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Poison Cartel, Vandana Shiva

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It is significant that at a time in history when a global economic paradigm shift is being loudly and clearly demanded due to the evident and documented failure of the current system of production, global trade and distribution that is leading us to environmental and climate catastrophe, this same apparatus of enormous corporate interests and highly paid lobbyists that disseminate false information, with ill-concealed concern, are

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putting to task the Italian Minister of Education, Lorenzo Fioramonti. The Minister has announced that he is creating a scientific committee on sustainable development that includes the presence of prominent and internationally recognized personalities such as Enrico Giovannini, Jeffrey Sachs and Vandana Shiva. The latter a choice of much concern for those who have every interest in preventing change of any form.

The choice is consistent with the positions already expressed by the Minister and with the same requests from the Italians. In a letter sent to the students in view of the next climate strike on 27 September, Fioramonti announced his position in favour of a sustainable economy, recognising that our development model is destroying us and must be changed as soon as possible. And this position responds to the expectations of 89% of Italians who, according to a recent survey, believe that global warming is an emergency, while 67% of our citizens do not believe that the Italian government is doing enough to tackle climate change. Environment and ecology must necessarily be part of school education programs if we want to save the planet and our society.

That is enough to put the establishment on the defensive. Once again, the mud machine, which is now known to have very predictable mechanisms, avoids mentioning critical issues and possible solutions to problems recognized by all major international institutions, starting with the United Nations. On the contrary, though the norm, the machine opts instead to attack individuals who are advocates of an alternative model of development, fairer and more socially inclusive and respectful of the environment. We are faced with a stranglehold in the face of the danger that a reformulation of the economic paradigm may affect partisan interests and balances of power that have done nothing but increase social inequalities and aggravate the environmental and health crisis, both in Italy and abroad.

In the face of the attacks of certain press and of certain “specialized” institutes linked to partisan interests, it would be sufficient to respond with data taken from official sources. But we don’t think that’s the point. Especially after the Monsanto Papers scandal that unveiled to the world the way in which multinationals systematically attack non-aligned journalists and scientists in order

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to protect their interests. Instead, we believe it is important to underline the logic of such manoeuvres that take place, not by chance, in the aftermath of the New York summit, where Greta Thunberg confronted world leaders with their non-action: “We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!”.

The vision of globalization and corporate capitalism considers the planet as a deposit of unlimited resources to be exploited to create wealth. The evaluation criterion that is used for the health of the economy is, however, “growth”, represented by anonymous numbers that tell us nothing about the real conditions of wellbeing. The feeling of outrage and impatience expressed by Greta is the same that must animate good politics today. We have only 11 years to reverse the trend according to the recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Change is possible, but first of all we must regain that very science which deniers and detractors are constantly delivering, paradoxically accusing those who go against their interests of being “anti-scientific”. As Albert Einstein said, you can’t solve a problem with the same mindset that created it.

For the record, science is telling us that between 25% and 30% of emissions are caused by the current food system, which in turn pollutes groundwater with chemicals considered likely to be carcinogenic by the IARC. The food produced in this way, transported along long and unsustainable supply chains (where 30% of the product is lost) is in turn harmful to human health. According to FAO data, one third of the value of the product is lost in social costs. While the global value of food production has been calculated at $2.8 trillion, environmental costs have been calculated at $3 trillion, to which should be added another $2.8 trillion for costs related to the loss of social welfare and conflicts caused by the loss of natural resources such as soil and water. In short, for every Euro of food produced we have already spent 3. These are the so-called hidden costs that taxpayers pay. The industrial agricultural system therefore has a negative productivity, and could not be sustained without the enormous public subsidies. The report of the Global Consultation Report of the Food and Land Use Coalition estimates that the public provides more than $1 million per minute of global agricultural subsidies, many of which

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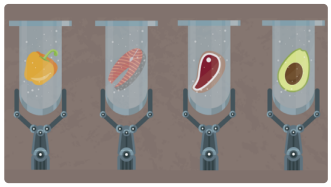
are at the root of the climate crisis and environmental destruction.

Market powers and modern economic systems, based on resource intensive and profit maximisation, are creating chaos in the world we live in, destroying both terrestrial ecosystems and democratic systems that guarantee justice and equality in society. By wiping out entire communities and destroying the biodiversity that keeps our planet alive, climate change is preventing diverse cultures and species from surviving and continuing to evolve. While industrial agriculture based on monocultures and intensive use of toxic chemicals is increasingly globalized, living species are disappearing at a rate that is 1000 times higher than usual, water resources are being depleted and soils are progressively desertifying, pushing entire communities to leave their lands. This is the case of Italy, as recently certified by Ispra which denounces how in Italy 14 hectares of soil are consumed per day with an increase of 180% in consumption since the 1950s and how our aquifers are increasingly polluted by the intensive use of pesticides of which our country is one of the first consumers in Europe. Chronic non-communicable diseases are spreading at epidemic levels, as our bodies are denied the essential nutrients that only a diet based on biodiversity could provide and the microbiome of our digestive system is constantly attacked by multiple toxic substances. What is the cost of this system to public health financed by citizens' taxes? By 2030, the costs of non-communicable diseases are expected to exceed $30 trillion, or 48% of world GDP, helping millions of people fall below the poverty line.

Who benefits from this system which certain Italian press and institutions intend to defend so fiercely? An ever smaller proportion of the population. According to a recent Oxfam report, the assets accumulated by the richest 1% of the world's population are equal to those of the poorest half of humanity, or 3.6 billion people. In 2010, 1% was represented by 388 billionaires and in 2017 by just eight people. A process of concentration linked to an exclusive economic system, which exploits the resources of the planet and of people leaving behind nothing but desolation and poverty.

The results of the FAO global scenario analysis for 2050 clearly

Detrimental to Ecological Transition, by Dr Vandana Shiva...



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show that ‘business-as-usual’, where outstanding food and agricultural challenges are left unaddressed, leads to significant undernourishment by 2050, even if gross agricultural output expands by 50 percent from 2012 to 2050, which would in turn contribute to increasing GHG emissions. A modelling of the potential of a 100% conversion to organic agriculture that would provide food to the population by 2050 and simultaneously reduce environmental impacts from agriculture, showed that organic management could indeed produce enough food for people without degrading the environment nor using more land, provided that the food system be designed to reduce by 50% food-competing feed use and food loss and waste. Consequently, reduced animal numbers (mainly, monogastrics) and reduced animal product consumption (globally, from 11 to 38%) are necessary. To this end, a comprehensive food systems perspective (of production and consumption) is crucial, rather than simply addressing a maximum yield goal for single crops as a stand-alone performance criterion.

According to the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, a paradigm shift would ensure a cumulative “gain” of 26 trillion dollars, compared to the expected result with the old model. Transforming food and land use systems in the next decade is a remarkable opportunity, which could have a social return more than 15 times higher than the necessary investment costs, which are estimated at less than 0.5% of global GDP. The report states that the shift to sustainable production of healthy food could unlock $4.5 trillion in new business opportunities each year by 2030. In addition, 65 million green jobs could be created by 2030 and 700 000 premature deaths from air pollution could be avoided within the next twelve years.

The alternatives are there, they already exist and have already proven their reliability, as pointed out by the FAO which identifies agroecology the key to redesigning the systems of global production and distribution ensuring food sovereignty to the world population. These are the alternatives on which we would like a debate to be opened. The challenge of sustainable development in the 21st century is to redirect our agricultural and food systems to make them not only more in line with the nutritional and health needs of a growing world population, but also environmentally and

financially sustainable.

Diversity and pluralism of knowledge systems are vital for evolution and adaptation, especially in times of intensifying instability and great unpredictability which we are seeing today. In this context, education and proper information are essential. All communities and cultures are creators of knowledge. Cultures that have survived over time have constantly evolved their knowledge systems, classified as “traditional knowledge” which today the dominant structures and institutions of knowledge production have steadily been undermining in favour of so called ‘experts’ that consistently exclude popular knowledge.

The right of communities and cultures to jointly develop and strengthen their knowledge, sharing this knowledge freely with other groups and networks, constitutes their sovereignty over knowledge. Pollution, degradation and depletion of our natural resources, together with global climate change, are a clear warning sign.

Now that the dominant model is showing its inadequacies and failures, we must necessarily recognize the plurality of knowledge systems and the potential of their integration, which is essential to increase our capacity for survival as a species. Adaptation in times of turbulence requires maintaining high levels of freedom and choice. This requires diversity in all its forms. A holistic synthesis between popular knowledge and the best of modern ecological science is vital to return to a vital planet and to heal human society. In such pluralistic systems, local scientific and traditional knowledge grows and enriches through a complementary process of hybridization.

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