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# questioning development



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glyn roberts

By the same author — Handbook for Development Workers Overseas

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GLYN ROBERTS

# questioning development

*notes for volunteers  
and others concerned with  
the theory and practice  
of change*



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## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3.
2. A fable	4.
3. Modernization, growth and other aliases	5.
4. Two views of underdevelopment	8.
5. Power and development	14.
6. Pyramids of privilege	18.
7. Power in personal relations	21.
8. White ants and black — a poem and a discussion	23.
9. Background on 'Aba County'	31.
10. The school in a rural area	34.
11. A serious case of <i>Xanthosoma sagittifolium</i>	36.
12. Development at home	40.

## INTRODUCTION

1.1 At some point, I believe, each person who goes out to help in an underdeveloped country begins to doubt.

The questions may come early, possibly at the training course or during the first few weeks of service. Perhaps they do not arise until much later, after months or years of committed work. Yet despite praise by visiting Ministers, reports in the press, congratulations by the British Council . . . in the very hour of success, the nagging thought occurs: Are we really helping the people of this country? Have our techniques actually brought progress? Is this *development*?

1.2 To wonder, you do not need to have worked at the grass-roots level in distant Africa. If you collect for UNICEF or OXFAM, if you work for a volunteer-sending organization or for a technical assistance programme, you may also be anxious to know if the aid sent overseas really creates development.

Whether you voice these doubts in public is another matter. The agencies may tolerate private criticism about a project here or there, but insist that the overall benefit of aid to developing countries must be beyond dispute.

1.3 After all, one hears plenty of reasons for *not* doubting:

\*The poor of the world are so obviously in need — hungry, sick, uneducated — every crumb of Aid given may feed some poor soul, so the more we give the more we help.

\*We must not scare off donors in the rich countries by suggesting their gifts or taxes do no good. The energy crisis has already soured public opinion against the Third World, so don't make matters worse.

\*Governments in the poorer countries *ask for* the majority of our aid programmes and they, surely if anyone, are in a position to judge their value.

But the biggest pressure against doubting the value of our aid is perhaps this:

\*If we criticise the technology and institutions which we export in the name of progress, we may put in question the very basis and values of our own society. And heaven knows where that might lead.

1.4 Suppressed, the doubts multiply. They surge back again at the sight of a ten-storey car park in Kampala, a class of Indian schoolboys performing "A Midsummer Night's Dream", a woman outside a clinic feeding her dying child on a watery mixture of Ovaltine, the Minister inspecting an agricultural project from his white Mercedes . . .

To whom do we turn at such moments, what standards shall we refer to? How can we measure the good or harm done in the service of "development"?

1.5 This book is written for those who are thinking of doing a year or two in one of the countries of Africa, Asia or Latin America. But anyone who has ever pondered over the White Man's Burden in bringing peace

and prosperity to the corners of the Earth may find here a new focus on old problems.

Personally, with each of four visits to Africa and further afield, I know that my own framework of ideas has evolved. Looking now at photos taken on an early trip, for example, I blush at my ignorance and insensitivity. How ill-equipped I was, in terms of values and perspective, to help Africa to *develop*; and how little I understood that fact.

- 1.6 Not that this book lays claim to all the answers. Far from it. But it does offer a number of ideas which may be useful to anyone who wonders about the changes he is helping to bring about.

For these ideas to be acceptable, we shall clearly have to come to an agreement as to what we mean by development. Paradoxically, this is something which many "development" personnel have never faced up to. Despite years in the Aid business, they have always been too busy getting on with the job to worry much about the overall picture. *Underdevelopment* too is something which they find so obvious that they do not feel the need to explore its meaning in depth.

If this sounds unlikely, ask a few professional or amateur developers their views on the nature of these terms, and judge for yourself by the quality of the answers you get.

- 1.7 Lastly, there is a bonus to the exercise which I propose in the following pages: looking at development in terms of power, we may gain insight into the cause of poverty in our own countries.

We may find that the differences traditionally noted between the "advanced" and the "less developed" nations are less important than the similarities.

## A FABLE

First of all, a story. This is based on fact, as with the other examples to come.

"The Experts arrived at the fishing village. For years the natives had used primitive techniques in their work. True, they caught fish, but they had to paddle out to sea every day, maybe even on feast days. It was a hard life, though well-tried over the years.

The new nets were rather dearer than the old, and the method of fishing was different too. But in a single net they caught a whole week's supply. Fantastic! You could work one day and be free for the rest of the week! The village folk had a great feast, several feasts . . . in fact so many that they had to fish two days each week to pay for the celebrations.

This is no good, thought the Experts, they should be fishing six days a week and making money out of it. We haven't come here to witness endless parties. Surely it's enough with one feast a month. This is an underdeveloped country; they must produce more proteins. Fish!

But the village favoured *fiesta*. Fishing two days, and free the rest of the week.

The Experts grew annoyed. They hadn't travelled from the distant North to watch natives drum, dance and dream. They had come to fill hungry stomachs, to lessen the threat of the undernourished against the overfed.

Yet the villagers danced late into the night. Why shouldn't they? They were rich now, almost as rich as the Maharaja, though he had never done a day's work in his life . . .

And then the Project Director had a brilliant idea. (Not for nothing had he taken an evening course back home in economics.) These lazy fisherfolk were not actually lazy: they were simply weak on *motivation*, motivation to work harder. They had not discovered their needs.

He bribed a villager to buy a motorbike. Bribery was distasteful, but sometimes necessary. True, there were no roads as such, but the wet sand along the water's edge was hard and smooth . . .

The motorcycle roared back and forth. What a toy! And soon every young man wanted one of his own. The village elders warned them:

*What use is there in riding far off and back again on the sand?*

But the young men replied:

*We can race. We shall see who is the fastest. And you grey-beards, you can place bets on us!*

The Project Director's idea proved a brilliant success. At last the men fished almost every day. The capital city got the fresh fish it needed. (Indeed, a large part is now turned into fish-meal and exported to Europe where it makes excellent pig food and helps keep down the price of bacon.)

But probably most pleased of all was the Maharaja, for it so happens that he was sole agent for the motorcycle firm in that country. He also owned the main fish market in the city, while his uncle's family built and ran the fish-meal factory. When the Experts flew home he raised the price of a motorcycle, so that to buy one a man must work three years, instead of a single season.

And the fishermen fished on. They had discovered a need."<sup>1</sup>

From this short story, one thing at least seems clear: change does not always mean progress.

## MODERNIZATION, GROWTH and other aliases

- 3.1 So what is development? Is everything *new* development — new hospitals, new roads, miracle rice that gives great harvests, electric toothbrushes, napalm, germ warfare . . . and if not, why not?

Or is it too crude to expect a straight yes/no answer to any of these examples; are they *partly* developmental? Or perhaps developmental in

<sup>1</sup> From: *U-landssagor* by Olavi Junus, Prisma, Stockholm, 1970.

one situation, but not in another?

One way of approaching this problem of definition is to look at it from another angle, and see what development is **not**.

3.2 This is useful since many different terms are used these days to describe the changes that take place around the world. You hear talk of *modernization*, *economic growth*, *social change* and even *civilization* as if these were scientific, reliable processes, generally understood and agreed upon. What is more, you will hear them used as if they were identical in meaning with *development*, which they are not.

3.3 This imprecision of language often reveals not only a carelessness of thinking, but also the basic attitude that it is *we* who are modern, advanced, civilized, developed. Our history, from the Greeks onwards, is world history. Our concepts of the world are true, because they made us what we are today.

Therefore our ideas need to replace *their* outdated, inefficient, false view of reality. With time and patience, we hear, "they will learn to be like us; though they had better not be in too great a hurry, for after all they are hundreds of years behind".

3.4 So let us look at some of these terms.

The story of the fishing village certainly gives some examples of **modernization**. By this we usually mean such changes as seem to be more efficient, more productive. The use of nylon nets, for example. The new technology is often (but not always) more complicated than the old, and is nearly always based upon fossil fuel energy (coal, gas, oil). This means a stronger dependence on the chemical and metallurgical industries.

Other typical aspects of modernization are the quicker tempo of work and communications, the growing importance of towns, a wider network of commercialism and the flow of money which (together with clockwork time) becomes the measure of man.

These changes have occurred, and are still occurring, in our own "modern" society, for better and for worse, both in the West and in the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe. China too is attracted by the power and potential of many modernising processes, though with some reservations.

No nation can ignore the need for rational procedures, efficient methods of production (and destruction), quicker communications and so on.

But what is rational for today may not be so for tomorrow. In 1974 it seems rational for the British police to put on computer the registration details of every car in the country, the more readily to indentify stolen vehicles. The cost of maintaining this computer will be enormous, though little compared to the other social costs of the private motor car. At any event, to computerize is modern. Or is it? Would it not perhaps be even more modern, more rational, to go forward to a system of good public transport and bicycles?

3.5 It would be silly to reject science and efficiency out of hand. Chemical fertilizers will indeed boost the crops, morphine certainly stops the pain,

container-transport is quicker, cleaner, safer — but let us remember two facts:

- i) almost all modernizations today depend heavily on fossil fuel energy, controlled by a few nations and multinational companies,
- ii) the rational is not always the reasonable. Human beings are only human. The rationalisations we see in the rich and the poor worlds, while perhaps modifying some forms of inequality, have a nasty tendency to concentrate power in the hands of the strong.

Modernization then, seems to have both good sides and bad; but let us agree at least on this: increased rationality and efficiency alone are not enough. Development is something more.

3.6 The story suggests too that **economic growth** occurred, thanks to the increased production of fish and fish-meal. 'Growth' is another term, often equated with development, which needs a closer look. Certainly new nets were bought, more fish were caught, transported to the city and sold. Then motorcycles were imported and sold to the fisherfolk, resulting no doubt in a number of accidents and the need for bandages and medicines. And let us not forget the experts themselves, a few in number perhaps, but with great purchasing power. They would need refrigerators, transport, housing, servants, European food and drink, diving equipment for work and pleasure, and much more.

Each one of these buying/selling, import/export activities would add to the annual Gross National Product statistics, by which economic growth is measured.

GNP 'growth' statistics might mean a good deal to an economist or to a maharaja, but they do not tell us a thing about the quality of life in a Third World (fishing village).

3.7 **Social change** is another term often used to suggest progress. Social change occurs in every society. The population grows or declines; the proportion of young and old will vary, so will their relationships. In the story, we gather that the younger men become more dominant; a change takes place in the hours and days they work. New "needs", values and status symbols merge into the culture.

These are all social and psychological changes, but they do not, in themselves, constitute *development*. One must bear in mind that social changes occurred, for example, in Hiroshima and Song Mai.

3.8 Introduce any piece of modern technology — be it a clock, an anti-biotic, a gun — to a society and you may well produce a whole series of changes. These will interweave and influence each other, having social, psychological and economic consequences.

Some will be short term, others irreversible; some will produce happiness and others lead to disaster. One is tempted to say that any fool can produce change.

3.9 *Development* is another matter. It requires a long term view. It is perhaps less a question of the changes which do occur, as those which *ought*

to occur. Development can be conceived only within an ideological framework; for development concerns justice, equality and democracy. It can never be limited to strictly measurable quantities — dollars spent, proteins consumed, electricity generated *per capita/per annum*.

- 3.10 **Modernization** — well and good — but which technology is suitable? In what order should it be applied? At what rate?
- Economic growth** — welcome! — but in which sectors and at what cost to a community?
- Social Change** — fair enough — but who needs changing, you, me? What do we value and preserve? Who decides?
- Development** — yes, but for whom?
- 3.11 These are not empty, rhetorical questions, but central issues which the 'advanced' world has by no means solved for itself. Meanwhile, alert African, Asians and Latin Americans are extremely sensitive to these issues and feel they have the right to question volunteers, missionaries, technicians at work in their country.
- Why do you think we need you to solve our problems?*
- What is the ideological basis for your action in our community?*

## TWO VIEWS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 There is no point in protesting that we do not have an ideological basis to our work. We do. No one thinks and acts quite independently. Rather we grow up to think in very standard patterns about the nature of man and the world, the good and the bad, cause and effect. These patterns vary, of course, from group to group; they can lead to oversimplification, to closed minds, but they also make it possible to understand and communicate. For a person to go overseas to help development, it is not enough to think "I go because they are sick and hungry . . ." though that may be an admirable motive. He must surely ask himself at some point "Why are they sick and hungry?"
- The answer he comes up with will be a product of his ideology.
- 4.2 Generally speaking, there are two main explanations given of underdevelopment, and with them, two strategies for progress. Let us call them the *Liberal* and the *Socialist* viewpoints.<sup>1</sup>

### The Liberal View

“The developing countries rushed into demanding independence during the 1950s and 1960s before they were mature enough to look after their own affairs. They are now caught in a vicious circle of overpopulation, hunger and illness brought about by poor administration (corruption, inefficiency),

<sup>1</sup> In the limited space available, I can only sketch in the main points of these two opposing views. The inverted commas emphasise that these are highly compressed versions of much more subtle philosophies.

superstitious beliefs among the population (reluctance to use contraceptives; Indians' refusal to eat cows), plus a general lack of knowhow, work discipline and *entrepreneurial* spirit.

## COLONIES<sup>1</sup>

The majority of people in the united Kingdom would refute the statement by Geoffrey Barker, on behalf of Oxfam (The News, January 2) that our ex-colonies were left in poor economic conditions.

We did not leave them. They opted out of Empire, through insidious infiltration of Communism promising freedom.

Freedom, they were brainwashed to believe, was Utopia.

Was there this so urgent need, as now, for charitable institutions when they were part of our Empire or Commonwealth?

Oxfam does a good job — where there are real disasters, e.g., Bangladesh, hurricane, flooding, and earthquake areas, but if our ex-colonies had not opted out of our family of nations they would not now be at the mercy of incompetent little dictators under the yoke of their Communist supporters.

The operative words in Mr. Barker's letter are "charities appear to invest wisely." Appearances are so often deceptive.

R.J.

Lucerne Avenue,  
Waterlooville.

This unfortunate condition is nothing new, for these countries have endured such misery for hundreds of years, fighting tribal wars (remember Tchombé and Lumumba?), suffering famines, ignorant of their resources. As a result, they now lack two things vital to their development:

- i. capital, financial reserves
  - ii. technical know-how.
- 4.3 Fortunately, the advanced world is still willing to help the poorer countries with capital investment and technical assistance. The *Associate* countries of the European Economic Community already receive considerable benefits, for example. The World Bank and other such agencies also stand by ready to assist, if not all poor countries, at least those which have family-planning programmes and which do not threaten to nationalise foreign investments.
- 4.4 No one is to be blamed for underdevelopment. Instead, let us be positive. Speedy progress is being made each year in many countries as their economies approach "take-off" point. Mexico, for example, and perhaps Turkey. Japan succeeded, perhaps with a certain price to pay in pollution, and other countries can follow.
- 4.5 The development strategy is this: Improve **communications** with the advanced world; build roads, rail, harbours, airports, hovercraft bases; **mechanize** and modernize production of such materials as the country is best able to produce, such as hardwoods, tea, coffee, copper ore, and **export** to the industrialised countries to earn valuable hard currency.
- The best judges of a worthwhile development investment are, naturally, private enterprise, for these will be the same firms, back in Europe and North America, which must refine the raw materials, sell them and find

<sup>1</sup> Letter in The News, Portsmouth, January 7th, 1974.

the money with which to pay to the developing country.

For this reason too, factories in the less developed country are often owned by foreign shareholders, as are plantations and hotel chains. Besides earning more hard currency, these provide **employment** and **training** to the work force.

4.6 The *Liberal View* places great faith in **education**, in the growth of new attitudes. This spread of modern ideas occurs not only in schools and factories, but flows in from abroad via films, magazines, radio and advertisements. Subconsciously, the native identifies with the heroes of the media; he wants to dress as they dress, drive the same Mercedes or at least a lambretta, drink the same Martinis. But to do this, he must start to produce — not babies, but work. He needs to get ahead and join the middle classes, noted for their stability and moderation.

4.7 The emphasis falls on the individual rather than his group. The pressure to do well, to succeed, is encouraged by the examination system in schools and the insecurity of employment in private firms (in contrast to the over-secure bureaucracy of nationalised bodies). These values are further promoted in many countries by the Christian ethic of personal sin and salvation and by the very goods available in the shops for individuals to acquire.

4.8 The *Liberal View* of development grows, therefore, out of the *Liberal View* of underdevelopment.<sup>1</sup> Both views have their roots in an ideology based on the North American and West European concept of democracy. This democracy protects and encourages, first and foremost, the individual's formal freedom to get ahead, to acquire wealth.

The goal is a welfare state in which those who are by nature weak and uncompetitive will be protected at a certain level by (and in) various institutions.”

### The Socialist View

4.9 “ Underdevelopment is not a passive condition, but an active process. For four hundred years the colonies were exploited for their resources by the countries which now call themselves “advanced” and this process continues today.

Furthermore, underdevelopment occurs not only in the so-called Third World, but within ‘advanced’ areas too — see the poverty in Scotland, Bretagne, Tennessee, and the vast decaying city slums.

Hunger, poor education, chronic illness and unemployment are bound to occur in a competitive economic system, where the dice is loaded anyway against the weakest members. These are not causes, but symptoms of underdevelopment. They are the inevitable by-products of capitalism.

4.10 Turning to history, this view insists, Asia, Africa and Latin America had each known cultured and sophisticated civilisations by the 1600s, but

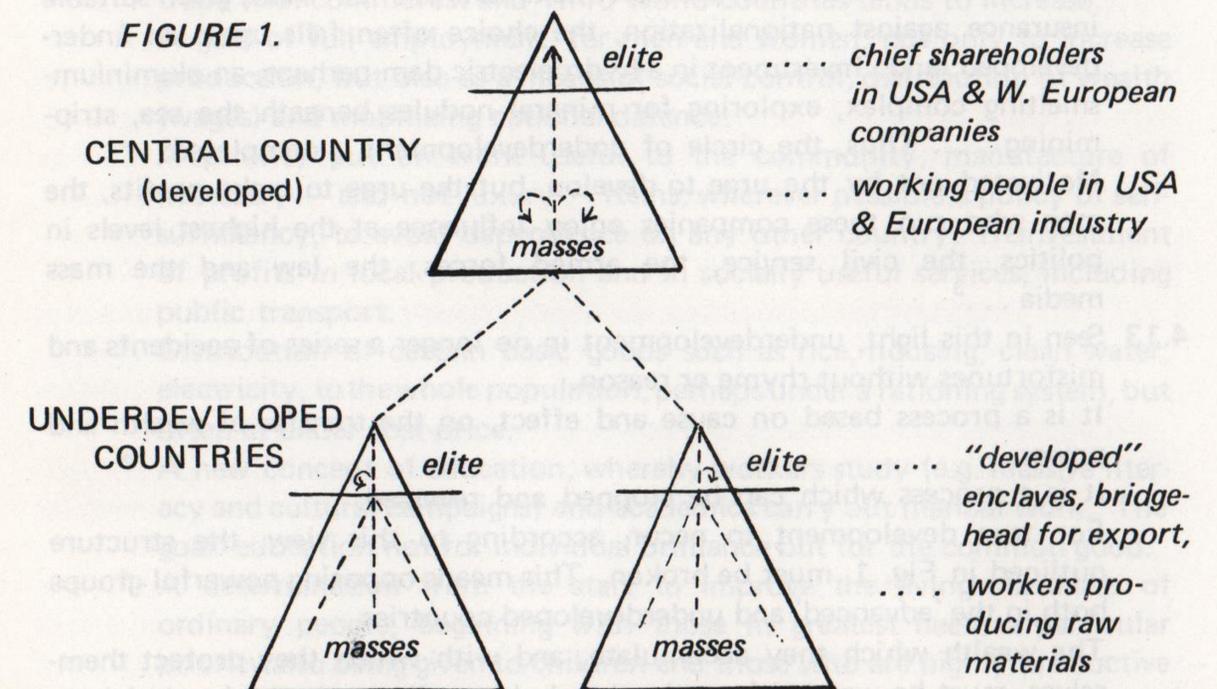
<sup>1</sup> For an excellent, critical precis of this view, see *Sociology of Development and the Underdevelopment of Sociology*, by Andre Gunder Frank, 1969.

these were destroyed in the centuries that followed and these areas became distant colonies on the edge of the “civilized” world, the centre of which was Western Europe — and is now the USA.<sup>1</sup>

Far from being poor, many ‘poor’ countries possess great resources, but these (despite Independence) remain under the control of powerful companies in the West, either through direct ownership, or through the manipulation of trade arrangements, patents, etc.

4.11 The flow of resources,<sup>2</sup> as perceived in the *Socialist View*, goes from the simple farmer/miner/plantation labourer in the interior of the underdeveloped country, by rail or truck, to the capital city and harbour. Here, some small part of the value is skimmed off and goes as high wages, “pay-offs” to the *elite* of the population, who enjoy a European standard of living.

FIGURE 1.



But the real value of the produce is transported overseas to the central industrial powers. There the raw materials are processed and manufactured goods passed on to the markets of the world.

The system, of course, provides jobs and relatively high wages for a wide range of workers in the West who register affluence most obviously in the ownership of cars, houses and colour TVs.

Yet though they share in this parasite-prosperity, the industrial masses are far from gaining most from this system.

<sup>1</sup> See *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* — Andre Gunder Frank, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Including intellectual and manual resources — The ‘brain-drain’ creams off nurses, doctors and others with professional training, while cheap migrant labour also services the advanced countries.

4.12 The real profiteers are the directors and chief shareholders of the major companies. Many of these companies are now *multinational*, that is to say beyond the control of any single country. With enormous reserves of capital and expertise they are coming to monopolize the greater part of the Western economy.

For years, *oil* has been a classic example. Howard Odum<sup>1</sup> has said that "the uneven distribution of wealth is really no more than an uneven distribution in the application of fossil fuels" and others might argue that Western culture is no more enduring than Western control of oil — cut off the oil and our vaunted civilization collapses overnight. Be that as it may; beyond dispute is the fact that Esso, Gulf and Shell made increased profits of between 35-60% in 1973 over 1972.<sup>2</sup>

The massive wealth accumulated, they have one worry; how do we reinvest this capital so that it will produce maximum profits? And, given suitable insurance against nationalization, the choice often falls upon an underdeveloped land. Investment in a hydroelectric dam perhaps, an aluminium-smelting complex, exploring for mineral nodules beneath the sea, strip-mining . . . Thus, the circle of underdevelopment is completed.

Motivated not by the urge to develop, but the urge to make profits, the men who run these companies enjoy influence at the highest levels in politics, the civil service, the armed forces, the law and the mass media . . .<sup>3</sup>

4.13 Seen in this light, underdevelopment is no longer a series of accidents and misfortunes without rhyme or reason.

It is a process based on cause and effect, on the transfer of wealth and power.

It is a process which can be stopped and reversed.

For true development to occur, according to this view, the structure outlined in Fig. 1. must be broken. This means opposing powerful groups both in the 'advanced' and underdeveloped countries.

The wealth which they accumulate, and with which they protect themselves, must be wrested from the shareholders, directors, chief technicians, bankers, barristers, generals . . . and redistributed amongst the people, who are the first and foremost 'resource' of any country.

4.14 Just how and when this is to take place cannot be known in advance. It is a process which, by definition, must occur from within and from below.

One can get some clues from the experiences of China, Cuba, Vietnam, Korea and, in its particular way, Tanzania.<sup>4</sup> Chile, too, made some progress with President Allende before its betrayal once more into the hands of the military and multinationals.

<sup>1</sup> *Environment, Power and Society*, H. T. Odum, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Even if the 'oil sheiks' are now putting up prices, basically nothing changes in the overall structure.

<sup>3</sup> See the interplay of these elites in, e.g. *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills, 1956, or *New Anatomy of Britain*, Anthony Sampson, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> See the collection of speeches by Julius Nyerere, *Socialism in Tanzania*, 1969.

Without going into great detail, their strategies seem to have the following in common:

\* The creation of a new concept of democracy, in which the individual's freedoms<sup>1</sup> are constrained by the need for group welfare; in which development priorities are debated and decided on within the framework of a single political party<sup>2</sup> and where the goal of the party is to create a socialist-cooperative society. In this society women and men have equal rights, obligations and opportunities. A strict morality is enforced, with severe penalties for corruption.

\* Nationalization of the country's main means of production (industry, banking, communications) with an emphasis on cooperative agriculture, in the context of a long-term plan. Since Western countries normally break off relations at this point, often applying trade/'aid' embargos, trade with communist and Third World countries tends to increase.

\* A goal of full employment, for men and women, not only to increase production, but also as a means of social control, distribution of wealth (wages) and mobilizing national defence.

\* A priority put on work useful to the community; manufacture of necessary — and not luxury — items; wherever possible a policy of self-sufficiency, to avoid dependence on any other country. Reinvestment of profits in local production and in socially useful services, including public transport.

\* Distribution of certain basic goods such as rice, housing, clean water, electricity, to the whole population, perhaps under a rationing system, but often at under cost-price.

\* A new concept of education, whereby workers study (e.g. massive literacy and cultural campaigns) and academics carry out manual work. The goal: education not for individual brilliance but for the common good.

\* A determination from the start to improve the living standards of ordinary people, beginning with those in greatest need, a particular priority also being given to children and those who are highly productive in their work.

In sum: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his need."

This then, is the *Socialist View* of underdevelopment,<sup>3</sup> and of the strategies needed for progress.

4.15 One comes across other ideologies too, for example religions which try to explain poverty as the result of human sin and the punishment of God, but we will ignore these for the sake of simplicity.

Yet the *Liberal* and *Socialist* views we cannot ignore, and it is no use claiming to be neutral, a 'mere technician'. Technology is never neutral, for it

<sup>1</sup> One may well ask how real those freedoms were beforehand. The starving Indian farmer enjoys one classic freedom — to starve.

<sup>2</sup> In some countries more than one party exists (Vietnam, Korea).

<sup>3</sup> For a critical review of some of the countries which preach socialism without practising it, see *Développement et Socialismes*, René Dumont, 1969.

is linked to a system of values like everything else, and those values are intrinsic to an economic system.

As a mechanic, nurse, teacher in the Third World one may not join in party politics, but one's ideas, skills, behaviour — one's very presence — will carry political weight.

The formal responsibility for our actions may lie on someone else, possibly a citizen of the host country, high up in some ministry. But finally our political weight will be judged by the ordinary people of the country. They will want to know why we are there, and it is worth having answers that convince not only them, but also ourselves.

## POWER AND DEVELOPMENT

5.1 To recap, with regard to the ideals of development:

The **Liberal view** believes that the competitive market economy produces greatest economic 'growth' and thereby human development. Modernization will close the gap in living standards between classes, between East and West and between 'advanced' and 'less developed' nations. Ultimately, we will all reach the same goal: the post-industrial society of mass consumption.

The **Socialist view** denies that economic growth will automatically reduce social tensions. On the contrary, without radical political measures towards cooperative socialism, uncontrolled 'growth' will only be to the disadvantage of those least able to compete, in rich and poor countries alike.

5.2 Which view best fits the facts? Personally I find the *Liberal* approach unconvincing and uninspiring. Unconvincing in view of the world scarcity of vital materials: certain metals, fuels, even of fresh water and oxygen. The entire world population can never now attain the life-style of the middle class North American or Swiss. Nor do I believe that the rich will ever give up their privileges without a fight, however big the national 'cake' may grow.

And would we even want that kind of world, where each family would have its private washing machine, stereo-colour TV, first and second cars? To me it would seem a nightmare of global greed, waste and pollution.

The *Socialist* view, on the other hand, looks to a society where all (and that means *all*) have equal life-chances, with the emphasis on community and creativity rather than consumption. It recognizes too that such a world society can only be built by challenging those established privileges — which the better-off like to call their 'freedoms'.

This is the way of confrontation and of solidarity, extending our loyalty to peoples on the other side of the Earth and to generations as yet unborn. It leads to the following definition of development:

**DEVELOPMENT** = the more equal distribution of power among people.

5.3 I choose power, since it seems to be the one factor that runs through

every aspect of development — be it economic, political, medical, educational or whatever. It is a kind of Lowest Common Denominator of development. A boarding school in the Punjab, a model farm in Ethiopia, a fishing project in South America, a hospital in Alaska, different though they may be, all are systems of influence.

All volunteers and technical assistance personnel, (whether they like it or not) are part of these power systems, both on and off the job. The sooner they realize this, the sooner they will have the possibility of judging their own development value.

5.4 Power is a pretty huge concept; how can we break it down; what for a start do we mean by the word?

In a nutshell: you have power if you can control or change another person's behaviour in a way that suits you. An equivalent term might be social control.<sup>1</sup>

Power, actually, is not a thing you possess, like a shirt or a radio; it is rather the dominating flow of energy in a relationship. The flow, like alternating current, may be two-way, of course: the servant can influence the master, although the master commands the servant and both need each other to exist.

So where does this all-important energy come from?

Primarily, from the sun, but for our purposes let us say that we can mobilize three sorts of power in order to control another person's behaviour:

### I Physical Power:

"Be quiet," the angry father threatens his daughter, "or I'll smack you!" If she grows quiet, she has responded to his superior power. (If she does not, then the father's threat of force did not, by definition, exercise **power** over her.)

It is this same threat of violence which loosens prisoners' tongues in the torture chamber; the same power, finally, which built the pyramids.

Superior physical energy lies behind a military junta, behind a prison, the police, behind some mental hospitals. This is the power that won the West its colonies. Man Friday may have been physically stronger than Robinson Crusoe, but Crusoe carried the gun.

This physical power underlies all our technology today. The drugs a doctor uses to pacify a disturbed psychiatric patient are chemical compounds concentrated by an industry that consumes vast amounts of physical energy.

The insecticides, tractors, mechanical sorters, drugs . . . with which we propose to solve the problems of the Third World, all have powerful social consequences affecting the behaviour of people there.

You do not need to be armed personally then, to influence people by physical power. Not only is your technology an impressive persuader, but

<sup>1</sup> Sociologists use this term rather differently, though finally it adds up to the same thing.

you are normally identified with 'the powers that be' by the local population, and in Third World countries today, the powers that be carry their own guns.<sup>1</sup>

## II Economic Power

While physical power threatens a man's back, *economic* power threatens his pocket.

This is the power of the wage packet that brings men and women to labour in the sun on endless plantations, to work a 60-hour week in the factories of Seoul, Bochum, Leningrad or Detroit amidst noise, heat, fumes and whirring machinery. This is the power of the strike and the lock-out.

Of all social behaviour, productive behaviour — the basis of wealth — is naturally the most important to control. At the same time, economic power is an even more fundamental means of social control than physical power.

Even in this day and age men still fight each other for tools, the winners earning the chance of doing a day's work<sup>2</sup> thus to earn a few cents with which to buy food for their families. This is economic power at its most brutal, but the same principle applies wherever there is mass unemployment. Surely an economic/political system demonstrates its complete worthlessness if it cannot even guarantee useful work to all its people!

Technology plays its part here too. The world-wide system of patents (especially those deliberately *unused*), the 'locking-in' of poorer countries — forcing them to buy complete technological packages, the trick of 'transfer-accounting' and the practice of **over-pricing** in the weaker countries all contain an element of the abuse of economic power.<sup>3</sup>

A development project in the Third World will obviously need to be assessed from this angle. And let us not forget this power at the individual level. Visit one of the 15,000 prostitutes in Addis Ababa, use a rickshaw in Calcutta, climb Kilimanjaro with hired porters, and you exercise your economic superiority *without* promoting the more equal distribution of power.

## III Cultural Power

This is power over men's minds. It has to do with controlling their behaviour by managing (even creating) their system of beliefs and values.

Teach a child to think in terms of *heaven, sin, salvation* and we can expect rather different behaviour from him than from a person who has grown up to see the world in terms of *class struggle, alienation* or *paper tigers*.

Each development worker in the Third World wields this power, both on and off the job, for we are all cultural salesmen whether we like it or not. Language, for example, a fundamental influence on the concepts we both

<sup>1</sup> They do in all countries, to the extent that political power — in the last resort — "grows out of the barrel of a gun".

<sup>2</sup> As witnessed by the author in Ethiopia and India.

<sup>3</sup> See the excellent journal **NEW INTERNATIONALIST**, No.5, 1973, "Traffic in Technology" by P. Maxwell. This article cites multinational pharmaceutical firms as over-pricing certain drugs in Third World countries by up to 6,500%!

have and transfer to others — how many development workers normally choose to speak the dialect of the community in which they serve? How many stick to English, French and Spanish?

Schools, missions, advertising agencies, the British Council, *l'alliance française*, *Goethe-Institut*, United States, Soviet and Chinese 'cultural' centres — all are competing for men's minds in the Third World.

CoCa Cola signs reach out to the last bush village, and even beyond that when you have climbed up the goat track and rest, a little dizzy high on the mountain looking out over the endless grasslands, from behind a rock comes a barefoot youth, his transistor radio blaring "ASPRO *stop dose aches an' pains, use ASPRO!*"

Why is cultural power so important? Because it is used to condition men's minds into accepting the two other forms of power — physical and economic.

5.5 Some people suggest that 'Expert Power' is a sub-section of cultural power. In our technically advanced societies, they say, decisions are made increasingly on the strength of 'expert advice', to such an extent that traditional politics may be giving way to 'rule by professionals'.

In an underdeveloped country this can be even more true, not only in matters of national concern, but also at the local level.

Time and again, raw Europeans and Americans find themselves taking on responsibilities far beyond their competence. A young volunteer draws up the secondary school syllabus in English for the whole of Cambodia. A motor mechanic sets about treating Ethiopian villagers from his personal medical kit. "Take one of these a day, and come back in a week." And the villagers obey their new doctor.

5.6 The question of **conditioning** needs a few more words. If I wield only physical power or economic power over a man, I make a slave of him. He will do as he is told, but unwillingly, and one day he may put an end to my rule.

But if I exercise cultural power over him, get him to accept my ideas about the world, my values about *him*, he becomes not my slave but my good and trusted **servant**. And servants are the pillars which support enduring privilege.

5.7 We should remember that power of all three kinds works in *long chains* and the three types of influence often intermingle.

A village woman in Nigeria forces her baby (*phys. p.*) to eat an imported tinned food instead of giving it her own milk. Why? Because she has been persuaded that breast-feeding is ugly and old fashioned. How did she get this idea? She has been to Lagos and seen big advertisements, showing fat babies in the arms of girls dressed as nurses, and she understood that the tinned food was clearly "Better for Baby" (*cult. p.*). Besides she was offered a *Free Plastic Baby-bottle* with every four tins of food purchased (*econ. p.*).

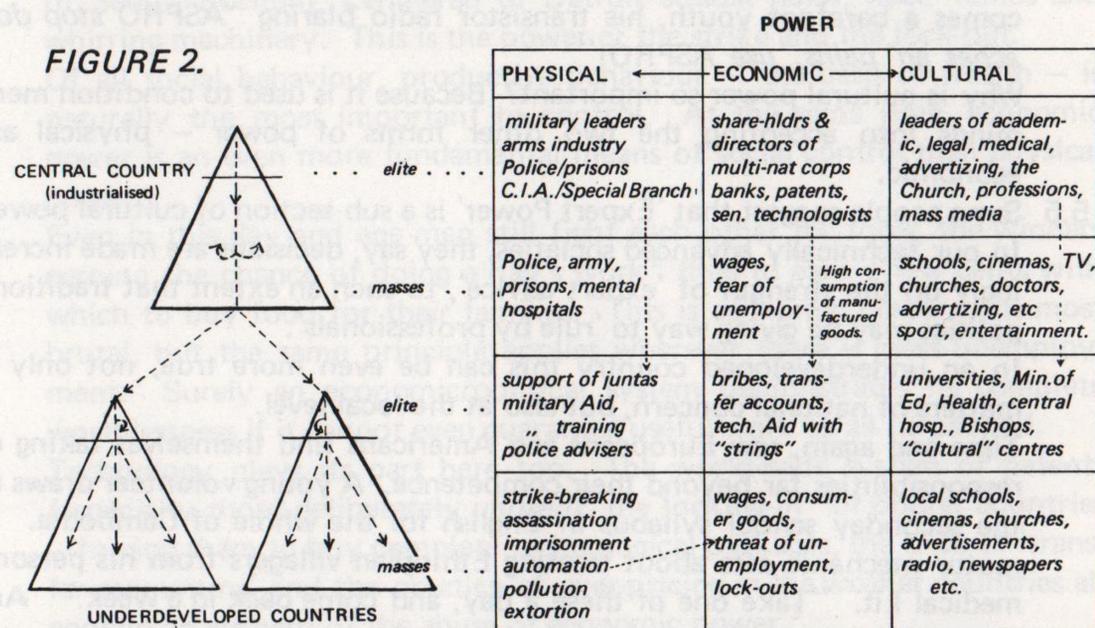
Who put up these misleading posters? An advertising firm, paid (*econ. p.*)

by the Promotions Section of the European tinned food company, on the advice of media psychologists (*expert p.*) on the instruction of the General Manager (*econ. p.*) whose first duty was towards his firm and his shareholders (*econ. p.*).

Thus, each decision, each social act, should not be seen merely as a local event. Rather, we can see it as the result of influence originating perhaps many thousands of miles away.

5.8 If we now put the above reasoning into the context of underdevelopment and the flow of wealth outlined in Fig. 1. we get the following:

FIGURE 2.



In the underdevelopment process, power can be defined as the *executive arm of wealth*<sup>1</sup>. Physical, material and cultural forces reach down, from level to level, each with the same message: "Do as you are told. Your superiors know best. Things are improving. You may succeed, as we have succeeded. Therefore, do as you are told."

5.9 This then, is the theory.

Can it really be applied to international aid programmes, to technicians genuinely working for better living standards, to teachers and missionaries based far out in the bush, helping children pass their exams, introducing new seeds and fertilizers . . . ?

### PYRAMIDS OF PRIVILEGE

6.0 We are all agreed, no doubt, that Development means healthier, happier, fuller and more meaningful lives for everyone. Earlier (p. 13) this was simply rephrased as Development = the more equal distribution of power

<sup>1</sup> N.B. In the underdevelopment process. Naturally, these three same sources of power can also be used against the underdevelopers — e.g. a guerilla raid, an industrial strike or a speech by Castro or Nyerere.

among people. And the distribution of power is reflected by the institutions in a society.

So we must take a look at the institutions now being built up in Third World countries and ask whether they are committed to the more equal distribution of power.

The first fact to strike us is that most Third World institutions are export versions of European and American prototypes.

6.1 The European discovered illness among the tribesmen and had an immediate line of thought: CURE: bring in *hospitals, pharmacies, medical schools* . . . He came across illiteracy, but thought: EDUCATE: build *primary schools, secondary schools, universities* . . . He found men drinking palm wine, with several wives and shamelessly naked; he decided to SAVE: establish *mission stations, seminaries, cathedrals* . . . He discovered fertile plains, forests, lumps of copper ore and dreamed of *joint stock companies, consortia, plantations, factories, insurance, a Central Bank* . . . He was, and remains today, imprisoned by institutional thought.

But all these institutions, as we know them from Europe and North America, are pyramids of power, steep hierarchies, where your rewards increase the higher and fewer you are.

Is this what the underdeveloped countries need? Who profits?

6.2 As a simple exercise, let us look at a real-life aid institution.

The figures below reveal the annual expenditure made by a scheme to eradicate leprosy in one province of an East African country.<sup>1</sup>

Given £70,000 for a year and the six budget items below, how might you have allocated the following percentages?

13%    45%    8.5%    10%    1.5%    22%

- |  |                          |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Drugs, medicines . . . .                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Hospital upkeep . . . .                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Travel . . . .                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. African personnel<br>(60 persons) . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. European personnel<br>(8 persons) . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Other . . . .                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

As a helpful clue to the actual distribution of expenditure we may note that the project cured some 200 patients in an average year.

Actual expenditure was: Drugs 1.5%!; Hospital 10%; Travel 13%; African personnel 22%; European personnel 45%!; Others 8.5%.

Since a number of the African employees were cooks and servants to the Europeans, an additional part of the expenditure should be noted to the advantage to the Europeans. A. and K. Holmquist<sup>2</sup> calculate that something like £35,000 went on the foreign advisers for that year. Tax free.

Not surprisingly, these same Europeans completely occupied the top positions in the project structure; nor was any training given at a professional level to any African.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spetälskan och Rädda Barnen by A. and K. Holmquist, Stockholm, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit. p.65.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit. p.41.

Such unjust priorities, whereby the European "experts" profit most from an Aid institution, are not — I believe — uncommon. But of course it is not easy to find figures as to the real way in which power and money are concentrated.

It is therefore most important that each person who goes out on a 'development' mission get the facts and decide for himself.

The following points are worth covering:

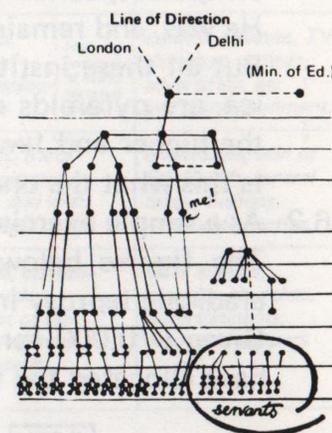
### 6.3 Structure

A good start is to sit down with a pencil and paper and draw a diagram of the project in which you work. For each position in the structure you can note the income/nationality and numbers involved. Very crude, but a pattern starts to emerge just the same. It may look something like this:

FIGURE 3

'KIMBALI SCHOOL-BUILDING PROJECT' at 1st June, 1975.

Position	No.	Nationality	Estimated yearly income + benefits \$
Co-directors	2	English/Indian	16,000/6,000
Deputies	3	English	11,000
Technicians (senior)	5	Engl/German	10,000
Technicians (junior)	8	6 Eng/1 German 1 Indian	6,000 2,500
Office staff (sen.)	2	English	7,000
Office staff (jun.)	6	Indian	700 - 1,300
Skilled manual	14	Indian	600 - 720
Semi-skilled manl.	28	Indian	400-500
Unskilled manl.	80	Indian	200-350



You can also add such factors as race, sex and age, together with experience and perhaps numbers of dependants. When you have indicated the lines of responsibility, you have your structure clear. Do not forget to include the international connections.

### Origin, Aims and Ethic

Having now a simple picture of the structure, one can usefully compare this with the original Aims of the enterprise. Does it match up? Who started the programme, on whose advice, with what purpose? Was it begun by local people and how much insight and control do they now have in its running? On what ethic is the activity based? Are all involved treated with the same consideration to their human dignity, or are some short-changed on this score?

### Decision-making

How are decisions made? Distinguish between routine, day-to-day decisions which largely operate the work plan, and those decisions which actually formulate the plan — *structural* decisions.

Follow up the case history of one such decision. Just who in the institution got the idea and promoted it; by what means? At what level were the *pros* and *cons* debated — by all who could be affected by the

decision? How quickly was the decision made, and how was it announced? Who benefited, and in which ways, and who found life harder?

Take a look too at some *non-decisions*<sup>1</sup> for these are most important. An example may make this clearer:

*"Nine months ago, the staff asked for weekly information meetings with management and field operators. Yet senior management has still not got round to deciding, or even discussing formally, whether or not to agree to this. It begins to look as if they never intend to do so."*

What could be the reasons for such a non-decision and to whose advantage might it be?

### Technology

Is it appropriate, equipping the local people with tools which they themselves control and with which they can better shape their environment? Or does it commit them to methods which are over-sophisticated, energy-hungry and controlled from afar?<sup>2</sup>

### Economy

Finally, who pays for all this activity, and who profits from it in crass financial terms?

6.4 As you put these questions to the aid institution of your choice, I should be surprised if you do not find there a firm resistance against distributing power to the local population or to the underlings in the hierarchy.

In other words, I doubt that you will find that it is a democratic institution. If you find that it is not democratic, is not distributing power even internally, you will have to ask yourself if it is indeed contributing towards *development*.

6.5 Whatever you discover about the overall set-up of your programme, you will also have to decide on your own personal stand. How about *you* and the distribution of power?

### POWER IN PERSONAL RELATIONS

7.1 We do not need to travel overseas to exercise power in personal relations, nor to submit to it. Our institutions at home, the school/factory/hospital, etc, are pyramids of power which control our behaviour for much of the time, and through which we in turn control the behaviour of others.

So too is the family, in which the father usually dominates on the strength of his economic power (and to some extent his physical power), while both parents enjoy some cultural power over their children.

But overseas, for various reasons, one's power increases as one is promoted from being any Tom, Dick or Harry (at home in Europe) to being someone *special* in the Third World set-up.

7.2 How can we assess our own personal role in development?

<sup>1</sup> See *Power and Poverty* by Bachrach and Baratz, London, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> See *Tools for Conviviality* by Ivan Illich, 1973.

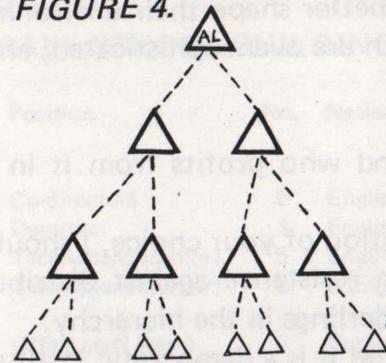
A key to this, I believe, is the point made earlier that development must take into account democracy. For the moment I do not mean political democracy at the national level (though that must come) but rather a democratic quality of relationships at the personal level of job, school, class or family.

7.3 A meaningful way to look at this is to use the work of Adorno<sup>1</sup> which distinguishes between the *authoritarian* and the *democratic* personality.

By applying various attitude measurements to many samples of people, Adorno and others evolved a scale, at the one end of which is the **authoritarian** outlook on life.

Typical of this are high conformity and submission to the stronger (plus a general admiration for toughness, hardness) and a vindictive need to punish the weaker, those who are 'different', the gentle and artistic. There is an *ethnocentric* devotion towards one's own group/race, whilst others are feared and rejected.

FIGURE 4.

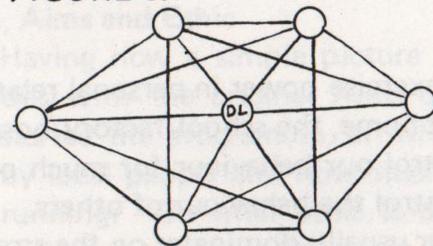


As a leader, the authoritarian tries to keep absolute power, to decide group policy and activities. He keeps communications vertical, leading to/through himself. Rigid, dominating, yet insecure, he fears initiative at lower levels as a threat to his own position.

The atmosphere in his own group tends to be competitive, tense, frustrated or (amongst the weaker members) apathetic.

7.4 At the other end of the scale we find the democratic personality, characterised by openness, flexibility, the courage to be different. Basically, this personality is not afraid of others nor of the unfamiliar, but sees each and every person as having a creative potential, whatever his/her age, race, status, etc.

FIGURE 5.



As a leader, he tries to get group members to play a full part in setting up group goals and in agreeing on how to reach them. This is not always easy; people tire; and it may take far more effort than simply giving orders.

Nevertheless he tries to spread responsibility and not to concentrate it. He encourages the flow of information between all group members, so that each has a basis for decision making.

Whilst competition may be used as a stimulus, the group dynamic is cooperation.

Make no mistake, this is still leadership, not *laissez-faire* or anarchy, but this

1 Adorno, Horkheimer and Fromm studied the phenomenon of facism in the 1930s, in Frankfurt and later in the USA. Erich Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom*, 1942, suggests that we may well be heading into a new Dark Ages of authoritarian rule.

is leadership built on concern for others. This is the leadership of love, in contrast to the authoritarian love of leadership.

7.5 Now these are two caricatures of types, rather than actual human persons, yet it is not hard to recognize these tendencies — one way or the other — in people we know from everyday life.

It is clear too that the two **structures** illustrated above are very different: the one is hierarchy, a power pyramid, and the other is a diamond, with each facet interlinked.

The leaders in these two types of group set the tone for relations between the members. In an authoritarian group, one becomes authoritarian — to survive; in a democratic group, other qualities have the chance to emerge.

7.6 The basic difference between the authoritarian and democratic personalities is that the authoritarian despises the weak, but admires and obeys the powerful, whilst one of a democratic nature — for some perverse reason — does just the opposite. He feels bound to be on the side of the weak, just because they *are* weak, and feels the need to question and criticise the strong:

This means that he will always be working to transfer initiative from the powerful to the weak. And this means, in effect, the **more equal distribution of power** I have mentioned several times.

7.7 Having got this far, let us look at our development worker, heading out for the first time, let us say, to Africa. What tends to happen?

Assuming that he is half-way along the scale between Democratic and Authoritarian as he steps aboard the Jumbo Jet and flies south, what becomes of him?

## WHITE ANTS AND BLACK

(Strange. I'd met them once before on a sponsored walk for OXFAM/Christian Aid. Later, we solved the problems of the world sprawled in their little flat on Pitcroft Road. James had engineered the Bideford by-pass (and the beans on toast, as I recall) while Monique worked long hours as a trainee-nurse.

That was years ago.

Tonight we met again, and I once more their guest, but now in N'kpwepwe. Sipping a second *dubonnet* we wait . . . James, Monique and I. Out in the warm darkness

cicadas chirp and pink lightning  
illuminates a distant storm.  
Minutes tick by. The table is laid  
with a starched white cloth; ice  
jams the neck of the boiled-water jar.  
Still we wait . . . )

James: . . . that damned cook! Fiddle-  
faddling back there with the soup.  
Ring the bell again.  
At last! Joseph! Where have you been?  
Dinner was for seven sharp!

*Excuse me, Sir. Excuse me, Madam.*

No. The guest first, then Madam!  
God . . . how many times?  
We inherited this one from the Peace Corps  
when they moved out, but he's a terrible  
disappointment. He should have been trained,  
they'd had him from a Greek who got him  
from the Baptist Mission, which  
got him out of the bush.

You can see he's an N'toto  
from the high cheekbones.

A poor lot, and every one of them

*Soup, Sir? Excuse me, Madam.*

a thief. Scurrying about, taking my  
socks, razor blades, candles, sugar —  
we call him the Black Ant — it all goes  
back to the bush. Doesn't it Joseph? He  
doesn't understand. See  
how he bows and smiles. They're big  
children really. But cunning.

In a month with us  
already he's had time off for  
one wedding, a burial and two "religious  
festivals". Now he says his wife  
must travel to Bamba to visit a sick  
relative, and "can he have an advance"?

In the early days we'd fall for that sort  
of a tale — lent our boys a small fortune,  
didn't we dear? But no more.

Not a dollar, Joseph, till Friday next.

*Excuse me, Sir. Excuse me, Madam.*

The project? I could do twice as much  
but for local interference, bureaucratic  
muddle, corruption.

If they put their mind to it (and  
with spares for the Caterpillars) we  
could cut through to Benda  
before the rains begin.

I plead with them. I curse them,  
but they won't follow the plan.  
The Highway Minister is far too busy  
with his fancy girls, and anyway  
the road is past his village now  
so why should he care?

I'm no racist, but  
the African, quite frankly, lives  
for the moment, won't analyse,  
can't plan. Ruins a tractor  
for a drop of oil and when your back  
is turned, sells  
the gear-box down at the market. (Don't  
drive down there alone. Orders from  
Military Command. Run over a chicken  
and the crowd will go for you.  
Keep moving!)

At least the Army has some backbone. Without  
it this place would go to pieces. Hanged  
five terrorists on the square  
in March. We drove down and saw them  
swinging. Didn't we, dear? Here's  
a snap. Minolta telephotomatic  
with a blue filter. Tax-free  
at the airport.

And how do you like  
Hotel Afrique? If you'd only stuck out  
they'd have put you at the Hilton  
with a far larger pool. We always  
swim there when in town. Like last week  
we motored up — 100 miles round trip —  
for bacon, fresh in  
from Nairobi.

No. You can keep your foggy Europe, all strikes and politics. It's Australia for us, or maybe South Africa next year, if they don't renew our contract. True, Monique finds her time can drag, though she has her riding now. The Swedes and Germans are often here for dinner — we surprised them once with smørgasbord and aquavit! — and there's the tennis tournament on Saturdays.

After the rainy season it's *safari time* — get away from it all — Serengeti, N'gorongoro. The animals are the finest thing in Africa. They're proud, they're clean, they have some sense. Unlike the people.

Talk about development! Not a chance while they breed like baboons. The fact is they don't *want* to get ahead. Monique told Joseph the other week she would teach his wife to read and write, cooking and hygiene. All arranged. But the woman never came. Quite typical.

Since the Peace Corps left, our only real friends have been the Johanssons — and they join the U.N.

*Excuse me, Sir. Excuse me, Madam.* in December. Ah! There you are. We need more ice for the drinks, and you can take away these dishes. Leave the washing up if you like — it's getting late. You may do it in the morning.

8.1 In the lines above, names have been changed of course, but otherwise each phrase I have heard from some ex-patriate or other. Nor does this exaggerate the typical attitudes. Some genuine phrases I would not dare to include for fear of it sounding a caricature!

The colonialist mentality did not die out with the coming of political

independence, neither amongst the Europeans nor — alas — amongst many of the people of the Third World.

Whilst we have no scientific evidence as yet (research is needed here) I am convinced that the majority of Europeans become *markedly more authoritarian* during a stay in an underdeveloped country — even as simple tourists.

8.2 The conversation above illustrates the widespread

- i **ethnocentrism**, a dislike and fear of "foreign" races (though in this case the European himself is in the minority and is technically the foreigner);
- ii **arrogant decision-making** — with Joseph, and doubtless with the staff on "his" road-building project.
- iii admiration for **discipline and power** and a systematic humiliation of the weaker.

During three years in Africa I have seen this authoritarian trend take place in work colleagues, in good friends, in myself.

8.3 Why this happens is fairly clear.

Each one of us has an authoritarian side to his personality — not surprisingly; for most of us have tasted oppressive rule in some form or other — but at home this may well have been contained.

Suddenly we arrive into a society which is openly authoritarian, still a colony in mental terms. The rich, some now with black faces, still luxuriate in modern quarters<sup>1</sup> while the peasants still pick scraps from their dustbins.

Of middle class tastes, we may not have asked for privileges of income, social status and accommodation, but they are thrust upon us. The forces of Law and Order defend our right to those privileges against beggars, thieves, revolutionaries.

Yet the developer comes to help ordinary people. How does he find an emotional balance in this dilemma?

In the early days, the newcomer is unsure how to behave, what to believe. He usually experiences some conflict, wanting to meet Africans and Europeans alike — without regard to status — on the principle that people are people everywhere.

But he finds himself the guest of James and Monique — so hospitable — who take him well in hand.

The irony, the paternalism of their conversation is infectious and the newcomer starts to pick up the habit. Reluctantly at first, but he smiles at his host's jokes about African 'stupidity'. He looks serious and indignant as he hears of an Asian clerk's 'cheek' to an Expert's wife.

And soon he has his own small tales to tell, of African inefficiency, Asian blunders. He has to. Without them, he will not only be a bore at the cocktail party circuit, but worse, he will be suspect of being *an idealist*.

8.4 He will be expected to keep servants of various kinds — even the average

<sup>1</sup> See *L'Afrique Noire Est Mal Partie* by René Dumont, Paris, 1962. Old, but still relevant today.

See too — vital reading — Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961.

volunteer nowadays seems to have a cook/housekeeper — with the justifications:

- a) my expert, European time is so valuable to Africa that not a minute can be wasted on such activities as washing up and keeping the house tidy;
- b) I pay above the normal rate for servants, so these are not servants any more but employees, members of staff;
- c) as I provide employment, where many go without jobs, this is a contribution to development; it is not for my sake that I have them, but theirs;
- d) my servants like me, because they smile and joke with me; I give them clothes and postage stamps off my letters; they don't think of me as a master but as a friend.

While there may be an element of truth in each one of these points, I believe they are basically rationalisations. Europeans employ servants for one main reason: it is a cheap and easy way to avoid the dreary work of washing clothes, making beds and cooking meals. Naturally, he will smile at your jokes, but the servant remains a servant. In fact it is often the African or Asian 'boy', himself trained during the colonial era, who cultivates a master out of the pale graduate fresh from Oxford.

(At first it is embarrassing to see that the dirty underpants you forgot by the bed have miraculously washed and ironed themselves and slipped neatly into a drawer. But you adapt. Three months later personal laundry is just another expected service.)

8.5 Language difficulties — with students, servants, shop-keepers — can also lead to authoritarian relationships. The politenesses with which we sweeten our demands in Europe — "Would you mind . . ." "Could you manage to . . ." are not always easy to translate into Tamil or Amharic. Requests simplify into a series of short instructions, which soon become orders.

Language also strengthens the ethnocentric tendency. Speaking Finnish, German or even English slang, ex-patriates can immediately create a barrier which will exclude any Third World 'foreigners'.

A deliberate use of complicated technological jargon can be used to the same effect, as a way of exploiting the 'expert power' mentioned earlier (p. 17).

8.6 The newcomer will suffer a great deal of frustration at work. He arrives eager to get on with the job. Probably he has only a couple of years. So he wants quick results, preferably concrete evidence that can be photographed, creditable exam results or some other measure of his efforts.

It takes him a while to realise that people of the Third World are enormously polite, that fifteen times "Yes" may still make a "No", that "Soon" may mean "Probably; in the not too distant future; so let us not give up hope".

Frustrated, as the weeks go by, he grows aggressive. He becomes more, not less, sure that *his* project, *his* solutions are vital. He grows frantic. He demands to see the Minister (which he would never dream of doing back

home, however frustrated). He appeals to his sending Agency, and perhaps the Ambassador, to press his cause.

Conflict often centres around the matter of definition. The European says, "This is your problem and therefore *that* is the right solution." But it may well be that those who were born in the country (and who will be living there still when the European has returned home, his project but an exotic memory) will define the problem in rather a different way, perhaps with reference to the local personalities involved.

When the African does not at first accept the European definition of a problem, the Expert reminds himself that possibly 'social and cultural blockages' are to blame. If he does not accept our view of reality at the second time of offering, the tendency is to slip into the 'they-are-just-like-children' line of thinking. But if, after a third or fourth time, he ignores, misuses or rejects our Truth, then the back-lash sets in and the European starts to see the African as a wilful idiot.

8.7 The newcomer will meet other frustrations. He may find that some citizens of the Third World don't especially want his cheerful friendship. (Why should they? They have worries of their own; the struggle for survival is no joking matter.)

He may suffer from prickly heat, sickness, cramps, flea-bites. His Hi-Fi equipment can be held up for months at some coastal town a thousand miles away. He may be longing to hear how Liverpool have done against Benfica.

Who can he turn to?

8.8 In nine cases out of ten, the course is simple: he turns to the other Whites. They have been expecting him. They sympathise.

Apart from work contacts, the odd wedding or a visit to a student's home, he does not spend much more time trying to get to know the 'the people'.

It is difficult to keep a foot in both camps anyway, and he is looking for firm ground, a pattern of values and behaviour that he feels secure with, and one that meets with approval. He finds it and adopts it — or it adopts him. Europeans have used it for hundreds of years, falling back on their advantages of physical, economic and cultural power. It is called Domination.

The Africans, Asians and Latin Americans are not surprised. They've seen it all happen before.

8.9 Some might argue that none of this matters. Let the job be the measure of your success, they advise. Build your road, grow even more maize, remove another appendix — democratic human relations are only of secondary importance.

I do not agree, and here we come back to power.

In power terms, authoritarianism amongst "aid" personnel is the very opposite of being developmental.

It seems to me that any doctor, teacher, technician — however skilled — is *anti-developmental* if he must rely on hierarchical power to be able to

function. For real development is not a matter of this job or that job, but about making the maximum number of people confident, aware and eager to question. Now.

These are not 'long-term goals' of development, as some would have us believe. Confidence, awareness and the eagerness to question are the *very means* of development.

8.10 In the gleaming operating theatre of a modern hospital in a Third World capital city, a heart surgeon, let us say, saves the lives of 150 patients a year. He also trains several Third World surgeons in the diagnosis of certain heart complaints and in surgical techniques. With these then, he shares his power and makes them stronger.

But at what cost?

To perform, the surgeon demands total obedience, expensive technological backing, a wide range of drugs, a staff of anaesthetists, nurses, doctors, matrons, registrars — in fact the complete institution of a large central hospital.

Without these he is lost, like a king without his court.

To meet these demands a Third World country pays dearly.

It pays with the health and lives of tens of thousands of people in rural areas — those who fall ill and die each year for lack of clean water, simple treatment, health education, a proper diet.

Their lives could have been saved by a different Health policy: one devoted to the widest distribution of power, with vast numbers of tiny clinics, locally manufactured drugs, perhaps herbal medicines, mass vaccinations nutrition and clean water programmes.

But in most Third World countries this cannot happen, for their elites have adopted the ethic: Cure is more Profitable than Prevention, and Heal Rather the Ten sad cases who can reach Hospital, than Help the Thousand who cannot.

*Could* our heart surgeon become democratic, whilst still keeping his position in the Third World hospital? To me, it seems a contradiction in terms. His status requires that he be treated with the utmost respect, on (and apparently off) the job. His skills are so refined that only a few select colleagues may ever learn them. His cases are interesting 'objects' to be performed upon, discussed, written up for a scientific Abstract, but never to be treated as equals. His salary and privileges are fixed accordingly high.

That he should start thinking in democratic terms, encouraging questioning, demanding equal access for all to surgical care, pressing for better pay for ward orderlies and for their representation on the Hospital Board of Governors? Unthinkable, if he wants to keep his position.

8.11 For the ex-patriate **teacher** the problem of democratic relations is less acute, but it still exists. Schools are traditionally authoritarian and teachers enjoy a certain status, particularly if they teach in their mother tongue and have a sheaf of university notes to wave about.

Naturally, a teacher must keep some authority, but for any real learning to

occur, a questioning process has to start in the minds of all the students.<sup>1</sup> This is vital, if the teacher's authority is not to degenerate into domination. To keep authority, yet transfer power, the teacher has to respect the dignity of the learners, even when they are driving him/her round the bend! Of course this is easier to write than to achieve, yet to have any hope of success it would seem that three further conditions need to be met:

- i) the teacher's understanding of the language and home environment of the learners;
- ii) the teacher's commitment to the welfare and progress of the whole group, and not only its most able pupils;
- iii) a school system which permits conditions i) and ii).

Indeed one starts to wonder if any ex-patriate teacher can develop really democratic relations in Third World school.<sup>2</sup> The examination system cuts right across such efforts. So do the attitudes of other teachers. Then there is also the question of the syllabus he has to teach.

The next section may make this clearer.

#### BACKGROUND ON 'ABA COUNTY'

*This example does not try to cover all the points made so far, but it may be of some help as a case study.*

*In this description of a rural education project in 'Afroland', dates, statistics and other information are all based directly on fact; only place names have been changed.*

9.1 'Aba County' is green, hilly and well watered, and surprisingly cool for the tropics.

Though only a few miles from the busy capital of Afroland and one of the first parts to be colonised and made Christian, it remains typical rural Africa.

Many problems face Aba's 35,000 population, despite all these years of contact with Europe. These were made clear to me during a recent visit. As I cycled round the villages, together with African health and community development workers and the newly-appointed Administrator for the county, villagers raised the following problems again and again:

- i. No medical service. The mobile, ½-day a week clinic, had stopped its visits six months earlier.
- ii. Bad housing, poor water supplies, lack of food.
- iii. Lack of trading centres, lack of advice as to which crops would sell. Need for better marketing of crops (now controlled by a few lorry-owners) need for better prices in the county, need for immediate pay-

<sup>1</sup> The need to stimulate questioning (through a process of dialogue) as the dynamic for development, has been most forcibly made by Paulo Freire; see *Cultural Action for Freedom*, 1971, and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to schooling, health and religion, read *Celebration of Awareness and The Church, Change, and Development*, 1970, and *Deschooling Society*, 1971, by Ivan Illich.

ment for crops delivered to wholesalers.

- iv. Lack of things to do in leisure time. Need for entertainment, sports facilities and equipment.
- v. Lack of schools, school-buildings, teachers' housing, flat land for sports fields.
- vi. No electricity to the villages.
- vii. Bad roads, isolation.

9.2 Although Africa is said sometimes to be "infatuated with education", it is interesting to note that economic and health matters rated higher on the list than schools.

Nevertheless it is true that many people do believe that the school is the only way to escape rural poverty.

And it is poverty that is the basic feature of Aba County.

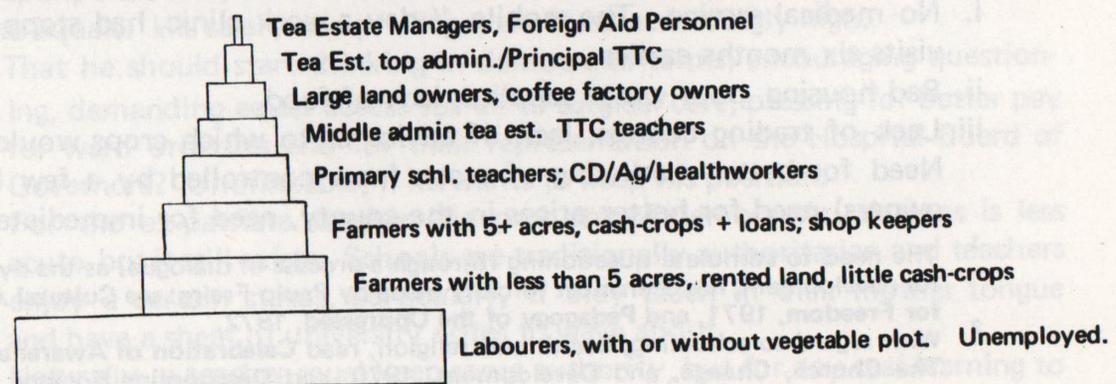
But here comes the paradox: Aba County is rich!

9.3 For a start there are three large tea plantations, employing some 2,200 labourers and selling tea for over US\$4½ millions per year. However, all the plantations are foreign owned. The sum total of wages and taxes paid each year to Aba labourers and County Administration is about US\$635,000. Then there are several (African owned) large coffee and cotton farms, and mills for husking and washing coffee beans. The owners of these live pretty well, though the prices they get when they sell to local traders are anything from half, down to one-sixth the price that these crops are sold to the consumer. The poorer farms have only beans and bananas, but face the same problem, their products double and treble in the hands of the middlemen.

9.4 True, 'progressive' farmers can now borrow money (indirectly from the World Bank) to buy tea bushes and fertilizer. But they must sell their tea to the plantation factories for about one-sixth the value of its final selling price. At first the interest rate on their borrowed capital looks small — a mere 1% — until one notes that this is per month (1971).

9.5 Aba people, then, are poor and the county is underdeveloped. The only decent roads, the only electricity and telephones go to the tea plantations and to a Teachers' Training College (European Director) set high up, amid green lawns and flower beds, on the highest hill in Aba.

9.6 A social pyramid of Aba County shows the following structure:



Wives and families share the status of the men at each of these levels. Between the strata, communication may occur in the course of work, but seldom otherwise.

Let us now take a look at the incomes enjoyed by these groups (before tax) in 1971, and we shall see that over 91% of the tax-payers of Aba County earn less than US\$290 a year. In fact 50% earn less than US\$215 a year.

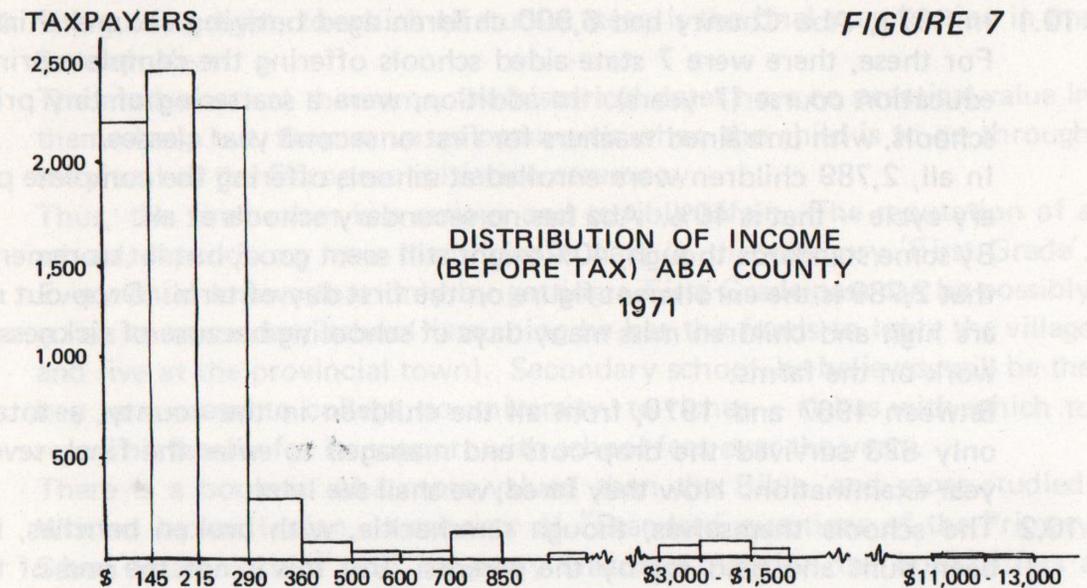


FIGURE 7

The tiny 'middle class' includes richer farmers, prosperous traders, primary school teachers, factory workers on tea plantations.

The even tinier 'upper middle class' covers one or two rich farmers, lecturers at the Teaching Training College and top administration of the Tea factories.

It is then worth noting that the *six remaining persons*, of whom four were European, together earned about US\$75,000 in a year.

The best paid of these, according to my calculations, earned in one year about 90 times the average wage paid to an Aba labourer.<sup>1</sup>

9.7 Where Aba County is going in terms of local government, nobody knows. Political parties are banned, and political activity is punishable by death under the rules of the military regime.

No development plan exists for the region, and there is no forum for discussions other than the Administrator's office. This Administrator, for 35,000 people, has no telephone, electricity nor even a map of the county in his office. He travels in the hilly terrain by cycle; not a bad thing for internal contacts, but hard going in an emergency, or keeping in touch with Regional Headquarters, 60 miles away.

9.8 Aba could be a rich developing area. It has good soils and can produce crops which are valuable locally and on a world market. Yet as a county

<sup>1</sup> Thus he earned in one year, the equivalent of three lifetimes' earnings of an African farm-labourer who starts work at 15 and dies at 45!

it is not developing. Some sectors may be doing so but others are actively underdeveloping the peoples' life chances.

Can the schools in Aba County help to solve this problem?

### THE SCHOOL IN A RURAL AREA

10.1 In 1971, Aba County had 6,900 children aged between six and thirteen. For these, there were 7 state-aided schools offering the complete primary education course (7 years). In addition, were a scattering of tiny private schools, with untrained teachers for first or second year classes.

In all, 2,789 children were enrolled at schools offering the complete primary cycle — that is 40%. Aba has no secondary schools at all.

By some standards though, 40% might still seem good, but let us remember that 2,789 is the enrollment figure on the first day of term. Drop-out rates are high and children miss many days of schooling because of sickness and work on the farms.

Between 1967 and 1970, from all the children in the county, a total of only 623 survived the drop-outs and managed to enter the final, seventh year examination. How they fared, we shall see later.

10.2 The schools themselves, though ramshackle, with broken benches, have been built and paid for by the parents. But this is not the end of their expenses. School fees are high. A single child costs between a fifth and a tenth of a farm worker's average yearly income. As families may have six, seven, eight children, the burden of school fees can be truly enormous on a family already at poverty level.

In the seven 'good' schools, to which children and parents naturally aspire, 39% of the teachers have either 'sub-standard' training or no teacher training whatsoever.

10.3 Much of the content of the primary curriculum is of secondary school standard. It is complex, academic and full of pedantic detail.

Each child dutifully copies off the blackboard diagrams of *THE EYE* ('sclerotic', 'choroid', 'ciliary muscle'), *THE EAR* ('endolymph', 'perilymph', 'malleus, incus and stapes') and *THE ECONOMIC MAP OF BRITAIN* (showing steel, ship-building and coal mining — no child ever having seen coal or a ship in his life).

If you ask them what their five senses are, or whether the Tea Plantation lies north or south of the school, they have no idea. Neither has the teacher. The points of the compass they take up under Geometry — a pretty pattern — along with "drawing of pentagons, hexagons and octagons and discovering their properties" . . . according to the *Reformed Primary School Syllabus of 1965*.

Geography covers Afroland of course and other African countries, but also pays great attention to Fiji, Samoa and the Gilbert & Ellice Isles (ex-British colonies). It makes no mention of the Soviet Union or China.

History devotes 20-22 lessons to the civilisations of Greece and Rome and 13 lessons to the first English "discoverers" of Africa for those children lucky enough to reach the sixth year of study. But during the same year they will only get one lesson on the Organisation for African Unity, or 'Agriculture in my Region Today'.

After the second year, all teaching is done in English (though all staff are African) and the final examination is also in English.

10.4 The guiding light, to which all studies steer, is the final examination in the Seventh Year.

The mathematical theorems, the historical dates have no practical value in themselves, but they serve as passwords when the child is to go through the ritual of the European initiation ceremony.

Thus, the final exam is a serious and terrible affair. The reputation of a school depends on how many pupils pass in the category 'First Grade'. Every child knows that only by getting a First Grade pass can he possibly go on to secondary school (assuming he has the funds to leave the village and live at the provincial town). Secondary school, he believes, will be the key to success, to college, to university, to riches — riches with which to repay his family for its support with school fees over the years.

There is a book in Aba more valued than the Bible, and more studied. Written by an Indian, it consists of "Standard questions of the Primary Seven Examination" and for every standard question the book offers a *Correct Answer*. Alas for the children and teachers of Aba, reading aloud, memorizing, copying and recopying Correct Answers in ragged exercise books . . . !

#### RESULTS of the SEVENTH YEAR EXAMINATION for all candidates entering from ABA COUNTY for the years 1967-70:

TOTAL entered for examination	623	
PASS First Grade	26	4.2%
PASS Second Grade	489	78.5%
FAILED	108	17.3%

In Afroland as a whole, about 10% of candidates normally pass First Grade. The towns do better. These are fairly typical figures for rural areas.

10.5 So just what function does Primary education have in the development of Aba?

For some, the gamble pays off, but for the majority I believe the rural primary school is a bus, overloaded with hopeful children squeezed in the doors and out of the windows — going absolutely nowhere.

The rural school does not educate, does not strengthen; it selects. Having prepared some few students for the first steps in an academic career in 19th Century Europe, it drops its weaklings back onto the farm, with a handful

of inaccurate notes in bad English on the properties of pentagons, hexagons and octagons.

Across the board it creates, as President Nyerere has said, a nation of failures.<sup>1</sup> Psychologically and materially.

10.6 But the story does not end here.

The world's leading experts in education know very well that rural primary school courses are irrelevant to the needs of everyday life in the village.

Far over the seas, a group of such experts met in 1966. They decided to set up an experimental project to:

"... investigate the adaptation of primary education for development of life in rural areas — thereby helping to reduce the migration of young people to the towns."

In particular the project would:

- \* Provide sound experience in general education . . . and vocational (work) education . . .
- \* Ensure a complete primary education for the greatest number of children . . .
- \* Introduce a new curriculum content, teaching methods and materials in the primary schools and in in-service teacher training. . .
- \* Provide functional literacy, general education, crafts, nutrition and health education for youth and adults, men and women . . .

And by fate or fortune, of all the millions of square miles of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the experts chose to focus this ambitious project on — *Aba County*.

### A SERIOUS CASE of XANTHOSOMA SAGITTIFOLIUM

11.1 Alongside one of the Tea Estates, lies Aba Teacher Training College. Some 200 boys, with varying amounts of Secondary education, study there before going out to teach in the village primary schools.

In 1969, when a number of international experts had visited the college and approved it as the base for an "integrated project for education in rural development", a contract was signed between the Ministry of Education in Afroland and the Technical Assistance agency concerned.

An expert in primary school science courses moved out to the college, and the project was ready to begin.

11.2 At a personal level, this project does not illustrate very well the power structure I have described earlier.

The expert did not dominate a vast power pyramid, though his income made him the highest paid person in the county. He lived very simply in an old house, rented from the Tea Estate, and though of a classic authoritarian disposition, he had no servants beyond his driver and a college student who lived in and helped with the housework for a period. For

<sup>1</sup> Education for Self-Reliance, speech by Julius Nyerere, March 1967.

some months, the expert had an African counterpart, but they did not get along and the African resigned.

Rather than dominance, then, the project seemed more marked by its isolation.

Nevertheless, this example does illustrate how one can run a development project without ever facing up to the real nature of underdevelopment. If the theory is wrong, then the practice has little chance of being right.

11.3 The strategic approach chosen was to base the project on "new curriculum content, teaching methods and materials".

To be able to produce this new approach to education, the expert had collected data on local climate, geology, flora and fauna.<sup>1</sup> He had stencilled out lists of plants in the area, e.g.:

*E-Jjuuni*

*New Cocoyam*

*Xanthosima mafaffa, Xanthosoma sagittifolium.*

*A herbaceous tuberous perennial with large sagittate leaves.*

These lists were to be distributed (at some future point in time) to trainee students and primary schools, to provide a scientific basis to their biology studies.

In a row of empty kerosene tins by the college office were piled various stones from different parts of Afroland. In 525 other tins grew different plants, not only from local area, but from the USA and Australia — each with its latin label.

The expert's house and demonstration room were indeed fascinating. Visiting Ministers and authorities on rural education came from as far as New York, Lagos, Colombo to see the animal skeletons, the boards showing a moth's life-cycle, different types of grasses, electric motors (cleverly made out of an iron nail, copper wire and a razor blade), model electrical cranes, and other inventions which demonstrated principles of physics, such as balance, the transfer of heat or the oxidation of metals. Unfortunately, for Aba trainee-students, these rooms were out-of-bounds.

In the grounds of the Training College, however, they could see a snake pit (containing one python), a fish dam, a weather station, an arboretum and a collection of signposts showing the distance by air from the college to Paris, Sydney, Buenos Aires . . .

In his two and a half years, the expert had worked hard, and he believed in what he was doing; but on what **theory of development** did all this activity rely?

11.4 On the theory that the **spread of scientific ideas** will lead to progress.

Afroland, according to this theory, is short of 'job-makers' yet is swarming with 'job-seekers'. Thus, development = the increase of 'job-makers'.

Unfortunately the African does not only lack a spirit of enterprise, he also lacks a rational approach to life. His knowledge of science is abysmal; he does not see around him all the richness that his country has to offer

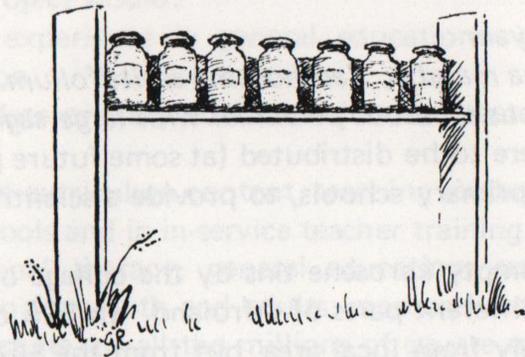
<sup>1</sup> As per my visit in late 1971.

Since he does not recognize limestone, he can never start to produce cement. He does not know that the red-leafed tree that grows over his hut is in fact *Euphorbia*, a plant much valued in Europe. Though his village has no electricity, if he can learn to make his own motor from a nail, some copper wire and a razor blade, he will begin to understand the principle of electric current, which is perhaps even more important.

The following example may make clearer this theory:

A few yards from the fish pond stood a wooden framework. On it stood seven large jars, each of which held a chemical solution.<sup>1</sup>

Jar number one contained a "complete solution"; jar number two had everything minus sulphur; jar number three everything but iron . . . and so on.



In these jars maize was to grow, the idea being to show that it grew best in the complete solution and less well when various elements were missing.

(As a teaching method, we will agree, this can be a striking way to show that plants need nourishment. It may possibly even show the value and composition of artificial fertilizer).

Years later, according to the theory, certain trainee teachers will recall this demonstration and repeat it in a primary school — assuming they can get the necessary jars and chemicals, perhaps 200 miles from a chemist. The school children are impressed; they suddenly see that artificial fertilizers are important. They tell their parents, who also grasp this truth and start to use these modern methods. Their crops grow bigger, their incomes rise, development is at hand.

Furthermore, the children discover that it is profitable to cultivate the soil if such big harvests are the reward, and lose the urge to leave for the big city.

11.5 That, at least, is the theory. In some ways it is attractive. There are hints of **intermediate technology**, simple and imaginative methods<sup>2</sup>. It seems

<sup>1</sup> At least, they should have done, according to the labels. During three months of my visit they were unused.

<sup>2</sup> I recall the expert's anger though, at the loss of some tools. He was not consoled by my remark that the stolen hammers and saws might produce more development than all his demonstration materials.

practical, linked to agriculture and production, to the local environment. Visiting experts seem to be impressed, so what right do we have to be critical?

To my mind, we have every right, for this is an approach which discounts the social reality described in earlier chapters.

It is based on the notion that underdevelopment is, first and foremost, a technical problem, which new techniques can solve.

It takes no account of local economic conditions, the poverty, the dominance of the tea plantations, the flow of wealth.

The majority of Aba farmers *knew* about fertilizers, weedkillers, insecticides. If they did not use them it was because they could not afford to take the risk. Even had they got a bumper harvest, they were totally dependent on the rich lorry owners to drive their crops into the city. If the farmers argued over the price offered, their crops would be left to rot by the roadside.

11.6 But the main criticism concerns **participation**, or lack of it.

The project was drawn up by an expert, four thousand miles from Aba County. It was 'sold' to the Ministry of Education in Afroland as a prestige project which would attract international experts from all over the world. (This it actually did, for afternoon visits, Aba being conveniently located close to the capital with its international airport).

At no point were local farmers consulted, nor had school teachers or children ever been invited to help in setting the goals or criticizing the method of the programme. It was a brave farmer indeed who dared to set foot on the green lawns of the Teacher Training College!

11.7 Could it have been different? Could one have introduced a rural education programme that was both developmental and democratic?

With a different approach, I think this could have been achieved. This would have involved the direct linking of education in the county to an Area Development Plan, conceived and approved by the local people themselves.

The Aba schools would have been broken out of the traditional examination system and put at the disposal of the entire community as centres for mass campaigns in literacy, social arithmetic and development studies. The whole would have been enlivened by county-wide programmes of culture and sport.

Since the people themselves were so poor, special taxes would have had to be raised from tea plantations and rich landowners, not only for the educational programme but also for the Area Development Plan.

Wouldn't this have been rather dragging politics into education? Of course! Politics, education and development are a whole. Keep them apart and you get the approach symbolized by the Aba project: a narrow reform(?) of one part of the syllabus.

Thanks to this approach, the children of Aba know the common yam as an *herbaceous tuberous perennial!*

## DEVELOPMENT AT HOME

12.1 It seems unlikely to me that a person will succeed in promoting development in a foreign land, if he does not even *recognize* underdevelopment at home.

Yet each year several thousands of Europeans and North Americans turn a blind eye to inequality all around them and head off overseas.

Of course they know that there are poor people in their own countries, but they would reject the old saying that Charity begins at home, and argue that the poor of the Third World are far worse off (true) and therefore in greater need of their expertise (false).

Most of them have something of a theory as to why we still find poverty in the midst of prosperity. It is the "vicious circle" argument,, reminiscent of the *Liberal view* of the Third World. It goes like this:

### The Poverty Cycle Theory

12.2 "People are poor because they live in a culture of poverty. They are inadequate because their parents were feckless and unintelligent. Children with inadequate cultural backgrounds do badly at school. Then they get the poorest jobs or go unemployed. With low, unsteady incomes they can only afford slum housing or are homeless as they start families of their own. They know little of sexual restraint, have too many children, who grow up in squalor, apathy and ignorance, and do badly at school . . ."

These people are already being helped a great deal by the Welfare State, this argument goes on, and of those who do not break out of the poverty cycle, most cannot really be trying. They are the sort of person who will not do an honest day's work — certainly not so long as there are so many state benefits to be enjoyed. Given better housing, 'they would only keep pigeons in the front room'. These are the *undeserving* poor, and there is little to be done to help them.

Their children, though, can be taken away to a children's home to be properly fed and looked after. If necessary, the local authority can assume full parental rights until the child is 18.

However, there are also the *deserving* poor, those who are 'genuinely trying to improve themselves'. Such people can be identified by various tests, administered by professionals. Once passed, they can apply for different forms of assistance. They may be retrained for a special job, given clothing to help them keep clean and neat, and given psychiatric treatment should their problems result in nervous disorders.

During periods of mass unemployment the Welfare States do not let these people starve, but provide widespread relief<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> If only to keep the situation from getting out of hand. The relief is later reduced to force the able bodied back onto the labour market again. See: *Regulating the Poor*: by Piven and Cloward, 1972.

12.3 Another approach, recently adopted to break the so-called poverty cycle (reminding one rather of 'Aba County' and other experiments — the bones of which lie bleaching in the sun in many an African country) is the *IMPROVEMENT AREA* approach.

Frightened by the poverty of our slums — or rather by the violence this poverty leads to, spilling over into respectable middle class districts — our governments have decided to apply Community Development techniques at home.

A part of a town is selected because of its squalor as an area suitable for *Urban Aid, General Improvement or Educational Priority*. Limited funds are then made available to pay for community development workers, new primary school classrooms, flower beds, language kits for 'slow' children<sup>1</sup>. Funds go too to community centres, offering ping-pong, coffee and bingo.

12.4 The principle behind this view of poverty is that the blame is to be found *within* the 'problem' people, either in their genetic heritage, their psyche or their culture.<sup>2</sup>

This theory assumes, likewise, that the institutions in our society such as schools, industries, the law, the services of local government, combine to help these people, and thus to reduce inequality in general.

12.5 It seems odd to me that volunteers can set off to help the Third World with this view of poverty as their guide. For if we extend that logic to the Third World, 2,000 million people are, by definition, "inadequate".

### Structural Deprivation

But we have a second, far more convincing explanation for failure/poverty in our midst, and this can indeed be applied globally.

It is the theory of **structural deprivation**.

What does this mean? Simply that our society and the institutions within it, is organized in such a competitive way that for some people to succeed, others must fail.

The most obvious example, of course, is the competitive economic system, in which the stronger firms eat up the weaker, taking over their markets and their skilled personnel and firing the 'redundant' employees — all in order to make bigger profits. Even within a firm this process goes on continuously, the competition being imposed upon departments by management, and the aim being to rationalize away persons, processes even whole departments if they are not fully cost effective.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. the P.L.D.K. — Peabody Language Development Kit, constructed in Nashville, Tennessee; introduced to British community projects in 1969-70. In itself a colourful, stimulating learning programme, but criticised by British teachers for its Americanisms. Fair enough; but would they be equally critical of the Anglicisms put across in the name of education by English teachers throughout the Third World?

<sup>2</sup> Another possibility, according to Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, Paris, is that the fault is to be found in their unlucky stars! 'On ne conteste plus, dans chaque pays évolué, que les plus pauvres de ses habitants *les plus défavorisés par le sort*, méritent une aide particulière.' p.11 *GUERIR LA MISERE DU MONDE*, 1973.

But it is not only in the jungle of industry, commerce and finance that the weak subsidize the strong, for, according to this theory, the pattern is repeated within every Western institution, even in those such as education and health<sup>1</sup> in which human values are supposed to be paramount.

12.6 **Schools** are, by and large, organized in an even more outdated and stratified way than is society as a whole. Like the schools in 'Aba County', they serve up academic subjects in 45-minute packages in the same authoritarian atmosphere of competition (or apathy/rejection amongst increasing numbers of working class children) with the same insistence on giving 'correct' answers. Creativity and criticism from below are not welcome. Working class children find themselves systematically disadvantaged at each stage of the schooling process; the truancy/drop-out rate grows steadily. Many teachers are cynical of the whole set-up ("I only do it for the long vacations") and further their own careers by pushing their stronger students through the exams.

Children are deprived from the pleasure and excitement of real learning. The last years at school – and once again, this refers particularly to working class children – serve merely to keep the kids of the streets.

Yet when we look at those people who sit in power in Britain, the top managers in business, the law, politics, the civil service, education, the army – we find that between 40% and 90% in each of these groups *never went* to the ordinary schools at all – they went to expensive fee-paying (yet state-supported) private ('public') schools! And between them they have a very effective old-boy network.<sup>2</sup>

So much for a democratic education system.

12.7 **Good health** and care in sickness, presumably basic human rights, also fall far short of being equally accessible to rich and poor in our society. Once again, the poor/weak subsidize the rich/strong.

A classic example is given by Titmuss<sup>3</sup> in his study of the collection of human blood in the USA and Europe, for the blood transfusion service. Particularly where commercial firms operate (USA) to collect blood (paying \$5 a pint) for resale to hospitals (minimum price \$35 a pint) many of the very poorest in society are bled. If they have not the price of a meal or a shot of dope, their local walk-in Blood Store can fix that . . .

This system is dangerous to the donors – malnourished and ill as many are – and it also spreads hepatitis, often leading to death amongst the receivers. Further, it produces surpluses and waste of blood, followed by desperate shortages. It lowers scientific standards and introduces the profit-system into the very choice of life and death. Finally, under this system<sup>4</sup> those

<sup>1</sup> If I seem to have my knife into schools/hospitals, it is not that I believe them the worst of our institutions, but that a) I have first-hand experience of them overseas and in Europe b) I am influenced by Ivan Illich (see note p.21).

<sup>2</sup> See *Stuff the System*, published by VCOAD, 1973.

<sup>3</sup> *The Gift Relationship*, R. M. Titmuss, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> A system fortunately banned in Britain, but spreading in other countries, notably Japan, as US firms export such contaminated blood whilst importing large amounts of blood from impoverished islands like Haiti.

amongst the lowest strata of society who give of their blood can seldom afford to buy it back again the day they need it to save their own life.

12.8 Blood is only one aspect of health, of course, but it is an open secret that adequate medical care in Western society (even with the National Health Scheme) is angled to the advantage of the wealthy.

Our health services – totally inadequate in the field of mental health – repeat the authoritarian structures we know so well. The 20th Century hierarchy and emphasis on status, the miserable rates of pay and long hours for service staff, the god-like position of the consultant, the patient's lack of rights and insight into his own position, the long queues, the special arrangements and private rooms for those with influence – these are all aspects of an undemocratic system, where privilege, profit and paternalism combine to humiliate the weak.

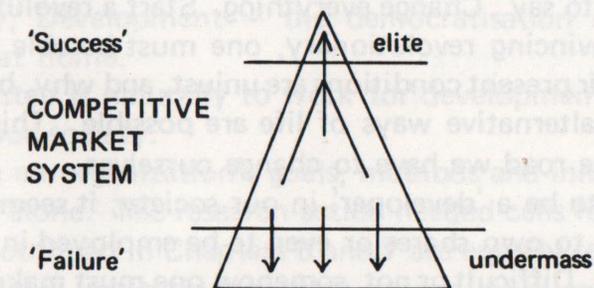
12.9 **Housing** repeats the same structural pattern.

As inflation, land speculation and quick-profit 'development' push up house prices, those who *own* property (or who have parents who do) can go on to acquire more; but those who have no such resources fall further and further behind in the race. While the privileged buy a second house in Spain, tenants of low rent property face eviction and homelessness, so that landlords can sell out to property speculators.

**The Law** is structured, so that the wealthy and influential can get away with crimes such as massive tax evasion, whilst the petty shop-lifter – a tin of coffee taken from her pocket by a triumphant Supermarket detective – is pursued to the courts and fined. Then her name and address appear in the evening paper.

Even when convicted of identical offenses, the rich and the poor get markedly different punishments, the poor getting heavier sentences and going to prison more often.<sup>1</sup> And having done time in jail, it is then not easy to get or hold a job.

12.10 So what does it all add up to? A model with which we are now very familiar:



A transfusion of wealth, a constant subsidizing of the richer by the poorer. And at the bottom of the pyramid we have the undermass, those drained of their strength, defeated by the system in which "poverty is a crime".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Om Straffens Sociale Funksjon*, W. Aubert, Oslo, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Even Disraeli, Conservative Prime Minister, recognized this!

This is the idea of *structural deprivation* as an explanation for underdevelopment and poverty in our society.

12.11 Which view comes closest to the truth? Each person must make up his own mind about this — as he must about the causes of poverty in the Third World.

If he settles for the "Poverty Cycle" view — that the cause lies in the "inadequate" people themselves — our developer will certainly not be alone. After all, this is the official view and a whole range of jobs open up to him.

He may join the Department of Social Security and give money to the poor, testing the appeals for help that come in, checking on how genuine they are, and prosecuting those who obtain more than their legal due — such as unmarried mothers with children who are found to be sharing their house with an adult male.

He may join the Social Services as a professional social worker, applying 'let's-talk-this-thing-over' case work techniques to families on the verge of break-up (usually for basic financial reasons), mental health patients, and homeless. He will work hard and wonder from time to time why the stream of clients never seems to decrease.

He may become a Probation Officer, an Education Welfare Officer or join the Prisons Service. All these arms of the Welfare State, and many more, offer a career to the young man who wants to work with 'social deviants'.

He may indeed be a Company Executive with a conscience, giving donations to charity one day, playing the stock market the next. For him there is no contradiction in this.

Or he may decide that poverty at home is not, after all, quite poor enough. With perseverance and contacts he can make the rank of international civil servant, combining the sensation of helping the World's poor, with status, salary and *per diems* that assure his personal comforts and security.

12.12 But if you take the other view, that the fault lies in the *structure* and not the people, where do you start then?

It's too easy to say "Change everything. Start a revolution."

To be a convincing revolutionary, one must be able to show people not only that their present conditions are unjust, and why, but also demonstrate that better, alternative ways of life are possible. This means hard work, and along the road we have to change ourselves,

For a start, to be a 'developer' in our society, it seems to me quite out of the question to own shares or even to be employed in a profit-making private business. Difficult or not, somehow one must make a break with these, the economic generators of structural deprivation. The only possible excuse for remaining in such a company would be as part of a plan to achieve workers' control. Shares, likewise, should only be held to gain insight into a company's dealings and a voice at its Annual General Meeting. But how then do we earn our bread and butter?

A common dilemma seems to be the choice between taking work in an

official set-up like teaching or local government, providing a service to clients, with even the chance of making them more radical and critical, but ever in danger of compromising and accepting the comforts of the system — or

breaking away from safe career structures — joining a collective, a radical theatre group, a solar energy commune — free from the control of officialdom, but in danger of growing self-centred, isolated and rejected by both the middle and the working classes.

I believe that if one genuinely works for the more equal distribution of power among people, this choice poses no dilemma. Do either. You may well find yourself doing both.

12.13 The first step is to take an honest look at who are the strong and who are the weak in our society, recognizing underdevelopment is a process, constantly separating out the 'effective', the experts, the articulate, the informed, the well-connected, the professionals, the light-skinned, the men, the adults, . . . from the 'ineffective', the non-competitive, the lonely, the unskilled, the elderly, the clients, the women, the children, the dark-skinned.

These, the systematically deprived, we must support.

Where do we start? Where we are — at work, at school, in the home. Study any of these institutions as a power structure and patterns of domination will emerge. Naturally, the privileged will set up a number of facades, of defensive myths to explain away the inequalities. These we must see through and expose.

Even in a commune or voluntary association a pattern of privilege can evolve. Such problems do not cease merely at the decision to live a collective life-style. Perhaps the more vocal/articulate members start to dominate the others by the sheer fluency of their talk. Often, the women/girls still find themselves landed as a matter of course with the dirty boring jobs. How many men campaign for justice in society, yet exploit the women in their day-to-day life!

Unlike charity, Development — the democratisation of relationships — *should* begin at home.

12.14 But the next step is naturally to work for development within the larger structures in our society.

In scrutinizing an organization's goals, methods and inner democracy, one cannot survive alone. The research action needed calls for a **group effort**.

The questions outlined in Chapters 6 and 7 are equally relevant here, as the group asks: Is this Institution working for the more equal distribution of power, and does it practise what it preaches? Set out systematically to collect facts, information, and you will find you have soon collected material which is as dangerous as dynamite — dangerous to those in power. For these power holders are not so well informed as they pretend.

There is a tremendous need for alternative research, critical research. The present research strengthens Management, the technocrats, the strong. We

need research which will strengthen those who are managed and manipulated.<sup>1</sup>

A group is also called for to formulate the goals, the vision of the society you want to build.

Lastly, you need a group for self-support. Sooner or later, if you are uncompromising, you yourselves will come face to face with established power:

in its **cultural** form: "Stop rocking the boat. Your attitudes are unprofessional, irresponsible, immature. Our figures show that your information is wrong. No, you may not see the records. You must rely on our word for it."

In its **economic** form: "The Management regrets that your services will not be required after Friday . . ."

In its **physical** form: "Leafleting on these premises is forbidden. You are under arrest and had better come down with us to the Station. Get into the car; and shut up."

12.15 This may sound overdramatic, but I believe that those organizations which avoid confrontation with the holders of power, those who pride themselves on simply 'getting on with the job', do development a *disservice*.

For all the signs are that the power elite in our society is leading us to disaster.

Today, the 'advanced' world faces huge crises — of energy, raw materials, city slums, nuclear pollution. And the vast organizations, the over-centralized bureaucracies which create these crises, are proving unable to handle them. Despite (or because of) huge concentrations of power, the wizardry of modern technology, computerization, these lumbering bodies fail to achieve simple, two-way, democratic communication. The point of decision-making grows ever higher, ever more remote.

As these crises hit us and our comforts are threatened, the danger grows of an enormous authoritarian back-lash. Our much vaunted tolerance may turn out to be skin-deep as a wave of national feeling breaks against the traditional scapegoats: 'Jews, wogs, blacks, socialists, homosexuals . . .' and against the Third World.

12.16 No organization claiming to work for development can turn a blind eye to these trends.

However specific its concern — for handicapped unemployed, for homeless families, for battered wives, for addicts, for play-spaces — an organization fails if it cannot relate its cause to the global scene.

It is not enough, say, to help homeless families find shelter. In the process — and I agree this can be very difficult when time is short and pressures are great — we must transform the dilemma of such families 'from a private problem to a public issue'<sup>2</sup> first and foremost in their own minds. They

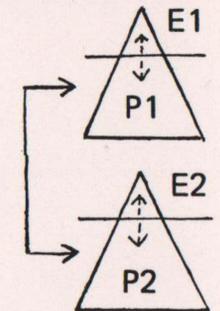
<sup>1</sup> Excellent studies have recently been carried out in Britain by such groups as SOCIAL AUDIT, Child Poverty Action Group and Shelter, each gathering data to set against official versions of inequality.

<sup>2</sup> See C. Wright Mills — *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959.

must begin to ask Why are we homeless? Why are we unemployed? and they must be helped to discover the answers in power terms.

This questioning, leading to confrontation, where the lowest levels of the social hierarchy learn to question their situation in terms of the unequal distribution of power, this is the mark by which you can tell a development programme from charity.

12.17 To refer a last time to our model: world development will become possible as and when the people P1 and P2, begin to realize that they have greater common interests with each other than they have with their own elites, E1 and E2.<sup>1</sup>



12.18 This global redistribution of power leads us step by step, choice by choice, to a socialist society, nothing less. As a guide in making these choices, we might refer to the following principles:

*" . . . men before machines, people before governments, practice before theory, student before teacher, countryside before city, smallness before bigness, wholeness before reductionism, organic before synthetic, plants before animals, craftsmanship before expertise, quality before quantity . . ."*<sup>2</sup> and, I would add, questioning before answers.

To my mind, development is about making such choices, at home or overseas. It is about challenging those who reject these priorities. It is about taking sides; and in this game, nobody is a spectator.

<sup>1</sup> This is most clearly explained by Johan Galtung in 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', *Journal of Peace Research*, Oslo, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Clarke — 'Technology for an alternative society', *New Society*, 1973, as quoted in *Impact of Science on Society* — UNESCO, 1973.

