

TOBACCO NOWADAYS, FATAL EPIDEMIC ADDICTION AND POLITICAL WEAPON

1. A FATAL EPIDEMIC

As with AIDS, many people still deny the mortal danger of smoking, which again like AIDS, only manifests itself through other illnesses (many more, more than 25), and only after a much longer length of time leads to an inevitable death (very much longer, 20 or 30 years).

Unlike AIDS tobacco existed in earlier times but this poison hardly killed anyone then: 1. Because more than 90% of smokers died from other causes before they reached 20-30 years as smokers, an age at which its different illnesses kill many smokers. 2. Because, on the contrary to former times, nowadays vulnerable groups of people smoke much more (the undernourished, young people, etc.). 3. Because then the

doses were lower because of the higher cost of tobacco and the methods of production and because there was no social or commercial pressure to consume constantly and obsessively. 4. Because in earlier times less harmless forms of taking tobacco existed (chewing, pipes, etc.).

So tobacco has become the principal cause of death in developed countries, 15% of all deaths, finishing off a third of smokers, robbing 5. 10 years of their lives depending on the levels of tobacco, their vigour, etc., with tobacco being responsible for a third of all cancers, heart attacks, etc.; deaths preceded, many years before, by a greater risk of anginas, colds, coughs, expectoration, loss of appetite, arrhythmia, premature ageing, wrinkles, loss of sexual appetite, etc. Tobacco, S. Freud said, is "the sole justification of Columbus' mistake", as he joked, like so many others, about its danger, but it caused his death after thirteen years of suffering with mouth cancer. Smoking is already now the main cause of death in many countries, more than AIDS, traffic accidents, murders, illegal drugs, suicides and fires all together. This data has been confirmed by the courts of justice, in spite of the "scientific", political and economic efforts of the powerful Tobacco companies, which are becoming forced to accept the fact and pay multimillion indemnity to their victims or the families of the deceased. So the principal national health authorities and the World Health Organization warn us: "Smoking is suicide in slow motion", as Dr. Mahler stated; "Tobacco kills half of all habitual users" his successor H. Nakajima stressed, and now Gro Harlem proclaims that tobacco, along with AIDS, is the principle enemy to be fought. The actor Yul Brynner recorded an impressive message before his death: "Hi there! I am dead. I would still be with you if I hadn't smoked so much".

2. MAXIMUM DEPENDENCE

"If smoking harms them, let them give it up! Isn't it a slow poison?" is the objection from those with a still common moralist and individualist stand. This opinion has been refuted by the latest research in the U.S.A. and G.B., which proves that nicotine is between six and eight times more addictive than alcohol, and can generate dependence which is even stronger than heroine; there is a genetic predisposition to this drug dependence in quite a few smokers. This addiction explains the incredible lethal... and economic success of tobacco. When the level of tobacco in the blood decreases after about two hours, the smoker experiences symptoms of abstinence, suffering and depending on the case, "anxiety, irritability, insomnia, fatigue, head aches, difficulties with concentration, dizziness, an increased appetite, strong desire to smoke, etc.

So the smoker becomes, to the highest degree, an addict, a slave exploited by the drug, to which he gives up (together with his health and welfare) even more than half of his spending money like 41% of young Spanish smokers in 1998. Perhaps beginning during adolescence or in a moment of weakness, but in any case already drugged, the smokers is not in control but is controlled by cigarettes, the victim of this addiction which is a serious -even, we stress, fatal illness (T. Salvador). Who said slavery had been abolished? Data from the WHO in 1998 stated that 80% of smokers -nearly one thousand million people- are addicts who want to give up this dependence which exploits, weakens and kills, but they can't.

3. A GROWING ADDICTION

Tobacco is creating greater and greater dependence:

1. Because, as people have more money and tobacco is cheaper (improvements in agricultural technology, processing, manufacturing of cigarettes, marketing, etc.), nowadays smoke more those who are undernourished, weak and excluded from society and therefore more liable to suffer from this addiction and die because of their poorer health. World production of cigarettes increased from 1950 to 1997 from 1,686 thousand million to 5,743, nearly a thousand cigarettes per person.
2. Because smoking starts at a much younger age again because of higher incomes and cheaper cigarettes.
3. Because, for the same reasons, women smoke more and inoculate their children with the addiction even before they are born. The children are weaker at birth and die more; also miscarriages are 30 to 70% higher in smokers, and women are twice as likely to contract lung cancer as men.
4. Because social, religious, moral and family pressures which limited the habit of smoking in earlier times have decreased.
5. Because the fast pace of modern life, life itself ("the rush") as well as rapid ideological, social, family and even local change, give rise to tensions and insecurity, frustrations and depressions of all kinds, which foster the use of drugs; normally people begin with tobacco.
6. Because the tobacco companies, with ever greater power, have carried out huge campaigns (the most costly in the USA after those for cars) to impose consumption, with a thousand false promises, which

would even make a hawker blush; through advertising the tobacco companies money has silenced the media with a golden gag so it does not spread the data against it.

7. Because cigarettes are the easiest product to buy, day or night everywhere, which has created an immense network of "pushers" mercenary accomplices of this drug.

8. Because the simple fact that so many people smoke encourages many others to smoke, a tragic vicious circle.

9. Because there is physical inoculation -through the smoke- of this drug, from smokers to their children, friends, etc.

10. Because its addictive character -the basis of its accumulative success with few possibilities of escape- has been criminally reinforced with chemical additives such as ammoniac.

4. THE SYSTEM'S "SAFETY VALVE"

At first view the success of tobacco can be explained as economic business. But it could not have managed to reach such predominance if it had not fit in perfectly with the political objectives of the system which, to foster it, did away with moral objections, imported slaves into America on a massive scale, kept just the right level of taxation and favoured the expansion of this drug. Only now, when it is beginning to work less smoothly as people become more aware of its consequences, is it sending this machinery of social domination to other "peripheral countries" of the Third World just as it has done with other weapons that have become obsolete. But the tobacco company mafias

are still capable of continuing to corrupt the most consolidated democracies.

Tobacco is a very bad economic business for a developed country if you take away all kinds of costs which have a monetary value from the income from tobacco, costs such as: health, work absenteeism, fires, accidents, etc. The calculations have often been made and the negative balance is obvious... at least as long as one does not have the "courage" to count as an advantage -in pensions etc- the saving which arise from the "timely" accelerated death of smokers near retiring age.

But if tobacco is so bad for the economy (except for that of the tobacco companies) it is even worse in the political field as it works as a safety valve alleviating tensions which means friction is reduced and the unjust ruling system can function more easily. Tobacco eases sorrows like all narcotics but "smoking numbs ones mind and makes thinking impossible" (Goethe). Nowadays nicotine has therefore become, from a subjective point of view, the most widespread "opium of the people" in the West, just like alcohol was before. As Carl Marx said about wine, smoking is now "the quickest way to get out of Manchester", to get away from the unbearable tension of the industrial city. With the invaluable advantage (for the exploiters) that this great money grabber -unlike wine and other drugs- lets you go on working all day long... in favour of another exploiter and for many years before it poisons you.

Smoking "relaxes", tames the workers and at the same time snatches away an important part of their low physical strength and their small economic savings which could have encouraged them to resist the boss. What more useful drug could be dreamt up, not now by capitalism

but by China which is by far the largest world producer of tobacco for domestic consumption at this time? Tobacco literally makes a large part of the opposition go up in smoke. If before even people, from Marx to Che Guevara, who criticised the system still smoked, now and in spite of the importance of tobacco for Cuba, Fidel Castro has condemned this merciless ruling order, has given up smoking and has supported the WHO campaigns against this (a) socially induced drug.

5. AN ARM FOR THE NORTH'S DOMINATION

Tobacco oppresses and weakens especially in the countries of the South. 800 of the 1,100 million smokers in the world live in this area, an unheard of number of drug addicts which is increasing rapidly, as the tobacco companies in the North, hounded more and more by the rejection of the public which is forcing Governments to adopt measures which curb their poison, are having to go to the South where there is no legislation limiting their deadly expansion, even among pre-adolescents. In one decade European and American tobacco exports have doubled, reaching 30% of total production from the U.S.A. and 60% of production from G.B. in 1998. Such an aggressive and harmful policy should be considered as a new opium war on a world scale, a war of the North against the South such as the 1839-1842 war of England against China to impose the "free market" of this other drug. In fact Philip Morris, the leading multinational of the seven which control half the world market, has increased the percentage of income from abroad from 43% in 1992 to 57% and Reynolds, the third multinational, from 32 to 44%. In ten

years the number of smokers in Africa has doubled.

If the majority of the three million annual deaths from tobacco are still in the North, in twenty years time the greater part of these deaths will be in the South. To these direct deaths from tobacco it is also necessary to add those due to the collapse of the weak health services in the South through an epidemic of smoking related illnesses, which will prevent the care of other illness with very different causes as is happening now with the AIDS epidemic in some Sub-Saharan African countries. Like Guatemala before, Nicaragua has made a legal claim for its health costs against the Tobacco companies of the USA which "have conspired to hide medical and scientific information on the risks associated with tobacco in order to make greater profits", so that, as the State Prosecutor of Nicaragua stated, "the consumption of nicotine for our country equals a permanent scourge like hurricane Mitch".

The varied and important role played by tobacco in the exploitation of the South began with the discovery of America. Let us remember that the monopoly or state levy on tobacco from America (justified like smoking itself for reasons of "health"), became straightaway along with cacao, the most profitable exploitation of the colonies by the Spanish Crown as it would be later for the English.