

but not on free trade; on forests but not on logging; on climate but not on automobiles. Agenda 21 — the Summit's "action plan" — featured clauses on "enabling the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods" but none on enabling the rich to do so; a section on women but none on men. By such deliberate evasion of the central issues which economic expansion poses for human societies, UNCED condemned itself to irrelevance even before the first preparatory meeting got under way.

The best that can be said for the Earth Summit is that it made visible the vested interests standing in the way of the moral economies which local people, who daily face the consequences of environmental degradation, are seeking to re-establish. The spectacle of the great and the good at UNCED casting about for "solutions" that will keep their power and standards of living intact has confirmed the scepticism of those whose fate and livelihoods were being determined. The demands from many grassroots groups around the world are not for more "management" — a fashionable word at Rio — but for agrarian reform, local control over local resources, and power to veto developments and to run their own affairs. For them, the question is not *how* their environment should be managed — they have the experience of the past as their guide — but *who* will manage it and in *whose* interest. They reject UNCED's rhetoric of a world where all humanity is united by a common interest in survival, and in which conflicts of race, class, gender and culture are characterized as of secondary importance to humanity's supposedly common goal. Although they acknowledge that a peasant in Bihar shares the same planet as a corporate executive, they view the suggestion that the two share a common future as farcical. Instead, they ask, "Whose common future is to be sustained?" Their struggle is not to win greater power for the market or the state, but to reinstate their communities as sources of social and political authority. *Whose Common Future?* is an attempt to describe the background to that struggle.

1 THE COMMONS

Where the Community has Authority

To Western eyes, the streets and lanes of Bangkok, like those of many cities in the South, may seem a strange mixture of order and chaos. In the shadow of shining high-rise hotels, apartment and office blocks, slum dwellers squat in dark, seemingly random collections of shacks near railway lines, on construction sites, and over swamps. In front of rows of concrete shophouses and air-conditioned banks, carts and stalls selling noodles, dried squid, curries and iced drinks jostle for kerb-space with amulet-sellers, fruit-vendors and beggars. Souvenir merchants block pedestrian traffic by jamming their tables up against those of purveyors of cheap baby clothes, leather-goods, sweets and dubious track shoes. Streetcorner vendors show open contempt for the solemnities of intellectual property by loudly inviting passers by to invest in fake Rolex watches, pirated rock music cassettes and bogus Lacoste shirts. Under the eyes of bored policemen, pedestrians jaywalk across roads congested with roaring, grinding, smoke-belching trucks, buses and motorcycles.

The hints of anarchy in these scenes may trouble the Western mind. Who are all these people raising pigs and drying clothes next to the railroad tracks? Why don't the police do something about the jaywalkers, the hawkers and the polluting vehicles? What is the law here? *Is* there a law here? Why doesn't anybody seem to know what it is? A Westerner setting up a food stall on the kerb of a busy street might have an uneasy sense of encroaching on public space, enforced by a worry about bureaucrats and police. Not the Bangkok vendors! Like the slum dwellers, they seem ready to take all the space they can get. Of course, now and then the police clear them off. But this hardly seems to be out of a real concern for public order. More likely the World Bank or a foreign dignitary is arriving for a meeting and some high official, fearful of losing face, has sent

out an order to spruce up the streets. In any case, as soon as the police are gone the vendors trickle back. In a week things are back to normal.

A HIDDEN STRUCTURE

Longer acquaintance with Bangkok may shift the Westerner's view. Beneath the seeming vacuum of public order and responsibility, the outlines of a different kind of moral and environmental order begin to appear. It becomes clear that while public space may not always be respected, informal boundaries are well-marked within communities of people who know each other. In the slum or along the row of street vendors, anyone who takes up too much space, or the wrong space, or leaves too much of a mess, is brought back into line by neighbours. The community may not possess much space, and has little opportunity to make it clean and attractive, but it makes the most of what it has. And because no one group is powerful enough to usurp too much space for itself, everybody has a share.

External borders are defended as well. When the police undertake a sweep of sidewalk vendors, furious mutterings spread down the lines of stalls. "This is our turf! We've been here for years! What right do the authorities have to evict us?" Elsewhere, outrage may lead to more organized resistance. In an area of orchards nestled in a bend of the Chao Phraya River near the city centre, landowners and squatters join together to protest the proposed conversion of their land into a "public park", pointing out that they and their ancestors have kept the place green for over a century. In a slum, when lines of policemen step forward to begin dismantling squatters' homes, children rush forward to grasp their legs. Shaking them off, the police advance a few steps further only to come up against a phalanx of angry, taunting women, baring their breasts to shame them into retreat. Behind them, in reserve, wait the men of the community. People may recognize the city's law as a fact rather than as a social norm, and value customs more than contracts, but their sense of rights and justice is sharp.

The order people seek is seldom a public one. Few are overly concerned about obligations toward unseen strangers. Few set much store by anonymous and formal words typed or printed on headed paper, or on proclamations that this or that area is "public property". Rather, people try to establish personal, face-to-face connections. Strangers feel each other out to find out where they stand. Who is the most powerful person here? Who the most senior? Do I know any of their relatives? Where can I carve out a space for my family? How much can I enlarge it by cultivating the right people and making the right alliances? How much can my family and friends get away with before we offend our neighbours? As new acquaintances jockey for position on the pavements, in the alleys, in the communities and restaurants and meeting rooms, invisible grid-lines are drawn, connections made, and unspoken rules laid down. As relationships become established and power is balanced, interdependence grows and benevolence is exchanged for respect. Insiders are distinguished from outsiders, and consideration and love flourish among familiars. Indulgences quickly become rights which cannot be violated without denying the growing personal ties themselves. It is in these rights and ties, more than in the formal machinery of the law or an inculcated sense of "the public", that ordinary people, and even police and businesses, place their faith.

ORIGINS, CHANGE, REVIVAL

This order does not emerge from nowhere. It recreates in broken form a long tradition visible more clearly in the countryside: a tradition of the commons.¹ There, until recently, the category of "the public" barely existed. In day-to-day practice, it was above all the community which exercised dominion over time, space, agriculture and language. Woods and streams feeding local irrigation systems remained intact because anyone degrading them had to brave the wrath of neighbours deprived of their livelihood, and no one was powerful enough to do so. Everybody was subject to everybody else's personal scrutiny and sanctions.

Bangkok twists this tradition. Benefiting from the growth of the state and "economic development", élites have gained the power to usurp larger and larger domains of common space — streets, clean air, green space — without having to concern themselves with the reaction of others. Webs of personal relationships have been stretched or frayed, losing their anchorage to a particular locality, reducing people's ability to defend their space and make it liveable. People whose livelihoods have been taken away by this process fall into increasingly abject dependency on those who have taken it away. At the same time, new webs of personal relationships ramify across the upper levels of society. Dynastic, commercial and military alliances concentrate and reconcentrate power largely beyond the ability of ordinary people to place checks upon it.

In this sense, disorder in Bangkok originates less in the huddled shacks of the slums or the haphazard rows of street vendors than in the forces — partly foreign — that lie behind the modern public and private high-rise buildings, fast-food outlets and brightly-coloured billboards which look so reassuring and orderly to the Western visitor. Indeed, it is in *commons* such as those found in slums and on street vendors' turf that the order which can safeguard the interests of ordinary Bangkokians and their environment is largely found. When subsistence is at stake, they often improvise or reconstruct rough-and-ready new commons regimes rather than pin their hopes on either the market economy or public institutions. For better or worse, the commons is the social and political space where things get done and where people derive a sense of belonging and have an element of control over their lives. In Bangkok, as in many places throughout the South, when the commons is gone, there is little that can take its place.

AN EVERYDAY REALITY

The tale of Bangkok and its broken commons may seem remote from Western experience. For many people in the West, the word

"commons" carries an archaic flavour: that of the medieval village pasture which villagers did not own but where they had rights to graze their livestock. Yet, for the vast majority of humanity, the commons is an everyday reality. Ninety per cent of the world's fishers rely on small inshore marine commons, catching over half the fish eaten in the world today.² In the Philippines, Java and Laos, irrigation systems are devised and run by villagers themselves, the water rights being distributed through rules laid down by the community.³ Even in the North, there are communities which still manage their forests and fisheries jointly (lobster harvesters in Maine, for example, or forest communities in many areas of Finland), bestowing on themselves the power to divide up what they regard as "their" patches of sea or soil among their own communities and kin.⁴ Moreover, new commons are constantly being born, even among what might seem the most fragmented communities. In the inner cities of the US, black communities' dialects express concepts that the language taught in state schools cannot touch. At toxic dump sites and around proposed nuclear plants in France, Switzerland, and elsewhere, people have insisted on their "rights" to keep the earth and air around their communities free from the threat of poisonous and radioactive substances, damning the economic and "public" rationality which dictates that their homes are "objectively" the best locations for waste sinks. For them, the sentiments expressed by an elder of a Brazilian tribe, despite the religious language in which they are couched, cannot be completely unrecognizable:

"The only possible place for the Krenak people to live and to re-establish our existence, to speak to our Gods, to speak to our nature, to weave our lives, is where God created us. We can no longer see the planet that we live upon as if it were a chess-board where people just move things around."⁵

THE COMMONS: NEITHER PUBLIC NOR PRIVATE

Despite its ubiquity, the commons is hard to define. It provides sustenance, security and independence, yet (in what many West-

erners feel to be a paradox) typically does not produce commodities. Unlike most things in modern industrial society, moreover, it is neither private nor public: neither commercial farm nor communist collective, neither business firm nor state utility, neither jealously-guarded private plot nor national or city park. Nor is it usually open to all. The relevant local community typically decides who uses it and how.⁶

The unlimited diversity of commons also makes the concept elusive. While all commons regimes involve joint use, what they define access to is bewilderingly varied: for example, trees, forests, land, minerals, water, fish, animals, language, time, radio wavelengths, silence, seeds, milk, contraception and streets.

Trying to find some order in this field, some theorists claim that the commons are "resources for which exclusion is difficult" and boundary-setting not worthwhile, or which "are needed by all but whose productivity is diffuse rather than concentrated, low or unpredictable in yield, and low in unit value": for example, seasonally inundated swamplands in Borneo, moorland in England, semi-arid rangeland in Botswana or Ethiopia, and scrubby *maquis* or *garrigues* in France and Spain.⁷ Yet smaller, more easily divisible, and more highly productive and defensible arable lands are often also treated as communal property. In traditional Malaysia and Laos as well as Ethiopia and much of the rest of contemporary Africa, plots have been traditionally allocated to individuals by the community, which nevertheless reserve the authority to redistribute them if they are not used for subsistence. In such cases of usufruct, common rights can be defined as the right not to the land or the soil, which rests with the community, but the right to what the soil brings forth over a particular period.

Other theorists suggest that the commons are jointly-used resources whose use by one person may subtract from the welfare of the next, and which are thus potentially subject to crowding, depletion and degradation. Yet while this may be true of a great range of cases, genetic diversity or knowledge of contraception (to cite just two examples of "resources" often maintained by commons regimes) are not "subtractible" in this way.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IS THE KEY

More fruitful than such attempts to define commons regimes through their domains are attempts to define them through their social and cultural organization: for example, local or group power, distinctions between members and non-members, rough parity among members, a concern with common safety rather than accumulation, and an absence of the constraints which lead to economic scarcity. Even here, however, it would be a mistake to demand too much precision. For example, what does the "local" in "local power" mean? In Shanxi province in China, communal forests were owned by villages, several villages together, or clans. In India the relevant bodies may be caste groups, while for Switzerland's city forests, it is "citizenship" (election to a given community) that counts.⁸

Similarly, what does the "power" in "local power" consist in? Sometimes it is the power to exclude outsiders or to punish them if they abuse the commons. Often this power lays the foundation for an additional structure of internal rules, rights, duties and beliefs which mediates and shapes the community's own relationship with its natural surroundings. In Maine, for example, it is only in strongly defended territories that lobster harvesters have successfully enacted informal and formal regulations on the numbers of traps used, and elsewhere in North America there have been clear "post-fur-trade linkages between the existence of viable hunting territories and intentional conservation measures."⁹ Sometimes the meshes of power internal to commons regimes give rise to notions of "property" or "possession", but in many cases the relevant group does not regard itself as owning, but rather as owned by, or as stewards of, water or land.

PERCEPTIONS OF SCARCITY

A further characteristic often ascribed to the commons is that, unlike resources in the modern economy, it is "not perceived as scarce". This is not only because many things available as commons,

such as silence, air or genetic diversity, will renew themselves continually until deliberately made scarce by the encroachment of outside political actors. More importantly, the needs which many commons satisfy are not infinitely expanding. They are not determined by a growth-oriented external system producing goods and services, but rather are constantly adjusted and limited by the specific commons regime itself, whose physical characteristics remain in everyone's view. Without the race between growth and the scarcity which growth creates, there can thus be a sense of "enoughness". Even where produce from the commons is sold, the "needs" defined by consumerism and external market demand for goods and services will be subject to internal revision.

THE WORLDLY COMMONS

Despite their resolutely local orientation and resistance to being swallowed up by larger systems, commons regimes have never been isolated in either space or time. Nor have their social organizations ever been static. Commons regimes welcome, feed upon and are fertilized by contact, and evolve just like any other social institution.¹⁰ Communities maintaining commons often work out arrangements over larger geographical areas with other groups. For example, inter-village commons boundaries are acknowledged by villagers in the Munglora area of Tehri Garhwal: each village has a recognized "turf" and encroachment by other villages for fodder-collection is likely to provoke objections.¹¹ In the Philippines, competing claims to water rights among different *zanjaras*, or communal irrigation societies, have customarily been decided by inter-village councils composed of *zanjara* officers and family elders in the community.¹²

Systems of common rights, in fact, far from evolving in isolation, often owe their very existence to interaction and struggle between communities and the outside world. It is arguably only in reaction to invasion, dispossession or other threats to accustomed security of access that the concept of common rights emerges.

Today, such rights are evolving where access to seeds, air and other resources which were previously taken for granted are being challenged through commoditization, legal enclosure or pollution.

Existing commons regimes, too, vary continuously with changes in their natural or social environment. Property-rights systems can shift back and forth in long, short or even seasonal cycles from communal to private and back again, depending on struggles among prospective beneficiaries, ecological change, and shifts in social relationships. For example, common-field systems are instituted in some new or revived villages in Ethiopia to attract labour and people; where this succeeds the tenure system may be switched to one based on inheritance. Later on, villages may revive communal tenure.¹³

DEFINING ONESELF

Each commons regime may be as different culturally from the next as all are from, say, a factory. But it is not only their cultural diversity that makes such regimes difficult to "capture" in technical or universal terms. Ivan Illich makes this point when he says that the "law establishing the commons was unwritten, not only because people did not care to write it down, but because what it protected was a reality much too complex to fit into paragraphs."¹⁴ This is somewhat inexact; commons rules are sometimes written down; and where they are not, this is not so much because what they protect is complex as because the commons requires an openness, receptiveness and adaptability to the vagaries of local climate, personalities, consciousness, crafts and materials which written records cannot fully express. But Illich's point is important. What makes the commons work, like the skills of wheelwrights, surgeons or machinists, cannot easily be encoded in written or other fixed or "replicable" forms useful to cultural outsiders. These forms can make some of the workings of commons regimes "visible" to moderns but have generally functioned to transfer local power outside the community.

In this and other respects, the concept of the commons flies in the face of the modern wisdom that each spot on the globe consists merely of coordinates on a global grid laid out by state and market: a uniform field which determines everyone's and everything's rights and roles. "Commons" implies the right of local people to define their own grid, their own forms of community respect for watercourses, meadows or paths; to resolve conflicts their own way; to translate what enters their ken into the personal terms of their own dialect; to be "biased" against the "rights" of outsiders to local "resources" in ways usually unrecognized in modern laws; to treat their home not simply as a location housing transferrable goods and chunks of population but as irreplaceable and even to be defended at all costs.

NO FREE-FOR-ALL

For many years, governments, international planning agencies (and many conservationists) have viewed commons regimes with deep hostility. Nothing enrages the World Bank more, for example, than the "Not-In-My-Back-Yard" or "NIMBY" mentality which so many communities display in defending their commons against dams, toxic waste dumps, polluting factories and the like.¹⁵ Many UNCED delegates and conservationists, similarly, view local control over land, forests, streams and rivers as a recipe for environmental destruction. The only way to secure the environment, they say, is to put a fence around it, police it and give it economic value through development.

In defence of such views, development agencies have played upon two related confusions. The first, promulgated most famously in the 1960s by Garrett Hardin and others, is the myth of the "tragedy of the commons". According to Hardin, any commons (the example he used was a hypothetical rangeland) "remorselessly generates tragedy" since the individual gain to each user from overusing the commons will always outweigh the individual losses he or she has to bear due to its resulting degradation.¹⁶ As

many critics have pointed out, however, and as Hardin himself later acknowledged, what he is describing is not a commons regime, in which authority over the use of forests, water and land rests with a community, but rather an *open access* regime, in which authority rests nowhere; in which there is no property at all; in which production for an external market takes social precedence over subsistence; in which production is not limited by considerations of long-term local abundance; in which people "do not seem to talk to one another";¹⁷ and in which profit for harvesters is the only operating social value.

TENDING THE COMMONS

The difference is critical. Far from being a "free-for-all", use of the commons is closely regulated through communal rules and practices.

In Canada, for example, the peoples of the Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation of Ontario still harvest wild rice as a commons, despite efforts by the state government to impose modern management methods. The rice grows in Rice Lake and until the 1950s was harvested entirely by hand from canoes, but recently machine harvesting has also been introduced. Both machine harvests and canoe harvests are regulated through community meetings in which harvesting rights are allocated. Depending on the will of the meeting, certain areas (generally those which have been recently seeded or which are more remote) may be set aside for machine harvesters, or else machines are allowed to enter into certain areas for a limited period "only after the customary canoe harvesters have been allowed to exercise their rights to the extent decided upon at the community meeting."¹⁸ Violations of harvest allocations by machine harvesters are dealt with at community meetings: a recent case resulted in one machine harvester being denied harvest rights for the rest of one season. For each canoe harvest area, the community agrees upon a "field boss" whose responsibilities are to regulate the harvest cycle according to custom, and

to arbitrate in any disputes. Where harvesting rules are breached, the offender may be "grounded", one person in a recent harvest being told to "relearn the Indian way by sitting on the shore and watching."¹⁹

Amongst the Barabaig, a semi-nomadic pastoralist group in Tanzania, rights of use and access to land are variously invested in the community, the clan and individual households. As Charles Lane explains, "the Barabaig recognize that, to make efficient use of resources, access to grazing needs to be controlled to prevent exploitation beyond the capacity to recover. Although surface water is universally accessible to everyone, its use is controlled by rules . . . water sources must not be diverted or contaminated . . . A well becomes the property of the clan of the man who digs it. Although anyone may draw water for domestic purposes from any well, only clan members may water their stock there."²⁰ Whether land is privately or collectively owned, there are rules ensuring that the use made of it is not detrimental to the community as a whole, while certain species of tree are regarded as sacred for the same reason. Disputes, which are rare, are resolved by a public assembly of all adult males, though sometimes in the case of a particularly difficult issue a special committee is formed. There is a parallel council of women, who also have property rights over land and animals, and occasionally may be the head of a family. Women have jurisdiction in matters concerning offences by men against women and in matters concerning spiritual life. Lane describes how recently a women's council upbraided the men for ploughing sacred land. At a regional level, a similar council oversees the movement of herds and people to ensure that there is no overgrazing.

A third example comes from Torbel in Switzerland, a village of some 600 people, where grazing lands, forests, "waste" lands, irrigation systems and paths and roads connecting privately and communally-owned property are all managed as commons. Rights to these commons are not open to all but are conferred by existing commoners who have the power to decide whether or not an outsider should be admitted as "citizens" in the community. Under

a regulation which dates back to 1517, which applies to many other Swiss mountain villages, no one can send more cows to the communal grazing area than they can feed during the winter, a rule that is still enforced with a system of fines. As Elinor Ostrom reports, "This and other forms of 'cow rights' are relatively easy to monitor and enforce. The cows are all sent to the mountain to be cared for by the herdsmen. They must be counted immediately, as the number of cows each family sends is the basis for determining the amount of cheese the family will receive at the annual distribution."²¹ Once again, the commons are administered by a council, in this case consisting of all local cattle-owners. Besides grazing rights, it assigns timber for construction and fuel, arranges the distribution of manure, and is responsible for the upkeep of fences, huts and so on.

THE TRAGEDY OF ENCLOSURE

A second confusion that muddies the debate over the commons is between environmental degradation which can be attributed to commons regimes themselves and that which typically results from their breakdown at the hands of more global regimes. As many authors have pointed out, "tragedies of the commons" generally turn out on closer examination to be "tragedies of enclosure."²² Once they have taken over land, enclosers, unlike families with ties and commitments to the soil, can mine, log, degrade and abandon their holdings, and then sell them on the global market without suffering any personal losses. It is generally enclosers rather than commoners who benefit from bringing ruin to the commons.

In the mid-North region of Brazil, for example, poverty has sometimes been blamed on dependence on babaçu palm in secondary forest, but can be more accurately attributed to the displacement of the babaçu commons by commercial forces. The palm has long been revered by local forest dwellers as a "tree of life" and was used to furnish leaves for shelter, husks for fuel and

fodder for animals.²³ Following a period of open access when the region was first colonized, common property rights to the palms were established informally, and many peasants depend partly on sales of babaçu products harvested from trees growing on agricultural land. When large-scale investors moved into the area to produce sugar, alcohol and cellulose, much land previously covered with babaçu stands was cleared. Ranchers have also cleared large areas for pasture. Peasants who gather babaçu fruits from this pastureland are castigated as trespassers and blamed for "starting wild fires, cutting fences and leaving behind fragments of fruit husks that can cause injury to the hooves of cattle," justifying further cuttings which lead to deeper impoverishment.

COMMONS REGIMES AND THEIR NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

None of this is to suggest that all commons regimes are always capable of preventing degradation of forests, fisheries or land indefinitely. But as Martin Khor of Third World Network puts it, "local control, while not necessarily sufficient for environmental protection, is necessary, while under state control the environment necessarily suffers."²⁴

One reason why local control is essential is that, as Richard O'Connor has argued, "the environment itself is local; nature diversifies to make niches, enmeshing each locale in its own intricate web. Insofar as this holds, enduring human adaptations must also ultimately be quite local."²⁵ Biological diversity, for example, is related to the degree to which one locale is distinct from the next in its topography and natural and human history. It is best preserved by societies which nourish those local differences — in which the traditions and natural history of each area interact to create distinctive systems of cultivation and water and forest use.

This local orientation is displayed par excellence in small commons regimes. As Elinor Ostrom notes:

"Small-scale communities are more likely to have the formal

conditions required for successful and enduring collective management of the commons. Among these are the visibility of common resources and behaviour toward them; feedback on the effects of regulations; widespread understanding and acceptance of the rules and their rationales; the values expressed in these rules (that is, equitable treatment of all and protection of the environment); and the backing of values by socialization, standards, and strict enforcement."²⁶

A second reason why local control is important is that where people rely directly on their natural surroundings for their livelihood, they develop an intimate knowledge of those surroundings which informs their actions. The Barabaig, for example, fully understand that if cattle were to be kept permanently on pastures near local water sources, the land would quickly become degraded. "As herds of livestock are brought to the river margins every day, whatever the season, they know that the forage there is needed by those who are watering their stock. If others are allowed to permanently graze it, this forage would soon be depleted and not available to those who go there to draw water. This would ultimately result in destruction of the land through over-grazing and damage from concentration of hoof traffic. The Barabaig, therefore, have a customary rule that bans settlement at the river margins and denies herders the right to graze the forage if they are not there to water their stock."²⁷

Similarly, the many diverse systems of agriculture evolved by peasant farmers around the world have not evolved randomly but reflect a "thorough understanding of the elements and interactions between vegetations and soils, animals and climate."²⁸ They are both dynamic and innovative, evolving out of a continuing dialogue with the land. Because each technique used is evaluated above all for its long-term local impact, the lore which governs commons regimes, unlike modern science, tends not to split itself into rigid disciplines which pretend to have application in all circumstances. Instead, it tends to focus on a "set of restraints which [help] conserve the social and physical environment for generations."²⁹ Indeed, the notion that present generations are merely stewards who hold the land of the ancestors in trust for future generations is one held by many local communities, particularly in the South.

That notion is not simply an ideal but, where commons regimes still hold sway, informs and influences day-to-day behaviour. Some commons, for example, are totally protected against even subsistence harvesting: for example, the *iiri* groves of the Mbeere of East Africa, where even fallen timber could not be gathered. In Nigeria around Yoruba villages, and around Akha villages in Yunnan, Burma and Thailand, traditional rings of thick forest used for defence, where cultivation was not permitted, were also sites of shrines to village deities. In the Himalayas, too, it is through a mix of religion, folklore and tradition that peasants draw a "protective ring around the forests",³⁰ and in British Columbia, conscientious management and ceremonial life alike "dictated periods of abstention from fishing so that adequate escapement of salmon to their spawning grounds up the rivers and to other upriver groups was ensured."³¹

CHECKS AND BALANCES

The remarkable success of local commons in safeguarding their environments is well documented. A detailed study of Japanese common land (*iriaiichi*) by M. A. McKean, for example, was unable to find a single example of a "commons that suffered ecological destruction while it was still a commons."³² In Pakistan, even the official National Report to UNCED ranks traditionally-managed *shamilaat* communal forests as more effective in environmental protection than forests owned and managed by the state.³³

But that success depends on more than local knowledge of the environment, respect for nature or indigenous technologies. The extent to which sanctions against environmental degradation are observed depends greatly on the extent to which members of a community rely on their natural surroundings for their long-term livelihood and thus have a direct interest in protecting it. Once that direct interest is removed — once members of the community look outside the commons for their sustenance and social standing —

the cultural checks and balances that limit potential abuses of the environment are rendered increasingly ineffective. The authority of commons regimes declines.

In that respect, the key to the success of commons regimes lies in the limits that its culture of shared responsibilities place upon the power of any one group or individual. The equality which generally prevails in the commons, for example, does not grow out of any ideal or romantic preconceived notion of *communitas* any more than out of allegiance to the modern notion that people have "equal rights". Rather, it emerges as a by-product of the inability of a small community's élite to eliminate entirely the bargaining-power of any one of its members, the limited amount of goods any one group can make away with under the others' gaze, and the calculated jockeying for position of many individuals who know each other and share an interest both in minimizing their own risks and in not letting any one of their number become too powerful. In contemporary Laos, for example:

"relations among the villagers may seem strikingly egalitarian, but this is not due to explicit ideology . . . For the Lao, no one's survival should be put at risk by someone else in the community: instability could endanger the survival of the entire village. In a natural economy barely providing sustenance, everyone knows this primary rule, so no one pushes. Older families can sometimes gain influence in a village, but only if the villagers see it as enhancing their chance of survival. Clientage of this sort does not last for long since the environment is not stable. Influence eventually disappears as a family's branches fade, move elsewhere, or experience bad weather . . . No one is in charge — although sometimes there is a village elder who helps make decisions, and who must work just as hard as everyone else . . . Everyone works hard, eats adequately, and gets along well together."³⁴

Where everyone has some degree of bargaining power, no one is likely to starve while others are comfortable. As in Indonesian or medieval European village society, any hardship must be shared. (This helps to explain why exclusion from the group is still regarded as tantamount to a death sentence in many societies in which the commons plays a central role.) In many such societies, commoditization of food is often perceived as a threat, since it

takes power over subsistence out of the hands of the less well-off.

Changes in the power base of a local élite or increases in effective community size entailed by integration into a global social fabric can rapidly undermine the authority of the commons. The sense of shame or transgression so important to community controls, as well as the monitoring of violations themselves, is diluted or denatured by increase in numbers, while envy of outsiders unconstrained by those controls flourishes. At some point, “the breakdown of a community with the associated collapse in concepts of joint ownership and responsibility can set the path for the degradation of common resources in spite of abundance.”³⁵

It is precisely this process that development fuels. The expansion of modern state, international and market institutions entails a shrinking space for the commons. Today, virtually all “human communities are encapsulated within or fully integrated into larger sociopolitical systems” as are their “local systems of resource use and property rights”,³⁶ making enclosure an ever-present threat. As political, social and ecological boundaries are erased, control is centralized or privatized, skills are made obsolete, people put at the service of industry or made redundant, and land is commercialized or placed under management. As their environments are destroyed or degraded, their power eroded or denied, and their communities threatened, millions are now demanding a halt to the development process. As the social activist Gustavo Esteva writes, “if you live in Rio or Mexico City, you need to be very rich or very stupid not to notice that development stinks . . . We need to say ‘no’ to development, to all and every form of development. And that is precisely what the social majorities — for whom development was always a threat — are asking for.”³⁷ For them, the struggle is to reclaim, defend or create their commons and with it the rough sense of equity that flows from sharing a truly common future.

2 *DEVELOPMENT AS ENCLOSURE*

The Establishment of the Global Economy

The creation of empires and states, business conglomerates and civic dictatorships — whether in pre-colonial times or in the modern era — has only been possible through dismantling the commons and harnessing the fragments, deprived of their old significance, to build up new economic and social patterns that are responsive to the interests of a dominant minority. The modern nation state has been built only by stripping power and control from commons regimes and creating structures of governance from which the great mass of humanity (particularly women) are excluded. Likewise, the market economy has expanded primarily by enabling state and commercial interests to gain control of territory that has traditionally been used and cherished by others, and by transforming that territory— together with the people themselves — into expendable “resources” for exploitation. By enclosing forests, the state and private enterprise have torn them out of fabrics of peasant subsistence; by providing local leaders with an outside power base, unaccountable to local people, they have undermined village checks and balances; by stimulating demand for cash goods, they have impelled villagers to seek an ever wider range of things to sell. Such a policy was as determinedly pursued by the courts of Aztec Mexico, the feudal lords of West Africa, by the factory-owners of Lancashire and the British Raj, as it is today by the International Monetary Fund or the Coca-Cola Corporation.

Only in this way has it been possible to convert peasants into labour for a global economy, replace traditional with modern agriculture, and free up the commons for the industrial economy. Similarly, only by atomizing tasks and separating workers from the moral authority, crafts and natural surroundings created by

their communities has it been possible to transform them into modern, universal individuals susceptible to "management". In short, only by *deliberately* taking apart local cultures and reassembling them in new forms, has it been possible to open them up to global trade.¹ As one advocate of development argued in the early 1960s:

"Economic development of an underdeveloped people by themselves is not compatible with the maintenance of their traditional customs and mores. A break with the latter is prerequisite to economic progress. What is needed is a revolution in the totality of social, cultural and religious institutions and habits, and thus in their psychological attitude, their philosophy and way of life. What is, therefore, required amounts in reality to social disorganization. Unhappiness and discontentment in the sense of wanting more than is obtainable at any moment is to be generated. The suffering and dislocation that may be caused in the process may be objectionable, but it appears to be the price that has to be paid for economic development: the condition of economic progress."²

To achieve that "condition of economic progress", millions have been thrown onto the human scrapheap as a calculated act of policy, their commons dismantled and degraded, their cultures denigrated and devalued and their own worth reduced to their value as labour. Seen from this perspective, the processes that now go under the rubric of "nation-building", "economic growth" and "progress" are first and foremost processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession. In a word, of enclosure.

ENCLOSURE IN BRITAIN

They hang the man and flog the woman
That steal the goose from off the common,
But let the greater villain loose
That steals the common from the goose.

(Traditional Rhyme)

Although enclosure of commons has taken place at many isolated moments throughout world history, it was in Britain between the 15th and the 19th centuries that the phenomenon became identifiable as a historical process. It is no coincidence that the country

which gave birth to the expression "inclosure", should also be the country that spearheaded the drive towards an industrialized market economy, for the one was essential to the other.

Enclosure in Britain can be distinguished from earlier forms of expropriation and enclosure in that it did not merely involve a transfer of power from the commons to an expropriating elite, but also signalled a more profound change in the social order in two related respects. Firstly, enclosure, by redefining land as "property", gave it the status of a commodity, tradeable within a rapidly expanding market system; and as a corollary, since the majority of people were denied access to the land and forced to become wage-labourers, labour also became a tradeable commodity. Secondly, enclosure in Britain has consistently been justified by its perpetrators and apologists as "improvement". The first legal act to enforce enclosures, the Statute of Merton of 1235, spoke of the need to "approve" (ie., improve) the land in order to extract greater rent.³ "Improvement" was seen as linked, if not completely synonymous, with profit in the same way that the later term "development" has come to be associated with "economic growth".

The system of "open-field" — unfenced and communally managed strips of arable land — that predominated in England throughout the Middle Ages had several advantages for the peasantry as well as disadvantages. Most importantly, it guaranteed access to the land for the bulk of the population. Although the poorer villagers were obliged to work for stipulated periods on the local Lord's land, for the rest of the time they were free to work their own plots. At the time of the *Domesday Book* census in 1086, more than half the arable land belonged to the villagers. This unfenced land was worked with varying degrees of collectivization, which allowed a certain elasticity both to the size of peasants' holdings and to the level of their labour contribution, as the size of their families changed over the years. After the harvest, the arable land became a collective pasture for villagers' stock and remained fallow during the following year. The greater part of the land consisted of meadow, heath, moorland or woodland, all of which were managed communally, and where peasants held many rights,

such as *estovers* (fuelwood), *turbary* (peat cutting) and *pannage* (turning pigs into the woods).

However, the system was not easily adaptable to change. There was no place in it for the ambitious farmer who wished to specialize in breeding sheep, or who in later centuries wished to apply more complex rotations including crops such as turnips or clover. But after the Black Death plague of 1348, which wiped out over a third of the population, the scarcity of labour and the abundance of land prompted a change in land-tenure from the bottom levels of society upward, whereby individual holdings existed alongside the open-field system, while the common pastures and woodlands remained substantially intact.

The rate of change, however, was not fast or lucrative enough for ambitious landowners who found that they could extract more value from the land by turning it over to sheep to supply the booming wool export market. Between the 14th and the 16th centuries, thousands of peasants were evicted from their holdings, while many more saw the common lands that were the basis of their independence fenced off for sheep. Other commoners found that their small plots of arable land were harder to maintain when deprived of the common pasture for cattle and were forced to sell up.

While newer tenants could be summarily evicted, those with traditional rights had recourse to the law. But the courts were invariably biased against the poor, as Bishop Latimer in 1552, testified:

“Be the poor man’s cause never so manifest, the rich shall, for money, find six or seven counsellors that shall stand with subtleties and sophisms to cloak an evil matter and hide a known truth . . . Such boldness have these covetous cormorants that now their robberies, extortion and oppression have no end or limits, no banks can keep in their violence. As for turning the poor out of their holdings, they take it for no offence, but say their land is their own and they turn them out of their shrouds like mice. Thousands in England, through such, beg now from door to door which have kept honest houses.”⁴

By Latimer’s day, enclosure was seen to be causing a severe law-and-order problem. It had created a dispossessed proletariat of potential wage-earners, without providing any industry to employ

them. Recurrent peasant revolts and the menacing presence of large bands of beggars upon the highways persuaded the 16th century Tudor monarchs to apply legal brakes to the enclosure process, which they did with partial success.

However, the English revolution of 1649–1660 brought to power the very class of landowners that benefited from enclosure and the process recommenced in earnest. “Early in the 18th century there begins the great series of Private Acts of Enclosure, of which 4,000 in all, covering some 7,000,000 acres were passed before the General Enclosure Act of 1845. During the same period it is probable that about the same area was enclosed without application to Parliament.”⁵ By 1876, the “New Domesday Book” calculated that about 2,250 people owned half the agricultural land in England and Wales, and that 0.6 per cent of the population owned 98.5 per cent of it.⁶

Of these 4,000 Acts of Enclosure, two-thirds involved open fields belonging to cottagers, while one-third involved commons such as woodland and heath. Initially the impetus for enclosure was the still expanding sheep industry. But by the 19th century, as cotton began to be imported, the relative importance of wool declined, although the sheep industry continued to expand to poorer lands in Scotland, where many thousands of peasants were evicted from their homes by the most brutal means and either left to fend for themselves, or else transported to America.⁷ In England, newer agricultural methods and more complex crop rotations, which had been developed anonymously over the previous two centuries, were now being vigorously championed by men such as “Turnip” Townshend and Arthur Young; ambitious landlords found that by enclosing and amalgamating several farms and applying these methods they could raise the rents of their lands by phenomenal amounts. The government was happy to sanction this process, since it could derive increased taxes from these higher rents, much of which went towards the costs of war against France, which in turn benefited the farmers by raising the price of food.

But although the farming methods looked good on paper, there were a number of “externalities” that the improvers had failed to

anticipate, as Arthur Young in his later life came to acknowledge.⁸ The environmental effects, though by no means as severe as those caused by the chemical agriculture of today, were nonetheless considerable. Valuable ancient meadows were ploughed up to take short-term advantage of artificially high corn prices, and then, when prices dropped, allowed to relapse to degraded pasture,⁹ and large amounts of heathland and forest were destroyed.¹⁰ Forest land was regarded by the new breed of agriculturalists as “the nest and conservatory of sloth, idleness and misery” and many forests such as Enfield Chase in 1777, Windsor Forest in 1817 and Hainault Forest in 1851 were destroyed by parliamentary Acts of Enclosure.¹¹

But the principal “externality” was the creation of a massive proletariat of dispossessed labourers, who could no longer feed themselves, nor afford to pay the high price of corn associated with the high land rents. This, as William Cobbett observed, was an effect that the advocates of enclosure had preferred to ignore:

“Those who are so eager for new inclosure seem to argue as if the wasteland in its present state produced nothing at all. But is this the fact? Can anyone point out a single inch of it which does not produce something and the produce of which is made use of? It goes to the feeding of sheep, of cows, of cattle of all descriptions, and . . . it helps to rear, in health and vigour, numerous families of the children of the labourers, which children, were it not for these wastes, must be crammed into the stinking suburbs of towns amidst filth of all sorts, and congregating together in the practice of every species of idleness and vice.”¹²

The responsibility for the upkeep of dispossessed commoners fell upon taxpayers and for a time was a considerable drain upon the economy. The eventual solution proved to lie in further liberalization of trade at home and intervention abroad. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 allowed free importation of cheap American wheat, while the enforced destruction of local textile industries in India and other colonies (*see* Box: King Cotton) provided work for the dispossessed multitudes at home. By 1900, British agriculture, despite the “improvements” of the previous century, was in a state of decline, whereas the industrial workers were beginning to share the rewards of development. This rise in the standard of living has been taken by apologists as a vindication of enclosure, which, even

King Cotton and the Enclosure of Markets

The enclosure of diverse local industries and markets into a single global system was achieved largely through the medium of a handful of luxury commodities — in particular gold, sugar, tea, cotton and opium. Of these, cotton had perhaps the most far-reaching effects.

The growth of the British cotton industry was phenomenal. Before the invention of Arkwright’s spinning frame in 1769, cotton was a luxury material imported in small quantities to Europe from the Orient. By 1912, Britain was importing nearly 900,000 tons of raw cotton, and exporting nearly seven billion yards of woven material each year — almost enough to provide a suit of clothes for every man, woman and child alive in the world at the time. The absurdity of shipping such a staggering quantity of material from all over the world to one island and then shipping it all out again was of no concern to the protagonists of an economic system whose only priority was profit.

The rise to dominance of cotton as a textile in the early 19th century was not due to any inherent superiority of the fibre as a textile, but to two characteristics which made it competitive in a global market. Firstly, being “a plant fibre, tough and relatively homogenous . . . where wool is organic, fickle and subtly varied in its behaviour”, it adapted more readily to mechanization and the factory system. This made it more attractive to industrialists who found the disciplining of a reluctant workforce considerably easier in the centralized factory environment than in a system where outworkers worked under their own speed at home. Secondly, it grew in the tropics, where labour was cheap and land for the taking. The importation of cotton spared land in England for food production, and labour to work in the new factories.

Enclosure of Land

The repercussions of the cotton trade were catastrophic and affected people of almost every hue and clime. In the US, about 90,000 Cherokee Indians were evicted from their lands to make way for cotton plantations, 30,000 of them dying on the march west. The period 1784–1860 saw an eightfold increase in the number of slaves in the Southern states, specifically for the cotton plantations, an increase which came to a climax in the most bloody conflict of the 19th century, the American Civil War.

In Egypt, the ruler Mehemet Ali:

“initiated in the 1820s a program to decrease the production of grain for domestic subsistence and to increase production of the one crop that could be exported, long staple cotton . . . Peasants were also drafted in large numbers to build irrigation works and canals in order to create the hydraulic infrastructure required for cotton cultivation . . . Between 1818 and 1844, the land in the hands of the peasantry diminished from 85–90 per cent of the total land area to 56 per cent . . . In 1882, the British took over Egypt. They reinforced the pattern of cotton growing on large estates, thus laying the basis for the problems that were to plague Egypt in the 20th century”.

Whose Common Future?

The process has continued into modern times. Under Ethiopia's Third Five-Year Plan, 60 per cent of the lands brought under cultivation in the fertile Awash Valley were devoted to cotton production. The local Afar pastoralists were evicted from their traditional pastures and pushed into fragile uplands, contributing to the deforestation that has been partly responsible for Ethiopia's ecological crisis.

The Enclosure of Markets

It was not only the cultivation of cotton that destroyed communities, but also the marketing of the finished product. In England, handloom weavers were put out of business, and driven to find work in the factories, where the conditions were appalling. The Irish linen industry was progressively forced out of existence after the manufacture of lawn and cambric was prohibited there in 1767. In India, the British set about the deliberate destruction of the indigenous industry. By building up its own network of cotton and cloth dealers, the British-owned East India Company was able to exert coercive control over India's handloom weavers, who rapidly lost their independence as producers and in many instances became waged workers employed on terms and conditions over which they had no control. Over 10,000 Bengali weavers were obliged by the terms of their contract to work entirely for the Company. When the East India Company's monopoly was abolished in 1813, the Indian weaving industry was too debilitated to resist the flooding of the market with inferior products from the Lancashire mills. India found the cash to pay for this imported cloth partly by growing opium to be sold to China as a means of breaking down its closed markets, a trade which resulted in the Opium Wars of the second half of the 19th century.

By the end of the century, India was taking nearly half of Britain's cotton exports, even though it was now producing cotton cloth itself in factories based around Bombay. Most of the rest went to other colonies where much the same inroads had been made into local markets. In 1886 the British consul of Lourenço Marques (Maputo) reported that native weaving and indigenous textile skills had completely disappeared from the area. Within the space of less than a hundred years, the Lancashire cotton industry had consigned to extinction countless native textile industries, whose techniques and designs had evolved over centuries.

In the early 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi organized a boycott of British-made cloth and championed the spinning wheel as a means of reviving the local economy. In public meetings he "would ask the people to take off their foreign clothing and put it on a heap. When all the hats, coats, shirts, trousers, underwear, socks and shoes had been heaped high, Gandhi set a match to them". After Gandhi's death his influence persisted in the large numbers of *khadi* workshops producing handspun material, although the Indian government under Nehru and Indira Gandhi pursued a policy of increasing centralization and industrialization. The *charkha*, the spinning wheel, remains upon the Indian flag as a reminder of the traditional industries and markets that were consumed by the cotton industry.

though it "made some terrible mistakes", "blazed a trail for the whole world."¹³ In reality, the social and environmental "externalities" of enclosure were simply transferred to the colonies —

Development as Enclosure

the process of enclosure went on to blaze its trail *across* the whole world. It gave added impetus to the process of expropriation that was already underway in some areas of the South and extended the process to others.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The European colonial powers perceived their "mission" as one of overt transformation, their primary objectives being: to secure new sources of raw materials for their expanding economies; to exploit the peoples of the colonies for cheap labour; to provide living space for Europe's "surplus population" — in effect, those who had been dispossessed of their lands and livelihoods by the encroachment of market capitalism; and to create markets for European (and later North American) goods by denying markets to local artisans and by forcing local people into the colonial market economy.

In the long term, this last objective was to prove to be the most important, because control of an expanding market became critical for the survival of capitalism. As one French official wrote of the colonization of North Africa:

"Apart from the civilizing mission she is pursuing in her colonies, France has created a colonial empire to develop her external commerce. Indeed, we only occupied the region of Niger to Chad to find an outlet for our products and a source of raw materials for our industry."¹⁴

Britain's colonial motives were made equally plain by Cecil Rhodes, the "founder" of Rhodesia:

"We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labour that is available from the natives of the colonies. The colonies would also provide a dumping ground for the surplus goods produced in our factories."¹⁵

DISPOSSESSION

But in order to create an international constituency of eager consumers, the colonialists first had to build up a labour force with

access to cash — and to achieve this they first had to commandeer land. This they did by dispossessing indigenous communities of the greater part of their traditional territories: in effect, by enclosing the commons. Throughout the colonies, it became standard practice to declare all “uncultivated” land to be the property of the colonial administration. At a stroke, local communities were denied legal title to lands they had traditionally set aside as fallow and to the forests, grazing lands and streams they relied upon for hunting, gathering, fishing and herding.

Where, as was frequently the case, the colonial authorities found that the lands they sought to exploit were already “cultivated”, the problem was remedied by restricting the indigenous population to tracts of low quality land deemed unsuitable for European settlement. In Kenya, such “reserves” were “structured to allow the Europeans, who accounted for less than one per cent of the population, to have full access to the agriculturally rich uplands that constituted 20 per cent of the country.”¹⁶ In Southern Rhodesia, white colonists, who constituted just five per cent of the population, became the new owners of two-thirds of the land.¹⁷ In Northern Rhodesia, the policy of reserving the best land for European agriculture was explicit, the 1932 *Agricultural Survey Commission* stating:

“Any land that had poor soils, inadequate water supplies, low nutrition grasses unsuitable for European cattle or [was] overgrown with impenetrable bush, was not suitable for Europeans and should be allocated to Africans.”¹⁸

Once secured, the commons appropriated by the colonial administration were typically leased out to commercial concerns for plantations, mining and logging, or sold to white settlers. In India, the British designated vast tracts of forest as “reserve forests”. The rights of access which villagers had traditionally enjoyed were curtailed and large areas were logged to supply timber for ship-building and sleepers for the expanding railway system. In French Equatorial Africa, the granting of commercial concessions proceeded at such a pace that by 1899, 70 per cent of the country had been leased to just 40 such companies, with one company receiving 140,000 square kilometres.¹⁹

Afforded little protection under the law, local peoples found themselves liable to eviction even from the “cultivated” land that was, in theory, theirs. Boer settlers in South Africa regularly drove local farmers off their tribal lands on the grounds that the “natives were merely subsistence farmers and deserved to be treated as squatters since they were not engaged in any systematic forms of agriculture.”²⁰ Even where “reserves” had been set up, the indigenous population were without legal security of tenure. In Kenya, the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, which supposedly “guaranteed” tribal land rights, made explicit provisions for any part of a reserve to be cancelled if it were decided that the land was “needed” for railroads and highways or any public purpose.²¹

Not content with dispossessing the indigenous population of vast areas of land, the colonial authorities also sought to break up communal systems of tenure and to substitute private ownership. In the Philippines, Malaysia, India and parts of Africa, land laws were passed actively encouraging individuals to register their plots as private holdings. In North Africa, the French deliberately set about breaking up the collectively owned lands of local nomadic herders by decreeing in 1873 that families would not enjoy any land rights under French law unless they established and registered their own individual holdings. Under the new law, “individualization” of the entire group holding was mandatory if any one individual in the group desired registration, regardless of the wishes of the other collective owners. The new laws were exploited by both French colonists and indigenous urban élites to acquire large tracts of the best land, the number of French landholdings in Algeria alone doubling between 1870 and 1890.²²

FORCED LABOUR

If dispossession was the favoured means of securing land for the colonial economy, finding labour presented a more intractable problem. Where elements of the commons remained, local peoples were still largely self-reliant and had little incentive to grow crops

for export to London, Paris or Amsterdam, nor any incentive to indulge in backbreaking labour down mines, on plantations or building roads and government offices. As an editorial in the *Rabaul Times* noted of New Guinea in the mid-1930s:

"One of the greatest contributing factors to the unsatisfactory services rendered by native labourers in this country is their economic independence. For it must not be forgotten that every native is a landed proprietor, and nature has endowed New Guinea with a prolific soil, which provides adequate sustenance for a minimum of labour. Dismissal from employment, if he fails to carry out his duties, holds no terrors for the New Guinean native . . . Unless and until our natives reach such a stage of development that they must work to obtain sustenance or a livelihood, they will never make suitable indentured labour for the average white resident."²³

Typically, in the early years of colonial rule, indigenous labour could only be recruited by force. Throughout the Americas, for example, the violent subjugation of the Indians was integral to the imposition of the export-orientated economy that the Spanish colonists required. Resistance to enforced assimilation has been continuous. In Guatemala alone there has been an average of one Indian rebellion every sixteen years since the Conquest in 1524.²⁴

In West Africa, the French and British also responded to labour shortages by imposing forced labour, even though both powers were nominally committed to the abolition of slavery. The colonial mind "resolved" this potential moral dilemma by "declaring slavery to be uncivilized and forced labour to be a necessary way of instructing primitive people about the advantages of modernity."²⁵ The French Minister of Commerce stated in 1901:

"The black does not like work and is totally unaccustomed to the idea of saving; he does not realise that idleness keeps him in a state of absolute economic inferiority. It is therefore necessary to use . . . slavery to improve his circumstances and afterwards lead him into an apprenticeship of freedom."²⁶

In Senegal alone, the *corvée* provided an estimated five million person-days of free labour every year in the early 1920s. Even in the 1930s, nine-tenths of the public work in French West Africa was undertaken through *corvée* labour, until it was finally abolished in 1946.²⁷ The conditions were so bad that, according to one

observer, "the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would have prosecuted me if I had given a dog the same quantity and quality of food and shelter."²⁸ The death toll in some work gangs was as high as 60 per cent.²⁹

TAXED INTO THE MARKET

But the colonial "mission" went beyond simply the expropriation of land and the coercion of local people into the labour force. Central to colonial enterprise was the drive to build up a cash economy and, with it, a market for goods from the industrial North. To achieve that task, the colonial authorities set about the systematic dismantling of those elements of the commons that stood in the way of market penetration. To that end, widespread use was made of such economic instruments as taxation, a strategy that not only introduced the need to earn cash but which also (by requiring village elders to collect it) undermined the balance of power that is central to the maintenance of the commons.³⁰

Taxes were levied on whatever the colonial authorities deemed most vital to villagers. In Vietnam, a poll-tax was imposed, followed by a tax on salt, opium and alcohol, with a minimum consumption level being set for each region and village leaders rewarded for exceeding the quota.³¹ In the Sudan, crops, animals, houses and households were singled out for taxation.³² To meet their tax obligations, rural people throughout the colonies had little option but to sell their labour or to grow crops for sale. In French colonial West Africa, punishments for "tax evasion" included "holding women and children hostage until the dues had been paid, burning huts, whipping and tying up people and leaving them without food for several days."³³

Similarly, a combination of force and taxation was used to destroy indigenous craft industries, particularly textiles, and to harness traditional trading patterns to the needs and interests of Western Europe. In South Asia, elaborate regional trading patterns, developed over at least two millennia, were ruthlessly commandeered as the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British carved out

their own areas of control through military force and, subsequently, by imposing a system of monopolies. Thousands of native traders and seafarers, deprived of their livelihoods, resisted by turning to piracy, giving the imperial powers an excuse for further intervention.³⁴ In French West Africa, the authorities deliberately set out to dismantle traditional inter-regional trading patterns by imposing, in 1905, special levies on all goods which did not come from France or a region under French control, thus forcing up the price of local products, to the ruin of local artisans and traders. Within five years, nearly half of the goods imported into France's West African colonies came from France.

In the Sudan, the British used similar tactics.

"Along the middle reaches of the Rahad River, for example, peasants preferred the cloth produced by their traditional methods from cotton they grew themselves to the more expensive Manchester cloth. As a result, the British banned private cotton cultivation in Blue Nile Province (and others nearby) and when the peasants persisted by moving their cotton plants inside their fenced compounds, the police searched them out and burned them. In either case, the result was the substitution of a regular cash need for a key indigenous handicraft industry."³⁵ (*See Box: King Cotton*)

NEW ELITES

Stripped of much of their land, reduced to labouring for another's benefit and increasingly dependent on world markets, local peoples throughout the colonies found themselves caught up in political and social changes that divided their communities and imposed new structures of oppression on society at large.

Critically, the colonial system of administration undermined the moral authority of commons regimes by co-opting traditional leadership of the communities it sought to control. Local leaders slowly became distanced from their fellow villagers with each colonial edict they enforced, and gradually transferred their allegiance to the colonial regime. In the Dutch East Indies, for example, village leaders were made responsible for ensuring that "their" villages produced specific quotas of crops under the so-

called "Culture System."³⁶ Increasingly regarded "as a source of governmental oppression rather than as a source of village solidarity and protection,"³⁷ village leaders inevitably came to rely on the colonial regime to legitimize their authority. In turn, the villagers — reduced to mere "administered producers"³⁸ — found their own power eroded as consensus gave way to dictat in decision making.

Likewise, the checks and balances that had helped to curtail the abuse of power and privilege in many pre-colonial societies were eaten away by the encroachment of the market economy and the imposition of European systems of jurisprudence and land tenure. In India, for example, the introduction of British contract law profoundly altered the traditional relationship between money-lenders and their clients, stripping villagers of the protection they had customarily enjoyed against dispossession through indebtedness. Before the arrival of the British the power of the money-lender was circumscribed:

"The money-lender could assure himself a portion of the harvest, but could not seize the debtor's land or contest hereditary rights to his land. The village would not allow the transfer of land to outsiders, and according to Hindu law, the debt could not build up to more than twice the original principal. With the coming of British tax law and land policy, however, mortgaging became possible and with that, a shift in favour of the money-lender in cases of flagrant insolvency on the part of the debtor. Protection of the village community and customary law largely ceased, since the lender could bring action in a British court. The latter, basing its judgement on the common law of contracts, would protect him. In contrast to Indian law, the entire property of the debtor could be seized in service of the debt. Without the protection of the village, moreover, the peasants were often swindled. They signed contracts containing obligations they had not agreed to; false bookkeeping entries were attested to as correct; and oral agreements were no longer, as formerly, valid . . . Because the local money-lender was very often the local merchant as well, he could easily collect his interest payments at harvest time. Later in the year, however, when the peasant's supplies were used up, he had to buy foodstuffs from the same merchant at higher prices."³⁹

A similar process took place in many other cultures throughout the colonies as individuals took advantage of the shattering of customary law to accrue power and influence for themselves at the

expense of the commons. Cash-cropping, for example, created or widened differences in wealth. In themselves, such differences need not have resulted in divisive social change: on the contrary, it was customary in many pre-colonial communities for wealth to be redistributed through a variety of channels — feasting, for example — to the benefit of the community as a whole. Equally, where land tenure was still held communally, opportunities to accumulate land at the expense of other members of the community were circumscribed. But where private property had been legitimized through the imposition of European law, the way was cleared for the accumulation of wealth, creating a new élite that was able to buy into the colonial system, albeit at a rank lower than that of their white rulers. Authority within the commons thus began to pass to those who shared the values and outward trappings of the colonist: those who had been to school or university or who had a profession and so on.

MALE DOMINANCE

Enclosure did not affect women and men in the same way. Underpinning all the enclosures essential to industrialism and colonialism is the enclosure of women.⁴⁰

From at least the 12th century onwards in Europe, women were persecuted, tortured and burnt as witches. A main objective of the witch-hunts was to remove women's control over their bodies, in particular their knowledge of contraception, abortion and child-birth. There was also an economic motivation: the rising class of merchant traders felt threatened by independent women involved in trade and commerce, while entrepreneurs, landowners and the emerging nation-state benefited from confiscated witch property. By the 19th century, many women had little option but to depend on a male breadwinner, a position reinforced by marriage and property laws. They were confined to the home to bear children, be sexually available and consume industrial products and imports from the colonies.

Although the workplace was separated from the home, women

did not stop working. Housewives' work became work to be done at any time, at any place, unpaid or poorly paid, and, in a cash economy, hardly valued. Like nature, women's work was considered free, but like nature, the system could not exist without it.

This transformation was paralleled in the colonies by the overturning of women's substantial influence in trade, agriculture and crafts. Like the European witches before them:

“women of the colonized peoples [were] progressively brought down from a former position of relative power and independence to that of ‘beastly’ and degraded ‘nature’. This ‘naturalization’ of colonized women is the counterpart of the ‘civilizing’ of the European women into housewives . . . The rise and generalization of the decent . . . marriage and family as protected institutions are *causally* linked to the disruption of clan and family relations of the ‘natives’”.⁴¹

Writing in Burma at the close of the 19th century, Fielding Hall described how local industries in the hands of women were destroyed by the import of commodities from England. “In Rangoon, the large English stores are undermining the Bazaars where the women used to earn an independent livelihood.” The next step, according to Hall, was to change marriage and inheritance laws so that Burma could become a “progressive” country:

“with [the Burmese woman's] power of independence will disappear her free will and her influence. When she is dependent on her husband, she can no longer dictate to him. When he feeds her, she is no longer able to make her voice as loud as his. . . The nations who succeed are not feminine nations but the masculine . . . It has never been good for women to be too independent, it has robbed them of many virtues. It improves a man to have to work for his wife and family, it makes a man of him. It is demoralising for both if the woman can keep herself and, if necessary, her husband too.”⁴²

The transition from a female traditional agricultural system to a white Christian settlers' agriculture disempowered Native American Iroquois women, not only in agricultural and economic fields but in family, social, political and religious spheres as well. Prior to the 19th century, Iroquois women worked communally in the fields for hours at a time. Men's work centred on hunting, diplomacy and trading. The people of the matrilineal Iroquois culture

lived in multi-family longhouses. But after the American Revolution, Quaker missionaries introduced private ownership of land and intensive farming methods, using iron ploughs and horses driven by men rather than the hand-held hoes used by women. Gradually the husband became the sole farmer and sole head of the family: his wife was relegated to keeping house, small-scale gardening, chores around the farm and child-raising within the nuclear family.⁴³

The enclosure of women is clearly linked to the rise of modern medicine, science and the market economy as women have been classed as “nature” and thus considered as a vast reservoir of resources — future human resources. Francis Bacon asserted that much as “woman’s womb had . . . yielded to the forceps, so nature’s womb harboured secrets that through technology could be wrestled from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition.”⁴⁴ Enclosure has given rise to an almost universal male dominated and hierachical system which is more intense, extreme and absolute than any form of patriarchy before.⁴⁵

FROM COLONIALISM TO COLONIALISM

The élites who came to dominate the independence movements in many colonies showed themselves to be as committed to the extractivist economy of the colonial regime as the colonists they helped unseat. For them, the argument was not over what type of economy to run, but over who should run it and who should reap the greatest rewards. In India, for example, what had most irked the middle-class members of Congress was not that village commons had been enclosed, nor that land was being used for cash-crops, nor that industrial development was undermining local livelihoods, but that they — “the natural rulers” — were excluded from power. In their minds, there was never any doubt that the future lay in further industrialization, in “catching up” with the West. Their fear was that the opportunity to transform India into a modern industrial state would be denied them by colonialism.⁴⁶

Indeed, it was precisely the commitment of Congress to industrialization that led Mahatma Gandhi to warn, “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.”⁴⁷

But Gandhi’s views, rooted in the aspirations of village India rather than the back-room politics of Delhi, did not prevail. Prime Minister Nehru rejected the Gandhian vision of an India consisting of numerous village republics — a vision that reflected the struggles of popular movements throughout the sub-continent to reclaim the commons — and instead set out to industrialize India through export-led growth, a path that would be broadly followed by other colonies once they had achieved independence.

A process of internal colonization, as devastating to the commons as anything that had gone before it, was thus set in motion. Using the slogans of “nation-building” and “development” to justify their actions, Third World governments have employed the full panoply of powers established under colonial rule to further dismantle the commons. Millions have lost their homelands — or the lands they had made their home — to make way for dams, industrial plants, mines, military security zones, waste dumps, plantations, tourist resorts, motorways, urban redevelopment and other schemes intended to transform the South into an appendage of the North. Deals have been made with Northern interests in return for aid and military protection; debts incurred to build projects that line the pockets of local commercial interests but which drive millions into poverty; multinational companies offered land, cheap labour and tax breaks at the expense of workers, peasants and the environment; subsidies handed out to richer farmers; industries allowed to pollute; and national economies tied more tightly than ever to the interests of global capital. Moreover, where popular movements have threatened to break the alliances that now exist between Southern élites and Northern interests, such movements have been suppressed or, where they have come

to power, toppled by local élites operating in consort with Northern powers.

ENCLOSURE AND THE PEASANTRY

The continual enclosure of farming communities illustrates this general process. With the backing of international development agencies, commons have been vilified and destroyed; peasants have been corralled into the market and taxed into growing cash crops; prime agricultural lands have been expropriated for plantations and ranches; and once independent farmers have been reduced to landless labourers or agricultural workers for domestic and international corporations.

Even after the demise of colonialism, dispossession still remains the most visible means of enclosure. In the Philippines, where agribusiness interests were given a virtually free hand under the Marcos regime to take over land for export agriculture, thousands were dispossessed during the 1970s and early 1980s. Thirty per cent of the total cultivated land area is now given over to cash-crop production for export, mainly bananas, pineapples and sugar-cane. The island of Negros is now little more than a vast sugar estate, producing 68 per cent of the Philippines' sugar crop. The most fertile area of the island of Mindanao, Davao del Norte, is almost entirely under cash crops, with 25,000 hectares of banana plantations alone. The plantations are run principally by foreign multinationals: Dole Philippines acquired over 30,000 hectares in South Cotabato, NDC-Guthrie gobbled up 8,000 hectares in Agusan, and Provident Tree Farms Inc. laid claim to 23,000 hectares for an industrial tree plantation to supply matchsticks.⁴⁸

Human rights abuses are common. As Memong Patayan, a Filipino activist, told the 1986 International Solidarity Conference for the Filipino Peasantry, "the use of force to terrorize the people and to make them accept relocation and resettlement is a necessary component of corporate landgrabbing."⁴⁹ From January 1981 to May 1982 alone, over 75 cases of military abuses were reported in areas of North and South Agusan province, targeted for plantation

by the Manila Paper Mills Inc. The use of arbitrary detention and physical harassment created "such a climate of fear that widespread evacuations occurred . . . The abandoned lands have reportedly been planted to *ipil-ipil* trees by Manila Paper Mills."⁵⁰

The overthrow of the Marcos regime and the coming to power of the Aquino government brought little relief for peasants. In the case of Provident Tree Farms:

"Coercive measures have been instituted to edge out peasants stubbornly clinging to precious parcels of land. These range from hamletting to burning of homes to strafing and even salvaging [executing] local residents who actively oppose the entry of agribusiness corporations. Goons, private armies, religious cults and, more often than not, the military are employed to conduct these operations under the guise of counter-insurgency drives."⁵¹

Moreover, although Aquino ordered the sequestration of all "crony property", the government is committed to the same "Balanced Agro-Industrial Development Strategy" (BAIDS) first developed by the Marcos regime. Under BAIDS, the planting of export crops is to be further widened to include non-traditional crops such as rubber, cocoa, sorghum, yellow corn and beans. The strategy aims to encourage private and foreign firms to invest in agribusiness management over agricultural lands devoted to these non-traditional crops. The International Solidarity Conference for the Filipino Peasantry concludes: "To the poor farmers, BAIDS could only mean more landgrabbing and military harassment."⁵²

Africa has also experienced an invasion of corporate agribusiness interests as post-colonial regimes have opened up their countries to foreign investment in the pursuit of export-led growth. In Nigeria, for example, Fiat, through its subsidiary Impresit Nigeria Ltd, capitalized on grants for large-scale irrigation schemes to set up the Talata-Mafara project on 10,000 acres near the Sokoto River. Some 60,000 peasants were forcibly removed from their land, without compensation.⁵³ When they protested, the state sent in armed police, brutally repressing the resistance.⁵⁴

However, transnational companies (TNCs) are now moving away from direct control of land and are operating instead through direct contracts with peasants, whereby a company agrees to buy

Dispossessed for Development: Mining

During the colonial period, mining interests were quick to establish themselves in the colonies, especially where there were rare and expensive minerals such as gold, silver and copper. Baser minerals such as iron and coal were mined mainly in Europe. But recently, as labour costs in the North have risen, and as the public has become increasingly unwilling to tolerate the pollution caused by mining, the production of iron and coal is being phased out in Western Europe, and supplies imported from Eastern Europe and the ex-colonies.

In Brazil, the Grande Carajas project, funded in part by the EC, is intended to open up an area the size of Nigeria in the north-east of the country to industry and industrialized agriculture. The centrepiece of the project is the Serra dos Carajas open-cast iron ore mine, which already supplies iron to Europe, USA and Japan, but there are many subsidiary mines and smelters, both for iron and aluminium. The project as a whole will affect the homelands of 23 tribal groups. Already 20,000 people have been evicted to make way for the giant Alumar aluminium smelter, and others are threatened as the smelter works expand. The smelters are fuelled by charcoal, made from local timber — if all the projects become operational they will require the chopping down of about 250,000 hectares of forest every year. The project is also likely to cause severe water and air pollution problems. The livelihoods of eighty thousand people in the State of Maranhão who make their living from fishing will be severely disrupted.

In Indonesia, where mining contracts are agreed by the government in Jakarta, rather than local landowners, indigenous peoples are regularly dispossessed of their lands to make way for mines. In Kalimantan, more than 100 mining contracts, many for gold and coal, were signed in the three years between 1985 and 1988, leading to an invasion of multinational mining interests. Recently, Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA) — an associate company of the British mining giant Rio Tinto Zinc — opened the Kelian gold mine, the biggest in the country. CRA also operate, together with BP, the Kaltim Prima coal mine, one of the biggest in South-East Asia. At both sites CRA have been accused of engineering the forcible removal of indigenous people and their families.

In the Philippines, CRA operate a mining operation in the northern Cordillera region, together with Lepanto Mining, a domestic Filipino company which built its wealth on exploiting gold deposits on land claimed by the Igorot peoples. The Igorot workforce is dragooned into the company's own union. "Attempts by workers in 1982 to form a branch of the National Federation of Labour Unions resulted in arbitrary dismissals. In 1989, Lepanto recruited members of Kadre, a notorious vigilante group, in order to ensure that Union elections proceeded without disturbing their control over the workforce . . . The farmers around the mine, in the Ilocos Sur and Abra area, have constantly reported pollution of their crops and major problems created by Lepanto's ore drying plant."

Minewatch, in its exhaustive study, *The Gulliver File*, lists nearly 4,000 mining companies, operating in over 120 countries, extracting metals and fuels mainly for the North and for the emerging economies of South-East Asia. Precious little of the profits ever finds its way to the people whose lands and communities have been torn apart. One Australian aborigine described his feelings thus:

"One time I sat in our Church, I looked around. It was sunset after the rain. I saw the beautiful sea and the creeks rippling, and thought how wonderful God has created the earth. And I looked out over my land, ripped up by human hands and machines. I thought — what will I get out of that dust? What will I get out of that bauxite? *Nothing.*"

The Gulliver File, by Roger Moody, is available from Minewatch, 218, Liverpool Road, London, N1 1LE, UK.

given quantities of crops with particular specifications at a fixed price in return for supplying inputs and advice. Under this arrangement, the peasants retain ownership of their land, but have to abide by the conditions set by the company regarding cultivation, marketing and pricing, if they are to sell their crop.⁵⁵ The risks of production, which have been heightened both by unstable global markets and increasingly unpredictable climates, are thus transferred to the peasant, who becomes a virtual tied-labourer for the company. Alternatively, companies are opting for "outgrower schemes", whereby independent producers are used to supplement output from company plantations. Either way, peasants become increasingly dependent for their livelihoods on corporations, their ability to hold onto their land being determined to a great extent by their preparedness to work to the company's specifications and accept its prices.

In many African countries, the state plays much the same role as TNCs elsewhere. In Zambia, for example, the setting up of large-scale state farms has been the favoured route to agricultural modernization, with peasants being dispossessed of their lands to make way for state-run plantations. In Senegal and Mali, peasants have been forced to grow specified crops under contract to the government. Peasants are subject to draconian constraints, with supervision by project officers frequently "taking on the shape of a police operation."⁵⁶ At San in Mali, for example, "the least lack of respect for the new techniques being disseminated and the timetable for crops leads to the peasant's expulsion from the project zone and repossession of the plot [the farmer] was occupying."⁵⁷

In South America, the same pattern of land-grabbing and dis-possession prevails as in Asia and Africa. In Brazil, land conflicts

and rural violence have escalated dramatically in the last 20 years as more and more of the prime land is taken over by companies (many of them multinationals) and large estate owners. The Catholic Church's Pastoral Land Commission estimates that in the whole of Brazil in 1971, land conflicts resulted in 20 deaths.⁵⁸ Twenty years later, the death rate was running at over 100 deaths a year. Yet, as Oxfam points out:

"The tragic figures for deaths fail to give the whole picture. Over the period 1985 to 1989, there were 2,973 land conflicts. The extent of land under dispute totalled over three-quarters of a million square kilometres. And over two million people were involved. To put this another way, during those five years, some 16 Brazilians in every 1,000 were disputing ownership of almost nine per cent of the national territory (an area almost equal to Britain and France together)."⁵⁹

In the North-East of Brazil, thousands of small farmers have been squeezed off their land to make way for cattle ranches or for plantations of sugar cane to be made into alcohol for fuel. Terror tactics are common. In the Amazon region, "where smallholders refuse to be bought out, the ranchers in many cases take the land by outright robbery, known as *grilagem*: they simply fence the land and declare it to be theirs. Anyone on the land is violently expelled. Some large landowners are said to have created private militias to clear the land."⁶⁰

Land grabs, escalating land prices, mechanization and rural violence have pushed millions of farmers and labourers off the land and created "an unprecedented exodus" to the cities.⁶¹ "Since the mid-1960s, the number of people living solely off the land has halved; the rural population now constitutes only 30 per cent of Brazil's 135 million people . . . The shift has been most marked in the fertile southern region, but the same economic policies and priorities have affected the entire country."⁶²

LAND SPECULATION

As the "winners" of the development process use their increasing

amounts of disposable income to buy up land held by people with low and diminishing bargaining power, so land speculation is now becoming an increasingly important force driving enclosure. Tax breaks, development projects, and a boom in industrial estates, golf courses and garden resorts have helped transform rural land into a valuable commodity and make it an increasingly attractive form of investment in many Third World countries — particularly where inflation levels are high and paper money is virtually worthless.

In Brazil, land values have soared as Amazonia has been opened up for ranching and mining, with big ranching interests following the settlers to the new frontier, displacing them once the forest has been cleared.⁶³ The profit from such ranches comes not from the beef raised (indeed, several of the largest ranches have never sent a single cow to market)⁶⁴ but from the subsidies, tax breaks and subsidized credit that could, until recently, be "captured" through ranching. Although many of the subsidies have recently been removed, ranching is still an attractive proposition. As Susannah Hecht remarks:

"A recognized land claim permits the holder to assert royalty rights on subsurface minerals that are technically owned by the Brazilian state. Thus areas adjacent to gold strikes frequently experience vigorous clearing. Cattle claim what is under their feet. The other main way in which extraction is linked to pasture expansion is through the use of valuable timber to subsidize pasture development costs. This is a more recent phenomenon due to improved infrastructure, expanding timber markets."⁶⁵

Moreover, because land in "effective" use cannot be expropriated for the purposes of land reform, the title to it is relatively secure.

In South-East Asia, too, land speculation is rife. Thailand saw a sevenfold increase in the value of land transactions between 1986 and 1990, with the number of transactions rising by 250 per cent. Tourist development has become a major force for expropriation.⁶⁶ In Indonesia, "developers are snatching away prime agricultural land to develop luxury resorts. Land-greedy golf courses are appearing, even in overcrowded Java and Bali, while transmigrants are shipped out to less fertile sites outside Java."⁶⁷

DEBT AND DISPOSSESSION

The vulnerability of local peoples to enclosure is compounded by growing personal indebtedness. Using some of the same taxes, threats and strong-arm tactics as the colonial powers before them, post-colonial regimes have dragooned peasants not only into growing cash crops but also into adopting intensive methods of agriculture. In many countries, it is standard practice for credit to be extended only to farmers who use pesticides. In Costa Rica, the main bank, the Banco Central de Costa Rica, requires tobacco farmers to spray their crop with ten pesticides if they are to receive assistance; for cucumbers, the bank stipulates the use of seven different pesticides and for peppers, eight.⁶⁸ Other strategies to promote intensive agriculture include: "national promotion campaigns through the media, literature distribution, agricultural extension programs, business advertising, tax discounts or exemptions for imports, subsidies, price controls to keep prices artificially low, tax shelters for distributors and agricultural credit policies."

With the control of markets firmly in their hands, multinational corporations and state-controlled enterprises have driven down farm prices while driving up the cost of the inputs on which farmers are increasingly dependent. The result is a cost-price squeeze that sends many farmers spiralling into debt, and eventually into bankruptcy. In the Indian Punjab, small farmers — who make up nearly half of the farming population — have been particularly badly hit. A survey carried out between 1976 and 1978 indicated that small farmers' households were running into an annual deficit of around 1,500 rupees. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of smallholdings in the Punjab declined by nearly a quarter due to their "economic non-viability."⁶⁹

Burdened in addition with heavy taxation, farmers have become trapped in a cycle of debt. To pay for inputs and taxes, they borrow money, often at exorbitant rates. To service their loans, they frequently have to sell their crop immediately it is harvested at a time when prices are lowest. They are then forced to buy in food

Dispossessed for Development: Timber Plantations

The enclosure of forests for timber extraction, agriculture or mining has been taking place for centuries, but since World War II, the pace has increased greatly. As more communities become enclosed into the global market, the demand for timber, paper, agricultural land and minerals increases, and the world's forests are now under an unprecedented threat.

Forced to admit the environmental consequences of deforestation, corporations, governments and development banks are stretched to find a way of continuing to plunder, expropriate and enclose further forest areas, whilst maintaining environmental credibility. Their solution has been to blur the distinction between a highly variegated natural forest (an environment propitious to the commons) — and a monocultural plantation (the ultimate in arboreal enclosure). Thus the *Forest Principles* section of Agenda 21, declares "these principles should apply to all types of forests, both natural and planted, in all geographic regions" and makes no attempt to discriminate between the two.

Thailand: Forest Reserves Before Community Forest

The rising demand for paper, together with the overlogging of natural forests, have prompted many governments to embark on ambitious plantation programmes. In Thailand, following the 1989 logging ban, forest reserves are being turned over to eucalyptus. As much as 4,000,000 hectares of so-called "degraded" forest (consisting mainly of farmland, pasture and community woodlands) will be leased to commercial planters to provide pulp and woodchips for both the domestic and the export markets. Under the recently-begun *khor chor kor* programme, villagers will lose almost 1,600,000 hectares of farmland, over 90 per cent of which will be given over to commercial plantations. They will be compensated with 768,000 hectares of Forest Reserve land of inferior quality (and often already-occupied). There is little doubt that an influx of uprooted peasants will put pressure on the forest in other areas. Altogether, 80 per cent of the occupants of National Reserve Forests, up to 970,000 families, are to be resettled.

The evictions have already started. In December 1991, troops marched into the villages of *Baan Dong Sakran* and *Baan Tad Faa* in the north-east of Thailand, "tossed out the residents' furniture and other belongings and tore down their houses as children and the elderly watched in despair." Both villages were founded over 100 years ago, whereas the land was made a forest reserve in 1964. "The villagers", says the Bangkok newspaper, *The Nation*, "had marked out their own community forest which they called *kok orn som*. They made and enforced their own rules to protect the forest."

The plans to plant eucalyptus have received funding from the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and Japanese, Australian, Canadian and Finnish aid agencies. If fully implemented, the plans are by themselves enough to doom most of Thailand's remaining forests through their potential to displace peasants. But in December 1991 the government approved a similar resettlement and reforestation scheme for the North of Thailand, called *rar for tor*, or "Accelerated Watershed Rehabilitation", which will cover the watersheds of four major tributaries of the Chao Phaya river, an area inhabited by minority hill peoples.

at the beginning of the planting season to feed their families, at prices which have doubled or tripled in the meantime. For many, the only option is to take up waged labour, placing an intolerable work load on the remaining members of the household, mainly women and children, who are burdened with the task of maintaining an uneconomical holding. As individual farmers carry out more and more tasks in the production cycle by themselves, traditional systems of mutual support, such as communal planting and harvesting, begin to atrophy.⁷⁰

New inequalities have thus been created, widening the gap between rich and poor villagers and increasing the power and influence of those (principally men) who have access to credit, new machinery, irrigation water and other inputs. Mechanization has exacerbated the problem, not least by increasing rural unemployment and underemployment. As the poorest farmers go to the wall, their land holdings are bought up by richer farmers, leading to the concentration of land into fewer and fewer hands; money, rather than the fulfilment of communal obligations, becomes the currency of power.

CHAIN REACTION

As the numbers of landless multiply, so one dispossession leads to another; farmers move from one area to enclose someone else's land elsewhere, often encouraged to do so by government-sponsored migration schemes or by patron-client networks. In Thailand, for example, merchants, millers, traders in forest products, timber companies and speculators have financed settlers who have cleared forests to plant maize, sugar-cane, cassava, rubber and eucalyptus. These new rural patrons have provided settlers with seeds, marketing and money to buy food or hire labour or tools at exorbitant interest rates of five per cent a month, or more. In some areas, peasants have been bought out after a few years, or otherwise pushed on to occupy new land and dislodge any isolated subsistence cultivators they may encounter there. After an interval, the peasants are again displaced by their corporate patrons, and the

cycle is repeated. As the frontier has advanced and the forest has disappeared, the government has begun to crack down on peasant colonizers, who are now increasingly being forced into a marginal existence as casual agricultural labourers.

Elsewhere, government-sponsored migration programmes have persuaded the landless to clear forest land. In Brazil, such colonization schemes were promoted under the slogan of "land without men for men without land". In Indonesia, the "transmigration" of "surplus people" from the inner islands has led to the massive destruction of forests and the takeover of forest dwellers' lands in Kalimantan and West Papua. Planned land settlement in tropical forests has also been promoted in Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia.

Planned colonization, however, has been far outstripped by unplanned settlement. In Indonesia, for example, the World Bank estimates that for every colonist resettled under the official transmigration programme, two more moved into the forest due to its "draw effect". Yet there is little to offer settlers in these places. The land is frequently unsuited to the farming they have traditionally practised, and it is quite common to see settlers give up their clearings after the first meagre harvest. They have to make new clearings every year, until eventually the whole area is cleared and they move on again. Many have returned home to an uncertain future in Java.

Ultimately, large numbers of those dispossessed through development drift towards the major cities of the Third World. Even here, however, the threat of eviction is ever present. To make way for commercial buildings and new roads or to smarten up the city for sporting occasions and visiting heads of state, the slums and shanty towns that they have made their homes are regularly cleared. In India, at least 500,000 citizens of Calcutta were thrown out of their homes between 1983 and 1985,⁷¹ whilst 900,000 people were violently evicted in a drive to beautify Seoul for the 1988 Olympic Games.⁷² Moreover, as Miloon Kothari of India's National Campaign for Housing Rights, notes, the incidence of

Reneging on Land Reform

A call to reclaim the commons is often reflected, in political terms, in a demand for land reform. Many Third World governments have come to power on the promise of agrarian reforms only to renege on their promise once in power.

In Kenya, where dispossessed farmers formed the backbone of the Mau Mau nationalist movement in the 1950s, President Kenyatta rapidly sidelined land reform as a political priority; the skewed land distribution inherited from the colonial regime remained as firmly entrenched as ever. Although it was agreed, under the terms of independence, that one million acres of land previously "owned" by Europeans would be transferred to some 25,000 landless and unemployed African families, the "beneficiaries came in fact from a small élite group, often comprising absentee civil servants rather than the landless." No attempt was made to redress the loss of women's traditional rights to land: on the contrary, the colonial system of investing land titles in men — the presumed "head of the household" — was continued.

In Egypt, independence brought minimal long-term change to the pattern of land ownership. Prior to a series of land reform programmes introduced by President Nasser from 1952 to 1969, 94.3 per cent of farmers were squeezed onto just 35 per cent of the country's farmland, living on small-holdings of under five acres. By contrast, the richest 0.4 per cent of farmers controlled 35 per cent of the land, usually that of the highest quality, their estates covering a minimum of 50 acres. Although the reforms initially reduced the concentration of landholdings, large estates began to re-emerge as those wealthier farmers bought out poorer farmers, the percentage of land holdings with 50 acres or more rising from six per cent in 1965 to 16 per cent by 1974. The greatest beneficiaries, however, were middle-sized farmers with holdings of between 10 and 50 acres. Their share of land more than doubled from its pre-reform days, primarily because they received the lion's share of credit under agricultural modernization programmes. Today, there are more landless farmers in Egypt than ever before.

In South Korea, land has been redistributed — but the imposition of modern intensive agriculture has left many crippled with debt: the number of rural households in debt rose "from 76 per cent in 1971 to 90 per cent in 1983 and to an astounding 98 per cent in 1985." The result is that farmers are leaving the land, the rural population dropping by three per cent between 1985 and 1988. As poorer families sell out, land is once again becoming concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

Reviewing the record of land reform since the break up of the colonies, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) admits, "the history of land reform . . . is largely one of failures." Indeed, land reform measures on their own are unlikely to achieve a permanent reversal of poverty and insecurity unless some attempt is made to eliminate the forces that led to inequities of land tenure in the first place. In a world where market forces, government regulations, vested interests and military conflicts conspire to undermine the stability of the commons, simply redistributing land provides no guarantee that the beneficiaries will be able to hold onto it for long.

forced evictions is growing :

"Forced evictions take place almost daily somewhere in the world

. . . The total number of people forcibly uprooted from their homes annually is in the millions. This staggering figure is all the more alarming given the fact that, according to UN figures, over one billion people throughout the world are already either homeless or inadequately housed."⁷³

THE EXTENSION OF ENCLOSURE IN THE NORTH

Neither evictions nor enclosure in the name of modernization and "improvement" are problems confined to the South, nor are they confined to rural areas. The forces that have shaped colonial and post-colonial history in the Third World have been at work either blatantly or insidiously in the Northern industrialized countries, and are still very much operative today, reactivating old forms of enclosures and initiating new ones. The intricate nature of this process is clearly visible in the evolution of agriculture in Europe and the US.

The expression "from seedling to supermarket", employed to describe the vertical penetration of the food industry by multinational companies, indicates the extent to which the human food chain has been enclosed. Indeed the phrase does not go far enough, for every aspect of food production, from seed nursery to the dining table, has been wrenched out of its vernacular context and drawn into a new web of reciprocating influences. It is no longer merely land and labour that are subject to enclosure, but also the agricultural input, in the form of seeds, chemicals, drugs and machinery; and the agricultural output, that is, the food itself, processed and distributed through a variety of sophisticated marketing strategies. The person who would challenge the logic or justice of any one aspect of the chain must eventually confront the logic and the justice of the entire system.

For example, any British smallholder applying for permission to start an agricultural enterprise risks receiving the refusal given in 1991 to a prospective free-range chicken farmer. "We must try and put a stop to these quasi-agricultural activities which are springing up all over the country," stated a member of the Salis-

bury District Council Planning Committee, who went on to explain: "What I mean by 'quasi-agricultural' is a mess of peasant farming . . . which prevents the Common Agricultural Policy from working efficiently in Europe."⁷⁴ His use of the word "agricultural" is revealing. Although in its origins the word means "growing in fields", in the councillor's book only large factory units merit the expression, while smallholdings where the birds are actually allowed to feed in the fields are merely "quasi-agricultural". "Agriculture", in effect, has been redefined to mean "economically competitive food production".

In such a regime, the elimination of supposedly inefficient farmers is viewed not as a social and cultural loss, but as an economic necessity. With the advent of the agro-chemical age, thousands of farmers have been bankrupted, and hundreds of thousands of farm-hands have been made redundant by the increasing use of machinery and chemicals. Between 1946 and 1989, the total number of people working on farms in Britain (full-time and part-time) declined from 976,000 to 285,000.⁷⁵ In 1990 alone, 6,000 farmers sold up and 4,000 full-time workers lost their jobs.⁷⁶ In the United States, in the six years between 1980 and 1986, 235,000 farms went out of business, and 650,000 people were lost from the farm workforce.

The disappearance of so many farms — and the personal tragedies that these figures conceal — should not be dismissed simply as the overdue streamlining of a pampered and inefficient industry. The majority of these farmers have not chosen to leave their land: they have been forced to do so by circumstances over which they have no control. Their ability to make a living has been undermined as a direct result of policies that favour large farmers over small, agribusiness over local control and intensive use of chemicals over sound husbandry. Governments, abetted by commercial interests, have applied a system of price mechanisms and subsidies which forces farmers to cover rising production costs by increasing production, and consequently to borrow heavily to invest in the most up-to-date machinery and in increasing quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Since subsidies are

allotted according to gross output, farmers with less land, however sound their farming methods, have found themselves unable to pay off their debts in the face of stagnating food prices.

The decline in the number of farms in Europe and the US, and hence of the established rural population, results in a decline in rural services. Inexorably, the rural fabric is enclosed within an urban framework of distribution and consumption, which in turn serves to undermine the viability of the remaining farms. As the rural population falls, local schools and hospitals close down, and shops, public transport services and other facilities decline through lack of support. At the same time, the cost of goods on sale in local shops tends to be considerably higher than in the cities (even for produce that is grown or reared locally). This decline in infrastructure prompts still more people, especially young families with children, to move to urban areas. Half-empty villages become "gentrified" as urban commuters and second-home-owners move into rural communities, bringing with them urban patterns of consumption which only hasten the decline of local structures.⁷⁷

Small retailers are among the principal victims of this latest round of enclosures. Ninety-five thousand food shops closed down between 1961 and 1983 in Britain alone, a decline which continued during the 1980s, so that there are now less than 45,000 outlets remaining.⁷⁸ Grocers, greengrocers, fishmongers and butchers have been squeezed out by a centralized supermarket network which in Britain now accounts for 83 per cent of all food sold. The trend has been much the same in France, Germany and Benelux.

This enclosure of retailing has enabled a small number of giant companies to increase their control of the food chain. Most food-processing in Britain is in the hands of a handful of conglomerates such as Nestlé (whose subsidiaries include Carnation, Crosse and Blackwell, Rowntree, Chambourcy and Findus) or Philip Morris (who control Marlboro, Kraft, Suchard and General Foods). These companies operate hand-in-glove with large commodity merchants such as Cargill, Continental Grain, Luis Dreyfus, Bunge, Andre and Co. and Mitsui/Cook, who between them exported 85 per cent of all US wheat, 95 per cent of its corn and 80 per cent of

its sorghum.⁷⁹

The influence of these companies now stretches right back to the farm. Once markets are enclosed, outright ownership of land or livestock units is no longer a pre-condition for controlling production, nor is it a guarantee that control can be maintained. As in Southern countries, many companies adopt a system of contract farming, in which farmers, often for want of any secure alternative outlet, are induced to sell exclusively to one retailing company, growing crops or rearing livestock to its specifications. Within the last 15 to 20 years, contract farming in Britain has increased to such an extent that most of the poultry, eggs, pork and bacon, and over 90 per cent of vegetables such as peas and beans are grown to the order and specification of the food industry.⁸⁰ Supermarket chains such as Sainsbury already control each stage in the production of meat for their stores, from the animal feed through to the slaughterhouse, through a series of commercial ties with other companies. Corporate enclosure of the livestock industry is gaining pace so rapidly within the US that four companies now control 41 per cent of all poultry production, and three companies control three-quarters of all intensive beef production.⁸¹

Products grown under contract have to be produced to the right specifications at the right time. To help farmers with this process, specialist advice is given on what variety to plant, and the timing and application of chemical treatments. Farmers are transformed into outworkers for corporations over which they have no control. In some cases, they have been reduced to virtual peons for food companies, their costs exceeding the money they receive in sales. Christopher Turton, a British poultry producer, puts it in this way: "It distresses me. I would prefer to be seen as a craftsman, not as a commercial exploiter of animals, but I feel I am being turned from one to the other . . . I am just a small cog in a big industry . . . Today poultry management is dictated by the company accountant rather than the stockman."⁸²

The enclosure of the entire food chain — from growing through processing, marketing and retailing, to consumption — thus has a dynamic that is self-reinforcing. The enclosure of small farms and

the consequent decline of the farming community weakens local markets and leaves them open to enclosure by a centralized retailing system. These supermarkets in turn steadily increase their hold over the production process, resulting in further enclosure of the farming sector. Significantly, the whole system is based on the heavy use of oil: to manufacture the chemicals and provide fuel for the machines that boost production; to power the transcontinental transport of commodities; and to get consumers from their homes to the hypermarket and back.

THE SEED ENCLOSED

It might seem that the transnational corporations already have the agricultural market well under their control. However there are still more forms of enclosure on the horizon, in particular those linked to the burgeoning genetic-engineering industry.

As part of the process of extending their control of inputs, agrochemical corporations have come to dominate the seed industry. Thousands of independent seed companies have already fallen prey to corporate take-overs.⁸³

By the late 1980s, three firms controlled nearly 80 per cent of the garden seed market in Britain. In The Netherlands, three companies held 70 per cent of the agricultural seed market, and four companies controlled 90 per cent of the market for horticultural seeds. In the US, one firm — Pioneer Hi-Bred — had tied up 38 per cent of the corn seed market.⁸⁴ Transnational seed houses now control about a quarter of seed sales in the North, and five to ten per cent of sales in the Third World.⁸⁵ In India, the pharmaceutical giant, Sandoz India, has entered into an agreement with Northrup King of the US and the Dutch conglomerate Zaaduin.⁸⁶ Two other US companies, Seedtec International and Dehlgien, have entered into agreements with Maharastra Hybrid and Nath Seed Company respectively. Pioneer Hi-Bred has formed an Indian subsidiary and Hindustan Lever is negotiating with a Belgian firm, whilst Hoechst and Ciba-Geigy are reportedly negotiating other tie-ups.⁸⁷

The enclosure of seeds threatens to complete the enclosure of

agricultural production. The adoption of agrochemicals has already put the majority of Western farmers in a position where they no longer have control over their key inputs but instead must purchase them from farm suppliers. Yet whether farmers use agrochemicals or not, they are reliant on hybridized seeds which, because they fail to breed true, require the purchase of new seeds every year. Seeds which used to be saved from the previous harvest must now be purchased on the market, shifting control over biological diversity from farmers to transnational corporations and changing a self-reproducing resource into a mere input.⁸⁸

With the advent of biotechnology, the domination exercised by corporations over the farmer is likely to become a stranglehold. Agrochemical companies are working to identify plant genes that will impart resistance to certain herbicides — usually their own brands — in order to sell seeds as part of a package deal designed to increase chemical sales. Worldwide, there are now at least 65 research programmes focusing on breeding herbicide tolerance into agricultural crops, with corporations like Monsanto, Du Pont, Ciba-Geigy and Bayer leading the pack.⁸⁹

To tighten their control over seeds, agrochemical companies are forging new tools for enclosure and reworking old ones. Companies such as Ciba-Geigy, which a hundred years ago argued vigorously against patents, on the grounds that they were a “paradise for parasites” and “a playground for plundering patent agents and lawyers”,⁹⁰ are now lobbying, cajoling and threatening national legislatures into adopting patents for every new innovation, including new seeds. To oppose patents, they argue, is to put national interests above “internationally accepted principles of fair trade.”⁹¹ Since the early 1970s, seed varieties developed by companies have been patentable, making it illegal for farmers to trade in such seeds. In the US, the Patents Office has extended patents to any genetically-engineered organism, from micro-organisms to plants and animals — only genetically-engineered humans are excluded — thereby enclosing the entire non-human gene pool in one regulatory stroke.

The move to protect patents and other forms of “intellectual

property” is a significant part of the current trade negotiations within the GATT Uruguay Round. Curiously, while the thrust of the proposals made by GATT economists has been to promote international free trade, their approach as regards patents is, in its effect, protectionist: there should be no free circulation of knowledge. The difference lies in the fact that information is an inexhaustible and intangible bequest, rather than a “subtractible” finite resource. In a capitalist system, free trade in exhaustible commodities leads, apparently inevitably, to the enclosure of the market by powerful oligopolies. But to achieve a parallel enclosure of human knowledge, an artificial structure of patents and property rights must first be introduced and enforced. As Jeremy Rifkin comments:

“The granting of patents represents the culmination of a five-hundred-year movement to enclose the planetary commons that began inauspiciously on the village green in small rural hamlets scattered throughout England and the European continent. Now even the building blocks of life itself have been enclosed, privatized, and reduced to a marketable product.”⁹²

Urban Enclosure

While the commons in the rural South is threatened by development, in the urban North it is threatened by redevelopment. As the commercial hub of the city expands and the radial road system broadens, poorer neighbourhoods and communities are characterized as slums or run-down inner-city areas and targeted for urban renewal. Of the innumerable conflicts and tensions that fill the pages of daily newspapers, a sizeable proportion are rooted in the resistance of an urban community to the forces of enclosure.

City Centres

Like the “improvement” of agricultural land, the redevelopment of urban space is driven by the need to extract an ever higher rent from a given area. The centres of our cities and towns have been the arena of a battle between powerful interests who wish to enclose public space and the communities who will be thereby displaced. City blocks — long-established communities of homes, shops and workplaces — are systematically bought up by syndicates of wealthy redevelopers, razed to the ground and replaced by spectacular tower-blocks and sprawling “complexes” of superhuman dimensions. Millions of square metres of office space are constructed, not to answer any human need, but to

generate profit. Sometimes, as in the case of Centrepoint Tower in London, they remain empty for years, or even decades, since they gain more value as enclosed land than they could do by being rented. In other cases, developers miscalculate the market and have to be bailed out: to salvage London's showpiece Canary Wharf scheme, the British government is planning to demolish another massive office block in Marsham Street, built only 25 years ago, so that office workers can be decanted to fill unrented offices in the new complex. The communities displaced by these developments, though they put up a fight, are no match for the steamroller of commerce, and are frequently dispersed to soulless housing estates or to dormitory suburbs of enclosed rural land, leaving only a rump of marginalized squatters prepared to resist to the end.

Shops

In tandem with the redevelopment of town centres, there has been a progressive enclosure of what is now known as the retail sector. As high-streets are transformed into malls, pedestrian precincts and shopping centres, rents rise to a height only affordable by national and international chains of shops, often masquerading under two or three different names, but selling the same restricted range of internationally distributed products. The small outlets which supply local, fresh, handmade, secondhand or unusual products — in fact anything that does not benefit from economies of scale — are unable to afford the rents. The hitherto public forum of the market-place is transformed into a privately owned precinct, managed by a business syndicate or a corporation such as British Telecom. Often these places are locked up in the evening or placed out of bounds to "undesirable" individuals, who are thus, in effect, barred from their own city centre.

Streets

The most ubiquitous enclosure of the public domain has been in the street, where the principal agent of enclosure has not been a capitalist élite, but a technology with "democratic" pretensions, namely the motor car. Whereas the street until early this century was an arena for social intercourse, for commercial exchange, for idle dalliance and for banter and play, it has now become mainly a thoroughfare for expensive, pollutant and dangerous automobiles transporting busy citizens from A to B and then back to A again. Without doubt, those who have suffered most from this enclosure have been children, many of whom are virtually held prisoner in their own house; and by association their exasperated parents.

Although the motor car has been effective, in the main, at clearing human activity off the streets and enclosing it in pedestrian precincts, hypermarkets and leisure centres, people still strive to recreate urban commons. An army of officials — police, social workers, planning officers — are therefore employed to "keep people off the streets": to clamp down on unlicensed street dealing, unofficial advertising (bill-sticking and graffiti), open air festivities and games, disorderly assembly, begging and loitering. It is in the so-called deprived inner-city areas that the commons is often the most resilient; and it is these deprived areas that are most frequently targeted for enclosure and redevelopment.

3 THE ENCOMPASSING WEB

The Ramifications of Enclosure

Because history's best known examples of enclosure involved the fencing in of common pasture, enclosure is often reduced to a synonym for "expropriation." But enclosure involves more than land and fences, and implies more than simply privatization or takeover by the state. It is a compound process which affects nature and culture, home and market, production and consumption, germination and harvest, birth, sickness and death. It is a process to which no aspect of life or culture is immune.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a general definition of enclosure — to "insert within a frame". Enclosure tears people and their lands, forests, crafts, technologies and cosmologies out of the cultural framework in which they are embedded and forces them into a new framework which reflects and reinforces the values and interests of newly-dominant groups. Any pieces which will not fit into the new framework are devalued and discarded. In the modern age, the architecture of this new framework is determined by market forces, science, state and corporate bureaucracies, patriarchal forms of social organization, and ideologies of environmental and social management.

Land, for example, once it is integrated into a framework of fences, roads and property laws, is "disembedded" from local fabrics of self-reliance and redefined as "property" or "real estate". Forests are divided into rigidly defined precincts — mining concessions, logging concessions, wildlife corridors and national parks — and transformed from providers of water, game, wood and vegetables into scarce exploitable economic resources. Today they are on the point of being enclosed still further as the dominant industrial culture seeks to convert them into yet another set of components of the industrial system, redefining them as "sinks" to