

The Land

The need for roots

The Unknown

1981

Note: The following article by The Unknown from Seattle was originally written as a contribution to the *North American Anarchist* newspaper as part of a debate on “the land.” The NAA agreed to print a section of it which has not been done to date; we gladly print it in its entirety. Communications to the Unknown may be sent to Box 81091, Seattle WA 98108.

The crucial question of “the land” has been treated recently in a most superficial and disturbing manner. A sort of historical materialism has been employed to “forever close” the option of ecological harmony represented by the neolithic village, the so-called primitive communism suppressed by civilization (i.e., by property, patriarchy and the state), in favor of “mechanization.” This is certainly an easy choice, as it is one that has already been made by capitalism. What is at issue is precisely the capitalization of the land.

Modern “advanced” societies have resolved the “peasant question” by eliminating the peasantry. There’s no need to argue about “turning the clock back” in that sense, but why should we condone the destruction of remaining peasant societies by the same process? Can we not see what such “progress” means in Africa and Asia? The globalization of capital is the source of overpopulation and depletion of resources rather than the remedy.

Do we lack the ability to conceive of human life except in the language of Capital, where our primal link with nature becomes merely “the industry that produces the food we eat.” While curiously ignoring the tragedy of the many attempts of 19th century Utopians and Romantics to “return to the land,” writers seriously debate the farce of the trivial hippie ventures of the 1970s. That debate is meaningless, a diversion from the necessity of facing the fact of an increasingly dehumanizing and denatured environment.

“Land and Liberty”—“Land to the Tiller”

Why did revolutionaries cry “The Land!” for thousands of years’, and not just the named ones, but the unknown masses crushed by masters and gods of conquest? Why did they cry so long in vain? Were the numberless jacqueries only hopeless frenzies? The marxists might deduce that most such uprisings impeded the development of the “means of production” (a.k.a. “Progress”) and were therefore “objectively” reactionary. Shouldn’t libertarians see them as first of all the sign, and attempted negation, of hierarchy and exploitation?

Indeed, what cry could have been more appropriate in an agrarian society, as were all before our own. The age-old cry was raised perhaps for the last time in all its revolutionary purity even as this first truly non-agrarian society reached its (first) maturity of world war. “Land to the Tiller!” “Land and Liberty!” Do we not stand on the side of the Makhnos and the Zapatas? The option of the Russian village mir and the Mexican ejido, of communalism and kinship which goes back to the dawn of homo sapiens is only now, before our eyes, being finally, “regrettably,” closed.

When the last agrarian culture is modernized and the last primitive civilized; when this vital link with the human past, with “the land,” passes out of living experience, then the cry will be silenced.

“Our revolution as a project to reestablish community was necessary from the moment when ancient communities were destroyed. The reduction of communist revolution to an uprising which was to resolve the contradictions imposed by the capitalist mode of production was pernicious. Revolution has to resolve all the old contradictions created by the class societies absorbed by capital...

“Beyond this, the revolutionary movement is the revolution of nature, accession to thought, and mastery of being with the possibility of using the prefrontal centers of the brain which are thought to relate to the imagination. Revolution has a biological and therefore cosmic dimension, considering our universe limited (to the solar system); cosmic also in the sense of the ancient philosophers and mystics.”

—J. Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity*

The Megalopolis of Capital

All this is by no means to idealize the parochial and conservative aspects of the rural, but only to recognize “the land” as our real and legitimate source of sustenance. Without urbanity, the gifts of the city, humanity would lose much. However, the city, in its finest hours the source of high culture, cannot be our refuge as it is the seat of the Power that destroys those gifts. Civilization has produced state and capital more abundantly than freedom and genius. What does the city, if it can still be dignified with that name, mean for us?

We can hope, some pray, that 22nd century Calcutta will become as “great” as modern London, hoping at the same time that today’s London doesn’t slide into tomorrow’s Calcutta. The existing Calcuttas and Londons, with their varying intensities of misery oppress us now. The megalopolis of Capital negates the classical city as voraciously as it devours the land. Far from training populations in global human citizenship, the megalopolis brutalizes every aspect of life for all but a privileged elite. Psychosis and crime are its mark. Even if the Brave New World manages to suppress nationalism and racism (along with more positive archaic modes), who is to say that its zombie culture might not be more depraved?

Technology is a human asset that can no more be abandoned, or “rejected,” than could art or language itself. The task is not the elimination of a fundamental attribute of humanity; but destruction of the “high technology” inseparable from capital, and its reinvention on a human scale. This cannot be the suppression of “Progress” or of “liberation from drudgery” as modern technocracy (the only possible organizational form of high technology, “self-managed” exploitation notwithstanding) is itself both the greatest obstacle to human evolution and the source of a new, all-encompassing drudgery as deadly as that of the Pyramid Age.

The utopians and high priests of technology envision work as something wholly invidious and debilitating, which is exactly what it must be under their order. In subsuming all human endeavor under the economy of capital, all control, all direction and purpose is transferred from man to the machine, from living labor to dead labor. It is the end of creativity. That is, all but the narrow invention it demands for its complete, final-universalization. The clock is running, but it measures nothing. To believe that “revolutionaries” could seize some summit of technological control to turn the means of production (of capital) to human ends is to fatally misunderstand both the nature of the Megamachine and the historic failure of socialism.

Runaway of Capital/Technology

What does the realization of the bourgeois world picture, the triumph of “Science” and the run-away of capital/technology, mean not only for humanity, but for life itself? How much evidence of ecological cancer do we need to recognize the social malignancy? Each component of the megamachine, under the intelligent supervision of the state, competes in the production of poison. Plutonium, fluorocarbons, PCBs, dioxin...a long list, any one of

which could irreversibly pollute the entire planet; not to mention the sundry techniques capable of wasting smaller regions, the dams, deep-well irrigations, freeways, etc. etc. ad nauseam. The whole constellation of commodities, elevated from a mere fetish to a full-blown religion, becomes the sole measure of human success and the measure of our destruction of nature.

Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whatever it touches; and obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame,
A mechanized automaton.
—Shelley

The real domination of capital is a Power that goes far beyond the meager resources of earlier civilizations, which could only despoil human nature. But even in this, modern technology promises previously undreamt of possibilities for the total capitalization of every moment of existence. Cybernation, nuclearization, genetic engineering: no premonition can be so pessimistic as to foresee what the future will actually bring. And this is the infinitely, seemingly irresistibly, expanding system some still search for “outs,” blind to all that yet lies outside its premises and imperatives, blind to both the alternatives and to the magnitude of change.

“Men who were much but had little now have much but are little.”
—F. Perlman, *The Reproduction of Daily Life*

“It is in reality only a logical step in the compulsive and suicidal ‘conquest of nature’ which is the zeitgeist of capital, east and west. From the mechanized, chemical-laden agro-factory system on up, this system tends toward an increasingly dangerous and universalized destruction of diversity—, ethno-cultural, agricultural and biological... A massified, bureaucratic technology spells out not only the necessity of totalitarian rule, but the inevitability of disaster.”

—P. Solis, 8 Theses on Nuclearism

Destroy the Megamachine

To submit to the irreversibility of the human experience makes of History as great a god as Marx or Muhammad ever imagined. To scorn the cry for “the land” is to willfully reject all the magic, beauty and harmony humanity once knew. And what grand hope is held out against the dismal future? Nothing less than the final abandonment of the Earth. This is the logic of rejection, of complete despair. We shall embrace the ultimate joy of High Technology, the space-tomb, to escape to the ultimate barrenness of the totally artificial environment. This is the zenith of civilization!

Isn’t the real task, the real revolution, to destroy the megamachine that would consume us; to destroy capital in all its forms—organizational, technological, and material; to bring the stars down to earth? “Nothing less can be proposed than another life where the gestures, the words, the imaginations and all the feelings of human beings will no longer be chained, where senses and brain will unite—only this union can eliminate all the fixations of madness.” (Camatte) DESTROY THAT WHICH WOULD DESTROY YOU!

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