

## NOTES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

### Ecosocialism and Spirituality

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*In Memoriam* for Chico Mendes and Dorothy Stang, who gave their lives for the Amazonian forest and the Peoples of the Forest.

*Chico and Dorothy are only the best known of innumerable martyrs sacrificed in a battle stretching over decades. Inspired by their religious faith, they struggled to their last breath for the cause of the oppressed and the exploited, which they saw as inseparable from the cause of the forest, of life, and of nature itself.*

#### Chico Mendes (ML)

The young *seringueiro* (rubber tapper) Francisco Alves Mendes Filho, born on December 15, 1944 and educated in the liberationist Christian culture of the Christian base communities,<sup>1</sup> discovered Marxism in the 1960s thanks to a veteran Communist, Euclides Fernandes Távora. In 1975, Chico and his companion, Wilson Pinheiro, founded the Rural Workers Union of Brasília and soon afterwards, in 1977, the Rural Workers Union of Xapuri, the town where he was born. During this period, he devised a novel form of non-violent struggle, the famous *empates* (confrontation without winners) and put it into practice in his union. Hundreds of *seringueiros*, along with their wives and children, would hold hands and, weaponless, confront the Caterpillar bulldozers of the big companies engaged in deforestation. Sometimes the rubber tappers were defeated, but often they were able to stop the bulldozers and chainsaws of the forest-killers. Sometimes they even won the support of the laborers who were carrying out the deforestation.

To the extent that these measures worked, they aroused the enemies of the *seringueiros* and other peoples of the forest: the *latifundistas* (big landowners), the agro-business and wood exporting companies, and the cattle-raisers. All of these shared a common interest in clearcutting the trees, whether to sell the wood or to replace the forest with pastures for cattle or cash crops. These forces organized politically into the so-called “Democratic Rural Union” (UDR) but also as paramilitary armed forces with their mercenary *jagunços* (hired gunmen). They were further assisted with numerous accomplices within the police, the courts, and throughout the local, regional, and federal governments. During those years, Chico Mendes began receiving death threats, and in 1980, his comrade in struggle, Wilson Pinheiro, was murdered by the death squads.

Chico Mendes did not back down. To the contrary, he took the initiative to unite the *seringueiros* and other workers, who lived from the forest by extracting nuts and other products, with the indigenous communities and various peasant groups. Thus arose the Peoples of the Forest Alliance. For the first time, rubber tappers and indigenous folk, who so often had fought each other in the past, joined against the common enemy. Chico Mendes defined the foundations of this alliance: “Never again will one of our

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\* This essay is an adaptation of a talk that was given at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil in January 2009. The initials ML and FB indicate which of the two authors the comments are attributed to.

<sup>1</sup> The base communities came out of the liberation theologies of the 1960s primarily in Brazil. They formed from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods or towns which organized their social and economic lives around “popular churches” where the people directly provided ecclesiastical services.

comrades spill the blood of the others. Together we can protect the forest, which is where we learned to live, to raise our children, and to develop our capacities in a way of harmony with nature, with the environment, and with all beings which live here.”<sup>2</sup> He was perfectly conscious of the ecological dimension of this struggle, as it affects not only the peoples of the Amazon but of all the world, which depends on the tropical forest—the green lung of the planet.

Mendes was a man of action: organizing, fighting, and concerned with practical and concrete issues, such as literacy and the building of cooperatives and viable economic alternatives for his people. But he was also, and no less, a dreamer and a utopian in the noble and revolutionary meaning of the word. Who can read without emotion his socialist and internationalist testament, dedicated to the future generations and published soon after his death by the Rural Workers Union of Xapuri?:

Attention, young people of the future: September 6<sup>th</sup> of the year 2120, anniversary of the first centennial of the world socialist revolution, which unified all the peoples of the planet around one ideal and one thought of socialist unity, and which put an end to all enemies of the new society. Here remains only the remembrance of a sad past of pain, suffering and death. Forgive me; I was only dreaming when I described these events which I won't be able to see. But I had the pleasure of having a dream.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1980s Chico achieved two important victories: the establishment of the first reservations set aside exclusively for *seringueiros* and other indigenous and peasant communities, who made their living from the forest in the Amazonian state of Acre, and the expropriation of the Cachoeira plantation near Xapuri, which belonged to the *latifundista*, Darly Alves da Silva. That daring act was also a death warrant from the rural oligarchy, which for centuries had been accustomed to “eliminate”—with total impunity—those who dared organize the rural workers to struggle against the big landowners. Thus, Chico Mendes became “a guy signaled to die” (a well-known expression used in the rural areas of Brazil). The murder took place in December 1988 in front of his house and was carried out by gunmen hired by Alves da Silva.

But Chico lives on in his combination of socialism and ecology, in agrarian reform and defense of the Amazonian forest, in peasant and indigenous struggles, in the survival of humble local populations, and in the protection of a heritage of humanity: the last great tropical forest not yet destroyed by capitalist “progress.” In all these ways Chico Mendes’s fight is exemplary. His example will continue to inspire new struggles both in Brazil and far from Brazil, in other countries, and on other continents.

### **Dorothy Stang (FB)**

In February 2005, Sister Dorothy Stang, a 73-year-old American missionary from the Notre Dame congregation, was assassinated with six bullets at short range in the town of Anapu in the Amazonian state of Pará. I met her in the 1970s, when I was preaching at a spiritual retreat in the state of Maranhão in which she participated.

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<sup>2</sup> Speech by Chico Mendes, quoted by Ailton Krenak, organizer of the Union of Indigenous Nations (União das Nações Indígenas), in *Chico Mendes*, published by the Xapuri Rural Workers Union (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores de Xapuri), which is a member of the Unified Labor Confederation (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores), São Paulo, January 1989, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Dorothy's engagement with the land conflicts of the Amazon started in 1982, when Bishop Dom Erwin Krautler, who was also threatened with death, from the Xingu River area proposed that she work in the small town of Anapu. Anapu is located on the Transamazônica Highway in an area where the pharaonic projects of the military dictatorship left a heritage of misery and conflicts. As Bishop Krautler put it, "Dorothy wanted to dedicate her life to the poorest families living in miserable conditions. I suggested that she go to the eastern area of the Transamazônica Highway in an area between the towns of Altamira and Marabá. And there she went." Anapu had only 8,000 inhabitants, but it was riddled with land conflicts.

After the 1980s, deforestation intensified in the region, particularly in an area known as the "Land of the Middle." The increase in deforestation aggravated the conflicts between *grileiros* (illegal big landowners) and big timber companies on one side and small peasants on the other. Inspired by Chico Mendes, Dorothy struggled for the creation of reservations of land set aside for indigenous and peasant communities. "The poor inhabitants were expelled from the land when some landowner arrived and pretended he owned that place," says Antonia Melo from the Amazonian Work Group of Altamira in the state of Pará, who was a friend of the murdered Sister. Dorothy fought for projects of sustainable development and for the right of small producers to the land.

In June 2004 in Brasília, Dorothy testified before the Mixed Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Rural Violence and denounced the impunity that the landowners enjoyed over their violent and lawless actions as an aggravating factor of the conflicts. Antonia considered Dorothy "a woman committed to social justice, the environment, and sustainable development."

Dorothy was born on June 7, 1931 in Dayton, Ohio in the U.S.A. She came to Brazil as a missionary in 1966. In Coroatá in the state of Maranhão, she worked with the ecclesiastic base communities composed mainly of small peasants. With the expansion of the *latifundium*, many families were forced to leave their lands and migrate to the state of Pará. Dorothy followed them. Her support of communities based on family agriculture and oriented towards extractive activities with low environmental impact provoked the ire of the *grileiros* and *latifundistas* of the region. When a PDS, or Sustainable Development Pole, project was announced for the region of Anapu, the illegal landowners invaded the area and forced the families to leave.

The public prosecutor of the state of Pará, Lauro Freitas Júnior, declared that he had no doubts that the landowner Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, known as "Bida," and the cattle-raiser Regivaldo Pereira Galvão, known as "The Crazy One," made an agreement to pay for the murder of Dorothy Stang. Bishop Dom Tomas Balduino, president of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), said: "One has to look for the background of this murder. It is not only the result of those who gave the orders, but of a whole rural structure, and not only in the state of Pará, but in the whole of Brazil." The two main reasons why [crimes such as the assassinations and other violent crimes of Sister Dorothy Stang](#) [intimidation](#) are so prevalent in the rural areas are the traditional impunity of the landowners and the absence of [a control](#) on illegal ownership. The Lula government has promised agrarian reform, but unhappily this has not yet materialized.

Perhaps because of the high-profile nature of this case and the fact that an American citizen was the victim, two of those responsible for Dorothy Stang's murder are being punished. After first being found guilty, then subsequently not guilty on appeal,

and then guilty again on further appeal, “Bida” Moura is now serving a long prison term. The hired gunman, Rayfran das Neves Sales, who confessed his crime, was sentenced to 28 years in jail. ~~This~~ The fact that Rayfran das Neves was found guilty and sentenced much earlier ~~is a manifestation of~~ reveals a perverse aspect of the Brazilian judiciary system in which: ~~those rich people who are not poor~~ commit crimes enjoy immunity and impunity, while ~~the~~ those who are poor ~~suffer~~ are easily convicted. The fact that the killer Rayfran das Neves changed his testimony on who gave the orders for the murder no fewer than fourteen times ~~!~~ shows how absurd court proceedings in these cases can be. The other landowner accused of the murder, the “Crazy” cattle-raiser Regivaldo Pereira Galvão, was freed awaiting trial by the Supreme Court of Justice ~~After~~ after just one year and three months in jail. He was arrested later after prosecutors accused him of forging land titles and illegally seizing the land that Dorothy Stang died trying to defend, and is currently awaiting trial. ~~the Supreme Court of Justice issued a writ of habeas corpus to the other landowner accused of the murder, the “Crazy” cattle-raiser Regivaldo Pereira Galvão, who has since disappeared.~~

Punishing *latifundistas* for contracting a murder is highly unusual in Brazil.

According to the Pastoral Land Commission, between 1971 and 2007, 819 people were killed as a result of agrarian conflicts in the state of Pará. Of these crimes, only 92 cases went to trial, and only 22 of those ~~went~~ before a jury. Only six of those accused of hiring the killers were sentenced, and only “Bida” Moura. ~~None of them~~ is in jail today.

## I. The Present Ecological Crisis, A Crisis of Civilization

### *The Approaching Catastrophe: Global Warming* (ML)

The setting of these events includes a planetary ecological crisis—that is to say, a crisis of civilization—of which the most threatening expression is the phenomenon of global warming. The result of atmospheric accumulation of greenhouse gases released by fossil fuels, the process of climate change is a challenge without precedent in the history of humanity. What will happen if the temperature of the planet rises above 2° C? Many of the consequences are known, thanks to the work of the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. These consequences include unprecedented disasters such as a rise in the level of the seas, with the risk of submerging maritime cities from Dhaka in Bangladesh, to Amsterdam, Venice, and New York; desertification on such an enormous scale that the Sahara desert could extend to Rome; and the widespread disappearance of drinking water. Each of these events, calamitous on their own, will be accompanied and aggravated by “natural” catastrophes—hurricanes, floods, etc.—occurring with growing frequency and intensity. Added to the rise in sea temperatures are the consequences of releasing the vast amounts of highly explosive, heat-trapping methane gas now held in the depths of the oceans.

One could continue with the list. At which temperature rise—5°, 6° or 7° C—will the planet become uninhabitable by humans? Unfortunately, we do not have the convenience of a known replacement planet in the existing universe. Apparently, there is a secret Pentagon plan in which a special spaceship would take elite representatives—bankers, politicians, military—to the planet Mars in the event of total collapse of terrestrial ecosystems. But this is little consolation to the readers of this essay, as we are not invited on this trip. (And who would want to go with them—those who caused the catastrophe in the first place—anyway?)

Worse, climate destabilization appears to be taking place at a much faster pace than originally predicted—the accumulation of carbon dioxide, the rise in temperature, the melting of the polar ice and the “eternal snow” on the mountaintops, the droughts, the floods. In fact, everything is happening so quickly that barely before the ink even dries, scientific assessments as to how global warming will play out already appear too optimistic. One doesn’t talk anymore of what will happen by 2100, but of what is awaiting us in the next ten, 20, 30 years.

Who is responsible for this catastrophic process of global warming along with all the other interconnected destabilizations of the ecosphere that constitute the unprecedented threat to life on a planetary scale? It is the human being, say the scientists, not a “normal” evolution of the climate, but the product of human activity. This answer, which a significant group of mercenary scientists—many of them richly endowed by oil and coal companies—continues to deny, is correct but too abstract and ahistorical. Human beings have lived on Earth for millennia, but the concentration of carbon dioxide has only become a danger in the last several decades. We need to grasp what humans are doing in *this* historical epoch to bring about the ecological crisis. And when we look at the problem this way, we see that the responsibility for this process belongs squarely to the *world capitalist system*, an intrinsically *unsustainable* mode of production.

*The Roots of the Crisis: A civilization—Western capitalism—based on consumerism, commodity fetishism, the unlimited accumulation of profit, and the conspicuous consumption of the elites.* (FB)

With its absolute priority on capital accumulation over human rights and ecological equilibrium, capitalism results in both brutal social inequality and the devastation of the environment on a planetary scale. Today, 80 percent of the industrial production of the world is absorbed by only 20 percent of the population, which lives mainly in the rich countries of the North and consumes recklessly. In general, the consumption pattern of capitalist society is unsustainable and has a decisive role in the process of climate change. A great part of this consumption is reserved for the conspicuous habits of the oligarchy. According to the United Nations Development Program, the total wealth of the 500 richest persons in the world is greater than that of the 416 million poorer ones. Thus averaging it out, one multimillionaire has almost as much as 1 million common people.

The walls of the fortresses of the privileged are too high to permit the entrance of the multitude of excluded. But the foundation of this fortress of privilege is too fragile to prevent the risk of implosion. The unfolding crisis has reached the point in which the entirety of our present model of civilization has to be transformed. This alternative necessarily entails a change in values and not simply new economic mechanisms.

If the world turns on the economy and the economy turns on the market, this means that the market rules over society, floating in the sky with godlike powers that override human rights and the Earth itself with all its resources. Humanity’s relation to the market is idolatrous; hence market values present themselves as absolute and preside over the life and death of nature and humanity. Under this arrangement, legitimate ends such as the protection of life and the promotion of human happiness are subordinated to the illegitimate goal of the private accumulation of wealth. The fact that the wealth of the few requires the poverty of the many matters not. The entelechy of the market emerges through the big numbers of the bank accounts, and not the dignity of human beings.

All human beings have the right to life and, as Jesus insisted, “a life in plenitude” (*John* 10, 10). How to make this viable? Any alternative must avoid the two models that harmed a significant part of humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the free market and bureaucratic central planning. Neither one subordinated the economy to the rights of the citizens. The market concentrates wealth in the hands of a small oligarchy. Bureaucratic planning, though implemented in the name of the people, excluded the people from the decisions regarding governance in society. The market aggravates injustice, and bureaucratic planning limits the exercise of freedom. Both are incompatible with a healthy environment and, among other things, lead to the present calamitous global warming.

In order to overcome this blind alley, economic logic must abandon the paradigm of private accumulation and recover the principles of common good and respect for nature so that citizenship becomes more important than consumerism, and the social rights of the majority surpass the conspicuous privileges of the minority.

The World Social Forum is a light appearing at the end of the tunnel, a beacon for the hopes of so many activists who struggle for utopia against a system that perceives bread as an exchange-value—that is, within the logic of the commodity—and not as a use-value, a good necessary for our life.

The rethinking of socialism requires that we not identify it with the regimes that came down with the Berlin Wall—just as the history of Christianity cannot be reduced to the Inquisition. For Christians, this is because Jesus’ Evangelium contains certain values, such as the sacred nature of each person, which already condemn all that the Inquisition represented. Similarly, socialist values are absolutely incompatible with bureaucratic and authoritarian regimes.

The germ of a new society is contained in those concrete proposals where political economy and ecology come together. One of the reasons for the brutal social inequality existing in Brazil—75.4 percent of the national wealth in the hands of only 10 percent of the population, according to official statistics from May 2008—is the neoliberal schizophrenia that separates economy from politics and politics from social and ecological needs. There can be neither consolidation of democracy nor defense of the ecosystems in Brazil or the world if we are not able to confront the decisive challenge of eradicating social inequality.

### *The “Market Solutions”—the Stock-trade of Emissions* (ML)

How does the dominant oligarchy confront the ecological problems, and in particular the burning issue of global warming? For many years, the greatest polluter and greenhouse gas releaser of the world, the U.S. under Reagan and the two Bushes, sided with “business as usual.” As Father Bush put it, “the American way of life is not negotiable.” The consensual discourse of the system’s spokesmen is “sustainable development,” a term used by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the G-8 governments. Unfortunately this is a formula without content, something the medieval scholars called *flatus vocis*, empty talk; it is a mere terminological concession to a public increasingly worried about the ecological issue.

The most ecologically conscious sections of international capital, the European and Japanese elites, came to an agreement to confront the greenhouse effect: the so-called Kyoto Protocol—which Bush refused to sign and Obama has set adrift in the catastrophic Copenhagen meetings of December, 2009. The chief contribution of Kyoto, which was supposed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the next 20 or 30 years, consists of an absurd mechanism—typical of neoliberal capitalism—so-called “carbon trade.” The richer countries continue polluting the world and releasing CO<sub>2</sub>, buying from the poorer countries the emission rights they do not use. Kyoto transforms the right to pollute into a commodity sold and bought on the stock market! The chief lesson to be learned is that this is the most advanced solution that the capitalist elite has been able to produce, thereby revealing its utter inability to contend with the climate destabilization it has inflicted on the world. In any event, the Kyoto system has failed miserably to reduce emissions enough to keep the temperature rise under the dangerous threshold of 2° C.

*Pseudo-technological Solutions: The Example of Ethanol* (FB)

According to the official argument, agrofuels are an answer to the danger of global warming by replacing gasoline, one of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions. However, if one takes into account the carbon emissions resulting from the production—the use of fertilizers, agricultural machines, factories—and transport of the so-called “biofuels,” the difference with oil is not so great. The race toward agrofuels is, in fact, a false solution with dramatic social consequences. The Greek prefix *bio* means life; *necro*, death. Can we say which outcome will arise from the fuel extracted from plants?

One of the first consequences of agrofuel production is a spike in the price of food. Research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations suggests that “biofuels will have a strong impact on agriculture during the years 2007 to 2016.” This will come on top of what has happened during the last decade, in which grains have risen 20 percent to 50 percent. In Brazil today, people pay three times more for food than in previous years.

Essentially, agrofuels serve to feed cars and starve people. There are 800 million cars in the world and an equivalent number of chronically undernourished people. It is worrisome that none of the governments that are so enthusiastic about agrofuels questions a social model that gives absolute priority to the individual car—a monstrosity responsible for much of the greenhouse gas emissions. Clearly, they regard the profits of the automobile industry as sacred.

Over the recent past, prices of food have risen in Europe, China, India, and the U.S. The main agrofuel made in U.S., ethanol produced from corn, has doubled the price of this grain in one year; similar results have taken place in Brazil, where sugarcane is the source of ethanol. Since the market is the ultimate arbiter of value in both the U.S. and Brazil, traditional food crops such as soya, rice, and other agricultural goods have been abandoned for the new agricultural “gold.” This results in a rise in the price of soya, rice, and the whole foodchain, since the U.S. exports half of the world’s grains.

Malnourishment today threatens 52.4 million Latin-Americans, 10 percent of the continent’s population. With the expansion of the areas reserved for the production of

ethanol, there is a risk that this “biofuel” will become a *necrofuel*, increasing impoverishment and loss of life.

An equally ominous development has been the destruction of Amazonia itself. In Brazil, expansion of sugarcane in the Southeast along with increased market demand has pushed the production of soya northward into the great rainforest, which has seen an 18 percent annual increase in soya cultivation between 1990 and 2009. Similar pressures have taken place with land for the raising of cattle, which has increased 11 percent *per annum* in the same period. The result has been a deforestation equivalent to ten times the land area of Portugal, with much worse to come if present neoliberal trends continue.

Satellite images taken for the INPE (National Institute for Spatial Research) found that from August to December 2007, 3,235 km<sup>2</sup> of the forest had been razed. It is important to emphasize that the satellite calculations do not include forest-burning, only the cutting down of trees. Since these images take into account only 40 percent of the destruction, the government calculates that some 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Amazonian forest have been eliminated. Of Brazil’s total carbon emissions, 70 percent results from the burnings in the Amazon.

At this rate, according to data from the Institute of Environment Research of the Amazon, by 2030 Brazil will lose 21 percent of its forests. If the present pace of deforestation continues, 670,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Amazonian forest will disappear from the map, an area equivalent to 22 Belgiums. This will result in an incalculable loss in biodiversity. Since the tropical forest is one of the last great carbon sinks of the planet, this loss will greatly exacerbate global warming, with catastrophic consequences for humanity as a whole.

Sugarcane production in Brazil is historically known for overexploitation of labor, destruction of the environment, and undue appropriation of public resources. The sugar mills concentrate landed property and produce monocultures destined for export. Neoliberalism’s enthusiasm for ethanol provoked a run of *usineiros* (sugar mill owners) from all over Brazil to seize available land: in less than four years, 300,000 hectares of sugarcane were planted on former pastures or agricultural land.

The Brazilian government’s energy philosophy of the Brazilian government is currently emphasizes two visions: transform the land into an immense sugarcane plantation, and to develop nuclear energy. Instead of this insane policy, the government should give priority to the renewable sources of energy abundant in Brazil, such as water, solar, and wind energies. Above all, the government should take care of the hungry before helping to enrich the *usineiros*.

## II. A Radical Alternative: Ecosocialism.

### *What is Ecosocialism?* (ML)

The dramatic ecological crisis requires *radical alternatives* beyond capitalism. This is the ambition of *econsocialism*, a current of thought and action that refers at the same time to the ecological protection of the environment and to the struggle for a socialist society inspired by the values of freedom, equality, and solidarity.

By breaking with the productivist ideology of “progress,” whether in its capitalist



or bureaucratic forms, and by opposing an unsustainable mode of production and consumption whose logic of unbounded expansion has shown itself to be incompatible with the protection of nature, ecosocialism represents an original attempt to articulate the fundamental ideas of socialism, whether of Marxist or libertarian type, with the insights of ecological critique.

The narrow rationality of the capitalist market, with its short-sighted calculation of profits and losses, intrinsically contradicts ecological rationality, which takes into account the long temporality of the natural cycles. It is useless in our view to oppose the “bad” ecocidal capitalists but embrace the “good” green capitalists: it is the capitalist system itself—based on unending and ruthless competition, the requirements of profitability, the running after the quick profit—which is destructive of the environment and responsible for disastrous climate change.

Socialism requires more than a change in the relations of production (collective instead of private property): the structure of the productive forces themselves are contaminated by the logic of capital and must be changed. Marx insisted, after the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, that the workers cannot simply take possession of the bourgeois state apparatus and put it at their service; they have to break with it and build a new, radically democratic kind of political power. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the productive apparatus; it cannot be appropriated as is by the people but must be radically transformed through the development of new methods of production, which respect both the health of the workers and ecological integrity.

For instance, the energy sources of capitalist production are dangerous and poisonous. This applies both to the fossil fuels responsible for climate destabilization and nuclear energy. This latter is a false alternative promoted by some governments and numerous propagandists. This is despite the fact that nuclear wastes pose gigantic problems that nobody has been able to solve, with millions of tons of highly toxic radioactive material, whose radiation can in some cases last hundreds of thousands of years, added to the environment. The revolutionary transformation of the productive forces under ecosocialism implies the use of renewable sources of energy compatible with the environment, such as wind, water, and above all, the sun.

Another challenge is to transform the totally unsustainable pattern of consumption inherent in capitalism, in particular, its industrialized centers. If humanity lived according to the American model of consumption, we would need five planets Earth to produce enough to satisfy everyone’s needs. Capitalist consumption is based on obsessive accumulation of goods along with compulsory acquisition of pseudo-novelties imposed by “fashion.” As Marx discerned in *Capital Vol. 1*, the domination of production by the Law of Value imposes a kind of “commodity fetishism” in which the products of exploited labor are worshipped like Godlike forms. This stimulates the elites to consume endlessly, while the masses do not have access to the necessities of life. A new society would orient production to the satisfaction of authentic needs, starting with those whose definition goes back to “biblical” sources: water, food, clothing, and shelter, but also includes basic services such as health, education, culture, transportation, and sanitation.

How are we to distinguish the authentic needs from the false and artificial ones? The latter are fabricated by mental and emotional manipulation, by the dominant capitalist ideology, by the fetishism of commodities, and, most directly, by *advertisement*. A rational society would suppress consumer advertisement, and with it, the artificial needs

for products, such as ~~for~~ Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola. Sans advertising, the producers of these unnecessary products will eventually lose their grip on people's minds, permitting a progressive emergence of a sustainable pattern of consumption.

From the ecosocialist viewpoint, a radical re-organization of the whole mode of production and consumption is necessary, based on criteria beyond the capitalist market that serve the authentic needs of the population and protect the environment. This requires an economy of transition to socialism, where the population itself—and not the “laws of the market” or an authoritarian Political Bureau—decide democratically the priorities and the investments for production.

This transition would lead not only to a new mode of production and a more egalitarian, solidary, and democratic society, but also to an *alternative way of life* beyond the kingdom of money, the artificial habits of consumption induced by advertisement, and the unlimited production of useless commodities. Such, in broad outline, will be ecosocialism.

### *Ecosocialism and Spirituality: New Values for a New Civilization* (FB)

The alternatives to neoliberalism and the building of ecosocialism are borne in social practice through the popular struggles, the unions, peasant and indigenous movements, the ecclesiastic base communities, the black communities.

To find alternatives is a collective work. This does not come out of the head of illuminated intellectuals or ~~ideologie~~ ideological gurus. The important task is to strengthen the organization of the social layers that aspire to something ~~else~~ other than the present reality: from peasants who dream of working on their own land to youth interested in protecting nature. Neoliberalism not only destroys communitarian institutions created by modernity, such as unions, social movements, and the democratic State, its aim is the total atomization of society, reducing people to mere consumers, individuals disconnected from the social and political context where they live. This is the logic of total capitalism, a system that is able to commodify everything: culture, biodiversity, the environment, human organs, the genome, even our imagination.

Without utopias, without hope, there can be no mobilization. And without the possibility of envisaging a different, new, and better world, no hope can exist.

Hope favors the upsurge of new utopias, which have to be translated into political and cultural projects that signal a new society and, as part of this, new conceptions of what it means to be a woman and a man. This requires rescuing ethical values, such as the sense of justice, practices of solidarity and sharing, and respect for nature. It is a spiritual challenge, in the vein suggested by the great Brazilian geographer Milton Santos, who advocated giving priority to the “infinite goods” over the “finite goods.”

This is the project of an ecosocialist civilization as the alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism, able to incorporate concepts and practices of social equality and sustainable development, such as those of the Cuban Revolution, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, and the MST (Landless Peasant Movement of Brazil) land occupations. We have to include in our utopia, our project, our program, new paradigms now emerging, such as ecology, indigenism, communitarian ethics, holism, solidary subjectivities,

feminism, and spirituality. In the struggle for this utopia, one can take inspiration in the lives and actions, the social and spiritual values, the sacrifice and the dedication of people like Chico Mendes and Dorothy Stang.