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## CAPITAL, POWER, AND INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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## CAPITAL, POWER, AND INEQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

NEW EDITION

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## Ecological Crisis, Sustainable Development, and Capitalism

*Guido Pascual Galafassi*

This chapter addresses the social and ecological crisis in Latin America in relation to the regional processes of social and economic development. Poverty, social exclusion, and environmental conflicts are some of the general consequences of the contradictions that characterize growth without balanced and ecologically sustainable development. To analyze the conditions underpinning these contradictions, it is necessary to take into account three main factors. The first is the contradiction between capital and other factors of production, such as nature, space, and labor power. The second is the underdeveloped nature of the economy, with high levels of inequality and social exploitation. The third is the utilization of natural resources based on an economic strategy of pillage.

Above all, Latin America is largely a derivative market economy: a peripheral copy of the growth economies in the North, exhibiting extreme income concentration and uneven development. The acceleration of economic growth, when it has taken place, has gone hand in hand with the deceleration of national socioeconomic development. While macroeconomic indices improve, the indicators that measure qualitative changes have generally deteriorated.

In this context, to explain the ecological crisis in Latin America, it is important to consider not only the different environmental impacts but also the socioeconomic factors and contradictions extent in derivative capitalistic development. This chapter concentrates on two interconnected issues. One is the general pattern that social and economic development has taken. The other is the relationship among industrialization, natural resource exploitation, and urbanization.

In order to study the relationship between development and ecological crisis, it is important to pay attention to new perspectives that can give us more analytical insight into the relationship between society and nature. Traditional interpretations of Latin American development have not taken into account the complexity of the existing relations among socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors. These interpretations mainly conceive society as "disconnected" from its natural surroundings. This perspective does not consider the interrelations, influences, and conditions that define the concrete historical processes, which are always (directly or indirectly) forged by the interaction between social and natural processes.

To study the relationship between society, nature, and development, we need to begin by considering one of the basic tendencies of capitalism: to debilitate and destroy its own conditions of production, as noted by O'Connor (1988). These conditions include the physical environment, the regional or urban infrastructure, and human labor power. This basic tendency of capitalism is what O'Connor calls the second contradiction of capitalism (O'Connor 1988). The first contradiction of capitalism (between forces and relations of production, or capital versus labor) is internal to the system and has nothing to do with the conditions of production. The second contradiction "focuses on the way that the combined power of capitalist production relations and productive forces self-destruct by impairing or destroying rather than reproducing their own conditions—'conditions' defined in terms of both their social and material dimensions" (O'Connor 1988, 12). Thus, the second contradiction involves capital against nature, labor power, and space. An intense and continuous exploitation of natural resources, space, and labor power is required for capital to increase its value. As O'Connor puts it, "The basic cause of the second contradiction is capitalism's . . . self-destructive appropriation and use of labor power, urban infrastructure and space, and external nature or [the] environment" (O'Connor 1988, 13). It is self-destructive because the costs of health and education, urban transport, housing and commercial rents, and extracting capital from nature rise, and private costs are turned into social costs.

In the first contradiction of capitalism, the rate of exploitation of labor is a clearly identifiable element. In the second contradiction, a unique term that summarizes the totality of the human-environmental contradiction does not exist. It is possible today to find a multiplicity of social movements with diverse grievances clustered around this second contradiction. These new social movements, together with the historical labor movement, are the agents of current social struggle and transformation. They represent the force of new social struggles that, among others, involve the nature of production, the workplace, health and safety, toxic-waste generation and disposal, air pollution, natural resource depletion, the deteriorating conditions of urban life, and radical democracy as a way to solve social and ecological problems and to make social and political decisions.

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

We can characterize the historical process of development in Latin America by dividing it into four periods: (1) colonial mercantilism (1500s–1750s), (2) outward growth liberalism dependent on primary exports (1750s–1914), (3) the crisis of the “liberal model” of growth (1914–1950), and (4) the current period of transnational capitalism. Structural underdevelopment and dependency in Latin America<sup>1</sup> started in the colonial period; as the prominent Latin American historian Bagú (1949) stated, “Production was not directed by the needs of national consumers, and not even by the interests of local producers. The lines of production were structured and transformed to conform to an order determined by the imperial metropolis. The colonial economy was consequently shaped by its complementary character” (23).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the politically dominant groups that had led the independence movements in the region retained the primary export economies created during the colonial period. They did not attempt to transform the internal productive structures; they only eliminated Iberian interference in the trade of products with England and northern Europe. The logic of the productive system in this period of outwardly directed development was not conducive to the creation of a large industrial sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1998).

This situation changed in the first half of the twentieth century. The world wars and the Great Depression produced a crisis in the export-oriented economies through the collapse of external demand, and this situation limited their capacity to import. Fiscal and monetary policies were adopted to try to promote the internal market and to avoid the negative effects of the external disequilibria. In this context, a favorable climate was created for the growth of an industrial sector under national governmental protection and support. The import-substitution-industrialization (ISI) policies introduced during this period employed the available foreign exchange to acquire the capital goods needed to manufacture substitute products for those that could no longer be imported.

This type of industrialization started to decline after World War II. The transformations in the center of the world system generated a new period of “transnational capitalism.” The dependency of the peripheral economies acquired a new character: the growing multinational corporations sought new markets and cheaper production sites for their increasingly technology-based manufacturing processes. These big corporations invested in the periphery and cornered the internal market. As Cardoso and Faletto (1969) note in their classic study, this process involved the “internationalization of the internal market” in the peripheral countries. In addition, two other tendencies can be mentioned. The first was “a new international division of

labor in which the periphery acquires capital goods, technology, and raw materials from the central nations, and exports profits, along with its traditional raw materials and a few manufactured items produced by multinational subsidiaries" (Cardoso and Faletto 1969, 34). The second was the denationalization of the import-substituting industries established in the previous period (Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1998).

Various writers have criticized the different approaches to Latin American development<sup>2</sup> from the perspective of sustainable development (Mansilla 1991; Tudela 1990; Gudynas 1999; Leff 1999; Guimaraes 1999). They have noted that Latin American development efforts have been based largely on the ideology of progress and a mechanistic view of society that necessarily equates progress with growth. Capital accumulation, increased productivity, and efficiency are the indicators of advancement in this approach to development. In this context, these writers note that all the tendencies, whether liberal, neoliberal, Marxist, or non-Marxist, consider economic growth paramount. They argue that the differences among the paradigms relate only to the role of the state, the market, the social classes, and so on, but not to the intrinsic sustainability of their models of economic and social development.

Nature generally does not appear in these theories, and when it does, it is only in a residual form. The environmental restrictions on development as growth have been minimized and, in some cases, even ignored. Nature has been replaced by the concept of natural resources, and each one is considered separately. Moreover, these natural resources are assumed to be infinite and to have the capacity to support an unlimited rate of exploitation. Thus, nature does not pose any limitations on material progress.

The concept of "sustainable development" has acquired some importance in the last decades in Latin America, although the concept of sustainability does not mean the same thing for everybody. Many Latin American thinkers (Sanchez 1983; Gallopín 1987; CEPAL 1992; Leff 1994; Sejenovich and Panario 1996; Guimaraes 2001) believe the main objective of sustainable development is to improve the quality of life. This improvement is considered possible through the maximum utilization of the productive potential of the ecosystem, through the use of socially as well as environmentally appropriate technology, and through the active participation of the people in making the fundamental decisions about development.

All of these sustainable-development approaches take into account the conditions of underdevelopment and the ecological crisis. The concept of sustainability raises serious doubts about the possibility of finding an effective solution to the social and environmental problems resulting from the growth economies in the South. Taking into account the process of boundless accumulation and competition in the present globalized context, Latouche (1999) has argued that "the concept of sustainable development is

but the latest attempt to ally the bad sides of economic growth" (505). Latouche argues that sustainable development integrates environmental elements into economic calculation in a way that does not address the root causes of the ecological crisis. To reduce the process of environmental and social degradation, it is necessary to modify not only the nature of the market economy but also the logic of modernity. Taking a Marxist approach, O'Connor has strongly criticized the concept of sustainability since he argues that it is not possible to resolve the two contradictions of capitalism. O'Connor maintains that sustainable capitalism is impossible since capitalism has an inherent tendency to self-destruction, and the market economy inevitably increases poverty and ecological devastation (O'Connor 1998).

### INDUSTRIALIZATION, DEINDUSTRIALIZATION, AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The modern approaches to development present in the different Latin American regions during the last century have produced a high social and environmental impact. The economic development in the South is a bad copy of the development approaches in the North. Most of the social, economic, and ecological crises in the South have to do with the spread of the "growth economy" approach to development (Fotopoulos 1997). Whereas the market economy has improved the living conditions of most of society in the North, the imported market economy in the South has resulted in a much more uneven pattern of development than in the North and led to a bad copy of the latter's growth-oriented economies.

The industrialization process that began in the 1930s and 1940s in Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most important causes of the social and territorial transformations that have taken place in the region, as well as the origin of both its rural and urban ecological crises. The demand for labor brought about by this industrialization process accelerated migration from the countryside to the cities and gave rise to the exponential growth of the Latin American cities. The urban population, which comprised 40 percent of the total population in 1950, grew to 56 percent in 1970 and reached 67 percent by the mid-1980s.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there are differences among countries: in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, more than 80 percent of the population lives in urban areas, while in Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, and Bolivia, only approximately 50 percent live in urban areas. But the tendency is for urban growth to continue. The fact is that Latin American and Caribbean countries have been transformed from agrarian to urban countries since the second half of the twentieth century.

It is necessary to distinguish between industrialization and urbanization. The industrialization process was the main cause of the urban growth from

1930 to 1950. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the urban population has continued to grow (although at a much slower rate), while the number of industrial workers has not only stopped growing but started to decrease.

Urbanization has been accompanied by an increase in commercial, financial, and construction activities, which in turn have generated serious communication and transportation problems. Moreover, most Latin American and Caribbean cities have experienced a profound degradation of their physical environment, and increasing noise, rubbish, and pollution are the most common expressions of the expanding urbanscape. Industrialization and urbanization have generated very high levels of energy consumption. The increase in industrial production and consumption has been based on the exigencies of industrial growth rather than on any kind of integrated social and economic view of development (Vitale 1983).

To promote such industrial growth, Latin American and Caribbean governments have attracted transnational capital to finance, establish, and manage new industries. This transnational capital has brought with it new capital-intensive technologies that have not been effectively incorporated locally. This technological exogeneity has also increased the level of dependency of the Latin American and Caribbean economies on transnational capital.

One of the consequences of haphazard industrial growth has been the generation of new forms of pollution, which in many cases have been outlawed in the more advanced capitalist countries. In their haste to promote industrial development, the Latin American and Caribbean governments have not paid much attention to the environmental impact of this kind of development.

The crisis of this pattern of industrialization started in the 1970s. Structural reforms and the opening of the economy to foreign capital have been central elements in the new economies' policies since the 1980s. The respect for "market rules" associated with these new policies has resulted in extensive privatization, deindustrialization, and economic concentration. As a result, there has been an increase in unemployment, poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and the wholesale looting of the region's natural resources.

The renewed specialization of Latin America and the Caribbean as a region that exports raw materials has had a heavy impact on the natural environment. There has been a sharp increase in the rates of natural resource depletion without significant regard for replacement and conservation. The basic characteristics of a "pillage economy" exist with regard to natural resource extraction. The logic followed in this economy is to extract resources as quickly as possible, then move on to new sites when nature cannot provide anything more. This logic of natural resource extraction has led to the

exploitation of the region's natural resources without any investment in regeneration in the case of renewable resources or the rational use in the medium or long term of nonrenewable resources. Some historical examples of this logic of extraction to the point of exhaustion are the exploitation of quebracho in the Argentinian Chaco, guano in northern Chilean, and silver in Bolivia.

A remarkable contradiction is present in this mode of exploitation. The logic of extracting resources as quickly as possible undermines continuous production. It can be clearly characterized as irrational, especially in those cases of small and medium producers with limited alternatives for changing to the extraction of other types of resources. However, it is clearly profitable for large mobile capital that can afford to go elsewhere once the damage is done and an area's natural resources have been exhausted. This pillage-and-move strategy of mobile megacapital is much more evident today due to the increase in foreign investments over the last decades.

Perhaps the most illustrative example is mining activity. In the context of the new open-market policies since the 1980s, these types of activities are exclusively extractive with no regard to conservation, environmental protection, or the rational social use of resources. These activities are managed by big multinational firms whose productive and investment territory is the whole world. Thus, their method involves two steps: they swiftly exploit the resources involved through extractive processes that minimize costs and maximize profits, and then, once they have exhausted the resources at the site, they move quickly to another region to repeat the process all over again.

Examining the impact of the dominant style of development in the region on the environment, it is possible to identify a series of relevant and significant features that have persisted throughout the region's contemporary history (Galafassi 2004). These features reflect the relationships between contemporary society and the natural environment, particularly the impact of the methods of exploitation that have been used to extract natural resources. They can be summed up as follows:

The natural endowment of resources in the region has played a preponderant role in the pattern of development that has been created in the region. Because of this endowment of resources, the economies in the region are based on agriculture and export-oriented mining. Latin America specializes in the production and export of primary products. A new version of this specialization is represented by the deep integration into the global economy and the region of genetically modified organisms (Dimitriu, Howard, and Reynolds 2002; Kneen 2002)—hence the importance of considering the contradiction between capital and nature as an important aspect of the current development process.

Despite the fact that land is one of the most abundant resources in the region, it represents a limited means of production for most of the population



due to the structure of land ownership and use. There is a high degree of monopolization in the ownership of land within Latin America and the Caribbean. A small elite owns most of the productive land, which still represents their main source of wealth and power. Although this concentration of land underwent some modifications in the twentieth century through agrarian reforms, *latifundia* (large estates) are a persistent feature of the region. This has affected urban life since the cities have attracted the large numbers of rural migrants who have been driven off the land or cannot find sufficient employment in the rural areas. The large numbers of rural migrants to the cities have created severe spatial and social imbalances.

The high natural productivity of certain ecosystems in the region has led to the concentration of primary agroexport production in these areas for a long time. The extent of exploitation of the natural environment in these ecosystems has increased over time largely because of the relative resilience of the environment in these ecosystems instead of the higher levels of technological innovation in agriculture. Because of both factors, however, there have been severe signs of soil exhaustion in these areas over the last few decades, which reveals once again the contradiction between capitalism and nature.

There is a notable contrast between the urban lowland systems and the urban systems located in mountainous areas. The different environmental conditions in these two types of urban settings are responsible for marked differences in terms of traffic congestion, access to fresh water, the self-purification capacity of ground-water systems, air circulation, flood problems, and the like. Buenos Aires, for example, is located in a vast plain surrounded by major courses of water. This location creates flood problems but allows for great air circulation. These natural conditions contrasts notably with those in Santiago (Chile) and Mexico City, both of which are located in mountainous areas with water-provision problems and a high level of air contamination due to the reduced air circulation in the valleys where they are located.

The dominant pattern and mind-set of development in the region have always considered everything that is natural on the surface as an obstacle that must be removed (forests, fauna, and biodiversity) in order to use the soil for farming, mining, or urban purposes. This approach gives more value to the soil than the rest of the natural resources. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the elite in power have privatized the public lands and all the natural resources that have profitable use, which were previously snatched from the native inhabitants during the colonial period. Thus, the soil is the fundamental resource for the present and future usufruct.

The supposition that there is an unlimited supply of resources has resulted in a slow, and in some cases increasingly deep, process of edaphic, landscape, and biodiversity deterioration. The high natural fertility of cer-

tain regions has often hidden this deterioration process until recent times. The production strategy has been, as mentioned above in the case of mining, to pillage new spaces instead of investing in resource renewal (e.g., reforestation) and conservation. The capitalist logic of minimizing cost and maximizing profits results in increasing resource exhaustion through the geographic mobility of the transnational companies and foreign investments involved in the process. Needless to say, the remaining vast virgin lands in Latin America are an incomparable natural treasure waiting to be pillaged.

The dominant style of development is characterized by a unimodal approach that assumes all regional ecosystems have the same stability and resistance. This assumption has led to the depletion and deterioration of the most fragile ecosystems. In addition, productive practices have acquired a pattern of uniformity and homogeneity that has given rise to the depletion of biodiversity and the destruction of indigenous and peasant cultural variability. The present advance of soy production, with its complex and dependent technological package, represents a new manifestation of this phenomenon.

#### URBAN AND REGIONAL SOCIOECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

To analyze the nexus between social and environmental conditions in the urban regions, one needs to take into consideration three main factors: (1) the high population density, (2) the rapid and concomitant territorial growth of the urban regions during the second half of the twentieth century, and last, but not least, (3) the virtual nonexistence of an integrated development strategy aimed at improving the quality of life of the majority of the populations (Galafassi 2002b).

Numerous forms of pollution and environmental degradation, the absence of an appropriate infrastructure, and widespread poverty are the consequences of the contradictions associated with capitalism and the lack of an integrated model of environmentally sustainable development. Poor housing conditions, health problems, food insecurity, and a dearth of basic utilities, among other ills, are mainly determined by the low incomes of a large part of the population (Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1987; Di Pace, Federovisky, and Hardoy 1990; Hardoy, Mitlin, and Satterthwaite 2001). Under these circumstances, it is easy to recognize the reasons for the social and ecological crisis confronting most of the urban regions in Latin America and the Caribbean. This crisis has been made worse by the implementation of neoliberal policies in the last decades.

The domestic habitat of poor families in Latin America is characterized by unsanitary conditions. Approximately 20 to 50 percent of the inhabitants

in most urban areas live in inadequate housing (Killen and Rahamn 2001; Hardoy, Mitlin, and Satterthwaite 2001); up to fifteen people can live in the same dwelling. In addition, the rapid increase in the cities' populations has resulted in the building of illegal communities over swampy areas with contaminated water. These "poor suburbs" have grown more quickly than the rest of the cities, and in most of them there is a lack of running water, drainage, garbage collection, sewage systems, and paved streets (Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1987; Hordijk 1999; Harth Daneke and Silve 1982; Moser 1982; Connolly 1982; Hardoy, Mitlin, and Satterthwaite 2001). Environmental quality is generally sacrificed in favor of more immediate necessities for people's survival, such as housing.

It is possible to establish a difference between the settlements of people who live in precarious houses built under illegal conditions and of those who live in deplorable conditions but in houses or apartments built under legal conditions. The first kind of settlement is referred to as a "shantytown" in English and as a *favela*, *callampa*, *cantegrile*, *pueblo jóvene*, or *villa de emergencia* in Portuguese and Spanish, depending upon the particular country in Latin America. The second kind of housing settlements are generally referred to as "slums" or "tenement houses" in English and are called *asentamientos* or *conventillos* in the Spanish-speaking areas.

Most of the shantytowns have dismal living conditions and appear in precarious geographic locations. There are shantytowns on the sides of mountains where mud slides and avalanches occasionally occur—for example, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Guatemala City (Guatemala), La Paz (Bolivia), and Caracas (Venezuela). There are also shantytowns in some sandy desert areas, such as those surrounding Lima (Peru), and in some flood-prone areas, such as Guayaquil (Ecuador), Recife (Brazil), and Resistencia and Buenos Aires (Argentina). In Mexico City, approximately 1.5 million inhabitants live on the Texcoco lake bed, which is dry most of the year, except when it rains. This place is exposed to dust storms during the dry season and turns into a muddy plain when it rains.

Industrialization has led some cities of Latin America and the Caribbean to have an important concentration of factories. These cities have serious pollution problems compared to the pollution problems in developed countries (Cherni 2001). Actually, these problems are sometimes more dramatic for two reasons. First, the growth of industrial production in some countries has taken place in a context of a thoroughly inefficient system of urban planning and land-use regulation. In general, the faster the increase of industrial production, the higher the probability that environmental problems will be worse since the control of industrial pollution is an important concern neither for the governments involved nor for most of the people. Second, industrial production is commonly concentrated in one or two areas. Despite some government efforts to decentralize industrial de-

velopment, most new industries have been located on the periphery of larger metropolitan areas. It is well known that the low level of regulatory control in the global South has made it possible for some of the most highly contaminating industries to relocate there. Multinational corporations have exported their high-pollution factories to Latin America and the Caribbean to avoid paying the costs associated with the stricter contamination controls and worker health and safety rules in the advanced capitalist countries.<sup>4</sup>

"Regional impact" is an important factor to consider in Latin America and the Caribbean since the disorderly growth of big cities affects the nearby territories in different ways. Big cities are big production and consumption centers and demand a great quantity of resources like water, fossil fuels, land, and all the other materials that urban activities require. But the cities are also great centers of pollution and contamination, so their regional impacts can be divided into two categories. The first stems from the extraction of natural resources required by urban activities. The second encompasses the urban spillover effects on the environment of the region surrounding cities. Obviously, both subcategories are closely related, and the type of urban production and consumption defines the natural resources needed, as well as the kind of waste and pollution spread into nearby territories. Furthermore, this permanent exchange of resources in return for waste and pollution makes it difficult to separate the rural areas from the urban areas.

There is a permanent relation between urban and rural areas. The impoverishment of the rural population leads to migration from the countryside into the cities. The cities grow and expand into the surrounding areas, where the agricultural producers and workers are expelled from their lands. New urban areas occupy these lands, generally without consideration of the provision of urban services and their impact on the natural setting, with possibly catastrophic consequences. Likewise, growing population pressure brings about greater demands on water and other resources from the surrounding areas and can have counterproductive effects, such as increased salinization of the water supply in the surrounding rural areas and their desertification.

According to some authors, a parasitic relationship has developed between the cities and their nearby lands. This relationship is based on the evolution of the economic value of the natural resources, particularly the soil, the subsoil, the vegetation, and the other geographical features, such as water resources. The growth of cities, therefore, decreases or eliminates the diversity of natural ecosystems affected by their growth, as it reduces the species and changes the geographical features of the areas affected and the potential fertility of the soil in these areas for food production (Rees 1999, 2001).<sup>5</sup>

## MODERNIZATION AND SOCIOECOLOGICAL MOBILIZATION

The ideology of modernization has influenced all the development processes in Latin America. As a consequence, the socioecological evolution and the social mobilization processes in the region have been closely related to this ideological paradigm of development. Modernization, as a subsidiary justification for a particular type of material progress, is sustained chiefly by mobilizing vast human capacities to transform material reality through developing productive forces, allegedly to increase the well-being of the population involved. Economic growth, technological innovation, the exploitation of labor, and nature are the main axes of modern progress. This pattern of development, even when presenting certain temporal and spatial variations, maintains an essential continuity throughout the most of the history of contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean. Economic growth and technological development have always been at the core of Latin American and Caribbean politics, from the populist period of the 1940s and the developmentalism of the postwar period to the increasing authoritarian neoliberalism of the 1970s and 1980s and the pseudodemocratic neoliberalism of the turn of the century. What may differ between countries is the degree to which wealth is distributed and how, the specific aspects of industrialization, urbanization, and agriculture, regional development modes, and the extent of exploitation of both nature and labor.

As a result of these parameters, a diverse range of organizations and social movements has emerged to oppose this dominant model of society, its sociopolitical and economic, as well as its ecological, aspects. These opposing forces include those who criticize capitalism and those who intensely point out the faults of modern progress itself. Criticism of capitalism does not necessarily imply a questioning of the modern development process per se. On the other hand, judging modernity from an ecological perspective involves a critical examination of economic growth as a product of both capitalist and Socialist productivism.

The theoretical frameworks with which social movements are currently researched (often functionalistic or influenced by the postmodern ideology of methodological individualism) tend to differentiate between "old" and "new" social movements, as well as between "old" and "new" political paradigms (Offe 1985; Melucci 1980; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). The old movements were enrolled in the classic class struggle in which the dominant social subjects were both the institutionalized groups and the political parties that promoted the values of social mobility. The new movements, on the other hand, are guided by open and flexible networks responding to noninstitutionalized politics in a context in which class struggles are not paramount. Instead of following this theoretical line

of argument, we prefer to think of Latin American social reality in terms of complex processes in which the mechanical divisions (between, for example, old and new social movements) do not correspond to the historical present and where the diverse manifestations of social movements interrelate and interact and always express some opposition between classes or fractions of classes (Galafassi 2006).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the differences were more marked, but at present a paradigmatic confluence is taking place. The countercultural and environmentalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s directed their criticism against the above-mentioned ideology of modern progress. They tried to achieve a "return to nature," initiating a new communal life related to a "radical democratic philosophy," thus breaking down the modern concept of private and individualistic life. In so doing, they tried to generate a new social model without industries and cities, decrying modernization and challenging the essential tenets of modern progress. This model also included a general and often inexplicit critique of capitalism.

However, there were also movements identified with left-wing tendencies and class organizations (the labor movement, urban guerrilla movements, peasant movements, etc.) that considered capitalism to be the root of social alienation, and they paid little attention to socioecological and "radical democratic" issues. The predominant prescription was the so-called two-step strategy: first, to gain state power; second, to transform the world (Wallerstein 2002). To attain this objective, a strong and rigid, Leninist-type political organization was seen as a necessity.

Nevertheless, over the last decades, a convergence among tendencies and movements has been emerging in Latin America and the Caribbean, paralleling a similar tendency at the global level. Although significant differences persist among environmentalist groups, they are not as marked as they used to be. The centrality of environmental problems, the criticism regarding state concentration of power, the related emphasis on participatory democracy, and respect for cultural and biological diversity are all standard features of the new social movements. These views are also now increasingly combined with a class-based critique of capitalism and the call for the construction of political organizations that will be able to win elections and form progressive governments, which are features similar to those of the old social movements.

For example, Petras (2002) has identified three waves of overlapping and interrelated new social movements since the end of the 1970s. The first wave comprised human rights, ecology, feminist, and racial/ethnic rights movements, as well as numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This first wave of new social movements had the military and civilian authoritarian regimes of that time as the main focus of their protest. A new manifestation of this generation of social movements is the popular as-

semblies that have appeared in recent years and have focused their actions on specific environmental problems.

Two examples of these are the Self-assembled Neighbors of Gualaguaychú (Vecinos Autoconvocados de Gualaguaychú), which protests the construction of new paper mills in Uruguay, and the myriad array of assemblies in Patagonia, the Argentine Andes, and Peru, which have opposed mining projects. The Esquel Assembly in the Patagonian Andes is paradigmatic of this type of popular mobilization. Meridian Gold, Inc., headquartered in Reno, Nevada, proposed to develop an open-pit gold mine seven kilometers upstream from the town of Esquel (population approximately thirty thousand). The mobilization against the proposal started in 2001, and since then the protests have gradually grown in scope and intensity. In March 2003, residents of Esquel responded with a resounding no to a referendum on the mine. More than 80 percent of the citizens of the region voted against the project and against any policy opening the way to natural resource depletion. This experience has been replicated in other places. For instance, the Patagonian Coordinating Assembly against Resource Pillaging was created shortly after Esquel. This assembly works in close relation with other local assemblies opposing mining in the Andean region and also with the aforementioned Gualaguaychú assembly in Uruguay.

A second wave of social movements that emerged in the mid-1980s comprises peasants and rural workers engaged in direct action to promote and defend communal styles of production and political organization. The Zapatistas in Mexico, the Rural Landless Workers of Brazil (the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra, or MST), the Cocaleros and other peasant organizations in Bolivia, the National Peasant Federation in Paraguay, and the peasant-Indian confederation in Ecuador are the most prominent movements in this second wave. It could be suggested that even the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a more "classical" form of guerrilla organization, has adopted some traits of these new peasant movements. Despite the fact that both their tactics and specific local demands have varied, these movements have in all cases considered "neoliberalism" and "imperialism" broadly defined as the strategic "enemy."<sup>6</sup> These organizations have developed actions and strategies opposing the neoliberal economic regime and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of local and foreign elites. Specifically, they have struggled for land redistribution, national and communitarian autonomy, and the conservation of the natural resources needed for their subsistence. They have fought against U.S. intervention in the form of coca-eradication programs, the colonization of territory for military bases, the penetration of national police and military institutions through U.S. advisers and training, and the militarization of social conflicts through projects such as Plan Colombia and the Andean Initiative.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) represents the rights of the indigenous population but also sees itself, and is seen, as part of a wider anticapitalist movement. The Zapatistas oppose corporate globalization and neoliberalism and advocate a communitarian perspective in which a harmonic and sustainable relationship between society and nature is fundamental to their ideology and practice. They see themselves as Emiliano Zapata's ideological heirs and also as heirs to five hundred years of indigenous resistance against imperialism. The EZLN has been fighting primarily for the autonomy of the indigenous population as a solution to poverty.

They seek to create a kind of state within a state where people can retain their own government and communal ways of life, yet receive outside support in basic areas. The Zapatistas have gradually formed several autonomous municipalities (*caracoles*) independent of the Mexican government. These municipalities have evolved into local government juntas, implementing communitarian food-producing programs and health and school systems, which are supported partly by NGOs. The Zapatistas do not tax the inhabitants and decide through assemblies to work on communitarian projects. Members in the juntas rotate continuously so that everybody in the community can have an opportunity to serve and also to prevent people in office from becoming used to power, or corrupted.

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, the MST, is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless members organized in twenty-three out of Brazil's twenty-seven states. The MST has been carrying out long-overdue land reform largely without the government's help in a country mired in unjust land distribution. In Brazil, 1.6 percent of the landowners control roughly half (46.8 percent) of the land. The top 3 percent of the population owns two-thirds of all arable lands in Brazil.

Since 1985, the MST has peacefully occupied unused lands, where they have established cooperative farms; built houses, schools for children and adults, and clinics; promoted indigenous cultures; and created a healthy sustainable environment and gender equality. The MST has won land titles for more than 350,000 families in two thousand settlements as a result of their actions, while 180,000 encamped families currently await government recognition. The MST holds that land occupations are recognized in the Brazilian Constitution, which states that land that remains unproductive should be used for a "larger social function." The MST's success lies in its ability to organize and educate a large number of people from different areas and different social categories. The organization's members have not only managed to secure land, which means food security for their families, but they are involved in developing a sustainable socioeconomic model that offers a concrete alternative to today's corporate-dominated globalization that puts profits before people and the well-being of humankind.



More recently, new multisectoral movements similar to the MST in Brazil have launched mass struggles that integrate farm workers and small and medium-sized farmers in Colombia, Mexico, and Paraguay. Their actions and protests are aimed at improving the conditions of peasant production and commercialization; however, environmental aspects are not central to their agendas.

Urban areas are the social space in which the third and newest wave of social movements is centered. This new wave of social movements includes the dynamic neighborhood-based mass movements of unemployed workers in Argentina—the picketers (*piqueteros*)—and organizations that have mobilized the unemployed and poor members of the urban population in the Caribbean basin countries (e.g., Venezuela and the Dominican Republic). Communitarian, democratic, and sustainable-development values are prominent aspects of their political agendas.

One of the main traits all these movements share is the rejection of the traditional patron-client, or patronage, style of politics that has been practiced by political party bosses and trade union bureaucrats in the past and in current populist political regimes. Instead, these movements tend to rely strongly on self-organization and direct action. The Unemployed Workers Movement and the Unemployed Workers Union in Argentina are examples of these kinds of movements. They have a decentralized organizational structure based on barrio or neighborhood organizations. Each local-level organization is directed by a general assembly in which all the active members participate. Political and economic autonomy is very important for these organizations. Many of these local organizations have developed a wide variety of autonomous productive enterprises, and a significant number have developed a deep relationship with peasant movements (for instance, in the area of goods for exchange and barter). The management of human and natural resources and communitarian development are central issues in the social and political strategies of these movements of the unemployed.

Complementing these local-based movements, there has been a reemergence of grassroots workers movements, such as the Inter-Sindical Clasista (Classist Union Coalition) in Argentina. Workers participating in this coalition define themselves as classist, combative, and antibureaucratic. In this case, however, the relation between nature and society is not an important concern.

Therefore, the present scene reveals a combination of the features of the old and new social movements. The different profiles of these social movements represent diverse manifestations of antagonisms and conflicts and various common aspirations. The inequitable distribution of power, wealth, and resources among classes and social actors is the structural condition that underlies all social conflicts in the region.

## CONCLUSION

The Latin American and Caribbean region is still burdened by the restraints of the so called Washington Consensus, the U.S.-made project to manage the postdictatorship order based on strictly limited democracy and the rules of a largely unregulated market economy (Galafassi 2002a). These policies have led to the privatization of the state and the shrinkage of its functions, as well as to the destruction of the incipient and fragmented industrial development generated during the period of ISI policies. These policies have led to an increase in the pillaging of the region's natural resources and the degradation of its ecosystems (thereby deepening the contradictions between capital and nature). They have been accompanied by economic concentration, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and high levels of unemployment. Moreover, the hegemony of neoliberal ideology has prevented the adoption of ecologically sustainable, integrated, and democratic approaches to economic and social development. On the contrary, they have intensified the two basic contradictions of capitalism referred to early in this chapter.

During the ISI period, the main objective was to establish national industries that could produce consumer goods for the domestic market. The ecological effects of this process of industrialization were not taken into consideration, although there were many environmental consequences of ISI. Between the 1930s and the 1960s, the process of national industrial development undertaken throughout the region did in fact improve the living standards of a significant part of the population. But this approach to economic and social development was replaced by the neoliberal, market-driven approach to economic growth adopted by most of the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the 1980s and 1990s.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, when the environmentalist movement gained prominence in the advanced capitalist countries of the North, neoliberal policies were being imposed on the Latin American and Caribbean countries without regard to their environmental consequences or the growing ecological crises in the region. Thus, efforts to address these ecological crises and the promotion of ecologically and socially sustainable development were put forward by civil society organizations, that is, by new social movements, certain NGOs, and academics.

New social movements have emerged in both the rural and urban areas as an expression not only of the traditional contradiction between capital and labor but also of capital's contradiction of its own (natural) conditions of production. In the rural areas, the most important issues addressed by these new social movements are those connected with the ownership of land, poverty, and the deteriorating conditions of agricultural production, all of which are intertwined with environmental issues. In the urban areas,

some of the new social movements are concerned primarily with ecological issues. These ecologist organizations mainly represent the concerns of the middle class regarding air, water, and food pollution, traffic congestion, and the loss of biodiversity. However, many of these social movements are also interested in "traditional" issues, such as unemployment, urban poverty, and other social and economic problems.

Together with ecological and sociopolitical issues, democracy, particularly representative democracy, has also reached a crisis point throughout the region. Because the limited forms of democracy in the region have lost legitimacy during the last decades as the state has failed to meet the demands of the popular classes, a growing number of people are increasingly questioning democratic representation, as well as the neoliberal capitalist regimes. In this political contest, attempts have been made to resurrect different forms of communal and participatory democracy.

In this context, new social movements have emerged with the clear intention of resisting market expansion (Luke 2001; Gezerlis 2002). These new social movements have adopted direct and participatory democratic forms of consensual decision making to resolve political, economic, social, and ecological problems. The notion of community (involving ecumenicity, autonomy, and democracy) has acquired central importance among many of these new social movements. An incipient articulation of the idea of confederated communities has taken hold. In some cases, solidarity alliances among different popular organizations have started to emerge. As a result, a new form of democracy is evolving as networks of movements organize on a regional basis to deal with common problems.

Some examples of this tendency are the networks that have developed among local popular assemblies to oppose new mining projects in the Andes region, the landless peasant organizations, and the new organizations of unemployed rural and urban workers. In these cases, ecological devastation and the pillage of natural resources constitute the crucible around which these popular organizations have structured their resistance against neoliberalism and the forms of natural and human resource exploitation that it promotes.

## NOTES

1. To quote Sunkel and Paz (1970), "Both underdevelopment and development are aspects of the same phenomenon, both are historically simultaneous, both are linked functionally and, therefore, interact and condition each other mutually. This results . . . in the division of the world between industrial, advanced or 'central' countries, and underdeveloped, backward or 'peripheral' countries."

2. An interesting critical analysis on the ideology of "developmentalism" and "globalization" can be found in Wallerstein (2005).

3. Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) Population Database compiled by the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University, and the World Bank (2005) Latin American and Caribbean Population Database. Available at [www.na.unep.net/datasets/datalist.php3](http://www.na.unep.net/datasets/datalist.php3) or <http://gisweb.ciat.cgiar.org/population/dataset.htm> (accessed January 23, 2007).

4. See recent examples of the relocation of asbestos manufacturing in Hardoy and Satterthwaite (1987) and mercury contamination in Street (1981).

5. Some studies on this topic in Argentina are Rodríguez et al. (1996) and Morello and Rodríguez (2001).

6. For specific information about popular mobilization versus neoliberal democracy in Mexico, see Stolle-McAllister (2005), McLeod (2005), Wise and Mendoza (2005), and Labrecque (2005).

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