industrialisation through intermediate technology

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An immediate cause of such misery and frustration in many “developing” countries is undoubtedly unemployment, particularly in rural areas. This generally gives rise to mass migration into metropolitan areas. It is possible to speak of a “process of mutual poisoning”. The establishment of modern industry in a few metropolitan areas tends to kill off competing types of traditional production throughout the countryside, thus causing widespread unemployment or under-employment. The countryside thereupon takes its revenge by mass migration into the metropolitan areas, causing them to grow to a totally unmanageable size.

Current forecasts on the growth of metropolitan areas in the “developing” countries suggest that few people expect this destructive process of mutual poisoning to be stopped or mitigated. Very few people indeed appear to expect that even the most ambitious “rates of economic growth” could suffice to cope with the problem of unemployment during the foreseeable future, exacerbated as this problem is being by the so-called population explosion. Fifteen and even twenty-five year “perspective plans” have been published in various “developing” countries which appear to hold out no hope of economic integration for the majority of people in these countries. In fact, the longer the forecast, the more desperate the situation appears to become, with towns growing to a size of 20, 40 and even 60 million inhabitants, a prospect of “immiseration” for multitudes of people that beggars the imagination.

It may be mentioned in passing that the trend towards “megalopolis”, towards vast conurbations, coupled with the denudation of the countryside, has recently been recognised as a serious problem even in the most highly developed countries such as the United States, Britain, France and Italy. These countries may be able to shoulder the colossal economic burdens arising therefrom, although the question remains whether developments of this kind really represent a rational and desirable employment of economic wealth. Whether or not the social fabric of the wealthy countries can carry these burdens, it seems abundantly certain that the “developing” countries cannot recover economic health along this road. No doubt, national incomes can grow and will continue to grow; but statistics of this kind do not necessarily signify a nation’s “standard of life”; they may merely give evidence of its rising “cost of subsistence”. It is undeniable that a man’s “cost of subsistence” rises significantly the moment he moves from a rural area into a big town where he becomes dependent on a multitude of costly public services which the rural environment provides free of charge.