Globalization Essay, Research Paper

Globalization: A Policy of Apocryphal Benefits

The idea of globalization is a greatly misconstrued, detrimental policy to those countries and people outside of the North American sphere of life. Corporations are globalizing not only to reduce production costs, but also to expand markets, evade taxes, acquire knowledge and resources, and protect themselves against currency fluctuations and other risks (Brecher and Costello 18). Three hundred companies own an estimated one-quarter of the production assets of the world and the richest fifth receives 82.7% of the total world income (Brecher and Costello 29). The gap between rich and poor is increasing worldwide: almost one-third of the population of developing countries, 1.3 billion people, live in absolute poverty- to poor to provide the minimum diet required for full human functioning (Brecher and Costello 24). The driving force of the marketplace is competition: sales go to the company who offers the lowest price. This alone is not a maligned process as prices are lower and there is improved efficiency in production. But when corporations and governments lower costs by reducing environmental protection, wages, salaries, health care and education, the result can be malevolent- “a downward leveling” of environmental, labor an social conditions (Brecher and Costello 20). The most prevalent symptom of globalization is the reduction in labor, social and environmental conditions that results directly from global competition for jobs and investment (Brecher and Costello 22). As the workforce seeks to become “more competitive” by reducing its wages and social and environmental overheads, income, social and material infrastructures deteriorate. Lower wages and reduced public spending mean less buying power leading to stagnation, recession and unemployment (Brecher and Costello 25). In this paper, I will evaluate globalization and show how its negative effects are widespread: how it affected Chiapas and how the Zapatistas fought back, how it affects South American women working on the banana republics and how it ravages the environment. Globalization has detrimental effects on every aspect of life, whether domestic or on the world-stage.

The advent of NAFTA resulted in the creation of a free-trade agreement amongst the United States, Canada and Mexico. An anti-NAFTA coalition was formed in the indigent Mexican state of Chiapas (New Statesman and Society 1). The coalition turned into an uprising led by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). The uprising began on January 1, 1994, signifying the day that NAFTA came into force. The livelihood of the Indians of Chiapas rested on the cultivation of maize, grown on tiny plots of land. The trade agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico was designed to sweep away this sustenance agriculture. The vast, mass-production of corn crops of the North American and Canadian prairies would poor into Mexico, undercutting the small producers (New Statesman and Society 2). The EZLN had a ten-point manifesto: “work, land, shelter, nutrition, health, education, liberty, democracy, justice and peace” (New Statesman and Society 1). On New Year’s Day, the revolutionary guerillas came out of the forests, down from the hills, and took over nine towns in Chiapas. Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari sent in the Mexican army, resulting in the death of more than 100 guerillas. The insurgence came to an end almost two months after it began. The Indians announced a 32-point accord with a “peace representative” acting on behalf of the Mexican federal government. The deal promised democratic reforms, limited autonomy for indigenous communities and Mexico’s first anti-discrimination law, together with schoolteachers, health clinics and doctors, electricity, better housing, roads and childcare centers. Indigenous people also received their own radio station free of government control (New Statesman and Society 1). NAFTA does nothing to promote the well being or help the people of Mexico. It was created to promote and protect the interests of U.S. investors in Mexico. The Chiapas Indians lashing out against this globalization which does nothing to alleviate the indigence of Chiapas’ 3.5 million inhabitants represented a voice on the world-stage against the exploitation of Third World countries by neo-imperialist countries.

In 1939, when Carmen Miranda helped bananas to become popular in the U.S., it established the banana as a staple crop for many Central and South American countries, thus ignited the creation of ‘banana republics.’ Banana republics are described as countries whose land and soul are in the clutches of a foreign company, supported by the might of its own government. Its government is staffed by people who line their own pockets by doing the bidding overseas corporation and its political allies (Enloe 133). The fundamental banana republics were those Central American countries, which came to be determined by the United Fruit Company’s monoculture, the U.S marines and the handpicked dictators (Enloe 133). Behind every all-male banana plantation are scores of women performing unpaid domestic and productive labor (Enloe 137). Once the banana trees have been planted, women are likely to become residents and workers on the plantations. Weeding and cleaning are the women’s jobs. Bananas are washed, weighed and packed in factories on the plantations before being transported to the docks for shipment overseas. Women remove the bunches from the thick stems, wash them in a chemical solution and pick out the rejects (Enloe 138). Women are hired by the companies to do low-paid, seasonal jobs that offer little training and promotion; some involve the hazards of chemical solution and sexual harassment (Enloe 139). Women are an intricate part of globalization. They perform the tasks and jobs that allow large companies to receive great capital. However, these women are exploited to a greater extent than the men are. They are paid half the wages of men and are the subject to sexual harassment. These women, and men, in the banana republics are paid these miniscule amounts all in the name of ‘downward leveling’- a component of globalization. The large fruit companies, such as United Fruit pay their employees very little in attempts to reduce overhead in order in to increase profit. Globalization ignores ethical policies as ‘Third World Employees,’ are paid below the sustenance level in order to further a company’s profit.

Globalization, and the process of ‘downward leveling’, is destroying the environment at a faster rate than the environment can be replenished or improved. Global corporations’ oil refineries, steel mills, chemical plants, and other factories, now located all over the world, are the main source of greenhouse gases, ozone-depleting chemicals, and toxic pollutants (Brecher and Costello 24). The attempts to modernize and improve comfort have had horrendous effects on the environment. There is a general disregard for the environment, its maintenance and protection. Those who wish to preserve the environment are labeled left-wingers, who are trying to hinder the advancement of capitalism. In “Earth and the American Dream,” many figures were given on the environment that are mind-boggling. In the first half of the 20th century, more non-renewable resources were used than in all of history. On a national level, Americans are the most wasteful people the world has known. In order to cut overhead and other costs, companies spend less money on treating their hazardous wastes. Rivers and oceans are the dumping grounds for waste products. The gases produced pour into the atmosphere, afflicting damage on the deteriorating ozone. There really needs to be stricter regulations on companies to prevent the dumping of hazardous materials. People are willing to make such great sacrifices of the environment in order to better their lives, or live more comfortably. Much more is taken from the environment than is replaced. Globalization has very deleterious effects on the environment that if not closely monitored, will eventually lead to severe irreparable damage.

Globalization, although beneficial to the large first world countries, affects every aspect of the world, from the Indians of Chiapas, to women working in the ‘banana republics,’ to the environment. The attempts to lower overhead and the costs of doing business hurt the very existence of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. When an American company reduces costs by moving their factories to foreign countries, they exploit the local cheap labor, doing nothing to alleviate their squalor. The creation of NAFTA led to an uprising by the Zapatistas who refused to be subjected to the exploitation of globalization. The women working in the ‘banana republics’ are an example of large companies taking advantage of the typically uneducated locals, whom they pay below the sustenance level. One of the most devastating, irreparable effects of globalization is its effects on the environment. A company often reduces its costs by cutting back on environmental protection- a company does not filter or treat its chemical or toxic waste products; rather, they dump them into rivers, lakes and other waterways. The production of toxic gases deteriorates the ozone layer. Globalization may help those fortunate enough to live in the large industrialized, former imperialist countries, but it does nothing to help the extremely poor of the Third World. There is a certain extent at which one must question if his/her luxury and excess comfort is worth the exploitation of so many. Globalization is a policy of apocryphal benefits that inflicts more damage than it helps.