

What is anti-industrialism and what does it want?

By Miguel Amorós

The anti-industrial current emerged, on the one hand, from the critical assessment of the period that came to an end with the failure of the old, independent workers' movement and the global reconstruction of capitalism – thus it was born in the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, it arose in the nascent attempt to return to the country of the times and in the working-class explosions against the permanent presence of polluting factories in the urban centers and against the construction of nuclear power plants, housing blocs, motorways and roadblocks. At the time, anti-industrialism was a theoretical analysis of the new social conditions that took into account the contribution of ecology and the struggle against the consequences of capitalist development, though the two factors had never worked together before. We can define anti-industrialism as a critical thought and an antagonistic practice born from the conflicts provoked by the development of the ultimate phase of the capitalist regime, to which corresponds the fusion of the economy and politics, capital and the State, industry and life. Due to its novelty and the extension of submission and resignation among the down-and-out classes, reflection and conflict do not always go hand in hand; the first postulates objectives that the other one doesn't always want to take on: anti-industrial thought fights for a global strategy of confrontation, while the struggle alone is reduced to tactics, which only benefits domination and its partisans. Mobilized forces are almost never aware of their historic task, while critical lucidity never manages to clarify mobilizations.

The global market continually transforms society in conformity with its own necessities and desires. The formal domination of the economy in the old class society was transformed into real and total domination in the technologically modern, mass society. The newly massified workers are, above all, consumers. The principal economic activity isn't industrial but administrative and logistic (the service sector). The principal productive force isn't labor but technology. On the other hand, salaried workers are the principal force of consumption. Technology, bureaucracy and consumption are the three pillars of current development. The world of the commodity can no longer be the object of a self-managing project. It is impossible to humanize it; one must dismantle it, instead.

The entirety of relations among human beings and with nature has lost its direct character, and finds itself mediatized by things or, at best, by images that are associated with things. A separate[d] structure, the State, supervises and rules this

reified mediation. Thus, social space and the life that houses it are modeled in agreement with the laws of so-called things: commodities and technology; the laws of traffic circulation and security – provoking an ensemble of social divisions between urban and rural, leaders and the led, rich and poor, integrated and excluded, rapid and slow, connected and disconnected, etc. The land previously worked by farmers is now converted into a new source of resources (a new source of capital, a décor and a support for macro infrastructures, a strategic element of traffic-circulation). This spatial fragmentation and this social disaggregation today appear under the form of a crisis that has different but inter-related aspects: demographic, political, economic, cultural, ecological, territorial, social. . . . Capitalism has surpassed its structural limits or, phrased another way, it has reached the ceiling.

The multiform crisis of the new capitalism is the result of two kinds of contradictions: internal ones that cause severe social inequalities, and external ones that are responsible for pollution, climate change, the exhaustion of resources and the destruction of the land. The former do not exceed the framework of capitalism because they remain hidden behind the problems of labor disputes, credit squeezes and government deficits. Unionized and political struggles never plan to get out of the framework of the established order, and they are still less opposed to its logic. Thus, the principal contradictions are either produced by the clash between the depletion of planetary resources and the infinite demand for development, or by the confrontation between the limits imposed by the devastation and the unlimited destruction that continued growth implies. These contradictions reveal the terroristic nature of the State market economy when it is faced with the environment and lives of people. Self-defense against the terrorism of the commodity and the State manifests itself in the form of urban struggles that reject the industrialization of life or, as in anti-industrialism, in the defense of territory that is faced with the industrialization of space. If the representatives of domination cannot integrate its struggles into a “green” opposition that respects the rules of the game, they present them as a minor problem of public safety in order to be able to repress and annihilate them.

At a moment when the social question tends to be presented as a territorial question, only the anti-industrial perspective is capable of envisioning it correctly. In fact, the critique of development is social critique as it exists today: none other is truly anti-capitalist because none other questions growth or progress, the old dogmas that the bourgeoisie transmitted to the proletariat. On the other hand, the defensive struggles for the preservation of land, by sabotaging development, shakes the dominant class’s order: to the extent that these struggles succeed in reforming an anti-capitalist collective subject, they become the modern-day class struggle.

Anti-capitalist social consciousness is detached from the unity of critique and struggle, that is to say, theory and practice; critique separate[d] from struggle becomes an ideology (a false consciousness), and struggle separate[d] from critique becomes nihilism or reformism (a false opposition [to capitalism]). Ideology often defends an impossible return to the past, which furnishes an excellent alibi for inactivity (or virtual activity, which is the same thing), even if its most common form is found in the economic sphere of coops or the political sphere of citizenism (the European version of populism). The true function of ideological praxis is the management of disaster. As much as reformism, ideology, no matter what kind, separates the economy from politics to propose solutions from within the dominant system. And since the changes derive from the application of economic, juridical and political formulae, the two [reformism and ideology] deny action, for which they substitute pale theatrical and symbolic copies. They flee real confrontation, given that they want, at any price, to render their practices compatible with domination or to at least profit from its shortcomings and failures, and thus subsist or coexist. They want to manage abandoned places and to administrate the catastrophe, not suppress it.

Anti-industrialism's unity between critique and struggle gives it an advantage that ideology does not possess: it knows everything that it wants and the instruments necessary to attain its goal[s]. In a realistic and credible manner, it can present the principal traits of an alternative model of society, one that will become tangible when the tactical level of coordination, association and assembly is surpassed, and when the strategic level of fighting communities is reached. That is to say, when the social fracture expresses itself in the sense of "us" faced with "them." Those below against those on high.

The crises caused by the headlong rush of capitalism did nothing other than affirm *a contrario* the pertinence of the anti-industrial message. The products of human activity – the commodity, science, technology, the State, the conurbation – have become worse by freeing themselves from society and looming over it. Humanity is reduced to slavery by its own unchecked creations. The destruction of the land, in particular due to cancerous urbanization, is today revealed as the destruction of society itself and the individuals who compose it. Like the god Janus, development has two faces: today the visible consequences of the energy crisis and climate change, illustrated by the extreme dependence and ignorance of the urban populations, show us its second and hidden face. The stagnation of gas and oil production announce a future in which the price of energy will be higher and higher, which will [in turn] increase the price of transportation, cause food-related crises (accentuated by global warming) and collapses of production. In the mid-term, the cities will become totally unlivable and their inhabitants will find themselves in the situation of having to remake the world in a different fashion or

disappear.

Anti-industrialism wants the inevitable decomposition of capitalist society to open upon a period of ruralization and decentralization in which the industries and infrastructures are dismantled; in other words, upon a transitional stage towards an egalitarian society, balanced and free, and not a social chaos of dictatorships and wars. Armed with these august ends, anti-industrialism disposes of sufficient theoretical and practical weapons to benefit from the new collectives and rebel communities, the seeds of a different civilization, free from patriarchy, industry, capital and the State.

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