

Green contradictions

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The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, begins stating that there is no room for discussion of the issue amid the latest financial crisis of capitalism and its consequences. The refusal to discuss imposed by European heads of state and the United States president demonstrated that sustainability and economic crisis cannot walk side by side: one must give up sustainability in times of uncertainty, since there is not a marriage between capitalism and sustainable development involving a union in happiness or in sadness. Even before death, they are already separated.



The problem with your “plan b” is that we do not have a “planet b” to apply it.

They are separated because they could never walk together, at least when considering sustainable development broadly. It is true that capitalism can be “green”, but a green capitalism necessarily implies exclusion. Ensure sustainable production to satisfy consumers’ desires of Americans and Europeans, for example, is a utopia. It would be impossible to meet the demand for goods as they are currently demanded in a model of sustainability that requires a profound shift in patterns of consumption and production. The development concept that we have today is focused on the development of capital and not on the development of human being.

For this development model, the limit of sustainability is the possibility of profit. The preservation of the environment is guaranteed only until the point where it is profitable or does not threaten economic growth, which includes the possibility of transforming “sustainability” into a factor of aggregation of value in production chains and, therefore, into a factor of exclusion: the ecologically correct becomes a synonym for luxury good. Within this model, what is possible in terms of sustainability is the creation of mechanisms to compensate the environmental damages caused by industries. These market mechanisms do not reduce the environmental damages, nor guarantee the right to a healthy environment for communities affected by the overwhelming process of capital development. This occurs, for example, in the carbon market, where companies keep polluting, affecting the lives of people who are within areas affected by its activities (which often is the global space). Despite causing harms for these nearby communities, they invest in faraway places to obtain carbon credits, transferring

the burden from one population to another, without even reducing GHG emissions, since “the predatory and polluting activity of industrial system does not change, as for a big polluting business is economically more rewarding and inexpensive to continue to pollute and buy carbon credits in developing countries, than to reduce their emissions or invest in clean technologies”.



Moreover, the quest for “sustainability” by companies and governments is turned into a justification for the exercise of discretionary power over vulnerable communities which are on the way of capitalist development. In the absence of any argument related to property rights, the grounds from removal is based on the alleged damage that communities are causing to ecosystems, without even thinking about possibilities to mitigate these damages or to take decisions considering the lives that exist there before acting with violence and intolerance. The environmental concern does not exist when it comes to the building of billionaire real estate projects such as the Noroeste Sector in Brasilia that is said to be the first sustainable neighborhood in the region, despite degrading an environmental protection area, causing contamination of groundwater and silting of streams and rivers. Sad irony.

And these are only environmental problems of sustainability. To be a real sustainability, it requires much more. Governments and businessmen know this very well. However, they are making clear that they will not take any step that means a radical change in how relationship between economy, environment and society are built today.



The current development model causes several implications for the (non)enjoyment of rights, as well as the mode of production that underlies it. The growing exclusion generated by the accumulation of wealth deprives more than two billion people of basic rights, while maintains other 3 billion in unsatisfactory living conditions (receiving \$ 330,00 per month, less than Brazilian minimum wage). They are human beings who have the right to food, health, housing, education and environment denied or made precarious on behalf of the maintenance of a model of social organization that favors the super-inclusion of a few, at the same time that it causes the super-exclusion of many others. And this situation only worsened after the financial crisis of 2008. Since then, as it was said by the sociologist Silvio Caccia Bava, there is a perception by society that governments obey the banks and not the voters, transferring to the private financial system enormous inputs of public funds at the expense of individual and social rights.

Civil society has been organizing itself to develop a counter-movement in order to fight the production and globalization models that are imposed on us today. The People's Summit is the public place where movements from the entire world who fight for another economy, another model of development, meet each other and articulate joint initiatives. However, they are still largely ignored and even criminalized, as occurs with the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil.



The Rio+20, as well as any other UN conference aimed at discussing the issue of sustainability, is doomed to fail if it insists not to address the issue of sustainable development as how it must be truly addressed. To think about sustainability requires a rethinking of how economic relations are structures today. The economy is/should be a field marked by an instrumental reason, apart from other social spaces in which social relations and even life are built? As It is written elsewhere on this blog (A Economia da Redenção), it is necessary to think about economy as politic, as the fulfillment of rights, as an expression of the correlation of social forces and as a space where subjectivities are composed. Thinking about sustainability requires overcoming the current financial crisis experienced by capitalism and this can only be made with a profound change that will questionate and transform the current model we have, front facing “the current owners of power”.