

Development and environmental sustainability

Consequences of a choice based on economic profit

- Oronzo Chievini –

***Abstract** – In recent years the worldwide politics is totally based on profit. Even the interpersonal relations are based on the interest. Whatever happens this must produce wealth. All that is causing a vortex of unusual needs. Man cannot realize that all that is causing a too high demand for energy which is inexorably destroying everything and directly or indirectly it is leading poor countries to hardship. In this paper the author wants to highlight how humankind is at a critical crossroads and how a wise choice in this moment still may save our life.*

According to many thinkers, intellectuals, scientists, philosophers our western civilization is at a critical point as regards the consequences occurring in the environment due to human works in recent centuries. The human population has grown massively in recent years indeed, but what led to the most important impact on the environment is the sea change that certain technologies have suffered. Step by step, the stone overexploitation due to the proliferation of human residence

areas, led to a considerable reduction of the forest. As a matter of fact, materials were obtained from the mountains which we later used to build houses that have in turn occupied a land once occupied by forests. Even the wood exploitation, since ancient times, directly resulted in a further impact on the flora. So, human being has always been a threat to the ecosystem that receives it. As we said, the most important and dramatic impact on the environment was given by last century new technologies and mainly by the direction that our waste-based economy has already taken several centuries ago. As a matter of fact with the arrival of plastics, occurred in early 1900, we began to get rid of extremely indestructible materials all around us that the environment can not possibly recycle.

Nuclear industry, for instance, which began to proliferate worldwide with the emergence of power stations, immediately after the Second World War, has further increased the number of new materials (moreover, extremely toxic) the environment had to deal with some way. Even man-made chemical elements, once completely absent on earth, appeared with the atomic age. One of these is plutonium, namely the isotope 239 which is highly toxic and dangerous, that was used to make very effective nuclear weapons. Just one milligram of plutonium is enough to kill an adult human being. Nowadays over 1000 tons are supposed to be stored in special warehouses under military administrations control. Combined utilization of various materials such

as metals, minerals, plastics and pasteboard, has determined both the abnormal mines exploitation and the depletion in stocks but, above all, the problem began to appear as the continued presence of a waste disposal. In several decades we already have accumulated a large amount of waste and our cities are overrun with it now. If we only turn attention to our country Italy, for instance, and try to examine a map showing the positions of the various legal and illegal landfill sites, we would be puzzled and horrified. This does not include the many hidden sites, which are therefore not documented and affect both northern and southern Italy. Recently there has been much talk of sunken ships with radioactive cargoes meaning that the problem, as it's easy to understand, even concerns every seaside next to our coasts and maybe more. This list of critical issues is further enhanced by the presence of incinerators that should be used to remove the waste. On the contrary their utilization, apart from resulting in a depletion of useful materials present in mines, turns those materials into highly toxic ash dramatically. The reader can easily find that most people (even highly educated people and not only ordinary people) erroneously believe an incinerator reduces the amount of waste. But, like any physicist or chemist well knows, that waste will be surely affected by a remarkable increase (at least as a gain weight). Figures got from Brescia incinerator are extremely obvious. Again, last but not least, the vast use of water and consumption of precious oxygen an incinerator makes usually must

be taken into account. The latter, which in turn is supplied too slowly by the same woodlands and green areas rich in plants and trees that are further reduced due to the expansion of our urban sites. And being more cynical as regards our statements, we must also remember that it's been shown now that an incinerator takes absolutely no benefit to the health of those living immediately close to it. The relevant statements made by Dr. Patrizia Gentilini were extraordinarily comprehensive and let us understand that, according to investigations conducted in the UK (Elliott Report) and also in Italy (Coriano Report in Forli) in areas next to an incinerator, a vast variety of cancers such as colon cancer, liver cancer, stomach cancer, lungs cancer, etc., dramatically increase, out of the population living there.

What's the reason why all this is happening?

The answer is as clear as day... Main countries' economies are based on profit. Obviously such a term (profit) should be carefully checked because what may seem a real asset in the long run, which is an advantage, is actually a virtual dazzling chimera. The whole "western" mankind is affected or rather completely mesmerized by such policy of profit. Everything must go faster and faster, increasing profits at any cost, always in pole position, excelling, being at the top, making profit unconditionally... "God Money", mammon, seems to have total control over the hearts of men populating Earth. And because of the

money unfortunately, human being is guilty of bad crimes towards society, against the individual himself and therefore against the environment. Now making mystical or philosophical allegations, it looks like as profit was a demon that lurking within our society in order to destroy it. And the reader can certainly see that what we say in this paper seems to support this statement as though it were a real and prophetic truth. In order to feed such policy of profit that aims to increase our assets in cash, the whole society turns to the production of goods. Manufacturing companies arise and multiply. Everything has to be produced and a relevant market has to be identified. And there must be those who produce and those who buy, a vicious circle feeding itself. Watch **"History of Things"** by **Anne Leonard** on YouTube: [1 of 3](#), [2 of 3](#), [3 of 3](#).

Every sort of good, object and sometimes unnecessary thing they make us buy through a continuous hammering advertising, is produced. All these things, shavers, mobile phones, perfumes, watches, washings, dietary supplements, or most funny tool ... require power energy to be built as well as energy to make them work. All this creates a vortex of constant energy demand. But at the same time, all this can do nothing but promote a high rate of pollution. Manufacturing requires processing of raw materials indeed, therefore generating waste that must be eliminated necessarily. Such goods become waste sooner or later, and we could finally say that the consumer policy of our current

economy appears as a global system extended throughout the Western world that continuously produces waste. We can now say that recently western societies do nothing but degrade the environment that has gradually formed due to a slow process of natural selection in billions of years. During this process we are simply replacing vast natural and harmonious areas, with areas consisting of high entropy, toxic and dangerous (for our ecosystem) products. Try and overlook the slow process of all human industry, of all daily things of men and you'll find out that what I'm saying actually happens and it happens even now before your eyes.

Aquifers are contaminated, vast areas become infertile land. Rivers are no longer the same, vegetables and fruits we eat contain pollutants and unfortunately in recent decades all this keeps on deteriorating. We must admit the system is definitely wrong. Reading somewhere that the statements spread in this paper are considered exaggerated by some, and feel even buckled as "catastrophic", can't help but making me smile and most importantly, it does not surprise me the limited knowledge of some supporters of so-called "economic prosperity" considered the achievement of our current society. No, gentlemen! We're becoming poor, far from enriching. Although the average lifetime seems to be increased it has certainly reduced quality-wise and decreased in the essential and fundamental contents. They probably do not know some basic information and are not able to judge, even with

clear parameters and available data, the results over time of our consumerist lethal expansion that has been degrading natural systems more and more until they collapse. Moreover, for such apparent and again, seeming well-being of Western society, the poorest part of the world pays a very high price, which can be measured in terms of poverty, pollution, violence and hunger. Our wealth is thus based on a humanitarian theft had no precedent in human history. I do not think many people are conscious that every convenience, comfort, well-being that we as westerners are able to take control of, is achieved to the detriment of Third-World countries. If the reader disagrees with that assertion, I am very happy I did it.... Few are aware that the richest areas in the world are Congo and Niger. Such territories are terribly afflicted by civil guerrillas, hunger and widespread famine...

Why? Did you know that: The Congo is rich in **Coltan** (*from **Col-Tan**, an acronym for **Columbite-Tantalite***), a mineral which the metal **Tantalum** can be extracted from and whose strength, chemistry and electronic properties make it valuable in many hi-tech and medical applications as Tantalum makes great capacitors for premium electronics, including cellular telephones and laptop computers. The Congo is also rich in diamonds and uranium, Niger is rich in uranium, a heavy metal which is radioactive and is used in the production of nuclear power and in some types of nuclear weapon we, as western, want to build. I do not want to say more on this point. Try

yourself and examine the facts. Everyone is able to make his own remarks and more importantly deepen his own deeper, but there's none as deaf as those who won't hear and there's none as blind as those who won't see. It is also important to think carefully on the following: western societies produce air pollution due to emissions of carbon dioxide and a waste pollution as we said over and over in this paper, and this already reached a critical point, unfortunately. Now since such a mess is only due to 15% of world population (the rich part) what on earth would happen if even entire populations in Africa, Asia, South America or India, who are still living in ramshackle huts, demanded their own home, a heating system, a car, and various household?

Don't tell me you're excluding this possibility because of the already too small resources? So, it's not so crazy of us westerners, to keep on behaving this way. One day we might have something to reckon with. The profit exaltation in all its forms also produces another important effect that impacts on our spiritual sphere as it gives a steady demand for excess of ego. An endless demand for new exciting sensations, "**quantity**", "**superiority**" and "**speed**". All mystical movements claim that man must improve to achieve happiness in a way that is exactly opposite, that's being content with little, being helpful, generous, charitable and bringing peace. So it is not difficult to understand why this century is marked by distress, anxiety,

depression and the human being soul is totally affected and lacking of harmony. Such a frenzy of reaching a state of physical wellbeing, of living in affluence makes us lose the most beautiful and profound side of life itself, that is love in all its shapes and, therefore, the respect and harmony of things around us. The artist inside each one of us is totally demolished, our creative side is compressed, and laboriousness and thirst for knowledge excelling in every young boy are hampered. On the contrary, the thirst for profit of companies that put it into practice requires a continuous tapping of energy from our planet by making sure the system collapse. All are doing their utmost to create more energy. In order to satisfy our continuous need of energy we study the most unbelievable systems to produce it, but few reflect that if we only look into the matter from a thermodynamic point of view, we have no chance to exploit a large amount. The more energy we produce the more processes we implement make new waste and problems impacting on sustainability. Human society should instead set out an optimization and savings path. Less and less energy... This could save the world.

I'm not exaggerating at all: try and reflect on the recent month environmental disaster of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused by the British Petroleum oil-plant. It's now many years since our sea-depths have been riddled in order to extract oil for our energy needs. Not only... our seas are daily crossed by tankers carrying hundreds of

thousands of tonnes of crude oil in various parts of the western world. Not only ... our seas are also sailed by cargo ships carrying a large variety of goods but, also by land, for example, we deliver uranium fuel rods (coming from nuclear reactors) which need to be rectified, other radioactive materials and industrial chemicals. Again, let's think about transport of very dangerous military supplies occurring by air, train or boat and think about the storage of various highly dangerous military materials ... or imagine how many other environmental accidents, such as the British Petroleum oil spill, may still happen. Statistic figures that in our future we might deal with other emergencies are very high. An emergency such as the one media have already discussed several times in different areas, without giving the right emphasis perhaps, is the waste crisis in the oceans.

Much has been said about our seas engulfed by all sort of plastic products such as cotton tip, plastic bags, and all kind of materials. Such materials, especially small plastic bags, are unconsciously gobbled by representatives of the aquatic fauna fated to death. But what has not yet been clarified is that we are already facing a serious waste emergency in our oceans. Without going into hot type statements that readers may find on the Internet by typing the phrase "**Pacific trash vortex**", we must confirm that unfortunately large areas of the Pacific Ocean are extensively covered by dense plastic waste. Several times such extensive "islands" of rubbish have been closely crossed by cargo ships. The

pictures found on the Internet are quite eloquent and therefore we ask the reader to search and read more on this subject. Where once the seas were sailed by wooden galleons (highly biodegradable material) today, unfortunately, they are crossed by ships made of different materials and they may let fall whatever into the water, not to list the spreading of waste in the coastline which contributes a lot to literally turn our oceans into a giant dustbin. For example, today people are talking about nuclear energy, but few really know the problem of waste and the potential danger of these expensive and huge systems. A nuclear power plant is a system that continually generates radioactivity. Nuclear power seems to be the practical solution to our constant energy demand. In recent times, our constant demands for energy crashed existing plants to supply electricity due to the continuous connection of new users produced by consumer society. Not least the air conditioning systems which are a major cause of the domestic consumption of electricity during the summer season.

Giampiero Godio in an interesting contribution on the Internet makes a very simple example that let us understand how nuclear energy is really an impractical solution. He says that nuclear powers (even those belonging to the new generation ones) usually produce radioactivity of approximately 50 million Becquerel per kilowatt-hour produced. Well... as comparison, we must remember that tens of thousands of hectares around the

Chernobyl plant exploding the 26th of April, 1986 were barred, then closed and forbidden to the public because in these areas a million Becquerel per square meter of radioactivity have been measured. At this point it is easy to make the following remark: whether producing a kilowatt-hour, which would be the energy required to make our own simple home baked pie, means potentially accumulating quantities of toxic substances that could inhibit about 50 square meters of land to the people for tens of thousands of years (this is a reasonable time period to reduce its hazardous nuclides), the question is: "Is it really worth?". It is therefore likely that a reasonable solution is to promote alternative energy sources and mainly the governments should encourage saving systems for electricity and not the disproportionate use thereof. Local governments ought to heavily tax all that promotes pollution and waste in the long run. On the contrary...

We keep on demanding plates and plastic dishes which proliferate in supermarkets, which are sold at very low cost and that a wise government administration ought to strictly tax without hesitation. Why westerners keep on buying junk? Why can't we see such problem? Using of disposables is a terrible humiliation of our ecosystem, of world poverty and our intelligence. To limit or otherwise reduce this problem we'll have to make sacrifices, we'll have to drastically reduce our standard of living, our level of waste. Our conscience should make us reflect on the importance of this decision which also applies to other contexts.

Only in this way our consciousness can raise and evolve towards a Sustainable Future. This matter certainly concerns others, the poor, who have nothing ..., those who cannot get resources from this planet and that we should have the same opportunity, but also directly affect us, since in the long run this way we'll lose everything. Soon the planet as we know it today won't be here any longer. Let me conclude by saying that we are at a very critical crossroads where our choices will determine the future of this planet, and above all we'll leave an important legacy to our children and our grandchildren.

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