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POLITICAL ECONOMY

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Subject:

“Capitalism and the Environment”

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteenth century, the question of the beginning of the history of capitalism, of its origins, of its consistency and above all of its evolution has been the source of major sociological, economic and historical debates. Today capitalism is the model of society in most countries of the world, however it generates a lot of controversy. Environment is the center of all debate about capitalism. Let's start to define these words. Capitalism is a production process organized around competing private companies that sell their products in a market in order to increase their profits. On another side, environment is a set of elements (biotic or abiotic) that surround an individual or a species and some of which directly contribute to meeting its needs. **Is capitalism able of integrating environmental issues into its functioning?** We will start to analyze what the environment brings to our industry and then reverse roles and see how capitalism pollutes our planet.

- II. Most of today's businesses and factories operate thanks to our environment. Indeed, it is our resources that provide the energy and raw material for the operation of factories.

Energy is fundamental, it allows to do a physical transformation: without energy the factory cannot function. The raw material is also essential to production, they are the initial products used in the production of finished or manufactured products.

In both cases the operation of our factories depends on environmental resources which are divided into three categories:

- Biomass is everything that is part of living such as animals, plants, trees or insects.
- Geological resources which include stone, earth and fossils.
- Renewable energies use wind, sun, geothermal energy and water.

Finally, our entire production plant is itself part of the environment since it is made up primarily of natural resources. What brings a problem in the long term, if we do not preserve our environment, our production plant will function less and less and will end up shutting down.

This reasoning goes far beyond energies and raw material. Bees, for example, are useless for our industry (except for honey), but thanks to their pollination activity, bees greatly participate in agricultural performance. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), out of all the species of cereals, fruits, roots and nuts that we eat, $\frac{3}{4}$ could not be produced in a sustainable way without pollination. So, the importance of the environment goes far beyond its resources and our human activities therefore depend on it.

INSPIRATION: Antonin Pottier, "Is capitalism compatible with ecological limits?", 2017

III. In this part we will explain the different way that capitalism impact environment

First let's think how the capitalism consumes the resources of our world.

The environment is not unlimited, we can distinguish **limits and borders**. The environmental limit is a period from which a resource is no longer exploitable, once it has been exceeded, nothing can be done, while an environmental border can be crossed but it will end up having consequences in the future.

Petrol is a limit: the day when we will have consumed all the petrol available on Earth, we will no longer be able to use it. Global warming is a border, the goal is to keep temperatures below an increase of 2 ° C, otherwise we will have consequences in the next few years.

In both cases, capitalism is a danger. Industries never stop consuming resources without thinking to the consequences that this could engender. Despite the strong awareness, examples of petrol and climate change are examples that are not taken into account by companies today. Companies are blinded by their immediate profit without thinking about long-term profit, but like we said previously our factory is part of environment, so companies do not take into account that their production plants could shut down in the next few years. This proves to us that capitalism with a direct profit still occupies a more important place in our society than the preservation of the environment.

We will use an example to denounce the natural disasters linked to capitalism.

Considered one of the worst industrial disasters in history, **Bhopal accident** officially kills 3,828, this toll having been revised to 7,575 in 1995. It in fact caused between 20,000 and 25,000 deaths, according to associations of victims. There are also 300,000 people sick as a result of the disaster.

The CEO of the company, Warren Anderson, has been accused of "death by negligence" for the disaster and has been de declared as a fugitive by the chief justice of Bhopal on the 1st of February 1992 for failing to appear in court during a trial. He died in September of 2014 in Vero Beach, Florida in the United States, he was never tried by Indian justice.

The Bhopal disaster is a chemical accident that occurred on the night of December 3, 1984 in Bhopal, a city in central India. It is the consequence of the explosion of a plant of a subsidiary of the American company Union Carbide producing pesticides. The explosion released forty tons of methyl isocyanate into the city's atmosphere.

When the factory was in operation, the waste was buried underground. The waste is still dispersed in the water table, poisoning the water drawn by the inhabitants of the surroundings. Twenty years ago, around thirty people died of this toxicity every month, but no measures were taken to clean the factories: the waste of the factories was in the open air and the children of the slums used them as land for games.

This new example will show how the search for profit has normalized the search for resources at the expense of the environment. **Fracking** is a massive cracking of a rock by means of the injection of a pressurized liquid. This technic makes it possible to recover petrol or gas in substrates that are too dense, where a conventional well would produce not very much or nothing. In addition to the fact that it still consists of a non-renewable, fuel and polluting energy source, this extraction technique would have strong environmental consequences.

In an article, BBC NEWS ("What is fracking and why is it controversial", 10/15/2018), explain that the intense use of the hydraulic fracture in the United States, where it revolutionized the energy industry, has generated environmental concerns. Fracking uses huge amounts of water which must be transported to the site at significant environmental cost. Salinization and pollution of soil and water, but also vibrations and disturbances of land would threaten some local species, especially those that depend on surface water or soil stability to live.

The University of Missouri has conducted a large-scale study on populations living near fracturing facilities and has seen a significant increase in endocrine disruption and hormonal diseases in exposed persons. The chemical agents used during fracturing would be once again incriminated.

Activists say fracking distract energy companies and governments to invest in renewable energy sources and encourage continued dependence on fossil fuels.

On another side companies says that they need a 21st century energy revolution based on efficiency and renewable energies; more than fossil fuels are added to global warming. (BBC article). here is again a limit of capitalism.

Here we will see how the expansion of capitalism created new environmental problems. Indeed, there is a very strong link between **maritime transport** and globalization. It can be argued that without maritime transport, globalization as we know it today would not have been possible. After World War II in 1950, just over 500 million tons of goods were transported by sea. Today, more than 10 billion tones pass through the sea every year! We talk a lot about the "dematerialized economy". Yet the international economy has never relied so heavily on physical flows and material goods. Maritime transport enables these considerable flows: 80% to 90% by volume of international freight transport is carried out by sea.

The ecological impact of maritime transport accounts for a large part of the total pollution generated on earth, the maritime sector pollutes both the air and water of the seas and oceans. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) estimates that carbon dioxide emissions from shipping in 2012 were equal to 2.2% of global emissions from human activity and expects them to increase by 50% at 250% by 2050 if no action is taken

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, despite the fact that we absolutely can't conciliate them, capitalism and ecology are closely linked. Whether it is to pull on resources of energy or raw material or when it destroys the environment through disasters or modes of exploitation, our capitalist industry constantly interacts with the environment. For my opinion the last chance to save our environment is to stop to conciliate ecology and capitalism and to rethink our societies and create a new economic model that is less lucrative but more conscientious of our resources.

We are conditioned for a capitalist society and educate to constantly consume. In order to preserve the environment, we should transform the institutions that shape us, in particular, the company and its quest for short-term profit, and reduce our mass consumption.