujarat state.<sup>41</sup>

A massive people's struggle against the dam project was led by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), led by Medha Patkar, who has fasted and led the struggle to stop the project.<sup>42</sup> In 1996, the Indian Supreme Court ordered that construction on the dam be suspended. Gujarat state officials reportedly declared that the Supreme Court Order 'held little relevance to them.'<sup>43</sup> States have excluded people from the decision-making process and local chambers of commerce portray the people as being in favor of the project.<sup>44</sup> As costs mount, the benefit of such massive developmentalist schemes, which destroy forests, ecosystems, villages, communities, and livelihoods for hundreds of thousands is being questioned.<sup>45</sup> Resistance groups argue that development must be 'people oriented.' This is 'substantive rationality' as distinguished from the 'instrumentalist rationality' pursued by the state.<sup>46</sup>

People are questioning big projects and resulting displacement, which it has been argued is an objective of the project for the purpose of creating a huge pool of cheap labor needed for development activities such as industry and

---

<sup>41</sup>J. Patel, 'Is National Interest Being Served by Narmada Project?' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (30), 23 July 1994, pp. 1957-64. In India, for example, some 20 million people have been uprooted from their ancestral villages and communities since 1947 by new dams. The Narmada Dam project in Western India is expected to uproot at least 200,000 people. The enormous Three Gorges dam project on the Yangtze River in China is expected to uproot more than one million people. It has been suggested that such displacement is one of the objectives of such projects to create a pool of cheap labor needed for other development activities such as industry and agriculture. See Dunu Roy, 'Large Projects: For Whose Benefit,' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (50), 10 December 1994, pp. 3129.

<sup>42</sup>Kumar, *State and People*, pp. 2666-67.

<sup>43</sup>S. Sangvai, 'Re-opening Sardar Sarovar Issue,' *EPW*, Vol. 30 (11), 18 March 1995, pp. 542-44.

<sup>44</sup>S. Sangvai, 'CM's Meeting on Narmada: What Did Not Happen,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (34), 24-31 August 1996, pp. 2287-88.

<sup>45</sup>V. R. K. Iyer, 'Nature Friendly Planning of Humanity's Future: Dialectics and Dynamics of Development Management,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (34), 24-31 August 1996, pp. 2297-2300.

<sup>46</sup>Kumar, *State and People*, p. 2667.

agriculture.<sup>47</sup> The record shows that in 40 years, at least 18.5 million people have been displaced, 77 percent of whom are tribals. Only 29 percent have been rehabilitated, by government estimates.<sup>48</sup> A new NGO, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), has brought together many grassroots movements as representative of non-party activism emerging in the Third World. These groups demand 'equality, simplicity, and self-reliance for proper development.'<sup>49</sup> Here we again see the 'sweeping of the people off the land' as part of an ongoing historical process.

NAPM sets out a number of principles for 'people's development'. First, the aim of development must be permanent peace, fulfillment and happiness, not prosperity in terms of material acquisition. Secondly, people must have control over the natural resources in their vicinity. Land should be owned by the tiller, the commons restored to the people, and planning must involve the people in decision making. Third, natural resources should be used for the fulfillment of the needs of all, not a portion of society. Fourth, there should be self reliance of both urban and rural communities, with a limited dependence on expanded markets. Fifth, production should be decentralized, largely based on renewable energy. Sixth, austerity and simplicity should be organizing principles, as opposed to exploitative consumerism. Seventh, alternatives to resources like metals and petrol must be found. Eighth, there should be sustainable use and conservation of soil, waters, and forests. Ninth, living relationships should be established between producer and consumer. Tenth, production should be organized around labor-intensive techniques with the right to work guaranteed as a fundamental right. Eleventh, justice and equity should be pursued through positive and protective discrimination toward egalitarian goals. Finally, nonviolence and dialogue should be used as means to change in individuals and societies. The 'destructive, self-defeating nature of the high consumption model' would become self-evident.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>D. Roy, 'Large Projects: For Whose Benefit?' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (50), 10 December 1994, p. 3129.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>R. Bakshi, 'Development, Not Destruction: Alternative Politics in the Making,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (5), 3 February 1996, p. 255.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 256-57.



Paul Ekins explored many grassroots projects that are based on decentralized people's initiatives in a number of countries.<sup>51</sup> Among these are CEFEMINA (Feminist Centre for Information and Action) in Costa Rica. Through this organization, women help plan their communities, build their own houses and carry out environmental actions.<sup>52</sup> Survival International is an international NGO to support indigenous peoples. The organization helped prevent NATO from building a second air base on Innu land in Canada and stopped the construction of a pulp mill on tribal land in Indonesia by Scott paper, among other successful campaigns.<sup>53</sup> Another example of people's initiatives is the **Sarvodaya Shramadana** Movement in Sri Lanka. This movement is active in village reconstruction in some 8,000 villages, as a way of keeping local capital at home, not in the coffers of transnational corporations. The organization operates in about one third of all villages in the country.<sup>54</sup>

Under transnational capitalism, communities are being depleted of the local capital to develop communities and utilize the use value they create with their living labor. This is very clearly linked to the process one sees in the capital depleted areas all across the northern tier of counties of North Missouri. Mercer County, for example, was populated with a larger population and viable functioning small communities and towns more than a hundred years ago. All these communities fell into decay, primarily with the expansion and centralization of capital in the post WW II expansion of the US economy. The small towns died as the TV-automobile culture emerged and more sophisticated marketing increasingly depleted small communities of local capital.

### 5. Forests For the People

Conservation and management of the forests is also an important part of environmental struggle in the global south. In

---

<sup>51</sup>Ekins, *A New World Order*.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-80.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-84.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-111.

Thailand, Buddhist monks have 'sanctified' trees with saffron cloths to protect the rain forests.<sup>55</sup> Grassroots movements to protect forests are widespread and functioning in many villages in various parts of India and other countries. The well-known Chipko Movement began in India in the 1970s, in which women hugged the trees to prevent the government's cutting of forests.<sup>56</sup> Women in many villages took over the management of forests themselves, organizing forest protection committees and stationed individuals to keep a watch over the forests to prevent damage. They also planted trees and began to manage the harvest of products from the forest. The results of this movement have been very significant. Village women have become local leaders and organized new economic activities based on forest products. Surplus fodder can be produced and sold outside the village for extra income.<sup>57</sup>

In a number of states of India, village forest protection committees, run by women, have been organized. Through these, the forests are regenerated and the increased produce provides extra income. These are natural poverty prevention programs.<sup>58</sup> Women have been the backbone of these movements.

Another issue is the right of tribal or indigenous peoples to forests, similar to the US. In December 1988, Chico Mendes, the rubber tappers' leader in the Amazon was assassinated by ranching interests while fighting for the rights of Indians to the forest.<sup>59</sup> The recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to land and forests is an issue in many countries today, including the US. In India, forests are the basis of the tribal economy. Surveys have shown that India is rapidly losing its forests which now cover only about 10

---

<sup>55</sup>Biny Pattnaik and Anirudh Brahmachari, 'Community-Based Forest Management Practices,' *EPW*, Vol. 31(15), 13 April 1996, pp. 968-75. In the Third World, efforts often struggle to save and replenish the forests, efforts to save ones own livelihood against encroachments of new industries such as steel plants, and against megaprojects such as dams that destroy hundreds of entire villages. While marginalized, the poor often enjoy a community until uprooting. Afterwards, this is also often destroyed.

<sup>56</sup>Makal, *Villages of Chipko*, pp. 617-621; Ekins, *A New World Order*, pp. 143-44.

<sup>57</sup>Makal, *Villages of Chipko*.

<sup>58</sup>Pattnaik/Brahmachari, *Community-Based Forest Management Practices*, pp. 970-72.

<sup>59</sup>Ekins, *A New World Order*, pp. 81-86.

percent of the land area. NGOs in India, such as the *Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* (Organization for the Consciousness of Peasants and Workers) are fighting for tribal rights to forests and there has been some movement toward recognition of the rights of tribals through the granting of land titles.<sup>60</sup> But there are conflicts today between government forestry officials and tribals over the use of the forests, with NGOs accusing the government of following the colonial policy of short-term profits and failure to respect the right of local communities to use the forests for subsistence. Activists argue that tribals should be allowed access to the forests so they will have a stake in their care and preservation. When people earn from conservation they will invest in it.<sup>61</sup>

It has also been pointed out how the 'tragedy of the commons' paradigm has been used to argue that common property institutions cannot work. As such, this perspective has become an 'ideological construct' which supports the trend toward 'states and markets reducing political space.' It has been used by states to legitimize seizing control of the commons on the grounds of conservation, or the greater needs of the larger society. But the model does not, in fact, demonstrate 'a real tendency toward human maximizing behavior.'<sup>62</sup> The model is used to demonstrate that people cannot act collectively. There are, however, many examples of how common property institutions are functioning on a collective basis. There is a tradition in India, for example, of informal village level committees that were eroded by colonial rule. The patterns of use of the commons varies widely and restraint over the use of land is related to rituals, myths, preferences, values, cultural norms and popular conceptions of what is moral and just. Among common property institutions were wells, bathing tanks, temples, pasture lands, and so on.<sup>63</sup>

This can clearly be related to communal cultural traditions such as those in Hawaii and among Native Americans. We have seen how the small rural communities of the US Midwest had their own communal cultural traditions, with local farmers working

---

<sup>60</sup>A. Baviskar, 'Fate of the Forest: Conservation and Tribal Rights,' *EPW*, Vol. 29 (38), September 1994, pp. 2473-2501.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2500.

<sup>62</sup>Sinha/Herring, *Common Property, Collective Action and Ecology*.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

together to produce local values and enhance the natural capital base of the local community. As farming moves to corporate farming, small communities stand to be even more depleted of the control of their own capital. We have seen how corporate pig farming has replaced family farming as a significant source of employment in the some areas.

Many institutions in India show that common community institutions can function well if the costs to individuals of not preserving the commons outweigh the costs of maintaining it. For example, biogas plants have been established in many villages and such institutions also become a source of community political cohesion.<sup>64</sup> Local communities in America have increasingly been broken down, decimated by the logic of capitalist individualism.

#### **6. The Gene Snatchers: Transnational Corporations and the Loss of Biodiversity**

Another area of NGO activity in the Third World is directed toward the rights of farmers to genetic resources and biodiversity which is under threat from Western multinational corporations. Under TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) of the WTO (World Trade Organization), indigenous plant genetic resources (PGR), seed germ plasm, is treated as the common heritage of mankind. But once bred into new varieties of seeds, the same PGRs are owned by Western multinational corporations, patented, and become a commodity which farmers must purchase. It has been reported that germ plasm import to the US has netted the US economy some 70 billion dollars from agriculture alone. Farmers risk losing the right to produce their own seed. Farmers lose control over their seeds as virtually every useful gene is privatized and even the characteristics of the plants are patented and owned by a dozen or so multinational biotechnology corporations. NGOs are working to preserve the rights of tribals, pastoralists, herbalists, and fisherfolk to the biodiversity they have preserved over centuries.<sup>65</sup> Local NGOs call for the recognition of

---

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>S. Sahai, 'How Do We Protect Our Genetic Resources,' *EPW*, 6 July 1996, p. 1725; V. Shiva, 'Agricultural Biodiversity, Intellectual Property Rights and Farmer's Rights,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (25), 22 June 1996, p. 1623.

community rights over individual rights for groups such as tribals. Such rights have been recognized by the highest court in Australia.<sup>66</sup>

Biotechnologies sometimes encourage the increased use of toxics in food production. Some new varieties of seeds being marketed in the global south by Western seed companies are bred to be more herbicide tolerant. With Attrazine resistant soybeans, three times as much of the chemical can be applied without damaging the crop.<sup>67</sup> This tendency toward monocultures to serve the needs of global markets is a threat to sustainable agriculture and the local ecology. Local solutions can be found that benefit the country and local communities, rather than render agriculture dependent upon foreign multinational corporations.<sup>68</sup>

#### 7. Use-Value for the People: Waste Not

The above examples of communities seeking alternative patterns of development at a time when transnational corporations are making major inroads into penetrating markets of the global south, illustrates some of the challenges ahead for environmentally sound alternative development. The struggle for actually sustainable development with local solutions is under threat by global capitalism. The following six principles could serve as guidelines for local development. First there should be social reforms, women's education and people's empowerment. Secondly, there should be a balance between industrial and agricultural activities, between urban and rural development. Third, communal ownership should be organized for the management of natural and productive resources. Fourth, technologies should be adopted which are employment-friendly and eco-friendly. Fifth, the exploitation of natural and productive resources for rampant consumerism must be avoided. Finally, is the need for the adoption of an energy strategy that is decentralized, ecologically viable and

---

<sup>66</sup>Shiva, *Agricultural Biodiversity*, p. 1629.

<sup>67</sup>K. R. Srinivas, 'Sustainable Agriculture, Biotechnology and Emerging Global Trade Regime,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (29), 20 July 1996, pp. 1922-23.

<sup>68</sup>G. Alam, 'Biotechnology, Agriculture and Developing Countries,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (12), 23 March 1996, pp. 703-704; M. G. G. Pillai, 'Multinationals and the Environment,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (6), 10 February 1996, p. 325.

non-exploitative.<sup>69</sup> In linking grassroots NGOs to international environmental organizations, states can be 'educated' as to the real needs and demands of the people, helping to create real people's democracy.<sup>70</sup> At its root, environmental justice challenges the systemic structure of developed capitalist society and the global system of discrimination.

Neoliberalism and its global spread is a real challenge today. The campaign to stop dioxin in North American is on the right track, but this must be extended to the global level when many industries in developing countries are following in the footsteps of the West with the same toxic production technology that has created vast environmental degradation.

#### 8. The Waste Cornucopia: The world of Wealth and Waste

Capitalism which produces wealth for the few ensures the poverty of the many. In the end it is the people who are wasted in increasing global inequality. It is wasting the world on a global scale.

All this leads us back to class and 'ensuring the poverty of the people.' The ongoing result enclosure, commodification, and destruction of human living and truly sustainable communities is increasing poverty and inequality around the world. It is the destruction of communities that leads to urban and suburban waste nightmares. Unless environmentalists can be led back to the question of class, they cannot be led back to the question of poverty and the question of global inequality. This the crucial question for the twenty-first century.

---

<sup>69</sup>V. K. Bawa, 'Gandhi in the 21st Century: Search for an Alternative Development Model,' *EPW*, Vol. 31 (47), 23 November 1996, pp. 3048-49.

<sup>70</sup>Princen/Finger, *Environmental NGOs in World Politics*, p. 225.