

the Socialist

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Socialism and the Environment

Re-Engaging the Environment

Judging by the mainstream media, it would seem that there are a number of open questions about current environmental concerns. 24-hour news channels report on climate change as if there was a debate in the scientific community about its existence. Coverage of U.S. use of fossil fuels centers around what country to invade for oil or what nature preserve to open up for drilling. And when covering hydraulic fracking for natural gas, opponents are made to seem like a fringe group that irrationally overstates the dangers fracking poses to water supplies and natural environment.

On environmental issues the terms of the debate are becoming increasingly narrow. They are defined by capitalist interests, as represented by the Democrats and Republicans, which leads to public misinformation on important issues like climate change, alternative energy possibilities, and natural resource extraction.

While the majority of Americans believe that climate change is happening and that it is caused by human activities, there is still a large minority — nearly a third of the population — who disagree. Though public opinion on climate change is predominantly in agreement with the scientific facts, this is not the case with offshore drilling and fracking. Currently, nearly two-thirds of Americans support offshore drilling, despite recent disasters such as the BP oil spill in the Gulf. Similarly, Americans support fracking by a 2:1 margin because, according to a Rasmussen poll, "the economic benefits for natural gas far outweigh any concerns for environmental impact." These statistics seriously underestimate the environmental impact of offshore drilling and fracking. This is what happens when the parameters of the debate are framed in a way that suggests these practices are necessary evils for the US to achieve "energy independence."

Dependence on foreign oil has been the perennial boogie man to bolster support for natural resource extraction, which has serious environmental repercussions. Despite the very real dangers of these practices, Republicans and Democrats continuously warn of the boogie man in various forms through the mainstream media. While there has been some coverage of protests around fracking, as well as the real devastation caused by offshore drilling, it has not been enough to sway popular opinion or to expand the conversation.

On the left, discourse on the environment has been dominated by militant environmentalists who are stuck in a defensive position of stopping, banning, ending particular practices and saving existing ecosystems from further destruction. For the most part, this positioning has not created much space for leftists to really think about environmental policy in a serious, systematic way.

The absence of serious engagement by socialists is a gap that needs to be filled now. As socialists, we have an extraordinary opportunity to reframe the conversation and give voice to the facts surrounding ecological suicide — particularly the role of capitalism and capitalists in the destruction and devastation occurring in the U.S. and abroad. We must make the environment a primary platform point for socialist analysis and action — and continuously look for ways to effect real change. Serious engagement does not develop in a vacuum, however; nor is it characterized by stop-and-go efforts. We must apply the same consistency and dedication to ecological harmony as we do to feminist, living-wage, labor and other platform campaigns.

For guidance, we can draw lessons from other groups. Die Linke's three guiding principles provide important direction: 1) individual freedom and personal development for everyone through a socially equal share in the conditions for a self-determined life and solidarity; 2) the subordination of the economy to development in solidarity and the conservation of nature; and 3) the realization of these two dimensions is a long emancipatory process in which the dominance of capital will be overcome by democratic, social and ecological forces and the society of democratic socialism will emerge. This should remind us that, as socialists, achieving ecological harmony is not a separate issue but wholly integral to a radical democracy. They are inextricably linked.

We must also look to our networks, both locally and nationwide, for inspiration and cooperation. As Nic Eaton points out in "Building an Effective Environmental Movement," there is one point of unity from which we can build with others on the left: we want to save our planet and save our people. Rather than continue on a path of divergence and divide, we need seriously to consider Eaton's suggestion that "we see ourselves as part of an organic process — contributing our thoughts and experience to a dialogue that will determine our collective path."

In unity,
Kristin

Statement of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY strives to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control - a non-racist, classless, feminist socialist society... where working people own and control the means of production and distribution through democratically-controlled public agencies; where full employment is realized for everyone who wants to work; where workers have the right to form unions freely, and to strike and engage in other forms of job actions; and where the production of society is used for the benefit of all humanity, not for the private profit of a few. We believe socialism and democracy are one and indivisible. The working class is in a key and central position to fight back against the ruling capitalist class and its power. The working class is the major force worldwide that can lead the way to a socialist future - to a real radical democracy from below. The Socialist Party fights for progressive changes compatible with a socialist future. We support militant working class struggles and electoral action, independent of the capitalist controlled two-party system, to present socialist alternatives. We strive for democratic revolutions - radical and fundamental changes in the structure and quality of economic, political, and personal relations - to abolish the power now exercised by the few who control great wealth and the government. The Socialist Party is a democratic, multi-tendency organization, with structure and practices visible and accessible to all members.

Building an Effective Environmental Movement

by Nic Eaton

Climate change is bad. Not just pretty bad, or not so good. It's more along the lines of catastrophe and impending doom. Social movements are good. This much we know. What hasn't been so good has been our attempts at intentionally building social movements that encompass our shared principles and values, produce and reproduce unity, celebrate diversity, are flexible enough to evolve in an ever-changing terrain and rigid enough to have real staying power. The craziest thing about all of this, though, is that environmentalists are an incredibly diverse demographic, united around a particular issue. The number of self-described "environmentalists" grows each day, regardless of their perspective, commitment, involvement etc.. While we could (and should) certainly applaud all the various groups doing meaningful environmental work, we should also examine the steps we can take to develop a powerful movement that can affect real, lasting change



ecosocialists unite

and avert the ever-nearing final crisis.

On the subject of the environment, radicals have found plenty to scoff at. Whether it's Al Gore, Power Shift, energy efficient light bulbs, or trendy and expensive t-shirts from a store that smells like canned spring break, we often find ourselves turning up our noses at the modest efforts of — let's face it — the majority of self-described environmentalists. This is a fatal error.

Unfortunately, building a social movement is nothing like playing a video game. We won't get anywhere as long as we want to develop the perfect mass movement. We don't get to manipulate stats or allocate points — crafting the ideal organizers and spending as much time as we'd like surveying the terrain. We don't get to save our progress or start over, and if we get frustrated or screw up there are serious consequences for throwing in the towel. We get the hand we're dealt, and, thus far, we've discarded any card that doesn't lend itself to a perfect hand.

The point is we're not going to get anywhere by associating only with the politically pure and fully committed. We've all been there: the meeting with poor turnout, more empty chairs than full, that either ends early in silence or extends into the night because two or three folks want to have an incredibly deep conversation about nothing that was on the agenda. For people committed to the idea of building power, we seem reluctant to actually do it. To some it may feel a bit dirty — a committed revolutionary getting involved with reform-oriented struggles. If done for the right reasons and a broader vision, it's not; and even if it is, it's okay to get a little dirty from time-to-time.

Let's meet the masses where they are and build power where there is potential for power to be built. Canvassing for energy efficient lifestyle changes is a way to engage people in a deeper dialogue. Power Shift is a breeding ground for active environmentalists begging for ways to get plugged into meaningful struggles. These aren't opportunities to be shunned, and while we might think that these folks don't have a clue what we think and say about them, they do. The environmentalist in the expensive t-shirt may reek of terrible cologne, but we've yet to shed the stench of political elitism. This isn't just a mild concern. An emotional rejection of the types of radicals who ostracize more reform-oriented activists easily manifests as a rejection of radical politics as a whole. We're doing it wrong and we're hurting the movement.

Unity and diversity are elements of a social movement that seem mutually exclusive. How can we maintain a unity of principles and values while still celebrating and encouraging diversity? An element of unity already exists: Save the Planet. Think of this as an outer limit or boundary. Within this boundary, however, are a plentitude of ideas ranging from unplugging your appliances to smashing the state. The problem we often face is that we either try to start with too rigid and defined a boundary or no boundaries at all. With the former, diversity is shunned. With the latter, all the various groups and tendencies lack coordination and, therefore, lack power. If, however, we intentionally build unity together as part of an ongoing collective process, we can safeguard both a unified movement and one that encompasses the needs and values of the many different groups that participate in the process.

Certainly most radicals see meaningful environmental change coming from systemic change. We're highly skeptical that riding a bike or passing a carbon tax initiative will prevent global catastrophe. We may be right, but we often fail to situate ourselves historically. We want it now, and we want it perfect. This is how we blind ourselves to the process of getting from here

CONTENTS

2 Editorial
3 Building an Effective Environmental Movement Nic Eaton
5 No Dam Good in Charlottesville Brandon Collins
6 Bald Eagles, Criminal Profits & the Death of Our Future Billy Wharton
8 Environmentalism 101: Interview With Ryan Wishart Elizabeth Gunn
10 The Future Will Be Ecosocialist Joel Kovel
13 National Directory

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to there. In regard to the environment, we are not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary moment. In the grand scheme of things, we haven't even committed ourselves to the appropriate groundwork necessary to build an effective movement. Is there an urgency involved with fighting climate change? Absolutely. Does that give us flexibility to ignore the historical conditions in which we're organizing? Absolutely not.

However frustrating it may be to work within the given political climate and however sexy it may appear to hoist red and black flags while engaging in romantic street battles, we have to weigh our personal desires against our stated goals. What do we want more? Would we rather feel exhilarated by tactics and strategies that don't lend themselves to saving the planet, or struggle through sweat and tears using tactics and strategies that will ultimately lead us to victory? In order to do the latter, we need to do a better job of not only embracing and utilizing reform-oriented tactics alongside more radical ones, but also understanding that it's not solely up to radicals to pre-determine on what grounds the movement is unified. Instead, we should see ourselves as part of an organic process -- contributing our thoughts and experience to a dialogue that will determine our collective path.

There are multiple ways that radical participation in less-radical grassroots work can contribute to building a stronger environmental movement. First and foremost, we should recognize that failures, under the right circumstances, are often to blame (or credit) for the trajectory of a movement. Embedding ourselves within campaigns that have weaknesses -- e.g., petitioning -- gives us the opportunity to provide support and direction at the end of a failed campaign. It allows a voice to enter the conversation about where to go, how to get there, and also how to cope with the demoralizing effect of losing a battle.

Secondly, we should appreciate the power of networks. Movements are not a smattering of individuals acting independently and spontaneously. Often, if we look at our own political development, we can point to particular people we've met or groups we've been involved with that were critical to bringing us to where we are today. Integrating ourselves into reform-oriented struggles gives us the opportunity to meet bright people we might otherwise have ignored -- and gives them the opportunity to be exposed to the radical community, build relationships with people they might never have met, and expand our networks astronomically.

Thirdly, while radicals often have a better grasp of where we need to go, more liberal organizers often have a better grasp of where we're at. Coordinating together gives us a balance that we otherwise lack, and might be why we see failures on both halves of the not-yet-formed movement. We're two parts of a totality that aren't strategically cooperating with one another. But I think that if we can get people to act together, they will bond with each other. A very good example of this was the arrest of several hundred people on the Brooklyn Bridge early on in the Occupy movement -- and those arrests included dozens of members of our party.

My lesson is that Socialist Party groups should always, in addition to meetings, discussions, and social events, plan actions that the whole group can take together. And as I watch our party grow and involve more youth, I know it is already doing this. We're beginning to see food co-ops coordinating with local markets, providing food for various functions related to environmental justice and delivering resources and information about healthy living to oppressed communities; reform-oriented activists coordinating with direct action groups to provide awareness and jail support; and mountain top removal activists banding together with anti-fracking groups and anti-offshore drilling organizers in spite of a media and corporate-driven campaigns that pit them against one another.

It goes beyond just the environmental movement, though, and this is important. Any revolutionary movement needs to recognize and integrate struggles against all oppression. We don't want an environmental movement that props up hetero-patriarchy, racism, or imperialism. It would be silly not to use the word "solidarity," but we should do so with

a caveat: that we truly think about what it means to stand in solidarity with one another. It's a term that has been thrown around so flippantly that its meaning has been buried under so much absent-minded drivel. Solidarity is not about wearing an anti-racist pin or posting some status update about sexism. It isn't reading an article about imperialism or writing a blog post about some oppression we consider to be of secondary concern. Solidarity is when we integrate the struggles against all oppressions to the degree that seeing where one struggle ends and the other begins is nearly impossible.

Can we build an environmental movement that encompasses our shared principles and values, produces and reproduces unity, celebrates diversity, is flexible enough to evolve in an ever-changing terrain and rigid enough to have real staying power? The answer is pretty clear. While there is absolutely a great deal of groundwork that needs to be done, we're heading in the right direction. If we can shed ourselves of silly, non-strategic biases, collectively and continuously decide our path, coordinate diverse elements of a broader movement, and situate the environmental movement in a greater revolutionary movement to abolish all oppression, we might just stave off the destruction of our species and the utter transformation of this planet for at least another hundred years.

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No Dam Good in Charlottesville

by Brandon Collins

All politics are local, it is often said. It should also be often said that this applies to socialist politics — particularly how we relate to our environment and the ongoing ecological crisis. If we take the premise that something must be done about global problems soon or we are all doomed, then we must act upon the premise that we cannot wait for utopian solutions handed down from the federal and state governments or from the free market. This was a consistent theme in my campaign for city council, one that resonated with a great deal of people. It was a theme, however, not presented as things we could or should do but rather as a realistic response based on a wider analysis of how we produce the things that our community and our world require to exist.

Every aspect of city planning — including jobs, poverty, transportation, mass incarceration, the military economy -- ties into our natural environment and how we exist in the world. Our town faced some serious decisions on our public water supply, and whether or not to put a road through one of our oldest parks. While the opposition candidates spent most of their time describing why these were bad decisions, I spent my time pointing out how these issues were integrated into the wider issues facing our capitalist society and how none of these problems can be addressed without addressing how production works. Pointing out that we have to act now rather than wait for some new technology or some new politician to make everything better was particularly annoying to local officials who love to talk about being "green" but who, along with lots of business cash behind them, were making terrible decisions about our natural environment. They weren't interested in anything but making excuses for involving Nestle in our water supply plan — a plan that was paid for with Nestle money. Supporters of the plan running for office received large amounts of cash from the "Free Enterprise Forum", and most of the supporters (all liberals) saw some need for an unnecessary, costly and destructive new dam in order to coax new business, and new jobs, to the area. The whole fiasco was a gold mine not just for moneyed interests in town but also for our neighboring county. It was also a gold mine for someone like me who does not accept those economic arguments, nor any pseudo environmental arguments.

During my campaign, a few things were all too clear. First, **liberalism will not do anything to solve our ongoing ecological crisis.** One tactic was to equate all of the wrangling over water and roads while ignoring the plight of the poor. One commenter, a Democratic Party operative on the payroll of Nestle as well as the local Chamber of Commerce, came up with a study showing how and where people are poor in our city. His solution (which has not materialized since the election) was to localize business contracts with the University of Virginia in the hope that this would "trickle down" into jobs for poor folks. He did his best, with some success, to divide the working class and the environmental class on the issue while simultaneously coaxing well-meaning liberals into supporting the water supply plan under the guise of confronting poverty. This is just one example of how liberal analysis of ecological and economic crises falls short — to the detriment of our environment as well as our communities.

Second, **publicly owned utilities is not a cure-all.** Although we have the opportunities to address our water board publicly, we have zero influence over their decisions. It is a regional authority with an extremely well paid staff (the director's attorney fees amount to thousands of dollars per hour). Despite repeated attempts to have a referendum and to address public concerns, the decision was made years ago with influence from Nestle' Corp., business associations and wealthy business owners in the county. Without any elected accountability, without board citizenry, without respect for the law, and without the spirit of democracy, the regional author-

ity is free to sow the seeds of environmental degradation and the privatization of our water supply through bad structural choices. While I still call for a return to public ownership of our electricity production, public ownership is no different without real democratic community control. This demonstrates an acute difference between a liberal and socialist approach.

Lastly, **moving a progressive agenda means doing more than getting elected, getting good people appointed, and advocating a position.** I have been presenting these ideas and promoting my platform before, during and after my campaign. We have made great headway, and many of my platform items have been implemented or are in the works. Those in office are threatened by the number of votes I received and the neighborhoods in which I received them. Some of them publicly support my proposals and sometimes even accept the analysis.

Although those in power still rely on neo-liberal market solutions for poverty and housing, they are finally talking about it. And I am still organizing in the community and calling them out on their poor analysis and faulty planning. I wish I could say the same for the environmentalists, but they still tie themselves to the kinder, gentler capitalism, having formed the "Cash Mob," a charity for capitalism and local business. They have also organized more cohesively into an open government group, with a largely conservative approach to ecology, relying solely on transparency and rule of law rather than addressing the underlying economic factors. A few, however, have attempted to take direct action by camping on the land where the dam will go, which I support 100 percent. Others have continued the fight against the Water and Sewer Authority issue by issue and have had better success. But again, without a big picture analysis, they will eventually lose. Their referendums will not materialize, despite state law, because the courts are with the capitalists.

As for me, I have moved forward with many of my planks, some of which are more of a call for self organization rather than a call for government action. We established a Transit Riders Union and are getting transit expanded, saving the planet, giving voice to the working class, and supporting drivers. I am proud to say that I am actively organizing in our public housing neighborhoods and look forward to the day when environmentalism is not strictly a bourgeois luxury. A current problem is Whole Foods, which has failed to employ a single resident in the public housing neighborhood located nearby. The call for workers' cooperatives is rapidly moving forward, however, especially in public housing communities and amongst the ex-offenders group with whom I have remained involved. Our Socialist Party local was also active in the living wage campaign at UVA.

Our influence and analysis is growing. Even opposing the military has taken hold, and the environmental underpinnings have been a huge factor. A green economy and green jobs can't happen unless we simultaneously replace our military and prison economies. We are, however, moving forward with plans to hire ex-offenders, and low-income people at a living wage to improve our park system, and to build energy efficient housing in town. We have a long way to go, but our dreams of a better world are attainable. Utopians are those who are waiting for magic market solutions and federal mandates to appear out of thin air. We can do the hard work of building a better society using reasoned anti-capitalist analysis. Revolution is possible in all forms as long as we are moving the right things forward and organizing. This means losing an election but sticking to radical analysis and organizing anyways.

Bald Eagles, Criminal Profits and the Death of our Future

by Billy Wharton

It is impossible to miss the patriotic irony offered by the recent news about the bald eagle. This bird had the cultural misfortune of being painted as a symbol of American hubris: think of the expanding American empire soaring high above the world while targeting its prey. While this legend was being carefully constructed, the actual eagle population was suffering greatly from toxic chemical environmental damage, courtesy of the US Military and Corporate America. The use of chemical pesticides, specifically DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), on crops and in anti-malaria campaigns, reduced bald eagles to near extinction numbers of just 487 breeding pairs in 1963. A subsequent ban on DDT and breeding habitat protections have enabled the population to rebound to 9,789 breeding pairs in 2006, and, today, to reappear in areas where its population had been devastated. Yet, the process of recovery, the measures needed to curb the corporations producing DDT, and the amount of time needed for the recovery of just one part of the natural world, offer a cautionary tale about the possibility of curbing other forms of environmental destruction currently underway.

DDT: Who's Spraying and Who's Paying?

DDT use in the US initially centered on its military applications. The chemical was viewed as an important tool in the elimination of malaria among troops, especially those fighting in the South Pacific during World War II. DDT was applied by the US military throughout Europe and dumped aerially by the ton on islands in the South Pacific. The resulting annihilation of mosquito populations and sharp reductions in levels of malaria and dengue fever among American troops have given DDT a "wonder chemical" status. Like any American military adventure, the measure of success was the condition of American troops rather than the impact on local populations or ecologies.

Once the war ended, private industries, especially the expanding corporate farming sector, rushed to discover new profitable applications for DDT. Experiments with DDT on crops revealed a similar success in the eradication of insects and led to the widespread saturation of fields and livestock. Domestic use of DDT expanded rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, reaching a peak of 30,000 metric tons in 1962. Studies conducted as early as 1954 indicated high levels of DDT had appeared in typical restaurant meals, and a 1968 study demonstrated that Americans were consuming an average of 0.025 mg of DDT a day. DDT use meant big money for the corporate farms that made the chemical a central part of food produced for unknowing consumers. The consequences of these profits would soon be felt by humans and birds alike.

The Consequences of Profit Accumulation

While the human population was subjected to DDT-filled meals, small scale environmental studies of bird populations, especially bald eagles and ospreys, revealed equally troubling effects. These studies discovered that eggs produced by these populations had been saturated with DDT. The saturation led to the thinning of eggshells which, in turn, reduced reproductive rates in both species. Rachel Carson's influential 1962 book *Silent Spring* summarized and popularized these local findings about the impact of DDT and opened a political space for criticism of corporations and public officials engaged in the production and use of DDT.

The additional wave of scientific research into the cancer-causing effects of DDT on humans triggered lawsuits by newly formed Liberal environmental institutions. The pressure forced Presidential and Congressional studies, which led to the banning of DDT in 1972. This appeared to be a major victory for the clean environment lobby — and



a signal that working inside judicial and mainstream political frameworks could yield concrete victories. Yet, banning DDT did not remove the hazards to either humans or eagles.

Corporate Foot-Dragging and Our Damaged Planet

Identifying and responsibly liquidating the stockpiles of DDT proved to be a serious challenge for a mostly toothless Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For example, it took almost 30 years to finally prosecute companies involved in a massive Los Angeles County DDT dump by Montrose Chemical Company. Although four companies were fined a then-record \$73 million in 2000 for the environmental damage they caused, the site remains a threat to human and oceanic populations to this day.

The Montrose Chemical Co. site in Torrance near the Harbor Gateway was closed in 1982. The plant was disassembled and paved over with asphalt in 1986. Yet, under the asphalt lies the remains of 35 years of DDT production — waste chemicals that have leached into the groundwater, have contaminated the soil and have seeped out into the Pacific Ocean for decades. As if this was not enough, the EPA also discovered that Montrose had dumped "bowling-ball pieces of technical grade DDT" into a nearby ravine. Although the Del Almo Superfund site began "remediation" efforts in 1995, nearly 20 years later, the EPA found dangerous levels of contamination in the surrounding groundwater, surface water and soil. In addition, DDT sedimentation continues to persist in sanitary sewers beneath the old plant that flow directly into the Pacific Ocean. This has caused untold damage to oceanic plant and animal populations.

Lessons of the Past that May Condemn Our Future

So, while the ever patriotically charged bald eagle enjoys its renaissance thanks to environmental protections, a few lessons can be drawn. The Montrose Chemical site in

California is just one example of the speed in which environmental change is possible in an economy and in an environment damaged by big corporations. Though gains have certainly been made via environmental legalism, corporations retain the ability to contest, delay or even disregard actions as substantive as Federal bans. They are under no obligation to report their own misdeeds and have proven to be highly successful at evading and undermining EPA oversight. In short, the pace of basic environmental cleanup under capitalism will likely be far too slow to catch up with the rapidly declining capacities of the natural world.

Further, the existence of a suicidal political formation such as the Conservative right ensures that the toxic wine of environmentally damaging practices will continue to find new mouths to drink it. The propensity for political compromise between Liberal gradualists and those who would lead us into global environmental suicide translates into a situation where the entire natural world, bald eagles included, is put at risk of extinction.

Now more than ever, a new sort of eco-socialist project is necessary. Such a project should be aggressive enough to speak honestly about the damages carried out by the corporate world, while being smart enough to understand that the fate of the bald eagle is very much linked to the fate of its neighboring human populations. The consequences for not developing such a vision lies under the ground of the Montrose Chemical Co. site. There, an environment that will mean certain death for all living things continues to fester some 40 years after the substance that causes such damage was supposedly eliminated. This provides testimony to the struggle being waged by corporations against a natural world that is needed to sustain both humans and eagles. Restoring ecological harmony will necessarily require a war against the profit motive that defines capitalism.



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Environmental Sociology 101: An Interview With Activist & Scholar, Ryan Wishart

by Elizabeth Gunn



Ryan Wishart is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon in Eugene studying environmental sociology with a dissertation focusing on the coal industry and underdevelopment in Central Appalachia. He is currently helping John Bellamy Foster, editor of the independent Socialist magazine "Monthly Review" and his committee chair, with research work. He has published a lengthy book review on Richard Heinberg's *Blackout: Coal, Climate and the Last Energy Crisis*, among others. As a student at the University of Tennessee, Wishart became active in the environmental justice movement leading to his current course of study.

EG: What work did you do in Appalachia?

RW: I did participant action research with the group Mountain Justice during my time at the University of Tennessee. I worked with the campus group SPEAK (Students Promoting Environmental Action in Knoxville) on a resolution for a policy of not purchasing coal for the university's steam plant from mines with records of serious environmental or labor violations. The resolution passed every deliberative body on campus, but in the end I don't think it really had any effect. I also worked for a while with the green jobs working group at Statewide Organization for Community Empowerment. For several years, I was a research assistant with the Southern Appalachian Field Lab at UT's Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment working on a Habitat Restoration and Conservation Prioritization Tool for the Appalachian bio-region for the US Geological Survey.

EG: How has that affected your course of study?

RW: I first heard about MTR from Maria Gunnoe at a conference at UT. The bitter divide between supporters of coal mining, who fear that (increased) unemployment and poverty are the only alternative if the coal industry does not get their way, and the victims of the mining related contamination, floods, dust, truck accidents, etc., who feel their human rights are being violated made me want to understand the history of the conflict. This led me to bigger questions about regional development/under-development and to study political economy for answers. The case of the United Mine Workers shift from "class warfare," as president Cecil Roberts once described it, to a war with the EPA and environmentalists is one that lends itself well to Treadmill of Production analysis. John Bellamy Foster's analysis of similar dynamics in the timberlands of the Pacific Northwest helped draw me out to Oregon. My interest in projects to create "green jobs" is part of my desire for positive solutions. Also, the extreme challenges faced by those trying to create jobs that are both sustainable and provide a good quality of life for workers can be a form of praxis whereby movement activists come face to face with the pathological structures of capitalism leading to a more radical perspective.

EG: How does profit maximization encourage environmental destruction?

RW: Profit maximization encourages environmental destruction in two related ways. First, it encourages "externalization" of costs. This means saving on dollar costs of labor and capital in ways that harm the health and well-being of current, or future generations; for example, by using toxic production processes and wasting resources. This is the qualitative aspect of the problem: When profit maximization is the goal of production, non-monetary harms (or benefits) are ignored and the future is discounted in favor of the present.

Secondly, when, as in our current economy, profit maximization is the main driver of economic activity, unlimited economic growth is required for stability. The historical trend is that less than a three percent rate of GDP [gross domestic product, commonly used to determine a country's wealth] growth in a capitalist economy leads to expanding unemployment. This is the quantitative side of the problem. While there have been increases in efficiency resulting in less environmental impact per dollar of growth, efficiency is ultimately limited by the laws of thermodynamics. Furthermore, the scale of economic growth has outstripped increased efficiency resulting in a still rapidly growing ecological footprint.

Take car engines for example: They have become much more efficient in their fuel use per horsepower, but the cars have gotten larger and heavier with more people driving and driving further than before. The result is ever-greater fuel consumption. This "rebound effect," or the Jevons Paradox, is intimately part of a growth demanding capitalist economy (see Blackwater's *The Denialism of Progressive Environmentalism*). When we look back at history, the choice in favor of automobiles versus public transportation was not made by consumers but by the powerful corporate interests of the auto-industrial complex, another example of qualitative aspect of the problem (see the documentary *Taken for a Ride* or the book *Stop Signs*).

EG: Can you tell me a little bit about the treadmill production theory of the late 70s and early 80s? Specifically, its relationship to attacks on the environmental restrictions placed on corporations?

RW: The Treadmill of Production is a neo-marxist perspective in environmental sociology first developed by Allan Schnaiberg. It highlighted the second, quantitative aspect, I discussed earlier of the growth problem associated with capitalism (and also the growth focused economy of the Soviet Union). Drawing in part on the theory monopoly capitalism associated with Monthly Review Magazine, Schnaiberg argued that the large corporations who dominate modern capitalist economies were able to draw both government and powerful labor unions into a coalition to maintain growth. Too little economic growth threatened the revenues of government (as we see clearly today, exacerbated by the polarized distribution of wealth) and the associated unemployment threatened the tenure of elected officials. For unions, the threat of increased unemployment was also serious, but increasing mechanization meant that ever greater sales were necessary for the same number of employees. Still, the unions are viewed as the weakest link in the coalition because they more often face the impacts of environmental externalities at work and in their communities as opposed to politicians who tend to come from the upper classes (e.g. half of congress are millionaires).

EG: What is Ecological Modernization Theory? Has it demonstrated itself to be effective?

RW: Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) was developed as a criticism of the Treadmill of Production perspective. It is derived from the Modernization Theory of economic development which was itself proposed as a defense against socialist criticisms of capitalism's consequences for the third world. In much the same way that Modernization Theory promised that eventually countries who followed a capitalist path would go through the same economic "stages" as the US and Western Europe, Ecological Modernization Theory proposed that as capitalist economies become "affluent" they would begin a process of rationalization, or "reflexive modernization," such as the US experienced during political movements that created the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) and brought about great improvements in air and water quality. EMT proponents further argue that this process of incremental improvement is without limit and therefore continued dominance of the profit maximization principle (with some regulation) and unlimited economic growth are compatible with sustainability.

Like Modernization Theory, EMT proponents have tended to focus on particular case studies without critical examination of the larger system. Cases like the Netherlands were used to propose the existence of a so-called "environmental Kuznets curve" — once a nation's GDP reaches a certain size the environmental impact of the economy begins to shrink rather than grow (imagine an upside down "U"). Unfortunately, when the world system is considered, there is no evidence for such a process. Instead, sociologists York, Rosa, and Dietz found that GDP has a positive and linear relationship with ecological footprint. For example, the US has made some progress in conserving our own environment and reducing pollution but much of this progress has been the result of consuming resources from other parts of the world and importing products produced in unsustainable (as well as highly exploitative) conditions. Studies suggest the US has effectively displaced 20 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions from products we consume by importing them from China instead. About one-third of China's total greenhouse gas emissions and about half of recent increases come from products sold abroad.

Technological fixes are central to EMT as it is new technologies, rather than new social relations of production and distribution, that are held to be most important for sustainability. This sort of techno-optimism even finds its way

into the reports of scientific bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The IPCC had assumed that for every kilowatt green power generation that is brought online an equivalent amount of fossil fuel will be displaced. But in a capitalist economy bent on profit maximization and growth, this is not the case. A recent study found it takes 13 units of non-fossil fuel energy to displace one unit of fossil fuel energy in the electrical sector and 4.5 units to displace one of fossil fuel energy generally.

EG: How do environmental and social degradation relate under a capitalist economic structure? Where in America are these problems most pronounced? Where internationally?

RW: The overriding focus on profit maximization in capitalist economies means they have a powerful tendency towards increasing economic inequality. The minority, who control society's economic assets, takes a greater and greater share for themselves. This brings about issues of deprivation and poverty for the working class and poor, who, not coincidentally, disproportionately experience the environmental problems caused by the "externalities" of profit maximization. This burden is the focus of the environmental justice movement. In the US, studies have shown that toxic industries and disposal take place with a statistically higher than expected frequency in native communities and communities of color.

In urban areas, this occurs both through intentional siting in communities who are politically less powerful and economically desperate and when costs of living push poorer people into the cheaper housing of already polluted neighborhoods. In rural areas, communities are sometimes targeted because they are desperate for jobs, but often it is due to their proximity to valuable natural resources or their isolation as in the case of military projects.

Internationally the situation is even worse than in the US today. Resource extraction is often associated with violence against the current inhabitants (e.g. against indigenous in the forests of South America or against peasants in India's coal fields) in addition to the ecological and health impacts of the process itself. In the new "workshops of the world" in places like China and India, air and water pollution are deadly threats to both workers and residents.

EG: How does the current economic crisis relate to environmental destruction?

RW: The Great Recession of the past four years has slowed economic growth and therefore slowed environmental destruction relatively.

Politically, it means more of a focus on economic issues is somewhat inevitable which can make action on environmental problems more difficult. The push for Green Jobs which has gotten support from many in the environmental justice community is one attempt to join the two. There is still the struggle to determine how truly green and of what quality those jobs are.

At this juncture, I think what is crucial is the critical discussion of how economic and ecological problems are related. For the past several decades, the richest 1 percent received the majority of income gains resulting from economic growth. When growth stalls, they seek to continue their accumulation by redistribution, which we see in the current calls for austerity. A return to robust growth seems unlikely at any point in the foreseeable future. So, both the improvement of economic conditions for the majority of people and the reorganization of society within sustainable bounds requires directly challenging capitalist productive relations. This can take many forms — from the very local, like we are seeing in Detroit with radical community action, to struggles at the national-level struggles in places like Bolivia (which has become one of the only nations in the world to demand climate action in line with what science is telling us is necessary).

THE FUTURE WILL BE ECOSOCIALIST –

Because Without Ecosocialism There Will Be No Future

by Joel Kovel, from “Ecosocialist Horizons,” November 27, 2011



Socialism was originally seen as victory in a struggle for justice. The proletarians, concluded the Communist Manifesto, “have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN[sic] OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!”

All this remains true. Working women and men continue to suffer exploitation, in the workplace and throughout a society ruled by capitalism’s money-power. Structural unemployment, along with increasing divisions of wealth and poverty, the curse of indebtedness and the militarism of the capitalist state — all this, and more, continues to afflict the people. Now, as in 1848, workers need a revolutionary socialist transformation. They need to unite, and to again quote the Manifesto, achieve “an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.” But the world we have to win is profoundly changed from the world of 1848. It is a world not simply to be won, but also to be saved from a terrible affliction. A day of reckoning has arrived far beyond anything humanity has ever experienced, though it has been building for centuries, indeed, from the beginnings of humanity’s time on earth. For we are the animal who became human by producing. Production is about the transforming of nature—the real physical world that is our legacy and ma-

trix—into the objects we use for our lives. Transforming nature means changing nature; and changes may be harmful as well as beneficial as they build up over historical time. Today, the harm wrought by human production has reached intolerable proportions. Our generation has inherited a world both transformed and deformed, to a degree that raises the question of whether humanity can continue to produce the means of its own survival. We see this taking shape in the menaces of climate change, massive species extinctions, pollution on a scale never before encountered. These are signs that humanity has so destabilized nature and our relation to it as to raise the real question of whether Homo sapiens, a species that has triumphed over nature to build the mighty civilization that now rules over the earth, has also prepared the ground for its own extinction.

The Ecological Crisis and Capital Accumulation

Destabilization of the natural foundation of society is the supreme question for our age, and because collective survival is at stake, the greatest challenge ever faced by humanity. Because it involves relationships between ourselves and nature, and because the study of relationships between living

creatures and their natural environment is named ecology, we can say that what we are going through is an ecological crisis. But whether its meaning is properly understood is another story. Unhappily, despite a vast amount of scientific investigation into the individual disasters that manifest the ecological crisis, there is very little awareness of its causes and real character, or even that it is an ecological crisis, between humanity as part of nature and nature itself. Instead, the dominant opinion, from all points of the political compass from left to right, sees this crisis under the heading of "environmentalism," which is to say, as something between ourselves and the external things of nature.

Environmental problems appear as a great set of discrete troubles, itemized like a huge shopping list. The movement that attempts to deal with "the environment" also becomes listed among other worthy causes, like jobs, health care, and the rights of sexual minorities. Environmental problems are accordingly dealt with by regulations, legislation, and policy changes under the watchful eye of a host of NGOs dealing with one aspect of the disruption in nature or another. These petition large bureaucracies like the UN carbon regulation system or the EPA. Typically, environmentalism seeks technical fixes or personal lifestyle changes, such as recycling and buying "green" products.

There is nothing wrong with environmentalism, except that it completely ignores the root of the ecological crisis by focusing on external symptoms and not the underlying disease. This is as effective in mending the ecological crisis as treating cancer with aspirin for the pain and baths for the discomfort. In other words, the prevailing approach fails to recognize that what is happening is the sign of a profound disorder. Environmentalism cannot ask what can be wrong with a society that so ravages the earth, but simply attempts to tidy up the mess in a piecemeal and fundamentally doomed fashion. Of course, each and every ecological threat must be vigorously met on its own terms. But we need to see the whole of things as well. We cannot put nature on a list, even at the head of a list. Nature is the entirety of the universe. We are a part of nature, and our society reflects whether we are at home in nature or estranged from it. Failure to understand this on the deepest level and to make necessary changes in our relationship to nature puts everything at risk, including, most poignantly, the lives of our children and grandchildren and all future generations.

If the choices embedded in our society lead to ruin and death, then the obligation is to remake society from the ground up in the service of life. And if this be read as a demand for revolution, so be it! But a revolution of what kind?

Look at the society that rules the earth and its guiding inner dynamic, the production of capital. However capitalism may be dressed up as the society of democracy, free markets, or progress, its first and foremost priority is economic growth, the eternal expansion of the economic product across society, converted into monetary units. The best word for this compulsion is accumulation. The accumulation of capital is the supreme value of capitalists, and all elements of capitalist society — from control over resources, to labor relations, to fiscal and tax policy, to culture and propaganda, to the workings of academia, to war and imperialism, and to be sure, policy towards the natural world—converge to gratify this hunger. Any diminution or even slowing of the rate of accumulation is perceived as a deep threat provoking the most ruthless, violent, countermeasures to restore order. As Marx vividly wrote in *Capital*: "Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets." In other words, he saw a religious impulse at work — Satanic in form, no doubt — driving the capitalist system to convert the entire earth, its oceans and atmosphere, everything under the sun, into commodities, to be sold on the market, the profits converted to capital.

Here we arrive at the obvious, straightforward, yet profound explanation of the ecological crisis and its life-threatening character. For though the universe itself may be infinite and have no boundaries, the corner of the universe inhabited by life is quite finite and thoroughly bounded: that, after all, is what ecology as a scientific study is about. So it follows that a system built on un-boundedness and endless growth is going to

destroy the ecosystems upon which it depends for energy and other resources, and is also going to destroy the human ecosystems, or societies, that have emerged from nature to inhabit the earth. That this brutally obvious truth is not widely accepted is partly the result of how hard it is to face up to a harsh reality, but chiefly the result of the titanic effort waged by capitalist ideology to deny its responsibility for the ruin of planet earth.

Seen in this light, capitalism is truly pathological; it may well be called a kind of metastasizing cancer: a disease that demands radical treatment, which in this context, means revolutionary change. And since socialism is — or should be — the movement toward the supersession of capitalism, the fact that the present ecological crisis is basically driven by the accumulation of capital puts socialism in a radically different position from that to which we have become accustomed. In this light we see the need to radicalize socialism and turn it to ecological ends alongside, indeed, as part of, the provision of justice to working people.

This means, however, that socialism itself must be transformed and produced anew. It can no longer be the reformist social democracy that has betrayed its promise by seeking to perfect instead of going beyond capitalism. Socialism today must be invigorated by the awareness that its goal is a post-capitalist society serving the well-being of humanity and nature alike. Most critically, because accumulation is the mainspring of capitalist society, the new socialism must respect the notion of limits and see production itself in ecological terms. The test of a post-capitalist society is whether it can move from the generalized production of commodities to the production of flourishing, integral ecosystems. In doing so, socialism will become ecosocialism.

First Ecosocialist Lessons

Nobody is under the illusion that we are anywhere near these goals. But that does not mean that we lack a mapping of the route toward ecosocialism. Let me give an outline of this and conclude this brief communication with a sense of how these can be applied to a case of the greatest urgency: overcoming the menace of climate change.

Ecosocialism is still socialism. What was stated at the beginning of this article remains. The basic principle of ecosocialism is that of socialism itself: freely associated labor. It is safe to say that application of this is the key to everything else. For ecosocialism, the restoration of nature does not begin with manipulating the external environment, but with the liberation of human beings and faith that women and men in full possession of their powers will use the appropriate technology and make the correct decisions as to how to organize their social relations and self governance in such a way that the integrity of nature is restored and preserved. The principle applies equally to the caring for nature and the provision of a good life for humanity.

A common root is the fact that, to the degree we are in possession of our creative powers, so also do we move beyond the addictive and false way of being indoctrinated into us from cradle to grave by capitalism and its ideology of consumerism. We break loose from the capitalist rat race, of trying to fill our inner emptiness with commodities, a motif absolutely necessary to the reproduction of the ecological crisis. Instead, we recognize ourselves as natural creatures, and recognize nature itself, thus positioning ourselves for nature's restoration. This also applies to the so-called "population problem," since freely associated human beings, women in particular, will have no trouble at all in regulating their numbers. In sum, we would say that ecosocialism is that form of society animated by freely associated labor and guided by an ethic of ecological integrity such as free human beings would freely choose.

We free ourselves in collective struggle. the meaning of which for ecosocialism is primarily "Commoning." Commons refers to the original communism of "First Peoples"; and also to the absence of patriarchy and class society among them. The word denotes collectively owned units of production. From the other side, the rise of class society and patriarchy, all the way to

the appearance of capitalism and right through to the present day, is a matter of "enclosing" the Commons, which includes separating people from control over their productive activity, thereby alienating them from nature and their own powers. Commoning can be as basic as making a community garden or day-care center. And it extends all the way to building intentional communities, organized democratically, and by extension, to a global society. We see ecosocialism from a twofold aspect, in terms of communities of resistance to capital and the capitalist state, and as communities of production outside of capitalist hierarchical relations between the owners of the means of production and the "wage slaves" who feed the capital-monster. Traditional labor organizing can come under this heading, insofar as it does not reproduce bureaucratic hierarchies; or, from another standpoint, to the degree that it builds authentic "unions" and "solidarity," both terms drawn from the language of ecology as well as the history of class struggle.

The wave of "occupations" washing over the United States as this is being written is very much an example of Commoning along ecosocialist lines, however scattered and reformist many of their immediate demands may seem in this early stage of development. Though the term itself is not applied, the structure is ecosocialist, arising out of the fundamental human drive toward collective control over a Commonly held space, both in terms of resistance — as by disrupting the established governmental and corporate ways; and production — as in providing the means of one's own subsistence while doing so.

Time and space are to be reclaimed through ecosocialist prefiguration. Keeping this term in mind is essential in navigating the great distance between where we are and what we need to become. Seizing a kind of Commons next to Wall Street is both symbolic of immediate demands for economic justice and prefigurative of liberated zones of ecosocialist production through freely associated labor. Our sustainable and worthwhile future will be a network of Commonal zones, beginning small but spreading and connecting across the artificial boundaries set up by class society and capital. Thus ecosocialism is transnational, global in scope, and above all, visionary; and each local moment of Commoning will contain the germ of this imagining. Prefiguration means the emerging of the vision necessary to imagine a world beyond the death-dealing society of capital. We need to see the coming-to-be of the new society in the scattered campgrounds of occupied zones within the capitalist order. Without vision, the people perish, as the saying goes. And with vision — and organizing to match — a new and better world can be won.

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