

ECO-IMPERIALISM: Green Power - Black Death

Excerpts from Chapters

(Note: All endnotes and citations in original text have been deleted; asterisks denote missing text.)

3. Cow Dung Forever

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The Third World's poor increasingly want to trade their huts for modern homes, and enjoy running water, refrigeration, electrical lighting and other basic necessities taken for granted by westerners (and by intellectual and government elites in their own countries). They want to see their children live past the age of five, and look forward to even better lives for their grand kids. They recognize that electricity and energy are *power* – economic and political power to:

- determine their own destinies;
- build modern schools and industries, to foster better educational and employment opportunities;
- provide sufficient food to make malnutrition and famine a distant memory; and
- improve their health and environmental quality, by powering modern hospitals, water purification and sewage treatment plants, manufacturing centers, and other facilities that are commonplace in the developed world.

They resent having their choices dictated by First World environmental activists, under the guise of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and corporate social responsibility. As one Gujarati Indian woman told a television news crew, “We don’t want to be encased like a museum,” in primitive lifestyles so romanticized by Hollywood and radical greens – and so rife with desperate poverty, disease, malnutrition and premature death.

They bristle at comments like those Friends of the Earth president Brent Blackwelder piously offered in the same television documentary:

“It’s not possible for people to have the material lifestyle of the average American citizen. And that’s not necessarily a healthy lifestyle to aspire to. In fact, there are many ways in which we find Americans very unhappy, because they can’t spend any time with their families, or with their friends. There’s no sense of community anymore. It’s a hectic pace. Who would want to wish that on the rest of the world?”

For Blackwelder and other environmental ideologues even to suggest that a “hectic pace” or supposed “lost sense of community” is on par with the ravages endured by impoverished people in India or Africa is incredible. As Kenya’s James Shikwati tersely put it: “What gives the developed nations the right to make choices for the poor?”

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Citing the precautionary principle and sustainable development, environmentalists worry about air pollution caused by the “unsustainable” burning of fossil fuels, and about “hypothetical, long-run risks of climate change,” Mitra notes. But they “conspicuously ignore the real risks that poor people face today,” including indoor air pollution caused by burning “renewable biomass fuel.”

The World Health Organization says nearly a billion people, primarily women and children, are exposed to severe indoor air pollution every year. WHO links indoor air pollution to some 4 million deaths worldwide each year among infants and children – primarily from

respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia. Biomass fuels also contribute to rampant asthma among women, and lung cancer in women “lucky” enough to survive long enough to get cancer.

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“The unsustainable cutting of firewood on marginal lands also leads to erosion and environmental degradation,” Mitra points out. “Reduced economic productivity, increased human suffering and loss of life, and negative environmental consequences all result from the current reliance on ‘renewable’ energy.” And yet, “European governments, third-world bureaucrats, businesses such as The Body Shop and the European Wind Energy Association, and NGOs such as Greenpeace, have decided that ‘renewable energy’ and ‘clean development’ are the future for third world countries.”

Wind and solar power will certainly play a role, especially for isolated villages. However, unless fossil fuel and hydroelectric facilities also figure more prominently, affordable, efficient, reliable energy, economic growth, improved quality of life and increasing environmental quality “will remain a dream rather than a reality” for poor people all over the Third World, he stresses.

As Mitra and Shikwati see it, what the developing world really needs is not sustainable development but “sustained development,” and an end to the “sustainable poverty” that has plagued these nations for centuries. Environmental pressure groups see matters very differently.