

DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT : STATES

OR PROCESSES?

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One of the most striking features of today's world is the disparity between poverty and wealth; between starvation and abundance; between want and luxury. In this paper a global perspective is taken, in an attempt to explain how this inequality originated, and from this attempt at explanation the central argument unfolds; it being that the analysis of underdevelopment is inseparable from that of development; that they are in fact parts of the same process; parts of a continuing action. In doing this the paper refutes the idea that underdevelopment is static and that malnutrition and starvation are the natural lot of the Third World countries. Instead, it argues that underdevelopment is not the original condition of any society but rather represents a distortion of the development process, as a result of outside intervention in both the past and the present. Implicit in this approach is the task of relating the factors which cause economic stagnation in one country to the world economic system demonstrating the link between the state of underdevelopment of certain areas of the world and the development of others. The paper concludes that there is an inevitable connection between development and underdevelopment; that it is development in one area which leads to underdevelopment in another. Later passages concentrate on contemporary issues and how they continue the process of underdevelopment. What is attempted throughout is to show that neither development nor underdevelopment are inevitable states but the result of various planned processes.

There is a myth in Western civilisation that underdeveloped countries have always been so: that the land was naturally devastated: that the people were always starving and that industry never developed. Destroying this myth is essential if we are to see underdevelopment as a process. It is too easy to ascribe underdevelopment to natural and therefore irreversible causes, instead of realising that conventional descriptions of underdevelopment, such as that of 'Traditional societies' or 'The situation in which there are persistent low levels of living' (Todaro 1977), are conveying false images of static equilibrium. Underdevelopment did not occur in a day, it evolved over a period of time. Hence an examination of world history is necessary to gain a full understanding of this process.

Looking at world history it becomes apparent that today's underdeveloped countries were once highly advanced. Various forms of civilisation existed before 1500 in the now underdeveloped areas of the world. The vast ceremonial stone buildings of Mexico and Peru affirm this view. Indeed, forms of social security are now known to have existed that resemble the modern welfare state. The following quotation, regarding Benin in southern Nigeria, illustrates similar developments.

"The town seems to be very great.
When you enter into it, you go into a
great broad street, not paved, which
seems to be seven or eight times

broader than the Warmoes street in Amsterdam.... The Kings palace is a collection of buildings which occupy as much space as the town of Harlem.. There are numerous appartments for the prince's ministers and fine galleries most of which are as big as those on the exchanges of Amsterdam... These people are in no way inferior to the Dutch" (In Rodney 1972).

Evidence of a division of labour, of specialisation in the production of certain goods and of progress in new techniques of production can also be found during this period. Today, all these elements are absent, and the countries involved provide a stark contrast to their former selves.

Agriculture was relatively highly developed in many parts of the world before the period of European expansion. Elaborate irrigation systems and hydraulic works were in use in India, China, Sri Lanka and Kampuchea. It was said of Indian agriculture that:

'Nowhere would one find better instances of keeping land scrupulously clear from weeds, of ingenuity in device of water-raising appliances, of knowledge of soils and their capabilities, as well as of the exact time to sow and reap, as one would find in Indian agriculture. It is wonderful, too, how much is known of rotation, I, at least, have never seen a more perfect picture of cultivation' (In Hayter 1981).

Sophisticated methods of farming were employed in Africa also, for example, terracing, crop rotation, green manuring, mixed farming and regulated swamp farms. Agriculture was much more highly developed than it is at present and the capacity of the people to feed themselves was also greater.

What therefore happened, why are areas, once self-sufficient in food, no longer so? How did the agricultural devastation that plagues Africa and other underdeveloped countries come about? Above all why is it that all this deterioration can be pinpointed to the exact time when Europe began to make prodigious advances? When one examines history one cannot fail to conclude that there is a link between the two phenomena. To establish the nature of that link is the major concern of this paper.

The contention presented here is that it was only when the colonialists intervened that the agricultural devastation, so familiar today, began. This statement applies particularly to the plantation system introduced by the Europeans in order that these countries might grow the products required in Europe. Cash crops, produced for a colonial market were introduced in many places. These included cocoa, coffee, sugar, tea, groundnuts, and cotton. Europeans thus set the wheel in motion and the process of European development began with the accumulation of vast sums of money from profit in Europe while at the same time the process of underdevelopment began in the dominated 'plantation' countries. Sugar provides

a typical example.

'The land was devastated by the selfish plant which invaded the New World, felling forests squandering natural fertility and destroying accumulated soil humus. The long sugar cycle generated a prosperity as mortal as the prosperity generated by the silver and gold of Potosi, Ouro, Preto, Zacatecas Guanajuato. At the same time directly and indirectly it spurred the growth of Dutch, French, English and United States industry (Galeano E. 1973).

The fact that the absorption of land by plantations and and latifundios progressed so fast meant that local people were left increasingly less land to provide for their own needs. Similarly, the concentration on crops for export rather than food crops led to the increasing vulnerability and eventually starvation.

'The development of food crops received little or no attention from the colonial administrators in spite of the periodic famines (Udo K. 1981).

Thus while Europe and the United States developed, the rest of the world underdeveloped. This process continued well into the nineteenth century. Foreign intervention, far from helping countries to develop produced underdevelopment.

Despite a general belief that industry never developed in the Third World, industry had in fact been quite sophisticated. The world renowned Ife and Benin bronzes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are the produce of Africa and were the product of a highly developed technique of working in bronze. Northern Nigeria was responsible for the tanning and dyeing of a superior brand of red leather known throughout Europe as 'Moroccan leather'. Cotton along with other fine cloths were also widely manufactured. It is now recognised that Africa was responsible for some of the scientific discoveries on which European progress was based. India has evidence of comparable developments. Their skill in the manufacture of textiles created cloth superior to that produced elsewhere. The iron and steel industry also points to their level of advancement. Trade in metals and luxury goods between the Incas and the Aztecs was taking place before the arrival of the Spaniards. Evidence of sophisticated forms of exchange based on gold mined in Africa and of well developed trade networks, for example across the Sahara between North and West Africa, also exist. Today, this seems incredible; it is obvious that underdevelopment has occurred and again the finger points to colonialism.

The principal aim of colonial policy was to integrate colonial territories into an international system of production and trade in the interests of the colonial power and its dominant classes. Colonies were to remain as suppliers of important raw materials while at the same time, acting as markets for the manufactured goods from the industries of Europe and the United States. Colonies were forced into such exploitative trading relationships, for example, in seventeenth century Britain, protective navigation laws were enacted. As a result of which colonies were prohibited by law, from turning to any industry which might compete with the industry

of the mother country. Instead of manufacturing products for themselves it was expected that they send the raw materials to Britain for the manufacture of these products and then buy them back from her. Legislation such as the Calico Act and the Woollen Act meant that many existing local and international trades were disrupted, and there followed a considerable decline in intra-African, intra-Asian and intra-Latin American trade. Legislation was also enforced to ensure a monopoly of shipping to colonial trading companies. This all had the effect of destroying any industrial activity which did exist in the colonies. The process which created development in Western Europe therefore set underdevelopment in motion in the colonies.

Legislation was not the only force at work in suppressing industrial development in the colonies: the physical destruction of previously existing manufacturing began also at this time. It is a well known fact of British colonial history that the British actually indulged in destroying the industrial economy of India itself. Between 1815 and 1832 the value of Indian cotton exports fell from £1.3 million to below £100,000. Meanwhile the value of English cotton goods imported into India rose from £156,000 in 1794 to £400,000 in 1832. (Hayter T. 1981). By the middle of the nineteenth century India was importing one quarter of all British cotton exports. The British eliminated competition from Indian textiles through an elaborate network of restrictions and prohibitive duties. Even within India, taxes effectively discriminated against local cloth. Similar measures destroyed the iron and steel industry in India. Duties imposed on Indian exports into Britain were five to twenty times higher than those duties allowed on British imports into India. The case in Egypt and other parts of Africa proves similar. There are also cases where exclusive trading and manufacturing rights were bestowed on chartered companies to the detriment of local manufacturers.

'Nearly all our (India's) major problems today have grown up during British rule and as a direct result of British policy. A significant fact which stands out is that those parts of India which have been longest under British-rule are the poorest today. Indeed some kind of chart might be drawn up to indicate the close connection between the length of British rule and progressive growth of poverty'
(Nehru. J. 1970).

These remarks can easily be applied to all countries with colonies in their possession.

The process of underdevelopment should not, however, be regarded as part of the past; it is ongoing today. Underdevelopment is the outcome of the way in which society is organised, the priorities it holds and the ways in which institutions operate. To illustrate this point I will draw briefly on two major issues, namely militarism and technology, both implicitly related to the process of underdevelopment.

One of the most controversial issues today is the arms race. World military spending is increasing yearly. In 1982 the figure was \$650 billion, \$110 for every man, woman and child on earth. The amount spent was more than the entire income of half the world's population and nearly twenty times the amount of official development aid given by the rich countries to the poorer countries. It is obvious that the vast amounts now being spent on armaments is leading to further underdevelopment.

'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, signifies a theft from those who are hungry and are not fed, from those who are cold and not clothed' (Eisenhower D. 1984).

Statistics show that more and more Third World countries are developing their own arms industries. At the beginning of the 1970's only a limited number of underdeveloped countries had significant arms production. As the years progressed however, many countries, notably Argentina, South Africa, Brazil, Israel and Libya initiated programmes to establish modern arms industries and have become formidable arms exporters:

'In Pakistan, a famine prone country, expenditure per soldier in 1981 was \$2,308 as against \$5 per person on education and \$1 on health. The armed forces numbered 429,000 against 40,000 physicians and 265,000 teachers for a population of eighty one million. The literacy rate was twenty three per cent and infant mortality rate 142,000' (In Regan 1984).

Likewise in Brazil, between 1968 and 1974 an economic boom resulted in an annual GNP increase of ten per cent per annum, however this growth was largely concentrated in the high technology industries, many of them militarily related. At the same time agricultural areas, particularly the northeast became impoverished as the wealth they created was used to finance industrial infrastructure in the city. Production of crops for export increased causing a reduction in the amount of foods produced for local consumption.

'The future does not look bright for Brazil. Military spending is increasing as are poverty, child mortality, malnutrition and systematic torture. Living standards are likely to drop still further while more arms are purchased and manufactured to maintain the whole shaky edifice' (New Internationalist no.47 Jan '77).

Militarism and underdevelopment must therefore also be seen, not as separate problems, but as two sides of the same coin, and, while nothing is done to halt investment in arms, underdevelopment will continue.

Technology, instead of improving the lot of underdeveloped countries, plays a part in the underdevelopment process. It is

'creating employment problems and skewed income distribution and failing to make use of poor countries' natural and human resources' (Stewart 1978).

The reason behind this is that, while almost all the technology of recent decades has originated in the developed world and increasingly markets for this technology are sought in underdeveloped countries, conditions which led to the development of such technology in industrial Europe and North America are to a considerable extent different from those currently existing in many parts of the underdeveloped world. This technology is often unsuited to the needs of the worlds poorest and scarce resources which are needed to tackle the problems of poverty and hunger are consumed in either high technology projects or in the importation of high technology which is of dubious merit in terms of development potential.

'Far from helping such workers (60 cents a day cane harvesters) Brazil's modernisation actually victimises thousands. When a salt company bought new equipment, efficiency soared - but 7,000 people lost their jobs' (In Regan 1984).

The use of technology developed in the underdeveloped countries themselves has either been ignored or actively discouraged while the use of western advanced technology is promoted. Harrison (1979) cites many similar cases. Unless more appropriate technology is adopted underdevelopment will continue.

'It is machinery that has impoverished India' (Harrison P. 1979).

The rich are growing richer: development, and the poor are growing poorer: underdevelopment. Clearly both are essential parts of the same process. What may be considered a more subtle form of colonialism is now at work. It is the ultimate scandal of the world food trade that the northern industrial countries i.e. North America, the whole of Eurasia from Britain to Japan, and Australia actually take more from the Third World than they give back. Underdeveloped countries devote vast areas of their best land to the production of cash crops, in particular cocoa and coffee, consumed in large quantities by the people of developed countries: in consequence their own inhabitants continue to starve.

'the production of food for local consumption was drastically reduced and is still decreasing in many parts of the world' (Hayter T. 1981).

In Central America fifty per cent of the land is employed in the production of export crops like tomatoes or cut flowers for Northern America. Meantime estimates show that seventy per cent of the children here are undernourished (George S. 1976). Equally deplorable is the fact that foreign businesses commonly raise around eighty per cent of their capital in underdeveloped countries, while at the same time remitting their profits abroad. Multi-national Corporations are therefore hindering the emergence of self-reliant

development and thus ensuring that underdevelopment continues to occur.

Never have the peoples of the developed countries experienced such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power as they do today. Yet massive proportions of the world's citizens are tormented by hunger and poverty. Excessive inequalities exist: the developed nations are marching onward with the world at their feet. Seeing, watching and witnessing this who can deny that underdevelopment is not a state but a process, the same process that creates development?

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