

Ecology & Barbarism

Super-Capitalism, Self-sufficiency & the “Third World”

C. Logre Mordicus

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In the Third World, the possibility of economic development can bring a strange form of “modernity.” For example, Madagascar, formerly a jewel in France’s illustrious colonial empire (45,000 deaths resulted from the French quelling of the 1947 uprising), had long been self-sufficient.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a relatively numerous and prosperous bourgeoisie had started to emerge, but it was destroyed by colonialism. The global economic crisis (fall in prices of raw materials, breakdown of local industries) coincided with ruling class mismanagement and led to economic catastrophe and to a suffocating spiral of decline: agricultural collapse, dependence on food provisions, the need for imports without having anything to sell, debts and pressures from the International Monetary Fund, currency devaluation of 700%, poverty, the exodus from the countryside, etc.

Luckily, Super-Eco was on the job! He proposed paying the Madagascan peasants to protect the tropical forest’s flora and fauna.

Step 1: In a debt swap, the World Wildlife Fund bought two million dollars of Madagascar’s debt for \$950,000 in exchange for respecting the environment [sic].

Step 2: The Madagascan State acquired this influx of new money and their bank creditors were happy to get their money back.

Step 3: Since peasants could no longer remove anything from the forest, they either joined the ranks of the urban poor or were transformed into guardians of the ecological museum.

Step 4: the State frittered the money away and the number of hungry mouths multiplied.

Luckily Super-Capitalist was on the job! He decreed: “Madagascans, you must export! To do this, you must grow corn!” (In the port of Tuleau, the average buying price is 11 cents a pound.) But how should they do this? “By clearing the (non-protected) sub-arid forest.”

The end result: This forest will never grow again. On 2.2 acres of the former forest, a peasant produces 750 kg. of corn annually; this provides him with 30% of the Madagascan minimum wage!

This example from Madagascar reveals the complete disintegration of everything that lies outside the “prosperous world,” where the search for profit reaches absurdity. But it also reveals that self-righteous Western ecologists see no alternative for poor people in these places except in the role of guard or guardian, dependent on tips from international travelers (“Merci, Bwana!”) provided they continue to respect “ecology.”

And this is just one example among many, especially in Africa. Is there any possibility of linking their oppositional activity and ours here? Is there some basis to the fears of Western rulers that waves of poor people from the South will come surging up North? And if so, where do we go from here?

— C. Logre Mordicus, April 1993

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