

Africa Report by Emmanuel Grenier

Adding toxic waste to injury

The World Bank proposal to use the Third World as a toxic waste dump is taking form in the ravaged nations of Africa.

It was the *Jornal do Brasil* that started the scandal. Thanks to a leak from the World Bank, the Brazilian daily printed part of an internal document from the international financial organization. The document, signed by Lawrence Summers, who heads the office for economic planning, was picked up by several German publications, but as of this writing, not by any in France. The memorandum figured that the costs of pollution are too high in the industrialized countries and that the most polluting industrial sectors should be transferred to the Third World or more generally to countries with low wage costs (see *From New Delhi* in *EIR*, Feb. 28).

This economic logic implies, of course, that toxic wastes, too, should be sent to the Third World, notably to Africa where, according to this document "several states are not overly polluted in the minds of their population." Summers then recommends that the World Bank take this aspect more into account in the elaboration of its upcoming development programs for Africa. The World Bank responded, acknowledging the existence of the report but underscoring that the use of this report was "strictly internal" and that the passages that were quoted were intended to be "ironical."

Meanwhile, even though agreements were signed during the Lomé IV Convention (which established relations between the European Community and the so-called Africa-Caribbean-Pacific countries) prohibiting

the export to the EC of toxic or nuclear wastes, a French-Belgian-Dutch-German consortium, seriously called "Afrique Energie," is preparing to build a waste treatment plant in Benin. "The consortium 'Afrique Energie' made its choice of Benin because it is the premier African country to presently offer the greatest guarantee of political stability for an investment as important as this, in the desire to help it establish its young democracy." Naturally, the treated wastes will be "neither toxic, nor nuclear, controlled by the international control agencies agreed to by the Atomic Energy Commissariat."

Better still, this is a project to recapture the energy contained in these "imported household wastes with high caloric content" of a paltry 30-100 megawatts of electricity! This is where they get this lovely name "Afrique Energie," for a mission far less noble: to dump between 1.4 and 3 million tons of European wastes onto Africa. For this, our consortium is prepared to agree to invest \$250 million north of Ouedo, "a small town with colonial charm" located 35 kilometers west of Cotonou.

It's something to see the ease with which one can come up with this much money! Beyond question, the waste financiers appear to be richer or more resourceful than those who desperately call for ridiculously small sums (on the order of \$1 billion) for projects in health care, water management, improvements in agricultural productivity—and who still can't manage to ob-

tain such vital projects.

But let's not be insulting: Afrique Energie "is prepared to receive, at its own expense, in Europe, several authorities and quality experts to have them visit power stations . . . similar to that projected for Benin, in order to demonstrate the safety of this type of installation, some of which have been operating for 10 years."

Frankly, the principle according to which the producer of wastes is responsible for their elimination, seems sound to me, and should, within the bounds of technological rationality, be accepted. It is absolutely not reasonable to send our wastes, however ordinary, thousands of kilometers away in order to eliminate them—even using safe procedures and viable techniques—under the pretext that the Europeans are too irresponsible to allow the installation of these kinds of treatment plants at home.

Rather than propose these corrupting voyages to the African leaders, the companies involved would do better to invest in educating Europeans on the problems of waste management. The future requires more information, and less hysteria.

As for Africa, insofar as it requires energy, it needs much more than 100 MW. We need more advanced solutions, put together with the perspective of beginning a new generation of skilled workers in the domains of energy, water management, and agriculture. Yes, absolutely, Africa deserves to be something better than our wastebasket! France, and the West in general, owes a special debt to this continent, which has undergone genocide and slavery on our behalf.

To think that the only profitable investments are waste treatments or trade in raw materials, is to bury a bit deeper this Africa which is a cradle of civilization, and to accept the unjust rule of international finance.