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TOWNS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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(A) A preliminary criticism must be made: there is too great a tendency to view the town as an autonomous reality and to devise a solely urban strategy completely different from a rural strategy that is also autonomous; the town thus appears as an end in itself. This narrowness of outlook is found in both action (the many policies for urban installations) and study (many conferences deal with the urban phenomenon only, sometimes only with a single facet, such as housing, of that phenomenon). In itself the town has no reality and must of necessity be put back into global perspective; study and action must concentrate neither on the town nor on the rural area but on the very content of the relationship between the two, seeing the nation as a whole. We are therefore going to attempt to put the urban phenomenon back in its place in the process of economic development and in the nation as a whole.

There is too great a tendency to consider the phenomenon of development only in its economic aspects: too often it is restricted to simple questions of growth and of the organization of production or trade. In fact, it is a complex historical phenomenon, and one must not hesitate to view it in all its amplitude. It is in the context of such expanded development that we shall define the role the town may have to play. Development is a breaking away from the past, and this past is contained in what is known as the "colonial structure". The basic framework of development must therefore, be breaking away from the colonial structure. What is understood by colonial structure? It is not our intention to analyse it in detail. It may be defined in outline by two of its aspects: an economic system, and a method of governing, and the African town may be defined as the physical expression of this structure.

(1) The colonial economic system is characterized by the flow of primary products to, and the flow of manufactured products from, the metropolitan countries. The capitals of the various States, are steeped in this system of trade (commercial undertakings, banks, etc.), particularly as these capital often are very ports. We can say, therefore, that the town is the integrating nucleus of the colonial economic

system. We also see that in its essence the town is defined by the nature of this economic system, by which the relationship between the town and the hinterland is determined.

Thus we have the colonial economic system and the town as the integrating nucleus of this system: everything depends, obviously, on the nature of economic relations between the territory and the metropolitan country. Is there economic complementarity? If so, the town becomes the centre of trade. But this is not the case. The flows between metropolitan countries and colonized territories are not founded on complementarity, which supposes the basic equality of the two, but on the domination of the territories by the metropolitan countries and they are merely the manifestation of such domination. Such a situation gives rise to two important consequences:

- the territory does not form an objective economic reality connecting, at domestic level, the town and the rural area and itself connected with the metropolitan country;
- the capital city is the arrival point for flows of goods from the rural area and the departure point for flows of manufactured goods (with the well-known imbalance between the two) but there is no economic complementarity between the town and the rural area.

(2) The colonial structure is also a special way of government. It was power by direct domination, built on the difference, the separation, between the foreign minority, which made decisions, and the rest of the population. We shall not dwell on the inherent logic of this type of government (which is by no means exceptional in history) which manifests itself at the level of both the power-holding minority and of the subordinate population. The foreign minority tends to show its power by its exclusiveness, by pursuing its way of life, whence it derives the essence of its prestige. The towns, which were created, or at the very least completely refashioned, by this minority were the privileged scenes where this striving after assertion of the difference was enacted.

A part of the subordinate population, reacting to the situation imposed on it, tends to adopt this foreign way of life and again it is the town that was the scene of this urge to adopt ways of life including everything from dress to housing.

The colonial structure has created a very special type of town: the centre of trade in goods and of colonial power, the town is the reflection, both economic and sociological, of colonial domination. Functionally, as a port, the town is oriented towards the metropolitan country and not towards its hinterland; sociologically, the town is the place where the consequences of the foreign power are felt, that is to say, where assimilation to the foreign way of life occurs. Both economically and sociologically the town is essentially cut off from the rural area, and it is this breach which any development policy must mend.

(B) It is only by seeing the urban phenomenon in the context of a breakaway from the previously defined colonial structure, that we can hope to devise a coherent strategy for it. We shall first try to determine the guide lines for such a breakaway and then we shall see what is actually happening in existing towns.

(1) We have already seen that the colonial economic system did not establish an organized territorial economy that had a proper trade relationship with the metropolitan country. The most general objective of a strategy of development and structural decolonization is, therefore, to establish an organized national economy. Only if the domestic economy is a reality will nations be able to enter into real negotiations with the exterior. Structuration of the domestic economy is the first step in attaining a certain degree of autonomy in international economic relations.

How can such an organized domestic economy be established?

The organizing process that establishes the domestic economy can be carried out at two levels:

- industrialization, which creates a real domestic market;

- organization of the nation as a geographic entity into inter-connected regions and the organization of these regions themselves, entailing dispersion phenomena.

The essential role of towns in such a process of establishing a domestic economy is immediately apparent; the town is the integrating nucleus of economic activities and, in particular, the region can only be organized around and in the town. Regions can only be organized in and by an urban network, that is also organized. We shall meet all these problems again later.

(2) Establishment of an organized domestic economy and the break-away from a colonial structure are by themselves not sufficient. The economy depends of necessity on active participants who, in one way or another, must sustain it. The colonial economic system and the power which made it function, were not built on true participation by the population in this economic life. Decolonization can only be reflected in an effort to involve those concerned in economic activity. This is the direction which, in theory at least, the various African States seem to have taken and which find expression in rural communes, co-operatives, agricultural trade unions.

In fact, the establishment of a domestic economy must be accompanied by a disruption of the relationships which were behind this economic activity. At the level of the rural population, authentic representative groups are established with which the public authorities enter into a dialogue, and negotiate. It seems that this dialogue, which must be genuinely established, is the sole channel for development.

Quite obviously the framework for this dialogue must be the small urban centres of rural areas; it is there that the population and the administration will be able to establish together both the regional economy and the national economy which primarily consists in regional organization.

(c) Such is the outline plan, it seems, into which development must in practice be fitted. Now, what happens?

First of all, a general observation must be made - there is an enormous disproportion between the capital city and the small rural centres, which seems to have become accentuated since independence. Two tendencies can be noted:

(1) An increase in the number of non-productive urban installations, such as government palaces, public buildings etc. This is the sign of a certain form of power based on prestige.

(2) Above all, there is a tendency for commercial profits and official salaries to be put into permanent houses and blocks of flats. This process of turning profits into permanent buildings has two characteristics:

(a) It leads to speculation in building sites and urban apartment houses.

(b) It is not part of the over-all national economy; it does, in fact, create work for a few building contractors and a few hundred workers; but this activity is self-contained, it is not connected with and does not radiate into the over-all national economy.

Socio-politically, it is a serious matter to see the group of persons who own the scant financial resources of the country launching out into prestige activities - which is what present urban construction amounts to. In fact, this is only a sign, in a way the outward expression, of an exclusive group standing outside the great mass of the population, which, by its way of life, sets itself apart and accentuates the difference.

This urban population is further differentiated into two categories: a minority of steady workers - which is of no great significance, either because it aspires to adopt the way of life of the first category, or because its members try to become the leaders of the urban masses. In fact, 70-90 per cent of the urban population consists of a mass of

people with no particular occupational skill, whose instability is proverbial and with a whole crop of very small-scale individual activity of tradesmen and artisans battering on to it.

There is a tendency for this urban mass to be organized in parties and trade-unions, and it thus becomes a factor in local politics, where it exerts pressure that is enormous but difficult to determine, ranging from blackmail, which leads to a multiplication of urban installations, which sometimes seems to be the material expression of demagoguery, to the overthrow pure and simple of the government - we can all remember recent examples.

The following problem arises:

Are the organized urban masses in any way an expression of the nation as a whole? Surveys have shown that since 1958 there has been a tendency towards a breach between the town and the rural areas, not only at the level of organizations but also in respect of the factors that have resulted in the awakening; in fact, the result is a situation that seems serious - the mass of village dwellers is kept outside the main stream of events and yet this peasant mass constitutes 90 per cent of the population!

It is difficult to diagnose the present situation; there seems to have been no break-away from the colonial structure, but merely a continuation of the previous situation - the capital city is still in the foreground, and the rural area remains a great silent shade, with less and less concern for what happens in the urban world which is a stranger to it.

(D) What must be done?

It seems that any form of "wait-and-see" attitude must be rejected; as always in strategy, there is a negative aspect and a positive aspect - all within the context of a coherent objective. Therefore, from the point of view of breaking away from the colonial structure, a process that may consist, let us recall, in connecting the establishment of a global domestic economy with the integration of the rural population,

there is one single coherent line of action to be prepared, both for the capital city and for the rural areas.

(1) The capital city

Urban installations should derive from rational economic motives and not motives of demagoguery towards the urban masses or from a concept of power based on the prestige of a bygone age.

Measures should be taken against the small number of speculators in buildings or building sites. Draconian severity is certainly justified economically (profits being lost in activities that do not form part of the over-all economy) and also for socio-political reasons, to the extent that the people engaging in this prestige building are very often the people in authority; in fact, this prestige building is linked to a form of power built on an increasingly marked cleavage between those in power and the population.

(2) Micro-urbanization of the rural areas

Consideration must be given to de-congesting the capital city, or more accurately, halting urban immigration, and a return to the rural areas. Now, such objectives perforce bring us back to the question of organizing the rural area; it is absurd to think of halting urban immigration as long as the present situation continues and a fortiori of creating the reverse movement. What can be the outline scheme for such a rural reorganization? We take up again the idea of a global economy, in the form of regions interconnected according to the rules of complementarity and dispersion.

A region by itself has no existence; in fact, it is built on the interconnexion of the rural area and the centre. It is only when this connexion exists that the region, as an objective entity, can become part of an inter-regional whole. What form can the relationship between the small rural centre and the rural area take?

Economically speaking, the activities of the rural centre are complementary to rural activity, and this complementarity is expressed

in the modernization of techniques; in particular, going beyond the provision of mere administrative and commercial services and venturing into handicrafts or small-scale industry adapted to the rural area. In fact, economically speaking, the nature of the small existing centre must be transformed; whereas it is at present only a link in the chain of the distribution of goods between the capital city and the rural area, it must be re-orientated so that it stands in a creative relationship with the rural area; and that at the level of providing technical means of production.

However, one must not make the mistake of restricting the rural centre to its economic functions. We said that economic development must include a dialogue between the authorities and the organized peasants; the rural centre must be the place where the institutions for this dialogue are established. With a rural centre of this type, we should avoid three obstacles:

Accepting dispersion and the fragmentation of the rural population and not seeking this necessary intermediary.

Imagining that it can be found at village level, which is too narrow an environment; it is precisely the village that must be superseded.

Or else to hold the dialogue with pseudo-representative organizations, which are of too wide a scope, being regional or even national.
