

BOOK REVIEW

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The Creation of World Poverty: An Alternative View to the Brandt Report

Teresa Hayter, London, Pluto Press, 1981, p.128,

It takes little to convince a convert. Teresa Hayter's *The Creation of World Poverty* achieves that objective with ease. It offers the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the process in which the Third World was impoverished and continues to dwell in utter poverty. But that, I feel, was not enough to combat the Willy Brandt Report, (*North-South: A Programme for Survival*), the avowed purpose of the book; she needed more powerful weapons in her arsenal.

This latest work of Hayter was designed to offer an "alternative view" to the now famous Brandt Report. Hayter, with much sarcasm notes that the main objective of the Brandt Report was the "preservation of the existing world economic order." Yet, she fails to attack the Report on this point or suggest strategies that may avert the situation. Instead, she chooses to explore the next best question, why poverty exists in the South? The Report, she feels, omits this question because "it might come to the embarrassing conclusion that the poverty (in the South) is caused precisely by the economic system which its proposals are supposed to protect (p.15)." So, she takes it on to herself to expose the crime and ends up with explanations that are today a common place in the radical literature on under-development. There is very little in her work that is startling or excitingly new. Beginning with the exposition of the history of early colonial atrocities, through which Europe managed to amass untold fortunes and

push the South into unending poverty, she goes on to show how in the modern times similar exploitation of the South is continued through the triad of aid, trade and foreign investment.

To all of these one can (and as a colleague of mine often does) say So What? So what if the North is the guilty party? How can the impoverished masses in the South be benefited from that knowledge? Or, how can all that be changed in favour of the downtrodden South? To these queries she, like the dependency theory on which the book is based, offers the simplistic solution of 'socialism'. Even if it is the solution, socialism is not a package deal that can be obtained from the grocer. It requires a carefully planned strategy and needs to be fought for and won. In the mean time, and short of that the hungry millions would need to be fed and clothed. Neither dependency theory nor Hayter offers any clear-cut programme that's may be followed by the South to free itself from the North. Indeed, if Hayter wanted to do justice to her purpose, that's where she should have concentrated. After all, the Brandt Report, according to her own exposition, offers "a programme for survival" for the North.

Thus, Hayter has little to offer beyond documenting the process through which the South came to be impoverished and continues to get poorer. Even this is done in a very journalistic fashion. She follows an archaic system of citation, which needs to be formalized. She also needs to refer to the now available macro level research reports (such as Bornschier et.al., 1978 ; Chase-Dunn, 1975; Rubinson, 1976) on Third World development. All of these can be easily remedied. A more serious problem is the subtitle of the book. In spite of its claims, the book does not offer "an alternative view" to the Brandt Report. Indeed, other than some astray remarks and occasional citation the book hardly deals with the Report. The least that can be done is to offer somewhere along the line, perhaps in the

earlier section of the book, a point by point discussion, if not refutation, of the Brandt Report. Failing that, the subtitle needs to be dropped.

Given these deficiencies, the book definitely merits attention even if for the sole reason that all familiar radical arguments on underdevelopment are available in this concise volume. The book was written for the people of the North, and may I add, some among us in the South, who may be shocked to learn that they are the cause of present poverty in the South. Considering that limited objective, the book may be called a success. But with expectations beyond that reader is likely to be disappointed.

References

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Published in *Social Science Review*, Volume III, June, No. 1, 1986 (quote accordingly)