

THE ECOLOGICAL SITUATION IN CATALONIA

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Nuclear Power Stations

Now that the nuclear power station Vandellòs II has started operations, Catalonia has become the most highly nuclearized country in the world in proportion to its surface area, and also the country in which the percentage of electricity produced from nuclear power is highest, even ahead of France. Catalonia's nuclear nightmare started in 1972, with the power station at Vandellòs I, which was not built with the production of electricity in mind so much as for the production of Plutonium (as was recently admitted by the former president of the company that operates it). Until just before the serious accident of 19th October 1989, the power station's used fuel regularly travelled the length of the country in the so-called "nuclear train", on its way to the French reprocessing centres at Marcoule and The Hague. For a long time, the train crossed the very heart of Barcelona, until opposition from the Residents Associations managed to put a stop to it. As regards the other two nuclear power stations, Ascó I and Ascó II, situated on the banks of the Ebro, it has recently been shown that the amount of radioactive waste they pour into the river exceeds the limits fixed in the water concession established by the Ministry of Public Works and Development in August 1987. An independent group of scientists (the "Grup de Científics i Tècnics per un Futur No Nuclear" –GCTPFNN) have also discovered that the Ebro bed is beginning the slow but irreversible process of radioactive poisoning, and that it contains products of fission and of activation.

Soil Erosion in Catalonia

It has now been recognized that 35.7 % of the surface area of Catalonia shows moderate to serious problems of erosion.

The soil is a common heritage left us by millions of years of live activity of the biosphere. Thanks to this activity, we have inherited the fertile soils which are the very basis of our energy supply (the human body burns



calories in order to carry out its activities). But our fertile soil is not always treated with the respect it deserves (examples of poor administration abound throughout the history of mankind). The principal causes of the loss of fertile soil in Catalonia are deforestation, forest fires, the introduction of industrialist agriculture in place of traditional agricultural activities, the modern "plague" of industrial estates, residential developments, etc.

The Biological Death of the Majority of our Rivers

Those rivers, so full of life, in which everyone could bathe and in which all sorts of fish could be caught, have in the last two or three decades become nothing more than sewers in which the ability to support life has been lost. Not only that, but surface and subterranean waters are receiving enormous quantities of heavy metals, organochlorates, organophosphates, etc., and many river beds in Catalonia already contain very high concentrations of these products. The large-scale use of detergents, the use of chemical fertilizers in agriculture, the dumping of chemical products of all kinds, etc. are the causes of the deplorable state of our rivers today, which has even forced the Public Prosecutor to bring charges for possible Ecological Crimes against certain companies responsible for dumping heavy metals into the Llobregat and the Besòs.

The Progressively Less Breathable Atmosphere of Catalonia

The concentration of industrial activities in particular areas of Catalonia means that the atmosphere is being filled with a number of products whose toxicity is common knowledge. As a result, the air which the local inhabitants breathe contains high concentrations of toxic products (very often exceeding even the officially authorized levels).

This is due to the considerable quantities of fossil fuels being burned (especially coal and oil) by power stations, foundries and other industrial activities and

also to the massive implantation of motor car transport. The Thermal Station at Cercs alone has released almost a million tons of SO₂ since it was opened. The city of Barcelona produces 3,000 tons of SO₂ every year and 8,000 tons of NO.

The result of all these emissions are the acid rains. Two cases have been detected in Catalonia: one in the woods of the Alt Berguedà region (luckily, the courts have recognized the Ecological Crime committed, following the legal action taken by Alternativa Verda) and the other in the woodland south of Tarragona (caused by the emissions from the power station at Andorra, Teruel, which releases more than 400,000 tons of SO₂ into the atmosphere every year. The consequences are the thousands of hectares of diseased woodland.

The rise in the earth's temperature is another consequence, which could affect agricultural production and even the climate, causing the level of seas and oceans to rise alarmingly. The main cause of this increase in temperature is the production of CO₂ during the combustion of coal and oil derivatives, but an important part is also played by the increase in the levels of methane, ozone, oxides of nitrogen, chlorofluorocarbons, etc. in the atmosphere, all substances produced in great quantities by the industrialist production system which prevails in Catalonia.

Of the three Spanish companies producing chlorofluorocarbons, two are based in Catalonia, so that our country also makes an important contribution to the reduction in ozone in the higher levels of the atmosphere. This is a well-known problem ever since a NASA report revealed that the layer of atmospheric ozone (which protects living beings from ultra-violet

radiation) was decreasing at an alarming rate (between 1.7 and 3 % from 1969 to 1986, for the regions between latitudes 30 and 60° N). The role of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in this decrease has been particularly noted.

What the Catalans Eat

As well as leading to a disastrous dependence on the oil industry (and to a reduced energy efficiency compared with traditional agriculture), the implantation of industrialist agriculture in Catalonia has contributed to the pollution of our rivers and has diminished the fertility of our soils. It has also resulted in food which no longer tastes the same as it did years ago, as a result of its being treated with large quantities of chemical products, both during cultivation and during its subsequent processing and marketing.

All this is also applicable to industrialist methods of stock-raising for human consumption, though in this case there is the added fact of the scandalously offensive treatment –for any minimally sensitive human being– which these animals receive in their breeding and slaughter.

The toxicity of many products used in agriculture and farming is recognized in many countries. In spite of the lack of government support, Catalonia is beginning to witness the appearance of farmers who practice a more ecological agriculture and co-operatives of consumers of ecological products.

This is some of the ecological destruction which most worries those of us who are witnesses to the violation of the rights of future generations to benefit from a country and a land in better conditions than those in which we found it. ■