

## SHOULD WE DEVELOP? AND IN WHAT DIRECTION?

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One of the biggest problems in the world (perhaps the biggest after the environment problem) consists in the fact that a very special kind of "development" has taken place in a small, remote part of the world that was relatively unimportant before "development" started to take place there. This part of the world now serves as a model for virtually all societies in the world, which want to appropriate the results of the development processes that this part of the world has gone through. In other worlds, these other societies want to be "developed". The demand for development is directed at us. Since the non-fulfillment of the demand has led to dangerous world conflicts and can lead to further, perhaps deadly conflicts, there are not only humanitarian reasons for its fulfillment but also eminently pragmatic ones. Hence there is no question about the fact that we should engage in development. And historical record demonstrates that contributions from the outside can be constitutive with respect to "catching-up" development: in the first third of the previous century the Europeans successfully engaged English experts, and the Japanese engaged European experts in the last third of the same century.

As a matter of fact, we have been involved in development for over four decades. But this relatively long period of a world-wide development programme has not had the result of making the situation of the developing countries more hopeful today than it was at the end of World War II. Nevertheless, the (few) exceptions show that no natural necessity has been involved in this worsening of the situation. The present condition is the result of human action. Therefore someone must have done something drastically wrong. Let us have a look then at those who bear the main responsibility for macro-societal development: the "ruling political classes" in the developing countries and in the industrialized countries.

## 1. The developing Countries

Today most of the developing countries present a picture of disintegrating societies that have taken away all hope from the majority of their members that it will ever be possible for their needs to be even approximately satisfied. Of course no knowledgeable observer underestimates the immense objective difficulties facing every remedial course of development. But if it is true that in the overwhelming majority of developing countries the task has not only been unsolved, but has not even been tackled seriously in the first place, then this is an indication of policies of the political elites that are false in principle and not simply in part or from case to case. In my opinion, wishful thinking is involved here in two respects: (a) the dominant classes in most developing countries expect development to promote their particular interest at the expense of the majority of the population; (b) as a result they subject the "entire occidental catalogue of goods" to a very specific selection process - from the point of view of maintaining themselves in power.

This selective kind of wishful thinking is not new. For example, it can already be observed over two hundred years ago in the Ottoman Empire: it was quite clear to the ruling class that "the retention of the Ptolemaic world-view was just as important for the continued existence of the given power structure as was the copying of the most modern types of artillery and ships".<sup>1</sup> This exemplifies the general attitude that certain aspects (e.g. the technology) can be extracted from the overall context of Western culture and appropriated while other, quite uncomfortable items, such as democracy or rule by law, can be rejected at no risk. The selection is carried out in the name of "cultural identity". What is understood by this makes for quite a heterogeneous conglomerate: on the one hand, stage props from the respective indigenous tradition, which are frequently held to be "more valuable" or of a higher moral quality than what the Occidental tradition has to offer; and on the other hand "modern" Western elements selected on the basis of consumption and stabilization of the power structure. Dynamic elements of the indigenous traditions (if such still exist) are negated. Thus

the "culture" of many developing countries (to the extent things go according to the wishes of the rulers) consists of an unfortunate mixture: the contribution of the West is assimilated "in the wrong way" and the indigenous contribution consists primarily in nothing more than folklore and deplorable social conditions. Social resources, including those contributed from outside - are employed mainly for "internal security". The result is that democracy, for example, is "Un-Islamic", as the king of Morocco recently declared.

## 2. The "Developed" Countries:

The "developed" countries are on the other side of the trench. Can an analogous relationship between rulers and ruled be ascertained here as well?

We are in a position to understand the situation in the "developed" countries only if we grasp the fact that these societies as a whole - i.e. irrespective of the difference between rulers and ruled - **represent a ruling class in the worldwide context:** a well organized minority, thoroughly in accordance with the terminology used by Gaetano Mosca, within which (all internal differentiation notwithstanding) there is a substantial identity of interests. This class, too, defends its position with the help of a kind of wishful thinking based on misunderstandings of socio-cultural relationships, and it arrives at the same result: There is no reason for "us" not to continue to pursue our form of development, which makes our society so content, or at any rate so easy to govern.

The developing countries? But with our development assistance we certainly give them a fair chance: we put them in a position to live the way we do - perhaps not tomorrow, but no doubt the day after tomorrow. And if they do not make use of this chance then there is no escaping the question of whether they are prepared to accept our form of development in the first place. A response to this question in the negative would of course simplify the matter enormously, hence it is scarcely astounding that even some of the "developed" countries have a made-to-order ideology in the desk drawer. Ironically, they have the same name for it that the leaders of

the "underdeveloped" countries have: cultural identity. Put briefly, this term means the following: the others are completely different from us, hence they have not only completely different abilities, but no doubt completely different needs as well. Automobiles, for example, are a part of our - admittedly somewhat materialistic - way of life; for Buddhists, Hindus, or Moslems on the other hand, religious factors still play the decisive role. Western development with its consumer-oriented society has robbed the countries of the Third World of their cultural identity, which they should now regain - with the help of fundamentalism, for example. Therefore the thought that they have no automobiles is no reason for uneasiness and we can continue to drive our second automobiles with a good conscience.

### 3. Universal Characteristics of Development.

Before we go on to inquire into the goal of development, we need to clarify two points: (a) The first point is directed to the underdeveloped countries: **Development is indivisible.** The powers-that-be in the developing countries must learn to accept the fact that they cannot pick and choose at will from the department store of the West. Whoever wants to have technology must also opt for science - as well as for the social conditions that make science possible. But this is not the end of the matter. "Development" can be a success only if it is firmly embedded in a social and cultural system in its entirety, if people participate in it actively, and if as the result of such development even the possible revision of the power structure is accepted into the bargain. This state of affairs has apparently been recognized by only a few developing countries: the East-Asian "success stories". They are making the effort to appropriate Occidental culture in its entirety (including the history of its development, its philosophy, its social dynamic, its music, even its alpine sports) - they have set in motion the development of those productive forces that are making state-of-the-art automobiles possible today and perhaps something of more long-term utility tomorrow. The contrast can also be described thus: whereas the representatives of selective wishful thinking

strive to attain Western consumption for a minority, here the goal is Western production - initially by the majority but then for it. Here a quotation in this connection:

"Hunger and mass destitution in the Third World does not obtain because the European path of development has been followed, but because precisely this has not been the case"<sup>2</sup>

(b) And now a point addressed to the developed countries: **Development is indivisible.** Of course it would be very practical if the underdeveloped countries were primarily interested in cultural identity, which is not particularly controversial economically (or ecologically). But unfortunately this is not the case. In the late 20th century there is no society on earth that is immune against automobiles, refrigerators and recreational electronics, and certainly only very few individuals are of the opinion that these nice things are indeed there for others, but not for themselves. If fewer automobiles are driven in the countries of the Buddhists, Hindus, or Moslems than where we are, then the reason is not the differences in preferences but rather the differences in incomes. The major Third-World cities, which have the lead in development in these countries, have in most cases also reached the international standard at least in that respect as well.

#### 4. The Unique Goal of Development.

Max Weber once called the idea "childish" that in pre-industrial Asian societies the acquisitive instinct is less pronounced than it is in the West. Today one cannot escape noticing that in India or Egypt the competition for wealth is much more fierce than in Germany or France. The reason for this is that the possibilities of realizing desires or fulfilling wishes are infinitely smaller in developing countries, **whereas the desires themselves are basically the same.** "Identity" (as far as the question we are addressing is concerned) is not harmony with some tradition or other, but harmony with the "real condition" ("Ist-Zustand"). And as far as **cultural identity** is concerned, we must make it

clear to ourselves that in the developing countries (just as in the industrialized countries) "cultural identity" is primarily a stage prop for political rhetoric employed in the competition for goods. In the developing countries this sort of rhetoric (e.g. fundamentalist) is aimed primarily at youths above the primary school level who have come to the conclusion that in their own society *rebus sic stantibus* (as things stand) they will never drive their own automobiles. (And they do not intend to solve this problem by immigrating). The reason that the Shah lost the race in Iran was not that he had been pursuing the false, i.e. the western goal, but that he did not reach it.

If one agrees with the argumentation as presented so far, then there can no longer be any doubt about the fact that in the long run there is only one conceivable course of development for the world. The attempt to establish various goals for development - e.g. further growth or prosperity for us, but only the satisfaction of basic needs in the developing countries - has no chance of succeeding.

Does that mean that we should recommend our present way of life to the developing countries (and make it possible through development assistance)? The answer to this question is given by reflecting on where, for example, the developing countries that at present function as dumping grounds for the toxic waste material of the "First World" are supposed to export their own waste after successful "modern" development, or where the oxygen to breathe is supposed to come from if all Indians and Chinese obtain private automobiles. But the way of life that we must come to an agreement about cannot be that of the majority in present-day India or Egypt - characterized by mass destitution and oppression. Hence the imperative of development, of change, obtains for both parts of the world.

It would be possible in this connection to compile a long list of wishes; I would like to restrict them to two key concepts: lastingness (*Nachhaltigkeit*) and equality.

**"Lastingness"**: The one-dimensional control of nature that has been pursued up to now with disregard for the principle of lastingness should be replaced with the idea

of comprehensive control of interaction with the natural environment. This requirement is directed primarily to the developed countries. The fact that the population of the industrialized countries in Europe is no longer growing should not be allowed to divert our attention from the fact that over population (which can be understood meaningfully only as "the relationship of the pressure of utilization to resources" is mainly a problem of the industrialized countries. Examples of overpopulated countries are England, the Benelux, Germany, Italy and Japan. The problem is of course not restricted to the industrialized countries (see the extreme case of Bangladesh). But in most of the developing countries the problem consists in the fact that the rapid increase of the population is not matched by the per capita developmental performances. Family planning therefore makes sense in the developing countries as well.

**Equality:** The second requirement is that of equality. This is directed to the developing countries at least as much as to the developed countries. The idea of equality is a result of Western development. It seems doubtful to me that concrete social equality (not abstract equality before God) has authentic roots in any non-occidental culture at all. In the only one of which I have a more intimate knowledge, the Islamic culture, this is not the case. And I surmise that the idea of equality is also alien to, say, Hinduism. The ruling classes in the developing countries, who are so fond of operating with the idea of equality over against the industrialized countries, should stop reacting with terror to analogous demands on the part of their own populations.

In the industrialized countries the problem of equality poses itself in a special form. If growth can no longer be offered as a substitute for equality, the equality itself must become a political programme - at any rate to the extent that a free form of society remains a goal. And the elite groups that have their difficulties with this programme are not only to be found in the developing countries.

## 5. A World Culture?

And now to the ticklish question of whether a world culture that permits a continued existence of all human beings without need and oppression will be simply an extension of the present-day occidental way of life - or whether it can adopt decisive contributions from non-occidental cultures.

I am of the opinion that central elements of occidental culture must definitely be adopted by all other cultures - e.g. the idea of equality just discussed above: the principle of equality between free and slave, man and woman, believers and non-believers, one's own group and foreign groups. Absolutely necessary are certainly also the Western forms of thought and attitudes that make possible modern technology and organization. The step to an industrialized society is apparently an "evolutionary universal" - (T. Parsons), as was the step to tilling the soil 6000 years ago (and which, like this step, is not taken at the same time by all potential candidates). Complete freedom, on the other hand, reigns in the realm of folklore, of which already nowadays assiduous use is made by many ethnic groups as a substitute for identity. The realm of aesthetics is not necessarily affected by this, nor the realm of religion. Throughout history religion has often shown itself to be extremely adaptable; Christianity, for example, has supported the most divergent forms of society and the opposition against them (Peasants' war in Germany, South Africa). And herein is probably also to be found the most important potential contribution of Non-European cultures/religions to the future world culture: in the legitimation of the idea, imperative for survival, that the possibilities of technology and organization, which are in principle infinite, must be restricted in the name of humanity. This will be made easier due to the fact that holy scriptures are generally very susceptible to interpretation.

## 6. What can we (i.e. those in the "developed countries") do?

Joint action between the "First" and the "Third" worlds will come about only if a rate of change is found that is not too fast for us and too slow for them. Here both sides will have



to make compromises. If we want to (re)gain our credibility, a self-restriction will be required of us in the very near future that will be very difficult for most people in our society. To mention just two things: to no longer take it completely for granted to live, work, go shopping and seek recreation in localities at great distances from each other; to take along a container to the supermarket for yoghurt. Briefly put, we must drastically change the way of life that we have been practising for over forty years and that today seems almost "natural", or at any rate necessary. This will be our decisive contribution to a future form of co-existence. The alternative to our way of life cannot be imposed from outside: an attempt of this sort collapsed without a sound just about exactly three years ago.

To conclude, please allow me, to make a short retreat to a more modest perspective, in order to make a plea in my own case, as it were: the case of development cooperation. Development cooperation is direct communication between societies at different levels of development. As of today this type of communication has not found its optimum form; so far it has not yet achieved what in principle, it can achieve. However, we are trying to get closer to this goal by adapting our financial and personal contribution more closely to the needs, motives, and abilities of the majority of the population in the developing countries. By orienting ourselves in terms of the concerns of the poor, self-help, promotion of women, and by taking into account the socio-cultural dimension, we are progressing step by step. And the emphasis on human rights, about which you have perhaps heard something from the media, is not the passing eccentricity of some politician or other but rather the attempt to give development the form it must have if it is to succeed: **Development for the people and by the people.**

#### NOTES

1. Steinhaus, *Sociology of the Turkish Revolution*, p. 28.
2. This formulation does not originate from an elderly, conservative economist at the International Monetary Fund, but from Dieter Senghass-epd 14/92).