

world. Significantly, Communalists do not hesitate to run candidates in municipal elections who, if elected, would use what real power their offices confer to legislate popular assemblies into existence. These assemblies, in turn, would have the power ultimately to create effective forms of town-meeting government. Inasmuch as the emergence of the city—and city councils—long preceded the emergence of class society, councils based on popular assemblies are not inherently statist organs, and to participate seriously in municipal elections countervails reformist socialist attempts to elect statist delegates by offering the historical libertarian vision of municipal confederations as a practical, combative, and politically credible popular alternative to state power. Indeed, Communalist candidacies, which explicitly denounce parliamentary candidacies as opportunist, keep alive the debate over how libertarian socialism can be achieved—a debate that has been languishing for years.

There should be no self-deception about the opportunities that exist as a means of transforming our irrational society into a rational one. Our choices on how to transform the existing society are still on the table of history and are faced with immense problems. But unless present and future generations are beaten into complete submission by a culture based on queasy calculation as well as by police with tear gas and water cannons, we cannot desist from fighting for what freedoms we have and try to expand them into a free society wherever the opportunity to do so emerges. At any rate, we now know, in the light of all the weaponry and means of ecological destruction that are at hand, that the need for radical change cannot be indefinitely deferred. What is clear is that human beings are much too intelligent not to have a rational society; the most serious question we face is whether they are rational enough to achieve one.

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The Ecological Crisis and the Need to Remake Society

In addressing the sources of our present ecological and social problems, perhaps the most fundamental message that social ecology advances is that the very *idea* of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human. The primary implication of this most basic message is a call for a politics and even an economics that offer a democratic alternative to the nation-state and the market society. Here I offer a broad sketch of these issues to lay the groundwork for the changes necessary in moving toward a free and ecological society.

First, the most fundamental route to a resolution of our ecological problems is *social* in character. That is to say, if we are faced with the prospect of outright ecological catastrophe, toward which so many knowledgeable people and institutions claim we are headed today, it is because the historic domination of human by human has been extended outward from society into the natural world. Until domination as such is removed from social life and replaced by a truly communitarian, egalitarian, and sharing society, powerful ideological, technological, and systemic forces will be used by the existing society to degrade the environment, indeed the entire biosphere. Hence, more than ever today, it is imperative that we develop the consciousness and the movement to remove

domination from society, indeed from our everyday lives—in relationships between the young and the elderly, between women and men, in educational institutions and workplaces, and in our attitude toward the natural world. To permit the poison of domination—and a domineering sensibility—to persist is, at this time, to ignore the most basic roots of our ecological as well as social problems and their sources, which can be traced back to the very inception of our civilization.

Second, and more specifically, the modern market society that we call capitalism and its alter ego, "state socialism," have brought all the historic problems of domination to a head. The consequences of this "grow or die" market economy must inexorably lead to the destruction of the natural basis for complex life forms, including humanity. It is all too common these days, however, to single out either population growth or technology, or both, to blame for the ecological dislocations that beset us. But we cannot single out either of these as "causes" of problems whose most deep-seated roots actually lie in the market economy. Attempts to focus on these alleged "causes" are scandalously deceptive and shift our focus away from the social issues we must resolve.

In the American experience, people only a generation or two removed from my own slashed their way through the vast forests of the West, nearly exterminated millions of bison, plowed fertile grasslands, and laid waste to a vast part of a continent—all using only hand axes, simple plows, horse-drawn vehicles, and simple hand tools. It required no technological revolution to create the present devastation of what had once been a vast and fecund region capable, with rational management, of sustaining both human and nonhuman life. What brought so much ruin to the land was not the technological implements that those earlier generations of Americans used but the insane drive of entrepreneurs to succeed in the bitter struggle of the marketplace, to expand and devour the riches of their competitors lest they be devoured in turn by their rivals. In my own lifetime, millions of small American farmers were driven from their homes not only by natural disasters but by huge

agricultural corporations that turned so much of the landscape into a vast industrial system for cultivating food.

Not only has a society based on endless, wasteful growth devastated entire regions, indeed a continent, with only a simple technology, the ecological crisis it has produced is *systemic*—and not a matter of misinformation, spiritual insensitivity, or lack of moral integrity. The present social illness lies not only in the outlook that pervades the present society; it lies above all in the very *structure* and *law of life in the system* itself, in its imperative, which no entrepreneur or corporation can ignore without facing destruction: growth, more growth, and still more growth. Blaming technology for the ecological crisis serves, however unintentionally, to blind us to the ways technology could in fact play a creative role in a rational, ecological society. In such a society, the intelligent use of a sophisticated technology would be direly needed to restore the vast ecological damage that has already been inflicted on the biosphere, much of which will not repair itself without creative human intervention.

Along with technology, population is commonly singled out for blame as an alleged "cause" of the ecological crisis. But population is by no means the overwhelming threat that some disciples of Malthus in today's ecology movements would have us believe. People do not reproduce like the fruit flies that are so often cited as examples of mindless reproductive growth. They are products of culture, as well as biological nature. Given decent living standards, reasonably educated families often have fewer children in order to improve the quality of their lives. Given education, moreover, and a consciousness of gender oppression, women no longer allow themselves to be reduced to mere reproductive factories. Instead, they stake out claims as humans with all the rights to meaningful and creative lives. Ironically, technology has played a major role in eliminating the domestic drudgery that for centuries culturally stupefied women and reduced them to mere servants of men and men's desire to have children—preferably sons, to be sure. In any case, even if population were to decline for an unspecified reason, the

large corporations would try to get people to buy more and still more to render economic expansion possible. Failing to attain a large enough domestic consumers market in which to expand, corporate minds would turn to international markets—or to that most lucrative of all markets, the military.

Finally, well-meaning people who regard New Age moralism, psychotherapeutic approaches, or personal lifestyle changes as the key to resolving the present ecological crisis are destined to be tragically disappointed. No matter how much this society paints itself green or orates on the need for an ecological outlook, the way society literally breathes cannot be undone unless it undergoes profound structural changes: namely, by replacing competition with cooperation, and profit-seeking with relationships based on sharing and mutual concern. Given the present market economy, a corporation or entrepreneur who tried to produce goods in accordance with even a minimally decent ecological outlook would rapidly be devoured by a rival in a marketplace whose selective process of competition rewards the most villainous at the expense of the most virtuous. After all, "business is business," as the maxim has it. And business allows no room for people who are restrained by conscience or moral qualms, as the many scandals in the "business community" attest. Attempting to win the "business community" to an ecological sensibility, let alone to ecologically beneficial practices, would be like asking predatory sharks to live on grass or "persuading" lions to lovingly lie down beside lambs.

The fact is that we are confronted by a thoroughly irrational social system, not simply by predatory individuals who can be won over to ecological ideas by moral arguments, psychotherapy, or even the challenges of a troubled public to their products and behavior. It is less that these entrepreneurs control the present system of savage competition and endless growth than it is that the present system of savage competition and growth controls them. The stagnation of New Age ideology today in the United States attests to its tragic failure to "improve" a social system that must be completely replaced if we are to resolve our ecological crisis. One can only

commend the individuals who by virtue of their consumption habits, recycling activities, and appeals for a new sensibility undertake public activities to stop ecological degradation. Each surely does his or her part. But it will require a much greater effort—an organized, clearly conscious, and forward-looking political *movement*—to meet the basic challenges posed by our aggressively anti-ecological society.

Yes, we as individuals should change our lifestyles as much as possible, but it is the utmost shortsightedness to believe that that is all, or even primarily, what we have to do. We need to restructure the entire society, even as we engage in lifestyle changes and single-issue struggles against pollution, nuclear power plants, the excessive use of fossil fuels, the destruction of soil, and so forth. We must have a coherent analysis of the deep-seated hierarchical relationships and systems of domination, as well as of class relationships and economic exploitation that degrade people as well as the environment. Here, we must move beyond the insights provided by the Marxists, syndicalists, and even many liberal economists who for years reduced most social antagonisms and problems to class analysis. Class struggle and economic exploitation still exist, and Marxist class analysis reveals inequities about the present social order that are intolerable.

But the Marxian and liberal belief that capitalism has played a "revolutionary role" in destroying traditional communities and that technological advances seeking to "conquer" nature are a precondition for freedom rings terribly hollow today when many of these very advances are being used to make the most formidable weapons and means of surveillance the world has ever seen. Nor could the Marxian socialists of the 1930s have anticipated how successfully capitalism would use its technological prowess to co-opt the working class and even diminish its numbers in relationship to the rest of the population.

Yes, class *struggles* still exist, but they occur farther and farther below the threshold of class war. Workers, as I can attest from my own experience as a foundryman and as an autoworker for General

Motors, do not regard themselves as mindless adjuncts to machines or as factory dwellers or even as "instruments of history," as Marxists might put it. They regard themselves as *living human beings*: as fathers and mothers, as sons and daughters, as people with dreams and visions, as members of communities—not only of trade unions. Living in towns and cities, their eminently human aspirations go well beyond their "historic role" as class agents of "history." They suffer from the pollution of their communities as well as from their factories, and they are as concerned about the welfare of their children, companions, neighbors, and communities as they are about their jobs and wage scales.

The overly economic focus of traditional socialism and syndicalism has in recent years caused these movements to lag behind emerging ecological issues and visions—as they lagged, I may add, behind feminist concerns, cultural issues, and urban issues, all of which often cut across class lines to include middle-class people, intellectuals, small proprietors, and even some bourgeois. Their failure to confront hierarchy—not only class and domination, not only economic exploitation—has often alienated women from socialism and syndicalism to the extent that they awakened to the ages-old reality that they have been oppressed irrespective of their class status. Similarly, broad community concerns like pollution afflict people *as such*, whatever the class to which they belong. Disasters like the meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor in Ukraine justly panicked everyone exposed to radiation from the plant, not simply workers and peasants.

Indeed, even if we were to achieve a classless society free of economic exploitation, would we readily achieve a rational society? Would women, young people, the infirm, the elderly, people of color, various oppressed ethnic groups—the list is, in fact, enormous—be free of domination? The answer is a categorical *no*—a fact to which women can certainly attest, even within the socialist and syndicalist movements themselves. Without eliminating the ancient hierarchical and domineering structures from which classes and the state actually emerged, we would have made only a part of

the changes needed to achieve a rational society. There would still be a historic toxicant in a socialist or syndicalist society—hierarchy—that would continually erode its highest ideals, namely, the achievement of a truly free and ecological society.

Perhaps the most disquieting feature of many radical groups today, particularly socialists who may accept the foregoing observation, is their commitment to at least a minimal *state* that would coordinate and administer a classless and egalitarian society—a nonhierarchical one, no less! One hears this argument from Andre Gorz and many others who, presumably because of the "complexities" of modern society, cannot conceive of the administration of economic affairs without some kind of coercive mechanism, albeit one with a "human face."

This logistical and in some cases frankly authoritarian view of the human condition (as expressed in the writings of Arne Naess, the father of Deep Ecology) reminds one of a dog chasing its tail. Simply because the "tail" is there—a metaphor for economic "complexity" or market systems of distribution—does not mean that the metaphorical "dog" must chase it in circles that lead nowhere. The "tail" we have to worry about can be rationally simplified by reducing or eliminating commercial bureaucracies, needless reliance on goods from abroad that can be produced by recycling at home, and the underutilization of local resources that are now ignored because they are not "competitively" priced: in short, eliminating the vast paraphernalia of goods and services that may be indispensable to profit-making and competition but not to the rational distribution of goods in a cooperative society. The painful reality is that most excuses in radical theory for preserving a "minimal state" stem from the myopic visions of ecosocialists who can accept the present system of production and exchange as it is to one degree or another—not as it should be in a moral economy. So conceived, production and distribution seem more formidable—with their bureaucratic machinery, irrational division of labor, and "global" nature—than they actually need be. It would take no great wisdom or array of computers to show with even a grain of imagination how

the present "global" system of production and distribution can be simplified and still provide a decent standard of living for everyone. Indeed, it took only some five years to rebuild a ruined Germany after the Second World War, far longer than it would require thinking people today to remove the statist and bureaucratic apparatus for administering the global distribution of goods and resources.

What is even more disquieting is the naïve belief that a "minimal state" could indeed remain "minimal." If history has shown anything, it is that the state, far from being only an instrument of a ruling elite, becomes an organism in its own right that grows as unrelentingly as a cancer. Anarchism, in this respect, has exhibited a prescience that discloses the terrifying weakness of the traditional socialist commitment to a state—proletarian, social democratic, or "minimal." To create a state is to institutionalize power in the form of a machine that exists *apart* from the people. It is to professionalize rule and policymaking, to create a distinct interest (be it of bureaucrats, deputies, commissars, legislators, the military, the police, ad nauseam) that, however weak or however well intentioned it may be at first, eventually takes on a corruptive power of its own. When, over the course of history, have states—however "minimal"—*ever* dissolved themselves or constrained their own growth into massive malignancies? When have they *ever* remained "minimal"?

The deterioration of the German Greens—the so-called "non-party party" that, after its acquisition of a place in the Bundestag, has now become a crude political machine—is dramatic evidence that power corrupts with a vengeance. The idealists who helped found the organization and sought to use the Bundestag merely as a "platform" for their radical message have by now either left it in disgust or have themselves become rather unsavory examples of wanton political careerism. One would have to be utterly naïve or simply blind to the lessons of history to ignore the fact that the state, "minimal" or not, absorbs and ultimately digests even its most well-meaning critics once they enter it. It is not that statisticians use the

state to abolish it or "minimalize" its effects; it is, rather, the state that corrupts even the most idealistic antistatists who flirt with it.

Finally, the most disturbing feature of statism—even "minimal statism"—is that it completely undermines a politics based on confederalism. One of the most unfortunate features of traditional socialist history, Marxian and otherwise, is that it emerged in an era of nation-state building. The Jacobin model of a centralized revolutionary state was accepted almost uncritically by nineteenth-century socialists and became an integral part of the revolutionary tradition—a tradition, I may add, that mistakenly associated itself with the nationalistic emphasis of the French Revolution, as seen in the "Marseillaise" and in its adulation of *la patrie*. Marx's view that the French revolution was basically a model for formulating a revolutionary strategy—he mistakenly claimed that its Jacobin form was the most "classical" of the "bourgeois" revolutions—has had a disastrous effect upon the revolutionary tradition. Lenin adapted this vision so completely that the Bolsheviks were rightly considered the "Jacobins" of the Russian socialist movement, and of course, Stalin used techniques such as purges, show trials, and brute force with lethal effects for the socialist project as a whole.

The notion that human freedom can be achieved, much less perpetuated, through a state of *any* kind is monstrously oxymoronic—a contradiction in terms. Attempts to justify the existence of a cancerous phenomenon like the state and the use of statist measures or "statecraft"—so often mistakenly called "politics," which is actually the self-management of the polis—exclude a radically different form of social management, namely, confederalism. In fact, for centuries, democratic forms of confederalism, in which municipalities were coordinated by mandated and recallable deputies who were always under public scrutiny, have competed with statist forms and constituted a challenging alternative to centralization, bureaucratization, and the professionalization of power in the hands of elite bodies. Let me emphasize that confederalism should not be confused with federalism, which is simply a continuation of nation-states in a network of agreements that preserve the prerogatives of

policymaking with little if any citizen involvement. Federalism is simply the state writ large, indeed, the further centralization of already centralized states, as in the United States' federal republic, the European Community, and the recently formed Commonwealth of Independent States—all collections of huge continental super-states that even further remove whatever control people have over nation-states.

A confederalist alternative would be based on a network of policymaking popular assemblies with recallable deputies to local and regional confederal councils—councils whose sole function, I must emphasize, would be to adjudicate differences and undertake strictly administrative tasks. One could scarcely advance such a prospect by making use of a state formation of any kind, however minimal. Indeed, to juggle statist and confederal perspectives in a verbal game by distinguishing “minimal” from “maximal” is to confuse the basis for a new politics structured around participatory democracy. Among Greens in the United States, there have already been tendencies that absurdly call for “decentralization” and “grassroots democracy” while seeking to run candidates for state and national offices, that is, for statist institutions, *one of whose essential functions is to confine, restrict, and essentially suppress local democratic institutions and initiatives.* Indeed, as I have emphasized in other books and essays, when libertarians of all kinds, but particularly anarchists and ecosocialists, engage in confederal municipalist politics and run for municipal public office, they are not merely seeking to remake cities, towns, and villages on the basis of fully democratic confederal networks, they are running *against* the state and parliamentary offices. Hence, to call for a “minimal state,” even as a coordinative institution, as Andre Gorz and others have done, is to obscure and countervail any effort to replace the nation-state with a confederation of municipalities.

It is to the credit of early anarchism and, more recently, to the eco-anarchism that lies at the core of social ecology, that it firmly rejects the traditional socialist orientation toward state power and recognizes the corruptive role of participating in parliamentary

elections. What is regrettable is that this rejection, so clearly corroborated by the corruption of statist socialists, Greens, and members of other professed radical movements, was not sufficiently nuanced to distinguish activity on the municipal level (which even Mikhail Bakunin regarded as valid) as the basis of politics in the Hellenic sense: that is to say, to distinguish electoral activity on the local level from electoral activity on the provincial and national levels, which really constitute statecraft.

Social ecology, whatever its other value or failings, represents a coherent interpretation of the enormous ecological and social problems we face today. Its philosophy, social theory, and political practice form a vital alternative to the ideological stagnation and tragic failure of the present socialist, syndicalist, and radical projects that were so much in vogue even as recently as the 1960s. As to “alternatives” that offer us New Age or mystical ecological solutions, what could be more naïve than to believe that a society whose very metabolism is based on growth, production for its own sake, hierarchy, classes, domination, and exploitation could be changed simply by moral suasion, individual action, or a primitivism that essentially views technology as a curse and that focuses variously on demographic growth and personal modes of consumption as primary issues? We must get to the heart of the crisis we face and develop a popular politics that will eschew statism at one extreme and New Age privatism at the other. If this goal is dismissed as utopian, I am obliged to question what many radicals today would call “realism.”

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