

# UP FROM THE ASHES

# 3 - A JOURNAL FOR THE SELF-EDUCATION OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISTS \$1.50

## THE "SOCIAL ECOLOGY" ISSUE

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### NOTES AND RESOURCES

A Plea for Social Ecology by Ron Hayley and friends -- This article is a revised version of a talk given on the topic of anarchism and social ecology at a forum last September at Toronto's 519 Church Street Community Centre. I have tried to incorporate ideas expressed in the discussion, though the formulation of these points is my own. Above all, I am indebted to Murray Bookchin for the ideas expressed herein.

In addition to the sources cited at the end of the article, I highly recommend Murray's other writings: in particular, his Toward An Ecological Society (Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1980) and The Ecology of Freedom (Cheshire Books, Palo Alto, 1982). The article mentioned from Harrowsmith is the best brief introduction to Bookchin's ideas I have seen anywhere.

What is Bio-Regional Economics? by Kirkpatrick Sale -- This article originally appeared in Green Revolution and Synthesis. I have edited it down from the original for reasons of space. Kirkpatrick Sale is also the author of Human Scale (Perigee Books, New York, 1980), which is perhaps the best popularization to date of the "human scale" vision of society. Its critique of contemporary gigantism is devastating. For more on bio-regions, see the special issue of Co-Evolution Quarterly, Winter 1981. In addition to several excellent articles, it features a condensed version of the opening chapter of Bookchin's The Ecology of Freedom.

Where Marxism Fails? by Matthew Lyons. This article is reprinted from Hermes. Also of interest are: "The Practical Marx" by John Zerzan in Anarchist Review #6, Murray Bookchin's treatment of Marxism in Post-Scarcity Anarchism and Toward An Ecological Society, and "History and Revolution" by Paul Cardan, available for 90¢ plus postage from Wooden Shoe Books, 112 S. 20th St., Philadelphia, PA, 19103.

Continued \*

A Glimpse At A Non-Repressive Society -- This is taken from a book by Gad Horowitz entitled Repression (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1977). The book is fairly technical treatment of the development of psychological "repression" theories from Freud through Reich to Herbert Marcuse, etc.

Declaration: A Fourth World Manifesto -- This is reprinted from the Co-Evolution Quarterly's "Bio-Regions" issue. It was adopted at a conference approximately 4 or 5 years ago of predominately European "submerged nations" (groups such as the Welsh, the people of Brittany, the Cornish, etc.). These submerged nations inhabit fairly well-defined bio-regions, and represent organic, as opposed to artificially imposed, forms of community. Given the plethora of "national liberation movements" which embrace statist, productivist, and technocratic values, this manifesto serves as a possible standard against which to measure whether such movements represent a step towards freedom or a reinforcement of the old world order. For more on the critique of "national liberation" movements, see "Third World Nationalism and the State" by Sam Dolgoff (available for \$2.00 from Out of Focus Books, P.O. Box 5811, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P2) and "The Logic of 'National Independence': The Expansion of Barbarism" in the June issue of Strike!

I also recommend No Middle Ground for information on developments in Nicaragua, etc. For those interested, a 4-5 day North American Bio-regional Congress is being planned for May of 1984. For more information, write to NABC, Box 129, Drury, MO 65638. The phone no. is (417) 261-2553.

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I apologize for the fact that this bibliography consists entirely of writings written by men. There are a number of very good feminist materials in a social ecology vein, and hopefully a bibliography will be developed in the near future. A couple of worthwhile titles which immediately come to mind are: The Death of Nature by Carolyn Merchant and Women and Nature by Susan Griffin. If you can suggest titles, or would otherwise like to communicate with Up From the Ashes, write to:

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#### LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Harrowsmith, Camden East, Ontario, Canada K0K 1J0. (bi-monthly), \$13.50 per year; \$2.50 per single issue. Mostly vicarious back-to-the-land stuff for city slickers.

Co-Evolution Quarterly, Box 428, Sausalito, California, USA 94966. Fairly expensive (I don't remember how much).

Synthesis, P.O. Box 1858, San Pedro, California, USA 90733. Mimeograph. Approximately monthly. Send \$1.00 for sample copy, and they will give you subscription information. Good source of up-to-date resources and information in social ecology field.

Green Revolution (have not seen; has been publishing for 40 years!), RD 7, York, Pennsylvania, USA 17402. 8-page quarterly. \$7.50 per year.

Anarchist Review -- I don't know if their address is still operative; try sending \$2.00 plus postage to Circle A Books, 1369 Haight St., San Francisco, California, USA 94117.

Hermes, Box A, Wesleyan Station, Middletown, Connecticut, USA 06457. Approximately monthly. A worthwhile publication.

Strike!, P.O. Box 284, Main Station, St. Catharine's, Ontario, Canada L2R 6T7. Approximately monthly. \$4.00 per year. 50¢ plus postage for single issue.

No Middle Ground, 495 Ellis Street (#781), San Francisco, California, USA 94102. \$6.00 for 4 issues. All checks or money orders should be made payable to "Libertarian Aid for Latin America."

If you have difficulty locating any of the above books or periodicals, write to Wooden Shoe Books (see above), and they can probably help you.

## What is Social Ecology?

"If humanity is to use the principles needed to manage an eco-system, the basic communal unit of social life must itself become an ecosystem -- an ecocommunity. It too must become diversified, balanced and well-rounded. By no means is this concept of community motivated exclusively by the need for a lasting balance between (humanity) and the natural world; it also accords with the utopian ideal of the rounded (individual), the individual whose sensibilities, range of experience and lifestyle are nourished by a wide range of stimuli, by a diversity of activities, and by a social scale that always remains within the comprehension of a single human being."<sup>1</sup>

Social ecology is a philosophy which takes as its goal the enhancement of the quality of life. It believes that the quality of life for humanity will be enhanced when we bring our ways of living into harmony with nature. It also believes that what makes for a healthy natural environment can also be applied to improving the quality of human existence.

For example, Murray Bookchin, in a recent interview in Harrowsmith<sup>2</sup>, cites three principles -- unity-in-diversity, spontaneity, and absence of hierarchy -- which are equally applicable to nature and society. Speaking of natural ecology, he writes

"..if we diminish variety in the natural world, we debase its unity and wholeness; we destroy the forces making for natural harmony and for a lasting equilibrium."<sup>3</sup>

The same is true of society. Only in a world where a variety of lifestyles and beliefs is fostered and encouraged can human beings make sensible decisions and live meaningful lives.

If capitalism is rapidly undermining the diversity of nature, so too is human culture becoming more slick and homogenous. Human beings are increasingly as lacking in individuality as the mass goods they produce and consume. The state, the nuclear family, and the monadic ego replace the richness of social forms characterizing pre-capitalist society. Like the natural world, human culture is becoming increasingly impoverished. A language is only as rich as its vocabulary, and human beings are only as multi-faceted as the culture they're immersed in. The convergence of these two crises -- the simplification of nature and culture -- reaches its starkest form in concrete and glass cities, where greenery is buried beneath concrete, and the image of the commodity dominates all.

Speaking of the principle of spontaneity, Bookchin writes:

"The anarchist...speaks in terms of social spontaneity, of releasing the potentialities of society and humanity, of giving free and unfettered reign to the creativity of people. Both (the ecologist and the anarchist) regard authority as inhibitory, as a weight limiting the creative potential of a natural and social situation. Their object is not to rule a domain, but to release it. They regard insight, reason and knowledge as means for fulfilling the potentialities of a situation, not as replacing its potentialities with preconceived notions or distorting their development with dogma."<sup>4</sup>

Such a society requires cooperation and an absence of hierarchy, and this can only come into existence where the social unit is small enough that all can participate in the day-to-day decision-making, and each can perform (and master) a variety of tasks. This requires a re-scaling of technology, and the adoption of only those techniques which require no specialized elite and which have a beneficent effect on nature.

Continued

In sum, we need communities where the spiritual nourishment human beings require -- natural and cultural diversity -- are part of the fabric of life. As it stands now, a rural existence provides the necessary contact with nature, but is often lacking in cosmopolitanism, cultural variety, and respect for different lifestyles. These exist (very imperfectly, but nonetheless exist) in large urban areas. Only when the rural areas come to possess these qualities will the countryside become an acceptable home for those who have urbane requirements.

Likewise, difficult and unrewarding as it may be, means must be found to promote the "greening" of the cities -- to bring the countryside and its values into the urban areas, to recusatate community and self-reliance, and to break down the noxious influence of the city on the biosphere.

Promoting Alternatives

Like it or not, this society fulfills people's needs, in however distorted a fashion. We will never win people's allegiance for a new social order until we develop the alternative structures enabling people to disengage themselves from the status quo. As I see it, modern society rests on four main bases: the state, the nation, the patriarchy and nuclear family, and the commodity system. We must devise viable alternatives to all of these, and, indeed, the alternatives already exist.

In opposition to the state, we can offer the community as the natural locus for decision-making and for people helping people without reliance on government bureaucracies. In opposition to the nation, we can offer the bio-region as the natural site for economic self-sufficiency, and a sense of rootedness and identity. In opposition to the patriarchy and the nuclear family, we can offer the adult affinity group with collective responsibility for child-rearing, enhanced autonomy for children, and an end to compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. In opposition to the commodity system, we can offer production for use -- where people themselves determine what they need, and produce in accordance with standards of craftsmanship (embodying love of nature and love for those for whom the product is intended). Indeed, as far as possible, we should return to the system of barter, or, better yet, to mutual gift-giving.

These cultural elements already exist and need to be nourished and politicized. Rural communities, for instance, still retain some degree of self-determination. Many bio-regions are potentially self-sufficient and their inhabitants possess a strong sense of regional identity. North American communards have created and tested the adult affinity group, and support groups based on sexual preference are increasingly widespread. Moreover, the underground economy is flourishing as never before -- as millions revive the practice of barter and neighbourly generosity.

The Unity of Culture and Politics

By promoting the growth of a social ecology movement, and by networking different lifestyle radicals together, we can prevent (or at least retard) the commoditization of the counter-culture that allowed much of the creativity of the 60's to be co-opted and trivialized. Every part of our revolution in culture (no matter how mundane or prosaic) must point to the whole -- to the recognition that only by melting down the technocracy and building, in its place, eco-communities can we create an existence worth living. Organic gardening, sexual freedom, community control -- all these are part of the transformation of everyday life, but, in isolation from one another, they become meaningless.

For example, in recent years, a passion for physical fitness has overtaken many North Americans, and, as a result, many have taken up early morning jogging. Unfortunately, scientists have determined that jogging in the city means exposing your lungs to 10 times the normal pollution. Not to mention the damage you inflict on cartilage and shins by jogging on sidewalks. Instead of fighting for a whole new way of life, capitalist culture encourages us to solve our problems and desires one by one -- by purchasing some new commodity or by taking up an activity in disregard of our over-all lifestyle. We must seek the transformation of the whole society -- that is, our culture must seek political expression. But, likewise, political radicalism must be encouraged to ground itself in lifestyle transformation so as to avoid the ugly phenomenon whereby radicals resemble in all details the ogres they presume to overthrow. The change we make can no longer be intellect-deep. "Practicing what we preach" -- that should be our motto.

In this respect, it could be argued that the "Left" is more part of the problem than part of the solution. Most Marxists and liberals remain committed to high-tech civilization, bureaucratic preogatives, social worker solutions, and a vaunting of highly socialized production and the proletariat as the augurs of change. More in tune with the times are those new-born forces: feminists, ecologists, peaceniks, and those traditionalists among the Native and rural populations who still cherish Earth- and people-centered values. If a fusion could be effected between the counter-culturalists and the traditional rural citizenry (those still clinging to folk traditions), an explosive force would be born -- representing the best of the urban and rural traditions.

Whether this fusion is possible remains to be seen. But the challenge before us is to relate our concerns to the problems of daily life, and to the lives of average citizens. Revolution that can't begin the way one lives one's daily life is no revolution at all. We need to build a bridge from the present to the future, so that people have some option other than being simply radicals in their heads. We need to rekindle hope, to paint a "utopian" vision rooted in worldly needs and aspirations, where the building blocks remain available to all.

### Where Do We Go From Here?

How do we go about it? No one knows for sure. Do we colonize a neighbourhood and create model communities? Do we organize Social Ecology Institutes -- beehives for theory, education, and activism? Do we move to the country and germinate among the rural citizenry? Perhaps, all these things and more. But one thing's for sure: we should unite our efforts. Not in a way that tramples over principle, but in a way that eschews ideological labels and concentrates on common values, goals, and objectives. In the absence of this, feminists, ecologists, and civil libertarians degenerate into "interest groups" -- trying to strike the "best deal" possible for their constituency. Moreover, we must avoid the careerism and opportunism of a "Green Party" where one seeks to build a "tip without an iceberg" -- a haven for disaffected liberals which, instead of fusing and mobilizing counter-cultural energy, merely siphons it off into the sewer of power politics.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Post-Scarcity Anarchism by Murray Bookchin, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1977, p. 43.
2. "A Return to First Principles," by Thomas Pawlick (Harrowsmith, June/July 1982).
3. Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 76.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

## WHAT IS BIO-REGIONAL ECONOMICS?

What is bio-regional economics? It is the vision of an economy built on the human scale, controllable by people, organic rather than plastic, whose guiding words are "simpler," "smaller," "cheaper," "safer," not "More, More, More," rooted ultimately in the natural world, with a view of the human economy as being part of -- rather than ruler over -- Nature: a system that goes from the Greek root oikos, meaning house or household, not to the Latin economy but to ecology.

The human scale vision is, in short, based on the idea of bio-regional self-sufficiency -- a North America, a world, made up of autonomous and empowered regions, whose boundaries, and activities, are determined not arbitrarily by governments but organically by Nature. Bio-regional self-sufficiency. In other words, the break-up of the American system -- to cure the break-down of the American system.

Let me briefly examine the two parts of that phrase, and suggest in some very preliminary ways what they might entail. A bio-regional economy takes its guiding principles from ecodynamics and its form from nature. The first law of ecodynamics is that conservation, preservation, sustenance, is the central goal of the natural world, hence its resistance to large-scale structural change (such as the industrial world has been trying to foist on it for a century). The second law is that, far from being entropic -- as is fashionable for many of the ignorant to claim -- nature is inherently stable and works always toward what ecologists call a climax, that is to say, a balanced, communal, integrative state of maturity.

Now you will note that these two natural laws do not sit well with the imperatives of capitalism -- but it is not hard to imagine an economy based upon them, as many economists from John Stuart Mill on down have done. It would be one in which one sought to maintain rather than exploit the natural world, to encourage rather than resist the processes of Nature, to try to understand and accommodate to the character of the environment rather than run blindly and stupidly up against it.

An environmentally conscious bio-regional economy would be what is now fashionable to call a steady-state economy -- in other words, like nature, one would seek a climax, a balance, a stability, not seeking growth and change and "progress"; one would minimize resource use, emphasize conservation and recycling, avoid pollution and waste; one which would adapt its systems to the natural givens -- energy based on wind, for example, where Nature called for that, or wood where that was appropriate; one which, like Nature, would seek to bring each individual, each community, to its healthiest and richest -- knowing that the maximum health of the system derives from the maximum health of each part.

As to the form, the setting of such an economy -- that, too, is determined by Nature. A bio-region is part of the earth's surface where is a more or less distinct geographical, biological, horticultural, and climactic identity, from which the human inhabitants have developed a more or less distinct economic, social, and cultural identity. A watershed, or river basin, is perhaps the most obvious type of bio-region, though there can be many others -- a valley, say, or a desert, or a plateau. The borders between them are usually not rigid -- and that is another rather lovely feature of the bio-region as a political concept -- but the regions themselves are not hard to identify, when once we pay attention to Nature's patterns rather than those of some government....

The bio-regions, then, are Nature's givens, the ecological truths of our earth. It would behoove us to pay attention to them and soon. As to how we pay attention, that takes us to the second part of my phrase, to "self-sufficiency." A bio-region with a self-sufficient economy would find ways of providing for all its essentials within that region, within what Nature has provided -- not a difficult task at all, when you come

down to it, and again it was essentially how the Indians lived. There is not a single bio-region in this country that would not, if it looked to all its resources, be able to provide its own abundant food, its own energy, its own shelter and clothing, its own health and medical care, its own arts and manufactures and industries. Most parts of this country are singularly fitted to depend on their own natural endowments -- and where this or that material or resource may be missing, it is not long before human ingenuity is able to contrive a substitute -- as, for example, this country learned to get rubber from the guayule plant during World War II when rubber supplies from abroad were threatened. If necessity is the mother of invention, I've long insisted, then self-sufficiency is the grandmother.

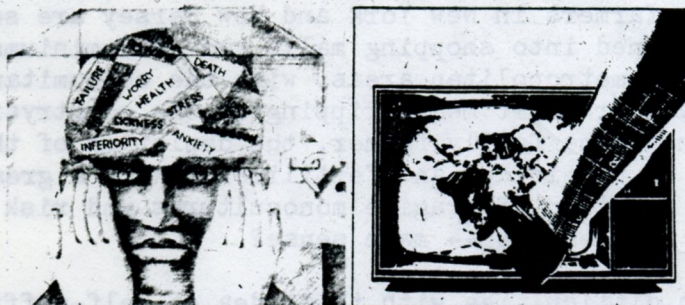
Does it make sense for New York City to import 29,000 tons of broccoli a year from California when it could just easily get that amount of broccoli from its own bio-region provided it were developed sensibly? Does it make sense for Manhattan to be totally dependent on the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys for almost all its vegetables and much of its fruit? Among the consequences: it means higher prices, obviously for transportation, storage, distribution; it means the expenditure of immense amounts of fossil fuels -- all the stuff comes by truck -- and a heavy toll on the already crumbling highways; it means increased pollution right straight across the country, but particularly in New York, and increased congestion too; it means a decline in nutritional quality, inevitably, and oftentimes the addition of chemicals put in just so that the stuff can travel so far so long; it means that farmers in New York and New Jersey are squeezed out of business, their lands sold and turned into shopping malls and condominiums, and more people moving into the already crowded metropolitan areas, with the concomitant impoverishment of vast rural areas; and in California it means ripping up the countryside for the demands of agribusiness, the death of the family farmer, the depletion of the topsoil and water resources, the over-use of pesticides and fertilizers, with a great risk to both grower and consumer, and the creation of fragile monocultures and risk to pest and disease attack. Does that -- by any measure -- make sense?

There may be certain difficulties with this idea of self-sufficiency -- it does usually demand some extra work (though obviously that is just what is needed in a land of such high unemployment); it may require some change in eating habits (though only in the direction of fresher, more nutritional, more healthful foods); it does mean giving up certain imports (though almost any that are truly valuable can be produced locally or substituted for in one way or another). Some difficulties perhaps but the fact is that haphazard trade, and the kind of dependent trade that we have developed -- New York is dependent on Californian fruit, New England is dependent on southern natural gas, the United States is dependent on foreign oil (and uranium, manganese, cobalt, chromium, copper -- and almost everything else except wheat) -- has many difficulties. There is no way to escape from the vulnerability of dependence, as we discovered during the oil crisis (particularly, when the culprit is the oil companies! -- ed.); nor from the enslavement of one part of the earth in service to another, as the cocoa growers of Ghana or the rubber workers in Malaysia could testify; nor from the employment of some significant part of the local economy, not for any useful goods or services but solely to create the money to pay for imports.

A self-sufficient bio-region is, in short, healthier than a dependent one. It is more stable, it has more control over its economy, it is not at the mercy of boom-and-bust cycles and distant political crises. It is not in economic vassalage to distant and uncontrollable political forces. It is able to plan, to allocate its resources, to develop what it wants to develop at the safest pace, in the most ecological manner. It does not ship its money off to distant and uncontrollable transnational corporations. And it is, of necessity, more cohesive, more self-regarding, self-concerned region, with a sense of place, of comradeship, of community, with the kind of character that comes from stability, pride, competence, control and independence.

Continued

Lastly -- and I find this of special interest -- that self-sufficient region has a greater diversity than the dependent one, largely because it is thrown on its own resources; and just as the self-reliant individual had best be able to cook and sew and harvest and chop wood and build and repair and play a little music at night, so the self-sufficient region would have to develop in highly diverse ways; it would have to complexify rather than simplify. The dangers of the world around us today are those of simplicity, of monolithicity, of monopoly, of monotony, of monochromality: whole nations given over to a single crop, cities to a single industry, farms to a single culture, factories to a single product, people to a single job, jobs to a single motion, motions to a single purpose. Diversity is the rule of human life, not simplicity: the human animal has succeeded precisely because it has been able to diversify, not specialize: to climb and swim, hunt and nurture, work alone and in packs. The same is true of human organizations: they are healthy and they survive when they are diverse and differentiated, capable of many responses: they become brittle and unadaptable and prey to any changing conditions when they are uniform and specialized. It is when an individual is able to take on many jobs, learn many skills, live many roles, that growth and fullness of character inhabit the soul; it is when a region complexifies and mixes, when it develops the multiplicity of ways of caring for itself that it becomes textured and enriched....



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# Where Marxism Fails

## Another Look at "Utopianism"

By Matthew Lyons

People forget that socialism arose in the nineteenth century not as a single idea or movement, but as a collection of many different movements. Only gradually did one form of socialism -- Marxism -- rise to dominate radical movements in most parts of the world. Marxism pushed its rivals -- notably anarchism and "utopian" socialism -- into the background, so that many people now consider "socialism" and Marxism synonymous. This change has not only narrowed socialism's political scope and critique of society, it has undermined the socialist ideal itself.

Other radicals have exposed many weaknesses in Marx's theory. For example, they have criticized Marx for viewing history simply as a reflection of economic class struggles. They point out that many forms of oppression and alienation, such as sexism and agism, cannot be explained in this way, if only because they are older than class society. And they have attacked Marx and Engels' claim that after a communist revolution a workers' government would "wither away" leaving a stateless society. But less often have they criticized the Marxist ideal of communism. Superficially, Marxian communism resembles other socialist ideals: it includes collective ownership of property, the abolition of classes and the state, distribution according to principles of mutual aid--by wants or "needs"--rather than a market economy, self-governing communities, integration of town and country and of mental and physical labor.



But the Marxist ideal is radically flawed. Even if we accept Marx's theory of history, even if we allow that communism could come about in the way he believed, the Marxist vision of the future Fails. Communism, as Marx and Engels envisioned it, would not be the society of true freedom Marxists often suppose. It would not abolish alienation or domination. Although Marxist theoreticians have long obscured this fact a careful reading of Marx and Engels' works reveals it forcefully. This "flaw," intrinsic to their economic view of society, results directly from their entirely unrevolutionary assumptions about work, technology and the relationship between people and nature. For a critique of these assumptions, and an ideal of true freedom, we must turn to other socialists -- "utopian" socialists such as William Morris and anarchists such as Murray Bookchin.

Continued

### The Marxist Vision

Although Marx and Engels condemned capitalism as a system of class rule, they believed that it was historically "necessary" as a stepping stone to communism. Capitalism's "civilizing influence," Marx wrote, is that it develops production in the direction needed for communism. Capitalism, he noted, replaces hand techniques with machinery, small-scale production with large, and the skilled, autonomous work of craftspeople with the factory, which fragments labor into many simple, specialized tasks. In Marx's view, communism would collectivize the productive apparatus but develop it further along these same lines. "Modern Industry" in communism would allow people to produce an abundance of goods while working shorter hours than under capitalism. It would also eliminate society's division of labor: with technical training, people would be able to rotate among a variety of relatively simple mechanized tasks. With no division of labor, people would be free to become "fully developed individuals."

But variation of work does not result in a fully developed individual unless the work itself is fulfilling. Marx himself emphasized that work in a big factory --the quintessence of "Modern Industry" -- is dehumanizing and unfree. "In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage.... Factory work ... confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity" (Capital, Volume I). Although Marx was referring here to a capitalist factory his comments apply to the labor process itself. Changing the factory's ownership would not change that. Engels made this point explicitly in his essay, "On Authority." Here Engels argued that the factory is intrinsically authoritarian and would remain so in communism.

In the communism which Marx and Engels envisioned, people would be free only part of the time -- after productive work. Life would be separated into two parts: the "realm of necessity," in which--under some unexplained psychological, social or "natural" compulsion-- people would perform largely uninteresting, machine-like work, and the "realm of freedom," in which they would suddenly become independent, creative and happy. Marx and Engels did not explain how such a disjointed, contradictory society would keep its balance. Their assumption that the working day "must" be shortened to allow for freedom does not resolve this contradiction, but only underscores it. But Marx and Engels' image of communism was not due to oversight; it agree fully with their world view.

### Domination of Nature

In the few passages where Marx and Engels tried to explain this half-free communism, they fell back on the idea that "man" "must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life." (Capital, Volume III). This assumption is so deeply entrenched in our civilization that it usually goes unnoticed. Human beings are perceived as separate from nature and in conflict with it: either nature dominates us or we dominate nature. Marx, steeped in the Western male intellectual tradition, took this for granted, it profoundly influenced his theory.

Ecology shows us that this attitude toward nature is fundamentally wrong: human beings are part of nature, ecologically interconnected with the other parts both living and non-living. An eco-system is not a machine which we can turn on and off or adjust with levers and buttons. It is an organism which changes spontaneously and grows toward a state of complexity, diversity and flexibility. We cannot "control" an eco-system except by ultimately disrupting it, by undoing its complexity and literally reducing it to the relative simplicity of a machine. This course, to which our society clings, leads sooner or later to ecological catastrophe.

But the domination of nature has other implications for society, as Marxism illustrates. The idea that nature is an "other" to be controlled characterizes nature as a human tool. For Marx and Engels, nature's only social significance was economic -- as part of production. And labor -- the productive relationship between people and nature -- in turn had no intrinsic value; it was simply a means to the end of material production. Work as something pleasurable and fulfilling had no value to them, even in communist society. It was actually bad, for it interfered with the "efficiency" of production.

#### Economism

Marx and Engels' entire economic view presupposes the rigid objectification of nature. They distinguished people from other animals by their ability to produce and engage in economic organization of production. In their view the worker's role in production had two aspects. As conscious beings people exert control over nature by working according to preconceived plans. But as material beings they are tools and are themselves subordinated to the labor process. This split view of people as subjects and objects characterizes the Marxist view of social relations, too: people can consciously influence society, but their actions are tied to, and ultimately determined by, their role in the economy. Society, Marx wrote, operates according to "natural laws" which work "with iron necessity toward inevitable results" (Capital, Volume I). In this conception, people's subjectivity -- their ideas, hopes, values, desires -- are abstracted and forgotten.

Economism thus "objectifies the revolutionary project and thereby necessarily divests it of all ethical content and goals" (Murray Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*). Ultimately, not only the "realm of necessity" but even freedom itself tends to be viewed instrumentally. In *The Grundrisse*, for example, Marx stated that freedom "produces" "fixed capital, this fixed capital being man himself."

Further, economism limits the revolutionary project by imposing narrow categories of thought. Marx and Engels never consciously rejected an ecological viewpoint or a concept of intrinsically valuable work -- these ideas simply had no place in their conception of the world. They dismissed the ecological outlook of the Iroquois, for example, as "subjection" to nature, and the medieval craftsman's creative pleasure as "subjection" to work. Because Marx and Engels viewed work in such narrow terms, they did not question "Modern Industry" itself. Work must be unpleasant toil and must be organized hierarchically, they believed. These were "natural" facts "independent of all social organization" -- the price of our "mastery" over nature.

With such an outlook it is no wonder that Marx and Engels' "scientific socialism" dismissed efforts to envision communism concretely, as "utopian" (in a pejorative sense). For utopianism can enable us to free ourselves from economic abstractions and picture a communism that does not compromise its own freedom. William Morris, whom Engels called a "settled sentimental socialist," provides a good example.



Marx on Work

*"The worker must subordinate his will to end of production.... The process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, ... and the less, therefore, he enjoys it..., the more close his attention is forced to be.*

**Karl Marx, Capital**

#### Morris' "Utopian" Vision

William Morris was an English artist, poet and socialist of the late nineteenth century. Although he identified himself with Marxism, his ideas diverged radically from Marx's in several important ways. Although he admired Marx's historical analysis and "scientific" socialism, Morris -- like Fourier and the other early nineteenth-century utopians -- promoted his vision of communism primarily on its moral appeal. Toward the end of his political career, he outlined his image of communist society in a utopian novel, *News from Nowhere* (1890).

Morris makes no division between "necessary" work and freedom in *News from Nowhere*. Instead of the alienating, hierarchical system of mechanized factory production implicit in Marxian communism, Morris pictured an England in which handicrafts and pride of work have been revived and work is one of the most fulfilling aspects of life. People work because they want to, not because they are compelled to. Some of their work is "mechanical," such as mending roads or harvesting hay, but it is not the mindless monotony of an assembly line. When in groups, people talk, laugh and sing along with their work and take pride in their skill. Work also provides many opportunities for creative expression. All products are apparently made by hand, and whether they are buildings or tobacco pipes, they are crafted skillfully and pleasingly.

Continued

"We have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want; and as we are not driven to a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them."

Waste has disappeared. People live simply, although not ascetically. They view their needs in the context of nature as a whole and reject the old system of mechanized production, which blighted the earth and the pleasure of work.

Work, like the rest of Morris' ideal society, is organized non-hierarchically. There are foremen and supervisors when people work in groups, but they do not impose their wills on the other workers; they simply watch to see that the work goes well and is coordinated properly.

### Ecological Work

Morris' vision of work in communism is closely connected with his ecological outlook. The people of *News From Nowhere* love the earth -- not because it is useful to them but because it is their home. The land, the weather, and the seasons fascinate and move them continually. "I am part of it all," says one, "and feel the pain as well as the pleasure in my own person. It is not done for me by somebody else, merely that I may eat and drink and sleep; but I myself do my share of it." Through "work which is pleasure and pleasure which is work work," they experience the world and rejoice in it.

In keeping with his ecological view, Morris rejected Marx's entire concept of a communist "realm of necessity," and therefore the "need" for mechanization. Marx wrote that in communism people would receive goods "according to their needs." He knew that needs are defined differently in different forms of society, but he implied that they changed according to "natural laws," like society as a whole. The "realm of physical necessity expands," he wrote, as human wants and productive abilities increase. In communism, therefore, people would "need" large amounts of material goods, and thus would require mechanization, for without it, people would have to work intolerably long hours to produce their many goods.

But to need something is to be compelled, which is the opposite of freedom. Morris agreed that needs tend to expand, but did not see this as an unchangeable process. He argued that under capitalism, the world market creates "artificial" needs. And although mechanization allows people to produce more, it "cheapens" production -- goods decline in quality and work loses all enjoyment. The worker's life itself becomes simply a means to the end of production for the market.

In the communist (and ecological) society of *News From Nowhere*, artificial needs have disappeared along with capitalism. People are now free to choose goods according to their desires.

### Machines

To Morris, mechanization was fundamentally linked to social domination and alienation from nature:

"Only slaves and slave-holders could live solely by setting machines going."

"Was not their mistake [in mechanizing work] bred of the life of slavery that they had been living? -- a life which was always looking upon everything, except mankind, animate and inanimate -- 'nature,' as people used to call it -- as one thing, and mankind as another. It was natural to people thinking in this way, that they should try to make 'nature' their slave since they thought 'nature' was something outside them.



Morris on Work

*"All work is now pleasurable: either because of the hope of gain in honor and wealth with which the work is done, which causes pleasurable excitement, even when the actual work is not pleasant; or else because it has grown into a pleasurable habit, as in the case with what you may call mechanical work; and lastly (and most of our work is of this kind) because there is conscious sensual pleasure in the work itself; it is done, that is, by artists."*  
William Morris, *News From Nowhere*

But Morris did not dismiss machines entirely from his utopia:

"All work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without."

He gave almost no information to explain what kind of work -- or how much -- this machinery would do. Since he seemed to condemn machines almost everywhere else in his novel, his vague statement here seems to lack conviction. But perhaps Morris meant only to condemn machines as they are used in capitalism, for he makes an important concession: some work is more "irksome" if done by hand than by machines. In other words, a complete return to handicrafts would not eliminate toil, and machines can either diminish or enhance "work-pleasure" depending on what they do and how they are used.

If Morris had examined this question more closely, he might have realized that it is arbitrary to exclude machines from pleasurable work. Most forms of creative work involve the use of tools -- but what is the dividing line between tool and machine? A skilled carpenter who uses a jigsaw, a power drill or an electric lathe may perform fulfilling, creative work, yet she or he relies on a machine tool. Not only does the machine save much "irksome" work but it may broaden the worker's creative possibilities. The same can be true when groups of people work together.

Continued

In Morris' time, as in Marx's, this side of machine-technics could easily be overlooked. Most of the momentum in technical developments was toward the big factory-style production which Marx decried. While Marx saw this trend as a "natural," unchangable and ultimately positive aspect of historical evolution, Morris recognized that freedom must include the ability to choose liberatory techniques. He generally interpreted this as going back to earlier forms, but he hinted that it would involve new applications of modern technical knowledge.

**A Technology for Life**

Technological discoveries of the past century have made it possible to envision new, liberatory technics somewhat more concretely. Murray Bookchin, in several parts of his books, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971) and *Toward an Ecological Society* (1980), explores the potential for modern technology in an ecological, libertarian communist society. Like Morris, Bookchin envisions a society in which freedom encompasses all areas of life; people live simply, creatively and ecologically, and have eliminated not only class domination, but all forms of hierarchy. In "Towards a Liberatory Techology" (*Post-Scarcity Anarchism*) he discusses specific ways in which contemporary technology could be used "to foster human solidarity and to create a balanced relationship with nature and a truly organic ecocommunity," liberating work from alienation and hierarchy. What is most important here is Bookchin's vision of work.

Bookchin notes that liberatory technics need not be less productive than existing forms. In the nineteenth century, productivity seemed to require bigger and bigger factories, for example, but techniques developed in the last few decades show that this can be changed. "Ever smaller machines are beginning to replace larger ones," notably among computers, but in other areas as well, such as steel production. Multi-purpose machines, which can be adjusted to perform a variety of different tasks, are being designed. Factories applying these techniques could be small and flexible enough to produce a wide range of products (suitable for a decentralized communist society). They would also make it easier for workers to value their own roles in production, to relate personally to the other workers and to make decisions collectively.

With modern techniques, most of the tedious, mechanical tasks - both physical and mental - of factory-style work could be fully automated. Modern self-regulating mechanisms, sensory devices and computers allow machines to function much more autonomously than before.

But automation alone would not solve the problem of work, Bookchin emphasizes. It could eliminate toil, but it would not create the "work-pleasure" which Morris envisioned, and human experience would be poorer. Thus communism would seek to combine machine labor with human labor in new ways, "to assimilate the machine to artistic craftsmanship."

Building a medieval cathedral, for example, involved a great deal of mechanical toil to shape and place the stone blocks-work which could now be done by machines:

"The machine, in effect, will participate in human creativity. There is no reason why automatic, cybernated machinery cannot be used so that the finishing of products, especially those destined for personal use, is left to the community."

"Once the stone blocks were set in place, the craftsmen made their appearance; toil was replaced by creative

human work. In a liberated community the combination of industrial machines and the craftsman's tools could reach a degree of sophistication and of creative interdependence unparalleled in any period in human history. William Morris's vision of a return to craftsmanship would be freed of its nostalgic nuances. We could truly speak of a qualitatively new advance in technics - a technology for life."

Bookchin's concept of a "technology for life" envisions productive work as an organic, mutualistic interaction between people and other parts of nature. Thus it differs fundamentally from Marx and Engels' idea that production and nature are merely instruments. This conception led Marx and Engels to a "revolutionary" ideal that compromises - and ultimately negates - freedom. Human liberation cannot be built upon the domination of nature. Morris and Bookchin do not provide a "blueprint" for freedom. Rather, they do present a conception of the world in which freedom is possible - a conception which has been buried by our civilization. Their articulation of freedom challenges us to work for its realization. ■





# A GLIMPSE AT A NON-

The Mbuti pygmies of the Congo, though patriarchally organized, are clearly a *relatively* non-surplus-repressive civilization. They have no differentiated 'political' power, not even chiefs or shamans. The only individual authority is that of a father over his children. 'No one individual is ... a leader; issues are settled by common discussion' (Turnbull, 1966, 28-9) either within the semi-autonomous age groups or within the band as a whole. 'All major decisions are taken by common consent ... Men and women have an equal say' (ibid, 178). There is a special mid-camp site from which anyone may harangue all present on matters of concern to the band (ibid, 187). Even children may take part in the band discussions. Youths are 'required to be able to voice their opinions and cite precedents' (ibid, 184). The criterion for a correct communal decision is that it be 'pleasing to the Forest,' but 'only when unanimity is beyond question is an opinion or an action considered "pleasing to the Forest"' (ibid, 187-8). 'Every Mbuti is nothing if not a powerful individualist who expresses his opinions with force and clarity' (ibid, 183). 'Individualism' is not considered incompatible with the high valuation placed on equality, co-operation, harmony, the common good.

The Mbuti have no magic, witchcraft, or sorcery (and are therefore considered 'backward,' hardly better off than animals, by their more 'advanced' Bantu neighbours; ibid, 54). They do not believe in an afterlife. When informed of its existence by missionaries they say: 'How do you know? Have you been there?' (ibid, 247) They do, however, believe in a super-natural Power or Godhead. It is the Forest: the totality of the Forest, down to the last grain of sand. To be good is to please the Forest. The Forest's demands, however, are anything but 'repressive.' To please the Forest is 'to hunt well, to have a full stomach, to sing and dance' (ibid, 278) and to have many children. 'Noise' is bad; 'silence' is bad; *quiet* is good, and is equated with singing, dancing, joy. 'A good part of the day is always given to singing, dancing, playing games and story telling' (ibid, 123). The Mbuti 'frequently sing and shout to the Forest, addressing it as "father" ... "mother" ... "friend" ... "lover"' (ibid, 252). 'The *erotic* aspect of the relationship between the Forest and the Mbuti is ... seen in the very clear individual preferences for certain types of place in which it is found good ... to have sexual intercourse, such as by a stream, or in dark shade, or in a patch of sunlight or moonlight, or during the hunt' (ibid, 254).

The Mbuti's sexual life is very pleasing not only to the Forest but also to the shade of Wilhelm Reich. Beyond the age of three or four every child becomes the responsibility of the band as a whole (ibid, 113). The children have their own self-governing community, as do the youth, the hunters, and the elders. Children learn erotic dancing even before they have learned to walk. From the time they can walk girls and boys 'lie down together and pretend [*sic*] to make love' (ibid, 124). Adults object to this only if it is 'noisy.' There are no restrictions on pre- or extra-marital sexual relations; divorce is at will (ibid, 111, 124).

Mbuti aggression is well neutralized. Arguments can be *enjoyed*. Fighting is not uncommon, but 'it is not at all proper to draw blood, nor to hit anyone on ... a dangerous spot' (ibid, 188-9). Punishment by the group seldom goes beyond ridicule and criticism. The ultimate sanctions, ostracism and exile, are very rare.

The economic base of this non-repressive civilization is one of great wealth, in the sense that the Mbuti's 'primitive' needs are more than adequately satisfied by the great provider of all things, the Forest. Nature is so generous that the struggle with her has barely begun. The Mbuti do not bother to hunt many animals which are difficult for them to trap; fishing is left to the children; to hunt for more than is needed would be displeasing to the Forest.

The hunt is primarily the responsibility of young and middle aged adults, but everyone participates, even the children. The hunt is 'work,' but so are singing and dancing. The hunt is a friendly communal endeavour, accompanied by singing, dancing, and sexual intercourse (ibid, 121-2). It is 'an excellent and exciting time to slip away into to the bush and copulate' (ibid, 156). At the same time, the hunt is a religious communion with the personalized Forest. Since it is pleasing to the Forest, the hunt (work) is by definition 'quiet' (joyful, *erotic*). It is pleasurable human activity, 'life itself' (Marx) rather than a compulsive means to life.



# REPRESSIVE SOCIETY

# ▲ Declaration ▲

We are the people of the Fourth World, we represent a broad global spectrum ranging from ethnic, cultural and linguistic, to religious, economic, ecological and community concerns, many of which have been submerged to one degree or another by the disastrous onrush of giantism of the last two centuries or more. We are united in our determination to defuse the prevailing anarchic crisis of power by seeking to create our own social, cultural and economic patterns as we see fit.

We declare that it is only through small social units which are capable of being subject to the control of their members that the peoples of the world will ever defeat the danger of global wars which giantism has created, and achieve genuine progress and prosperity. It is only by such means that they can resolve the problem of excess human numbers, make effective a proper respect for

and other people in terms of war, ecological excess and economic dislocation: the bigger the state, the bigger the danger.

We further affirm that even within such human-scale nations, in order to overcome the dangers of war and the overgrowth of human numbers, to check the spread of the spiritual void of mass alienation, and to widen the boundaries of freedom, there is an urgent need for a new respect for the rights and powers of decision-making and control of both political and economic institutions by the members of localised communities in their villages, wards and parishes as the case may be, in every part of the world. Such a programme of non-centralised political and economic power as is here envisaged can do much to prevent the power of the state being seized by any group for

their material environment so as to defeat the ecological peril, and end the curse of alienation from life and fellowship which now afflicts millions upon millions of people in many parts of the world. Neither we nor our forebears ever desired this development of giantism, very often it was fiercely resisted, it was never accepted and now we proclaim our total repudiation of it.

We assert in its place our inalienable right to live as free, independent, autonomous and self-governing peoples and we denounce the validity of any arrangements, however long-imposed, especially by giant political units, which seek the continued denial of this right.

We further assert our right to operate and control our own schools, hospitals, police forces, banks, industries, commercial trading and transport arrangements, forms of taxation and the purpose of war, aggrandisement or oppression.

For the same reason we hereby affirm our unreserved opposition to any attempts to increase the size or the scale of political units or any moves towards further governmental centralisation. We denounce such trends as likely to lead to yet a further loss of human control and a further increase in the prevailing global dangers.

The grim lesson of political life of the 20th century, which has already inflicted more murder, suffering and infamy on the common people than has been perpetrated in any previous period, is that the only safe form of power is shared power.

We reject the pseudo democracy of huge mass political parties, for since these are really complex forms of citizen manipulation by party leaders

other matters of community concern as seems best to us without external interference or coercion.

There is quite clearly a pronounced need for many forms of association and co-operation across national frontiers if the potential for the enrichment of human life is to be realised as much as possible; we are happy to acknowledge this need and we look to a far greater degree of transnational co-operation in the political, economic and social spheres than prevails today. We affirm our readiness to participate in such co-operation wherever the mutual or general interests of people are thus best served, but in so doing we reserve to ourselves the inalienable right to decide in what ways we shall participate, and the full freedom to withdraw from any such arrangements at any time.

In general terms we assert that any state which exceeds modest, human-scale dimensions is at serious risk of being unable fully to control its own affairs and is thus a danger to its own in whose grip the real power is held, no real sharing of power is practised.

We call on all the peoples of the world to affirm their membership of the human family and their duty to advance its well-being in terms of peace, freedom and ecological sensibility by joining with us to establish The Fourth World, a world where power is fully shared by the people in societies which are modest enough in size to do justice to the majesty of the human spirit and to serve the noblest accomplishments and potentialities of its creative genius.

We pledge ourselves to work unceasingly for the liberation of peoples everywhere in these terms.

*Long live the Fourth World!*

—John Papworth  
Assembly Convenor

